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IS THERE AN ICONOGRAPHIC PATTERN OF THE BINDING OF ISAAC?¹

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Many scholars presume that the Canaanite population sacrificed their children and that it were the Israelites who got rid of this deplorable custom. In comparisons between Israel and its neighbors, this anti-Canaanite prejudice is rarely questioned. We present primary sources for the first time (seals, stelae, temple reliefs), which demonstrate for both the Syro-Canaanite as well as for the Egyptian culture, that the redemption of enemies and child sacrifices was an option; not merely as a marginal phenomenon, but as a central motif in the cultic symbolic system. The comparison between pre-monotheistic and monotheistic images of the redemption of a human sacrifice provides evidence of a surprising continuity in the image constellation. Furthermore, we can demonstrate how Gen 22 contains relics of the Canaanite, pre-monotheistic redemption conception.

Key Words: Abraham, Isaac, Binding of Isaac, Child-sacrifice, Canaanite religion

1. The Problem

In the heart of Berne, the capital of Switzerland, there is a fountain statue called the "Chindlifrässer," which in English means "child eater." It is Kronos, who swallows his own children. The late medieval artist gave him a Jew's hat.² Certainly this was not due to his knowledge of the Phoenician origin of the



- ¹ The thesis of this article was presented to the public in Fribourg (CH), Landau (D) and Boston (USA) and has benefitted from various feedbacks. I thank Christopher Dickin-son for the English translation and Gerald Klingbeil for his editorial support.
- ² Some art historians doubt that it refers to a Jew's hat, but the anti-Jewish adaptation of the motif is well documented in woodcarvings on contemporary calendars (fig. 1) as is the anti-Jewish spirit of Bern in those days.

of the god Kronos, but rather because in his time the majority of Christians living in Berne believed that the Jews killed and ate children. Thankfully today, though more than 60 years after the Shoah, hardly anyone believes this anymore. However, there are still many scholars (especially in the United States) who still believe that child sacrifices were a widespread phenomenon in Carthage and therefore also in Canaan.³

These scholars rest their judgment exclusively on secondary sources, most of which can easily be unveiled as attempts to depict a certain group of people as second class citizens, claiming that they sacrificed their own children. Deut 12:31 certainly belongs to this category, where it reads that the natives of the land of Canaan sacrificed their sons and daughters on a fire. The biographer of Alexander the Great, Quintus Curtius Rufus (IV.III.23), writes concerning the siege of Tyre, that some of those present, while considering the catastrophic situation, had suggested performing a sacrifice which had not been practiced for centuries, namely the offering of a freeborn boy. The council of elders, however, claimed to have dismissed this request.⁴

This source, which is hardly ever cited, proves that in the heart of Canaan the custom of sacrificing the firstborn in a situation of danger had been abandoned centuries ago, and there is not one Greek historiographer or philosopher who reports such a custom. However, a much younger source by Eusebius (Praep. Ev. I.10.33.44; IV.16.6) is all the more frequently quoted, in which Eusebius quotes Philo of Byblos, according to whom in mythical times Kronos offered his only son and heir to the throne to Uranus. Omri Boehm concludes from this single "non-biblical evidence" of Eusebius the existence of the pattern of an ancient Near Eastern child sacrifice myth.

This included, according to Boehm, (1) a time of disaster threatening a city or a people; (2) the sacrifice (as a burnt offering) of the (only) son of the king in order (3) to save his people and (4) appease his gods; (5) the circumcision of the male citizens in order to strengthen the effect.⁵ Boehm inter-

³ See Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, 2 Vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), 1:495; he mentions: Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rites or Population Control," in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 1984; John van Seters, "From Child Sacrifice to Paschal Lamb: A Remarkable Transformation in Israelite Religion," in *Old Testament Essays* 16/2 (2003), 453-63.

⁴ Keel, 1:495.

⁵ See: Omri Boehm, "Child Sacrifice, Ethical Responsibility and the Existence of the People of Israel," in *Vetus Testamentum* 54/2, 150-51; and Omri Boehm, "The Binding of

prets the Abraham narrative as a "reflection story" which presupposes a familiarity with this myth and is directed at "a sophisticated reader," capable of discerning similarities and differences between the two. He sees the Abraham narrative as a counter narrative to his own reconstructed myth of child sacrifices. The Bible describes the destruction of a city (Sodom), for which the king (Abraham) had interceded, while the son, whom in an earlier version of the narrative had himself refused to sacrifice, is saved. The circumcision is added to the beginning of the narrative as a preceding sacrifice. Boehm's thesis rests upon shaky ground in three regards: (1) his choice of antique sources is highly selective and at the same time uncritical; (2) his reconstruction of an original myth is accordingly hypothetical; and (3) his treatment of the biblical text is highly free-handed⁶.

In contrast to Boehm, it is here suggested that it would be fairer to look for real parallels between Gen 22 and possible older patterns. Instead of looking for sources that speak polemically of human sacrifices in Canaan, evidence should be sought that speaks of the redemptive aspects of human sacrifices, which is the true theme of Gen 22. If this is done, there is a greater likelihood of discovering that the angel himself is a significant remainder of an older pattern.

2. Redemption in Ebla

Such a pattern is to be found, not in some random source, but in a chief work of Syrian artwork of the middle Bronze Age (the very era in which the foundations of Canaanite culture were laid). It is the basalt stele from the forecourt of the sanctuary G3 of the city goddess of Ebla (fig. 2-3).⁷ Syntactically, the banquet scene, with the sacrifice and music (A3) for the goddess on the front of the stele, forms the centerpiece. The same scene is found in a

Isaac: A Religious Model of Disobedience," in *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 468* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

⁶ E.g. the interpretation of the Angel in Gen 22 as secondary insertion. He claims that it was Abraham himself who refused the sacrifice. This obviously aims at turning the obedient Abraham into an autonomous thinker.

⁷ The stele was moved here during a temple renovation. In the first phase of the temple, it was probably located in the forecourt where it was visible from all sides (Matthiae 1987: 454).

similar depiction on the cultic basin from two other sanctuaries of Ebla.⁸ In the uppermost preserved register (A2), the image of the goddess is depicted in the winged shrine above a bull, flanked and protected by bull-men.



Figure 2: Ebla Stelae

⁸ Paolo Matthiae, *Alle origini della civiltà urbana. Trent'anni di scavi in Siria dell'Università di Roma „La Sapienza,“* Milano, 422 (fig. 291); and IPIAO 2, No 497.

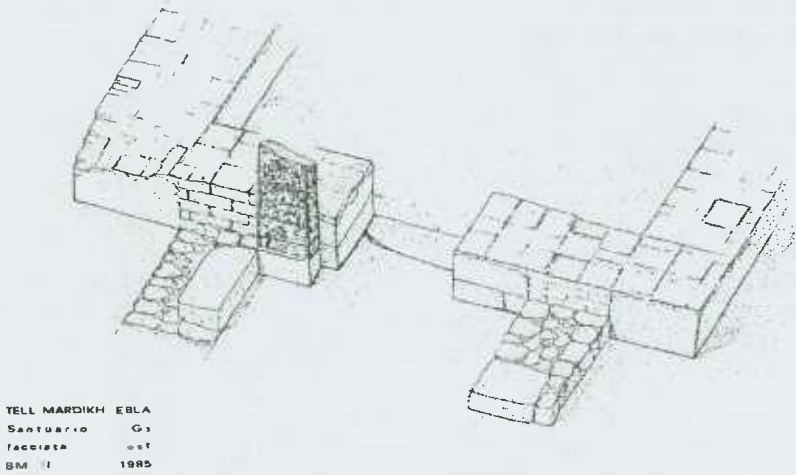


Figure 3: *Stelae in situ before sanctuary of the city goddess of Ebla*

In a more compressed form, the constellation of the banquet in front of the goddess with her entourage (A2) can be found on a contemporary cylinder seal of the BIBLE+ORIENT Collections in Fribourg (fig. 4).



Figure 4: *"Kültepe Level II" Seal*

The lowest scene on the front side shows a water-spewing dragon (A4). It is the older carrier animal of the rain goddess and the storm god during the Akkadian Period, as well as in the ancient Babylonian Period (fig. 5).



Figure 5: Cylinder Seal

Furthermore, it underlines the civilizing function of the cult (A3) between the dragon (A4) and the goddess (A2). The diagonally placed animal fighting scenes (C2/B4) underline the goddess' positive effect on culture. The diagonally placed priests (B2/C4) as well as the flanking priest and the demigods (?) on the pedestal (B3/C3) emphasize their role as mediators in a cultic act. The upper registers on the back side (D2-3) depict two different Chimeras, a regular one as well as a winged beardless bull-man. Analogous to the investiture image of Mari,⁹ the upper registers (D1) probably contained a further Chimera in the form of a Cherub. These would represent three guarding beings, of which the highest one protects the heavens (most probably represented by celestial emblems and their venerators; B1, A1, C1), the second one the sphere of the goddess (B2, A2, C2), and the third one the herd (out of which came the sacrificial animals of the third register [B3, A3, C3]). This provides a succession which can aid in the interpretation of the lowest image of the back side (D4). It most likely depicts the protection of the human sphere. Indications can be found in the bull-fighting scene of this register (B4) illustrated by the threatened human-headed quadruped saved by the hero. In D4 the active protecting power is the double King in his striking gesture, armed once with a dagger and once with a

⁹ IPIAO 2, No. 434.

battle axe. The unmistakable gesture, the doubled king and the head dress, which was probably inspired by the white crown, refer to the original Egyptian origins of the motif. A seal from Alalakh, which we know was used for many centuries as a dynasty seal (fig. 6), depicts the same motif (otherwise rarely found in Syrian glyptic), although in a more enculturated version. On this seal, the Syrian goddess is holding a life symbol in her hand. On the Ebla stele, the threatened person is stylized as being naked. In the contemporary glyptic of Alalakh, he is sometimes depicted in a victorious pose, sometimes in a fight with other naked people, and sometimes subordinate, but never dead. He takes an intermediate role between the hero and the enemy or demon.¹⁰ The animal above him is a kid goat,¹¹ and thus a very popular sacrificial animal. Since this animal is positioned in an obvious fashion above the threatened man, it cannot simply be interpreted as a figure protected by the men (for this is usually depicted behind the protector or underneath his feet), but rather as a substitute sacrifice.



Figure 6: Sealing; Kültepe about 18th cent. BC

- ¹⁰ Dominique Collon, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh*, in *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Vol. 27 (Butzon und Bercker, 1975), Pl. 37.
- ¹¹ And not a hare (against Matthiae 1987:460). Front and hind legs of the hare face forwards (as in B3, above) while those of the goatling face inwards (cf. Collon 1975:41 with pl. 42).

The life symbol, which the goddess on fig. 6 holds out not only to the king, but also above the threatened person, speaks for this interpretation as well. Indeed, she thereby not only prevents the king from killing, and thereby from blood revenge, but saves the life of the endangered person as well by offering an animal from her own sphere of protection for sacrifice. The same constellation can be found on a cylinder seal from Kültepe (fig. 7).



Figure 7: Cylinder Seal; ancient Babylonian

Here the substitute sacrifice is to be seen beneath the Janus-faced interdiator, clearly distinguished from the protected caprid behind the menacing hero. The goddess stands between the menacing hero and the Janus-faced being. On an ancient Babylonian seal (fig. 8), the menacing scene with the sacrificial animal is carried out in front of the winged goddess who stands on a lion.



Figure 8: Cylinder Seal; Mari 18th cent. BC

The lion and the kid goat represent here, so to speak, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum* of the goddess. She decides whether the enemy is killed or saved through her mercy.¹² The most explicit depiction of redemption is on a cylinder seal from Mari (fig. 9).



Figure 9: "Alalach Level VII" Seal

Here, the city's king carries the redemptive sacrificial animal before a smiting god, whose foot is placed on a human sacrifice. Just like the Ebla stele, a further redemptive sacrificial animal is to be found at the very top of the scene's symmetry axis. The naked goddess and a lama goddess act as intercessors. Based on this interpretation, one should ask regarding many of the cylinder seals of the Middle Bronze Age II as to whether or not they depict (in one form or another) the redemptive and thereby blessed sacrificial animal, sponsored by the goddess herself. If this proves to be true, it would be contrary to what has been believed up until now. In any case, evidence indicates that the cited illustrations point to the conclusion that the redemption through human sacrifices is a theme which is accounted for on Syrian cylinder seals of the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, and which was inserted into a prominent part of the Ebla stele within a comprehensive theological image program. The redemption of a victim (sometimes stylized as a naked hero) by a kid goat represents on the forecourt of the temple the blessing power of the goddess who has the power to give life to those sen-

¹² As a side note, Paulo Matthiae, the excavator at Ebla, suspected that the mysterious building P3, with its thick walls but no entrance, is to be understood as the lion's den of the goddess in which humans were possibly offered as sacrifices.

tenced to death. The ritual of redemption was probably carried out facing the goddess in front of her temple. In Jerusalem, where the biblical tradition locates Mount Moria (see below), the role of the redeemer-goddess may have been adopted by the goddess Hepa during the Late Bronze Age and even in earlier times.¹³

3. Redemption in Karnak

In a similar placement to that which is on the stele of Ebla, there occur redemption scenes on the great Amun temple in Karnak. The oldest one is from the time of Sethos I (1273-1279 BC; fig. 10a/b) who conquered the rural Canaanite population of the Levant called Shasu. A great number of his prisoners of war were consecrated to Amun. They are depicted on the exterior northeastern corner of the Great Hypostyle Hall. The battle and triumphant scenes are arranged in such a way that the consecration of the prisoners of war before Amun form the conclusion and culmination of the image sequence.

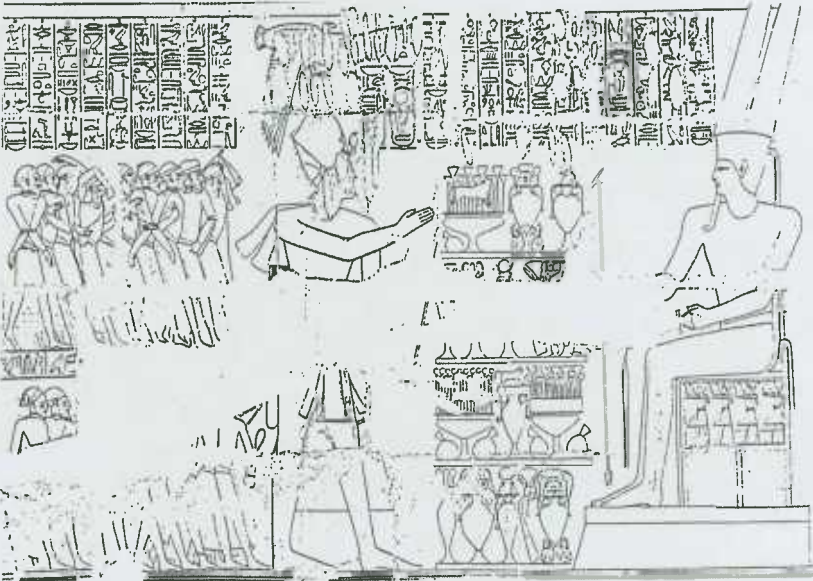


Figure 10a: *Redemption of Shasu in front of Amun; Karnak*

¹³ For Hepa (possibly the goddess behind Eve) in Jerusalem, see Keel 2007:116-118 and IDD 316f.391f.

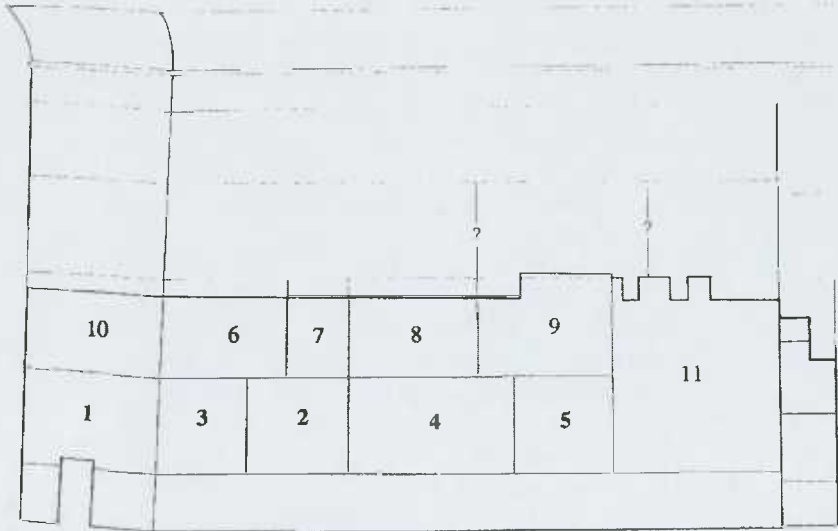


Figure 10b: Schema of the military campaign against Palestine under Sethos I

They form the link between the story of the military campaigns and the ritual of the consecration and redemption, which was probably enacted at this location. The redemption is expressed visually by the heavy tribute of the conquered, depicted between the deity and the Pharaoh with his prisoners of war. A further indication of the redemption is contained in the words coming from the mouths of the prisoners: "Hail to thee! How great is your name, how mighty your power! Blessed is the land that acts in partnership with you, and miserable those who attack your borders – enduring your Ka. We knew nothing of Egypt; our fathers had not entered into it. Give us the breath that you give."¹⁴

Two generations later, under Merenptah (1213–1203 BC), an analogous sequence of images was created closer to the front on the so-called "Cour de la Cachette." Here too, the redemption scene suggests the conclusion of an equivalent to the peace treaty of Qadesh.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Staubli, *Das Image der Nomaden im Alten Israel und in der Ikonographie seiner sesshaften Nachbarn*, OBO 107 (1991), Freiburg/Göttingen, 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58 (with fig. 2).

Furthermore, images of sacrificial cattle in funeral and cultic contexts from this imperialistic Egyptian period, with the heads of enemies depicted between their horns (instead of the usual floral decorations), are sometimes illustrated in such a way that their horns become the supplicating arms of those enemies,¹⁶ first attested in the Tomb of Huy (fig. 11).

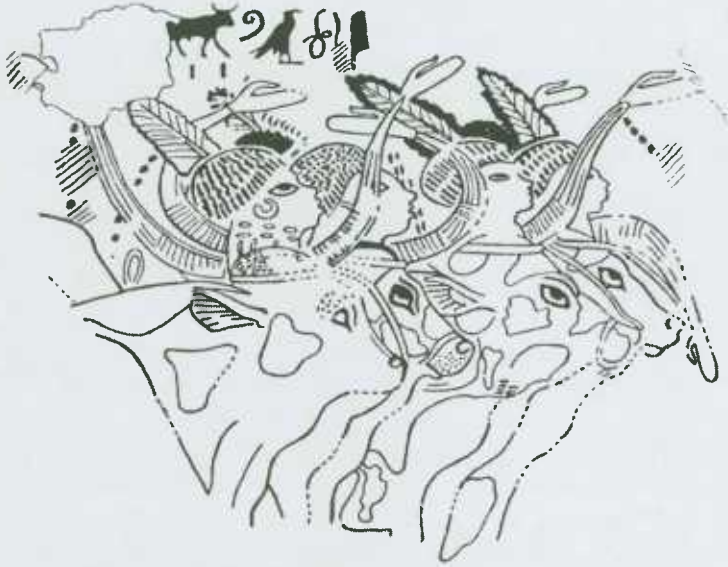


Figure 11: Detail from the Tomb of Huy

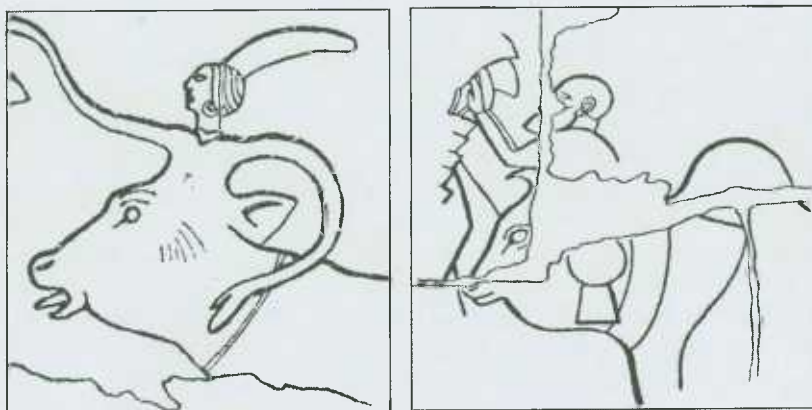
Examples of Nubians and Asians are found in the procession reliefs of the Luxor-temple (fig. 12 and 13). Further evidence of this motif comes from Kawa¹⁷ and Bet el-Wali.¹⁸ This is a concise iconographic way of saying that the sacrificial animal is identified with the enemy and represents his substitution.¹⁹ The Egyptian depictions illustrate that here as well, humans or enemies respectively, were not sacrificed before the deity but were instead redeemed, and that here also the redemption was depicted iconographically and most likely also enacted ritually at a prominent location; this was also seen as a sign simultaneously of the victory and of the philanthropic nature of the deity.

¹⁶ I thank Othmar Keel, Fribourg, for pointing this out.

¹⁷ Jean Leclant, La „Mascarade“ des boeufs gras et le triumphe de l’Egypte,” *MDAIK* 14 (1956), fig. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fig. 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.



Figures 12 and 13: Details from the procession in the temple of Luxor

4. Redemption in Genesis 22 (resp. Gerizim/Jerusalem)

The historical context of the story in Genesis 22 is highly disputed. A link with the sacrifices for Molekh, criticized elsewhere, is hypothetical. Even more so, the exact interpretation of these Molekh sacrifices is in question: some understand them in analogy with the sacrifices for Tanit in Carthage,²⁰ while others see an analogy to the burial-rituals for Adadmalik, the Aramaic Lord of the underworld.²¹ What can be considered as certain, however, is (1) that Gen 22 is about the redemption of a first-born (cf. Ex 13:2.13b.15b; 22:28b; 34:20b), (2) that this episode was understood as an explanation for a place called Moria (only literally relevant for history [Gen 22:2]), and (3) that in the Jewish tradition this place was identified with the sanctuary of Jerusalem before the time of the Chronicles (2 Chr 3:1) at the latest, and thereafter also by Josephus Flavius (Ant I,244) and the Midrash on Genesis (GenR 55,117; NBL 2,846).

In addition to these facts, there are a certain number of structural observations concerning the location of the story within the Bible. The Mishnah already notes that the Binding of Isaac was the last and hardest of ten tests or trials of Abraham, meaning that it was the end and culmination of a

²⁰ See Hans-Peter Müller, „Art.: מֹלֶךְ,” in *ThWAT* IV (1984), 957-968; and Idem., „Genesis 22 und das mlk-Opfer. Erinnerungen an einen religionsgeschichtlichen Tatbestand,” in *BZ* 41 (1997), 237-246.

²¹ Keel, 492-504.

whole series (bAvot 5,4). In relation to the book of Genesis, this narrative can be considered to be the centerpiece if we follow Jehuda Radday²² in understanding the prehistory as its prologue, the Joseph narrative as its epilogue, and the change of names (from Abram to Abraham [Gen 17:5] and Jacob to Israel [Gen 32:29]) as a framing of its central feature. A further privileged status results from the age of Abraham. Radday²³ noticed that the Bible remains silent about the first and last 75 years of Abraham's life, who died at the age of 175. The narrative restricts itself to his life between the ages 75 and 100, with one exception: Gen 22. If we assume that Sarah died in the year of the Binding of Isaac at the age of 127 (Gen 23:1), then Abraham was 137 years old when he offered up Isaac. The event falls exactly into the middle of the last 75 years of his life.

It therefore should be noted that Gen 22 is first of all about the redemption of the first-born; that, secondly, various texts signal a special status to this narrative, and that, thirdly, the story was linked to the main cult site of Judaism, by commentators on the text. This presents three close parallels to the Syrian and Egyptian traditions of redemption depictions. This then allows for the assumption that the narrators of Gen 22 were able to tie in to a very old tradition of redemptive human sacrifice in important sanctuaries.

5. The Iconic Consistency of Redemption

The consistency of the tradition is given from another perspective as well, the visual. This is especially evident when comparing the ancient Syrian redemption depictions with those of the Binding of Isaac in the imagery traditions of those religions that refer to it. Starting with the redemption depiction in Ebla, it can be safely affirmed that the sacrificial victim, the sacrificer, the deity and the substitute sacrifice represent the constitutive and indispensable iconemes in the iconographic depiction of redemption. The combination of these four iconemes turns out to have had a consistency that outlasted millennia, and which has remained unchanged even throughout the transformations into the Christian and Muslim symbolic systems (fig. 14-18). This constellation's origins lie not in the Hebrew Bible, even if the narrative handed down therein of the Binding of Isaac was of enormous importance for it. But these are instead more than a thousand years older and can be found already in Mesopotamian and Syrian proto-

²² Jehuda T. Radday, „Auf den Spuren der Parascha. Ein Stück Tora. Zum Lernen des Wochenabschnitts,“ Band 6 (Berlin, 2004), 60.

²³ Radday, 62.

types, which most likely served as an example to the Canaanite culture for the redemption of their enemies and especially of their children.

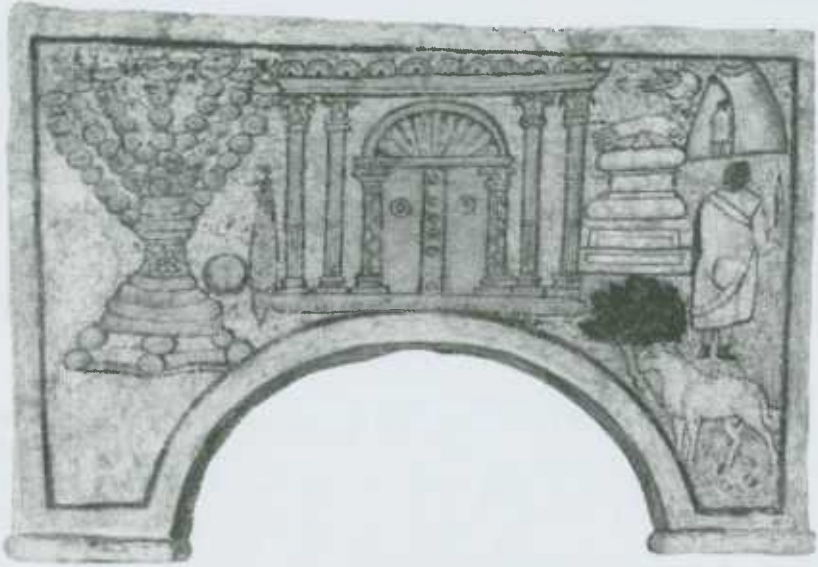


Figure 14: *The Binding of Isaac depicted on the Torah Ark of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos*

The transition from the polytheistic to the monotheistic paradigm creates a significant change in the depiction of the deity. In the polytheistic context of Syria and the Levant, divine action is assigned to two actors: a god who demands the sacrifice of human life as a sign of gratitude and submission by his protégé, and a merciful goddess who offers a substitute sacrifice from among her own property, the realm of her holy herd (Hebr. *'āštārōt*; Lat. *Veneres gregis*). In the biblical monotheistic paradigm, demand and remission are attributed to the same divinity at the cost of requiring the entire scene to be understood as a borderline trial of the pious, since God demands something that contradicts His own nature. However, even in Gen 22 we find reminders of pre-monotheistic “paganism,” in as much as it is Elohim who demands the sacrifice of Gen 22:2. But it is the messenger of JHWH who stops him (22:11f). Indeed, in the Book of Jubilees (17,16) is found the notion that, as with Job, God was provoked to such a deed by Satan respecting Mastema and that it was thus the divine voice that pre-

vented the sacrifice; this was the case even while the temptation was caused by the adversary.²⁴



Figure 15: The Binding of Isaac depicted on a Christian oil lamp, Northern Africa

Even the Qur'an preserves a certain ambivalence where Ibrahim receives the command to kill his son in a dream and not explicitly through the divine word (Sura 37, 102). The iconographic elucidation of Canaan's pre-history of redemption shows where the ambivalence and the multi-figured concept originates: Elohim has taken on the role of the male deity, while the angel took the place of the intervening goddess.

²⁴ Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Genesis* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000, repr.), 492.

Figures 18a and 18b: Binding of Isaac in Folk art

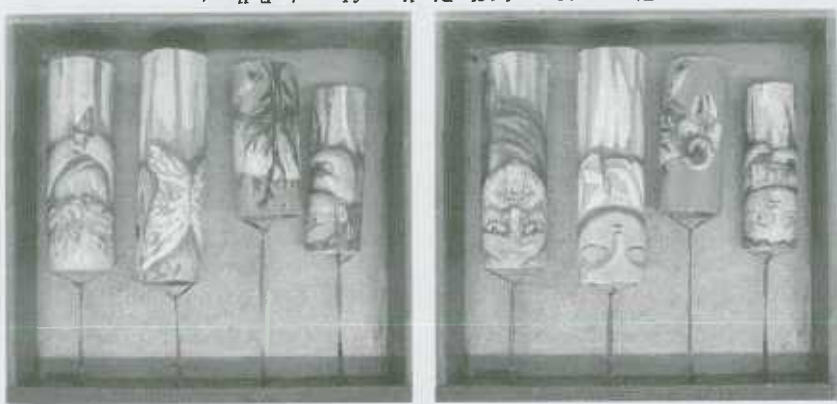
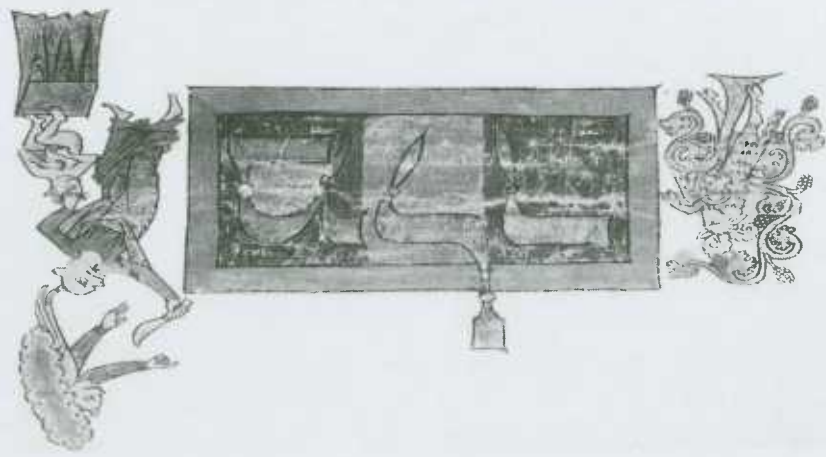


Figure 17: Ishmael's Binding on a Muslim child's drawing



Figure 16: The Binding of Isaac as a book illustration for Kosh hashaman



STAUBLI: Iconography and the Binding of Isaac

6. Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is summarized in the following seven points:

1. The initial question of this paper can be affirmed: There is an iconographic tradition of the redemption of human sacrifices, which probably served as a pattern for the *Akedat Yitzchak*. The constitutive iconemes of its underlying image constellation are: a human sacrifice, a male sacrificer, a deity demanding (more or less explicitly) a sacrifice, and an interceding goddess offering a substitute as a redeeming sacrifice (an animal or another tribute). In the context of the patriarchal monotheistic paradigm the role of the goddess is replaced by an angel.
2. This tradition can be traced back to the Middle Bronze Age II, which was constitutive for the Levantine, including the Canaanite culture. Cylinder seals provide the main sources.
3. The biblical as well as non-biblical redemption scenes stand in close relation to an important sanctuary (Ebla, Karnak, Jerusalem) where the redemption ritual may have taken place.
4. The biblical as well as non-biblical redemption scenes are part of a longer visual or narrative sequence and provide their conclusion and culmination,²⁵ but they can also be understood and have meaning independent from these contexts. The record on the Ebla stele shows the great importance of this act at the heart of a culture.
5. At least part of the iconographically documented redemption scenes are about the redemption of one's enemies. If the enemies were redeemed, then it may be concluded, that this was all the more true of the biological children whom one felt obligated to sacrifice out of thankfulness to the gods.
6. All of the source texts that serve for the reconstruction of a so-called ancient Near Eastern child sacrifice myth are secondary sources and originate in part from demonstrably polemic contexts making them

²⁵ Redemption scenes also form the culmination of the dramatic arc in important Greek epics. Within them, dramatic tension is built up and then released. Cf. the ransom of Hector's body at the end of the *Iliad*, where Zeus sends the divine mother of Achilles to persuade him to give the body to Hector's father Priamos (*Iliad* 24,561f); or the sacrifice of Phrixus, who out of gratitude for the gods' intervention to save his life sacrificed the ram Chrysomallos to Zeus his savior at King Aeëtes in Colchis. Chrysomallos' fur, the "Golden Fleece", was hung in the sacred grove of god Ares, which in turn served as link for the Argonauts saga (I thank Philippe Lefebvre, Fribourg, for pointing this out to me).

questionable as sources. The sources presented in this article, on the other hand, are primary ones.

7. It is inadmissible, methodically speaking, to compare biblical texts on substitution sacrifices with (allegedly) extra-biblical sources on child sacrifices or vice versa. Substitution sacrifices must be compared with substitution sacrifices, and child sacrifices with child sacrifices. Each scholar must question his own anti-Canaanite prejudices as well as the possible sources and consequences of the latter.

Figures:

Fig. 1 Saturn (= Chronos), who devours his children, as a Jew; Almanach of the Nuremberg publisher Peter Wagner (1492 CE); Schreckenberg 1997: 343 fig. 2.

Fig. 2 Stelae; basalt stone; Ebla, precinct of sanctuary G3; 18th cent. BC; Museum Idlib 3003; Matthiae 1987: fig. 4 (= IPIAO 2 no. 464) with annotations by the author with respect of the numeration of the scenes by Matthiae *ibid.* 455-460.

Fig. 3 Stelae (fig. 1) in situ before sanctuary G3 of the city goddess of Ebla; reconstruction; Matthiae 1987: fig. 2.

Fig. 4 «Kültepe Level II»-Seal, Syrian style; provenance unknown; early 18th cent. BC; BIBEL+ORIENT Collection, Freiburg CH, VR 1982.150; Keel-Leu/Teissier 2004:no. 306.

Fig. 5 Cylinder seal; provenance unknown; Akkadian era (approx. 2340-2193 BC); BIBEL+ORIENT Collection, Freiburg CH, VR 1981.46; Keel-Leu/Teissier 2004:no. 79.

Fig. 6 Sealing; Kültepe; about 18th cent. BC; Winter 1983:fig. 82.

Fig. 7 Cylinder seal; provenance unknown; ancient Babylonian (middle of the 2nd mill. BC); Winter 1983:fig. 82.

Fig. 8 Cylinder seal; Mari (18th cent. BC); Winter 1983:fig. 266.

Fig. 9 «Alalach Level VII»-Seal, found in Level IV (15th cent. BC); reconstructed from different sealings; around 1700 BC; Collon 1975:12f.170f.Pl. XII.

Fig. 10a Redemption of Shasu in front of Amur; Karnak, northeastern corner of the great Hypostyle Hall; Sethos I (1290-1279 BC); in situ; Staubli 1991: folding plate I, scene V.

Fig. 10b Schema of the military campaign against Palestine under Sethos I depicted on the exterior northeastern corner of the Great Hypostyle Hall; Staubli 1991: 49 fig. 1; **fig. 10a** = no. 5 of the schema)

Fig. 11 Detail from the Tomb of Huy (TT 40), Thebes West, Tutankhamun (1333-1323a); Davies/Gardiner 1926: pl. 30.

Fig. 12 Detail from the procession in the Temple of Luxor; Ramses II (1279-1213a); Leclant 1956: fig. 10.

Fig. 13 Detail from the procession in the Temple of Luxor; Ramses II (1279-1213a); Leclant 1956: fig. 11.

Fig. 14 The Binding of Isaac depicted on the Torah Ark of the synagogue of Dura-Europos (3rd cent. CE); National Museum, Damascus.

Fig. 15 The Binding of Isaac depicted on a Christian oil lamp, Northern Africa (5th cent. CE); Fribourg, BIBLE+ORIENT Museum, GFig 2005.4,

Fig. 16 The Binding of Isaac as a book illustration for Rosh haShanah in the Laud-Machsor; Southern Germany (around 1265 CE); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Laud Or. 321, fol. 184r.

Fig. 17 Ishmael's Binding on a Muslim child's drawing (20th cent.); source unknown.

Fig. 18a/b Binding of Isaac in Folk art (21st cent.); see online sources: http://farm1.static.flickr.com/30/51923592_2d4d01c81d.jpg?v=0
http://farm1.static.flickr.com/24/51923593_1a1237a634.jpg?v=0

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THE CONTEXT OF CONTEXTUALIZATION: REVISITING ACTS 15 FROM THE PERS- PECTIVE OF ITS LITERARY CONTEXT

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Most missiologists consider Acts 15 as both a biblical basis for doing contextualization and an example of contextualization. This study will examine the context of Acts 15 to see to what extent the passage suggests contextualization and in what situations contextualization could be applied.

Key Words: Contextualization, Cornelius, circumcision, Jerusalem council

1. Introduction

The Jerusalem council described in Acts 15 has been considered by the missiologists as one of the biblical bases for contextualization.¹ Most of them argue that this passage suggests contextual theology (or contextualization of theology). They divide the conflicting parties into two groups: the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians; Jerusalem and Antioch.²

- ¹ Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, (ed. A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 227, noticed that there is no single definition of contextualization that is broadly accepted. He suggests that the goal of contextualization may define what it is: "That goal is to enable, insofar as it is humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation." With that goal, he defines contextualization in mission as "The effort made by a particular church to experience the gospel for its own life in the light of the Word of God. In the process of contextualization the church, through the Holy Spirit, continually challenges, incorporates, and transforms elements of the culture in order to bring them under the lordship of Christ" (Ibid.).
- ² To mention some, see for examples, Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 43-55; A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 57, argues that If the story of mission is at the same time the story of how Jews and Gentiles were able to form one people of God, then "the Jerusalem council is a pivotal point for missionary thinking and provides a model for missionaries today in wrestling with issues of contextualization." See also Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Mission: Biblical Foundations & Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 109; John Davis, "Biblical Precedents for Contextualisation," *Asia Theological Association*

However, it seems that Acts 15 has been perceived by missiologists as a major model of contextualization without carefully considering the context of the passage itself. Therefore, it would be necessary to revisit Acts 15 to see to what extent the passage suggests the concept of contextualization and in what context(s) contextualization may be applied. It is the purpose of this study to try to answer the questions above.

In order to reach the goal of this study, the following steps are taken: to analyze the broader context of Acts 15, which includes Acts 10-14; to analyze the background to Acts 15 that created the environment wherein the apostles came up with a decision that is considered by many as contextualization; and to look at what was really going on during the Jerusalem council.

2. The Context: Acts 10-11

In order to know what was going on in Acts 15, the context that leads to the Jerusalem council needs to be clarified. There are at least two events prior to the council that are mentioned clearly in Acts 15: the conversion of Cornelius (15:7-11),³ and the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas (15:12; cf. 12:24 – 14:28). With this context in view, it is now possible to assess the story of Cornelius' conversion and its similarities to the pattern of the Jerusalem council as described in the table below:⁴

Journal 2 (1994): 21; David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 10-11; C

- ³ Although Cornelius is not mentioned, Peter's statement, "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us" (15:8), is similar to his statements, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (10:47) and "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning" (11:15). See also Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 453-54.; Chalmer E. Faw, *Acts, Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), 162.
- ⁴ Although Dean Flemming, 54 states, "The final two accounts of Cornelius and the Jerusalem Council in particular serve as case studies for doing contextual theology," though he does not provide a parallel pattern between those two narratives.

| Acts 11 | Acts 15 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Caused by evangelism to Gentiles— Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) | Caused by evangelism to Gentiles— Paul’s missionary journey to Cyprus, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13, 14) |
| The problem raised by those of the circumcision (11:2) | The problem raised in relation to the issue of circumcision (15:1) |
| The problem raised in Jerusalem (11:2) | The problem raised by those coming from Judea, probably Jerusalem (15:1, 5) |
| The apostles and the brethren were involved (11:1) | The apostles, the elders, and the church were involved (15:4, 6) |
| Peter explained the case in Jerusalem (11:3) | Paul and Barnabas brought the case to Jerusalem (15:2, 4, 12) |
| The problem was solved (11:18) | The problem was solved (15:22-31) |

Table 1: *The Jerusalem Council Pattern*

The problem in Acts 11 was triggered by the conversion of Cornelius and his household. Cornelius was “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” (Acts 10:2).⁵ He knew God and was called φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν, “one who fears God.” This expression occurs nine times in the book of Acts (10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17)⁶ and has been defined as Gentiles “who saw much good in Judaism but who were not willing to go the last centimetre of circumcision to conversion.”⁷

There is no adequate information in the text as to why Cornelius was not willing to be circumcised, although he feared God. However, one may argue that the reason why Cornelius was not willing to be baptized is that he considered circumcision as part of Jewish requirements and not God’s.

⁵ Unless notified, all English Bible texts are taken from New King James Version (NKJ)

⁶ Following Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 52-3, the phrase φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, σεβόμενοι τὸν θεόν, σεβόμενοι, and σεβόμενοι Ἕλληνες are considered synonymous and thus included in the counting. It can be considered, however, that the phrase σεβόμενοι προσήλυτοι (13:43) is not synonymous with the phrases above.

⁷ Jade T. Sanders, “Jew and Gentile in the Book of Acts,” *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 439. He classifies Cornelius in Acts 10 and the Centurion in Luke 7 in this category. So also Flemming, 36. For extensive information regarding God-fearers, see Levinskaya, 51-126.

Although he is not a member of the Jewish community,⁸ he believed and practiced Jewish elements that he considered to be God's requirements. Cornelius gave alms and prayed to God constantly (Acts 10:2), both being practical realizations of the love commandment: to love God and to love others (Matt 22:37-39). Had he been convinced that circumcision was part of God's requirement, he would have given himself over to be circumcised.

In his vision Cornelius was told to invite Peter to come to his house (10:5). He obeyed God and immediately sent his servants to see Peter in Joppa. When Peter came to his house four days later, he asked Cornelius: "for what reason have you sent for me?" (10:29). Cornelius replied: "we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God." (10:33). It seems that Cornelius just wanted to hear what God wanted him to do, not what the Jews wanted him to practice. It could have been a great privilege for Peter to tell Cornelius that God required circumcision as a condition for salvation if circumcision were really God's requirement for salvation, and Cornelius would have been willing to be circumcised. Instead, Peter replied that "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (10:43). What Peter required was what Cornelius had never done before: to believe in Jesus Christ. It was a new concept he accepted: to abandon all other gods and to believe only in the God of heaven and Jesus Christ His Son.⁹

God is the playmaker of the narrative in Acts 10-11. The word θεός occurs one-hundred-sixty-two times in the book of Acts, of which twenty-three times it occurs in the narrative of Cornelius (chaps 10-11).¹⁰ The word θεός is used in relation to: the object of fear (10:2); the object of prayer (10:2); the sender of messenger (10:3); the one who answers prayers (10:4); the one who makes a decision and no one can change it

⁸ Levinskaya, 121.

⁹ Cohen classified Gentiles who show sympathy to Judaism into seven categories. Those who showed it by "(1) admiring some aspect of Judaism; (2) acknowledging the power of the God of Jews by incorporating him into a pagan pantheon; (3) benefitting the Jews of being conspicuously friendly to Jews; (4) practising some or many of the rituals of the Jews; (5) venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods; (6) joining the Jewish community; (7) converting to Judaism and 'becoming a Jew'". S.J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1989): 14f. According to him, Cornelius can be classified as belonging to categories 2-4, but not the fifth, since being a Roman centurion, he participated in a pagan cult. *Ibid.*; see also Levinskaya, 79.

¹⁰ The word θεός occurs 21 times in the preaching of Stephen (Acts 7); 22 times in the narrative of the Pentecost (chaps 2-3).

(10:15); the one who gives visions and makes commands (10:28). This significant occurrence and function of θεός is relevant to the fact that Cornelius is a God-fearer (φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν). That is why, after Peter arrived in Cornelius' house and both of them shared God's direction that they experienced, Cornelius said: "Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God" (10:33). It indicates that Cornelius was ready to accept and follow whatever command God would give to Him.

Luke uses the verb προστάσσω, "to command, to order" in describing what God would command through Peter. This verb is used in the LXX to describe a command given by a ruler (either a king or a master) that should be followed (Gen 47:11; 50:2; 2 Chr 31:5, 13; 1 Esd 5:68; 6:22-31; Esth 2:23; 3:2; Jdt 6:10; 12:7; 1 Macc 10:37; 10:62; 2 Macc 7:3, 4; 13:4; 15:30; 3 Macc 4:11, 13; Dan 2:12, 14; 3:13, 24). It describes God's command to his natural creature (Jonah 2:1; 4:6; 4:7; 4:8). It also describes God's command through His prophets (Deut 18:20), a command that neglecting it would result in death (Lev 10:1, 2; Deut 17:3-5; 27:1-26). In short, the verb προστάσσω is used in the LXX to describe a command by someone in higher authority to his subject. It is never used to describe a command given by a person to another on the same level. Such a command must be obeyed.

In the NT, the verb προστάσσω occurs only seven times (Matt 1:24; 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14; Acts 10:33; 10:48; 17:26). It is used to describe God's command to his creation (Acts 17:26); a command of God's angel (Matt 1:24); the command of Moses to the Israelites (Matt 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14); and the command of God through his servants (Acts 10:33, 48). As it is in the LXX, the use of προστάσσω in the NT also suggests the same meaning—a command given by someone in higher authority than the one or those to whom he gave the command. Luke used it the most, once in his gospel and three times in the book of Acts.¹¹ In the sequence of the occurrence, the meaning of verb προστάσσω in Luke-Acts shows a switch from describing commands given by Moses (Luke 5:14) to describing commands given by God (Acts 10:33, 48; 17:26).

Luke emphasizes the importance of obeying what God commands. He records the decisive statements of John, Peter and the apostles: "Whether

¹¹ This paper presupposes the Lukan authorship and the unity of Luke-Acts. For further explanations regarding the common authorship of Luke and Acts, see Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, (ed. John Riches; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1982), 3-23. See also Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 1-12; Walter L. Liefeld, *Interpreting the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 21-48.

it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge" (Acts 4:19); "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). These statements are declared before the top leaders of the Jewish people and Judaism. It seems that Luke considers the command of the Jewish leaders to be a human command and the gospel commission as the command of God. Therefore, in the case of Acts 10-11, Cornelius may be seen as having been ready to follow whatever Peter would tell him, when he said: "We are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God (πάντα τὰ προσεταγμένα σοι ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου)" (Acts 10:33). This request of Cornelius was fulfilled by Peter in 10:48: "And he commanded (προσέταξεν) them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." For this reason, as mentioned above, had Peter commanded Cornelius to be circumcised, he would have given himself up to undergo circumcision. In this case, circumcision was not required of Cornelius, not because circumcision was not his culture, as was clearly not the case, but because circumcision was not the command of God for salvation. In this sense, the absence of circumcision was not a form of contextualization. It was simply not the command of God.

At this point, Dean Flemming seems incorrect in his inclusion of dietary laws as among the barriers which separate the Jews from other people.¹² He interprets the vision of Acts 11 as a command to Peter to give up the law of clean and unclean foods.¹³ The fact that Peter did not understand the meaning of the vision until the messengers sent by Cornelius arrived, indicates that Peter did not see that the vision should be interpreted literally.¹⁴ Peter did not know that while he was receiving the vision, God had been unfolding the meaning of the vision. When he entered Cornelius' house and saw many people gathered together, he said: "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). Peter continued: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality" (10:34). The vision is about animals and the meaning is about human beings.¹⁵ The vision does not indicate the idea of

¹² Flemming, 38.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ After three times he heard the voice say: "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15), "Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean" (10:17, cf. v. 19).

¹⁵ The word used in the statement given to Peter in the vision and in the statement of Peter to Cornelius is the same: "What God has cleansed (ἐκαθάρισεν) you must not call common (κοίνου)" (10:15), and "But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean (κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον)."

contextual theology in the sense of giving up or negotiating the law of clean and unclean foods in order to bring Gentiles to Christianity. Instead, the vision indicates that God, by using a law that had been familiar to and observed by Peter (10:14), contextualizes His commission to Peter in order that Peter might overcome his internal barriers to reach out to the Gentiles. The meaning is revealed and the law of the clean and unclean foods remains.

There were two reactions of those of the circumcision to what happened in Caesarea.¹⁶ This group is divided in the following manner: first, those of the circumcision who came together with Peter to Caesarea were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was also poured upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:45); second, those of the circumcision from Jerusalem were not happy with what happened in Caesarea. As soon as Peter arrived in Jerusalem, the latter group criticized him (11:2). However, after Peter explained to them what really had happened, “they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (11:18).

The issue was circumcision or uncircumcision and not clean or unclean food. The complaint was about the persons with whom Peter was eating and not what he was eating (11:2, 3). This complaint is similar to that which was addressed to Jesus when he was eating with Jewish tax collectors, although the food was clean (Matt 9:10, 11; Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 5:29, 30).

Acts 10-11 does not provide a biblical basis for contextualization in the sense of overcoming the so-called cultural and social boundaries by nullifying circumcision and the law of clean and unclean food. Contextualization in this context is far from the context. The context of Acts 10-11 has to do with overcoming *soteriological* prejudice—salvation is only for the Jews. The passage does not indicate that either Peter accommodated a certain cultural aspect of Cornelius or modified a certain belief of that Caesarean in order to bring them into Christianity. Instead, Peter broke the wall of prejudice and found his way to Cornelius, bringing to him the command of God. Cornelius, who had been ready to accept whatever God commanded, gave himself up to be baptized.

In the context of Acts 10-11, both Cornelius and Peter received a vision. In the case of Cornelius, the angel of God spoke directly to Cornelius, without any illustration and straight to the point, that he should

¹⁶ Luke makes a specific distinction between Cornelius with his household and the Jews. The first is called ἀκροβυστία “(the) uncircumcised” and the latter is represented by οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς “those of the circumcision” (Acts 11:2, 3).

see Peter. Cornelius responded to the command of the angel immediately. In the case of Peter, God had to use an illustration that was familiar to Peter to impress the truth upon him. Peter understood the message and obeyed God's command accordingly. When there was a protest in Jerusalem, Peter had to explain the case step by step, using the illustration that God gave to him in the vision; it worked and the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem glorified God. It seems that contextualization was more appropriate to reach Peter and the Jews than to reach Cornelius, a God-fearer. Acts 10-11 tell not only "a tale of two conversions"¹⁷—the conversion of Cornelius and the conversion of Peter, but a story of three conversions—the conversion of Cornelius, the conversion of Peter, and the conversion of those of the circumcision.

3. The Context: Acts 12-14

Acts 12 deals with the persecution agitated by Herod. James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod, and Peter was put in prison, but then miraculously delivered. Herod died and the word of the Lord was spreading and more people heard the good news.

Acts 13 and 14 tell about the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, after Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen laid their hands on them and sent them away (13:2, 3). They started their journey from Antioch and ended it in Antioch.¹⁸ This indicates that Antioch, in a sense, was the central missionary base for Paul and Barnabas. In Antioch itself, there had been many believers with both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds (Acts 11:19-26).

In order to understand what happens in Acts 15, it is necessary to analyze the different people groups referred to in the missionary journey. Through careful analysis of such groups, the identity of which group complained and which group was attacked should become evident.

3.1 In Cyprus (13:4-12)

In Cyprus Paul visited two cities: Salamis and Paphos. In Salamis they preached the word of God in the Jewish synagogues (13:5). In Paphos

¹⁷ Flemming, 35.

¹⁸ In this missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas departed from Syrian Antioch, going down to the seaport in Seleucia, sailed to Cyprus where they stopped by Salamis and Paphos, sailed to Perga, took a land trip to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, and then retraced the same route from Derbe back to Syrian Antioch.

they met with a Jew by the name Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer and false prophet who introduced them to the governor of that territory. In Paphos there was a miniature representation of the two main groups which dominates Paul's mission: Governor Sergius Paulus, representing the Gentiles who receive the gospel message, and Bar-Jesus, representing the Jews who try to obstruct the conversion of the Gentiles.

3.2 In Pisidian Antioch

In Pisidian Antioch Paul and Barnabas maintained their custom of entering Jewish synagogues wherever they went. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, Paul was asked to give words of exhortation to the congregation. Paul addressed two groups of people with his message: "ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται "men of Israel," and καὶ οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν "those who fear God." This classification indicates that those who feared God were not Israelites; rather, they were Gentiles, even God-fearing Gentiles. In 13: 26, once again Paul called them υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ "sons of the race of Abraham," and οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν "those who fear God." These two groups worshipped together in the synagogue.

Although God-fearers were not necessarily proselytes,¹⁹ they did have good relationships with the Jewish community. God-fearers came from a group of Gentile people "whose social links with the Jewish community secured Jewish life in the Gentile milieu."²⁰ They were not 'won' by the Jews because the Jews had a special mission for their salvation, but simply because the Jews sought to have a good life among the Gentiles. The Jews were satisfied with a certain *status quo* in regards to their relationship with the Gentiles. They accepted the God-fearers in the synagogues in order that they might maintain that relationship with them. When Christianity concentrated its efforts to win the Gentiles, the Jews were shocked, because Christian evangelists were targeting and had gained success among people whose social links with the Jewish community secured Jewish life in the Gentile environment.²¹ The more the Christian mission was intensified, the more effort was put forth by the Jews to secure the support of their Jewish sympathizers. Therefore,

if the Jewish community in a particular place decided to put a stop to the Christian mission, it was by far the easiest way to do so by using their influence on the God-fearers, among whom there were socially

¹⁹ Levinskaya, 123.

²⁰ Ibid., 125.

²¹ M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 87.

high-ranking and influential people. Consequently God-fearers, in places where these happened, ceased to be responsive to the Christian message and the missionaries found that those Gentiles who were not connected with the synagogues were easier to approach.²²

The social phenomenon described above happened in Pisidian Antioch. After the meeting at the synagogue, “many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God” (13:43). Here another two groups were introduced: πολλοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων, “many of the Jews,” and “(many) of the devout proselytes.”²³ The two partitive genitives πολλοὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων and πολλοὶ τῶν σεβομένων πρὸ σηλύτων suggest that both groups came from the two main groups mentioned above—the Jews and the God-fearers (13:16; 13:26). The implication is that there were many of the Jews who received the gospel and there were also many of the God-fearers who received the message of salvation. Those of the God-fearers were described as proselytes. It seems that many of the God-fearers had become proselytes and if that was the case then they must have been circumcised.²⁴

Paul and Barnabas gained a large catch of converts in that synagogue.²⁵ They found success not only among the God-fearers but also among the Jews. The following Sabbath “almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (13:44). According to the theory posed by Goodman and Levinskaya above, this phenomenon might have destroyed the security of Jewish life in the midst of the Gentile milieu. “They were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the

²² Levisnkaya, 125.

²³ The syntactical construction suggests that πολλοὶ modifies both τῶν Ἰουδαίων and τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων.

²⁴ Philo indicated that physical circumcision should symbolize circumcision of the heart, and therefore emphasized circumcision of the heart rather than that of the body. However, in the circumcision of the heart, the bodily circumcision was assumed. Peder Borgen, *Philo, John and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity*, Brown Judaic Studies 131 (Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press, 1987), 217.

²⁵ Acts 13:43 indicates that those Jews and devout proselytes accepted the gospel messages. Luke describes Barnabas as admonishing the church in Syrian Antioch to remain in the Lord (11:23), and Paul and Barnabas also taught the new believers in Pisidian Antioch to remain in God’s grace (11:43). He uses the same infinitive προμένειν, “to remain faithful to, to continue in” in describing the admonition given by the apostles to the believers in both places.

things spoken by Paul" (v. 45). They "stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (v. 50).

Thus far, it may be reasonably concluded: The people of Antioch consisted of three different groups: (1) the Jews, (2) the God-fearers, and (3) the Gentiles. The message of forgiveness and salvation gained many people among those three groups (v. 43, 48). The rest of the Jews, through some of the God-fearers and the Gentiles, raised persecution and expelled them from the region (v. 50).

3.3 In Iconium (14:1-6)

Coming to Iconium, Paul and Barnabas again went into the Jewish Synagogue and preached in such a way that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed (14:1). While referring simply to "the Jews" as the opponent of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch, Luke clearly identified the group which opposed the apostles in Iconium: the unbelieving Jews (v. 2). They "stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren" (v. 2). The people of the city were divided into two: those who sided with the Jews and those who sided with the two apostles (v. 4). Then the unbelieving Jews, the unrepentant Gentiles, and their leaders became allies in devising an evil plan to persecute and stone the apostles. Those who sided with the apostles must have told them about such a plan and the apostles went on to the cities of Licaonia (v. 6).

Up to this point, there had not been an issue of circumcision, at least as far as the record of Luke is concerned. There had not been a request by the Jewish Christians that their Gentile brethren must be circumcised. Many Gentiles became Christians because they believed in what Paul and Barnabas were preaching, and not because there was an anti-circumcision proclamation. In other words, the absence of circumcision did not become a major factor in bringing the Gentiles into Christianity. The power of the gospel message had attracted not only the uncircumcised but also the circumcised.

3.4 In Lystra and Derbe (14:7-20)

From Iconium Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra. Here Paul performed miraculous signs that amazed the people of the city. As a result, they were trying to idolize the apostles as Zeus and Hermes. It is indicated that as the result of this missionary work, churches were established in those cities (Acts 14:21-23). The Jews from Pisidian Antioch and from Iconium went also to Lystra and influenced the people against the apostles. Paul

was stoned in Lystra and left for dead. Both of them continued their trip to Derbe, and retraced their route back to Antioch.

3.5 Tentative Observations

As to what has been discussed above, the following important points may be advanced:

1. In any city Paul and Barnabas visited, they would, as much as possible, have entered Jewish synagogues and met with both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. In addition, they would also have done their best to meet the Gentiles. Many people of these groups received the gospel message and believed in Jesus.
2. In reaction to the gospel mission, the Jews were disturbed and tried their best to hinder the spreading of Christianity. The opposition and hindrance did not come from the Jews who became believers, but from the Jews who rejected the message of salvation. They did this in several ways: (1) by confronting directly the teaching of the apostles; (2) by stirring up the prominent God-fearers and the chief leaders of the city to persecute the apostles; (3) by provoking the unrepentant Gentiles to be against the repenting Gentiles; (4) by following the apostles to any city they visited that they (these Jews) might also agitate persecution against the apostles.
3. There has not been an issue of circumcision in the cities the apostles visited during the first missionary journey. Many God-fearers and Gentiles repented and became disciples, not because there was an anti-circumcision campaign, but because they accepted the message of forgiveness and salvation. The message of salvation brought by the apostles was so powerful that it might convince not only the uncircumcised but also the circumcised. The core emphasis of the message was not on the absence of circumcision but on the saving power of God through Jesus Christ.

4. What Happened in Acts 15?

The issue of the conflict depicted in Acts 15 is clearly the issue of circumcision: "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (15:1).

These men were false teachers in two senses: (1) they were not sent by the “mother church” in Jerusalem,²⁶ and (2) they taught false teaching. They told the church in Antioch that they were sent by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem but actually they were not (15:24).²⁷ Interestingly, the conflict was not triggered by the local Antiochian Jewish Christians, but by those of Jerusalem. Why Jerusalem? Jerusalem played an important role in the decision-making and problem-solving in the early church.²⁸ Peter had to make a report to the leaders in Jerusalem about the conversion of Cornelius and the church in Jerusalem accepted the report (Acts 11:1-18); Jerusalem sent Barnabas to resolve a problem in Antioch and the problem was settled (11:19-26); some prophets came from Jerusalem to prophesy the forthcoming famine, and the believers in Antioch believed them and sent their aid to Judea (11:27-30); Paul and Barnabas and some others had to come to Jerusalem in order to discuss the matter with the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem (chap 15).

“While [the] Jerusalem church became the center of the circumcised Christians, Antioch in Syria became the center of the Christian mission to the Gentiles.”²⁹ The church in Antioch depended on and was influenced by the church in Jerusalem. It is reasonable that by bringing a false teaching to Antioch in Syria, the circumcised party, coming from Jerusalem might be able to incite Gentile Christians, not only in Antioch, but also in all the cities that Paul and Barnabas visited during their first missionary journey. With this incitement, circumcision, which was once not an issue, became an issue in the south Galatian cities (Gal 1, 2).³⁰ It has been observed above that the problem in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Listra was not triggered by the Jewish (circumcised) Christians, but by the unrepentant Jew—the circumcised that rejected the Christian message of

²⁶ D. Tjakrapawira, “The Jerusalem Council and Doctrinal Conflict: An Exegetical Study of Acts 15: 1-35,” Ph.D Dissertation, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS, 1995), 18, explained that the church in Jerusalem is called “the mother church” for five reasons: (1) It was the first base of the church; (2) the gospel spread to other territories from Jerusalem; (3) the church in Jerusalem helped in resolving the problems of other churches; (4) it was the pattern of other churches; (5) it was acknowledged by other churches.

²⁷ This *modus operandi* was common during Paul’s missionary journeys. See for example 2 Thess 2:2.

²⁸ Tjakrapawira, 16-20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁰ The South Galatian theory is assumed: that is, that Paul wrote his epistle to the churches in the cities of South Galatia which he and Barnabas had visited during his first missionary journey.

salvation. Therefore, if circumcision eventually became an issue in South Galatia, then it was probably triggered by the circumcised coming from the mother church of Jerusalem.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul seemed to suggest to the brethren there that although a messenger from Jerusalem brought a different gospel than what Paul had preached, they should not have accepted it. He said: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8). Paul was astonished that the Christians in the cities he visited in south Galatia were so quickly turning away from the grace of Christ (v. 6). Perhaps, they turned away from Christ as quickly as the false teaching coming from Jerusalem arrived in their cities. These false teachers might have assumed that if Paul and Barnabas had claimed authority, since they had been sent off by virtue of the authority of the church in Antioch, then they could make the counter-claim that they had been sent off by the apostles in Jerusalem, thereby laying claim to a superior authority over that of the two apostles.

The context of Acts 15 indicates that the requirement of circumcision was imposed by the circumcised, not on the unbelieving Gentiles, but on the believing Gentiles. It was a practice required of the Gentiles who have become Christians.³¹ There is no indication of the involvement of non-Christians. It was a problem between the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church in Antioch (15:3), welcomed by the church in Jerusalem (v. 4), and the church in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the church in Antioch (vv. 22-29), and the letter was read publicly before the church in Antioch (v. 30). Therefore, it was an internal problem, not an external one.

It was thus a doctrinal problem and not a practical one. The false doctrine was: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (v. 1), and the right doctrine is: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they" (v. 11). In the Old Testament there are several examples where non-Israelites were willing to undergo circumcision. Abraham and all the men in his house were circumcised, and the practice was done after the reason for the practice had been explained (Gen 17:12-27). They gave themselves to be circumcised because they understood and accepted the

³¹ This group of believing Gentiles was referred to by Luke as τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς "the brothers, brethren." This term is always used to refer to the believers (see Acts 15:1; 15:32; 15:36; 16:40; 17:6; 21:7; 22:5; 28:14). They were also called τῶν μαθητῶν "the disciples" (15:10).

significance and the meaning of circumcision. The same was with Shechem, Hamor, and the Hivites who were willing to be circumcised because the reason for their circumcision was understood and accepted (Gen 34:14-24). Every male in that city was circumcised willingly (v. 24). In the case of Acts 15, it is true that it was not the practice of Gentiles to be circumcised. We can even say that circumcision was not part of their culture. However, the Gentile Christians were not circumcised when they became Christians because there was no doctrinal requirement taught to them by Paul and Barnabas that they had to be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas did not require circumcision of the incoming Gentile Christians, not because they wanted to adjust to or adopt the culture of the Gentiles; it was simply because circumcision was not a requirement for salvation.

When there were several practical requirements made, those were requirements that had been read every Sabbath in the synagogues (Acts 15:20, 21). Those included abstinence from: (1) things offered to idols, (2) blood, (3) things strangled, and (4) sexual immorality (v. 29). Interestingly, circumcision was not mentioned in the letter. It seems that circumcision was not part of the Law of Moses that had been read every Sabbath.³² The Gentile Christians must have been given good reasons to practice those requirements and no reason to practice circumcision.

Most likely, circumcision was implied by the expressions: ζυγόν, “a yoke” (v. 10), and βάρος, “a burden” (v. 28). If this was true, then the opposite of ζυγόν, “a yoke,” is found in the following statement, preceded by a contrasting conjunction ἀλλὰ, “But [on the contrary] we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (v. 11). Then the emphasis on circumcision was not the practice, but the concept that circumcision brings salvation—salvation by works. Following this argument, then the four-fold practices required from the Gentile Christians (v. 29) did not imply that they were to be saved by works.

When the letter was read before the church in Antioch, “they rejoiced over its encouragement” (Acts 15:31). A question must be asked: What brought consolation for the church? Was it the exclusion of circumcision from the list? In fact, as far as the number of requirements is concerned, what was included was more than what was excluded. Is it because their culture was adopted or adapted by the church? Remember that what disturbed the Gentile Christians in Antioch was the teaching of some false teachers from Jerusalem who came to Antioch claiming to be sent by the

³² The conjunction γὰρ connects the requirements (v. 20), and the reason for requiring them (v. 21).

leaders in Jerusalem (v. 24). There was an issue of leadership and authority. In fact, of the 115 Greek words (including definite articles, prepositions and conjunctions) composing the letter, only 32 words or ¼ of it that dealt with the problem mentioned in 15:1. The remaining words are introductory. However, what was mentioned in the introduction might have had more impact that caused the rejoicing of the church than the four-fold requirements.

There are at least four aspects emphasized in the introduction. First, the elders, the apostles and the brethren in Jerusalem considered the Gentile Christians in Antioch as their brothers (15: 23). Second, the teachers who taught that there is no salvation without circumcision were false teachers. They were not sent by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (v. 24). Third, Paul and Barnabas were recognized and acknowledged by the leaders in Jerusalem as authorized teachers and apostles (v. 25). Fourth, to confirm the content of the letter, the leaders in Jerusalem sent Judas and Silas to be witnesses of the validity of the letter by giving an oral report of the same content with the letter (v. 27). These might have been the factors that made the Gentile Christians in Antioch rejoice.

In the context of Acts 13-15, the group of people that always created difficulties for evangelism was the Jews. They did that directly or by using the God-fearers and the Gentiles who did not accept the truth. This was the group that was most difficult to reach. The next group, after the Jews, that was difficult to reach was the God-fearers—Gentiles who had a connection with the synagogues. They were difficult to reach because the Jews influenced them not to accept the gospel message.³³ If this is the case, then the Gentiles who did not have any connection to the synagogues were the easiest group to reach. Therefore, in this context, if contextualization was needed, then it was needed mostly to reach the Jews. The four-fold requirements mentioned in the letter were not new for the Gentile Christians. They were not commanded to start doing those requirements, but to continue doing them.³⁴ So, if they had been doing those requirements, why should such requirements be mentioned in the letter? It was for the sake of the Jews.³⁵ The same reason had been given for the circumcision of Timothy: Paul “took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts” (Acts 16:3). To continue following those requirements was not a significant factor for the Gentile Christians since they had been connected to the Jewish synagogues.

³³ See Levinskaya, 125, in footnote 22 above.

³⁴ The present infinitive ἀπέχεσθαι should be translated “to continue to abstain.”

³⁵ See Flemming, 47.

5. Conclusion

Both the stories of Acts 10-11 and Acts 13-15 do not imply contextualization, at least in the sense of adopting the cultural practice and belief of the Gentiles in order to bring the gospel to them and win them for Christ. To overemphasize contextualization in this sense based on these passages is far from the context.

EDWARD IRVING ON THE SINFUL HUMAN NATURE OF CHRIST: A RESPONSE AND CRITIQUE FROM AN ARMINIAN/ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVE

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Edward Irving argued that Christ during the incarnation assumed humanity's fallen, sinful human nature. He made it clear though, that Christ never committed actual acts of sin. He affirmed that Christ was fully God and fully human, yet qualified his stance that Christ's divinity was quiescent during the incarnation. He attributed Christ's victory in sinful flesh to the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore sinless living is possible as well for fallen humanity, with the aid of the same power. Irving's attempt to establish that sinless living is possible through Christ's condescension to the same level of fallen humanity, while noble, essentially results in a Christology that is questionable. This study attempts to prove that it is not necessary for Christ to assume sinful human nature in order for Him to be humanity's Savior. Moreover this study proves that although Christ's human nature was sinless, yet He holds no distinct advantage over our humanity in our struggles against temptations.

Key Words: Christology, Holy Spirit, incarnation, quiescent, assume, corrupt propensities, sinless, sinful, humanity, divinity.

1. Introduction

Edward Irving (1792–1834) began his ministry in his native Scotland, but rose to prominence in the late 1820s in London.¹ In fact, his rise to a position of influence was rather meteoric, but then his "fall" from favor was also rather dramatic within the Church of Scotland. And the key factor which caused his "fall," and most likely his premature death (he died at the age of 42), was the censuring of his controversial views on the sinful nature of the "substance" of Christ's humanity. In fact, it was relatively late in his brief career that not only censure, but also the revocation of his ordination was meted out by the Church of Scotland on account of his views on the humanity of Christ

¹ A concise life-sketch of Irving is given by David Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), 23-71.

Irving's importance to the developments in Trans-Atlantic Evangelical Protestantism during the 19th and 20th centuries is becoming better recognized. He is now seen as a key contributor to not only the resurgence of Pre-Millennial eschatology in the 19th and 20th centuries, but also as a harbinger of the rise of the Pentecostal/Charismatic revival in the 20th and 21st centuries. Yet his role in Christological developments has been relatively unrecognized. This is most likely due to the benign neglect that the issue of the humanity of Christ (whether seen as peccable or impeccable) has been subjected to in the last two hundred years of evangelical theological discourse.²

In all probability, however, it was his views on the sinful human nature of Christ which provide the key to a proper understanding of not only his Pneumatology, but also his teachings on justification, sanctification, perfection, and the atonement. And all of this was most closely associated with his views on the pre-millennial second coming and its greatly anticipated imminence.

This article will review and then critically respond to Irving's Christology. While both authors have experienced a lengthy involvement in the Seventh-day Adventist debates over the issue of the humanity of Christ,³ it is only recently that we have become aware of the importance of Irving to these rather prolonged exchanges. Thus, while having an intimate familiarity with most of the issues associated with the 19th through early 21th centuries debates over the humanity of Christ, it is only recently that we have made a more extensive study of Irving's primary documents.⁴

² There are certainly notable exceptions to this benign neglect in both Dogmatics and Biblical Studies, including Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970), 2:154; T. F. Torrance, Colin Gunton, Harry Johnson *The Humanity of the Saviour* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 167-78; and C. E. B. Cranfield. See Dorries, xxi. But the issue has not gained much traction in either the Reformed or Wesleyan circles in the 19th or 20th centuries.

³ See Woodrow W. Whidden, II, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ: A Chronological Study* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1997) and a published paper entitled "The Humanity of Christ Debate—What Did She Actually Teach?," *"Ellen White and Current Issues" Symposium*, Vol. 2, 2006, Jerry Moon and Merlin Burt, ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Center for Adventist Research of Andrews University, 2006), 41-74.

⁴ Remwil Tornalejo, "A Comparative Study of the Christology of Edward Irving, Ellet Joseph Waggoner and Alonzo Trevier Jones" (MTh Thesis, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite Province, the Philippines, 2009). The Historical and Theological Studies faculty of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies has, in recent years, been made the beneficiaries of the outstanding

Tornalejo's thesis, which Whidden directed, has mainly sought to explore the influence of Irving's thought on Christological developments in late 19th and early 20th centuries Seventh-day Adventism. After an informative survey of Irving's Christology, he has presented plausible evidence of the influence of Irving on two of the most important figures in Seventh-day Adventism's early debates over the humanity of Christ, E. J. Waggoner⁵ and A. T. Jones.⁶

2. The Key Issues in Focus

The debates which Irving sparked in early 19th Century Britain, along with the later debates in Seventh-day Adventism, have been preoccupied with the question of whether Christ, in the incarnation, took an essentially fallen ("post-fall") or unfallen ("pre-fall") human nature. This article will (1) initially focus on the conceptual "what" of the substance of Irving's teaching on Christology, especially His humanity. Then it will venture (2) an interpretive appraisal of the "so-what's," or the theological implications of his influential convictions and interpretations of Christ's fallen, sinful humanity. Special attention will be devoted to the coherent adequacy of the arguments generated by Irving.

3. An Overview of Irving's Christology

David Dorries has identified five key characteristics⁷ of Irving's Christology:

work done by Aecio Cairus. Professor Cairus has traced the influence of Irving's eschatology on Millerite developments from the late 1820s up through the Second Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844. This has provided a window for a clearer view of the possible influences of Irving's thought on subsequent 19th and 20th centuries developments in the Seventh-day Adventist debates over the humanity of Christ.

⁵ Woodrow W. Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner: From the Physician of Good News to Agent of Division* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008). This is the first detailed, scholarly biography of Waggoner and includes detailed analysis of the unfolding of the key facets in his theology, including Christology.

⁶ George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy, The Case of A. T. Jones* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987). This is the only scholarly biography of Jones and is in the process of revision for re-release in 2010.

⁷ Dorries, 349 ff.

1. The foundational key to his Christology is the principle of God as gracious love and Christ as the incarnate embodiment of God's love, especially God's filial love for lost sinners.
2. Christ has been verily (truly) God from all eternity and became verily man (human) during His earthly incarnation and has retained His humanity since His ascension. Irving is very much in the classical orthodox tradition of Christology. He would have received no anathemas from either Athanasius or the church Fathers at Chalcedon. The Person of Christ was consubstantial with both God and humanity. There was neither the slightest scent of Eutychianism nor Nestorianism.
3. The humanity which Christ assumed, or took, was infected with "fallen flesh." As this aspect of Irving's theology is so central to his controversial convictions, a more detailed elaboration of this phase of his thought will be given after the following two key characteristics are described.
4. The full deity of Christ was fully present in His Person, but was also fully "Quiescent" during the Incarnation. This was an especially strong point for Irving and all subsequent "post-fall" advocates in the broader Adventist tradition. Though Christ came with all of the "fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9), yet He never utilized His inherent divine powers and prerogatives in either working miracles to His own advantage or resisting the temptations of the Devil. Thus Christ was alleged by Irving to have assumed no advantages over those whom He came to redeem, at least when it comes to the great struggle with the flesh, the world and the enticements of the Devil. This aspect of Irving's expositions will prove to be especially central in the subsequent history of how his Christology has been received in the Adventist tradition.
5. Though Christ's inherent, consubstantial deity was quiescent during the incarnation, the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed on Him was understood to be abundantly active. Christ, in His sinful, dependent humanity, was the "Receiver of the Holy Spirit." And here is the final, key aspect of Irving's explanation as to how Christ could be born with a sinful nature, in full consubstantial solidarity with fallen, sinful human flesh, and yet remain immune to the lingering effects of original sin and be totally victorious over all temptations, completely refraining from actual acts of sin. For Irving, the sinlessness of Christ was the result of the empowering gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit—even from the moment of

His “miraculous conception” in the womb of Mary.⁸ This latter point proved to be centrally important to Irving’s account of the sinlessness of Christ—especially when compared to every other baby known to have been conceived in human history (at least from the Protestant perspective—thus excluding the Roman Catholic concept of the Immaculate Conception of Mary).

3.1 “Fallen Flesh”

What did Irving mean by the expression “Fallen, Sinful Flesh of Christ”? He was not averse to using the most explicitly clear language to express his convictions. He was very forthright that the humanity of Christ was as sinful as the “substance of the fallen Adam” (or the “substance of fallen manhood”); His experience was not just a matter of mere appearances.⁹ His humanity was not only afflicted with the effects of sin; it was infected with sin, analogous to a wide-ranging, systemic, viral infection. The “principle of sin” was inherent in His “flesh” and made “it mortal and corruptible” all of His life—that is until His resurrection, which purged the effects of sin from His human nature in vindication of His victorious, sinless life.¹⁰

Thus even such expressions as sinful and corrupt “propensities,” “dispositions,” and “inclinations” to sinfulness were not foreign to the conceptions and terminology of Irving. He disdained any explanation of the impeccable nature of Christ that was akin to the Catholic doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary. He was absolutely clear that Christ took the “fallen substance of Mary’s humanity.”

It is vitally important to understand that Irving held that the source of Christ’s sinless holiness was not caused by any inherent change in the “substance” of the humanity which He received from Mary during the Incarnation. Christ was thus sinful in His humanity, yet sinless in a derived sense—derived from the influences of the Holy Spirit, beginning at the moment of His human conception and lasting until His death.

Thus it is very clear that the Holy Spirit never changed the “substance” of Christ’s sinful, fallen human nature, but continuously subjugated its evil effects and infection until the atoning death was accomplished: “The eternal Son of God, in becoming the Son of Man, took our very nature into union with himself, with all the infirmities brought upon it by the Fall; but upheld

⁸ Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving* (ed. G. Carlyle; London: Alexander Strahan, 1864), 2:195, 262.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2:100-101; 2: 219.

¹⁰ Irving, cited by Dorries, 357.

it from sinning, and sanctified it wholly, and constrained it (in his person) to do the entire will of God."¹¹ Dorries sums up the issue quite well: "Irving never contended that Christ's flesh contained inherent moral evil, but only the natural evil of Mary's fallen substance, which He ever kept morally pure through the operation of the Spirit."¹²

If all of this terminology seems a bit harsh to many evangelical theological ears, the issue is further complicated by some anomalous sounding statements made by Irving as he sought to explicate the sinful, yet sinless humanity of Jesus. Carefully ponder the following:

Whenever I attribute sinful propensities and dispositions and inclinations to our Lord's human nature, I am speaking of it considered apart from Him, in itself . . . we can assert the sinfulness of the whole, the complete, the perfect human nature, which He took, without in the least implicating Him with sin.¹³

Some have understood such language to suggest that Irving was seeking to make a distinction between the "nature" and the person ("apart from Him") of Christ. Marcus Dods, an early 19th century contemporary critic, reacted by suggesting that "Nature cannot exist excepting in a person," therefore "if a fallen nature exists at all, it can exist only as a nature of a fallen person."¹⁴ And quite possibly Dods was correct. But before any facile conclusions can be reached, there is the need to ponder another similar statement:

"But as Christ was man, and not a man, he cannot be spoken of as a human person, without being brought in guilty of original sin. As a divine

¹¹ See Dorries, 360. cf. Edward Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature*, (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1830), 22. Cited 24 January 2008. Online: <http://www.schoolofthespirit.info/OCDLHN.htm>

¹² Edward Irving, "On the Human Nature of Christ," *The Morning Watch or Quarterly Journal on Prophecy and Theological Review*, vol. 1 (London: Ellerton & Henderson, 1829): 75. Cited 22 September 2008. Online: <http://books.google.com.ph/book?id=2Hc3AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=editions:0cWazVvLJ;;mrOadNh7j&hl=en>.

¹³ Dorries, 331.

¹⁴ Marcus Dods, *The Incarnation of the Eternal Word* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1831): Cited 11 November 2008. Online: http://books.google.com.ph/books?hl=en&id=ZVoXAAAAYAAJ&dq=The+of+the+Word,+Marcus+Dods&printsec=froncover&source=web&ots=bRRW1umNY1&sig=zy4Ktc_4ixmQM6t5Q7z0sy1WFNE&sal=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA378,ML

person he is clear of it, and no one can impute it to him. His not having natural generation, clears him of it altogether."¹⁵

Dorries suggests that what Irving is here getting at has to do with the subtle parsings of the "anhypostatic" speculations made by Cyril of Alexandria: Cyril taught that a distinction can be made between "ordinary generation" (being created or naturally born into this world) and "extraordinary generation;" and Irving seemed to be in agreement with this distinction.¹⁶ Thus Christ was granted the gift of an "extraordinary generation" by the Holy Spirit, in clear contrast to the "ordinary lineage" shared by all other human beings who have descended from Adam.¹⁷

Now it could be that Dorries is correct and that Dods and others have not seen this subtlety in the thought of Cyril of Alexandria and Irving.¹⁸ But what is absolutely clear is that Christ was somehow granted a unique, "miraculous," "extraordinary," "generation," or "conception" that shielded him from any infection of sin received by all the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam. This issue will later be further elaborated, but there are a couple of other factors in Irving's thought which need further attention if one is to get a credible handle on his views, including the manner in which sin did or did not infect Christ's humanity.

Most certainly the previous discussion raises the question of the meaning of "original sin" in the thought of Irving? And it seems that for Irving, there was simply no such thing as "original sin," that is, in terms of some sort of original guilt. Sin has, however, been manifested in the lingering effects of the sin of Adam which afflicted Christ with strong "inclinations," "dispositions" and "propensities" to do wrong acts. But such sinful predispositions

¹⁵ Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving in Five Volumes* (ed. G. Carlyle; London: Alexander Strahan, 1865): 5:563-565. Cited 23 September 2008. Online: <http://books.google.com.ph/book?id=2Hc3AAAAMAAJ7printsec=frontcover&dq=editio ns:0V719QYvXZ68P-qdkT;Internet>.

¹⁶ Dorries, 418.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁸ When one tries to wrap the mind around the discussions of *ousia*, *hypostasis* and their beguiling subtleties, it tends to leave the mental capacities somewhat "challenged." Justo L. Gonzalez offers the following suggestion: "Some interpreters have understood him (Cyril of Alexandria) to mean that in Jesus the divine nature took up human nature in general, and that therefore, as to his humanity, Jesus was not an individual. Most likely, what Cyril means is simply that the human nature of Jesus has no subsistence of its own, but subsists in its union with the divine" Justo L. Gonzalez, "Anhypostatic Union [Anhypostasis]," *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2005), 8.

(or bents or aptitudes) involved no corrupting guilt, unless they happened to flower into actual acts of sin.

Therefore for Irving, the sinlessness, or impeccability of Christ's humanity was almost totally bound up with His character record which consisted of habituated, Holy Spirit empowered acts of righteousness and the avoidance of acts of sin. Thus, while Christ was understood to be afflicted with inherited inclinations to sin, He never manifested any initial, habituated acts or cultivated tendencies to sinning.

3.2 Why So Strong an Emphasis on Sinful Nature?

For Irving, if Christ did not take the full, consubstantial sinfulness of human nature, there could be no atonement for sin and salvation from it. And thus it is appropriate to give consideration to the role of two additional key-principles drawn from the early church Fathers that strongly informed Irving's Christology (and his thoughts on atonement, justification, sanctification, and perfection):

(1) Christ could "only redeem that which He assumed." This concept was one of the key maxims of Gregory of Nazianzus and was closely related to (2) the theme of Irenaeus that Christ must recapitulate the experience of fallen humanity if He is to effectively redeem sinners from sin. Both were much in evidence in the Christological and soteriological thought of Irving.

Thus drawing on Gregory and Irenaeus, Irving aptly sums up the issue: "If Christ took not our substance in its fallen, but in its unfallen state, and brought this unto glory, then nothing whatever hath been proved with respect to fallen creatures, such as we are. The work of Christ is to touch not us who are fallen; there is not reconciliation of the fallen creature to God. God is not in Christ reconciling a sinful world, but he is in Christ reconciling an unfallen world; for it is the unfallen creature and the Godhead which have met in Christ."¹⁹

In the thought of Irving, the atoning work of Christ was just as focused on the birth and life of Christ as it was on His death and resurrection. If Christ could not triumph over sin and temptation in the assumed and recapitulated sinful, fallen nature of lost humanity, there could effectively be no atoning death and resurrection.

¹⁹ Irving, *The Collected Writings*, 5:154.

4. The Problematic Nature of Quiescence and the Gift of the Spirit

With this background, it now seems appropriate to commence a review of the critiques which Irving's Christology has received. While one could quibble with Irving's understanding of the nature of sin, original sin, Christ's recapitulation and assumption of sinful nature for the purposes of redemption, and the meaning of such expressions as the sinful substance of human nature, the following is abundantly evident:

Whatever "sin" there was which dwelt in the humanity of Christ, it was somehow neutralized by the gifting of the Holy Spirit. And this special gifting commenced at the time of Christ's earthly "conception" and continued with sustained effect to the moment of His death on the Cross.

Thus, while Christ's inherently divine substance was seen to be quiescent during His entire sojourn as the Incarnate Son of God, the gifting work of the Holy Spirit in His life was continually proactive. And it is these convictions which have sparked most of the reflections on and criticisms of Irving's Christology.

First of all it is important to note that this review of Irving's views on the humanity of Christ reveals almost nothing new to anyone familiar with the debates over this issue that have unfolded in Protestantism from the late 19th Century to the present. And while such notable 20th Century theologians as Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance, Colin Gunton, Harry Johnson, and Clark Pinnock have embraced significant portions of Irving's thought, it has provoked relatively little debate among both Roman Catholics and Protestants (including Wesleyans,²⁰ with their strong emphasis on holiness). But there is one notable exception—Seventh-day Adventism.

In Sabbatarian Adventism, the issue has been at the heart of a protracted debate over the issue of holiness and Christian perfection. In fact, the issues in the Seventh-day Adventist debates over the meaning of the humanity of Christ (and its implications for holy living) are so similar to those sparked earlier by Irving, that it does lead to the suggestion of whether Irving is the ultimate source for what has been called the Seventh-day Adventist "post-fall" or "post-lapsarian" view of the humanity of Christ. Thus, what follows will be a brief review of the issues from an Adventist/Arminian perspective.

²⁰ The Wesleyan Tradition simply seems to have followed Wesley in this strange neglect. He affirmed the humanity of Christ, but provided little sustained, substantive comment on the issue.

The heart of Irving's Christology centers in his attempts to remove any unfair advantage granted to Christ in His struggles with temptation through the alleged quiescence of His inherently consubstantial deity. And this is the key concept which becomes the source for much of the subsequent debate.

Essentially two schools of thought have evolved: the above-mentioned "post-fall" thinkers and their "pre-fall" opponents. The arguments of the "post-fall" thinkers have hardly varied in principle from those of Irving. Thus the key arguments that will be rehearsed are those of the "pre-fall" critics of Irving and his subsequent admirers.

The core of the "pre-fall" case is encapsulated in the following question: Hasn't Irving granted Christ a profound advantage over the rest of sin infected humanity who have not been blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit from their very conceptions? To the "pre-fall" respondents, the following facts seem self-evident:

While Christ was "miraculously" conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary, the rest of humanity have been birthed with sinful flesh and do not normally receive the converting work of the Holy Spirit²¹ until many years later in life. Thus sinful humans bear not only the burden of being conceived, gestated, and born with sin-infected natures, but are further cursed with years of the habituated practice of sin.

One observer of the "pre-fall" versus "post-fall" Christology debate has framed the issue this way: "Right here there remains a massive gap between Christ and the sinner. At best, Christ can only face initial temptation, but He cannot be brought down to the level of the alcoholic who faces the temptation to indulge in strong drink for the thousandth time . . . Christ never knew the power of habitual sin and cannot meet fallen man on that level. . . . And any attempt to drag Him down fully to our level collapses on the bedrock of our history of universally habitual sin."²²

Tornalejo has expressed similar reservations: If "Christ was preserved from original sin and guilt through the miraculous conception, why was such a miraculous way of birth not made common to all humanity? By this all humanity could have started from where Christ started?"²³

²¹ In evangelical parlance, this work which transpires at conversion is normally understood to be a spiritual "conception," or the "New Birth."

²² Eric C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984; later republished by Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI, 1992), 419, 420.

²³ Tornalejo, 77, 78.

To Irving's "pre-fall" respondents, simple logic seems to indicate that Webster and Tornalejo are onto something quite critically important. Maybe the issue could be re-phrased this way: If all that Christ can help sinful humans with is the initial temptation to sin, how, in this sin-infested world, can He be of any help in succoring (Heb 2:18) those (the entirety of the human race) who have to struggle with years and even decades of cultivated, habituated tendencies to acts of sinning?

Thus the "pre-fall" partisans not so subtly suggest that Irving, by giving Christ the unique gifting of the Holy Spirit at His conception, has created a "massive gap" between all of the rest of sinful humanity and Christ. And thus, with the one hand, what Irving thought he has taken away in affirming the quiescent handicap of the full Deity of Christ, he has, with the other hand, given back to Christ with a unique, head-start gifting of the presence and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit during the occasion of His miraculous conception. Thus the "pre-fall" critics go on to claim that it is small comfort for believers to be told that Christ was not advantaged with the "immaculate conception" of His mother Mary, and then be promptly informed that He was given a unique "immaculate reception" to which all the rest of sinners have had no effective access.

4.1 Was Christ Advantaged by His Full Deity and Sinlessness?

As many "pre-fall" thinkers have pondered the various Scriptural passages on the humanity of Christ, especially those key New Testament verses invoked by Irving and his "post-fall" admirers in support of their position, they claim that Irving and company are reading quite a bit into the texts that is not necessarily there. Here one immediately thinks of such passages as Heb 2: 14, 16–18; 4: 15, 16; and Rom 8: 3 (just to name the most often cited). After seeking to absorb the interpretations which the "post-fall" partisans have so persistently sought to convey and giving further review to their own interpretations of these passages, the "pre-fall" thinkers have offered the following responses:

While acknowledging the "post-fall" suggestions, they have not yet seen any of these passages explicitly saying that "total depravity," "total corruption", or sinful "propensities," "inclinations," "tendencies," "bents," "dispositions," or natural proclivities to sin were the inheritance of Christ's humanity. They also honestly admit that the "pre-fall" interpretation of the key texts does not necessarily and explicitly say what they claim is the truth of Christ's sinless human nature. Neither case is all that explicitly compelling in support of their respective positions.

But the “pre-fall” teachers then go on to point out what they sense is truly compelling for both the “pre-” and “post fall” arguments: they both end up with a Christ who is sinless, in the sense that He never committed any acts of sin, or cultivated tendencies to evil. Thus it is claimed that both schools of interpretation must confront one very stubborn fact of evangelical biblical interpretation—that Christ is the only Person since the Fall Who has somehow achieved a record of sinless character. And the key point that all the participants in this debate must struggle with, especially the “post-fall” partisans, is the question of how to explain this sinlessness of Christ—that is, without giving Him some sort of explicit, or tacit advantage. So what is to be made of this situation?

The “pre-fall” thinkers have put forth the following, somewhat unremarkable suggestion: Why don’t both schools admit that in contemplating Christology all are dealing with heavy mystery that simply defies a fully satisfactory explanation. This is essentially the same thing most theologians do when confronted with any number of other issues in Christian theology.

And here one’s thoughts easily turn to such questions as (1) the hypostatic union manifest in the person of Christ, a Being Who remains both human and divine; (2) a Godhead of three divine Persons who co-exist in the being of one God; and (3) the problem of evil (especially the question of why a good and merciful God seems to continue to put up with so much unmitigated evil when He allegedly has the power to instantly bring it all to a merciful end? The “pre-fall” participants then suggest that what both sides are dealing with regarding the humanity of Christ is simply a mystery that is too profound to ever fully fathom. But if such seems like a cop-out to the “post-fall” admirers of Irving, the following concession and suggestions are offered:

It is apparent, in the face of such mystery, that there might be some explanatory power in the careful use of sanctified theological discourse which can help point the way out of the conundrum that Irving has sought to settle with his appeal to a quiescent deity which ends up being not quite so quiescent. This conundrum is especially evident in the previously mentioned unique timing of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit’s protection of Christ against the alleged ravages of sinful propensities, corruption and systemic viral depravity. A re-appraisal of the issue can be put forth in the following terms:

For Irving, the key issue in defining Christ’s sinlessness was almost totally exhausted by negatively defining Christ’s impeccability as the absence of acts of sin, or positively as acts of perfect obedience. While all of this has been readily acknowledged by both schools of interpretation, the “pre-fall” advocates go on to suggest that such a limited definition of righteousness

conjures up a somewhat superficial view of the complexity of the phenomena of sin (and righteousness). They then suggest that there have always been deeper, more foundational aspects of sin and temptation which Irving and his "post-fall" tradition have either inadvertently overlooked or conveniently ignored.

For instance, what about the deeper issue of the divinely bestowed gift of God-dependence versus the human generated, subtle deceitfulness of self-dependence? Who has the greater temptation to trust self, one who is sinlessly perfect from the very moment of conception and fully advantaged with inherent deity, or one who is sinful (in both nature and acts) and totally devoid of the gift of inherent deity?

The seeming lynch-pin of the "pre-fall" argument suggests that one of the more fundamental or radical aspects of the nature of temptation and sin lies in a key definition of sin found in Rom 14:23—"whatsoever is not of faith is sin." And here lurks the most salient thought: at the root or heart of every temptation to sin is the issue of self-trust versus self-denying trust in God. The truly "original sin" of the biblical Adam and Eve was the sin of not maintaining faith in God and His revealed "word." One of the most compelling facets of Jesus' resistance to temptation was His constant dependence on the grace which was imparted to Him in response to His clinging faith in His Father's assuring, guiding Word, and the Spirit's sustaining power.

All would concede that Irving was right about the quiescent deity of Christ. But Irving seemed to be strangely neglectful of one very important facet of sin: that sin consists of not just a catena of bad acts, but is also more radically evident in a badly directed faith. And could it be that the key to Christ's good acts was a good faith?

The heart or core of the "pre-fall" response seems imbedded in the Rom 14:23 definition of sin which has been manifested in every instance of temptation—the issue of God-dependence versus self-dependence. Thus the "pre-fall" question regarding who it is that has the greater temptation to trust self? Is it the Person who has the great advantages of full, inherent deity, an impeccably pre-fall nature, and a squeaky-clean character history of sinless actions and thoughts? Or is it the penitent soul who is naturally sinful, failing, and bearing the legacy of a lengthy "rap-sheet"?

The "pre-fall" appeal concludes with the following: When all interpreters carefully ponder the issue of temptation from this angle, it becomes somewhat ironically plausible to see that all of Christ's inherent advantages begin to morph into points of disadvantage. As one able homiletical rhetorician so vividly put it: Who has the greater temptation to break speeding laws? Is it

those who have a huge power-plant under the hood, or those who drive a fuel efficient Hybrid" or a "Mini"?²⁴

It is then further suggested that when penitent sinners commence to experience the converting power of the Holy Spirit, this is when the realization begins to emerge as to how little all believers naturally have under their spiritual "hoods," and thus the utter futility of trusting self. But by way of contrast and comparison, all are requested to consider Christ's experience when tempted (1) to depend on His sinless, divine Self and (2) to neglect an attitude of continual trust in the imparted power that was on offer from the Father, mediated to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

4.2 A Review of the "Pre-Fall" Response

When temptation and sin are viewed in the light of Christ's evident advantages, temptation, understood as self-dependence (versus constant, faithful dependence on the imparted power of the Father, through the Spirit), then sin and righteousness take on a somewhat different perspective. Did Christ have advantages in His inherent deity and His sinless humanity? The biblical evidence points in this direction. But seen in the light of Rom 14:23, both of these advantages become clear channels of explanation for Christ's profound identity with sinful, dependent, mortal human beings.

Therefore the key temptation for Christ was the same as it is for all humans—the desire to go it alone and depend upon self rather than to lean upon divinely imputed and imparted power (on constant offer from Christ). Did the fact that Christ had all sorts of advantages truly advantage Him? Ironically or paradoxically enough, they became the key occasions of His great disadvantages in His struggles with every species of temptation.

Furthermore, the "pre-fall" perspective suggests one other facet in the history of temptation. The biblical narratives of Adam and Eve, the fall of Lucifer and one-third of the angelic host (Is 14, Ezek 28 and Rev 12) point to a rather simple fact of the angelic and human experience with temptation: *having natural tendencies to sin is not essential to being tempted*. Certainly God did not create either the Angels, or the primal parents of humanity as in any way flawed. Yet they did yield to temptation. And thus the fact that Christ could have come into this world with a neutralized, sinful nature did not automatically free Him from temptation—especially the bent to trust His advantaged Self. Thus it appears that the tortured "post-fall" arguments and strained interpretations of Scripture which seek to set forth a Christ who is corrupt

²⁴ This is a rough, somewhat updated paraphrase of the rhetoric of contemporary Seventh-day Adventist revivalist and author, Morris Venden.

and depraved, yet sinless in behavior, are obviated. Once more, it could be that the key bible texts mean what the "post-fall" advocates say they mean. But the "pre-fall" thinkers sense that they just might be reading a little too much into them. In fact, based on the quite self-evident interpretation of Rom 14:23, the following alternative interpretation of the key post-fall texts is put forth:

Christ was a rather typical first century human being and it thus seems best to express the freedom from sin in His "spiritual nature" this way: While He certainly was *affected* by sin, He was not *infected* with it.²⁵ Somehow at His conception and during His gestation, as He took the "likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), he was *affected* by weakness which was caused by physical degeneracy, but He was not *infected* in His human nature with any sort of selfishness and lusts of the flesh.

Probably the best illustration of this difference has to do with the variations which arise when a comparison is made between the scars which result from bad cuts (and the limps which result from broken bones) with such terminal, viral infections as AIDS. The former are largely lingering *effects*, the latter are deep-seated, systemic *infections*. Thus it is possible to say that Christ was marked by sin, but was not doomed by an incurable (from the human perspective) infection. From the "pre-fall" perspective, this line of illustrative argument suggests a more coherent exposition of the key biblical texts than do the interpretations of Irving and his admirers.

5. Conclusion and Summation

Both "pre-fall" and "post-fall" advocates acknowledge that Irving has made a number of helpful contributions to a fuller understanding of the humanity of Christ and its implications for the atonement and personal salvation. While the "post-fall" interpreters have, in principle, embraced almost all of the key assumptions and conclusions of Irving's teachings on the humanity of Christ, the "pre-fall" interpreters have expressed serious reservations about his advocacy that Christ's humanity included sinful, corrupt propensities, tendencies, inclinations, and bents to sin. And thus they have offered an alternative treatment of the humanity of Christ, based on Rom 14:23. This line of thought has maintained the full impeccability of

²⁵ For this simple, distinguishing terminology, the "pre-fall" school is indebted to 20th century Seventh-day Adventist theologian, Edward (Ted) Heppenstall, *The Man Who Is God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1977), 133.

both Christ's human nature and character, and yet understands Him to be in a condition where He is fully able to "succor," or aid struggling sinners in their battles with temptation. The issue revolves around the central issue of all specific occasions of temptation, the alternatives of deadly self-dependence or life-giving faith dependence on the imparted divine power of the Father which is administered through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus any advantage gained by Christ in the Incarnation is negated by the subtle disadvantages of being both sinless and divine.

THE FIVE STAGES OF CHARLES FITCH'S LIFE (1805 – 1844)

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1. Introduction

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw an unprecedented worldwide revival of interest in the biblical teachings about the Second Coming of Christ.¹ Concluding that Christ would come in their own time, many students of the Bible put a date on the anticipated event.² However, this message of the return of Christ would come to a peak in the Second Advent Movement of the 1840s under the leadership of Baptist William Miller,³ who provided one of the most precisely “elaborated and refined” chronological calculations of biblical prophecies,⁴ showing the impending fulfillment of that event.

This paper will review, in chronological sequence, the life of Rev. Charles Fitch (1805-1844), one of the most prominent characters of the Millerite movement, focusing on his Christian experience. This angle was extracted from his existing correspondence and published writings. Thus those materials will aid our understanding of the crucial events of his life and his personal spiritual pilgrimage.

Looking at his life, one can note that Fitch went through five notable stages. Thus, this study is divided into five parts, one for each section. The first briefly explains the propitious times in which Fitch lived (1805-1825). The decade of preparation at the beginning of his ministry (1826-1835) and the three main issues that stirred controversy (1836-1840) are described in the next part. After that, I will portray his conversion to the doctrine of the

¹ Gottfried Oosterwal, “Modern Messianic Movements: As a Theological and Missionary Challenge,” *Missionary Studies*, no. 2 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1973), 50.

² There were many approximations of the return of Jesus Christ between 1830 and 1847.

³ Everett N. Dick, *Founders of the Message* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 1.

⁴ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 291.

Second Coming of Jesus (1841). Finally, I will bring out the last period of his life as the era of outstanding communication (1842-1844). These periods suggest a pedagogical acrostic consisting of the first five letters of each title of the stages of Fitch's life, FITCH.⁵

2. Fortunate Moment, 1805-1826

Before and during Charles Fitch's life many important events occurred. Those events significantly influenced his life and gave him new perspectives.

2.1 Background

Such major events as the American Revolution (1776-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799) were climactic expressions of the increasing democratic spirit of that time. In the New World, the "age of democratic revolution" made a significant impact not only on the social and political structures of the United States but also on its religious life.⁶

Though the First Great Awakening (led by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Gilbert Tennent) manifested great popularity, the Second Great Awakening (1790-1830)⁷ was "the most influential revival of Christi-

⁵ Bethany Margaret McIntyre's M.A. dissertation, "*A Star of no Small Magnitude: The Life and Work of Rev. Charles Fitch (1805-1844)*," is perhaps the most comprehensive and accurate secondary source that deals with Fitch's life. McIntyre, who is a deeply rooted in the Advent Christian tradition, describes Fitch's life and theology. L. E. Froom's four-volume *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1950-54); Francis D. Nichol's *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1944); and George R. Knight's *Millennial Fever and the End of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1993) all contain, in some parts, general stories of Charles Fitch's life. Several sections of P. Gerard Damsteeg's Th.D. dissertation, "Toward the Theology of Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church or Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission," offer important points about the famous sermon of Fitch, "Come out of her, my people," especially the section entitled: "Attitudes to Other Churches." Thus, none of these studies present a more detailed description of Fitch's life.

⁶ See R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964).

⁷ The revivals reached their height in the United States around 1830. Borge Schantz, "*The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Thought: A Contemporary Appraisal*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1983), 82.

anity in the history of the United States.”⁸ “One of the most popular and well publicized aspects of the Second Great Awakening was the tremendous increase in missionary work.”⁹ There was also a strong and recurring emphasis on eschatology.¹⁰ Evangelical Protestantism was exerting its greatest sway.¹¹ “By allowing the European denominations to coexist in the same geographic setting, American democracy put those denominations in the free, competitive environment that gave room to several new religious experiments.”¹² Thus, Charles Fitch lived in the midst of an unprecedented worldwide revival of interest in the biblical teachings about the Second Coming of Christ.

2.2 Beginning

Very little is known about Charles Fitch's childhood. All the information that we know about is inferred from Fitch's own writings, as well as from the sparse secondary sources available.

Even though we do not know the precise place where Fitch was born, we can presume that it was in Hampton, Connecticut, in 1805.¹³ Knowing the religious fervour of those years, it is very likely that he grew up in the midst of Christian faith and Christian parents. This upbringing was fundamental to his development as an enthusiastic minister.

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 166.

⁹ Stephen E. Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974), 188.

¹⁰ “The theology of the Second Great Awakening also differed from the earlier revival tradition. Stressing God's sovereignty in all things, Edwards and Whitefield had emphasized the inability of sinful people to save themselves. The theology of leading revivalists in the nineteenth century, both North and South, suggested that God had bestowed on all people the ability to come to Christ. This shift in perspective was related to the larger political and intellectual developments we have already noted, but it also arose from a widespread desire for a theology of action that could encourage and justify the expanding revivals of Christianity.” *Ibid.*, 170.

¹¹ “This stage was marked by a pluralism of Christian experience broadening well beyond evangelical Protestantism.” *Ibid.*, 164.

¹² Alberto Ronald Timm, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages, 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1995), 1, 2.

¹³ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, 4:533.

2.3 Ministerial Training

Fitch was trained at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁴ Brown University was the third college in New England and the seventh in America.¹⁵ It was also the first Baptist-affiliated university in the New World.¹⁶ Then, after obtaining his M.A., Fitch was ordained to the Congregational ministry.

3. Indispensable Decade, 1826-1835

The decade from 1826 to 1835 was the formative period for Fitch the preacher. It was also when he married.

3.1 Zerviah

The exact date of his marriage is not known. It is possible, however, that he married in his early twenties. He married a young woman named Zerviah¹⁷ with whom he had at least five children, Charles L., Ellen, Willie, Libby, and Jennie.¹⁸

Keeping a good relationship with each other, they understood their mission to be entrusted to them by God. Even though Charles spent much time away from his family, his heart remained with his wife and their children. On one occasion, writing to his eldest son, he admonished,

I want you to give a great deal of love from me to your dear mother because she is a very particular friend of mine and has been for a long time, before you were a baby; and I feel very sure that there is not a person on the earth, that I begin to love one half as well as I do her. In truth I feel as

¹⁴ Nichol declares that it was in 1826, but Fitch was already the pastor of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Massachusetts, in 1825, 185.

¹⁵ <http://www.brown.edu/web/about/history>.

¹⁶ Bethany Margaret McIntyre, 4. See also Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ Zerviah Fitch, to Charles L. Fitch, April 16, 1841, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. But McIntyre stated "at least seven," McIntyre, 5. Maxwell declares that Fitch was "father of six." C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists*, rev. ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1977), 34.

though I had lost a great deal more than one half of myself when she is not with me...I know however that she loves me well.¹⁹

Moreover, he wanted his family to be faithful to God:

My Dear Wife...Even now while I write, my heart is overflowing with gushing tenderness toward you, and I feel that I want words of tenderness which language does not contain, to express what I feel toward you. I speak sincerely my wife, my heart feels toward you just as I say. And yet I know that my love to you in either tenderness or strength is as nothing, is less than nothing, when compared with the love which our Blessed ever Blessed Redeemer continuously feels for us both.²⁰

3.2 Pastoral Care

His early career as a pastor was indispensable to his mature ministerial formation as a spiritual theologian, Bible student, and an encouraging Christian. By 1825, Charles Fitch, though only twenty years old, was the pastor of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Massachusetts. Froom suggests that Fitch served successively as a pastor “at Abington, Connecticut; Warren, Massachusetts; and Hartford, Connecticut.”²¹ After working in those places, he became pastor of the Marlboro Congregational Chapel in Boston, in 1836. In spite of little information about those years, it is possible to say that this decade was useful to the challenges of the next and last decade of his life.

At the beginning of Fitch's ministry he held some beliefs he would later repudiate. For instance, in his sermon at the funeral of Joseph Stedman Fairbanks, a member of his Holliston congregation, he preached ideas of Platonic dualism on November 10, 1825. Referring to Fairbanks, he explained:

His immortal spirit had fled; and all that we behold of the active, enterprising youth is the clayey tabernacle which that spirit inhabited...the immortal interests of the soul... The aged and the young the man of gray hairs, and the infant in the cradle will soon be sleeping together in the dark and gloomy abode of the congregated dead. And oh! may we so live, “that we shall dread the grave as little as our bed.” And when the

¹⁹ Written in the letter of Zerviah Fitch, to Charles L Fitch, April 16, 1841, in the hand of Zerviah Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²⁰ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, August 31, 1840, in the hand of Charles Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

²¹ Froom, 4: 533.

archangel's trump shall awake our sleeping dust, may we be prepared to welcome its summons; and with the rising saints be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so be ever with the Lord.²²

3.3 Century Sermon

As the fifth minister of the Congregational Church of Holliston, Fitch was responsible for delivering the "Century Sermon." Having heard the eloquent discourse delivered by Fitch, the citizens of Holliston, with their numerous and respectable neighbours, expressed their admiration for it and desired that it be published. Fitch divided his discourse into three parts: the first part contained the civil history of Holliston; the second its ecclesiastical history; and the third a statistical view of the town, with the addition of other important miscellaneous matters.²³ In the last part of his discourse, he persuaded the people to view the future with hope and clear anticipation of the personal return of Jesus Christ to earth to raise and judge the dead. The message of the second coming would be his passion in the last days of his life. He preached:

And while we sleep with our fathers, the monumental marble may stand at our grave's head to tell to future generations that we had lived; but it is only the monument which our works shall erect, that shall assure posterity that we have lived and died well...And when we, and our ancestors, and our descendants shall together stand before God, may we be found prepared to join the full chorus of saints and angels in praise to Him, that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. Amen and Amen.²⁴

3.4 His Longest Work

Writing his most lengthy work, containing 214 pages, Fitch ended his decade of preparation and started a new stage of his life with new and bigger challenges. Now he was the pastor of the Free Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut. In 1835 he published his book with the title, *Inquirer's Guide: or Truth Illustrated by Facts*.

Thirteen stories of conversion are related in this book. One can find there the conversion of Ellen P. and the Universalist man who embraced Christ as he lay dying of tuberculosis. The stories of two young people

²² Ibid., 3, 6, 15.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

twelve or fourteen years old, who accepted Christ through a pastor (probably Fitch), and the conversion of J. F. who abandoned his rum, are also narrated in Fitch's book.²⁵ Through these dramatic conversions to Christ, Fitch exhorted his readers on with different evangelistic expressions: "Let these feelings be manifested in your life, and you are a child of God, and an heir of heaven."²⁶

One can note an evangelistic tone in this work, desiring to see more sinners repent of their sins and turn to Christ.²⁷ Knowing of the success of Fitch's book, John Bigelow ordered from Fitch one hundred copies to sell in his city. Moreover, he asked, "Should there be one or more of your productions of a similar nature, if it is a late work, you may have them put in."²⁸

In his journey through this decade (1826-1835), Charles Fitch expressed his love for his wife and children and greatly desired that they walk in the way of God. Through his family and early ministry, this passionate preacher was preparing for greater challenges. Thus, during the next years three topics would command his focus.

4. Three Main Points, 1836-1840

Between 1836 and 1840, Charles Fitch openly proclaimed three key points: the abolitionist cause, the second coming of Jesus, and the doctrine of entire sanctification. Not surprisingly, these controversial points made many enemies for Fitch. While these topics were advocated by Fitch, others defended their traditional beliefs. And the result was numerous debates. Fitch was insatiable to get the truth.

²⁵ The contents are divided into thirteen chapters: The two neighbors; Ellen P.; W. B. and his friend; the cousins, conversion of J. F.; Delay is dangerous; God is willing that sinners should be saved; The moral man, Value of decision, Husband and wife; The new heart; All must be forsaken for Christ; and Pride. Charles Fitch, *Inquirer's Guide: or Truth Illustrated by Fact* (Harford: Daniel Burgess & Co., 1835).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁷ In the preface he states, "To awaken the thoughtless, therefore; to guide the inquiring; and to aid such as are laboring to win souls to Christ; are objects which the author hopes in some humble degree to promote by this little work." *Ibid.*, iv.

²⁸ John Bigelow, to Charles Fitch, 15 February 1836, typed transcript, Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

4.1 The Abolitionist Cause

On the morning of July 4, 1836, being a member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Fitch himself preached openly against the institution of slavery at Boston's Pine Street Church. Later in the afternoon, he preached the same address again in Salem, Massachusetts, this time "by request of the friends to the immediate abolition of slavery"²⁹ This address was probably based on his forth-coming tract concerning slavery.

By 1837 Fitch published a tract that provided a forceful attack on slavery entitled *Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and its Comparative Guilt Illustrated*. Throughout the 36-page tract, Fitch presented a series of comparisons concerning slavery with other evils, specifically with the Roman Catholic Church and the sin of infidelity.³⁰ Moreover, "the making and vending of ardent spirits," the problems of theft and robbery,³¹ the sin of murder,³² fornication, adultery, rape,³³ and treason³⁴ were compared with slaveholding. Thus, Fitch clearly saw the institution of slavery as the greatest sin the world had ever known.³⁵ Quite obviously, Fitch manifested a favorable attitude to the abolitionist cause and its well-known leader and agitator, William Lloyd Garrison. But their collaboration was short-lived. Both men believed that the Church was not fulfilling her duty in this man-

²⁹ McIntyre, 14.

³⁰ Fitch declares, "I say then, there are points in which slavery outdoes the Romish Church in cruelty and guilt; binds heavier burdens, and more grievous to be borne, and lays them on men's shoulders, and will not touch them with a finger." Charles Fitch, *Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and its Comparative Guilt Illustrated* (Boston: s.n., 1837), 8.

³¹ "This is slavery. It robs a man of all his earnings during his whole life. Labor as he may, sweat as he may, he can never have a farthing to call his own. ... what is that but robbery—except that it is unspeakably worse, because it is legalized—and the poor man has no means of redress?" *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³² "If a man shoots you dead by the wayside, it is your own fault if you do not go to heaven. You have the Bible, and the gospel. You know that there is a Saviour, and if you have not repented of your sins, and believed in him for your salvation, you are without excuse. If you lose your soul, the fault is your own. Though murdered-you might if you would, have been saved. But the poor slave is prevented from learning the way of salvation while he lives, and then worn out from toil, he dies and is lost forever. Surely I need not say more-what honest man is not prepared to say that slavery is worse than murder?" *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁵ McIntyre, 18.

ner.³⁶ Unfortunately for Garrison, in August 1837, Fitch would become a formidable opponent of Garrison's anti-slavery organization³⁷ because Garrison's backlash against the churches resulted in more harm than good to the abolitionist cause.³⁸ The same month Fitch, along with four of his ministerial colleagues from the Boston area, authored the *Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Anti-Slavery Matters*.³⁹

The publication of the *Appeal* did not oppose the abolitionist agenda of Garrison: "Fitch was not so much out of harmony with Garrison's anti-slavery principles as he was with Garrison's teachings against the clergy and his downplaying of the Sunday-Sabbath as a holy day (Garrison taught all days were holy), the visible church, and the Christian ordinances."⁴⁰ The *Appeal* created debates between the followers of Fitch and Garrison.⁴¹ Thus, Fitch and his colleagues had decided to split off from the Garrisonians and create a society of "Evangelical Abolitionists."⁴² Garrison, for his part, saw Fitch as a "deserter" and a traitor.⁴³

"Between 1835 and 1840 Garrison bombarded the American religious establishment with every epithet that was none too vile to include in a speech or a newspaper article. He spared no denomination."⁴⁴ A few years after 1837, on January 9, 1840, Fitch sent a letter to Garrison expressing regret that he had participated in the *Appeal* and had condemned Garrison. Certainly, his conviction of the soon second coming of Jesus led Fitch to express his apology. All this bitter experience finished with the hope of seeing Jesus Christ coming "in the clouds of heaven, coming to judge the world, and to establish His reign of holiness and righteousness and bless-

³⁶ Ibid., 20.

³⁷ George R. Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 107.

³⁸ McIntyre, 21.

³⁹ Charles Fitch and others, *Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Anti-Slavery Matters* (Boston, s.n., 1837).

⁴⁰ Knight, 108.

⁴¹ For a glance at those debates see, McIntyre, 22-29.

⁴² Knight, 108.

⁴³ Louis Ruchames, ed., *A House Dividing Against Itself, 1836-1840: The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 2:275.

⁴⁴ William L. VanDeburg, "William Lloyd Garrison and the 'Pro-Slavery Priesthood': The Changing Beliefs of an Evangelical Reformer, 1830-1840," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (June 1975), 232.

edness over the pure of heart."⁴⁵ Thus, this topic was his second talking point.

4.2 The Second Coming of Jesus

As the pastor of the Marlboro Chapel of the Congregational Church in Boston, Fitch was given a copy of Miller's Lectures, containing his views on the Second Advent, in early 1838. He "was greatly overwhelmed with the subject, until" he felt he "could truly love Christ's appearing."⁴⁶ Miller's book was to Fitch such a novelty that he "devoured it with a more intense interest than any other book I had ever read: and continued to feel the same interest in it, until I had read it from beginning to end for the sixth time."⁴⁷

It was then that Fitch's zealous spirit led him to preach his first two sermons on the Second Advent on March 4, 1838.⁴⁸ The following day, March 5, he penned a letter to William Miller:

My Dear Brother: I am the pastor of an Orthodox Congregational Church in this city. A few weeks since your lectures on the second coming of Christ were put into my hands. I sat down to read the work, knowing nothing of the views which it contained. I have studied it with an overwhelming interest, such as I never felt in any other book except the Bible. I have compared it with Scripture and history, and I find nothing on which to rest a single doubt respecting the correctness of your views. Though a miserable, guilty sinner, I trust that, through the Lord's abounding grace, I shall be among those that "love his appearing." Preached to my people two discourses yesterday on the coming of our Lord, and I believe a deep and permanent interest will be awakened thereby, in God's testimonies.

Yours in the faith of Jesus Christ,
Charles Fitch.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Charles Fitch to W. L. Garrison, January 9, 1840, in Garrison and Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 2:335-337.

⁴⁶ Charles Fitch, "Fitch's two sermons," *Signs of the Time* III no 2 (13 April 1842): 13.

⁴⁷ Charles Fitch, Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1841), 2.

⁴⁸ In Charles Fitch, "Fitch's two sermons," 13, Fitch claimed that the sermons were preached on the date of February 17, 1838. However, in a letter of Fitch to Miller, he suggests March 4, 1838. Charles Fitch, to William Miller, March 5, 1838. Reproduced in George R. Knight, *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 82.

Thus, Fitch had his first contact with Miller. Following these events, on March 6, the Suffolk South Association of Congregational Ministers had a meeting where Fitch introduced to its members the exciting news: Jesus is coming for the second time to Earth. At that time, the famous preachers, Bush, Finney, Cowles, and others had taught “the soon-coming millennium would be a thousand years of earthly peace and plenty brought about through social reform, national progress, and personal perfection.”⁵⁰ Fitch’s message, therefore, was considered by his colleagues as “moonshine,” “ditto,” and that “the prophecies can’t be understood.”⁵¹ Moreover, at the end of the meeting an elderly pastor approached the young Fitch and expressed his concern over the views he had presented to the ministerial association.⁵² “Fitch was led to believe that it was his lack of training in prophetic study.”⁵³ On the one hand, it was negative because it drove Fitch to keep silent for some time and, on the other hand, it was positive because it drove him to learn more about the Second Advent. Even though he lacked knowledge of the Second Coming in the beginning, the seed had been sown and soon would bear fruit.

4.3 The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification

The last and more important point between 1836 and 1840 that affected his theology till the end of his life was his focus on Christian perfection or “full sanctification.” This topic also highlights the utter sincerity of his personality.⁵⁴ After leaving the Marlboro Chapel in Boston, Fitch went to New Jersey, where his “mind became deeply absorbed in examining the subject of full sanctification by faith in Christ.”⁵⁵

While he was pastoring the Presbyterian Church in Newark, New Jersey, he wrote *Views of Sanctification* in November of 1839. It was ironic because the Presbyterian Church, just like the Congregational Church, did not believe in the possibility of Christian perfection. Thus, at the beginning of

⁴⁹ *A Brief History of William Miller, the Great Pioneer in Adventual Faith*, 2d ed. (Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1910), 140, 141.

⁵⁰ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 18.

⁵¹ Charles Fitch, “Fitch’s two sermons,” 14.

⁵² Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842, typed transcript Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

⁵³ McIntyre, 35.

⁵⁴ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 108.

⁵⁵ Charles Fitch, Letter to Josiah Litch, 9

his ministry, Fitch rejected the doctrine of sanctification, due in part to the bad testimonies of those who professed full sanctification.

A work popularly called "A Treatise on Christian Perfection," written by English Methodist John William Fletcher, was read by Fitch and caused him to change his position about Christian perfection.⁵⁶ This "little work," as he named it, showed that Christian perfection was equated with the experience of Pentecost. Considering Christian perfection as an instantaneous work, Fletcher thought that there was gradual experience of the work of the Holy Spirit both before and after the baptism.

For that time, Charles Fitch was not the only minister preaching the doctrine of holiness. This doctrine was also prevalent among the faculty of Ohio's Oberlin College and became known as "Oberlin Perfectionism."⁵⁷ For them "holiness consists primarily of the perfection of the will and is available to every Christian after conversion." Although not officially connected with Oberlin College, Ohio, Fitch united with their theology "and thus became a colleague in the cause with such Oberlin theological professors as Asa Mahan, Henry Cowles, and Charles Finney;" all of these men published books "on the subject of perfection."⁵⁸ Finney wrote *Views of Sanctification* in 1838 and the next year Mahan wrote *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*.

Fitch's *Views of Sanctification* was divided into three sections. In the first, Fitch asked, "Had God, in the economy of His grace, made provision to save His people from their sins?" He answered: "He is my Saviour [Jesus], to save me from my sins; and this is just the Saviour that I need."⁵⁹ Then he questioned whether Christians can avail themselves of this provision of the grace of God so as to be saved from sin in this life? He answered: "He who serves God...is saved from sin, all the days of his life."⁶⁰ And finally he asked: "In what way may the provisions of God's grace become available, to save His people from their sins?" He states "we are...to cleanse ourselves

⁵⁶ John William Fletcher was a close friend with both John and Charles Wesley, and thus was exposed directly to their doctrines. Later on Fletcher was appointed Superintendent of Trevecca College, Wales; but after controversy broke out at Trevecca between the Calvinists and the Arminians, Fletcher resigned, siding with Wesley and the Arminians. As a result of this theological controversy, Fletcher authored his most well-known work, *Checks to Arminianism*.

⁵⁷ McIntyre, 50.

⁵⁸ R. J. Green, "Oberlin Theology," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 834.

⁵⁹ Charles Fitch, *Guide to Christian Perfection* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 1997), 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, by the promises of God. These contain the truth, through which we may be sanctified, according to our Saviour's prayer."⁶¹

After this publication, the Newark Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church accused him of heresy in a "*Resolution of Censure.*" This resolution prohibited Fitch from preaching about entire sanctification. Later, Fitch declared to Litch, "I lost my church connection, and became, in part an ecclesiastical outcast."⁶² Early in 1840, the journal, *Guide to Christian Perfection*, began publication of a series of letters written by Charles Fitch on the doctrine of entire sanctification. In replying to the accusations of his ecclesiastical superiors, Fitch penned a short preface introducing the topic for the readers of the *Guide*:

Some have thought that I was bringing "strange things to their ears," and such a report went abroad. At a late meeting of the Presbytery, the brethren, with perfect propriety, and with the utmost kindness, desired of me that I would tell them "what this new doctrine is." I gave them a brief statement of my feeling and views, and answered as well as I was able several inquiries. The Presbytery, then, with perfect propriety, in my apprehension, appointed a Committee to confer with me further on the subject. Of all this, I fully approve. Soon after, I received a note from one of the committee,⁶³ in which, in a kind and Christian-like manner, he proposed [a series of] questions, and requested an answer.⁶⁴

Convinced of the doctrine of entire sanctification, Fitch wrote a letter to the Presbytery of Newark which gave the reasons why he taught that doc-

⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶² Charles Fitch, Letter to Josiah Litch, 9

⁶³ William R. Weeks, who was an associate of Fitch, was the pastor of Newark's Fourth Presbyterian Church. He was not satisfied with Fitch's answers to the presbytery, and wrote a lengthy letter to Fitch questioning him further. Weeks objected to the fact that Fitch had chosen to publicly respond to a private matter. In the last part of his letter he penned, "I offer no apology for the plainness of these questions. The relation we sustain makes it my duty to try to open your eyes to what I think a dangerous delusion. I have not designed to say anything to hurt your feelings, nor to cast any unkind imputations. I have been obliged to [do this] in great haste, and have not had time to weigh all my words with as much exactness as might be desirable. If there is any appearance of hardness, I ask your forgiveness for it. But if the questions are in any degree searching, both to you, and the subject, this is what I supposed it was my duty to aim at. May the Lord make them the means of good to you and to me, and to the church of Christ." William R. Weeks, *Letter to the Rev. Charles Fitch, on his Views of Sanctification* (Newark, 31 December, 1839), 23.

⁶⁴ Charles Fitch, *Guide to Christian Perfection* I (February 1840), 168-169.

trine.⁶⁵ He ultimately received rejection, and then he soon replied with his *Reason for Withdrawing From the Newark Presbytery* in April of 1840. There, he firmly declared, "I do hereby withdraw from you."⁶⁶ "Thus he bade adieu to his Presbyterian brethren."⁶⁷

Fitch would continue preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification until his death. For him it was completely the work of God, and contained nothing of the works of the believer. His thinking on entire sanctification was that it was "really a matter of the efficacy of the atonement-if Christ died for sins, and those for whom he died were unable to be freed from the bonds of those sins, then his death must not have been efficacious."⁶⁸ Knowing that Christ's death was efficacious, Fitch concluded that entire sanctification was possible.

In short, for Fitch the doctrine of entire sanctification was inseparable from the efficacy of Christ's atonement. He claimed that it changed his life: "He was given an assurance of forgiveness and salvation after which he had long sought."⁶⁹ Furthermore, the doctrine of holiness affected his understanding of the second coming of Jesus.

5. Convinced of the Second Coming of Jesus, 1841

After he left the First Free Presbyterian Church of Newark, Fitch moved back to Haverhill, Massachusetts, to begin a new stage of his life. While he did not have a specific church for a while, he did have greater freedom to preach. This was a period of trouble and uncertainty. He remembered those sad days in a letter written to Walter and Phoebe Palmer:

You know dear Bro. & sister how my heart had been bounding with intense desire to get about to proclaim the glorious doctrine of holiness... My way seemed completely hedged up after I came to Haverhill. I felt as though shut up in some narrow cell, looking out with intense desire at my grated windows and longing and weeping, and wrestling with God to open the way before me that I might go forth and spread out before

⁶⁵ Charles Fitch, *Letter to the Presbytery of Newark* (10 April, 1840).

⁶⁶ Charles Fitch, *Reason for Withdrawing From the Newark Presbytery*, 3, 12.

⁶⁷ Froom, 4:536.

⁶⁸ McIntyre, 41.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 51, 52.

my fellow men the bread and water of life. I fasted, I prayed, I groaned, I wept before the Lord.⁷⁰

In the middle of the enveloping darkness he received new rays of hope through Josiah Litch. This light, which three and a half years previously had shone for a while (in 1838), would now shine until the last day of his life. Thus, Fitch testified: "At length brother Litch, whom I had never seen, called & said, 'Brother, you need the doctrine of the Second Advent to put with the doctrine of Holiness.'" ⁷¹

After this challenge, Fitch began to examine the Scriptures anew regarding Miller's teaching. It would prove to be his second chance. But now he was not intimidated by anybody. Sensing strength and aid from God, he studied with prayer, meditation, and fasting in order to find "all truth."⁷² Later on, in November of 1841, Fitch would write a tract of 72 pages, entitled a *Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ*:

My dear Brother Litch: You will, doubtless, remember that when you called at my house some months ago, you requested me to examine the Bible doctrine respecting the second coming of Christ, and write you the result of my investigations. Having now looked at the subject, until I feel that my mind is settled and established, and my feet placed on "the Rock," I take great pleasure in attempting to communicate my views and feeling to you, according to your request. Permit me here to say, that it is my wish to bear testimony, on this momentous subject, to the world, as extensively as the Lord shall permit...My mind is now in a state of delightful rest in the Lord, touching the whole matter; and I feel fully prepared, and happy, to lay before you what I believe to be the truth, and the arguments by which I find it supported.⁷³

Fitch's testimony was not only shared with Litch, but was also sent to his Holiness friends, the Palmers. He expressed to them that he wished only to know God's will and added, "Light seemed breaking in upon my mind, ray after ray, & I found myself more & more unable to resist the conviction that it was indeed the truth."⁷⁴ He was convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus was at the door. He was now resolved to proclaim the good news to

⁷⁰ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "When Dear Bro. Litch named the second advent, I went to the Lord; I read my Bible, & all the works that I could obtain. I possessed myself of all the evidences in that case that I could; & then with fasting & prayer I laid them & myself with all before the Lord, desiring only that the Blessed Spirit might guide me into all truth." Ibid.

⁷³ Charles Fitch, *Letter to Rev. J. Litch, on the Second Coming of Christ, with the Sentiments of Cotton Mather* (Boston, Joshua V. Himes, 1841), 5, 14.

⁷⁴ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

the world, whatever the cost. Quite evidently, in this message he had found what he did not have, peace and assurance. He composed poetry and wrote scores of letters about the Second Coming as well.

On December 15, 1841, the newspaper, *Signs of the Times*, reported with joy that Fitch had returned to Adventism: "This dear brother has come into the full faith of the Second Advent, both as to the *manner*, and the *time*." Moreover, the Millerite newspaper announced that Fitch's views "will be published in a pamphlet, and will be for sale about the 10th of the present month, at this office." And the advertising ended, "Friends will send in their orders without delay."⁷⁵ Thus, his acceptance of the belief of the pre-millennial return of Christ was so well known that he made enemies. But from that time it would be completely different. Before he had felt badly, with a strong sense of failure, but now his eyes seemed illuminated with hope. He trusted in the soon return of Jesus and the hope it engendered took on great significance for him.

Even though Miller's doctrine of a personal, premillennial return of Christ was so repugnant to the Oberlin theologians, Fitch accepted it. For him, sanctification was the means by which one could become prepared for second coming of Jesus. Through both the doctrine of sanctification and Christ's imminent return, Charles Fitch found personal peace and assurance.⁷⁶ With these two doctrines in mind, the impulsive Fitch would communicate with enthusiasm his legacy in the last stage of his life.

6. Heir of Outstanding Communication, 1842-1844

In the last part of his life, Fitch proved to be an outstanding communicator. For most of his last three years, he enthusiastically put his whole heart into the Millerite Advent Movement. He had become one of the most aggressive and successful Millerite leaders. He fearlessly proclaimed that Jesus is coming again, and exhorted, "Be prepared." Between 1842 and 1844, we can note nine important events which revealed that he was an heir of outstanding communication.

⁷⁵ "Bro. Charles Fitch," *Signs of the Times* II, no 18 (15 December 1841), 144.

⁷⁶ McIntyre, 56.

6.1 Communicating Through His Preaching

With great eloquence, Charles Fitch preached in many parts of New England, to particularly large congregations in 1842. LeRoy Froom's description of him claimed that "in appearance he was slender but well built, with an engaging smile and genuine kindness of heart." As to his preaching, he added that Fitch "was a cogent reasoner and a powerful preacher, deep solemnity characterizing his style. There was warmth and glow in his public address."⁷⁷ And while he received many invitations to preach, he was unable to answer all the calls:

And now so soon as I was ready to come out on the Second Advent, the door before me was thrown wide open and I have been wholly unable for the last 8 months to meet one half the calls which I have received. Wherever I have been God has been with me. Since the 1st of Dec. last, I have preached as often as every day & about sixty times besides. I have been in all The New England States, congregations have been large in all places. Wherever I have been I have preached holiness. My usual practice has been to preach on Holiness in the afternoon, & on the Second Advent in the evening. I have seen saints sanctified & sinners led to Christ.⁷⁸

These years (1842-1844) were very busy for Fitch. Having left his family at home, he went forth to communicate the blessed hope. People came long distances—five, ten or fifteen miles—in those days of primitive travel. His sincere passion for Christ attracted many people in various places. The two following letters reveal his tireless work:

I reached this place [Montpelier] at about half past twelve o'clock on Wednesday. I had then preached 13 times in a week, & attended many prayer meetings & then at the end of it instead of taking rest I had had a most fatiguing ride of 75-miles. A meeting however was appointed for me here on the evening of my arrival. Accordingly I went to bed, & after sleeping 2 hours & a half, I arose exceedingly refreshed, & preached in the evening. The audience was tolerable for numbers-though by no means such as I had left at Claremont. Yesterday I preached twice, & the audience in the evening was much increased. The spirit of the Lord was present, & truth had power.⁷⁹

After eleven days Fitch wrote again to Zerviah, his wife:

⁷⁷ Froom, 4, 539.

⁷⁸ Charles Fitch, to Dr. W.C. Palmer, 26 July 1842.

⁷⁹ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, June 17, 1842.

This morning I Lectured at 5 o'clock on the 2nd advent-I expect to Lecture once or twice more, in the course of the day & evening. Tomorrow morning I leave for Richmond 60 miles toward the north-west, where I am to tarry till Monday morning, when I set out for home I have preached already 39-sermons since I left.⁸⁰

Not only his charismatic personality, but also his creative methods of presentation endeared him to his hearers and readers. As an evangelist, he knew how to capture the people. Depicting the figure from King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel, he used visual aids and a three-dimensional statue. After talking about each kingdom, he removed each part of King Nebuchadnezzar's body, according to the dream. At the end of his preaching, his audience in the "Great Tent"⁸¹ understood that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44) at the Second Coming of Jesus.

6.2 Communicating Through His Famous "1843 Chart"

While Fitch was travelling about, proclaiming the message of the soon return of Christ, the words of Habakkuk came forcefully to his mind: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For revelation awaits an appointed time; It speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."⁸² This was the call that resulted in the making of the legendary "1843-chart."⁸³ After designing the "1843' prophetic chart, assisted by

⁸⁰ Charles Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, June 28, 1842.

⁸¹ "Bro. Fitch lectured in the afternoon, briefly going over the second, seventh, and eighth chapters of the prophecies of Daniel. The rise and fall of the four universal kingdoms that were to precede 'God's Everlasting kingdom,' was illustrated in a very impressive manner, by the aid of a carved image, representing the one described in Dan 2:32, 33. When proof was adduced that ancient Babylon fell, the head of the image was taken off and laid aside; and so of the breast and the arms, the belly and sides, then the legs, leaving nothing behind but the feet and toes. None but the willfully blinded could help seeing that we are living in the very last days." "The Meeting," *Midnight Cry* VI, no 21 (1844): 372.

⁸² Habakkuk 2:2-3, New International Version. "As early as 1842, the Spirit of God had moved upon Charles Fitch to devise the prophetic chart, which was generally regarded by Adventists as a fulfillment of the command given by the prophet Habakkuk." Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy: The Controversy between Christ and Satan* 4 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1884), 4:241.

⁸³ Named the "1843 chart" because it displayed numerous arithmetic calculations pointing to the year 1843, it superseded all previous charts. Its use became an identifying mark in public representations of the Movement until the seventh-month phase, which was based on "1844," not on "1843."

Apollos Hale, Fitch presented it to the Millerite General Conference in Boston, of which Joseph Bates was chairman. It was an instant success. The conference recommended the production of 300 lithographed copies for the use of Adventist preachers.⁸⁴ This was in May of 1842.

On September 23, 1851, Ellen G. White, the Sabbatarian Adventist prophet, was shown the “1843 chart” and reported “that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; that His hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures, so that none could see it, until His hand was removed.”⁸⁵

6.3 Communicating “The Hope” to the Oberlin Community

Later on, between September 19 and October, 4, 1842, Fitch made his first public presentation at Oberlin. This occasion became known for the debates with the Oberlin faculty. His opponents were Oberlin president Asa Mahan and professors Charles Grandison Finney,⁸⁶ Henry Cowles, and John Morgan. He was no stranger to the Oberlin theologians. They noted “with grief” that their beloved Charles Fitch had accepted Miller’s religious thinking.⁸⁷ Their postmillennial theory, a thousand years of earthly peace, was contrary to the premillennial return of Christ. Once Miller’s theory was spread throughout Oberlin College, its leader took some measures against it:

Oberlin’s consternation with Miller’s doctrine is indicated by that between February 17, 1841, and December 22, 1841, the *Oberlin Evangelist* published a series of twenty-three articles on “The Millenium [sic].” That series was succeeded by a second one of seventeen articles entitled “No Millenium [sic]” that extended from January 19 through August 31, 1842. Both series were aimed at Miller, but the second more openly specified the problem as Miller’s “doctrine that the world is never to be converted to God.” The *Evangelist* deplored the fact that many of the “best ministers” were “renouncing the doctrine of the temporal Millenium [sic].”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps*, 10, 11.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 74.

⁸⁶ In 1835, Fitch had been the dedicatory speaker for Finney’s new Broadway Tabernacle congregation in New York City.

⁸⁷ *Oberlin Evangelist*, January 19, 1842, 14.

⁸⁸ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 110-111.

The next year, 1843, Fitch and his family had located in Cleveland, Ohio. Then, a second series of debates was held in September. This time, the debates would be in the public square. Despite the great interest of the population, the Oberlin scholars held to their position. However, Fitch, though anguished at the opposition, strengthened his belief in the return of Christ:

I have never seen the glorious truths of the Bible, teaching the kingdom and coming of Christ, met with more determined opposition, contempt and scorn, than they have been by the Oberlin Faculty; and never, in all my life have I felt such anguish at my heart's core, or shed such bitter, burning tears as I have at their rejection of the Word of the Lord.⁸⁹

6.4 Communicating Through His Own Journal

While thinking about how he could expand the proclamation of the truth of the Second Coming in the western region, the innovative Fitch decided to begin the publication of his own journal. After writing to Joshua Himes, Fitch received a long awaited answer. Himes appreciated his initiative and sent him \$100, of which \$25 "was from a friend in Providence," and "the rest from the Lord's treasury, 14 Devonshire Street."⁹⁰ 14 Devonshire Street was the publication office of Himes' own paper, *The Signs of the Times*.

Furthermore, Himes advised him to write more and promised to send him more publications soon. He challenged Fitch to keep his paper alive.⁹¹ The journal had already begun on January 18, 1843 as a weekly newspaper called the *Second Advent of Christ*.

6.5 Communicating Through His Most Famous Sermon

Anti-Millerite sentiment had rapidly developed in the year 1843.⁹² The general idea held among the Millerites up until 1842 was that the Roman Catholic Church/Papacy was Babylon. This changed with the preaching of Charles Fitch's sermon, "Come Out of her, My People."

The big factor that moved Fitch to preach his famous sermon was the prohibitory "Bath Resolutions" of July 19, 1843, seven days before his famous sermon on July 26, 1843). These resolutions were enacted at Bath, Maine, where "Bishop E. Hedding presided, and W. H. Pillsbury (the histo-

⁸⁹ Charles Fitch, *Midnight Cry*, December 21, 1843, 167.

⁹⁰ Joshua Vaughan Himes, "Letter to Charles Fitch," *Signs of the Times*, V, no 7 (19 April 1843), 52-53.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² P Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1995), 79.

rian) was secretary. 'Millerism' occupied most of the time of the session."⁹³ The resolutions were clearly aimed at the Millerite message. For instance, one resolution says:

Resolved, that those who persist in disseminating those peculiarities, either in public or private, and especially those who have left their appropriate work for this purpose, be admonished by the Chair, and all be hereby required to refrain entirely from disseminating them in future.⁹⁴

Charles Fitch, "true to his zealous and sincere character,"⁹⁵ concluded in his sermon that Catholics and Protestants are Antichrist:

Thus I have defined what Babylon, or Antichrist is. It is everything that rises in opposition to the personal reign of Christ on David's throne, and to the revealed time for his appearing: and here we do find the professed Christian world, Catholic and Protestant, on the side of Antichrist. They all say, let *us* take the kingdom, and let Christ and the departed saints that have suffered with him, to whom the kingdom has been promised, remain where they are.⁹⁶

To Fitch, Babylon meant "confusion." His sermon received wide circulation. "Its greatest impact was in the West."⁹⁷ Charles Fitch published it in his paper, the *Second Advent of Christ* (Cleveland) and Himes sent it out for publication from New York to publications in the west, and a pamphlet was also published in Rochester, New York.⁹⁸ The *Signs of the Time* only published part three of the sermon. "It thus avoided giving wider circulation to Fitch's definition of Babylon with which the editors did not agree."⁹⁹

6.6 Communicating His Belief on the Conditional Immortality of the Soul

George Storrs, who was convinced by Fitch to become an Adventist in mid-1842, now convinced Charles Fitch of the biblical teaching of death as an unconscious sleep. After much study, as was his habit, Fitch confessed to

⁹³ From, 4:775-776.

⁹⁴ *Bath Maine Inquirer*, July 26, 1846, 3. Oddly enough, it was published the same day that Fitch preached his famous sermon.

⁹⁵ Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, 106.

⁹⁶ Fitch, *Come out of Her, My People*, 15.

⁹⁷ Arthur, 66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60, 66.

⁹⁹ "Notwithstanding the fact that many of these leaders could not endorse Fitch's position and actually opposed it, Fitch's sermon exerted a tremendous impact on the movement, and the cry to leave Babylon assumed an importance second only to proclaiming the Second Advent." *Ibid.*, 66.

the former Methodist, Storrs, his complete acceptance of the doctrine of the conditional immortality of the soul.¹⁰⁰ On January 25, 1844, Fitch wrote the following:

I write this to say that I am at last after much thought and prayer, and a full conviction of duty to God, prepared to take my stand by your side. I am thoroughly converted to the Bible truth, that "the dead know not anything," and that all the instances in the Bible in which they are spoken of as though in a conscious state, are instances in which "God who quickeneth the dead, calleth the things which be not as though they were."¹⁰¹

Though William Miller himself never accepted conditional immortality, Fitch never hesitated in his acceptance of this doctrine.

6.7 Communicating Through His Baptism

The baptism of Charles Fitch communicated his public acceptance of Jesus Christ. But what kind of baptism? By early 1844, after having completed his ministry in Painesville, Ohio, Charles Fitch reported to the *Midnight Cry* that "My wife and I have recently been 'buried with Christ by baptism,' having received that precious sacrament at the hands of brother Cook."¹⁰² Soon afterwards, the intrepid Fitch himself baptized eight people at Painesville, and about thirty at Cleveland.¹⁰³

Not only were he and his wife baptized, but also Charles L. Fitch, their eldest son. On April 16, 1844, Charles L. Fitch sent a letter to his mother narrating his impression after his baptism by immersion: "I have felt as though this world was nothing; it seems as though we should soon be done with this and exchange it for a better world."¹⁰⁴ Later that summer, at the St. George's Campmeeting, Charles Fitch "went into the water" baptizing a good number; among them were Josiah Litch and his wife.¹⁰⁵ Then, in September 1844, the editors of the *Midnight Cry*, on the subject of the adherents

¹⁰⁰ Neither Charles Fitch nor George Storrs ever became Sabbath keepers.

¹⁰¹ Charles Fitch, to George Storrs, 25 January 1844. Reproduced in George R. Knight, ed., *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, 163.

¹⁰² Charles Fitch, "Letter from Bro. Charles Fitch," *Midnight Cry* VI no. 8 (7 March 1844), 270.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Charles L. Fitch, to Zerviah Fitch, 16 April 1844, In the hand of Charles Fitch, (photocopy), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

¹⁰⁵ McIntyre, 75.

of immersion, such as Fitch and others, did not take a firm position of accepting or rejecting baptism by immersion.¹⁰⁶

6.8 Communicating Through His Death

By September of 1844, with a clearer understanding prophetic time, the Millerite Movement put all its evangelistic efforts into promoting the Second Coming. There was a powerful sense that the Day was drawing nigh. For his part, Fitch, who was a spokesperson in the west, left his home in Cleveland to go preach in various places in Ohio, and Buffalo and Rochester, New York, and even to several cities in Canada. The ardent Fitch was tireless in his proclamation that Jesus was coming.

However, his last days of life were at the door. Chronic disease was soon to take its toll. After another successful preaching campaign at the Morrisville and St. Georges camp meetings, Fitch believed that it was time to come back home. On September 16, 1844,¹⁰⁷ while at home, Fitch was requested to baptize a group of believers in the chilly waters of Lake Erie near Buffalo. He continued his journey home with his wet garments, and a cold wind blowing. A second group of believers then desired to be baptized and Fitch acceded to their request. Later, a third company came with the same desire as well, and Fitch again went into Lake Erie. Now Fitch was seriously chilled.

Having contracted a “bilious fever” (possibly pneumonia) in Buffalo, Fitch was unable to return home. A certain Brother Judson reported to the *Midnight Cry* that Fitch was “apparently just alive. His soul, however, was full of hope and glory.”¹⁰⁸ He had read the article on the tenth day of the seventh month by George Storrs and fully expected the Lord to come on October 22. Thus he trusted that “If he went into the grave, he would only have to take a short sleep.”¹⁰⁹ On Monday, October 14, 1844, just eight days before he expected to meet his Savior, Charles Fitch died at the early age of thirty-nine. It is said that being in a public meeting, he mentioned that “he had a presentiment that he must sleep a little while before the coming of the Lord.”¹¹⁰

Zerviah believed that very soon she would see her beloved Charles again. Thus the Millerite journal, *The Midnight Cry*, reported that “his

¹⁰⁶ See “Mode of Baptism,” *Midnight Cry* VII no. 12 (26 September 1844), 92.

¹⁰⁷ “Bro. Charles Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. No. 18 (31 October 1844), 142.

¹⁰⁸ “Bro. C. Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. No. 17 (19 October 1844), 133.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ “Bro. Charles Fitch,” *The Midnight Cry* VII. no. 18 (31 October 1844), 142.

widow and fatherless children are now at Cleveland, confidently expecting the coming of our Lord to gather the scattered members of the family."¹¹¹ Moreover, a "Bro Williamson reported that 'Sister Fitch is there [Buffalo], without a tear, expecting to meet her husband very soon. So far from sorrow, she is smiling and happy.'"¹¹²

Being widely loved, the Millerite movement lost one of its most prominent preachers. Remembered as a compassionate pastor, a deep thinker, an original writer, a powerful preacher, and a lover of truth, Charles Fitch died in the hope of seeing the Second Coming of Christ on October 22, 1844.

6.9 Communicating After His Death

Charles Fitch communicated through his preaching, his famous "1843 chart," his witness of hope to the Oberlin Community, his own journal, his most famous sermon, his belief in the conditional immortality of the soul, his baptism, and his death. Later on, Ellen G. White was shown that Charles Fitch was to be among the redeemed:

Here we saw the tree of life and the throne of God. Out of the throne came a pure river of water, and on either side of the river was the tree of life. On one side of the river was a trunk of a tree, and a trunk on the other side of the river, both of pure, transparent gold... We all went under the tree and sat down to look at the glory of the place, when Brethren Fitch and Stockman, who had preached the gospel of the kingdom, and whom God had laid in the grave to save them, came up to us and asked us what we had passed through while they were sleeping. We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out, "Alleluia, heaven is cheap enough!"¹¹³

7. Conclusion

Although his name does not appear much in the pages of nineteenth-century American historiography, Charles Fitch was a prominent leader in the Millerite movement. He was an Abolitionist, a Perfectionist, and an Adventist. McIntyre recognizes him as "a star of no small magnitude." L. E. Froom admired him as "well educated, deeply pious, and a lover of truth."

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 17.

George R. Knight calls him "the zealous Charles Fitch." And *The Midnight Cry* mentioned that he had "a father's tenderness, and a brother's love for the children of God."

Many times, Charles Fitch was separated from his family while preaching his convictions. He was an eloquent and impulsive preacher, an innovative teacher, a productive writer, and a seeker of the truth. He worked beside many of the most influential characters of his day. William Lloyd Garrison became a friend. Together with Charles Grandison Finney, Asa Mahan, and Phoebe Palmer, Fitch preached entire sanctification. Subsequently his proclamation of the soon return of Jesus Christ would be linked to the doctrine of holiness. Thus, Fitch worked passionately for the Millerite movement.

Through the five stages of his life he was a fervent, unapologetic Christian. His last words of hope still resound-- "I believe in the promise of God."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ From, 4:545.

THESIS AND DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

Theological Seminary, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

“Genesis 1:1-2:3 in the Light of Text-Linguistics and Text-Oriented Literary Studies”

Researcher: Daniel Kwame Bediako, Ph.D. in Religion, 2009

Advisor: Gerald A. Klingbeil, D.Litt.

This study investigates Gen 1:1-2:3 through grammatical text-linguistic/pragmatic and text-oriented-literary analyses. The need for such an eclectic approach has arisen due to the following reasons: (1) not only in view of the emergence of text-oriented approaches resulting from the recent methodological switch from historical diachronism to literary synchronism; but also (2) the realization that the integration of text-linguistics/pragmatics and literary analysis promises fresh avenues for analyzing and understanding biblical texts.

As defined in this study, the grammatical text-linguistic/ pragmatic analysis takes shape in the following areas: (1) a morpho-syntactical diagram, which demarcates each clause and indicates its syntagms/constituents, structure/word order, and type; (2) clausal analysis, which offers syntactical analysis within each clause and highlights variations and discourse functions of word order/markedness as well as clausal functions; (3) paragraph analysis, which deals with inter-clausal relations, foregrounding/backgrounding functions, and cohesion; and (4) lexical semantics, where ambiguous terms/word pairs are examined through syntagmatic (and rarely paradigmatic) relations in light of the clausal analysis. The literary aspect of the study focuses on the text type and structure of Gen 1:1-2:3. Thus, the study follows a ‘bottom-up’ process where analysis proceeds hierarchically from the lower level to the higher level of the text, so that the analysis of text type and structure of the pericope is informed by the analysis at clausal and paragraph levels. While this study is, to some extent, an experiment in method—the primary interest being to analyze Gen 1:1-2:3 synchronically from text-linguistic/pragmatic-literary perspective rather than focus specifically on isolated issues—a few conclusions have been reached that relate to several problem areas in the pericope. For example, the study has suggested that (1) Gen 1:1-2 possibly contains antecedent information upon which the rest of the passage is based; (2) several

formal features (emic or etic) seem to suggest that Gen 1:1-2:3 may be understood as a historical narrative in its own right; and (3) the symmetric and stylistic structures found in 1:1-2:3 need not be emphasized over and above its formal/linear structure, which is clearly and explicitly marked, and which accords well with the narrative understanding of the pericope.

The study anticipates that the incorporation of relevant elements of text-linguistics/pragmatics into OT exegesis may contribute to a better understanding of the biblical text. Some of these aspects are verb forms and their discourse functions, word order (markedness/fronting, topic/focus), foregrounding/backgrounding functions, text typology, and cohesion.

“Empowering Leadership: A Seminar Curriculum for Local Church Leaders in the Baden-Wuerttemberg Conference of Seventh-day Adventists”

Researcher: Christoph Berger, D.Min., 2008

Advisor: Reuel Almocera, DPS

Jesus' command “to make disciples” expresses the central aim of all Christian leadership. Leadership needs to motivate, guide, and equip members to an active role in the ministry and mission of the church. However, the context of south Germany shows at present only a small percentage of members in the Seventh-day Adventist church who are actively involved in discipleship. The leadership style of most local church leaders does not empower the members. There is a need for empowering leadership in the local churches. This study approaches the challenge using the methodology of program development and is divided into four major chapters.

The introduction describes the reality and consequences of a professional clergy, where the pastor performs the main ministry tasks in the local church. Chapter 2 provides a theological base for the development of a seminar curriculum and indicates seven main principles of empowering leadership: (1) An empowering leader sees his/her personal spiritual life as a priority, (2) builds strong relationships, (3) selects potential members, (4) works in a team, (5) fosters a clear vision, (6) regularly motivates for growth, and (7) enables growth.

Chapter 3 analyzes the leadership of two local church settings. The analysis includes a cooperative work of one month in each setting, the gathering of relevant data, observation, and informal interviews with leaders

and members. The analysis identified the weaknesses of the leadership and set the focus for the training.

Chapter 4 presents the general shape of the seminar and gives the outline of eight single topics. It also describes the implementation in the two church settings, with special focus on their weaknesses in empowering leadership. After a timeframe of three months, an evaluation of the curriculum was done. With the help of several evaluation instruments, the study showed that only initial change in the leadership had occurred.

The study concludes that the emphasis of empowering leadership is crucial in order to fulfill the mission of Jesus. If an ongoing training is realized by a motivated local minister, with a special focus on young leaders, a growth in discipleship will be visible.

"Views on the Image of God: A Comparative Study of the Views of Karl Barth and Anthony A. Hoekema"

Researcher: Reymand Hutabarat Ph.D. in Religion, 2007

Advisor: Kyung Ho Song, Ph.D.

This study seeks to give a satisfactory, though not necessarily final, answer to the questions, "What are the common grounds and points of difference between the views of Karl Barth and Anthony Hoekema concerning the image of God?" and "What are the underlying influences of these two views?" To reach this goal, the study first describes Barth's and Hoekema's views of the image of God; then, it compares and analyzes these two views.

Barth understands the image of God in man as the relationship between man and woman. He believes that in the Godhead there exists a being "confronting one another" among the three Persons, of which man is the visible pattern. For him, the man who is the image of God is not an individual man but the man as male and female. He believes that the humanity of Jesus Christ is the very image of God. However, this image is not something He possesses as a person, but is found only in His relationship with His woman, the church.

Hoekema understands the image of God as an irremovable aspect of man. He maintains that the image of God must include both structural and functional aspects of man. In the functional aspect, the image is to be seen in man's threefold relationship: toward God, toward others, and toward nature.

This study observes that Barth was heavily influenced by Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, and Ludwig Feuerbach in the formation of his theology. Martin Buber's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's influence was notable in the formation of his doctrine of the image of God. This study also reveals that Hoekema was influenced by many reformed theologians in the formation of his doctrine of the image of God including John Calvin, Emil Brunner, Herman Bavinck, and Hendrikus Berkhof. Due to these significantly different backgrounds, views of Barth and Hoekema on the image of God are apparently incompatible. However, after comparing and analyzing these two views, this study concludes that the apparent differences between them are not antithetical but merely complementary to each other.

CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Bassler, Jouette M. <i>Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts</i> (Richard Saubin)..... | 197-200 |
| Skip MacCarty, <i>In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath</i> (Felix Ponyatovsky)..... | 200-202 |
| Paul De Neui, <i>Communicating Christ in Asian Cities</i> (James H. Park)..... | 202-205 |

Navigating Paul: An Introduction to Key Theological Concepts, by Jouette M. Bassler. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. Pp. xii + 139. ISBN 0664227414; 9780664227418. Softcover. \$19.95.

Navigating Paul is a small book with big responses. Reviews of the book have been done by different scholars including one by Paul J. Achtemeier (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 no 4 (O 2007): 809-810) whose work in Pauline theology was also cited by Jouette M. Bassler.

Jouette M. Bassler is Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. She has written a number of journal articles on Pauline theology including, "Grace: Probing Its Limits" *Interpretation* 57.1 (2003): 24-32, that eventually became the first chapter of her book.

Bassler selected and discussed seven comprehensive essays on Pauline theology. She acknowledged that "the essays will not provide a full roadmap to Paul's letters, much less to his theology, but they will provide navigational guides to the more difficult currents on his thought" (p. 10). Although she chose only seven theological concepts of Paul, the chaptering of the book, whether she realizes it or not, is arranged in a certain sequence that begins with *grace* (chap 1), the initial step of one's salvation, and ends with the eschatological *parousia* (chap 7).

In chap. 1, "Grace: Probing Its Limits," Bassler concurs with E. P. Sanders that while "obedience to the law was of undeniable importance, obedience was framed, defined, and sustained by initiatives of divine grace" (p. 1). This opinion goes against the concept that associates Judaism merely with legalism. Bassler argues that grace was not a new theme for Paul. Having a Jewish background, Paul understood what God's grace is. However, his concept of grace was later changed because of at least three factors: (1) his encounter with Jesus Christ; (2) his understanding of

human suffering; and (3) his mission to the non-Jewish people (pp. 3-8). Bassler challenges her readers to follow Paul in probing further the limits of grace (p. 9).

In chap. 2, Bassler elaborates "Paul and the Jewish Law." She picks up three topics of discussion in relation to Jewish Law: Paul's attitude toward circumcision (p. 13), Paul's understanding on "works of the law" (pp. 13-17), and the function of the Jewish law (pp. 17-21). Bassler brings into discussion two perspectives in regards to the "works of the law": First, the old perspective held by Protestant scholarship arguing that "works of the law" refer to "good works done in order to gain or achieve righteousness before God" (p. 14); second, the "new perspective" arguing that "the works of the law" are not a means to earn God's favor, but are "identity markers" of God's privileged people to distinguish them from the surrounding nations (p. 15). Bassler then comes up with a reconciling proposal: for Paul, the use of the term "works of the law" is flexible, meaning, it does not exclusively fit with one theological framework. Paul begins his argument by directly introducing God's solution for the Gentiles' salvation and then "from that perspective worked his way back to the plight" (p. 17). In this perspective, Bassler believes that "works are contravened by grace (Gal 3:21; Rom 4:2-5) yet obedience is enabled by the Spirit (Rom 8:2-4)" (p. 17). Bassler has entered the current discussions on the function of the law in a concise and effective manner while at the same time introducing another perspective. However, what I would like to see more on this section is a representative study on the word *nomos*.

Chapter 3, "Faith," logically follows chap. 2. Bassler specifically raises the discussions on the meaning of the word *pistis/pisteuein* (pp. 23-27). She emphasizes a simple yet profound statement that "*pistis* is related to Christ" (p. 27). Then in pp. 27-32 she continues with the two main arguments on how *pistis* is related to Christ based on the genitive phrase *pistis Christou* (Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9; Eph 3:12): 1) "faith in Christ," and 2) "faith of Christ." Although she does not give an explicit preference from these two options, she seems to conclude that *pistis Christou*, for Paul, includes "Christ's own faith" (p. 32). She connects faith with law: "Faith can be manifested through obedience to the law (Rom 8:4)" (p. 33). However, she could have made a stronger connection between faith and love that is prescribed in Gal 5:6, a reference that occurs only once in her book (p. 13).

In chap. 4, Bassler discusses what "In Christ" means according to Paul. She begins with presenting various understandings suggested by scholars on the phrase "in Christ" (pp. 35-37): 1) "In Christ" refers to a mystical union with Christ (Albert Schweitzer, Adolf Deissmann), 2) "In Christ" is

an ecclesiological formula meaning an integration into the church by baptism, salvation through Christ (Rudolf Bultmann, Hans Conzelmann), 3) "In Christ" means a new relationship to God and Christ (Jürgen Becker), 4) "In Christ" means salvation through participation with Christ in which Christ shares all our experience (Michael Boutierr). Bassler continues by elaborating the idea that "in Christ" is a language of participation (pp. 37-41) focusing on the various interpretations of Rom 6:3 and Gal 3:27. She does not try to reconcile the various opinions, but goes in line with the understanding of "in Christ" as referring to "a union with Christ that is best described as mystical" (p. 46). Bassler could have enriched her introduction to this section by elaborating different Greek prepositions (e.g. *en* and *eis*) employed to introduce the idea of "in Christ."

Chapter 5, "The Righteousness of God," presents a thorough study on the word *dikaiosynē* "righteousness" modified by the noun *theos*, "God." Bassler acknowledges that without the book of Romans the importance of this theme is not obvious. Therefore, she begins with a general review on the use of the phrase *dikaiosynē theou* in Romans (pp. 49-50). Then she traces back to the Old Testament and the Qumran the corresponding Hebrew word for righteousness, namely *zēdāqā* "righteousness" (pp. 51-55). Her rationale is that since Paul does not explain the meaning of the concept of righteousness in his letter to the Romans, he must have assumed that his audience already had some understanding of the meaning from scripture (p. 55). After doing a literary analysis particularly on Rom 3:21-4:25 and Rom 10:1-4, she concludes that "Paul is convinced that God's righteousness is revealed in God's constancy, consistency, dependability, trustworthiness, and faithfulness", both in revealing His righteous justice, in fulfilling His promises, and in His faithfulness to Israel (p. 65). In addition to her discussion, she also provides an excursus on justification (pp. 66-69). In this chapter, Bassler thoroughly covers a sizable theme with few pages. This may serve as a significant introduction to the theme of justification for those who are interested.

After focusing so much on Romans and Galatians in her previous chapters, in chap. 6, Bassler brings up all Pauline passages on "The Future of 'Israel'": 1 Thess 2:14-16; Phil 3:2-3; 1 Cor 10; 2 Cor 3; Gal 4:21-31; 6:16; Rom 9:9-11. By reserving Romans 9-11 as the last passage to discuss, Bassler seems to put heavy emphasis on some issues in the passage, especially on chapter 11, "where the question of Israel's identity and future comes to a head" (p. 79). The focus is narrowed down to the identification of "all Israel" (Rom 11:25, 26). She presents three possible identities of "all Israel": 1) the elect of Israel, 2) the "spiritual Israel" that consists of the elect remnant plus the Gentile believers, and 3) all of Israel, the elect gen-

tiles and the rest combined (pp. 81-82). Bassler seems to prefer the first option that defines "Israel" by "faith" as the common denominator. With this definition, Gentiles who have faith may be considered as part of this Israel, and the rest of Israel who do not have faith are excluded. However, she still leaves the decision to her readers: "Many options: how does one decide?" (p. 84). She follows Charles Cosgrove's conclusion that a text like Rom 9-11 should be examined not based on Paul's view of the future of Israel but on one's presupposition about the future (p. 85).

In the last chapter, "Then Comes the End . . .," Bassler emphasizes the issue concerning the final state of the resurrected ones at the Parousia. She selects four main discussions: 1) the resurrection at the Parousia (1 Thess and 1 Cor), 2) the naked soul? (2 Cor 4:16-5:10), 3) to depart and be (immediately) with Christ (Phil 1:21-24), and 4) the cosmos and the Parousia (Rom 8:18-25). She considers Paul, while projecting the end-time events that he presented within the framework of first-century Jewish thought. The result of Paul's approach, according to Bassler, is "a rich complexity that stimulates reflection" (p. 96). Bassler concludes that for Paul, resurrection is certain but how God will do it remains mysterious (p. 96).

This book is small in size but with great insights. Its content is well represented in the title. It not only introduces main Pauline theological themes but also stimulates the curiosity of careful readers to dig deeper. Bassler's art of asking questions has navigated her readers to follow her discussion from one step to the next. This book is highly recommended for New Testament students as a starting point for further study in Pauline theology.

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Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2007), xv + 344. ISBN 978-1-883925-57-4. Softcover. \$19.99

Skip MacCarty's book is an attempt to find an answer to the question of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, especially between the Sinai covenant and New Covenant. As the author explains, his book is written as a protest against the point of view that the Sinai covenant, and the Ten Commandments as part of this covenant, were given only to the Israelites and Jesus abolished both of them (xii).

Although the book is written in popular language and contains many examples of imagery to clarify some issues, the author uses an impressive bibliography and quotes from many authoritative sources. Thus the book combines the solidity of an academic work with the simplicity of a popular publication.

At the outset, MacCarty reveals his presuppositions. He considers the basis of all of God's covenants with humanity to be love. Every biblical covenant in human history is an adaptation of the "everlasting covenant" which exists between the Persons of the Trinity, grounded in their love relationship (5, 10).

The method of MacCarty's study is very simple. He tries to understand the essence of the New Covenant, or as he calls it, the DNA of the covenant. Pursuant to this purpose, he analyzes two passages which seem to most fully characterize the New Covenant: Jer 31:31-34 and Heb 8:8-12. Drawing on his analysis, MacCarty identifies four essential characteristics, or "DNA markers" of the New Covenant: (a) *sanctification*, "the righteousness from God imparted to the believer" (29); (b) *reconciliation* – the goal of every covenant God made with humanity (30); (c) *orientation to mission* – to spread the knowledge of God (31); and (d) *justification* – God removes sins and gives believers the right to have access to Him (32).

Having identified these markers, MacCarty tries to find them in the Old Testament covenants. He concludes that the Sinai covenant completely fits the characteristics of the New Covenant: sanctification (Lev 11:45; 19:2); reconciliation (Lev 26); mission orientation (Ex 19:5-6); and justification (Exod 34:1-7).

Such a conclusion inevitably provokes another question: if the Sinai covenant is a "New Covenant" then what is the difference between the Old and the New Covenant? The author gives a simple but convincing answer. According to MacCarty, when the biblical authors speak about the Old or New Covenant there is no differentiation between various historical eras, but only between different religious experiences of the covenant people. Whereas the Old Covenant experience was expressed in rebellion against God's law or in an attempt to consider salvation in a legalistic way, the New Covenant experience implies salvation by faith when the believer lives in accord with God's laws because they are written on the individual's heart. As an example of this, the author analyzes the dichotomy between the two covenants mentioned in Gal 4 (94-95). So, it is possible to live in the Old Testament era and receive the New Covenant experience (Heb 11) and to live in the New Testament era and fall into the Old Covenant experience (Gal 1:6, 7).

Following this, the author discusses the most debated issues about the covenants. The relationship between Love and Law is examined in chapter 8. MacCarty denies the claim that whereas the Old Covenant was based upon Law, the New Covenant was founded on Love. He argues that Love has always been the basis of the Law and finds many arguments supporting his position. For example, there are plenty of references to God's love in the book of Deuteronomy, the book, which has traditionally been considered as a collection of laws (145-146). On the other hand, as MacCarty observes, in spite of the fact that the New Covenant is the Covenant of Love, there are many commandments in the New Testament and some of them imply very severe punishment in case of violations (155-158). Thus, the author shows that it is wrong to speak about one covenant as the Covenant of Love and about another as the Covenant of Law.

The question about the signs of the covenants is considered in the chapter 9. Special attention is paid to circumcision and the Sabbath as covenant signs. MacCarty believes that circumcision in the New Covenant era was replaced with the ceremony of the baptism (176). He draws this conclusion from the fact that both ceremonies are initiation rituals for entering God's covenant. The Sabbath in the New Covenant era, according to the author, is still as valid as in Old Testament times because it remains the sign of the covenant rest (219). The author finishes his work with a discussion of practical issues as to how believers can internalize either the Old or New covenant experiences in daily life (chapter 12).

This book is a great contribution to the understanding of the relationship between the Old and New covenants. The author not only seeks to explain some embarrassing questions, but he seeks to build a theory which could be applied to many difficult issues related to the doctrine of the covenant(s). The question, which remains unclear is this: if the Old Testament covenant was already the "New Covenant" why do we need the New Testament New Covenant? The Bible rather portrays the Old Covenant as contrasting with the New Covenant (Heb 8:13), instead as "one unified, developing covenant" (41). But, probably this is a theme for another book.

Felix Ponyatovsky

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Communicating Christ in Asian Cities, by Paul De Neui, editor. William Carey Library, 2009. Pp. x + 297. ISBN 978-0-87808-007-6. Paperback. \$18.00.

Paul De Neui is the editor of this book and currently serves as the Associate Professor of Mission and Director of the Center for World Christian Studies at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. He holds a PhD degree in Intercultural Studies and has spent eighteen years working with indigenous groups to grow culturally relevant ministries within a folk Buddhist county in Southeast Asia.

According to the preface written by the editor, this is the sixth volume in a series produced from the annual SEANET Missiological Forum held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The conference attracted over one hundred participants from fifteen countries. Nine of the conference presentations are presented here in three sections. Section one deals with the foundational factors and focus on the influence Asian urban areas have on rural populations (pp. 1–39) and the role the media has played in shaping the values of today's urban Buddhist (pp. 41–71).

Section two discusses the contextual issues inherent in the tension between different ethnic groups and Christianity in Buddhist cities (pp. 75–94); the understanding of Urban Buddhists in Sri Lanka (pp. 95–110); reaching the Neo-Buddhist in Urban India (pp. 111–134) and how urbanization has affected Buddhism and Christianity in Sri Lanka (pp. 135–159). Section three looks at the strategy of reaching the nations by reaching the cities (pp. 163–199); of mission to urban Buddhists in the Philippines (pp. 201–223) and how to contextualize the gospel in a holistic way for urban Buddhists in Thailand (pp. 225–259). A bibliographic list of references for the whole volume and an index complete the work.

After a general introduction into the growth of urbanization, Alex G. Smith outlines the development of Thai cities in Asia over the last three millennia and specifically looks at the changing demographic of Bangkok from 1854 to 1920 (p. 9). He laments that although work for the slum areas has not been lacking, their remains the challenge of "finding more effective ways to access and reach the families of the majority population that hold influence and power within these nations" (p. 17). I agree with this tenet wholeheartedly and also with his insight that "mobility provides an open door to increased receptivity" as a vital principle for reaching people in urban areas (p. 25).

A. Stephens Nevins writes an excellent article on the effects of globalization on the third world Buddhist culture. Citing good sources, he successfully shows that culture is one of the West's main exports (p. 45) and relates how this has impacted the Thai, Cambodian and Sri Lankan culture. He also deals with the power of story to convey meaning and truth in modern culture (pp. 58–64).

Section two, which deals with contextualization. Three out of the four articles focus on the challenges Christians face in reaching out to the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. M.S. Vasanthakumar states that "in the history of Sri Lanka, South Indian and European invasions have created negative images about Tamils and Christians in the minds of the Buddhists" (p. 81). Traditionally Sri Lankan Buddhists have believed that the Buddha visited their country three times in order to designate it as a sacred land where the religion would flourish and spread to the rest of the world. These historical and other factors are impediments to the spread of the gospel there.

Santa Lal De Alwis argues in chapter four that in order to contextualize properly we should get to "know the worldview of the neighbour in order to communicate the Gospel effectively" (p. 109). He gives a helpful overview of the historical, religious and cultural dimensions of Sri Lankan Buddhists in both the urban and rural settings. In chapter six G.P.V. Somaratna gives a good overview on how Buddhism has been affected by urbanization. He writes very clearly on how Buddhism has adapted to urban and Christian influences including the use of urban facilities, the role of the monk in urban society, the adoption of preaching as a means of communication, the taking up of social work, the development of missionary monks and several other cultural items.

In chapter five, J.N. Monokaran has researched the challenge of reaching the Neo-Buddhist in urban India. He reports that although Buddhism began in India, its Hindu counterpart eventually stymied the religion until recently when several mass movements towards Buddhism have occurred. He argues that several social factors such as the rigidity of the Hindu caste system, exploitation and victimization have contributed to Buddhism's new appeal. He relates practical incidences where respect for the downtrodden, the attractiveness of the person of Jesus, deliverance ministry, friendship evangelism, the influence of relatives, counseling, summer youth camps have been effective in reaching the Neo Buddhist for Christ in urban India.

Section three deals with the strategic means of mission and begins with a comprehensive article by Stephen M. Spaulding, which attempts to give a solid Biblical foundation for the church's mission to reach the nations. After raising the issue of just how to define the "nations," Spaulding concisely shows how the Old Testament prophets tended to combine together "the interrelationship between 'peoples,' 'nations,' 'cities,' 'lands,' and 'kings'" (p. 169). He then provides both an Old Testament (pp. 171-178) and New Testament (pp. 178-190) survey of the

nations and its related concepts. The article ends with the Biblical material applied to missiology to both the city and the Buddhist world.

In chapter eight David S. Lim has written a much-needed fact-filled article about the number and influence of Filipino Overseas Contract Workers (OCW) who are seeking to provide a Christian influence in a Buddhist context. He cites "low pay at home" and good "people skills (p. 202) as two important factors that motivate the more than 7.5 million Filipinos who are currently working overseas. After citing the fact that the Philippines is "the one major Asian nation with a Christian majority" (p. 203), he reports that the Philippine Missions Mobilization Movement (PM3) is the main coordinating body among the Evangelical (pp. 206-207), Charismatic/Full Gospel (pp. 208-210), Transformational (pp. 210-214) and the Diasporal (pp. 214-216) groups. The chapter ends with a detailed listing of the Filipino Urban Missions by Country and People Group.

The last chapter details the experiences and observations of David Von Stroh who has lived in two slums in Bangkok from 2003 until the writing of the book in 2008. His thesis is "that to the extent we access the fullness of the holistic message of Jesus and to the extent that we access the fundamentals of what Buddha himself put forth, we find a large common ground and opportunity for fruitful ministry together" (p. 226). The author gives his first-hand observations about addictions, family breakdown and fatalism within the slum dwellers as well as trying to find how common ground could be found between Jesus, Buddha and the concept of "Tamma" (otherwise known as Dharma which is the force behind the universe which he acquaints with the Greek concept of Logos).

I would highly recommend this book to missiologists and others who are either doing research or practicing ministry in the Buddhist context. The book provides very readable and excellent information for the layperson as well as the academic. The level of the articles is of a consistent high caliber and the editor has done a very good job of providing a focused view of the subject without overlapping the material. I know there has been a call for many years that local peoples develop their own contextualized theologies to aid the church in its understanding and mission. The current volume of the SEANET Forum goes a long way in answering that call. May its tribe increase!

James H. Park

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