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PURPOSE

To provide an inter-tradition forum for scholars who affirm the historic Ecumenical Creeds of Christianity to constructively communicate contemporary theologies, developments, ideas, commentaries, and insights pertaining to theology, culture, and history toward reforming and elevating Western Christianity. ATI seeks a *critical* function as much or more so as a quasi-ecumenical one. The purpose is not to erase or weaken the distinctives of the various ecclesial traditions, but to widen the dialogue and increase inter-tradition understanding while mutually affirming Christ's power to transform culture and the importance of strengthening Western Christianity with special reference to Her historic, creedal roots.

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EDITORIAL

The Double Mind

Gannon Murphy

A lot has been written lately about *how the mind works*, particularly what drives creativity. Emblematic, and receiving considerable attention, is Jonah Lehrer's *Imagine: How Creativity Works*. Now, those familiar with my editorials know what's coming—I'm going to pounce on it. And to be sure, I'm about to. But I have to say that I actually like the book quite a bit. Principle among Lehrer's insights is that we've largely had it wrong when it comes to driving the creative process. We run around offices pounding coffee all day, hold brainstorming sessions that mostly discharge mental spit-up, canter from one meeting to the next, and then—at the end of day—sleep too little. By all appearances, this makes us “productive.” Worse, successful output is measured in terms of comparison by *stress levels*. Whether in business or in the academy, we win rounds of workplace oneupsmanship by virtue of visible, circadian trauma. If you're frazzled, you must *really* be doing great work. Your superiors are pleased.

But for Lehrer—and here I couldn't agree more—this cultural *modus operandi* is not only counterproductive but positively inimical to the creative mind. Creativity, rather, is engendered by a state of relaxation, quiet reflection, and peace. Think, for example, about the last time you forgot someone's name. The harder you try, the more the name eludes you as though you're trying to catch a piece of lint with chopsticks in a room with a fan on. What's deeply strange about this sort of thing is that, whenever it happens, at that point *you know you don't know something that you know you know*. You know that the information you desire is stored somewhere in your own brain. It's yours, and yet you cannot access it. So when *are* you able to remember the name? Later, when you're relaxed and not stressing over it. Perhaps during a walk in the park. This too, Lehrer avers, is why good ideas often come to us in places like the shower or perhaps while making an omelet—wherever we're not engaged in various modes of institutionalized freneticism. I like it.

So what, then, is my big fat problem with Lehrer's book? It is this—it *misses the entire reason why the mind (and creativity with it) is actually diminished and ultimately destroyed*. Consequently, by failing to identify the ultimate destroyer of minds, the book misses the nexus through which it is finally enlivened. The book, and others like it, is a delight in terms of neat insights and helpful tips (though some border predictably on the juvenile, e.g., did you know that the color blue can help you double your creative output?), but it fails utterly to reach the substrata of what truly kills human minds: *believing, and operating according to, a lie*.

In this issue of ATI, our Patristical reading comes to us from Saint Hilary's magnificent treatise on the Trinity. He begins from an entirely existential vantage point, to wit, anxiety and the subsequent manner in which reflection on what's *real* is precisely how the mind is ultimately swept clean of the daily dross that clouds judgment and actually enables creative thinking, nay *life*, to begin. The ability to create comes when we begin thinking and seeing clearly and when the hard work is done to rid ourselves of the habitual disillusionments that breed mediocrity.

This is the matter of addressing the double mind. Take, for example, the (post)modern corporation. It has become a matter of course in our day for corporations to adopt official

statements of their mission and values and to then drum them into the minds of their employees. A serious problem emerges, however, when two things happen: First, the corporations' mission and values do not truly reflect their practices or aims. Second, the employees enter into a hierarchically-driven hive mentality in which droningly *believing* such statements becomes paramount.

A friend of mine recently applied for a job with a major corporation known historically for the exorbitant compensation of its executive officers and the relatively low respect it tends to have for its employees. Before he had spoken, much less met, with anyone there, he received an automatic reply to his application via email that thanked him for his application and then said that they—*just like him*—are driven by values such as integrity and compassion. Question: how, without knowing a thing about him, can they possibly know whether he's a person that enjoins the values of integrity and compassion? Answer: they can't and, therefore, the statement is as empty of meaning as when they make it in reference to themselves.

The worst part is when employees who work for such corporations actually start to believe this stuff. And it's all too common. Instead of exacting a good day's hard work with a clear purpose in mind, much of the day is spent engaging purely in image management. The focus is not on what *is*, but on how it can be made to *look*. This is a classic case where the death of the mind—and the breeding of mediocrity—begins. There is today a widespread sort of newspeak that evinces a double mind, wherein logically contradictory theses are maintained in a hypnotic tension. That is what a double-mind does. It exhausts and hypnotizes and saps the mind of creativity to the same extent that honesty absconds. It is a trance-state that is requisite for heartless bureaucracies to operate the way they often do, when everyone damn-well knows that profit, or power, or some other thing is the primary driving force. But they slap a different label on it. Their "mission" must be conceived and presented as something positively altruistic, charitable, and life-changing. It is a matter of human history that the double-mind is germinated in the petri-dish of a duplicitous grammar. One of the first things Mao did in China was to transform and diminish the language. We think in words. Therefore, to limit them is to limit the human mind and its potential. It is furthermore the way in which humans corporately tread the spectrum downward from mediocrity, to inhumanity, to outright atrocity.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not an anti-capitalist. If anything, I would advocate for a "moral capitalism" if such is possible (though, I admit an affinity for E. F. Schumacher's quant notion that "Small is Beautiful"). There's nothing wrong with forthrightly selling goods and services that people need or wish to acquire. But please, *please* don't confuse that with social justice, ushering in world peace, or saving the planet. Don't pretend your *raison d'être* is something other than commerce. It's unhealthy. Equally, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with producing a statement of an organization's intentions via its mission and values, provided they are honest about what really drives what they are doing.

I have experienced firsthand the psychological torpor that ensues from striving to maintain the double mind. I've seen organizations that tout values of "trust," "integrity," and "respect" descend into cultures of secrecy and greed. I know the toll it first takes on the individuals who are a part of it, and then eventually on the whole enterprise as it sinks. In both business and the academy, I've known what it means to *want to believe* that what the institution says about itself is just so. But when the heart incessantly informs the mind

concerning what it knows to be a lie, the worst sort of interior conflict is conjured—one which must inevitably result in a break. If the break isn't made cleanly and honestly, decay soon takes up residence in the soul and unwanted consequences are the result. People start to labor under the weight of an unrefreshed mind and a nagging conscience. Creativity dries up as the waters of truth recede.

No doubt, creative mind-power can be poured deeply into nefarious gains. But the essence of evil is, sooner or later, to degenerate and decay. Imagine the creative genius it took to plan, build, and operate the Soviet Gulags. Now we see only the ghostly remains and are left to wonder how it all happened. How could otherwise decent men and women have taken part in such a hell on earth? One of the images that has always stuck out most for me from Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* is how the military women were frequently used to carry out acts of torture on the imprisoned men. The men would be stripped naked and tied spread-eagle to the floor while a female officer stepped on their genitals. This was done not merely for the exquisite pain it produced, but for the added benefit of humiliation. How can a woman come to such a place where she abandons any sense of empathy, femininity, beauty, and maternity; to become a monster hallmarked by her newfound ability to institutionally compartmentalize malevolence? How could the men ever have conceived of such scenarios? The double-mind is the *sine qua non* of such compartmentalization. It is, in fact, a form of mind control. The lie takes over to such an extent that the unspeakable is made entirely possible and all-too-real. As Roger Waters of Pink Floyd fame wrote concerning the emergence of war: "Wave upon wave of demented avengers march cheerfully out of obscurity and into the dream." That dream, the big lie, does what lies always do—it parades as the truth, calls what is evil good, and creates mobile armies of willing deception. The lie of careerism alone is capable of this.

I realize it's a pretty big leap from the duplicitous mission and value statements of some American corporations to the horrors of the Gulag. But it must be said that in terms of psychological mechanism, they are one and the same. Whether it's mediocrity and a chronic lack of imagination in the corporate workplace, or the unbridled evils of prison camps, the way to get there mentally is identical—the emergence of the double mind. The rest is a matter of degree.

In the Epistle of St. James, we read that it is the "double-minded man" who is "unstable in all his ways" (1:8). The Greek word used here for "double-minded" (*dipsuchos*) is very much like calling a person "twice." The mind begins to decay and is then ultimately destroyed by the persistent maintenance of an antithetical tension that arises from a self-serving falsehood. This is why Kierkegaard wrote that "purity of heart is to will one thing." To be singly committed to the real, the good, and the true—without alloy—is to be free. As we read what Saint Hilary has to say in this issue's reading, it is no small thing to ponder the outpouring of lasting, creative genius that came upon him. More important is from whence it came: the rigorous pursuit of truth and the arduous process of banishing the lie. What happens from there is often beautiful.

PATRISTICAL READING

ON THE TRINITY, I.1-10

Hilary of Poitiers¹

1. When I was seeking an employment adequate to the powers of human life and righteous in itself, whether prompted by nature or suggested by the researches of the wise, whereby I might attain to some result worthy of that Divine gift of understanding which has been given us, many things occurred to me which in general esteem were thought to render life both useful and desirable. And especially that which now, as always in the past, is regarded as most to be desired, leisure combined with wealth, came before my mind. The one without the other seemed rather a source of evil than an opportunity for good, for leisure in poverty is felt to be almost an exile from life itself, while wealth possessed amid anxiety is in itself an affliction, rendered the worse by the deeper humiliation which he must suffer who loses, after possessing, the things that most are wished and sought. And yet, though these two embrace the highest and best of the luxuries of life, they seem not far removed from the normal pleasures of the beasts which, as they roam through shady places rich in herbage, enjoy at once their safety from toil and the abundance of their food. For if this be regarded as the best and most perfect conduct of the life of man, it results that one object is common, though the range of feelings differ, to us and the whole unreasoning animal world, since all of them, in that bounteous provision and absolute leisure which nature bestows, have full scope for enjoyment without anxiety for possession.

2. I believe that the mass of mankind have spurned from themselves and censured in others this acquiescence in a thoughtless, animal life, for no other reason than that nature herself has taught them that it is unworthy of humanity to hold themselves born only to gratify their greed and their sloth, and ushered into life for no high aim of glorious deed or fair accomplishment, and that this very life was granted without the power of progress towards immortality; a life, indeed, which then we should confidently assert did not deserve to be regarded as a gift of God, since, racked by pain and laden with trouble, it wastes itself upon itself from the blank mind of infancy to the wanderings of age. I believe that men, prompted by nature herself, have raised themselves through teaching and practice to the virtues which we name patience and temperance and forbearance, under the conviction that right living means right action and right thought, and that Immortal God has not given life only to end in death; for none can believe that the Giver of good has bestowed the pleasant sense of life in order that it may be overcast by the gloomy fear of dying.

3. And yet, though I could not tax with folly and uselessness this counsel of theirs to keep the soul free from blame, and evade by foresight or elude by skill or endure with patience the troubles of life, still I could not regard these men as guides competent to lead me to the good and happy Life. Their precepts were platitudes, on the mere level of human impulse; animal instinct could not fail to comprehend them, and he who understood but disobeyed would have fallen into an insanity baser than animal unreason. Moreover, my soul was eager not merely to do the things, neglect of which brings shame and suffering, but to know the

¹ Saint Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315—c. 367) was Bishop of Poitiers and a champion of orthodoxy against Arianism. Hilary was among the first Latin writers of the church to introduce Greek doctrine to the West.

God and Father Who had given this great gift, to Whom, it felt, it owed its whole self, Whose service was its true honour, on Whom all its hopes were fixed, in Whose loving-kindness, as in a safe home and haven, it could rest amid all the troubles of this anxious life. It was inflamed with a passionate desire to apprehend Him or to know Him.

4. Some of these teachers brought forward large households of dubious deities, and under the persuasion that there is a sexual activity in divine beings narrated births and lineages from god to god. Others asserted that there were gods greater and less, of distinction proportionate to their power. Some denied the existence of any gods whatever, and confined their reverence to a nature which, in their opinion, owes its being to chance-led vibrations and collisions. On the other hand, many followed the common belief in asserting the existence of a God, but proclaimed Him heedless and indifferent to the affairs of men. Again, some worshipped in the elements of earth and air the actual bodily and visible forms of created things; and, finally, some made their gods dwell within images of men or of beasts, tame or wild, of birds or of snakes, and confined the Lord of the universe and Father of infinity within these narrow prisons of metal or stone or wood. These, I was sure, could be no exponents of truth, for though they were at one in the absurdity, the foulness, the impiety of their observances, they were at variance concerning the essential articles of their senseless belief. My soul was distracted amid all these claims, yet still it pressed along that profitable road which leads inevitably to the true knowledge of God. It could not hold that neglect of a world created by Himself was worthily to be attributed to God, or that deities endowed with sex, and lines of begetters and begotten, were compatible with the pure and mighty nature of the Godhead. Nay, rather, it was sure that that which is Divine and eternal must be one without distinction of sex, for that which is self-existent cannot have left outside itself anything superior to itself. Hence omnipotence and eternity are the possession of One only, for omnipotence is incapable of degrees of strength or weakness, and eternity of priority or succession. In God we must worship absolute eternity and absolute power.

5. While my mind was dwelling on these and on many like thoughts, I chanced upon the books which, according to the tradition of the Hebrew faith, were written by Moses and the prophets, and found in these words spoken by God the Creator testifying of Himself 'I AM THAT I AM, and again, He that is has sent me unto you' [Exodus 3:14]. I confess that I was amazed to find in them an indication concerning God so exact that it expressed in the terms best adapted to human understanding an unattainable insight into the mystery of the Divine nature. For no property of God which the mind can grasp is more characteristic of Him than existence, since existence, in the absolute sense, cannot be predicated of that which shall come to an end, or of that which has had a beginning, and He who now joins continuity of being with the possession of perfect felicity could not in the past, nor can in the future, be non-existent; for whatsoever is Divine can neither be originated nor destroyed. Wherefore, since God's eternity is inseparable from Himself, it was worthy of Him to reveal this one thing, that He is, as the assurance of His absolute eternity.

6. For such an indication of God's infinity the words 'I AM THAT I AM' were clearly adequate; but, in addition, we needed to apprehend the operation of His majesty and power. For while absolute existence is peculiar to Him Who, abiding eternally, had no beginning in a past however remote, we hear again an utterance worthy of Himself issuing from the eternal and Holy God, Who says, Who holds the heaven in His palm and the earth in His hand [Isaiah 40:12], and again, The heaven is My throne and the earth is the footstool of My feet.

What house will you build Me or what shall be the place of My rest ? The whole heaven is held in the palm of God, the whole earth grasped in His hand. Now the word of God, profitable as it is to the cursory thought of a pious mind, reveals a deeper meaning to the patient student than to the momentary hearer. For this heaven which is held in the palm of God is also His throne, and the earth which is grasped in His hand is also the footstool beneath His feet. This was not written that from throne and footstool, metaphors drawn from the posture of one sitting, we should conclude that He has extension in space, as of a body, for that which is His throne and footstool is also held in hand and palm by that infinite Omnipotence. It was written that in all born and created things God might be known within them and without, overshadowing and indwelling, surrounding all and interfused through all, since palm and hand, which hold, reveal the might of His external control, while throne and footstool, by their support of a sitter, display the subservience of outward things to One within Who, Himself outside them, encloses all in His grasp, yet dwells within the external world which is His own. In this wise does God, from within and from without, control and correspond to the universe; being infinite He is present in all things, in Him Who is infinite all are included. In devout thoughts such as these my soul, engrossed in the pursuit of truth, took its delight. For it seemed that the greatness of God so far surpassed the mental powers of His handiwork, that however far the limited mind of man might strain in the hazardous effort to define Him, the gap was not lessened between the finite nature which struggled and the boundless infinity that lay beyond its ken, I had come by reverent reflection on my own part to understand this, but I found it confirmed by the words of the prophet, Whither shall I go from Your Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Your face? If I ascend up into heaven, You are there; if I go down into hell, You are there also; if I have taken my wings before dawn and made my dwelling in the uttermost parts of the sea (You are there). For there Your hand shall guide me and Your right hand shall hold me. There is no space where God is not; space does not exist apart from Him. He is in heaven, in hell, beyond the seas; dwelling in all things and enveloping all. Thus He embraces, and is embraced by, the universe, confined to no part of it but pervading all.

7. Therefore, although my soul drew joy from the apprehension of this august and unfathomable Mind, because it could worship as its own Father and Creator so limitless an Infinity, yet with a still more eager desire it sought to know the true aspect of its infinite and eternal Lord, that it might be able to believe that that immeasurable Deity was appared in splendour befitting the beauty of His wisdom. Then, while the devout soul was baffled and astray through its own feebleness, it caught from the prophet's voice this scale of comparison for God, admirably expressed, By the greatness of His works and the beauty of the things that He has made the Creator of worlds is rightly discerned [Wisdom 13:5]. The Creator of great things is supreme in greatness, of beautiful things in beauty. Since the work transcends our thoughts, all thought must be transcended by the Maker. Thus heaven and air and earth and seas are fair: fair also the whole universe, as the Greeks agree, who from its beautiful ordering call it *κόσμος*, that is, order. But if our thought can estimate this beauty of the universe by a natural instinct—an instinct such as we see in certain birds and beasts whose voice, though it fall below the level of our understanding, yet has a sense clear to them though they cannot utter it, and in which, since all speech is the expression of some thought, there lies a meaning patent to themselves—must not the Lord of this universal beauty be recognised as Himself most beautiful amid all the beauty that surrounds Him? For though the splendour of His eternal glory overtax our mind's best powers, it cannot fail to

see that He is beautiful. We must in truth confess that God is most beautiful, and that with a beauty which, though it transcend our comprehension, forces itself upon our perception.

8. Thus my mind, full of these results which by its own reflection and the teaching of Scripture it had attained, rested with assurance, as on some peaceful watchtower, upon that glorious conclusion, recognising that its true nature made it capable of one homage to its Creator, and of none other, whether greater or less; the homage namely of conviction that His is a greatness too vast for our comprehension but not for our faith. For a reasonable faith is akin to reason and accepts its aid, even though that same reason cannot cope with the vastness of eternal Omnipotence.

9. Beneath all these thoughts lay an instinctive hope, which strengthened my assertion of the faith, in some perfect blessedness hereafter to be earned by devout thoughts concerning God and upright life; the reward, as it were, that awaits the triumphant warrior. For true faith in God would pass unrewarded, if the soul be destroyed by death, and quenched in the extinction of bodily life. Even unaided reason pleaded that it was unworthy of God to usher man into an existence which has some share of His thought and wisdom, only to await the sentence of life withdrawn and of eternal death; to create him out of nothing to take his place in the World, only that when he has taken it he may perish. For, on the only rational theory of creation, its purpose was that things non-existent should come into being, not that things existing should cease to be.

10. Yet my soul was weighed down with fear both for itself and for the body. It retained a firm conviction, and a devout loyalty to the true faith concerning God, but had come to harbour a deep anxiety concerning itself and the bodily dwelling which must, it thought, share its destruction. While in this state, in addition to its knowledge of the teaching of the Law and Prophets, it learned the truths taught by the Apostle in the Gospel—In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made. That which was made in Him is life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light. That was the true light, which lightens every man that comes into this world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own things, and they that were His own received Him not. But to as many as received Him He gave power to become sons of God, even to them that believe in His Name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth [John 1:1-14]. Here the soul makes an advance beyond the attainment of its natural capacities, is taught more than it had dreamed concerning God. For it learns that its Creator is God of God; it hears that the Word is God and was with God in the beginning. It comes to understand that the Light of the world was abiding in the world and that the world knew Him not; that He came to His own possession and that they that were His own received Him not; but that they who do receive Him by virtue of their faith advance to be sons of God, being born not of the embrace of the flesh nor of the conception of the blood nor of bodily desire, but of God; finally, it learns that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and that His glory was seen, which, as of the Only-begotten from the Father, is perfect through grace and truth.

CATHOLICITY AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Thomas L. Gwozdz*

In *Insight*,¹ Bernard Lonergan argues that the notion of being is not a concept. Hence, it cannot be defined. Rather, the notion of being is an unconfined and dynamic intentionality of the human intellect. It arrives at a partial answer and presses on to know more by means of further questioning. As such, being is the known-unknown that questioning intends. It is the already-not yet known. In other words, the intellect intends a wholeness it does not yet fully know.

In his book *Where is Knowing Going?*, John C. Haughey² argues that the notion of “catholicity” is analogous to the notion of being. It is an open ended and dynamic notion that beckons us to ever more. Since Christianity is an eschatological religion, the whole meaning of catholic will not be known until the whole is reached at the end. Consequently we cannot fully know what “catholic” means. In a broad sense “catholicity” means the exigency of the pure desire to know all that is true and good. It is not confined to the Institutional church. Rather, it exists wherever human beings authentically seek truth and goodness. Historically, “catholicity” achieved partial meaning in the tradition through the minds of the early Church Fathers, Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas and Scotus. As an ongoing process it continues to search for ever greater meaning wherever men and women intend whatever is true and good.

Catholicity, according to Haughey, is intrinsic to human knowing. Like the notion of being, the notion of catholicity intends a wholeness, but of itself does not know the contents of the wholeness it intends. Rather, it “keeps beckoning us unto a more, to something that is in the genre of “is” and “is good, but also is meaningful.”³ As such, it is essentially “an orientation, a drive, an undertow that anticipates a transcendent reality.”⁴ Karl Rahner⁵ pointed out that all human beings possess a basic horizon by which they are implicitly aware of the dynamic intentionality of the mind toward a transcendent goal. In fact all particular acts of knowing truths and choosing values are partial determinations of the total goal of this spiritual activity. Essentially when one comes to know and to value, one is making explicit and determinate what one already knows implicitly and indeterminately, namely, the existence of God. It is this awareness of a fundamental dynamism that is the foundation of Rahner’s notion of the anonymous Christian, i.e. a term applied to anyone who sincerely seeks the truth and human values. He or she is already a Christian without knowing it. The

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¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1979), 348-364.

² John C. Haughey, *Where Is Knowing Going?: The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 200, 40-47.

³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵ Michael Vertin, *Rahner, Lonergan, Philosophy, and Theology (Paper Delivered at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston, 2011)*, 14-15.

distinguishing feature of such people is their implicit Christianity. Such a person is in the horizon of “catholicity.”

Haughey argues⁶ that the rapid advances in science and technology in the 20th century have been driven by the notion of catholicity moving the human mind to go from so many unknowns to knowns. Haughey mentions such discoveries as Big Bang cosmology which has enhanced the theological notion of creation and the mapping of the human genome which has enhanced the notion of anthropology—what it means to be human. Other advances in science and technology worth mentioning are quantum mechanics and World Wide Web. So, “catholicity” properly understood includes advances in theology, science, and all the human sciences. It includes all that can be known by faith and reason, the two pillars of truth. It is unfortunate that the term “Catholic” was swallowed up by its association with the institution of Roman Catholicism to whose history we now turn.

Modern Roman Catholicism is a movement that came to birth in the post Reformation era formed around the Papacy in opposition to the liberal, secular society and culture of the Enlightenment. Joseph A Komonchak’s article “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism”⁷ lays out the history in a clear and concise way. Roman Catholicism was in essence a “ new sociological form”⁸ of Catholicism that differed significantly from the “catholicity” of earlier eras. It was based on the perception of the Church as being engaged in a battle—a great warfare between God and Satan. A good example of this attitude is found in the inaugural Encyclical of Pope Pius X where he writes that “...there is good reason to fear that this great perversity may be as it were a foretaste and perhaps the beginning of the evils reserved for the last days and that the ‘Son of Perdition’ of whom the Apostle speaks may already be in the world.”⁹

In the same apocalyptic tone, Pope Leo XIII in his inaugural encyclical describes the evils of the day and traces their origin to a rejection by modern society from the holy and venerable authority of the Church.¹⁰ In all this the Church was more and more alienated from the emerging society, polity and culture of the 19th century while at the same time forming itself into a strong counter-cultural force. It was a moment of self-definition in which the Church was defining herself in clear and unambiguous terms as the Roman Catholic Church.

Along with this counter-cultural opposition there arose what Komonchak calls “counter-revolutionary mysticism.”¹¹ A Marian piety flourished in which Mary was seen as having the power to free souls and society from the evils that threatened the church. The rosary became the great weapon against modernism. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus also flourished. Leo XIII formally dedicated the whole human race to the Sacred Heart and established the

⁶ Haughey, 113-114.

⁷ J.A. Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism” in *Christianesimo nella Storia* 18 (1997), 353-385.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 362.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 363.

Feast of Christ the King to emphasize Christ's Kingship over all human society. Both of these devotions put on heavy sociological and polemical clothing.¹²

Catholic associations arose as counter-forces opposing the spread of liberalism, while safeguarding the rights of Catholics and supporting a strong catholic identity. As a Church in battle, the Church centralized itself and all Catholic life around Rome and the figure of the pope.¹³ The Catholic Church was increasingly becoming the Roman Catholic Church—a Church quite unlike the Church of the middle ages.¹⁴ As a formidable weapon against the ideology of modernism, the Church took authority over the intellectual life by promoting the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas as the official philosophy of the Church. Thomism was used to combat the philosophical errors of the Enlightenment begun with Rene Descartes.¹⁵ The role of ecclesiastical authority was to both oversee and direct all philosophical and theological development. It also used its centralized authority to issue outright condemnations of thinkers whose thought became suspect. In a further effort to centralize its authority, the variety of traditional canon law was systematized under a universally and obligatory Code of Canon Law promulgated by Rome.¹⁶ The code took on a very clear and legalistic attitude with its *latae sententiae* penalties (those automatically incurred regardless of circumstance).

All this centralization and control was solidified in the First Vatican Council which condemned modernist thinking and claimed papal infallibility - a way to ensure certitude in the battle against modernism. The papal magisterium would from then on be understood as one of the aspects of the pope's power of jurisdiction.¹⁷ Periodically various reform movements arose seeking change, but change and evolution were met with strong suspicion by Church leaders. Pius X condemned the very idea that the Church's structure and dogma could evolve.¹⁸

Joseph Komonchak, in a paper read at the Lonergan Workshop in Boston in 2011,¹⁹ claimed that Catholicism was called "Tridentinism" by Yves Congar who described it as "a system that embraced absolutely everything: theology, ethics, Christian behavior, religious practice, liturgy, Roman centralization, the constant intervention of the Roman congregation in the life of the Church."²⁰ Louis Bouyer referred to Catholicism as an "artificial system...forged by the Counter reformation" and "hardened by the brutal repression of modernism"²¹ In short, modern Roman Catholicism, according to Komonchak, was constructed in the 19th century in opposition to new revolutionary economic, social, political

¹² Ibid., 363-366.

¹³ Ibid., 371.

¹⁴ Ibid., 383.

¹⁵ Ibid., 373-376.

¹⁶ Ibid., 372.

¹⁷ Ibid., 376-377.

¹⁸ Ibid., 382.

¹⁹ Joseph A. Komonchak, "Interpreting Vatican II" (Paper Delivered at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston, 2011).

²⁰ Ibid, 11-12.

²¹ Ibid, 12.

and cultural developments.²² Joseph Ratzinger, the present Pope Benedict XVI, spoke of the Church before Vatican II as being...

...in the late phases of a culture that looks no longer forward but backwards...theology seemed to have thought its way through everything, piety to have practiced and crystallized everything that could possibly be done and formulated; every space had been filled up with the data of tradition, just like a church building that is packed with altars, pictures, and testimonies to the piety of former generations.²³

This insight clearly describes the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism of the 19th century.

How are we to evaluate the institution of the 19th century modern Roman Catholicism. First, like all “isms,” as claimed by Immanuel Levinas,²⁴ it had the tendency to totalize. Totalization grows out of a drive toward self-preservation by totalizing the other, namely, by seeing all others only through one’s idea of them. The Roman Church saw 19th century culture through its own idea of what modern culture was instead of being open to dialogue and further understanding. This preconceived modern culture was seen as a threat to the church, and so the Church sought power over that culture by establishing a strong centralized controlling culture of its own. This culture was evidenced by its Roman centralization, its control of its intellectual life, its suspicion of others who thought differently and its all pervasive attitude of modernism as a “great perversity” that must be fought against. Consequently, modern Roman Catholicism became an ideology of its own against the ideology of modernism. As an “ism” it was the Church as an ideology that was closed instead of openly dynamic, a Church that was fearful and self protective. As an ideology, like all ideas, it considered itself as universal and unchanging. It defined itself in a closed clear and unambiguous way. It had lost the spirit of “catholicity.” This was an unfortunate moment in the history of the Church which by definition is a Spirit-filled and open system.

Second, it seems that the Church of Roman Catholicism was a victim of what Lonergan calls group bias.²⁵ Group bias is a psychological mechanism where what becomes paramount is a group’s own self-interest. In the name of self interest, the group represses any relevant questions that would work against those interests. In group bias the ego of the group takes over, and the group refuses to be critical of its own position. In short, group bias is a flight from group understanding. It is a blind spot that darkens the intellect preventing it from exercising the pure desire to know and arriving at authentic insights. In essence, it is a contradiction to the notion of catholicity which, grounded in the pure desire to know, anticipates an eschatological totality. We don’t yet know the full meaning of what it means to be Catholic. However, Roman Catholicism of the 19th century seemed to claim that it did. Given the fact the Catholic Church has always had a tradition and openness, the worst kind of Catholic bias would be enunciated as follows: “Since we have the truth, there is nothing to learn that could change what we already know.” That sounds a lot like Ratzinger’s

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁴ Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 2002), 53-54; 58-59; 81-82.

²⁵ Lonergan, 222-225.

evaluation of the pre-Vatican II, namely, a Church that no longer looks forward, but backwards, and a Church who theologically has thought its way through everything and crystallized everything that could possibly be formulated and done.

It was this modern Roman Catholicism/Tridentine Church that was challenged by the Second Vatican Council. Yves Congar argued that the great achievement of Vatican II was a departure from the Tridentine system. In short, the council called into question the logic of modern Roman Catholicism in three basic ways: first, a more positive view of modern culture, second, a reform of Church worship, devotion and practice, and third, it encouraged local Catholic Churches to achieve cultural diversity within the one Catholic Church.²⁶ In essence, the council moved the church away from a Catholicism that was static, backward looking, controlling, dogmatic, authoritative, and centralized to a more open, forward looking, decentralized Ecumenical Church—a Church more in line with what was implied in the notion of “catholicity,” a Church that is dynamic and open to the pure desire to know and searches for what is authentically true and good, a Church that realizes that it is an eschatological Church that has achieved partial meaning and self-understanding, but not full meaning and self-definition. The Catholic Church has always had the mark of “catholicity,” namely an intellectual tradition that was wide and ongoing—a long history of discerning truths and values in economics, politics, culture, the arts, science, humanities, and religion. It was always open to further insights and development. According to Komonchack, Karl Rahner claimed that the Second Vatican Council was “the beginning of a tentative approach by the Church to the discovery and official realization of itself as a world-Church.” It was a shift from a Euro-centric Church to one that opens itself to other great cultures. As such, Rahner felt that the Council contained a theological caesura in church history, a break from a Euro-centric Christianity.²⁷ In terms of the thesis in this paper, it was a break with the Roman Catholicism of the 19th century to a new multi-cultural ecumenical age.

In a paper delivered at the Lonergan Workshop in 2010 William E. Murnion²⁸ sees the Pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as a ‘single long pontificate’ meant to “arrest and in some cases reverse the *aggiornamento*—the modernization of the Roman Catholic Church initiated by Vatican II.”²⁹ Evidence for this backward looking is John Paul’s signaling out of Aquinas as the authentic exemplar for the reconciliation of faith and reason. Murnion claims that this “exclusive endorsement of Aquinas for both his systematic and his moral theology reversed the approach of Vatican II, which, while giving a ritual endorsement to Aquinas, freed Catholic philosophers and theologians to explore the entire universe of thinkers, ancient, medieval, and modern, and develop their own independent philosophies.³⁰ It seems that John Paul explicitly intended to revive and continue the Thomism sparked by Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. In line with the practice of 19th century Roman Catholicism, Cardinal Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith

²⁶ Modernity, 384.

²⁷ Interpreting, 8.

²⁸ William E. Murnion, “Faith and Reason in Aquinas” (Paper Delivered at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston, 2010),

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

enforced orthodoxy by silencing or otherwise disciplining a hundred Catholic theologians and philosophers, generally in secret and with peremptory decrees.³¹

Also, apparently both John Paul and Benedict have depicted the modern world “as a reign of secularism—a crisis to which they call the Catholic Church to oppose with the rule of faith.”³² They have also “described ecumenical relations and inter-religious dialogue, not as valuable endeavors in and of themselves, but simply a tactic in the Church’s mission of universal evangelization.”³³ This was the task of John Paul’s encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*. In short, the medium of the Kingdom of God “subsisted “ in the Roman Catholic Church. Other Christian churches were simply “deficient as churches.”³⁴ In this way the Roman Catholic Church is the sole representative of Christianity.

If one looks at seminary culture today one observes among some seminarians a tendency to harken back to the catholicism of the post Tridentine 19th Century Roman Catholicism. When asked a theological question, instead of exploring the question in terms of what theologians are saying or have said, seminarians immediately want to know what the church teaches on the subject. They want an official position—some kind of a clear cut official answer. The spirit of “catholicity” does not seem to be there. What is lacking is the spirit of adventure and the openness of the pure unrestricted desire to know that is at the heart of Lonergan’s understanding of the human mind which constantly questions the unknown in order to know. Some seminarians feel more comfortable with primary sources of Aquinas and feel threatened by the modern thought of someone like Immanuel Kant. Instead of trying to understand what Kant has positively contributed to the field of philosophical thought, they display a bias that dismisses him as simply erroneous. In modern science, something like the Big Bang theory, for example, is viewed as having nothing to do with theology. There is little interest in pursuing the relationship between natural science and faith.³⁵ Some seminarians find it objectionable to discuss authors like Teilhard de Chardin because he had been silenced by Rome at one time. A real openness to dialogue with other Christian churches is not evidenced. Instead there is displayed a self centered righteousness about one’s Catholic faith, and a corresponding totalizing of other Christian denominations. This tendency to harken backwards to a Post Tridentine 19th century Roman Catholicism is apparent in the overwhelming desire for Gregorian Chant and the Extraordinary Form of the Mass—a form that in the minds of some seminarians seems to be a viable alternative instead of extraordinary. All this is symbolized by the wearing of the cassock and biretta as well as lace surplices and albs, and fiddle back chasubles. Seminary culture does not seem to be driven by “catholicity,” namely, a forward looking openness to the future and a sincere search for what is authentically true and good. Rather it evidences a closed system harkening back to the past.

³¹ Ibid., 5.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 6

³⁵ For theologians who are trying to reconcile science and theology see John Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin*. Boulder Colorado, Westview Press 2003, John Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 2000, John Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation*. Mahwah, N.J., Paulist Press 1995, and Christopher T. Baglow, *Faith Science and Religion: Theology on the Cutting Edge*. Woodridge, Ill., Midwest Theological Forum, 2009.

In conclusion, I have argued for a distinction between “catholicity” which is an open ended concept that is unfinished in content, and “Catholicism” which saw itself as a closed universal and unchanging Catholic ideology. Historically, a spirit of catholicity was exhibited in the theology of the early Church Fathers, Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Scotus. In the 19th century, that spirit was lost with a climate of self-defense against modernism, and the formation of Roman Catholicism. Currently, it seems that we have not regained a spirit of catholicity in spite of the effort of Vatican Council II. Rather, there is exhibited—especially among some young seminarians—a desire to return to the pre-Vatican days of Catholicism.

THE FORM OF THE NEW COVENANT IN MATTHEW

George R. Law*

When one is seeking gold or diamonds, finding such treasure is easier if one can recognize the geological signs pointing to the treasure's location. Likewise, locating the record of an ancient covenant, such as the Old Covenant, becomes easier when one can recognize the elements comprising its form.

God promised to make a new covenant¹ because the Israelites had broken the Old Covenant. Sound evidence that the New Covenant does exist is provided by the single fact that the second "half" of the Bible, consisting of the writings of Christ's disciples, is called the "New Testament."² Furthermore, the author of the book of Hebrews demonstrates that Christ did, in fact, mediate the "better" New Covenant. The author compares Christ with Moses, Christ's better priesthood with the Levite priesthood, and Christ's new commands with the Old Covenant Law. Also, a literal reading of many other New Testament texts indicates that Christ initiated the New Covenant's blessings, gave new commandments to His disciples, and ratified the New Covenant with His blood. The question begging to be answered is "Where is the formal record of this New Covenant?"

Since there is ample evidence that the New Covenant does exist, what might one expect concerning its form? The Old Covenant exhibits elements and a literary form similar to other ancient covenants. Is it reasonable to expect that a record of the New Covenant would also exhibit literary characteristics similar to other ancient covenants? Interestingly, over fifteen years ago, Carl B. Hoch Jr. suggested that the New Covenant would be a suzerainty-type covenant with elements similar to those found in the Old Covenant.³ The purpose of this article is to suggest that the New Covenant is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and can be identified because, like the Old Covenant, the New Covenant exhibits covenant elements and a form similar to other ancient covenants.

The records of the Old Covenant may provide a key to help in the identification of the record of the New Covenant. "The law ha[s] a shadow of good things to come" (Heb 10:1 AV; cf. Heb 7:5; Col 2:17). Thus, the shadow of the Old might present a rough "outline" or "sketch"⁴ of the New. More generally, Paul taught concerning the records and events of the Old Testament that "these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Cor 10:11 NASB; cf. Rom 15:4). These Old Testament examples

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¹ Initial capital letters will be used when referring to the "New Covenant" and the "Old Covenant" as written documents.

² The Greek word διαθήκη ("testament") is used in the Septuagint as an equivalent for the Hebrew word ברית ("covenant").

³ Carl B. Hoch Jr., *All Things New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 93. Also see Carl B. Hoch Jr., "The New Covenant: Its Problems, Certainties and Some Proposals," *Reformation and Revival* 6 (Summer 1997): 65.

⁴ Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, Joseph Henry Thayer, and Christian Gottlob Wilke, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: American Book Co, 1889), 578.

provide “types” or “patterns”⁵ to help New Testament believers understand God’s Word and His will for them. Therefore, if the Old Covenant examples can instruct one concerning the question of the New Covenant, then the elements and form of the Old Covenant should help one to locate and identify the elements, form, and the record of the New Covenant.

Early Church

Without much explanation, the New Testament authors made passing comments concerning the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, and His commandments. Their comments seem to indicate that their original audience was familiar with this information which, at that time, was well-known to the early church and required little explanation. Quite the opposite, the modern audience of the New Testament is unfamiliar with many aspects of ancient covenants, and thus cannot so easily recognize the form of the New Covenant or understand its implications.

The New Testament speaks plainly concerning many aspects of the New Covenant currently in effect. Christ was born to be king (Mt 1:1; 2:2-11; 27:11, 37; 28:18; Mk 15:2, 26; Lu 23:3, 38; Jn 18:33-37; 19:19; Acts 2:36; 17:7; Col 1:13; Heb 1:8). Christ has mediated the New Covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15), has given new commandments which constitute His Law (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), and has ratified the New Covenant with His blood (Heb 9:14-26; 12:24). Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper as a memorial of His blood sacrifice which ratified the New Covenant, stating, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Lu 22:17-20 NASB; cf. Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25).⁶ Christ’s disciples are to obey His new commandments, memorialize His New Covenant, and serve Him as ministers of the New Covenant (Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 Cor 11:24-26; 14:37; 2 Cor 3:6; 1 Thes 4:2).

Other authors in the early church also wrote concerning the New Covenant, Christ’s new Law, and His new commandments. For example, the author of *Barnabas* (AD 90-110) indicated that God had abolished the Jewish feast laws so “that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of necessity, might have a human oblation” (*Barn*, 2).

Justin Martyr is another author who further reveals the understanding of the early church concerning the New Covenant and the Law of Christ. Justin declared that Christ was a Lawgiver who handed down the New Covenant and His new Law. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* (AD 150-160), Justin was responding to Trypho, a Jew who criticized Christians because of their new manner of life and their apparent disregard for the Law of Moses. Trypho protested that, while the “precepts [of Christ] are so wonderful and so great,” they are impossible to attain (*Dialogue*, 10).⁷ Justin responded by explaining that Christians follow a new Law given by Christ, “even as the new Lawgiver commanded us” (*Dialogue*, 18). Justin described the final Covenant and Law of Christ:

I have read that there shall be a final law, and a covenant, the chiefest of all, which is now incumbent upon all men to observe, as many as are seeking after the inheritance

⁵ Grimm, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 632.

⁶ The phrase “blood of the covenant” was used when Moses ratified the Old Covenant (Ex 24:8).

⁷ All quotations of Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* were translated by Marcus Dods and George Reith (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885).

of God. For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves [the Jews] alone, but this [final law] is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law—namely, Christ—has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy, after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance (*Dialogue*, 11).

Other prominent authors throughout Church history have acknowledged that, with the arrival of the New Covenant, a new Law has replaced the Law of Moses.⁸

Modern Authors

Some modern authors have also recognized that with the New Covenant Christ gave His disciples a new Law, and they have suggested that the principles of the Law of Christ are found in what is commonly called “the Sermon on the Mount” (Mt 5-7).

For example, J. Oswald Dykes surveyed Christ’s new Law for His kingdom in the second book of his trilogy, *The Laws of the Kingdom* (1873).⁹ Leo Tolstoy provided his assessment of the new commandments of the Law of Christ in his book, *What I Believe* (1902).¹⁰ In *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Literary Structure and Didactic Purpose* (1902), Benjamin W. Bacon provided a thorough analysis of Christ’s discourse in Matthew 5-7. Bacon’s assessment was that the purpose of Matthew 5-7 was to present “what Paul calls ‘the Law of Christ.’”¹¹ Bacon concluded, “There was a real sermon, a Sermon on the Mount, a discourse of Jesus to his disciples, worthy to be called the New Torah of the kingdom of God.”¹² In 1927, E. L. Hamilton presented Christ’s ten new laws in his book, *The Laws of the Kingdom: as Contained in the Sermon on the Mount*.¹³ Recently, in *The Law of Christ: God’s Will for New Testament Believers*,

⁸ Femi Adeyemi provides a thorough treatment of this subject including the views of these prominent authors: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther (*The New Covenant Torah in Jeremiah and the Law of Christ in Paul*, New York: Lang, 2006, 21-35).

⁹ J. Oswald Dykes, *The Beatitudes of the Kingdom*. (London: James Nisbet, 1873); *The Laws of the Kingdom* (New York: R. Carter, 1873); *The Relations of the Kingdom to the World* (New York: R. Carter, 1874).

¹⁰ Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe: “My Religion”* (Christchurch, Hants: The Free Age Press, 1902), 66-100.

¹¹ The full quotation from Bacon is the following: “That gospel, which, as we saw, most clearly reflects the standpoint of Jesus’ own age and people, distinctly gives expression to this conception, not merely in its repeated citation of Jesus’ teachings to this effect, but by the fact that it begins the entire story of his public career by the great discourse we are to study, conspicuously placing the Mount of Beatitudes over against the Mount of the Law, and by the whole arrangement of the material indicating that this is to be considered what Paul calls the ‘Law of Christ,’ what James, that other Hebrew of the Hebrews among New Testament writers, speaks of as ‘the perfect law,’ a mirror of moral perfection, ‘the law of liberty,’ ‘the royal law,’ that is, the law of those who are children of the King.” Benjamin W. Bacon, *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Literary Structure and Didactic Purpose* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1902), 7; cf. 79.

¹² Bacon, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 35. He also stated: “In this sense Christ was called in Jewish Christian circles the ‘true Prophet,’ the second Moses (So in *Clem. Homilies and Recognitions, passim*)” (Bacon, 46).

¹³ E. L. Hamilton, *The Laws of the Kingdom* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1957). In his preface, Hamilton explained the importance of the Law which Christ gave in Matthew 5-7: “I believe, together with many of God’s children, that our Lord will return very shortly for His Church, and then come and

the present author has identified what he believes is Christ's New Covenant Law including His new Ten Commandments.¹⁴ Although each of these authors has defined the number and content of Christ's commandments somewhat differently, it is significant that each has recognized that Christ presented His new Law during the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁵

Example of the Old Covenant

Conveniently, the Old Testament provides some excellent examples of covenant agreements which illuminate the principles of ancient covenant formation and might help one to recognize the form of the New Covenant. Two formal records of the Old Covenant have been identified in the Old Testament: the Covenant in Exodus 20-25 made at Mount Sinai and the updated Covenant in Deuteronomy mediated with the second generation of Israelites. Renewals of the Old Covenant are recorded in Joshua 24 and Nehemiah 7-10.

Scholars have recognized that the Old Covenant exhibits a literary form similar to the form of other ancient Near Eastern covenants.¹⁶ They have demonstrated that the Old

set up His Kingdom upon the earth. These Laws, now applicable to individuals in the Kingdom, will then be the Laws by which the world is governed. God's purpose is that His children shall be judges and rulers in that Kingdom. St. Paul says, 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' (1 Cor. 6:2). If, then, we are to administer these Laws during the Millennium, it behooves us to learn how to carry them out now" (5-6).

¹⁴ George R. Law, *The Law of Christ: God's Will for New Testament Believers* (Pfafttown, NC: Ready Scribe Press, 2011), xi, 113-210.

¹⁵ Dykes presented five commandments from Matthew 5 and one commandment from Matthew 6. Tolstoy saw five new commandments (*What I Believe*, 67). Bacon saw only the two "great commandments" being illustrated by Christ (*Sermon on the Mount*, 111-113). Hamilton listed ten new laws (*Laws of the Kingdom*, 7).

¹⁶ In 1934, Viktor Korošec recognized that the Hittite treaty was the prevalent literary form for covenants used in the ancient Near East during the second half of the second millennium BC (*Hehitische Saatsverträge*. Leipzig, 1931). In January of 1948, Donald J. Wiseman observed the parallels between the Old Covenant and the Hittite treaty form when he read a paper before the Society for Old Testament Studies. Meredith Kline has noted Wiseman's contribution (*Treaty of the Great King: the Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963, 13, n. 2). In 1954, George E. Mendenhall recognized similarities between this Hittite treaty form and the Old Covenant and demonstrated the resemblance of their literary form (*Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Pittsburgh, 1955, reprint of two articles in *BA* 17.2, .3 [1954]: 26-46, 49-76). Dennis J. McCarthy called Mendenhall a "pioneer" and his work "still [the] fundamental study" (*Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963, 5). Mendenhall (p. 36 n. 26) credited Elias J. Bickerman with previously pointing out the similarity of the Old Covenant to Hittite treaties in Bickerman's work, "Couper une alliance" (*Archives d'Histoire du Droit Oriental* 5 [1950]: [133-156], 153-154). Meredith Kline extensively discussed the structure and purpose of the Old Covenant in Deuteronomy, showing how it exhibits the form of a late second-millennium BC Hittite suzerainty treaty (*Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963). Also see, John A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1964); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London, 1966); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter, 1977); Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish and early Christian writings*, trans. David E. Green, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971); Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976); Eugene H Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); and John

Covenant includes elements commonly found in ancient Hittite covenants and is a good example of the “pattern” used to make ancient covenants.¹⁷

Concerning the variations of the covenant form, John A. Thompson explained: “The Old Testament preserves the particular form of the pattern which was current in Israel.”¹⁸ Paul indicated that God’s covenants were fashioned “after the manner of men...[and] man’s covenant[s]” (Gal 3:15 AV). As a general rule, throughout human history, most legal documents have followed the literary form appropriate to their distinct time periods. When the Hittite empire rose to prominence in the middle of the second millennium BC, the Hittite covenant treaty became the prevalent Near Eastern literary form for international covenant treaties. It is not surprising that Moses, with his royal education “in all the learning of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), was aware of the literary form of contemporary covenant treaties and would use standard covenant elements to fashion the Old Covenant.

Form of the Hittite Covenant

Until recently, the Hittites, their civilization, and covenants had largely been forgotten.¹⁹ From 1500 BC until the fall of their empire soon after 1200 BC, the Hittites exerted their international influence into parts of Mesopotamia and northern Africa, making covenant treaties with neighboring nations.²⁰ An analysis of extant Hittite treaties reveals two basic types of international treaties: parity covenants and suzerainty covenants. Parity covenants were made between Hittite kings and kings of other nations of equal power and stature. Suzerainty-vassal covenants²¹ were made between “Great Kings”²² and lesser vassal kings.

Certain covenant elements appear to be characteristic of particular variations of the Near Eastern covenant form during different time periods. Amnon Altman explained that during the second half of the second millennium BC these treaties normally included the following three standard covenant elements:

H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1990). This last source provides a list of many extant Hittite treaties and where their translations can be found (95-101).

¹⁷ Klaus Baltzer admitted “Some literary units [elements], however, can still be identified” and acknowledged that Deuteronomy “provides a good illustration of the literary form we have been studying” (*Covenant Formulary*, 31).

¹⁸ Thompson, *Ancient Near Eastern Treaties*, 7-8.

¹⁹ Ira Price wrote, “The Hittites are often mentioned in the Old Testament. Otherwise they were a forgotten people until the second half of the nineteenth century. The lack of extra extra-biblical testimony to their existence led some scholars about half a century ago to deny their historicity. They scoffed at the idea of...such an unhistorical people as the Hittites” (*The Monuments and the Old Testament; Evidence from Ancient Records* [Chicago: Christian Culture Press, 1900], 75-76); see also William Wright, A. H. Sayce, Charles William Wilson, C. R. Conder; and W. Harry Rylands, *The Empire of the Hittites* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1884). In this book Wright traced the initial archaeological discoveries which re-established the Hittites’ place in history.

²⁰ Louis L. Orlin, *Life and Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 90.

²¹ Examples of these Hittite treaties can be found in James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1955): 203-205.

²² The title “Great King” was regularly used to identify the suzerain of the covenant and has its origin in the ancient theories of kingship (McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 29, 85).

1. a preamble,
2. stipulations, and
3. curses.²³

Altman suggested that if the treaty was a parity covenant the following three covenant elements might be added:

4. a prologue (proclaiming peace and brotherhood),
5. divine witnesses, and
6. blessings.

However, if the treaty was a subordination (suzerainty) covenant, all six elements would be included, with the following changes:

- a. the prologue would give the treaty’s historical background, and
- b. another element, giving instructions for the deposit of the covenant document, might be added.²⁴

Old Covenant	Date BC:	3rd Mill.		2nd Mill.			1st Mill.
		<u>Ebla</u>	<u>Mari</u>	<u>Mid-Hittite</u>	<u>Late Hittite</u>	<u>Assyrian</u>	
	<u>Elements</u>						
1	Preamble			1		1	1
2	Prologue	1				2	
3	Stipulations	3	3	3		3	3
4	Blessings					6	
5	Curses	2 & 4	4	5		7	4
6	Witnesses		1	2		5	2
7	Deposit of Doc.					4	
	Oath		2	4			

Table 1.1 Comparison of Ancient Treaty Form to the Old Covenant²⁵

A specific set of six or seven covenant elements seems to be standard in the classic form of a late second-millennium BC Hittite covenant treaty.²⁶ On the other hand, the form of

²³ Amnon Altman, “How Many Treaty Traditions existed in the Ancient Near East?” in Yoram Cohen, Amir Gilan, Jared L. Miller, and Itamar Singer, *Pax Hethitica: Studies on the Hittites and Their Neighbours in Honour of Itamar Singer* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010): [17-36] 25.

²⁴ Altman, “How Many Treaty Traditions existed in the Ancient Near East?” 25-27.

²⁵ The above table is adapted from information provided in Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 286-288. *Using the appearance of the elements in the Old Covenant as a standard of comparison, the numbers in each column indicate the order of appearance of the elements in that particular covenant. Thus, the best match for the form of the Old Covenant in Deuteronomy is the latter half of the second millennium BC.*

²⁶ Mendenhall’s analysis of Korošec in *Law and Covenant*, 32-35; Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 28; Thompson, *Ancient Near Eastern Treaties*, 13-14; Baltzer, *Covenant Formulary*, 10-15. Some such as Craigie

first-millennium BC Assyrian covenant treaty was reduced to only four standard elements.²⁷ Table 1.1 (above) shows the changing pattern of the ancient covenant form and the elements regularly included from the third millennium to the first millennium BC. Commenting on identifying the variations of the ancient covenant form, Dennis J. McCarthy suggested that “only the combination of several elements characteristic of the treaties gives us reasonable certainty that the form is being used.”²⁸

The historical prologue is a sufficiently consistent element, by itself, to clearly distinguish the late second-millennium BC Hittite form from the first-millennium BC Assyrian form.²⁹ A reluctant Moshe Weinfeld wrote: “we must admit that Deuteronomy includes the ‘historical prologue’ which is not found in the treaties of the first millennium.”³⁰

Another significant distinction of this Hittite form is evident in the covenant sanctions. Ernest Lucas noted that, while the covenant sanctions of the late Hittite form consistently included both blessings and curses, the sanctions of the first-millennium BC Assyrian form listed curses, but its blessings were almost non-existent.³¹

Form of the Old Covenant

The form of the Old Covenant is most similar to the form of these Hittite covenants. Most likely, God used this familiar literary form to help communicate His intentions to His people. Their understanding of the implications of a suzerainty covenant would help their comprehension of such a covenant from God. In such covenants, the primary concerns were the covenant loyalty and obedience owed to the Great King (suzerain) and the land rights the covenant granted to the vassal. The Great King expressed his will in the covenant stipulations which were required of the vassal.³² To encourage the vassal to be loyal and

do not include the deposit of the document in his list of elements included in the classic form (*Book of Deuteronomy*, 22-23). Kenneth Kitchen confirmed the fact that in many covenants the order of some of the covenant elements simply varied; see *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London, 1966), 90-102. Also see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter, 1977), 79-85; and Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy in New Century Bible*; London: Oliphants, 1979), 31-33.

²⁷ John H. Walton explained how certain basic elements distinguish the Hittite group from the other categories. There are at least two basic, identifiable subgroups: (1) the Hittite family of treaties is characterized by the use of historical prologue to an extent not found elsewhere; (2) the treaties from Syria and Assyria show a much greater emphasis on the curses that are used to enforce the treaty (see *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1990], 101).

²⁸ McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 6.

²⁹ Delbert Hillers noted that the change over the centuries is “most noticeable with respect to the historical prologue” (*Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1969, 69). Gary Beckman confirmed the prologue’s importance: “A striking peculiarity of the Hittite documents, however, is the routine presence of a substantial historical prologue, a feature seldom found elsewhere” (“Hittite Treaties and the Development of cuneiform Treaty Tradition,” in Witte, Markus. *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur "Deuteronomismus" - Diskussion in Tora und vorderen Propheten* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006]: [279-301] 298).

³⁰ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 67.

³¹ Ernest C. Lucas, “Covenant, Treaty, and Prophecy,” *Themelios* 8.1 (September 1982): [19-23] 20.

³² Cleon L. Rogers Jr. explained this relative to the Old Covenant: “This means the Law or Covenant stipulations were a reflection of God’s will” (“*The Covenant with Moses and its Historical Setting*” *JETS* 14 [1971]: [141-55] 155).

obedient to the Great King, the covenant sanctions described blessings to come on those who were loyal and obedient as well as curses to come upon those who were rebellious.

Table 1.2 (below) displays the covenant elements found in the scriptural records of the Old Covenant. Although ordered a little differently than the standard Hittite covenant, the structured elements of these Old Covenant records support the sound conclusion of Meredith Kline and other scholars that the Old Covenant “exhibits the classic legal form of the suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic age.”³³

1. Preamble	Ex 20:1	Dt 1:1-5
2. Historical prologue	Ex 20:2	Dt 1:6-3:29
3. Stipulations		
a. General	Ex 20:3-17	Dt 4, 5-11
b. Specific	Ex 21-23, 25-31	Dt 12-26
4. Blessings and Curses	(Lev 26:3-41)	Dt 28:1-68
5. Witnesses (Divine)	Ex 24:4	Dt 30-32
6. Deposit of Covenant	Ex 25:16	Dt 31:10-26

Table 1.2 Covenant Elements in Records of the Old Covenant³⁴

However, sometimes a particular covenant treaty does not exactly follow the standard literary form; it might leave out typical elements or change their expected order.³⁵ This is the case with the Old Covenant: although it includes elements similar to those commonly found in a late second-millennium BC Hittite suzerainty treaty, these elements and their expected order have been modified. Noting that “More than forty years of scholarship has reached a near consensus about the essential elements of standard Hittite treaty texts,” Eugene Merrill further explained the adaptation of covenant elements in the Old Covenant: “Deuteronomy...expands upon these [elements] by adding unique covenant elements such as covenant recapitulation and other material of a hortatory or narrative nature.”³⁶

Thus it seems that Moses, under the Holy Spirit’s direction, modified the standard covenant form and adapted its elements to meet his needs. The following outline provides a summary of the standard elements of the Old Covenant and their order in Deuteronomy.

³³ Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 28. The following conclusion of Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman is held by many conservative scholars: “Because of its strong affinities with the structure of second-millennium treaties as opposed to the structure of treaties known from the first millennium, Kline’s argument provided a prima facie case for the date of Deuteronomy close to the period of Moses instead of at a later time such as the seventh century” (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 98).

³⁴ This table presents Kitchen’s view of the covenant elements in these two records of the Old Covenant; found in Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Fall and Rise of *Covenant, Law and Treaty*,” *TNB* 40 (1989): [118-135] 124-125. Others, including the present author, might divide these texts differently, but the standard elements of the covenantal form would still be evident.

³⁵ Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, 32.

³⁶ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 29-30.

1. *Preamble* (Dt 1:1-5). According to George E. Mendenhall, its typical formula is simple: “thus says X.”³⁷ The preamble of the Old Covenant identifies Jehovah God as the Suzerain, the children of Israel as the vassal, and Moses as God’s mediator, who “spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him as commandments to them” (Dt 1:3).

2. *Historical prologue* (Dt 1:6-4:49). According to Mendenhall, the prologue provides a historical synopsis of the “previous relations between the two [parties].”³⁸ It includes God’s renewed offer of the Old Covenant to the Israelites and the Promised Land for their inheritance.

3. *Stipulations* (Dt 5:1-26:19). According to Mendenhall, the general and specific stipulations detail “the obligations imposed on and accepted by the vassal.”³⁹ The Old Covenant stipulations are the Torah (law) and provide the legal principles of the covenant.

The general stipulations (Dt 5:1-11:32) begin with a slightly modified restatement of the Ten Commandments (Dt 5:7-21; cf. Ex 20:3-17). God promised that, if the Israelites would obey His commands, they would live, their lives would go well, and their days prolonged in the Promised Land (Dt 5:33; 6:2-3).

The specific stipulations (Dt 12:1-26:19) follow the general stipulations and expound on the proper application of these general principles to the various circumstances the Israelites would face in the Promised Land. In the Old Covenant the specific stipulations include both casuistic law⁴⁰ (often called “judgments,” משפטים) and apodictic law (often called “statutes,” חקים).

4. *Sanctions*⁴¹ (Dt 27:1-30:20). Normally the sixth standard element in a Hittite covenant, the sanctions of the Old Covenant include both negative consequences (curses) for those who were disloyal and failed to obey God’s covenant commands and positive consequences (blessings) for those who were loyal to God and obeyed His commands.

5. *Witnesses* (Dt 30:19; 31:28, 30; 32:1-47). In pagan covenants, this element lists the local deities who were to enforce the covenant’s sanctions (curses and blessings). Instead of calling on false deities to be witnesses for the Old Covenant, Moses modified this element,

³⁷ Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, 32.

³⁸ Ibid. These events might be interpreted as providing an apology justifying the covenant. Joshua Berman explained the main purpose of the prologue: “There is a single underlying principle that girds the argument of these historical prologues: Moral and legal obligation on the part of the subordinate for the favor bestowed upon him by the sovereign” (Joshua A. Berman, “God’s Alliance with Man,” *Azura* 25 [Summer 2006]: 79-113). To support his point, Berman cited Amnon Altman, *The Historical Prologue of the Hittite Vassal Treaties* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan, 2004), 27; and George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, “Covenant,” in Gary A. Herion, Astrid B. Beck, and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 1* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1181.

³⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁰ The casuistic formula for judgments is “If X is done, then you shall do Y.”

⁴¹ Kline used the term “sanctions” because it includes both the negative and positive consequences (*Treaty of the Great King*, 49, 121-134). Moshe Weinfeld also used the term “sanctions” to describe the curses and blessing, explaining, “Sanctions of this kind were included not only in treaty texts but in all types of official legal settlements” (*Deuteronomy*, 61). McCarthy also used the term “sanctions” (*Treaty and Covenant*, 93-94, 132, 148-149, 159).

calling on heaven and earth to be witnesses against Israel (Dt 30:19; 31:28). Also, he composed a song to witness to their hearts (Dt 31:30; 32:1-47). Further, instead of placing this element in its expected position before the sanctions, he placed it after them.

6. *Deposit of document*⁴² (Dt 31:9, 24-26). Normally the fourth standard element in a Hittite covenant, Moses placed this element concerning the deposit of the document last in the Old Covenant. Moses delivered the written record of the Old Covenant and its Law to the priests (Dt 31:9) and directed them to preserve this record of the Old Covenant in the Ark of the Covenant (Dt 31:24-26).

In spite of these legalities, the Old Covenant did not reduce the relationship between God and Israel into a mere legal arrangement. In fact, the basis for their relationship was the grace which God had shown to Abraham and had extended to them as Abraham's descendants.⁴³ Even after the Israelites broke the Old Covenant and were being judged with its curses, God continued to deal graciously with them as His covenant people and even promised to make a new covenant with them (Jer 31:31-34).

Record of the New Covenant

Since God promised to make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31), it is reasonable that standard covenant elements would be found in the New Covenant in much the same way that such elements were used to fashion the Old Covenant. As previously mentioned, Carl B. Hoch Jr. suggested that the form of the New Covenant might be similar to that of the Old Covenant.⁴⁴ If standard covenant elements commonly found in other ancient covenants can be identified in Matthew (the Gospel written to the Jews), these covenant elements might, in fulfillment of God's promise, comprise the formal record of the New Covenant.

The form of the New Covenant, as with any covenant, would be identified based on the covenant elements it includes.⁴⁵ The New Covenant does not have to exactly imitate the form of other covenants. Any identifiable covenant elements which are apparent in its record will reveal its form and the degree to which it is like or unlike other ancient covenants. In what is called "the Sermon on the Mount" (Mt 5-7), it seems that Christ adapted covenant elements to suit His desires, and these covenant elements were presented so that His audience would be able to identify the form, and thus the record, of the New Covenant.

⁴² McCarthy suggested, "the document clause appears so rarely that it is difficult to consider it a fixed part of the scheme" (*Treaty and Covenant*, 41). Baltzer mentions the deposit of the document but does not include it as a standard element (*Covenant Formulary*, 15-18).

⁴³ The Torah of the Old Covenant should be understood in light of the underlying relationship which already existed between God and His people. John Milton explained: "the Torah must be seen first of all as the positive instruction of a loving God in a way that is good. It was given as 'a rule of life' for a redeemed people. It was given 'for our good always'... (Deut 6:24; cf. 10:12-13)" (*God's Covenant of Blessing*, Rock Island, IL: Augustana, 1961, 162).

⁴⁴ Carl B. Hoch Jr., *All Things New*, 93. Also see Carl B. Hoch Jr., "The New Covenant: Its Problems, Certainties and Some Proposals," 65.

⁴⁵ Many ancient texts in the centuries before and after Christ were written according to the covenant formula. Klaus Baltzer traced the "covenant formula" in intertestamental Jewish literature and early Christian literature (*Covenant Formulary*, 97-136).

Form of the New Covenant

One would expect the form of the New Covenant to include elements common to the ancient covenant form. Ancient Near Eastern covenants commonly consisted of three to seven standard covenant elements.⁴⁶ The following three elements seem to be most basic:⁴⁷

1. an introductory preamble or title,
2. covenant stipulations, and
3. covenant sanctions.

In Matthew 5-7, five covenant elements can be identified: besides the three most basic covenant elements listed above, a prologue follows the preamble, and an epilogue follows the sanctions. The following outline details the identifiable elements of the New Covenant:

Outline of Elements in Mt 5-7

- I. Preamble: (5:1-2)
- II. Prologue: [Beatitudes] –benefits of the law-code (5:3-16)
- III. Covenant Stipulations (5:17-7:12)
 - A. General –Christ’s Ten Commandments (5:17-6:34)
 - B. Specific (7:1-7:12)
- IV. Covenant Sanctions (7:13-23)
- V. Epilogue: Personal Ratification (7:24-27).

Just as the covenant elements of the Hittite covenant form helped Mendenhall and other scholars to recognize the formal outline of the Old Covenant in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the covenant elements identified in Matthew 5-7 can help modern readers to recognize the formal outline of the New Covenant. The three basic elements of the New Covenant help to identify the location of the New Covenant’s record. Its two additional covenant elements, a prologue which enumerates some of the covenant’s benefits and an epilogue which exhorts a radical decision,⁴⁸ distinguish this covenant form from other ancient covenants.

⁴⁶ See Table 1.1 above.

⁴⁷ Baltzer provided the covenant formulary’s “most simple form”: 1) a prologue, antecedent history, 2) stipulations, general and specific, and 3) sanctions (*Covenant Formulary*, 97). Early treaties (third millennium BC) from Ebla provide examples of covenants with only a few elements, usually having some sort of introduction, stipulations, curses, and witnesses. Amnon Altman identifies only three elements in a treaty of Naram-Sin with an Elamite king of Awan, and in another earlier Eblaite treaty he identifies only three elements: an introduction, stipulations, and curses (“How Many Treaty Traditions existed in the Ancient Near East?” 19-20).

⁴⁸ Kline explained this covenant element which calls for a radical decision (*Treaty of the Great King*, 133-134).

These words of Christ were crafted to exhibit the following covenant elements:

1. *Preamble* (Mt 5:1-2). The preamble of the New Covenant identifies Christ as the one “speaking the words,” detailing the New Covenant. The Jewish multitudes following Christ (Mt 4:25) are the people to whom Christ initially offered the New Covenant. The New Covenant preamble in Matthew’s record is similar to the preambles of the Old Covenant records in Exodus and Deuteronomy:

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying (Mt 5:1-2 NKJV).

So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them. And God spoke all these words, saying (Ex 19:25-20:1 AV).

These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel...Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him as commandments to them (Dt 1:1-3 NKJV).

2. *Prologue* (Mt 5:3-16). The prologue of the New Covenant is not historical for good reasons. First of all, fashioning a historical prologue (distinctive of Hittite covenants in the late second millennium BC) might lead to some confusion concerning the date of the New Covenant. Secondly, a historical prologue would be inappropriate because the New Covenant was not a renewal of the broken Old Covenant. According to Jeremiah’s prophecy, the New Covenant was to be of a “fresh” (שׁוּב) nature and “not like” (-לֹא כִּי) the Old Covenant:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,” says the LORD (Jer 31:31-32 NKJV).

Instead of providing a historical synopsis, the New Covenant’s prologue enumerates prospective blessings which the Great King will bestow on His covenant people. More like a prologue which introduces a law-code, it emphasizes the benefits (blessings) which will come to those under the authority of the Lawgiver.⁴⁹ The beneficial character of this prologue is also reminiscent of the kind of prologue found in a parity covenant treaty, such as the one between Hattusili III of Hatti and Ramses II of Egypt, which, according to Altman, declared “their intention to create ‘great peace and brotherhood between them forever.’”⁵⁰

However, in a significant way the New Covenant’s prologue is still like the typical Hittite prologue in that it proclaims the rights of the covenant people to the land which the Great King is granting them: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3,10); “they shall inherit the

⁴⁹ Richard Abbott has observed that if a covenant’s purpose was to present a law-code, its prologue might enumerate the present or future benefits of its laws and the virtues of its lawgiver (“Old Testament Covenants and Law-codes—Deuteronomy” [accessed Jan 8, 2011], available on the internet at <http://www.oldtestamentstudies.net/sojourn/covenantsdeut.asp?item=2&variant=1>).

⁵⁰ Altman, “How Many Treaty Traditions existed in the Ancient Near East?” 25.

earth” (Mt 5:5); and “great is [one’s] reward in heaven” (Mt 5:12). Weinfeld explained that “the historical prologue generally ends with a declaration granting land and rule to the vassal.”⁵¹ Thus, the prologue of the New Covenant looks to the future instead of the past: it proclaims a fresh start for this covenant people, granting those under its authority specific blessings, an inheritance, and rewards in the kingdom of heaven.

3. *Stipulations* (Mt 5:17-7:12). The stipulations of the New Covenant include, as expected, two types: general and specific.

The general stipulations (Mt 5:17-6:34) which Christ handed down in the New Covenant consisted of Ten Commandments reminiscent of the Ten Commandments found in the Old Law of Moses. Christ’s new Ten Commandments are the general principles of the New Covenant Law. However, this New Covenant Torah is not one which condemns like the Old Torah; instead, it offers believers the opportunity to become godly. Just as the Old Law specified God’s will for the Israelites, the New Covenant Law specifies His will for New Testament believers.⁵²

The specific stipulations (Mt 7:1-7:12) of the New Covenant provide for the proper application of the general principles of the New Covenant Law. In the Old Covenant, the specific stipulations were introduced as “judgments”: “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them” (Ex 21:1 NKJV; cf. Dt 12:1). Imitating the example of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant signals the introduction of its specific stipulations with the concept of “judgment”: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged” (Mt 7:1-2 NKJV).

4. *Sanctions* (Mt 7:13-23). Since many of the New Covenant’s blessings were already specified in its prologue, the sanctions of the New Covenant are mostly negative. However, one should notice that these sanctions are not curses like those found in the Old Covenant; instead they are warnings similar to the sanctions commonly found in other testamentary covenants.

According to Klaus Baltzer, the nature of certain elements included in testamentary covenants were modified; specifically, “the original element of ‘blessings and curses’ undergoes the most far-reaching transformations.”⁵³ Baltzer further clarified that, when a covenant is used as a testament, the curses are transformed into warnings: “Within the formulary there is an important change: blessings and curses become promises and threats.”⁵⁴

Baltzer’s explanation of the use of sanctions in a testamentary covenant fits the overall testamentary purpose of Christ’s New Covenant (Heb 9:16). Christ did not fashion the New

⁵¹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 71.

⁵² For a list of Christ’s new Ten Commandments, see George R. Law, *Law of Christ*, xi.

⁵³ Baltzer, *Covenant Formulary*, 180. In ancient covenants various optional elements would be added or subtracted from the covenant form based on its author’s purpose. Baltzer explained that, in analyzing the process of transformation in the covenant form, it is sometimes difficult to determine in a particular covenant “what is a mark of the literary type, [and] what is a peculiarity of the text at hand” (*Covenant Formulary*, 98).

⁵⁴ Baltzer, *Covenant Formulary*, 137.

Covenant's negative sanctions to be curses.⁵⁵ Instead, He changed them into warnings of ruin and directed these warnings to those who might become disloyal and fail to obey His New Covenant commands. If a believer is disobedient and acts "lawlessly," he reveals his lack of commitment to this covenant made with the Great King. Such "lawless" works reveal that he does not "intimately know" (in covenant terms) the Great King (1 Jn 2:3-6). Jesus warned that He will respond to a believer's rejection of His Covenant by reciprocating his lack of covenantal intimacy and will say to him: "I have never been in approving connection with you"⁵⁶ (Mt 7:23; cf. Mt 10:32-33).

5. *Epilogue* (Mt 7:24-27). The epilogue of the New Covenant in Matthew exhibits an element which is found in other testamentary covenants, specifically, an appeal to the members of the covenant community to choose and act wisely.⁵⁷ In this conclusion to the New Covenant, Christ set forth a vital choice: to obey His Law and be like a wise man or to disobey His Law and be like a foolish man. This radical decision⁵⁸ is also reminiscent of the choice presented to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess (Dt 30:15-16 NKJV).

In the renewal of the Old Covenant before his death, Joshua presented a similar choice to the Israelites:

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Josh 24:15 NKJV).

In the epilogue of the New Covenant, Christ presented His servants with a similar choice between good and evil, obedience and disobedience. Those who wisely hear and obey Him build a secure house (stewardship) on the Rock; but those who foolishly disobey Him build an unstable house on sand, and their work will be ruined in the coming judgment (Mt 7:24-27).

Table 1.3 (below) compares the form of the New Covenant with the form of earlier covenants. The New Covenant has four elements in common with the second-millennium Hittite covenant form and thus also in common with the Old Covenant. The New Covenant has three elements in common with the first-millennium Assyrian covenant form. Furthermore, the Epilogue of the New Covenant, which calls on the wise to make a radical decision, clearly imitates a covenant element common to other testamentary covenants around the time of Christ. Therefore, the New Covenant show a progression of the

⁵⁵ Christ was "made a curse for us" (Gal 3:13 AV).

⁵⁶ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers*, 4 vols. in 1 (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), s.v. "Know."

⁵⁷ Baltzer, *Covenant Formulary*, 108.

⁵⁸ Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 133-134.

covenant form, going from the Hittite form, beyond an imitation of the first-millennium Assyrian form, to become a new, testamentary covenant form.

<u>Elements</u>	2 nd mill. BC		1 st mill. BC	1 st century AD
	<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>Hittite</u>	<u>Assyrian</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
Preamble	1	1	1	1
Prologue	2	2		2
Stipulations: Gen & Spec	3	3	3	3
Sanctions: Blessings	4	6		
Curses/Warnings	5	7	4	4
Witnesses	6	5	2	
Deposition of Document	7	4		
Epilogue				5

Table 1.3 Variations in the Ancient Covenant Form⁵⁹

Renewals of the New Covenant

The covenant form has also been identified in other documents created immediately before and after Christ’s lifetime.⁶⁰ Interestingly, William Shea presented his identification of the covenant form in each of Christ’s letters to the Seven Churches (Rev 2-3).⁶¹ Shea carefully explained that the variations within this covenant form were intentional and that “ancient covenant statements did not slavishly follow exactly the same order in every instance.”⁶² Highly significant to this discussion is Shea’s suggestion that these covenant letters to the Seven Churches can be understood as “providing for a renewal of the more original covenant of the suzerain in each of the seven instances.”⁶³ A renewal of the New Covenant necessitates the prior existence of the New Covenant. Although Shea did not identify the record of “the more original covenant of the suzerain,” certainly, he must have been referring to the New Covenant mediated by Jesus Christ. Thus in Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, Christ presented the New Covenant to His first disciples in Galilee; and in Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, Christ renewed His New Covenant with His disciples scattered throughout the Roman world.

Conclusion

The form for ancient covenants has gradually changed over the millennia. Although a few standard elements are consistently found in almost all covenants, some covenant

⁵⁹ The numerals indicate the element’s order of occurrence in the particular covenant form.

⁶⁰ Baltzer has identified the covenant form in two Jewish and several early Christian writings. Probably written the century before Christ, *The Manual of Discipline* (also known as *Rule of the Community*, Dead Sea manuscript 1QS) exhibits the covenant form, as does the *Damascus Document* (150 BC) (*Covenant Formulary*, 99-122). Among the early Christian writings, Baltzer has identified the covenant form in *Barnabas*, *The Didache*, and *The Second Epistle of Clement* (*Covenant Formulary*, 123-136).

⁶¹ William Shea, “The Covenant Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21.1 (1983): 71-84.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 83.

elements are optional, while others might be used only for a limited time (e.g. the historical prologue of the Hittite form). Variations in the covenant form seem to arise from the changing needs of the particular covenant parties who modify and adapt the covenant elements to meet their requirements. These variations in the covenant form are helpful to the modern scholar since they enable the identification of particular covenants and their approximate dates.

Modern scholars were able to identify the form and records of the Old Covenant because they recognized that it included standard covenant elements similar to those found in second-millennium BC Hittite covenants. Standard covenant elements can also be recognized in Matthew's record of Christ's first discourse to His disciples (Mt 5-7).

Christ chose the three most basic covenant elements and two other elements consistent with the testamentary nature of the New Covenant. He adapted these elements to suit His purposes. He modified the prologue to look forward and encourage the believer's future hope of inheriting the kingdom and reigning with Him. He used warnings instead of curses to instruct believers concerning the dangers of ignoring His commands. In the New Covenant's conclusion, He exhorted believers to be wise, presenting them with a radical choice: obey or disobey, serve God or serve self, build a secure stewardship or reap the ruin of vain labor. Since covenant elements and the covenant form are evident in Christ's words addressed to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, Christ's first discourse in the Gospel of Matthew can be recognized as the formal record of the New Covenant.

EXEGETING FORGIVENESS

Randy Nelson*

Before embarking on a fecund exegesis of key New Testament (NT) narratives in forgiveness, it will be helpful to make two important distinctions and to describe the different views. The first distinction is between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of each other. The NT itself implies this distinction in such verses as Mt. 6:12, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." While praying for God to forgive our sins against him, we acknowledge that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. For our purposes, we will refer to the former as "vertical forgiveness" and the latter as "horizontal forgiveness." Another helpful distinction is between God's initial forgiveness that occurs at conversion and God's ongoing forgiveness that occurs throughout the Christian life. Initial forgiveness entails repentance and results in the forgiveness of all our sins (cf. Col. 2:13; I Jn. 2:12). Since this forgiveness results in salvation, we will call it "salvific forgiveness." There is another kind of forgiveness that a believer seeks through the regular confession of sins (cf. Mt. 6:12; Acts 19:18; James 5:15; I Jn. 1:9). Since this forgiveness results in ongoing spiritual cleansing, we will call it "sanctifying forgiveness."

Four Views on Horizontal Forgiveness

When it comes to horizontal forgiveness, four views can be plotted on a continuum between passive and aggressive. Two of these views are extreme. On the extreme passive side of the continuum, the offended chooses to do nothing when wronged. Instead, he plays the victim by denying the wrong or minimizing the injury. On the extreme aggressive side of the continuum, the offended attempts to retaliate against the offender either by behavior (i.e., abusive words and actions) or by attitude (i.e., anger, bitterness, hate). While Christians sometimes exhibit both these extremes, neither are biblical.

On the literature about horizontal forgiveness, Christians are divided between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Before distinguishing these views, it will be helpful to understand what they have in common. First, both views agree that the offense was wrong and that the injury was real. They further agree that a personal offense incurs a moral debt. In forgiveness, the offended releases the offender from his moral liability. Second, both views believe that a personal offense damages the relationship resulting in estrangement between the two parties. Third, both agree that it is wrong either to play the victim or to seek vengeance. Fourth, both views believe that there are consequences, natural and judicial, that follow wrongdoing even when forgiveness is granted. Fifth, both views agree that our forgiveness of others should be modeled after God's forgiveness of us, even if they disagree on what it means to forgive in a manner similar to God. Sixth, both views have reconciliation as the end goal—the restoration of a trusting relationship. Although these two Christian views have much in common, they differ on the means by which reconciliation is realized. In particular, what role, if any, does repentance play in horizontal forgiveness?

For advocates of conditional forgiveness, forgiveness is bilateral. The offender must first repent before the offended can forgive him. Repentance, according to this view, should include remorse, confession, and restitution. Until the offender repents in this manner, the offended is obligated to withhold forgiveness. Caneday comments, "We would be mistaken to suppose that we are obligated to forgive the sins of those who will not repent in violation

of the order of the gospel.”¹ For conditional forgiveness, reconciliation automatically follows forgiveness. Chris Braun states, “The Bible never speaks of God’s forgiveness apart from reconciliation.”² Two passages are commonly used to support conditional forgiveness. The first passage is Col. 3:13, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (cf. Eph. 4:32). Jay Adams concludes, “forgiveness is modeled after God’s forgiveness which is unmistakably conditioned on repentance and faith.”³ The second passage seems to confirm this conclusion: “if he repents, forgive him” (Lk. 17:3). Ken Sande says, “Ideally, repentance should precede forgiveness (Luke 17:3)...however, minor offenses may be overlooked and put away even if the offender has not expressly repented. Your spontaneous forgiveness in these cases can put the matter behind you and save you and the other person from needless controversy.”⁴ Although not all advocates of conditional forgiveness would agree, Sande allows for unconditional forgiveness in the case of minor offenses.

For advocates of the unconditional view, forgiveness is unilateral. The offended graciously forgives the offender to begin the process of reconciliation. Robert Jeffress says, “Remember that forgiveness is not synonymous with reconciliation, restoration, or even releasing a person of consequences that might arise from their wrong.”⁵ Support for unconditional forgiveness is found in the teachings and example of Jesus. In Mk. 11:25, Jesus commanded his disciples, “if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.” In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to forgive unconditionally: “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt. 6:12; cf. Lk. 11:4). In Lk. 6:37, Jesus commanded his disciples, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Jesus not only preached unconditional forgiveness, according to this view, he practiced it. While hanging from the cross, Jesus prayed for his executioners: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34; cf. Acts 7:60). John MacArthur summarizes well the position of unconditional forgiveness: “This kind of forgiveness involves a deliberate decision to cover the other person’s offense...It is a choice made by the offended party to set aside the other person’s transgression and not permit the offense to cause a breach in the relationship or fester in bitterness.”⁶ Although not all advocates of unconditional forgiveness would agree, MacArthur allows for conditional forgiveness for serious sins through a formal process of confrontation culminating in church discipline.

Relevant New Testament Passages

Forgive Others as God Forgave You

Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. In two of his letters, the Apostle Paul developed an analogy comparing our forgiveness of others to God’s forgiveness of us: “Forgive as the

¹ Ardel Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive? A Biblical Primer and Grammar on the Forgiveness of Sins* (Mount Hermon, California: Center for Cultural Leadership, 2011), 10.

² Chris Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 58.

³ Jay Adams, *From Forgiveness to Forgiving* (Amityville, New York: Calvary Press, 1994), 34

⁴ Ken Sande, *The Peace Maker* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 210.

⁵ Robert Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn’t Make Sense* (Colorado Springs, Waterbrook Press, 2000), 77.

⁶ John MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 122.

Lord forgave you” (Col. 3:13; cf. Eph. 4:32). But what does this mean? Commenting on this verse, Caneday states, “Because we are creatures, of course, made in God’s likeness, our forgiveness of the sins committed against us is analogous to and derivative from God’s forgiveness of our sins in Christ Jesus. Thus, the analogy is in both the manner of forgiveness and the basis of forgiveness.”⁷ For proponents of conditional forgiveness, since God requires repentance as a condition of forgiveness, so should we. But, how do advocates of unconditional forgiveness interpret this verse? MacArthur says, “To make conditionality the gist of Christ-like forgiving seems to miss the whole point of what Scripture is saying. When Scripture instructs us to forgive in the manner we have been forgiven, what is in view is not the idea of withholding forgiveness until the offender expresses repentance...The emphasis is on forgiving freely, generously, willingly, eagerly, speedily—and from the heart.”⁸ For advocates of unconditional forgiveness, since God forgives graciously, so should we.

In Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13, Paul does not use the common NT word for “forgive” (*aphiemi*).⁹ Instead he uses the Greek verb *charizomai*, the semantic range of which includes: “give freely and forgive graciously.”¹⁰ Regarding *charizomai*, Douglas Moo states that it “conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, often ‘not deserved.’”¹¹ In Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13, *charizomai* is in the present tense emphasizing the ongoing nature of our gracious forgiveness of others.

Also in both passages, Paul uses the Greek conjunction *kathos* which can introduce either a causal clause or a comparative clause.¹² Most commentaries argue that Paul intends to communicate both cause and comparison. Peter O’Brien states, “The introductory ‘just as also’ has both comparative and causal force (cf. 5:2, 25, 29): what God has done ‘in Christ’ for believers...provides both the paradigm of and the grounds for their behavior.”¹³ While God’s forgiveness of us surely provides the basis for our forgiveness of others (cf. Mt. 18:23-35), in this passage Paul is more likely emphasizing the comparative nature of God’s forgiveness. Andrew Lincoln rightly observes, “Such statements introduced by *kathos kai* have been called ‘the conformity pattern’ and function within exhortations to show Christ’s or God’s saving activity as prototypical for believers’ conduct.”¹⁴ For introducing a comparative clause, *kathos* can be translated: “as, even as, just as, like, in the same way, in the same manner.” Thus, in Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13, Paul is making a comparison between the way God forgave us and the way we should forgive others. In other words, vertical forgiveness provides a model for horizontal forgiveness.

⁷ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 10.

⁸ MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 118-119.

⁹ In his writings, Paul used the verb, “forgive” (*aphiemi*), only once (Rom. 4:7). He used the noun, “forgiveness” (*aphesis*), twice (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

¹⁰ The Greek verb *charizomai* occurs in its verbal form 23 times, 10 of which refer to the forgiveness of sins. Of these 10 references to forgiveness of sins, half refer to vertical forgiveness (cf. Lk. 7:42, 43; Eph. 4:32b; Col. 2:13; 3:13b) and half to horizontal forgiveness (cf. II Cor. 2:7, 10; 12:13; Eph. 4:32a; Col. 3:13a).

¹¹ Douglas Moo, *Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 279.

¹² Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 674-75.

¹³ Peter O’Brien, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 352.

¹⁴ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 309.

In Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13 was Paul exhorting believers to forgive others in exactly the same way that God forgave them? Such comparisons, by their nature, are limited. Or, as the saying goes, “Every analogy breaks down.” This is especially true with divine/human comparisons. How, then, should the limits of a comparison be determined? A sound hermeneutic would require that the limits be established by the theology of the author as well as the immediate context of the comparison. It would be unreasonable to treat Paul’s comparison as an ink blot into which we read our own personal theologies. Neither should we read into Paul’s comparison the entirety of Old and New Testament theologies of vertical forgiveness. Is it likely that Paul intended by this comparison that the offender should sacrifice an unblemished animal to atone for personal sin? Or, that the offended has the right to judge and condemn those who fail to repent? At minimum, the meaning of Paul’s comparison should be delimited by his theology.

So what is Paul’s theology of vertical forgiveness? Paul says little about God’s forgiveness of human sins and the need for repentance. Within the Pauline corpus, the apostle refers six times to vertical forgiveness (cf. Rom. 4:7; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Col. 1:14; 2:14; 3:13). He uses the verb “repent” (*metanoeo*) only once (II Cor. 12:21) and the noun “repentance” (*metanoia*) four times (cf. Rom. 2:4; II Cor. 7:9, 10; II Tim. 2:24). Donald Guthrie rightly concludes, “If we assess Paul’s approach by the number of times he uses the verb ‘repent’ or the noun ‘repentance,’ we shall have to conclude that he had little interest in the subject.”¹⁵ Given the rarity of Paul’s reference to repentance, it is unlikely that it played a role in his comparison, “forgive as God forgave you.”

Paul’s understanding of vertical forgiveness is subsumed in his doctrine of justification by faith. Regarding Paul’s view of justification, Guthrie comments that, “His doctrine of justification has to do with God’s provision for the sinner, but he never suggests that man himself has no part in it. God’s gift of righteousness needs only one response, i.e., to be received.”¹⁶ The role of forgiveness in Paul’s doctrine of justification can be seen when Paul appealed to Ps. 32:1-2: “David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him’” (Rom. 4:6-8). In these verses, Paul equated God’s credit of righteousness to believers with God’s forgiveness of their sins. If this was Paul’s understanding of God’s forgiveness of believers, should believers imitate God by declaring righteous those whom they forgive? This hardly seems reasonable. What, then, does Paul mean by the comparison, “forgive as God forgave you?”

The second way to delimit the comparison is to consider the immediate context in which it occurs. An instructive example of this can be seen in Mt. 5:48, where Jesus commanded, “Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Did Jesus command perfection in all areas, such as knowledge, power, and righteousness? The context of Mt. 5:48 is about love not only for neighbors but for enemies. Just as God provides sun and rain for the righteous and the wicked, so should believers show mercy to their enemies. This mercy is more than a sympathetic attitude; it involves acts of benevolence, kindness, and generosity. So then,

¹⁵ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1981), 589.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 590.

believers are to be perfect like their heavenly Father in the practice of mercy. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Luke 6:36, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

What is the immediate context of Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13? Preceding these two verses, Paul compared two lists: a vice list that characterized our pagan life and a virtue list that should characterize our Christian life. The vice lists in Ephesians and Colossians include: bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. According to Paul, believers should remove these vices from their lives and put into practice a variety of virtues, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. It is significant that the vices and virtues listed by Paul are relational in nature. Lincoln correctly observes, “In contrast to the vices so destructive to harmonious relationships, the qualities now enjoined are those conducive to communal living.”¹⁷ Among the virtues that should characterize Christians, Paul lists forgiveness. In the context of Ephesians and Colossians, the virtue of forgiveness stands in stark contrast to the hostility and bitterness that disrupted our previous relationships. The forgiveness that now characterizes us as believers stands in continuity with the virtues of kindness and compassion. Walter Liefeld states: “It is the attitudes of grace, mercy, kindness and compassion that make forgiveness possible in our relationships.”¹⁸ So then, our forgiveness of others should be like God’s forgiveness in kindness and compassion.

Nothing in the words or the context of Eph. 4:32 or Col. 3:13 suggest that believers should require repentance as a condition for forgiving others. Moreover, none of the commentaries considered for this study argued that Paul’s comparison included the requirement of repentance. They all agreed that a believer’s practice of forgiveness should be like God’s in grace, mercy, kindness, and compassion. They also agreed that certain vices, such as anger and bitterness, characterize those who withhold forgiveness. Klyne Snodgrass states well the conclusion of these commentaries:

What forgiveness does accomplish is the rejection of bitterness, malice, and revenge. We do not control the actions of others, but in choosing to forgive we establish control over our own responses. We choose to value the other person despite his or her offense and to desire what is good for that person before God. Forgiveness also restores relations, or at least provides a foundation on which they can be restored.¹⁹

As the offended, we take the first step toward restoration by extending forgiveness to the offender.

Aside from imitating God’s mercy in forgiveness, what else does the NT teach about horizontal forgiveness? Jesus had much to say about how his followers should forgive others. After a careful study of one passage in Mark and three in Matthew, we will examine five passages in Luke-Acts.

Jesus Commanded Believers to Forgive Others Unconditionally

Mark 11:25. One of Jesus’ clearest teachings on horizontal forgiveness is found in Mk. 11:25, where he said, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone,

¹⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 309.

¹⁸ Walter Liefeld, *Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1997), 122.

¹⁹ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 264-65.

forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.” This verse occurs on the heels of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple and cursing of the fig tree (11:12-19). Jesus used this opportunity to teach on the power of prayer that results from faith and forgiveness (11:20-26). For Jesus, both faith in God and forgiveness of others are prerequisites of effective prayer. James Edwards comments, “The final instruction in v. 25 is about forgiveness of sins, which is the feature of faith that most perfectly epitomizes God’s nature.”²⁰ It is often the case in the NT that horizontal forgiveness is mentioned in the context of prayer. This is true not only in this verse but in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4), Jesus’ prayer from the cross (Lk. 23:34), and Stephen’s prayer for his killers (Acts 7:60).

How is Mk. 11:25 interpreted by advocates of conditional forgiveness? Commenting on this verse, Adams states, “His prayer is to God, and since he is not granting God forgiveness, in the verse the word ‘forgive’ must be used by extension to express the willingness to forgive another.”²¹ Caneday calls this willingness to forgive a “forgiving posture.”²² For advocates of conditional forgiveness, the offended should maintain a forgiving attitude toward the offender. Actual forgiveness, however, should not be granted until the offender repents. How do proponents of unconditional forgiveness interpret Mk. 11:25? Regarding this verse, MacArthur comments, “That describes an immediate forgiveness granted to the offender with no formal meeting or transaction required. It necessarily refers to a pardon that is wholly unilateral, because this forgiveness takes place while the forgiver stands praying.”²³ For proponents of unconditional forgiveness, the offended is called upon by Mk. 11:25 to grant actual forgiveness even if the offender does not repent.

In Mk. 11:25, the conjunction “if” (*ei*) introduces a first class conditional sentence in which the protasis (if-clause) is assumed to be true for the sake of argument.²⁴ What is assumed true is that “you hold anything against anyone.” The Greek verb for “hold” is *echo*, which is used in the NT for withholding forgiveness (cf. Acts 7:60; Rev. 2:4). So, for the sake of argument, it is assumed that believers may come to prayer while withholding forgiveness from others. Given the human tendency to withhold forgiveness, this is probably a safe assumption even for believers who have experienced God’s salvific forgiveness. The words “anything” (*ti*) and “anyone” (*tis*) are indefinite pronouns, making this verse inclusive. This means that no offense or offender is to be excluded from our forgiveness.

The apodasis (then-clause) in this verse is simply, “forgive [him].”²⁵ The Greek verb for forgive is *aphiemi*, which is the most commonly used word for forgive in the Greek NT²⁶ The semantic range of this verb includes: “let go, release, cancel, pardon, and forgive.” Although originally an accounting term, this word was used as a metaphor for the forgiveness of sins. But, what is emphasized by this metaphor? The cancellation of the debt or the release of the

²⁰ James Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 348.

²¹ Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, 31.

²² Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 17.

²³ MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 121.

²⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 690-694.

²⁵ The personal pronoun “him” is not in the Greek text. It has been added in the NIV for clarity.

²⁶ This Greek verb occurs 142 times, only 45 of which refer to the forgiveness of sins. The semantic range of noun form of this verb, *aphesis*, includes: release from obligation, liberation, and forgiveness. This Greek noun occurs 17 times, 15 of which refer to forgiveness of sins.

debtor? Some scholars argue that the debtor is emphasized: “it is debtors that are forgiven, not ‘debts.’”²⁷ Other scholars argue that it is the debt that is emphasized: The two principal Greek verbs (*aphiemi*, *charizomai*) we translate as ‘forgive’ both have ‘sin’ as their direct objects and have ‘the recipient’ of forgiveness of sin as their indirect objects.²⁸ In Lk. 6:37, it is clearly the debtor who is forgiven: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” In Mt. 6:12, Jesus probably intended to communicate that both the debt and the debtor were forgiven. Thus, “forgive” (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from his moral liability. In Mk. 11:25, “forgive” is in the present tense and imperative mood, meaning that forgiving others is commanded as an ongoing action.²⁹ There is no indication in this command that a forgiving attitude is sufficient. Jesus here is commanding the ongoing practice of actual forgiveness. Thinking about forgiveness or feeling forgiving fall short. Also, nothing in the context of Mk. 11:25 suggests that repentance is an implied condition of horizontal forgiveness. It is significant that none of the commentaries consulted for this study identified such an implication.

Behind the NIV phrase, “so that,” is the Greek conjunction *hina*; it usually introduces a purpose clause and is better translated as “in order that.”³⁰ Thus, the purpose for our ongoing, inclusive forgiveness of others is God’s sanctifying forgiveness of us: “your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.”³¹ Regarding Mk. 11:25, Craig Evans comments, “one’s own forgiveness of others must grow out of one’s being forgiven. Therefore, to be forgiven and not forgiving, to have obtained mercy and not be merciful, is in reality to have failed to experience God’s gracious acceptance and makes a mockery out of prayer as understood in vv 22-24 as an expression of one’s relationship to God.”³²

What can we conclude about horizontal forgiveness from Mk. 11:25? First, our forgiveness of others, like our faith in God, impacts our prayers. Our prayers to our heavenly Father will be hindered if we approach Him with either unbelief or a lack of actual forgiveness. Second, our forgiveness of others is to be inclusive, meaning that no one or no offense is to be excluded from our ongoing forgiveness of others. Nothing in the words or the context implies that our forgiveness of others should be conditioned on their repentance. Third, the reason we are forgiving toward others is that we continue to expect our heavenly Father to be forgiving toward us. Robert Stein summarizes well our interpretation of Mark 11:25, “This saying gives an additional condition for having one’s prayers answered, especially the prayer for personal forgiveness. Those who want to be forgiven of their ‘trespasses’...must forgive those who have offended them.”³³ There is nothing easy or simple about forgiving those who have wronged us. Yet, in spite of being wronged, believers

²⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 147. See also R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 250.

²⁸ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 4.

²⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 485.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 677.

³¹ The Greek word for sin in Mk. 11:25 is *paraptoma*. Its semantic range includes: false step, fall, lapse, deviation, offense, and sin. This noun occurs 28 times in the Greek NT, always with reference to sin. 24 times it refers to sins against God while 4 times it refers to human sins against each other (cf. Mt. 6:14, 15; 18:35; Mk. 11:25). The Greek word *paraptoma* is largely synonymous with *hamartia*.

³² Craig Evans, *Mark, 8:27-16:20* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 193.

³³ Robert Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 520-21.

are called to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from moral liability. This preemptive forgiveness is an act of the will and an act of obedience.

Matthew 6:12-15. Another passage on horizontal forgiveness is found in Matthew 6:9-13—the Lord’s Prayer. Verse 12 constitutes the fifth petition of this corporate prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Of the seven petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, this is the only one with an explanation and condition: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (6:14-15). While the petitions for physical sustenance and spiritual deliverance appear self-explanatory, forgiveness will require some clarification from Jesus. Given the human tendency to withhold forgiveness, this need is understandable. So important is horizontal forgiveness that Jesus makes it a condition of vertical forgiveness. Commenting on Mt. 6:14-15, Donald Hagner rightly concludes, “These verses are a forceful way of making the significant point that it is unthinkable—impossible—that we can enjoy God’s forgiveness without in turn extending our forgiveness toward others.”³⁴

How is Mt. 6:12-15 interpreted by proponents of conditional forgiveness? Although repentance is not stated as a condition of forgiveness, they argue, it is implied. Commenting on these verses, Braun states, “It is true in these verses that Jesus does not explicitly utter a condition of repentance. However, the requirement is implicit.”³⁵ Caneday agrees with this interpretation: “Jesus’ unstated assumption, of course, is that the one who sinned has repented.”³⁶ What about advocates of unconditional forgiveness? R.T. Kendall says, “This petition is both a plea for forgiveness and a claim that we have already forgiven those who have hurt us.”³⁷ Nothing in the words or context of these verses suggests that repentance is implied or that a forgiving attitude is sufficient until the condition of repentance is met.

It is important to keep in mind that the Lord’s Prayer is the prayer of Christians, those who have experienced God’s salvific forgiveness of all their sins at their conversion (cf. Col. 2:13; I Jn. 2:12). David Turner puts it this way: “Prayer for ongoing forgiveness (6:12) implies that the disciple has made the decisive turn from sin to God demanded by the message of the kingdom (3:2; 4:17)...When disciples pray for pardon, they recognize that they are not yet perfect—their attitudes and actions often fall short of kingdom standards (cf. 5:3, 6).”³⁸ The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, then, represents the regular confession of sin and ongoing plea for sanctifying forgiveness that should characterize believer’s prayers (cf. Acts 19:18; Jam 5:15-16; I Jn. 1:9).

In Mt. 6:12, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Forgive us our debts.” The verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from moral liability. In this verse, “forgive” (*aphiemi*) is in the aorist tense and imperative mood. While the imperative mood is the mood of command, it can also be used as an entreaty.³⁹ Also, nothing in the word “forgive” (*aphiemi*) implies or requires repentance. Someone can readily

³⁴ Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 152.

³⁵ Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 146.

³⁶ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 5; See also Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 146.

³⁷ R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 2007), 81

³⁸ David Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 188.

³⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 486.

cancel a debt and pardon a debtor without a prior request. Just as a debtor can unilaterally be released from his debt, so an offender can be preemptively forgiven for his sin. The Greek word for “debt” is *opheilema*.⁴⁰ The semantic range of this accounting term includes: “what is legally owed, debt.”⁴¹ Robert Mounce notes, “Behind the Greek *opheilema* (‘debt, one’s due’) is the Aramaic *haba*, which was used figuratively of sin as moral debt.”⁴² When we sin against God and others, we incur a moral debt. This moral liability must be paid by the offender through restitution or cancelled by the offended through forgiveness.

In the second half of the fifth petition, Jesus’ taught his disciples to pray, “as we also have forgiven our debtors.” The same Greek verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) is used here as in the beginning of the petition. This time, however, the verb is in the aorist tense and the indicative mood. With this mood, the aorist tense points to past action. In other words, our petition to God for his forgiveness follows our previous forgiveness of others. This verse says nothing about having a forgiving attitude while withholding forgiveness until our offender repents. This verse is about the actual forgiveness of sins, whether repentance from our offender is forthcoming or not. Craig Blomberg observes, “Our pleas for continued forgiveness as believers, requesting the restoration of fellowship with God following the alienation that sin produces, is predicated on our having forgiven those who have sinned against us.”⁴³ The failure of offenders to acknowledge their sins should not hinder the offended from fulfilling his duty to forgive those sins. Why should the offended be held hostage by the offender’s inability or unwillingness to repent?

The second use of the verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) in the fifth petition is preceded by the Greek conjunction “as” (*hos*): “Forgive us our debts **as** we have forgiven our debtors.” This conjunction can introduce a variety of subordinate clauses: comparative (“as”), causal (“because”), temporal (“while”), and result (“so that”). The specific meaning is determined by context. In this context, two possibilities stand out: comparative and causal. If “as” (*hos*) introduces a comparative clause, then a proper translation would be: “as, like, in the same way, in the same manner.” Thus, a comparison is being made between the way we have forgiven others and how we want God to forgive us.⁴⁴ But, since humans are finite and fallen, it seems unlikely that horizontal forgiveness would provide a model for vertical forgiveness.

The other possibility is that “as” (*hos*) introduces a causal clause and can be translated as: “because” or “since.” So, we are able to request vertical forgiveness because we have already granted horizontal forgiveness. This interpretation is consistent with Luke’s parallel account of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our sins, **for** we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Lk. 11:4). The conjunction “for” (*gar*) follows the main clause and introduces a causal clause; it could rightly be translated as “because.”⁴⁵ Since “as” (*hos*) can also introduce a

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The word *opheilema* occurs only twice in the Greek NT (cf. Mt. 6:12; Rom. 4:4). In Mt. 6:12, “debt” is being used as a metaphor for sin or offense. Matthew’s use of “sin” (*paraptoma*) in vss. 14-15 and Luke’s use of “sin” (*hamartia*) in the Lukan parallel (Lk. 11:4) confirms this.

⁴² Robert Mounce, *Matthew* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1990), 57.

⁴³ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Louisville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 120.

⁴⁴ Strangely, Braun reverses the comparison in Mt. 6:12, “In Matthew 6, Jesus told the disciples to forgive as God forgives,” in *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 146.

⁴⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 674.

causal clause, Matthew's rendition of the Lord's Prayer could rightly be translated: "Forgive us our debts **because** we have forgiven our debtors." But, our vertical forgiveness is not automatically the result of our horizontal forgiveness. Nor is our horizontal forgiveness meritorious. Michael Wilkins rightly comments, "Those who have received forgiveness are so possessed with gratitude to God that they in turn will eagerly forgive those who are 'debtors' to them."⁴⁶ Thus, our forgiveness of others is an expression of gratitude for the salvific forgiveness we have already received through faith in the atoning work of Christ. In the Lord's Prayer, our forgiveness of others precedes and serves as the basis of our plea for forgiveness from God. We dare not withhold forgiveness from others while pleading for God's sanctifying forgiveness. Leon Morris concludes, "we have no right to seek forgiveness for our own sins if we are withholding forgiveness from others."⁴⁷ Moreover, it seems precarious to make our obedience to Christ's command to forgive others dependent on the actions or inactions of those who have offended us.

The conjunction "for" (*gar*) at the beginning of vs. 14 introduces an explanatory clause. The request for forgiveness in vs. 12 is now explained in verses 14-15, even though these verses are not a formal part of the Lord's Prayer. Interestingly, the word for wrongdoing has changed from "debt" (*opheilema*) to "sin." The word for sin here is *paraptoma*, which can be translated as: a fall, "a lapse, a deviation, and a sin."⁴⁸ In this passage, the two words for sin, *opheilema* and *paraptoma*, are used synonymously.

The conjunction "if" (*ean*) occurs twice in vss. 14-15. In both cases, it introduces a third class conditional sentence where the protasis may or may not be true. But, if the protasis is true, then it follows that the apodasis is also true.⁴⁹ The first condition found in vs. 14 is stated positively: "if you forgive men when they sin against you." If this condition is true, then we can be assured that God will forgive our sins: "your heavenly Father will forgive you." The second condition found in vs. 15 is stated negatively: "if you do not forgive men their sins." If this condition is true, then we can be assured that God will not forgive our sins. John Nolland states, "Matthew thinks of forgiveness of others as a necessary condition for seeking God's forgiveness."⁵⁰ It is significant that Jesus stated this conditional clause both positively and negatively. This seems to suggest that the negative conditional statement cannot simply be inferred from the positive conditional statement. What is clear from these verses is that our forgiveness of others precedes and serves as the condition of God's forgiveness of us.

What can we conclude about horizontal forgiveness from Mt. 6:12-15? First, we can conclude that our requests for ongoing forgiveness from our Heavenly Father should be preceded by our actual forgiveness of those who have sinned against us. Second, we can conclude that our actual forgiveness of others is the basis of our request to be forgiven by God. Third, the ongoing forgiveness of our sins against God is conditioned on our actual

⁴⁶ Michael Wilkins, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 279.

⁴⁷ Morris, *Matthew*, 147.

⁴⁸ This noun occurs 23 times in the Greek NT, 5 times of which address human sins against each other (cf. Mt. 6:14, 15; 18:35; Mk. 11:25, 26).

⁴⁹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 696-99.

⁵⁰ John Nolland, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 291.

forgiveness of others. Those who refuse to forgive others should not expect the sanctifying forgiveness of their heavenly Father.

Matthew 18:15-17. A second passage to consider in the Gospel of Matthew is 18:15-17: “If your brother sins [against you],⁵¹ go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” Mt. 18:15-17 is preceded by Jesus’ instructions on “little children,” which was Jesus’ way of referring to his followers (cf. Mt. 11:25; 18:3). Jesus encouraged his disciples to receive the Kingdom of God like a child (18:2-4) and warned them against those who might cause them to sin (18:6). In the episode immediately before Mt. 18:15-17, Jesus told the Parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10-14; cf. Lk. 15:3-7), which illustrated God’s pursuit of a wandering Christian. It is significant that this Parable is preceded by a brief warning: “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones” (18:10). The Greek word for “look down on” is *kataphroneo*, which means to despise or to look down on with scorn or contempt. D.A. Carson comments, “Jesus is telling the community as a whole how to handle the situation when a brother sins; and in the immediate context, this sin is that of despising another brother.”⁵² For Carson, then, the sin addressed in Mt. 18:15-17 is specifically the sin of contempt. This interpretation may be too narrow. Jesus was, however, probably describing a formal process of confrontation for only serious sins. More will be said on this in a moment.

How is Mt. 18:15-17 interpreted by advocates of conditional forgiveness? Caneday comments, “In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus clearly teaches the necessity of repentance for forgiveness of sins under the imagery of ‘hearing.’”⁵³ Adams agrees with this interpretation: “If forgiveness were unconditional, then this entire process of discipline would be impossible. It is my contention that the very existence of such a program as this requires us to believe that forgiveness is conditional.”⁵⁴ How are these verses interpreted by proponents of unconditional forgiveness? MacArthur states, “in certain cases the offender is to be confronted and ultimately even excommunicated from the church if he or she refuses to repent (Luke 17:3; Matt. 18:15-17).”⁵⁵ As we will see, however, Mt. 18:15-17 is not really about repentance as a condition of forgiveness.

In Mt. 18:15-17, Jesus developed a procedure for addressing personal sin. The reference to “brother” in Mt. 18:15 indicates that the sin is committed by a Christian against a fellow Christian. The phrase “against you” points to a personal sin rather than a general concern about a fellow believer’s spiritual welfare. The reference to the church indicates that this

⁵¹ In the UBS Greek NT, the phrase “against you” is placed in brackets and given a ‘C’ rating which indicates “considerable degree of doubt.” Craig Keener observes, “Some of the earliest manuscripts omit the words ‘against you’ in 18:15, but the early geographical distribution favors their inclusion,” in *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 453n.

⁵² D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 402.

⁵³ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 13.

⁵⁴ Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, 33.

⁵⁵ MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 119.

issue was to be addressed within the community of believers.⁵⁶ A formal process for resolving conflicts is not unique to Christianity. Exclusion from the community can be seen in the O.T. Blomberg observes that Mt. 18:15-17 “resembles the Old Testament practice of ‘cutting’ someone ‘off’ from the assembly of Israel (e.g., Gen. 17:14; Exod. 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38).”⁵⁷ The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls had a similar three-step procedure for addressing personal grievances:

They shall rebuke one another in truth, humility, and charity. Let no man address his companion with anger, or ill-temper, or obduracy, or with envy prompted by the spirit of wickedness. Let him not hate him [because of his uncircumcised] heart, but let him rebuke him on the very same day lest he incur guilt because of him. And furthermore, let not man accuse his companion before the Congregation without having admonished him in the presence of witnesses. (*The Community Rule* 5:25-6:1)⁵⁸

How are believers to address personal sin in the church? In Mt. 18:15-17, Jesus delineated a three-step process of progressive confrontation that culminated in the application of church discipline. In the first step, the offended takes the initiative to confront the offender, albeit in a private manner: “Go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” The verb “go” (*hupago*) is in the imperative mood. It is a command directed at the one offended.⁵⁹ Morris comments, “‘Go’ means taking the initiative; the person in the clear is not to wait for the sinner to come to him.”⁶⁰ The phrase, “show him his fault,” translates the Greek verb *elegcho*. The semantic range of *elegcho* includes: “bring to light, expose, set forth, convict, convince, reprove, and correct.”⁶¹ Regarding this word, R.T. France states, “It includes the related ideas of reprimand, of bringing the wrong to light, of trying to bring the person to recognize that they are in the wrong, and of correcting them.”⁶² If the offender “listens” to the offended, then you have won over your brother and the process is over. The Greek word for listen is *akouo*; its semantic range includes: “hear, listen to, learn, be informed, and understand.”⁶³ Blomberg interprets *akouo* to mean “responds properly.”⁶⁴ The Greek verb “hearing” (*akouo*) is never used for “repent” in the NT. The phrase, “won over,” translates the Greek verb *kerdaino* which means to gain.⁶⁵ It seems to imply reconciliation from the alienation caused by the personal sin. It is significant that the purpose for this private confrontation is redemptive. The goal is not to punish the offender but to reconcile with him.

⁵⁶ A good hermeneutic requires that biblical passages be applied in comparable settings. For example, I Tim. 2:11-15 was originally applied in an ecclesiastical setting. It would be inappropriate to apply these verses to a corporate or academic setting. In Mt. 18:15-17, Jesus described a three step process of confrontation for believers in an ecclesiastical setting. This formal procedure, which culminates in church discipline, is inappropriate for corporate or academic settings.

⁵⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 279.

⁵⁸ Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin Press, 1997), 105.

⁵⁹ In Mt. 5:23-24, Jesus exhorted the offender to go and be reconciled with the offended. Whether the offended or the offender, Christians have a responsibility to pursue reconciliation.

⁶⁰ Morris, *Matthew*, 467.

⁶¹ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 249.

⁶² France, *Matthew*, 689.

⁶³ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 31-32.

⁶⁴ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 278.

⁶⁵ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 429.

In the second step, if the offender will not be reconciled, then 1-2 witnesses must be brought to establish the facts (cf. Dt. 17:6-7; 19:15-17). Nolland comments, “The presence of the supporting parties ensures that the initiative is not a confused one, based on a misunderstanding, but is also concerned to enhance in the eyes of the one being approached the seriousness of what is at stake.”⁶⁶ The goal for this second step is the same as the first: To get the offender to respond properly, that is, to be reconciled. If step two fails, then the offended must proceed to the third and final step. In the third step, the conflict is brought to the attention of the church, the community of believers. Morris observes, “Jesus envisages the brother who initiated the process as telling the local church as a whole what had happened...The implication is that the church will try to bring him [the offender] to his senses.”⁶⁷ If the offender refuses to respond appropriately and be reconciled, he is to be treated as a “pagan or tax collector.” Some scholars deny that church discipline is advocated by these verses. They point out that the personal pronoun throughout the procedure is singular. R.T. France, for example, states, “It is addressed entirely to the individual disciple; even the ‘you’ of v. 17 is still singular, so that that verse prescribes not communal ostracism but the attitude of the individual disciple who first noticed the problem. The disciple is envisaged as acting within the context of the whole community, but the focus is on the individual’s attitudes and actions.”⁶⁸ Given the involvement of the church at this final step, however, it is unlikely that discipline would be administered only by the offended in the form of personal ostracism. Carson correctly concludes, “The argument and the NT parallels (Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:14) show that Jesus has excommunication in mind...in the Greek expression, ‘let him be to you as,’ the ‘you’ is singular. This suggests that each member of the church is to abide by the corporate judgment.”⁶⁹ Thus, the entire church administers discipline in the form of removal from fellowship. This view also makes better interpretive sense in light of the practices of the O.T. and Dead Sea Scroll community.

An important issue to address at this point is what sins need to be confronted by this formal process that culminates in church discipline. Should every personal infraction, large or small, result in confrontation? What about passages that encourage believers to overlook personal offenses? Love, according to the Apostle Paul, “keeps no record of wrongs” (I Cor. 13:5). Regarding this kind of record keeping, Carson observes, “But suppose genuine injury has been done? What then? Paul’s answer is that love ‘keeps no record of wrongs,’ a private file of personal grievances that can be consulted and nursed whenever there is possibility of some new slight. Its stance in the presence of genuine evil precludes such accounting; for at a very deep level, love cannot bear to be censorious or hypocritical.”⁷⁰ The Apostle Peter had a similar view to Paul: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins” (I Pt. 4:8). The Greek word “sin” is *hamartia* and it can be translated as: “missing the mark, wandering, erring, and sinning.” The word “cover” (*kalupto*) means to hide or to cover up. The present tense of the verb emphasizes the ongoing nature of the covering of sin. I. Howard Marshall states, “What Peter says here is closer to what Paul says in I Corinthians 13:5: ‘Love...keeps no record of wrongs.’ It does not treasure up the

⁶⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 747.

⁶⁷ Morris, *Matthew*, 468.

⁶⁸ France, *Matthew*, 600.

⁶⁹ Carson, *Matthew*, 403.

⁷⁰ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 62-63.

memory of wrongs committed or offenses, but releases them and does not hold them against the person.”⁷¹ The idea of overlooking the infractions of others can be traced back to the O.T. wisdom tradition. We read in Pr. 10:12, “Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” Likewise, in Pr. 17:9, it states, “He who covers over an offense promotes love but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” Wayne Grudem offers this insight: “Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offences, and even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound.”⁷² Since believers are called to overlook personal offenses, it is likely that Jesus is commanding a formal process of confrontation only for serious sins.

What is the purpose of this formal process? Is the purpose to extend forgiveness when the condition of repentance is met? This does not seem to be the case. Neither the word “forgiveness” (*aphiemi*) nor “repentance” (*metanoia*) occurs in these verses. Also missing are instructions on when to withhold or extend forgiveness. Mt. 18:15-17 is not about forgiveness but reconciliation: “you have won your brother.” The three-step process described by Jesus is to reconcile believers who have been alienated by serious sin. This process of confrontation culminates in the application of church discipline. Interestingly, the discipline administered is not the withholding of forgiveness but the exclusion of the offender from the fellowship of believers. Moreover, it is the church that administers this punishment, rather than the offended believer. That Mt. 18:15-17 is not about repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness is confirmed by Peter’s question about the frequency of forgiveness. Shortly after Jesus’ instructions on confronting serious sins, Peter inquired, “how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” (18:21). This question does not make much sense if forgiveness was withheld during the three step process of confrontation. Peter seemed to assume that forgiveness was granted even when the brother refused to be reconciled. If forgiveness was withheld during each of the three steps due to lack of repentance, Jesus should have answered Peter’s question, “Zero, unless he repents.” Instead, Jesus responded, “seventy-seven times” (18:22). In other words, your forgiveness of others should be without limit, even when you find it necessary to confront serious sins that have caused alienation.

It is important to note that exclusion from fellowship is the result of a church decision, and then only after a progressive procedure of confrontation. Like the state (cf. Rom. 13:1-7), the church (cf. I Cor. 6:1-6) has been ordained by God to administer justice. Although the process of church discipline may begin as a private correction, public rebuke and exclusion from fellowship are to be administered by the church. Church leaders, in fact, must play a central role in this process (cf. II Thess. 3:14-15; I Tim. 5:20; Titus 3:10-11). Individual Christians should indeed practice mutual accountability (cf. Gal. 6:1), but they do not have the right to impose punishment on each other.

Matthew 18:21-35. After Jesus’ his initial response to Peter, He told the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Like many of his others parables, Jesus prefaced this one with the words, “the kingdom of heaven is like.” Thus, parables were not about the physical realities mentioned, e.g., farming, vineyards, weddings, finances. Rather, through his parables, Jesus

⁷¹ I. Howard Marshall, *I Peter* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1991), 144.

⁷² Wayne Grudem, *I Peter* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1988), 173-74.

provided illustrations of God's kingdom. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, then, was not about financial debt but about the practice of forgiveness by those who belong to God's kingdom.

How is this parable interpreted by proponents of conditional forgiveness? Caneday states, "...when Matthew narrates Jesus' response to Peter's question, he does not need to reiterate what is already obvious within the preceding context from Jesus' instruction concerning the order of addressing sins within the church body. Jesus' teaching neither renders repentance optional nor forgiveness unconditional."⁷³ For Braun, the parable addresses Christians who refuse to forgive even when the offender repents: "Those unwilling or unable to forgive should fear for their salvation."⁷⁴ How do advocates of unconditional forgiveness interpret this parable? Jeffress comments, "But Jesus' point was that the first slave had an obligation to release his friend from his debt, considering the debt from which he had just been freed. Forgiveness is the obligation of the forgiven."⁷⁵ MacArthur agrees with this idea of obligation: "Scripture everywhere teaches that those who have been forgiven much are obligated to forgive others (Matt. 18:23-35; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13)."⁷⁶

In this particular parable, Jesus told the story of a king who cancelled the incredible debt of one of his servants. This servant owed a debt of 10,000 talents—a massive debt, comparable to about five billion dollars by today's standards. Since the servant was unable to pay, the king decided to sell the man and his family into slavery. Such a sale, however, would hardly have made a dent in the servant's debt. The action of the king appears to be punitive. But, the servant begged for the king's patience until he could payback everything. Instead of granting forbearance, the king "took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go" (18:27). The word "pity" (*splagchnizomai*) means to move with compassion; it occurs also in the Parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:33) and the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:20). The semantic range of the verb "let go" (*apoluo*) includes: "release, forgive." The verb "cancelled" (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from moral obligation. The king, of course, incurred the debt himself.

Later, that same servant approached a fellow servant and demanded payment for a debt. The amount of the debt was 100 denarii, equivalent to about \$2,100. This amount paled in comparison to the amount of the debt from which the first servant was released. Nonetheless, this first servant had every right to collect this debt. After all, it was owed to him. The second servant begged for patience, using almost the exact same words as the first servant. Yet, the first servant had him thrown into debtor's prison "until he could pay the debt." Nolland observes, "People sense their need for mercy, but they are not so ready to see the need to extend mercy."⁷⁷

When the king learned about the first servant's failure to show mercy, he confronted him: "You wicked servant...I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (18:32-33). In

⁷³ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 13.

⁷⁴ Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 123.

⁷⁵ Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn't Make Sense*, 57.

⁷⁶ MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 75.

⁷⁷ Nolland, *Matthew*, 759.

his anger, the king had the first servant thrown into jail to be tortured. While the king's mercy earlier led to forgiveness, the king's anger now leads to judgment. Unlike most of his parable, Jesus offered an interpretation: "This is how your heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (18:35). Carson comments, "Those in the kingdom serve a great king who has invariably forgiven far more than they can ever forgive one another. Therefore failure to forgive excludes one from the kingdom, whose pattern is to forgive."⁷⁸ The point of the parable is that since God mercifully forgives believers a great debt, they should gratefully show mercy in their forgiveness of others. Nothing in this parable suggests that forgiveness should be withheld until the condition of repentance is met. Neither is there any suggestion that a forgiving attitude is sufficient.

Horizontal Forgiveness in Luke-Acts

Joel Green has rightly observed, "Forgiveness of sins...is a pervasive motif in the Lukan narrative."⁷⁹ The two writings of Luke, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, contain several references to horizontal forgiveness. Before examining Lk. 17:3-4, let's consider three passages in Luke's gospel and one passage in Acts.

Luke 6:37-38a. The first verse to consider is Luke 6:37-38a, "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you." Though not indicated by the NIV translation, these verses are introduced with the conjunction "and" (*kaí*) indicating that they are connected with the preceding verses on love and mercy. Jesus taught, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Lk. 6:27-28). This love for enemies, according to Jesus, imitates our heavenly Father who "is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Lk. 6:35). Jesus concluded with this command, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Luke 6:37-38a is followed by Jesus' promise of divine blessing to those who are generous in giving: "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Lk. 6:38). Thus, it is within the context of mercy and generosity that Jesus taught about horizontal forgiveness.

In Luke 6:37-38, Jesus provided his disciples with four examples of love and mercy. The first two examples are negative: don't judge and don't condemn. Marshall states, "In their own day-to-day conduct the disciples are forbidden to usurp the place of God in judging and condemning other people. The context would suggest that it is the attitude which fails to show mercy to the guilty which is here being attacked."⁸⁰ The next two examples of love and mercy are positive: forgive and give. In contrast to judging and condemning, believers are to exemplify forgiving and giving. Darrell Bock observes, "Jesus develops his description of mercy by highlighting its relationship to forgiveness and judgment...Negatively, Jesus says we should not judge or condemn. Positively, we are to forgive and give generously."⁸¹ It is significant that God practices all four qualities: judgment, condemnation, forgiveness, and giving. Yet, God has chosen to share only the last two qualities with his children.

⁷⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 406.

⁷⁹ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 443.

⁸⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 265.

⁸¹ Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), 126.

All four examples of love and mercy are followed by divine promises: you will not be judged, you will not be condemned, you will be forgiven, and you will be given to. Each of these verbs is in the passive voice. The use of the passive voice here is known as the divine passive in which “God is the obvious agent.”⁸² Therefore, God makes a promise to believers: he will not judge us if we do not judge others, that he will not condemn us if we do not condemn others, that he will forgive us if we forgive others, and that he will give to us if we give to others. With the passive verb, “you will be forgiven,” you is the subject of the verb but it receives the action of the verb. Thus, in this verse, the emphasis is on the forgiveness of the person rather than the forgiveness of his sins.

The semantic range of the verb “forgive” (*aphuo*) includes: “release, pardon, and forgive.” In this verse, the verb is in the present tense and imperative mood, meaning that the forgiveness of others is commanded as an ongoing action. Stein notes, “The command does not require that the believer ignore the guilt of those who have sinned against them or to proclaim the guilty as innocent. It means instead to forgive the guilty.”⁸³ But how are we to forgive? In the context of this passage, it is clear that we should forgive freely and generously.

The conjunction “and” (*kai*) which follows the command to forgive usually introduces a coordinate clause. In this context, “and” (*kai*) appears to be introducing a result clause which could be translated as “so that” (cf. Mk. 11:25).⁸⁴ Thus, the result of our ongoing forgiveness of others is God’s forgiveness of us: “you will be forgiven.” As mentioned before, this is an example of a divine passive in which God is the agent. God promises to forgive us as the result of our forgiveness of others. There is nothing in the context about our willingness to forgive without actually forgiving. In other words, the promise of God’s forgiveness is the result of actually forgiving those who have wronged us.

Luke 11:4. The next verse to consider is Luke 11:4, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.” This verse occurs within Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer (11:2-4; cf. Mt. 6:9-13). As mentioned previously, the Lord’s Prayer is the prayer of believers, those who have already experienced God’s forgiveness at conversion. Stein comments, “The prayer assumes the regular need for confession of sin, even as I John 1:9 does. The issue is not one of entrance into God’s people, i.e., salvation, but the regular cleansing from sin that each believer needs.”⁸⁵ Since believers have already experienced God’s salvific forgiveness, the forgiveness requested here is God’s sanctifying forgiveness.

The verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from his moral liability. Marshall observes, “To sin is to come under obligation to God and hence to owe him restitution. Often debtors become slaves to their creditors. But Jesus speaks of the forgiveness of sinners and debtors without any restitution being offered by them to God.”⁸⁶ In fact, our plea for forgiveness is one of complete helplessness for we cannot even begin to repay the debt of our sin to God. Since we cannot make restitution, we are utterly dependent on God’s mercy to forgive our debt to him. Like the tax collector in

⁸² Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 437-38.

⁸³ Robert Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 212.

⁸⁴ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 392.

⁸⁵ Stein, *Luke*, 326.

⁸⁶ Marshall, *Luke*, 461.

the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, we approach God with the plea, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Lk. 18:13).

In the first usage of “forgive” (11:4a), the mood of the verb is imperative which, as we’ve seen, commonly functions as an entreaty in NT prayers. In the second usage of “forgive” (11:4b), the present tense is used indicating continuous action. This is different than Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer where the verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) is in the aorist tense (6:12). So while Matthew’s version emphasizes the pastness of our horizontal forgiveness, Luke’s version emphasizes the ongoing nature of that forgiveness. Bock states this well: “a forgiven person is to be a forgiving person.”⁸⁷

As noted before, the conjunction “for” (*gar*) follows the main clause and functions to introduce a causal clause; it can rightly be translated as because or since. So, the basis for our request for vertical forgiveness is that we continually practice horizontal forgiveness. Thus, our plea in this petition is that God would forgive us because we are continually forgiving those who sin against us. Green rightly concludes, “Jesus grounds the disciples’ request for divine forgiveness in their practice of extending forgiveness.”⁸⁸

The participial phrase “everyone who sins against us” is built on the verb “sins” (*opheilo*) which means “to owe.” In Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, the noun “debt” (*opheilema*) is used. When we sin against God and others, we become indebted to them. The participle is in the present tense which emphasizes the continuous action of those who are indebted to us. And our response to them should be one of continuous forgiveness, if indeed we expect ongoing forgiveness from our heavenly Father. Stein observes, “The hand that reaches out to God for forgiveness cannot withhold forgiveness to others.”⁸⁹ It is significant that the participle, “who sins,” is modified by the adjective, “all” (*pas*). The word is inclusive, and the participial phrase could rightly be translated as “all who sin against us.” In other words, no one is to be excluded from our forgiveness, at least not if we hope to be forgiven by God.

Luke 23:34. The third verse to consider in the Gospel of Luke is 23:34, where Jesus prayed while hanging on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”⁹⁰ The verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from his moral obligation. There is no explicit statement about what sin was to be forgiven, other than that it was a sin of ignorance. “Forgive” (*aphiemi*) is in the imperative mood which, as mentioned previously, commonly functions as an entreaty in NT prayers.⁹¹

How is this verse interpreted by proponents of conditional forgiveness? Braun interprets Jesus’ words from the cross prophetically: “Jesus prayed that those who crucified him would be forgiven in the future—he did not thank God that they were already forgiven. If they had

⁸⁷ Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1055.

⁸⁸ Green, *Luke*, 444.

⁸⁹ Stein, *Luke*, 326.

⁹⁰ In the UBS Greek NT, this verse is placed in double brackets and given a ‘C’ rating which indicates “considerable degree of doubt.” Nonetheless, most commentaries believe that the verse is authentic, even if not originally a part of Luke’s gospel. I. Howard Marshall states, “The balance of the evidence thus favours acceptance of the saying as Lucan, although the weight of the textual evidence against the saying precludes any assurance in opting for this verdict” (868).

⁹¹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 488.

already been forgiven, such a prayer would have been superfluous.”⁹² Caneday agrees with this interpretation: “Jesus’ prayer upon the cross became effectual through the proclamation of the gospel, forgiveness of sins through repentance.”⁹³

How do advocates of unconditional forgiveness interpret Jesus’ words from the cross? MacArthur observes, “Forgiveness was the predominant theme of His thoughts throughout the whole ordeal of His crucifixion.”⁹⁴ Like proponents of conditional forgiveness, MacArthur believes, “it was a plea on behalf of those who would repent and trust Him as their Lord and Savior.”⁹⁵ As we will see below, this is probably not the case.

In Lk. 23:34, the personal pronoun “them” (*autos*) is the object of Jesus’ plea for forgiveness. But who is the “them?” Scholars are unanimous on this question. Green believes that the pronoun refers to Jews and Romans who conspired to have Jesus crucified.⁹⁶ Thus, Green concludes, “In death, Jesus continues his redemptive ministry, even putting into practice his own instruction regarding love for one’s enemies: ‘Pray for those who abuse you’ (6:27-28).”⁹⁷ Evans confirms this interpretation: “it presents Jesus as willing to forgive those who have committed an inexcusable crime against him. Jesus asks that they be forgiven on the grounds that they did not know what they were doing.”⁹⁸ Bock agrees with the interpretation of Green and Evans.⁹⁹ None of the commentaries consulted for this study interpreted Jesus’ words from the cross prophetically.

A close examination of the immediate context, however, reveals that the antecedent of “them” is clearly the Roman soldiers. Consider the preceding clauses: “they led him way,” “they seized Simon from Cyrene,” and “they crucified him.” Immediately after Jesus pleads for their forgiveness, we are told that “they divided up his clothes.” The mocking of the Jewish mob does not occur until after these events (Lk. 23:35-38), making it clear that they are not the antecedent of the personal pronoun, “them.” In antiquity, a detail of Roman soldiers was responsible for carrying out crucifixion. The crucifixion detail usually consisted of one officer, perhaps a centurion, and four soldiers. So then, Jesus is pleading for the forgiveness of this crucifixion detail. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus taught his disciples to “pray for those who abuse you” (Lk. 6:27-28). Hanging from the cross, Jesus now practiced what he preached. Stein states:

Jesus modeled his own teachings on love for enemies, forgiveness, and nonviolence. For Luke’s readers it should be easier to love their enemies possessing this example of how the Christ, the King of the Jews, forgave his enemies. Who had ever been more wronged than God’s Chosen One? Yet he forgave his enemies.¹⁰⁰

An important question still needs to be addressed: Is Jesus pleading for the forgiveness of all their sins or for the specific sin of killing an innocent man? On other occasions, Jesus

⁹² Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 145.

⁹³ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 15.

⁹⁴ MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 38.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹⁶ Green, *Luke*, 819-20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 820.

⁹⁸ Craig Evans, *Luke* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1990), 340.

⁹⁹ Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1849.

¹⁰⁰ Stein, *Luke*, 591.

exercised His divine prerogative and forgave humans sins against God: “Your sins are forgiven” (cf. Mk. 2:5-10; Lk. 7:47-50). In this episode, Jesus pled with his heavenly Father: “Father, forgive them.” It appears that Jesus had already granted horizontal forgiveness for this personal sin against him; he is now pleading for their vertical forgiveness. But, is this plea for God to forgive all their sins? The context makes it clear that Jesus is pleading for God to forgive their sin of killing an innocent man, “they do not know what they are doing.” Surely, not all the sins of these soldiers were committed in ignorance. In the broader context of the passion narrative, these soldiers had earlier brutalized Jesus, beating and flogging him. Now they were in the process of crucifying him. Since Jesus had been found guilty by Pilate, they had no reason to question his guilt. Bock observes, “Even in this desperate situation, Jesus prays for those who kill him. He asks his executioners be forgiven, since they acted in ignorance.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Jesus is not praying for the absolution of all their sins but only for their sin against him, specifically murder. Yet, there is no evidence in this passage that the Roman soldiers had repented of this sin. Thus, Jesus practiced the very unconditional forgiveness that he preached to his disciples.

Acts 7:60. The last verse to consider in Luke-Acts is Acts 7:60, which records the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. In the literary context, Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin, offering a lengthy speech about Jewish history that culminates in the coming of Jesus, the promised Messiah, whom the Jews killed. In a fit of rage, those present dragged Stephen outside the city walls and stoned him. In the midst of his martyrdom, Stephen plead for the forgiveness of his executioners. Stephen prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Jesus’ prayer for the forgiveness of his executioners (Lk. 23:34) clearly provided a model for this first Christian martyr.

Who is the “Lord” (*kurios*) to whom Stephen prayed? In his message to the Sanhedrin, Stephen used the word “Lord” (*kurios*) to refer to Yahweh (cf. Acts 7:31, 33). When Stephen began his prayer, he addressed, “Lord Jesus” (7:59). The addressee “Lord” in vs. 60 must also refer to Jesus. Although Jesus addressed his plea for the forgiveness of his executioners to his heavenly Father, Stephen pled his case to the now resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus.

The verb “hold” (*istemi*) means to lay, to establish. It was used metaphorically for the withholding of forgiveness (cf. II Tim. 4:16; Rev. 2:4, 14, 20). Stephen is pleading that “this sin” (*bamartia*) may not be held “against them.” This plea indicates that Stephen was not withholding forgiveness for this sin. In the context, “this sin” clearly refers to the killing of an innocent man. F.F. Bruce states:

But there was yet another of our Lord’s utterances upon the cross that Stephen echoed. For, on his knees amid the flying stones, he made his last appeal to the heavenly court—not this time for his own vindication but for mercy towards his executioners. Before he was finally battered into silence and death, they heard him call aloud, ‘Lord, do not put this sin into their account.’¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1994), 373. See also Marshall, *Luke*, 867.

¹⁰² F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 171.

After surveying these four passages from the Lukan corpus, what can we conclude? From the first two passages (Lk. 6:37-38a; 11:4), we see that Jesus linked our ongoing forgiveness from God with our actual forgiveness of those who have wronged us. There is no evidence that our forgiveness of others should be conditioned on their repentance. In fact, our forgiveness of others is to be generous and inclusive; no one is to be excluded. From the second two passages (Lk. 23:34; Acts 7:60), we can conclude that unconditional forgiveness is not merely an idealistic theory. Not only did Jesus practice it, so did Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Exposition of Luke 17:3-4, “if he repents, forgive him”

There is one more passage concerning horizontal forgiveness in the Lukan writings that needs to be considered. In Luke 17:3-4, we read that “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” The preceding passage is about causing believers to stumble (17:1-2). Just as believers are not to cause each other to sin, neither are they to withhold forgiveness especially from those who repent. In both passages, Jesus is concerned about horizontal relationships. In the verses that immediately follow Lk. 17:3-4, the disciples asked Jesus, “Increase our faith” (17:5-6). Given the subject matter of causing to sin and offering forgiveness, this plea for increased faith is understandable. Nolland puts it this way: “Reeling under the impact of these demands, the apostles petition for an increased allocation of faith.”¹⁰³

How are these verses interpreted by advocates of conditional forgiveness? Braun comments that, “Jesus said that Christians should forgive if the other party repents.”¹⁰⁴ Caneday agrees with this interpretation: “Far from being a singular passage that poses a problem for those who advocate ‘unconditional forgiveness,’ Luke 17:3-4 is in full harmony with the whole of the New Testament’s instruction concerning the indispensability of repentance as the stipulate posture for receiving forgiveness of sins.”¹⁰⁵

How do proponents of unconditional forgiveness interpret these verses? Jeffress says, “Nowhere in this verse does Jesus advise withholding forgiveness from a person who refuses to repent. Repentance is our offender’s responsibility; forgiveness is our responsibility.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the offended should fulfill his responsibility of granting forgiveness, whether or not the offender fulfills his responsibility of repenting.

In 17:3a, the conjunction “if” (*ean*) introduces a third class conditional sentence. The protasis may or may not be true. Once again, however, if the protasis is true, then it follows that the apodasis is also true. So then, “if your brother sins, rebuke him.” The reference to “brother” here indicates that Jesus is limiting his teaching on horizontal forgiveness to believers who are brothers and sisters in God’s spiritual family. The verb “sins” (*hamartano*) can be translated as: missing the mark, wandering, erring, and sinning. Although verse 3 is ambiguous about who is sinned against, verse 4 makes it clear, “he sins against you.” So then, if a Christian is sinned against by a fellow believer, according to Jesus, they are to

¹⁰³ John Nolland, *Luke* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 839.

¹⁰⁴ Braun, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Caneday, *Must Christians Always Forgive?*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn’t Make Sense*, 80.

rebuke the wrongdoer. The semantic range of the verb “rebuke” (*epiimao*) includes: “admonish, reprove, rebuke, or warn sternly.” The verb is in the imperative mood, which means that it is a command to obey. The offended must take the initiative to confront the offender. Regarding this rebuke, Green observes, “Jesus’ followers are not to stand at a distance from the sinner, but to seek actively for his or her restoration.”¹⁰⁷ While Lk 17:3-4 makes it clear that the offended should seek reconciliation, Mt. 5:23-24 made it equally clear that the offender should seek reconciliation. So then, as Christians, whether we are the offended or the offender, we should take the initiative to pursue reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Although believers should be committed to this kind of mutual accountability, as we saw in the previous section, it is the responsibility of the church to impose discipline.

In 17:3b, the conjunction “if” (*ean*) introduces another third class conditional sentence. And again, if the protasis is true, then the apodasis is true. Thus, “if he repents, forgive [him].” The semantic range of the verb “repent” (*metanoeo*) includes: “turn from, turn around, change one’s mind, and repent.”¹⁰⁸ In all cases, whether verb or noun, this word is typically used in regard to the initial turning from a sinful life that occurs at conversion. It is significant that the call for repentance is typically directed toward unbelievers. The Apostle Paul summarized well this call: “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance (*metanoia*) and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). When unbelievers obey the call to repentance and place their faith in Christ, they enjoy the forgiveness of all their sins and experience reconciliation with God (cf. Rom. 5:10-11; Col. 2:13; I Jn. 2:12). This is salvific forgiveness.

The verb *metanoeo* is found in the imperative mood on the lips of John the Baptist (cf. Mt. 3:1), Jesus (cf. Mt. 4:17), and Peter (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22). All three men commanded: Repent! So important was the need for repentance that Jesus told the crowd: “unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Lk. 13:3). In the Greek NT, *metanoeo* is often combined with the Greek verb *epistrepho*, the semantic range of which includes: “turn toward, turn back, and return.” For example, Peter said, “Repent (*metanoeo*), then, and turn (*epistrepho*) to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19; cf. Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; I Thess. 1:9). So then, divine forgiveness requires both a turning from sin and a turning toward God. As the gospels make clear, this turning to God is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Mk. 1:15; Acts 20:21).

The use of *metanoeo* in Lk. 17:3b is unusual because, as we’ve seen, repentance is most commonly associated with conversion. In the NT, repentance is connected with horizontal forgiveness only here. Also, it is rare for believers to be called to repentance for vertical forgiveness.¹⁰⁹ Repentance from sin, along with faith in Christ, typically takes place at

¹⁰⁷ Green, *Luke*, 613.

¹⁰⁸ The verb “repent” (*metanoeo*) occurs 34 times in the Greek NT. The noun form, *metanoia*, occurs an additional 24 times.

¹⁰⁹ There are two exceptions in Paul’s letters. In one instance, Paul was disappointed that some believers at Corinth had not repented of “sexual sin and debauchery” (II Cor. 12:21). In the other instance, Paul encouraged church leaders to gently instruct those who oppose them “in the hope that God will grant them repentance (*metanoia*)” (II Tim. 2:25). The only other time that Christians are called to repentance is in the Book of Revelation. On five occasions, the risen Jesus called churches to repent because they were in danger of apostasy (cf. 2:5, 15, 20-22; 3:3, 19).

conversion and results in the forgiveness of all sins (cf. Col. 2:13; I Jn. 2:12). Stein states that, “Although ‘repentance’ for Luke usually referred to the conversion experience, here it involves a subsequent experience of sincere sorrow over having offended a fellow believer.”¹¹⁰

The verb “forgive” (*aphiemi*) means to cancel the debt of sin and to release the offender from moral liability. In this verse, *aphiemi* is in the aorist tense and imperative mood. Forgiveness, according to Jesus, is not optional. Interestingly, Jesus’ command is directed at the offended rather than the offender. Nolland comments, “Clearly the responsibility has been laid by Jesus on the one offended to show wholehearted readiness to forgive, and not upon the offender to demonstrate the reality of his or her repentance.”¹¹¹ It is significant that the verb ‘repent’ (*aphiemi*) is complimented here by the verb “comes back” (*epistrepho*). As we saw previously, the call to repentance from sin is often supplemented by the call to return to God (cf. Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20). Luke uses the same Greek word, *epistrepho*, to describe our return to our brother in Christ. Therefore, in Lk. 17:3-4, Jesus is saying that we cannot withhold forgiveness from those who turn from their sin and come to us for a restored relationship. This points to the seriousness of the sin and the necessity of extending forgiveness even in extreme cases.

Are there limits to the extension of forgiveness? Jesus says, “If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” Seven, of course, is not a limit. Morris states, “If the offender repents, the believer must forgive him. And his forgiveness must be without limits.”¹¹² It is significant that the wrongdoer offers only a minimal acknowledgement, “I repent.” There is no demand here for sufficient remorse, a detailed confession, or the offer of restitution. Moreover, any expectation of restitution would render the need for forgiveness superfluous. After all, there is no need to forgive a debt once it has been repaid through restitution. All that is required of the offender, according to Jesus, are the words, “I repent.” No other requirement should be attached. Nolland offers this insight: “In traditional Jewish approaches to forgiveness, the burden lies with the one seeking forgiveness to demonstrate the genuineness of his or her repentance. With Jesus, the emphasis is on the readiness of the heart to forgive... The benefit of the doubt lies entirely with the one being forgiven.”¹¹³ Unfortunately, with some Christians, repentance is a moving target. No matter what is said or done by the offender, it is never sufficient to merit the forgiveness of the offended.

Luke 17:3b makes it clear that Christians are to forgive fellow believers who wrong them and then repent. In fact, Jesus commanded us to forgive repentant brothers so that withholding forgiveness is not an option. But what if the offender is an unbeliever? This verse does not address that issue. To use it to do so is an argument from silence. What if the offender is a believer but he does not repent? Surely we should be able to withhold forgiveness from unrepentant brothers. Again, this verse does not address that issue. And again it would be an argument from silence to use it in this way. Stein rightly concludes, “The saying does not deal with the question of what a believer should do if his brother does

¹¹⁰ Stein, *Luke*, 431.

¹¹¹ Nolland, *Luke*, 839.

¹¹² Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 256.

¹¹³ Nolland, *Luke*, 838.

not repent.”¹¹⁴ Interestingly, none of the commentaries consulted for this study argued for the conditional statement: *If he does not repent, you must not forgive him*. All agreed that when repentance is present, forgiveness must be granted. None, however, argued that forgiveness should be withheld in the absence of repentance.

Yet, it seems reasonable to infer the converse of Lk. 17:3, “If he repents, (you must) forgive him.” But, what is the converse? According to deontic logic (i.e., the logic of duty or obligation), there are two possibilities. One, the converse could be: If he does not repent, you must not forgive him. Two, the converse could be: If he does not repent, you may or may not forgive him. The case must be decided by context, whether the immediate context of Lk. 17:3 or the broader context of Jesus’ teachings. Since nothing in the immediate context decides the case, what about the context of Jesus’ teaching on horizontal forgiveness elsewhere? As we’ve seen, Jesus commanded horizontal forgiveness on two occasions (cf. Mk. 11:25 and Lk. 6:37). Jesus also made the believer’s practice of forgiveness the basis of God’s forgiveness of them (cf. Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4). Jesus even made the believer’s forgiveness of others the condition of God’s forgiveness of them (cf. Mt. 6:14-15). Nothing in these verses suggests that repentance was the implied condition of horizontal forgiveness.¹¹⁵ Neither is there any evidence that a forgiving attitude is sufficient. Instead, the basis and condition of a believer’s forgiveness from God is their actual forgiveness of those who have sinned against them. It seems clear from these verses that Jesus taught unconditional forgiveness. Moreover, Jesus’ unconditional forgiveness of the Roman soldiers who crucified him demonstrates that Jesus practiced what he preached (cf. Lk. 23:34). Given the broader context of Jesus’ teaching on horizontal forgiveness, the appropriate converse of the conditional sentence, “If he repents, forgive him,” is clear: If he does not repent, you may or may not forgive him.

Jesus emphasized mercy in forgiveness: “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how your heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Mt. 18:33-35). The prioritizing of mercy can also be seen in James: “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:12-13). Given this emphasis on mercy, it seems more prudent to extend forgiveness to the unrepentant than to withhold it.

Conclusion

Vertical Forgiveness is not Formulaic

Part of the problem with conditional forgiveness is that it attempts to turn forgiveness into a formula. Once the right ingredients are added in the proper order, then you have forgiveness. Since God requires repentance as a condition of forgiveness, it is reasoned, so should believers. But is this always true? On two occasions Jesus exercised his divine

¹¹⁴ Stein, *Luke*, 431.

¹¹⁵ Paul’s exhortation to “forgive as God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13) was not about requiring repentance as a condition of forgiveness. As the context made clear, believers are to forgive like God with grace, mercy, kindness, and compassion.

prerogative to forgive human sins against God. Upon seeing the faith of the paralytic's friends, Jesus said to the paralytic, "your sins are forgiven" (Mk. 2:5). Upon seeing the devotion of the sinful woman, Jesus said to her, "your sins are forgiven" (Lk. 7:48). In neither case is there any evidence of repentance. Moreover, every believer will die with unconfessed sins. Yet, we have full assurance that all our sins are forgiven (cf. Col. 2:13; I Jn. 2:12).

Thus, it is clear that God does not always require repentance as a condition for the forgiveness of each and every sin. Moreover, just because someone repents does not mean that God is obligated to forgive him. Judas, for example, repented: "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood'" (Mt. 27:3-4). In spite of his repentance, there is no evidence in Scripture that Judas was forgiven for the sin of betraying Jesus (cf. Jn. 17:12). Some might argue that Judas was not forgiven because God judged his heart. Exactly! God is able to do what we cannot when it comes to forgiveness, namely, judge the human heart. From the example of Jesus' practice of unconditional forgiveness and Judas's lack of forgiveness in spite of repentance, it should be clear that vertical forgiveness is not formulaic. God reserves the absolute right of divine clemency: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:14; cf. Ex. 33:19).

Human Relationships are Complicated

The main reason that Christians should practice unconditional forgiveness is because Jesus commanded it, making it the basis and the condition of our petition from vertical (sanctifying) forgiveness. Are there other reasons? There are at least two other reasons why believers should practice unconditional forgiveness. First, humans are finite and fallen. Because we are finite, our perspective and knowledge is limited. Because we are fallen, our perspective is skewed and our knowledge is tainted. Given the reality of the human condition, personal sins are bound to happen. Sometimes we are innocent victims of evil actions done with evil intentions. More often we add to relational problems through our actions or inactions. In other words, we contribute to the escalation of hostility by what we do and do not do or say. When it comes time to resolve these problems, we are hardly objective in our assessment. Given our bias, we will rarely be fair in judging motives or considering circumstances. For the sake of Christian community, we should forgive each other preemptively. This allows us to diffuse the situation and move beyond the relational impasse. This forgiveness, however, should not be confused with reconciliation. Reconciliation is the rebuilding of a trusting relationship. While forgiveness can be unilateral, reconciliation takes the best efforts of both people. Paul said, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18).

A second reason to practice unconditional forgiveness is to avoid the vices of anger, bitterness, resentment, and hate. How can love keep no record of wrongdoing (I Cor. 13:5) and at the same time withhold forgiveness from those who wronged us? How can we not become bitter when our offender has not met the minimum standards of repentance: sufficient remorse, detailed confession of wrong, and restitution for injury? In the two passages where believers are exhorted to forgive as they have been forgiven by God (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13), the virtue of forgiveness is contrasted with the vices of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. These are the vices that characterized the "old life." The

virtue of forgiveness should characterize our new life, along with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. Given the stark contrast in these verses, it seems humanly impossible to withhold forgiveness without nursing a grudge against those who have wronged us.

Unconditional Forgiveness is Countercultural

When wronged, our human inclination is to get even. This inclination has not gone unnoticed by Hollywood. Countless box office hits are a veritable celebration of human vengeance, e.g., “Unforgiven” (Clint Eastwood), “Out for Justice” (Steven Segal), and “Payback” (Mel Gibson). These movies play to our desire to get back at our offender, even if we need to take the law into our own hands. For those who are unwilling to act out this vengeful desire, the alternative is to withhold forgiveness until the other person takes responsibility for the wrong and acknowledges the injury it caused. Even then, some might continue to withhold forgiveness because no amount of repentance can undo the harm that was done. Much of what Jesus taught was countercultural, even counter intuitive. For example, Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, and to go the extra mile (Mt. 5:38-44). Conditional forgiveness is consistent with our natural inclinations and cultural climate. We want, and are often encourage, to believe that we have the *right*, even the obligation, to withhold forgiveness from those who have sinned against us. Yet, this approach seems utterly at odds with Jesus’ teachings about forgiveness. In fact, withholding forgiveness seems to border on vengeance. Ironically, Adams comes to the same conclusion: “Refusal to forgive is a decision for vengeance. It is taking vengeance into your own hands...Because the Lord has said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,’ to take vengeance of any kind—even the withholding of forgiveness—is an attempt to arrogate God’s work to oneself.”¹¹⁶

While conditional forgiveness is consistent with human natural instinct and cultural mores, unconditional forgiveness is consistent with Jesus’ countercultural message. With unconditional forgiveness, there is no attempt to deny the wrong or minimize the injury. The offense was wrong and the injury was real. This wrongdoing resulted in the offender’s moral debt to the offended and in estrangement between the two parties. Nonetheless, the offended preemptively forgives the offender in the hope of moving the relationship toward reconciliation. This unilateral forgiveness cancels the debt of sin and releases the offender from moral liability. Believers do this in obedience to Christ and out of gratitude for God’s gracious forgiveness of them. While there are no conditions to this forgiveness, there still may well be consequences, both natural and judicial.

Finally, forgiveness should not be confused with reconciliation. Forgiveness can indeed be unilateral, but reconciliation is bilateral requiring the best efforts of both parties. If the offender is a Christian who refuses to be reconciled, then the offended may need to use a formal process of confrontation that culminates in church discipline. The purpose of this process, of course, is remedial rather than punitive. The goal is the reconciliation of alienated believers within the body of Christ.

¹¹⁶ Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, 25.

GUARDINI, VERDI, AND SALVATION HISTORY

Daniel J. Heisey*

Romano Guardini (1885-1968) observed in *The Lord* (1937) that Christians have had a sense of salvation history since the Pentecostal founding of the Church. Guardini cited as an example the preaching of Stephen (Acts 7); in that homily, the pivotal figure is Christ. “All that has been was preparation for Him,” wrote Guardini, “all that is to come works through Him.”¹ Guardini used the image of an arc or arch, the half before Christ being rooted in the prophetic history of the Jewish people, the half after Christ reaching towards fulfillment in God at the end of time. The publication of Guardini’s book on Christ, the Lord of all, occurred four years into the chancellorship of Adolf Hitler, dictator of Germany and dreaming of world domination. In this book, Guardini was careful to give only biblical examples, staying well clear of case studies from secular history. Guardini, born in Italy but reared in Germany, embraced the heritage of Christian humanism and cherished its art and poetry. In order to consider Guardini’s arch of salvation history, this essay will see it through the lens of a nineteenth-century Italian opera, *Attila*, by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). For Verdi, the central event in the story of Attila the Hun was his confrontation by Pope Leo the Great.

That historic confrontation was a dramatic clash of cultures, much as one finds in the Scriptures. The special role played in history by the Hebrews, God’s chosen people, occurred in dynamic encounters with secular events caused by neighboring or invading pagan nations. For Guardini it was possible to see this intersection of sacred history and secular history as a long, slow preparation for the coming of Christ. By the time of Attila and Leo, the fifth century, the great conflict was between pagans and Christians, but rather than seeing two separate histories converging, it is more accurate to see history as a continuous unit.

Aware of this continuity, Guardini observed in *The End of the Modern World* (1956) that medieval Christians had developed a constructive relationship with classical antiquity, building upon the natural truth expressed in pagan literature.² Educated leaders such as Leo the Great saw God at work in the poetry of Vergil, and so they could see Him at work also in the prowling about of Attila. In other words, “If God makes use of the vehicle of historical progress,” wrote Hans Urs von Balthasar, “the whole of this ‘vessel’ that he uses is going to be permanently marked by the fact that the Lord of history has made use of it, and

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¹ Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, trans. Elinor Castendyk Briefs (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954), 443. Originally published in 1937. See Robert A. Krieg, “Romano Guardini’s Theology of the Human Person,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 459; Guido Sommavilla, “Romano Guardini a Vent’ Anni dalla Sua Morte,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* (6 May, 1989): 246. Krieg expanded his article into a chapter (5) of his *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 107-130; see also his *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 116.

² Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), 14. This volume contains *The End of the Modern World*, trans. Joseph Theman and Herbert Burke (1956), and *Power and Responsibility*, trans. Elinor C. Briefs (1961).

used it, moreover, for that voyage which is the progress of grace.”³ Since medieval Christians called Attila the Hun *flagellum Dei* (“the scourge of God”), his role as a channel for grace requires some attention, albeit at an oblique angle through opera glasses.

Attila and Attila

Verdi’s *Attila* presents a stylized rendition of the historical collaboration of three cultures, three seemingly separate histories, in achieving the one will of God. These three cultures conflicting in *Attila* did not remain so in the historical record. In time both the Roman and barbarian (to use the generic Graeco-Roman term) peoples converted to Christianity, which in its turn had adopted various aspects of Graeco-Roman or barbarian culture. Christians had turned the Greek language of philosophy into the language of their Creed, and they turned the Roman cross used in public executions into the symbol of their divine Lord’s triumph over death. In *Attila*, the Roman desire for power and revenge hinders the spiritual growth of the characters Ezio, Foresto, and Odabella, and it prevents any chance for Attila’s possible conversion. Leone (Pope Leo) alone is a complete character, a person of serene strength.

As Verdi knew, the dramatic confrontation in 452 between Pope Leo the Great and Attila the Hun is just right for opera. Moreover, that standoff, being about the fate and future of Italy, had direct bearing on events in the 1840s. “Opera and history are inextricably intertwined,” observed historian Paul Preston. He added that “It is as impossible to understand Verdi without a sense of the Risorgimento as it is to understand the Risorgimento without listening to early Verdi.”⁴ This lesson applies also to people who are not teachers or writers of history. “If you are going to sing Verdi,” Jane Bunnell of DePaul University tells her voice students, “you have to know something about the Italian revolutions.”⁵ For example, it is helpful for singers and spectators to know that in *Attila* Verdi used the invading Huns as symbols for the Austrians who were occupying northern Italy. Despite that parallel, Verdi’s Attila emerges as a complex and sympathetic individual.

Attila, in Verdi’s version, is a vulnerable and conflicted character, relentlessly checkmated by people intent on betraying him. “He’s got a kind of morality that they don’t,” explained Samuel Ramey, an operatic bass who had performed the role for many years.⁶ Verdi’s Attila is granted a challenging, prophetic dream that changes his life, but a Christian viewing this opera ought to keep in mind that this dream comes to a most unlikely character. “Verdi’s Attila,” wrote Anthony Tommasini, “is not the monstrous conqueror from history, but an ambitious king tormented by doubts.”⁷

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 133.

⁴ Paul Preston, “Opera and the Historian,” *History Today* 35 (February, 1985): 4; cf. Jerome V. Reel, Jr., “History through Opera: A Classroom Experience,” *The History Teacher* 11 (August, 1978): 536: “The focus of the course was thus placed squarely on opera, the libretto, the music, and the setting, as an historical document of its own time.”

⁵ Quoted in Mark Thomas Ketterson, “Universatories,” *Opera News* 76 (August, 2011): 23. This article discusses the value for opera singers of having a liberal arts education, obtained from a college or university, rather than an exclusively musical training from a conservatory.

⁶ Quoted in Patrick Dillon, “Conquering Attila,” *Opera News* 74 (February, 2010): 31.

⁷ Anthony Tommasini, “Dividing and Conquering, but Felled by Love,” *The New York Times* (25 February, 2010): C-6.

A few words are in order about this opera. Verdi's *Attila* is rarely performed, although there was a production in 2010 at the Metropolitan Opera; a 1991 La Scala version is on DVD.⁸ *Attila* (1846) dates early in Verdi's career, overshadowed by his later works, especially *Don Carlo* (1867, revised 1884) and *Aida* (1871). Nevertheless, Verdi's *Attila* has featured in other genres. For instance, Willa Cather's novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) opens with a scene depicting prelates in Rome discussing missionaries in North America, and in their polite, oblique conversation, they mention a new opera by young Verdi. Even when reading fiction, historians notice such details, especially in novels so closely based on historical personages and events.⁹ The novel opens in 1846, so the new opera would be *Attila*. To the casual reader of Cather's story, it may seem odd that anyone, let alone an early nineteenth-century Italian, would want to write an opera about Attila the Hun. Marauding barbarian chieftains seem hardly the proper subject for a genre over-populated with ill-fated mythological figures.

Verdi's opera, the libretto by Temistocle Solera based on a romantic German play, depicted the meeting between Leo and Attila having supernatural dimensions: Attila has a vivid dream that an old man confronts him with the message that in the name of God the Huns would be forbidden to enter Rome; in due course, Leone, an Old Roman, his entourage trailing behind him, appears on the scene to confront Attila and deliver the same message. (Censors of the day forbade the depiction of religious personages on stage.) Verdi has this encounter occurring amidst the subplot of the fictional Foresto, a knight of Aquileia, and Odabella, his daughter, contriving to stab Attila to death, Attila having captured and fallen in love with Odabella. Meanwhile, Attila and Ezio, the historical Roman general Aetius (d. 454), arrange to divide up the Roman Empire, Ezio telling Attila, *Avrai tu l'universo, resti l'Italia a me* ("You may have the world, but leave Italy to me."). That line received rave applause from the audience, seeing it as a declaration of independence from Austria. In recent years, John Man, in his book on Attila, rightly dismissed the historical accuracy of the opera, saying, "the story-line is complete tosh."¹⁰

Modern historians of the papacy have supplied us with reliable, far less poetic, accounts of the events around what today might be called the summit meeting between Leo and Attila. Eamon Duffy explained that "Leo the Great gave the papacy its definitive form in the

⁸ For the Met's performance: Anthony Tommasini, "Dividing and Conquering, but Felled by Love," *The New York Times* (25 February, 2010): C-1 and C-6; Alex Ross, "House of Style," *The New Yorker* (29 March, 2010): 90 and 92; Jay Nordlinger, "A Nose, A Scot, and a Hun," *National Review* (5 April, 2010): 53. For the DVD: Ira Siff, "Verdi: Attila," *Opera News* 69 (June, 2005): 74; cf. Harvey E. Phillips, "Verdi: Attila," *Opera News* 57 (16 January, 1993): 44, reviewing the video. There was also a performance in December, 1999, in Sardinia, recorded on CD: William Fregosi, "Attila: Giuseppe Verdi," *The Opera Quarterly* 18 (Winter, 2002): 117-119. See also Zachary Wolfe, "Verdi's Fearsome Hun, with Destruction Writ Large in Neon Green," *The New York Times* (27 January, 2012): C-3.

⁹ Cather's novel is based on the life of Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy (1814-1888): See Maria Stella Coplecha, "Willa Cather's Archbishop," *Crisis* 19 (March, 2001): 24-29; cf. Paul Horgan, "Churchman of the Desert," *American Heritage* 8 (October, 1957): 30-35 and 99-101.

¹⁰ John Man, *Attila: The Barbarian King Who Challenged Rome* (London: Bantam, 2005), 297. For a synopsis of Verdi's plot: Stanley Sadie, ed., *Verdi and His Operas* (London: Macmillan Reference, Ltd., 2000), 78-81; cf. "Attila," *Opera News* 74 (March, 2010): 30-33. See also James W. Porter, "Verdi's *Attila*, an Ethnomusicological Analysis," in *Attila: The Man and His Image*, ed. Franz H. Bäuml and Marianna D. Birnbaum (Budapest: Corvina Books, 1993), 45-54.

classical world, and set the pattern of its later claims.”¹¹ Those claims were unfolded in a letter from one of Leo’s successors, Gelasius I (d. 496), to the emperor in Constantinople: Gelasius asserted that in any conflict between imperial power (*potestas*) and priestly authority (*auctoritas*), the latter took precedence, since emperors dealt with the disposition of temporal affairs, priests with that of eternal souls. “In 452 ‘for the sake of the Roman name,’ as the *Liber Pontificalis* expresses it,” Duffy wrote, “Leo had to travel to Mantua to persuade Attila the Hun to turn back his armies from Rome, and, miraculously, he succeeded.” That miracle enhanced Leo’s, and the papacy’s, prestige. “In Leo’s vision of the papacy as the head of an *imperium* which was not of this world,” Duffy concluded, “the Church had found an ideal which would carry it through the collapse of the classical world, and into the future.”

Likewise, R. A. Markus interpreted the historical context thus: “The stories of the embassies of Roman nobility led by the pope to secure Rome’s safety from destruction by barbarian leaders such as Attila the Hun (452) and Geiseric the Vandal (455) show the extent to which the papacy’s standing in the city, now endowed with an aura of moral authority, had grown to allow it to be the patron and protector of the citizens.”¹² Christopher Kelly has put it simply and well, yet imaginatively: “Faced with the sternness of Leo’s gaze and the magnificence of his gold-embroidered pontifical robes, Attila fell silent.”¹³

Verdi’s and Gaurdini’s Views of History

While not felled to silence by a pope, Verdi himself was often a melancholy person, a difficult man at odds with his church. Although some of his operas in addition to *Attila*, such as *Nabucco* (1842) and *Giovanna d’Arco* (1845), have biblical or Christian historical settings, Verdi seems not to have given much thought to theories of salvation history. His long estrangement from the Catholic sacraments reinforced, and was reinforced by, his low opinion of the clergy. Part of that poor opinion derived from the (for Verdi) maddening procedure of ecclesiastical censors editing Verdi’s operas. Whether in *Aida* or *Don Carlo*, Verdi’s revenge was making priests the villains. During the Risorgimento and after, when the Church, pining over the loss of the Papal States, seemed to Italian nationalists to be an obstruction to unity and thus an enemy of progress, Verdi’s anti-clericalism resonated with many of his countrymen.

Meanwhile, Verdi’s personal life was scarred by tragedy: as a young man he endured the deaths of his wife and children. During those crises, he found no comfort in the Church.

¹¹ Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 36. Subsequent quotes from Duffy are from this same page. For Gelasius, see Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 38 and 40; cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 48; Walter Ullmann, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1972), 19-20.

¹² R. A. Markus, “Popes and Emperors,” in Paul Johnson, *The Papacy*, ed. Michael Walsh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 46; cf. John Julius Norwich, *The Popes: A History* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), 22-23, speculates, not implausibly, that Attila was persuaded by “a substantial tribute” as well as by being “incorrigibly superstitious” and feared attacking a holy city, the same city sacked in 410 by Alaric the Goth, soon after which violence Alaric died. In the United States, Norwich’s book appeared, also in 2011, as *Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy*.

¹³ Christopher Kelly, *Attila the Hun: Barbarian Terror and the Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 207. This book was published in 2009 in the United States under the title, *The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the Fall of Rome*.

Whether as a result of such suffering or from a basically pessimistic temperament, or a combination of both, he seems to have adhered to a fatalistic view of history; this view is perhaps best seen in *Il trovatore* (1853), where, more so than most operas, the current dramatic action has been determined by events as unpredictable yet as irreversible as the roll of the dice. To look at Verdi's dark view of life another way, one recalls that of Verdi's twenty-eight operas, only two were comedies, and in his long list of tragedies and melodramas he has an opera called *La forza del destino* (1862, revised 1869). Nevertheless, Verdi also composed an incomparable *Requiem* (1874), a work which seems to have emerged from genuine, if idiosyncratic, Catholic faith. Although in life he almost never darkened the door of a church, Verdi arranged for his own funeral Mass.

As did his dim view of the Church, apparently Verdi's fatalism also had popular appeal. For the Christian historian, Verdi's gloomy sense of history fits into the framework sketched by Guardini.¹⁴ With his image of an arc or arch in mind, Guardini noted three ways of looking at human history: One way sees the present on the downward slope of the arc, the best part being behind us; a second way sees the present on the upward slope and most of history before us; a third way is unsure where the present is on the arc, the only certainty being that history is constituted by a series of blind chances and meaningless events.

According to Guardini, the Christian view of history is distinct from these three other views, prominent throughout the ages. The first way was characteristic of the ancient pagan, who had a belief in a past Golden Age; the second way is typical of the modern Whig or progressive approach, believing that the best is yet to be; the third way also occurs today, although it can be found, for example, in ancient Epicureans, a belief that life is futile and random. Sometimes a strong man emerges to impose his meaning on the chaos, but in time his forceful presence fades away, followed by further fragmentation and pointlessness. Guardini defined the Christian view as seeing that "history's sense lies in the fulfillment of salvation."¹⁵ Until the end of time, history is a mysterious confluence of God's call and man's response, even if that response is to reject the call. The image of the arc or arch must be seen as a whole, the emphasis being neither on the ascent nor the descent; what gives it coherence, as well as meaning is the keystone, Christ.

As this paper has proposed, it is here that opera, in particular one based, however loosely, on historical events, can provide a Christian historian with what philosophers call a thought experiment, such as a means for viewing Guardini's abstraction about an arch of salvation history. In this way, an opera like *Attila*, with its compelling central character, offers not only a deeper understanding of human limitations, but also of those of the nature of the craft of history. Erik Varden, perhaps inadvertently, touched upon that subject when he posited that, "For all the limits of human desire, where speech, unless it resorts to self-subverting apophaticism, must fall silent, music continues to sound, capable of uniting

¹⁴ Guardini, *The Lord*, 512-513. For Guardini's understanding of grace and the meaning of history, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Romano Guardini: Reform from the Source*, trans. Albert K. Wimmer and D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 44 and 106. Originally published in 1970. See also George A. Panichas, "The Essential Guardini," *Modern Age* 47 (Spring, 2005): 173-174.

¹⁵ Guardini, *The Lord*, 512; cf. Balthasar, *Romano Guardini*, 106: "A Christian does not share a belief in future progress within this world, but proclaims conversion instead of progress."

opposing forces in euphony and so, mysteriously, of voicing the ineffable.”¹⁶ Varden’s observation seems to be the same as that expressed by Charles Moore, who said, “opera can liberate the imagination,” adding that in opera there is no “need to make a character individually convincing,” since “the situation is archetypal.”¹⁷ In opera, human desire can break free of prosaic speech and soar into an elemental sphere, the music conveying what words or acting cannot. For historians, it can transfer attention from antiquarian data to a transcendent panorama, such as salvation history.

Verdi’s musical depiction of a dramatic scene from Late Antiquity, from the century in which Rome was sacked by the Goths (410) and the Western Roman Empire fell (476), can bring certain historians round to ruminations about the rise of the Church amidst the Empire’s decline and fall. Guardini’s image of the rising and descending sides of an arch then contribute to those meditations. Joseph Volpe, a former general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, has written of “opera’s strange powers of immersion: the more you go, the more you want to know.”¹⁸ That deepening desire for knowledge is part of the historian’s calling, and every scholar, whatever the field, recognizes the obsessive quality inherent in researching any topic. For some historians, enjoying opera may be relegated to the level of a secret vice, a frivolous pursuit. “Opera often seems ridiculous and embarrassing,” wrote Paul Preston, “to those not yet hooked on its intoxicating delights.”¹⁹ Unexpectedly, *Attila* can focus historians again on pondering about Attila and his role in a great power’s demise.

Conclusion

Lest a Christian historian thus pondering lapse into Verdian cynicism or gloom, the Christian integrity of Guardini’s metaphorical arch of history ought to allay fears that the current era is sliding down to the bottom. Guardini cautioned against confusing the waning of an era with fallen human nature; each era will have indications of decline because humanity is marked by original sin.²⁰ As Christ taught, even at the end of time, there will be “wars and rumors of wars” (Mt 24:6; Mk 13:7); in other words, life at the end will be much as it has been since the beginning. One would be mistaken, then, to look about for a modern Attila and fret that society is becoming more pagan. In a way, it would be good to have more pagans: pagans had a sense of virtue, natural law, and sacrifice. Given the choice for these days, to replace contemporary sensualists and sybarites, one would prefer a new generation of noble pagans such as Cicero, Vergil, and Seneca, pagans whose writings were vital to the growth of Western Christian culture throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

¹⁶ Erik Varden, “Towards the Authentic: Reflections on Music, Desire, and Truth,” *The Downside Review* 125 (January, 2007): 10.

¹⁷ Charles Moore, “The Fantastic Power of Opera to Fly Free,” *The Daily Telegraph* (21 July, 2009): 19.

¹⁸ Joseph Volpe, *The Toughest Show on Earth: My Rise and Reign at the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 265.

¹⁹ Paul Preston, “Opera and the Historian,” *History Today* 35 (February, 1985): 4.

²⁰ See Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 158-161; cf. the warning against fatalism, Romano Guardini, *Prayer in Practice*, trans. Prince Leopold of Loewenstein-Wertheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 163.

In *Power and Responsibility* (1961), Guardini reflected again on the theme of salvation history.²¹ “History starts anew with every man,” he wrote, “and in every human life, with every hour.” In that perspective, Guardini’s arch, along with salvation history itself, takes on a personal image, that of Christ. “Jesus’ existence,” Guardini explained, “arches from the mystery of the living God, Sovereign over all that is ‘world,’ into present, concrete historicity.” To the extent that a Christian is baptized into Christ and thus can bring Christ to others, this arch can enter anew through a Christian into each day. Regardless of what Leo the Great said to Attila the Hun, Leo made present before him that overarching truth that is Christ.

As noted at the outset, Guardini prudently steered clear of historical or contemporary applications of his metaphorical arc or arch, thereby freeing others to relate Guardini’s arch to historical examples, and so with the operatic meeting in *Attila* of three cultures, one can get another perspective on that image for salvation history. Moreover, this opera by Verdi invites a Christian historian to use it to focus once again upon the mystery contained within that arch of history that Guardini described, so that the Christian historian may then step back to survey the unlikely and unexpected persons God has used to bring about His will. In an interview with a former student, Hans Urs von Balthasar summed up Guardini’s view by saying, “There exist elements in the natural sphere...which reveal their significance only when touched by supernatural light.”²² For one believing in Guardini’s arch of salvation history, God’s kingdom, though not of this world, uses the vast variety of human events, whether papal tomes or barbarian invasions, to lead those who accept His call from this fallen world to everlasting life.

²¹ For what follows, see Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 146-147; cf. Romano Guardini, *Jesus Christus: Meditations*, trans. Peter White (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959), 83.

²² Hans Urs von Balthasar and Angelo Scola, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*, trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 24.

APPROACHING THE DIVINE THROUGH FORM AND COLOUR: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE PICTORIAL APOPHASIS OF MALEVIČ AND REINHARDT

Christopher Evan Longhurst*

The religious message behind modern art, or its meaning in a theological context, has long been submerged beneath fashion, sentiment, politics, intellectualism and, yes! at the risk of admitting it—ignorance. Recent discussions on matters of contemporary art have, however, displayed a sensibility for rediscovering within it a religious significance.¹ They have even gone so far as to show signs of returning to aesthetic theories of earlier masters such as those of the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–94) and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, an anonymous theologian of the late 5th–early 6th century AD.² The following essay looks at how the most radical of modern art can serve religious interests by framing such art within the philosophical/theological system of iconoclasm according to its two traditions of Eastern apophatic theology and Western metaphysical abstraction. By locating in this framework the most emblematic of modernist artworks from two significant twentieth century modernist painters—Kazimir Malevič (1879–1935), Russian painter renowned for his Suprematist³ paintings that focus on fundamental geometric forms—in particular the square and circle, and Ad Reinhardt (1913–67), Abstract Expressionist painter active in New York in the mid twentieth century, it may be seen how modern abstract

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¹ Cf. James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); “Art, Philosophy, and the Philosophy of Art”, in *Humanities*, vol. 4, No. 1 (February 1983); Roger Lipsey, *Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997); Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Trevor Pateman, “Religion and Art” in *Key Concepts. A Guide to Aesthetics, Criticism and the Arts in Education* (Falmer Press 1991); *Jean Clair, Considerations sur etat des beaux-arts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); *Jean-Marie Schaeffer, L’arte dell’età moderna* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992); Paul Tillich, “Existential Aspects of Modern Art” in *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1956) and *On Art and Architecture*, ed. John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger, trans. Robert P. Scharlemann (New York, Crossroad, 1987); Earle J. Coleman, *Creativity and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998)—not to mention the works of Hegel, Heidegger Schelling, Scheler, Schopenhauer, Dewey and Tolstoy.

² Using figurative imagery such as darkness and obscurity both Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite speak of negating that which God is not in order to know something about what he is. They do so in harmony with the “*via affirmativa*” or “cataphatic way” in order to avoid destroying the concept of divine creation. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius: *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. J. Jones (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980). Gregory of Nyssa’s contribution to the topic is found in *Contra Eunomium libri I et II*, ed. W. Jaeger (Leiden, 1960), and his doctrinal work titled *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe, Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

³ The term implies the “supremacy” of a new art in relation to the past. Cf. Jane Turner, *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 30 (Groove, 1996), 6 at art. “Suprematism”.

painting embraces theological issues and how the most esoteric of these artworks need not partake of any explicitly religious content or symbolism in order to be theologically meaningful. In other words, this art can envision a profoundly spiritual significance and uncover aspects of Truth and Existence without direct reference to religious content or subject matter.

A cursory look at the masterworks of Malevič and Reinhardt within the contexts of both apophatic theology and metaphysical abstraction will articulate how and whether or not the most iconic paintings of these artists can display relevance for serious theological discussion and thereby prove useful, even essential, to the expression of religious thought concerning art theory in its modern and post-modern contexts.

Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism

Suprematism is an art movement originating in Russia in 1915-6. Its herald is Malevič—an avid reader of theosophy and other metaphysical works, who asserted that his art represents “the purist world of forms and colour.”⁴ One of his most renowned paintings is *Black Square* (1915) which depicts a simple black square on a white background. (Fig. 1).

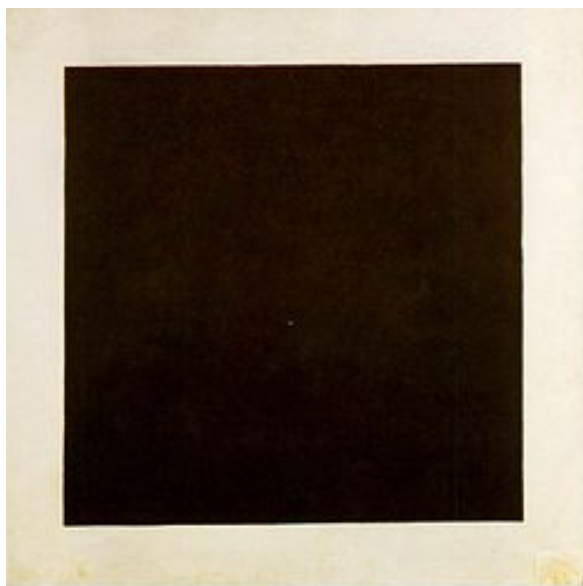


Fig. 1 *Black Square* (Malevič, 1915)

Reinhardt is also well known for his so-called “black paintings”—the most celebrated being *Abstract Painting no. 34* (1964). This image, an archetype of Abstract Expressionism, depicts four muted black squares portraying a barely discernible cruciform shape. (Fig. 2).

⁴ Kasimir Malevič, *Ecrits II. Le Miroir Suprématiste* (Lausanne: L'Age de l'Homme, 1977), 84.



Fig. 2 *Abstract Painting no. 34* (Reinhardt, 1964)

Abstract Expressionism is an extension of the Romantic tradition of the Sublime. With its predilection for symbolic revelation, this pictorial movement reaches its climax in the purest expression of universal archetypes.

At first glance both artworks—*Black Square* and *Abstract Painting no. 34*, appear to be simply painted black canvases, however, they are in fact compositions of black and shades of near black. Advertently or not, Reinhardt's work alludes to the emblematic symbol of Christianity—the cross, while Malevič's *Black Square* underscores the very essence of apophatic theology. An analysis of this radical visual language and an exploration of mystical non-figurative expressivity provide a precedent for this art.

A common though rather inconsequential reaction to these artworks is to call a *black square* a “black square.” A more discerning response would find within them a creative impulse transcending the parameters of art, for both Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism transform the fundamentals of painting into an expression that seems to have particular relevancy for theological discussion. Surely these artists did not conceive of their works to be framed in such a context. Or did they?

Theology in Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism

Analysing Malevič and Reinhardt's modernist monochromes is no simple matter. They have already been the subject of extensive critical study, some already within a theological framework.⁵ Critics have described them as nihilistic or iconoclastic manifestations

⁵ Cf. Matthew Kieran, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: London: Blackwell, 2006); Anthony Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit* (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003); Barbara Rose, *Monochromes: From Malevich to the Present* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); *Kasimir Malevič: Suprematism*, Matthew Drutt, ed., Catalogue, Deutsche Guggenheim (Berlin, 2003).

underscoring the existential reality of the modern world.⁶ Malevič and Reinhardt speak similarly of their works calling them icons of their time—“icons of the new art.”⁷ Both artists acknowledge their paintings to be concerned only with form and colour. Malevich declares that such artwork constitutes the “zero of form”—a new kind of pictorial language “that brings an end to the old conventions.”⁸ Both artists have ultimately produced, nevertheless, a pictorial typology that develops into representations used for the metaphysical expression of the divine as a pure Essence or a non-representable Being, thus advancing the idea that Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism are potentially the most spiritual of all pictorial types. As such, critics have ostensibly tied this art to a metaphysics and abstraction in which theology has particular interest.

The purported theological content of these artworks stems from a shared tradition in which icons and symbols not only represent reality or direct to another reality, but they are, *in se*, their own reality. The use of substantial form and solid colour produces an archetypal truth pervasive in both the disciplines of metaphysics and theology. Form, used as a symbol in these paintings, expressive without figurative representation, becomes an authoritative source for understanding Existence while colour, used as a subject, becomes a device to expound the attributes of God. How so?

Apophatic Theology in Pictorial Language

Perhaps the most salient feature that ties these artworks to theological discussion is their intimate association with apophatic theology and metaphysical abstraction. In both examples the concept of negation in pictorial media is placed readily at the service of theology, for in theology there is a way to talk about God by means of denying what he is not and this is called the “*Via apophatica*” or the “*Via negativa*.”⁹ This is a discourse, a way of speaking about the “unspeakable”, an affirmation by negation—a language developed by Plotinus and others from platonic thought and adopted by the Scholastics to talk about God.¹⁰

The *Via apophatica* unravels a descriptive explanation of what God is by using negative attributes. Emphasis is placed on the belief that God can be known best by what he is not rather than what he is, thus instead of producing direct and positive divine attributions, it abstains from asserting that God is “supremely good”, “omnipotent” or “The Truth” and

⁶ Cf. Boris Groys, *Художественный журнал - Topology of Contemporary Art*, online: (accessed 12/03/2011) and Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁷ Cf. *The Art Story: Artist - Kazimir (Severinovich) Malevich* (accessed 12/09/2011). See also Alain Besançon, *op. cit.*, 362.

⁸ Cf. Jane Turner, *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 30 (Groove, 1996), 7 at art. “Suprematism”.

⁹ From the Greek verb ἀποφίσκω (*apóphasis*)—negation, to deny, stems the *Via apofatica* (way of negation) with its roots in neoplatonic philosophy. Cf. Dionigi Areopagita, *De divinis nominibus*, IX, 7 and *De mystica theologia*, III. See also Jonah Winters, *Saying Nothing about No-Thing: Apophatic Theology in the Classical World*, 1: online: Apophatic Theology in the Classical World (08/12/2011).

¹⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 12, 13.1: « *Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, licet per revelationem gratiae in hac vita non cognoscamus de Deo quid est, et sic ei quasi ignoto coniungamur; tamen plenius ipsum cognoscimus, in quantum plures et excellentiores effectus eius nobis demonstrantur; et in quantum ei aliqua attribuimus ex revelatione divina, ad quae ratio naturalis non pertingit, ut Deum esse trinum et unum* ». Cf. *Summa theol.*, I, 3; I, 13, 2, 3, 5, 12 and *De veritate*, II, 1, 9, 10 and the works of Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 8, 2 and *Esposizione sul Salmo 145*, 2 and 3.

asserts a negation of the contrary, for example, that in God there is no evil, no limitation of power, and no falsehood. Using this approach theology emphasizes that God is not like anything that exists, that he is totally different from everything created or imaginable and that there is nothing comparable to the divine.

Apophatic theology does not deny, nor is not opposed to positive knowledge. What is said in the apophatic sense is believed to be true, however, this approach recognizes that the nature of God goes beyond knowledge that is both positive and negative. It removes from the notion of God every positive attribute and restates it in the negation of its opposite. This discourse follows a cognitive methodology that does not dissolve the mystery of God—meanwhile, denying knowledge of God through the imperfections of created beings, it affirms the absolute perfection of its contrary.

Applied to art and understood in the context of painting, it may be said that Malevič and Reinhardt investigate the meaning of the apophatic sense through a pictorial idiom. In fact, their works have a poignantly apophatic dimension insofar as they re-veil the divine by way of negation. This “mode of speaking” about God is originally found in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and it is also characteristic of a mystical theology present in writings of the Eastern Fathers in general.¹¹ Exploring the limits of human language, the paintings of Malevič and Reinhardt espouse the same theory of Pseudo-Dionysius which states that God is so absolutely transcendent and so far removed from human understanding that knowledge of him can only be obtained through definitions of what he is not. According to the Areopagite this manner is the most appropriate way to speak about God and approach God in the darkness of the human mind. It seems that if such language were applicable to painting then its representation would be best seen in the works of both Malevič and Reinhardt.

The apophatic tradition applied to pictorial art coincides, in practice, with the speculative theology oriented towards “making empty inside” to encourage the advent of the “Other.” This feat is achieved best through negation, with no support of images, in the darkness of mind, conceptually, without acknowledging pictorial content or subject matter. The art historian Donald Kuspit speaks of the connection between apophatic theology and art according to the Abstract Expressionism of Reinhardt stating: “Reinhardt connected his own painting with a long tradition of negative theology in which the essence of religion [...] and the essence of art, is protected [...]”¹² Kuspit also suggests that Malevič’s Suprematist artworks: “resemble holy icons and are presented as such—the religiosity indicates the interior.”¹³ No doubt an exemplar of this iconography is *Black Square*. Likewise Reinhardt’s *Abstract Painting no. 34* directs towards the interior enlisting notions of the divine in a plausibly apophatic sense.

As a term to describe painting the word *apophatic* seems appropriately applied to Malevič and Reinhardt’s paintings to express what the artists intend to portray and to understand

¹¹ Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, op. cit.; Pseudo-Dionysius: The Divine Names and Mystical Theology, op. cit.; and Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium libri I et II*, ed. W. Jaeger (Leiden, 1960) and *The Life of Moses*, op. cit.

¹² Donald Kuspit, “Concerning the Spiritual in Art” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1986), 317-9.

¹³ Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 102.

what the observer sees or interprets through negation. Their paintings follow the way of *apophasis* insofar as they bring the observer closer to a sense of God through the path of abandonment, through absence, through what is not revealed. They recall what the Sacred Scriptures recount: “And the LORD said, ‘but you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’” (Ex 33:20), and acknowledge what Islam’s Divine Revelation affirms: “No eye is capable of seeing Him”, “Sights cannot attain him”, “No vision can grasp Him”¹⁴ and what the aniconic tradition asserts: “He is such that senses cannot perceive Him, place cannot contain Him, eyes cannot see Him and veils cannot cover Him.”¹⁵

The adaption of the term *apophatic* in a pictorial context does not offer a solution to the question of who God is but presents an aesthetic modality to express what is fundamentally inexpressible. Following the *via negativa*, Malevič and Reinhardt have produced artworks that convey the manner in which images of the divinity need not consist of figurative or corporeal arrangements. Framed in an *apophatic* context, their works assert how the divine essence has no form or shape; that such is non-material and non-finite. In a manner similar to how apophatic theology avows that no one can never truly define God in words or symbols, these paintings attempt to express the inadequacy of logocentric language and even the limitations of figurative representation to describe or characterize the divine. They restrain the intellect from becoming distracted by what the eyes see.

Applied to art the apophatic tradition coincides, in practice, with that speculative theology oriented towards “making empty inside” to encourage the advent of the “Other.” This is achieved best through negation, with no support of images, in the darkness of the mind, conceptually, without and not acknowledging. Rudolph Otto comments on such a pictorial void as “a denial that removes any ‘this’ and ‘here’ until the ‘wholly other’ may arise in its reality.”¹⁶ The pictorial content is not a space that signifies nothing, nor is it correctly understood as an absence—on the contrary, as incumbent of the Divine Mystery, an orienting towards infinity as Coleman writes: “This is the ineffable cause of everything.”¹⁷ Coleman suggests: “[...] such emptiness is not mere vacancy; by being devoid of finite things, empty space has “room” to receive and suggest an infinite presence.”¹⁸ Rudolph Otto mentions that such a pictorial void is: “a denial that removes any ‘this’ and ‘here’ until the ‘wholly other’ may arise within its reality.”¹⁹ Steiner writes on “that ‘great emptiness’”:

[...] As if in terror of the void, the emptiness with which it was so intimate - the “great void” within which and against which Yves Klein launches his paintings - as if the abstract art strives to “make visible the invisible world.”²⁰

¹⁴ Qur’ān 6:103.

¹⁵ Nahjul Balagha, *Sermons, Letters, and Sayings of Ameer al-Mu’mineen, the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib* (Sermon 184), online: <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul/184.htm> (accessed 12/12/2012).

¹⁶ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 70.

¹⁷ Earle J. Coleman, *Creativity and Spirituality*, op. cit., 155-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁹ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 70.

²⁰ Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences*, op. cit., 222.

In fact, as Dionysius says, the emptiness shows the maximum possibility of being, the ideas of the beautiful, the Good and the True, which always accompany God in himself.²¹ Dionysius writes in the case of negatives:

[...] We eliminate everything from the latest reality when we go back to the very original, so you know without veils of ignorance hidden in all beings from all things knowable, and see the darkness supersensational hidden by all the lights present in living.²²

This kind of void or emptiness is of course radically different from the divine presence, nevertheless, it is an emptiness that cannot help but assume the form of a presence which has in itself the becoming of all forms and potential styles. It is exemplary form. Steiner remarks: “The aesthetic event, more than any other way accessible to us, has felt the configuration of a denial (as partial as ‘figurative’ in the strict sense of the word) of mortality.”²³ Even when it seems destined for other purposes this art celebrates the enigma of the visibility of the unseen and therefore has openings to all artistic representation, especially that of spiritual themes.

Returning to the discourse of Steiner on the mystery of presence, in relation to the evocation of that presence in contemporary painting and its ability to claim an affinity with the ineffable mystery, Steiner states, “a [work of] Malevič or Reinhardt reveal an encounter with a “true absence”.²⁴ Steiner suggests that “the density of the absence of God, the intensity of presence in that absence, is not an empty dialectical sleight of hand.”²⁵ Through the mystical meaning of apophaticism *Black Square* of Malevič evokes a sense of extraordinary presence, perhaps not as educible as in the way of ordinary symbolism, but it transforms that presence into a meaning pregnant with metaphysical existence. In fact, Malevič and Reinhardt’s paintings possess an inescapably metaphysical undertone undoubtedly conceived by the very same aspirations of a theology that seeks to arrive at conclusions about God by negating what God is not. This is an attempt to reveal the idea of *Deus absconditus*” (the hidden God) in painting, or *Al-Bāṭin* of Islam—The Hidden, The Unmanifest, The Inner,²⁶ or espouse in painting the *via negativa* of apophatic theology.

In their method of expressing and revealing by means of negation, these artist have generated a kind of pictorial apophaticism. Such a painting typology is by its nature cryptic and not hermetic. It may be called “a denial of aesthetic.” It hides something although it does so in a way that what is hidden may be discovered by those who look with a discerning eye or the eye of the mind. Consequently the artists challenge the same goals of apophatic theology though through the medium of abstract pictorial art so much so that the art critic Di Giacomo states:

The same Malevič spoke of his *Black Square* as an “icon of my time.” This artwork, in fact, has a non-polemical, iconoclastic, symbolic and somewhat apophatic nature: it is

²¹ Cf. Dionigi Arcopagita, *De mystica theologia*, I, 3.

²² Ibid., II, 1.

²³ George Steiner, *Real Presences*, op. cit., 209-10.

²⁴ Ibid., 229.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cf. Qur’ān 57:3.

the negative revelation of what is, the manifestation of what is not. Precisely because of its nature as an icon, *Black Square*, in the exhibition “0.10”, was suspended above, in that corner of the wall, where—as in Orthodox cases—there is the icon of “Christ blessing” or that of the “Mother of God.”²⁷

Metaphysical Abstraction in Painting

The theory of abstract painting is, *in se*, a metaphysical one therefore it is related to theology insofar as it culminates in the consideration of the expressibility of God or divine concepts by means of a pictorial medium. Just as a conception of reality is attained through abstract metaphysical concepts, Malevič and Reinhardt offer a vision of reality in terms of visual symbols, geometric shapes and solid colour, the meanings of which derive from nature or physics and are, therefore, universally accessible. The abstractions employed by these artists have universal meaning as evidenced by the universal interpretations which they invariably engender.

Surely it would be mistaken to think that a theory postulating abstract concepts is incompatible with theology—a science that seeks to objectify God, therefore, it is expected that theology and metaphysical abstraction in art would have various points of contact. The difference is in the manner of treatment—theology relies on divine Revelation while metaphysical abstraction hinges upon perceptual awareness and human reason. The latter is the art of immaterial being since it seeks to depict things which are both separate from matter, namely, spiritual realities which exist without matter such as God and spiritual substances, and those subjects that matter does not enter such as act, essence and cause.

It is not easy to deny the presence of a metaphysical property or ontological referential in the works of Malevič and Reinhardt. Their images are powerfully possessive of a quality that somehow communicates a sense of transcendence, the numinous, the otherworldly, a hint of the negative side of that “Uncreated Light” of which the Greek Fathers speak.²⁸ In the Western sphere of abstract painting the conceptualization of God now becomes an “art-act”, or a “pictorial act”, the execution of a visual manifestation of God’s own self Revelation—“*ego eimi ho on*” (“I am Who Am”).²⁹

Without objection Malevič and Reinhardt have arrived at the most elementary of pictorial compositions—an extreme minimalism of form and colour through metaphysical abstraction, the “One” of Proclus in symbolic representation, a feat of no trivial subject matter for religion but rather one of fundamental importance, compelling the critic to recognize within these artworks the essence of formlessness and incorporeality.

Malevič and Reinhardt’s paintings oblige an association with something beyond what is perceptible to the external senses, a kind of rendezvous with the divine properties in art—the “Pure Being” of Aristotle, the “Immense Object” of Hegel, the idea of the “Absolute”

²⁷ Giuseppe Di Giacomo, *Icona e arte astratta* (Palermo: Aesthetica Preprint, 1999), 51. The translation from the original Italian is mine.

²⁸ Reference here is made to the theological notion of *apophasis*, or the *via negativa* of Greek Orthodox theology. Cf. Karl Krumbacher, *Gesch. der byzant. Litt.* (Munich, 1897), 43; Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983).

²⁹ For reference to the Hellenistic formula see the *Book of Exodus*, 3:14. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 3, 4.

and the “Perfect”—“*ens summe perfectum*” and “*Ipsum esse subsistens*” of Thomas Aquinas, along with the metaphysical notions of “Infinite Being”—“*regressus in infinitum*”, or the mystics’ conception of the “Unsaid”—“*l’indicibile*”, not to mention the same Hellenistic formula of divine self-disclosure—“*ego eimi ho on*”, all alluding to the mystery of God’s indecipherable form in the images on the canvases of Reinhardt and Malevič.

Such an aesthetic approach to theology maintains that one can never truly define the divinity in words or figures; that in the end reason gives way to visual sensation and intellectual discourse halts; that the rational functions of the human mind surrender to the contemplative mode of human being. Upon viewing such artwork, the passive observer becomes an active participant in something trans-temporal, one who, in contemplating a sense of the mystery, must transcend discursive language and even figurative visual objects in order to arrive at an initial understanding of the nature of God. This may be precisely what Malevič and Reinhardt had in mind when they ventured upon revealing their artistic play on form and colour. It is certainly what Gregory of Nyssa had in mind when he said: “leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends, but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, [the human mind] keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence’s yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God.”³⁰

A Radical Theological Aesthetic

The terms “theological” and “metaphysical abstraction” do not merely imply a passive or negative characterization of Malevič and Reinhardt’s artworks. On the contrary, they seem to indicate how the absence of representationality is presentable in a positive light—not as a lack or privation but as a purification of aesthetic value, the raising of artistic properties to the level of the metaphysical. As an exploration of the world of ideas, and involved with the ends of both metaphysics and theology, these art-forms are capable of evoking a primordial awareness in the human mind providing access to the nonphysical, transcendent and spiritual aspects of reality. One could even argue that they express precisely what in Christian theology Jesus Christ’s human nature is claimed to be to humanity—the paradigm or exemplar.³¹

The religious significance of these paintings coincides with a sense of sacredness represented by the harmony of geometric form and the simplicity of a constant colour field. The images appear voluminous and possessive of infinite space representing the divine attributes of infinity and immensity—God as *Al-Wasī’* (The Vast, The Omnipresent, The Boundless) from the Islamic tradition.³² Their scale is indeterminate as the form reaches beyond the picture field evoking an inner or cosmic reality—God as *Al-Bāqīy* (The Infinite, The Immutable).³³ In other works, the subject matter conveys a sense of emergence with stability and immutability. The observer’s own reality looms large in an apparent act of creation where no beginning and no end exist. At the least these artworks set a stage for the

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, op. cit., 95.

³¹ Cf. Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art 2* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 191. In reference to Hegel’s aesthetic theory Barasch explains how this form is an ideal for art as the humanity of Christ is for human nature.

³² Cf. Qur’ān 2:268, 3:73, 5:54.

³³ Cf. Qur’ān 55:27.

locus of ultimate meaning and this too is the basis of theological inquiry. They venture beyond physical reality, into the core of the human unconsciousness, into the unknown. They impinge upon an encounter with “the Unmanifest, the Inner”—“*ġayb ash-shabādabī*”—“that which is unknown and unimaginable”, “the invisible of the visible world”, conveying the idea of a spiritual atmosphere consistent with Judaism and Islam’s emphasis on God’s immateriality, associating the observer with the invisible spiritual order and the fact, as the evangelist John indicates: “No man hath seen God at any time”³⁴; and the beliefs of those great monotheistic religions that extoll God’s presence everywhere: “wherever you turn, there is the face of God”³⁵; but visible nowhere with the physical eyes, only with the inner eyes of the soul: “God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil”³⁶ and “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him.”³⁷ The artworks themselves become meaningfulness without any literary prerequisite or learned perceptivity, for the absence of objective content or figurative subject matter does not imply the absence of meaning. In this way, they offer the observer a direct experience with the “meaning of meaning” as Steiner describes it.³⁸

Together with the artworks of other pioneers of abstract art,³⁹ these images offer the possibility of a transcendent experience liberated from the confines of what may be intellectually untenable religious doctrine. As if desperate to find a way out of a theological maze, Malevič and Reinhardt use form and the absence of content as well as the meaning of colour and its impact on sight to suggest a certain doctrinal statement addressing epistemological and metaphysical issues.

By using forms that are able to establish a sense of the spiritual and exert independence from Western European traditions of figurative painting, this kind of art can be related to the icon tradition that survives in Christian Orthodoxy. In Eastern iconography the illusion of pictorial space is always minimal as in Malevič’s Suprematism. Figures are frequently centrally placed and frontally visible, oftentimes set against a unilaterally symmetrical shape such as the Greek cross, a circle or square as in Reinhardt’s Abstract Expressionism.

Inhabiting the scope of these artworks is the possibility of divine reception, actualized through an inspiration implemented in linear and absolute in which the invisible subsists in colour and form. An artistic and theological journey takes place in the cosmic dimension of the void and on this ground of negative representation the question of God in modern art reveals its irreducibility and union. This link provides an opportunity through which it is possible to feel the pulse of the “invisible God” (Ex 33:20 and Jn 1:18)—thus both Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism make the relationship between religion and art less ambiguous. They draw together the lines that separate these two enterprises. By

³⁴ John 1:18.

³⁵ Qur’ān 2:115.

³⁶ Qur’ān 2:7. Cf. 7:179.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:9.

³⁸ Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences*, op. cit., 216, 227.

³⁹ Modern critics have suggested that this type of painting influenced the works of Wassily Kandinsky, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Piet Mondrian and that their masterworks may never have been produced without these canvases.

reducing this gap they destroy those cultural theories that describe art as secular along with the religious traditions that espouse iconoclasm. They also create a mutual relationship between religion and art, one in which there is no room for dominion of one over the other. In each of these styles art is neither subservient to religion and nor does religion use this art as a vehicle for its own propaganda. Both disciplines, on account of such art, work together in a symbiosis of nurture and inspiration. Religion and art thus become fused into an identity that makes it impossible to distinguish where art begins and religion ends.

The Mystery of Black in Theological Aesthetics

Despite the numerous meanings of the colour black, its use in these non-representational artworks merits a second reading in order to not discard these monochromes at first viewing as simplistic, mundane or meaningless. In Malevič and Reinhardt's works the colour black reunites the aspirations of art and theology on a new level of metalogical intensity, for the primal field of colour—black, accentuating the observer's isolation from visual sumptuousness, essentially lifts the symbolic extremes of colour and form onto a metaphysical plane.

In two seemingly opposite though complementary descriptions, black may be defined as either an "achromatic colour," meaning that it has no colour at all, therefore in actuality it is the absence of colour, a notion similar to the visual impression experienced when no light reaches the eye, or conversely, as the correct proportions of primary colours to the degree in which, when mixed together, they reflect so little light so as to appear black, therefore effectively containing all colours. Black is thus simultaneously the absence of all colours that make up light—a negative connotation, and the imparticipable colour, that is, a perfect combination of multiple colours—its positive meaning. It is in this latter description that black approaches closely the notion of the divine.

Using the colour black along with a non-figurative pictorial medium Malevič and Reinhardt expose the absence of content with the infinity of space and the notions of immateriality and permanence. Their artworks rely solely on form and the textural manipulation of blackness, a development considered as mystical by the Russian painter Aleksandr Rodchenko and his followers.⁴⁰ As darkness is the absence of light, black is the absence of colour, and so the colour black in painting leads to the meaning of an absence of possession, an emptiness and silence, therefore it takes on an apophatic role. This is undoubtedly why Reinhardt proclaims: "Black is negation."⁴¹ It is the same reason why Dionysius refers to God as "darkness beyond light" and "darkness concealed from all the

⁴⁰ Rodchenko (1891–1956) is a central exponent of Russian Constructivism which borrows from the pre-1917 works of Malevič. His paintings are characterized by the systematic way in which he rejects the conventional roles of self-expression. He executed what are arguably some of the first true monochromes and proclaimed "I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue, and yellow." Cf. "Drawing a blank: Russian constructivist makes late Tate debut", *The Independent*, 2009-1-27 (accessed 13/12/2012).

⁴¹ Black Moods, TATE ETC - TATE ETC.—Europe's largest art magazine (accessed 13/08/2011).

light among beings.”⁴² Here negation is understood as a reversal of any affirmative description.

Fostering Theology in Non-Figurative Imagery

Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism, though equally conceptual determinations as types of abstraction, focus on fundamentally spiritual values. They capture something of the mystery of darkness—“the dark cloud of Sinai” using the words of Clement of Alexandria (c.155-c.220) who relates abstraction to the various ways of coming to know God, a theme imbuing both Eastern apophatic theology and Western metaphysical abstraction.⁴³ These themes are of no insignificance in theological discussion. If darkness were expressible in painting as an infinite negative quantity then perhaps Malevič has captured this concept superlatively, and if the cross were a symbol of the Christian emerging from darkness, or conversely, being submerged into it, then perhaps Reinhardt has underscored this equally as well.

As these artworks challenge the limits of the visible, they prompt a new kind of awareness: “the seeing which is not seeing” in the words of Gregory of Nyssa, a kind of knowledge that “transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.”⁴⁴ They recognize the memorable lines of Shakespeare who in *Hamlet* expresses how *not seeing anything* means *to see everything*: “Can you see nothing there?” the Prince asks his mother as she gazes into the black night sky. “Nothing at all” the Queen replies “...yet all that is I see.”⁴⁵ The wisdom of the queen’s reply is found in the quest of all speculative sciences to know an answer to the questions concerning the purpose and significance of life. In a similar way, Malevič and Reinhardt’s artworks evoke a presence that only the mind can see or rather “understand”—though a “real presence” one might say using the words of Steiner.⁴⁶

These artists see their works precisely as a repudiation of everything strictly extraneous to them, a liberation from representation to the freedom of presence, a total seeing with the mind that has been emptied for spiritual filling. Their paintings, appropriately vacant in preparation for a divine union, suggest a deep silence and infinity, a vast, all-embracing boundlessness evocative of the numinous presence of the eternal God. This is their most affirmative theological association, a concept expressed eminently by the artworks’ solid blackness—a “scarcity in impure transparency” as theologian Robert Grosseteste describes; the revelation of a God who Dionysius identifies as “lying beyond all vision and knowledge.”⁴⁷ As depictions or symbols of the meaning of sacred presence, these images are the vehicle for personal transcendence and momentary union with the divine. For the artists themselves their works retain a mystical experience associated with the concepts of the

⁴² Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (Surrey, UK: Garden City Press, 2004), II.

⁴³ Cf. Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Erigena* (Louvain: Peters Press & W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 229.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, op. cit., 95.

⁴⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 4: [133].

⁴⁶ Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁴⁷ Cf. *Philosophical Connections: Grosseteste* (accessed 13/08/2011) and Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, op. cit.

“fourth dimension” and the nature of timelessness as explored in the mystical speculations of the Russian esoteric philosopher Pyotr Uspensky. They may be described as a form of visual mysticism with a mystical dimension that is not linked to the desire to communicate any specific theological doctrine.

Yet these paintings are antagonistic. They consolidate a familiar subject matter creating immense space inhabiting a uniform symbol in a totally frontal and therefore confrontational positioning. The observer senses directness and a menacing tone as if the painting itself were to ask: “Why are you here?” or “What is the meaning of this?” The answer emanates as the image draws its own response. The ominous painting then remains silently and perpetually in the self-satisfying pleasure of having achieved its end.

As extreme forms of art these paintings advocate a cryptic, almost idiosyncratic symbolism which goes hand in hand with the entire aniconic tradition. Despite reference, albeit inadvertent, to the traditions of Eastern apophatic theology and Western metaphysical abstraction, they present no recognizable religious imagery and, strictly speaking, remain outside the perimeters of exacting theological inquiry. They offer an iconoclastic attitude to religious experience as they reject the roles of image. Though not entirely—in actuality they support a symbolic use of non-figurative imagery as an allusional depiction of an abstract or sacred concept.

Yet at the same time, in their refusal to foster figurative imagery Malevič and Reinhardt have taken over and developed, both by innuendo and consequence, the ideas addressed by the early Church Fathers regarding the eighth century question of the icon at the time of dispute between iconodules and iconoclasts.⁴⁸ Devoid of surface decoration or content, their minimalist works convey a search for the ultimate Essence through the power of peace and tranquillity. The basic meaning of the Greek term *hesychia* (silence) is evoked and a watchful, inner stillness or an internal quietness that the Greek Fathers identify as “*ec-stasis*”—a “standing apart” from the world of objects.⁴⁹ This separation from, or absence of figurative representation is not one in the sense of privation but rather the signification of a kind of pictorial *kénōsis*, an “emptying” from excess or superfluity or gratuitousness, a cessation of effort, thought, and occupation with subject matter, ultimately, a metaphorical transfiguration of the corporeal into the spiritual.⁵⁰

The artists’ occultation of light and figurative content comes close to the theological notion of abasement, the manifestation of a kind of aesthetic intellection. The link between apophatic theology and such pictorial genre is rediscovered in a so-called “aesthetics of emptiness”, that which justifies the “empty space” in painting which, in turn, is not shown

⁴⁸ Cf. Second Council of Nicaea, 787 AD.

⁴⁹ This is not to confuse ecstasy with the Buddhist concept in which one is the center of the experience, a kind of stupor, but rather to enjoy being “fully present”—not to be completely a part from but in and not part of.

⁵⁰ Touching on the ancient Greek notion of *kénōsis*, perhaps in this sense Malevič and Reinhardt’s artworks receive their most theological reading. The term *kénōsis* is frequently used in theology and mainly in a Christian context. Although Christian Scriptures do not use the word, the verb form *kenōō* occurs five times (Ro. 4:14, 1; Co. 1:17, 9:15; 2 Co. 9:3; Phil. 2:7). Of these, it is Phil. 2:7—“Jesus made himself nothing (*ἐκένωσε ekénōse*)...” or “...he emptied himself...” using the verb form *kenōō kenōō* “to empty” that the Christian theological idea of *kenosis* derives.

and cannot be represented—a revelation of painted nothingness. Malevič and Reinhardt's paintings are, undoubtedly, the most equivalent in pictorial art to *kénosis* as any painting could be. This is perhaps the primarily quality that affords them an ability to elicit a sense of aesthetic pleasure, the "*id quod visum placet*" of Thomas Aquinas, since, as the semiologist Umberto Eco illustrates, the simplest and most intelligible things delight the mind.⁵¹

The conceptual and metaphorical reach of these paintings, in their theological context, becomes centrally representative in an entirely immaterial though rational sense, giving visual content to the notion of "*imago Dei*", or more precisely, the indispensable archetype of creative excellence. Consistent with the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Greek Fathers, these black paintings break down the basic pictorial elements of form, colour and figure in order to achieve a return to the idea of "meaningful presence" or the triumph of formlessness.⁵² By the use of black squares camping in emblematic style, and in the absolute darkness of space they conjure a sense of spiritual consciousness and approach that sublime intuition of Plotinus's undifferentiated Oneness. They verge upon those unbounded notions of the Islamic tradition's "unity of being" (*wahdat al-wujud*) and the principle of "divine Unity and Oneness" (*tawhid*), cornerstone of the Islamic faith and consistent with the idea of the figurative non-representationality of God.⁵³ With an indescribable spiritual essence and distinctionless unity they stand as the quintessence and origin of all possible forms, as genuinely theological expressions. One could argue that given the fact that these paintings have had all sense of figurative representation removed from them, they are therefore the most aniconic and spiritual exhibitions that the medium of painting could ever offer.

Ultimately, while remaining art, even according to the institutional theory of art, Malevič's *Black Square* and Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting no. 34* may have taken on a sacramental role insofar as they achieve the effects of providing a channel for actual grace. How so? Simply by agitating the human soul to contemplate the divine mysteries. Such is the meaning of the sacramental. Not only are they therefore relevant for the junction of religion and art, they also breach the gap that has divided these disciplines for so long by providing an exchange of ideas between contemporary art and religion.

In spite of these artworks being capable of probing the divine realities, they cross the depths of the unknown, carrying a more generalized spiritual meaning. They effectively surpass the boundaries of theological terminology and overcome the barriers to religious unity. When reason no longer understands the mysteries of faith, they reveal to the observer what is hidden, what is unattainable in objects or in matter, what does not possess figuration and what is ultimately unknowable and non-representational. This is what Pope John Paul II touches upon when he mentions in his *Letter to Artists*: "Every genuine artistic intuition goes beyond what the senses perceive and, reaching beneath reality's surface, strives to interpret

⁵¹ Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. H. Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 240.

⁵² Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences*, op. cit. and Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology*, IV and V.

⁵³ Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, in *Plotini Opera*, P. Henry, H. R. Schwyzer, eds. (Oxford 1964-82). For Plotinus "God" and "Unity" (or the "One") are interchangeable names for precisely the same thing, the source of perfect unity, utter simplicity and non-diversity beyond being.

its hidden mystery.”⁵⁴ This “artistic intuition”, this mystery, this “reaching beneath” and “striving to interpret” is experienced on a level beyond the confines of the rational and physical representation of objects. At the same time the artworks of Malevič and Reinhardt give witness to the immaterial essence of Being which, in religion, is commonly called “God.” They echo the words of Malevič himself who says regarding his *Black Square*:

“[...] so I gaze searchingly into its mystical black space, which becomes a kind of new face of a Suprematist world, its outward appearance and spirit. I see within it something which people once saw in the face of God.”⁵⁵

By deliberately avoiding the visible and figurative idiom they give rise to a new pictorial language capable of dialoguing with contemporary culture, theology and, in particular, these espouse the theology of the *via negativa*. There leaves little doubt that in the end this type of art is an integral part of human experiencing and an opening to spiritual awareness. Graphic media are needed to express all aspects of human experience, including the divine realities, for which the visual arts are essential. And it is through the pictorial medium that the most abstract artworks touch the inner chords of human existence enabling communication with the spiritual world, as Kandinsky suggests: “Painting is the most spiritual of all visual arts.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

It is not easy to disprove the hypothesis that Malevič and Reinhardt’s rejection of representational imagery has been widely influential and the study of the dynamics of their geometrical forms and monochromes has had an investigative dimension leading to the development of religious subject matter in pictorial language. On account of the disappearance of the visible from their Suprematism and Abstract Expressionism God is not defeated because, in the end, it would be incorrect to conclude that everything has been removed from view. Although figurative objects and vivid colours are indeed eliminated, an exemplary form, the archetypal image is represented and the meaning of black or darkness is manifested clearly and positively.

In the end modern abstract painting maintains its actuality in the light of theology, and this would be the case at least until there no longer exists questions on the existence or non-existence of God, because as the modern world is inhabited more intensely by a scientific-secular society, artistic forms and the use of colour continue to provide a new freedom, most unthreatening, for the inspiration of religious thought. In the case of Malevič and Reinhardt, these artists have convincingly tended the same concept of *Deus absconditus* (The Hidden God) and *Al-Baṭīn* (The Hidden, The Unmanifest), and notwithstanding the fact that this characteristic in art may elude the understanding or appreciation of some, by using only a single form and a monochromic effect, these artists have created theomorphic “icons” for a God-centeredness in the modern age and possibly for all time. In effect they have achieved a

⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), n. 6.

⁵⁵ *Ikone der Moderne. Das schwarze Quadrat—Hommage à Malevič* (accessed 13/08/2011).

⁵⁶ Cf. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (original title: *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1912), Eng. trans M. T. H. Sadler (Las Vegas, IAP, 2009). For Kandinsky, painting was above all deeply spiritual (“*geistig*”). He was extremely influenced by the sensorial properties of colour and form, and sought to visualize these through increasingly abstract pictorial compositions.

fundamentally theological feat. Perhaps then, in their quest to underscore everything that representational art is not, they have demonstrated that to search deeply enough for understanding in art is ultimately to search for God.

BOOK REVIEWS

***Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth Claims.* By R. Scott Smith. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012, 256 pp., \$89.95.**

Scott Smith's latest work fits nicely into Ashgate's New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies monograph series, though its overall focus is robustly centered in *philosophical* inquiry. This is a book that concerns both metaphysics and epistemology, especially as pertains to religious material. Smith is interested in "testing religious truth claims," an intention which is echoed in the book's subtitle. He wants to show that naturalism cannot provide an adequate foundation for reality-based knowledge and, further, to set up Christian theism as an epistemic alternative.

Smith's program in this book involves examining several naturalistic positions on perception and our knowledge of reality in order to demonstrate how each of these is inadequate to ground what he presupposes to be an axiomatic truth, that we do truly know things about reality. Smith is defending direct realism, i.e. we perceive the world directly as it really is. Simply stated, according to Smith, naturalistic ontology is not sufficient to support the claims of naturalistic epistemology. He divides the book into three parts: Part I: Direct Realism; Part II: Philosophy as Science: Neuroscience, Neurophilosophy, and Naturalized Epistemology; Part III: Other Alternatives, and Naturalism's Future.

Chapter one is devoted to the older views of D.M. Armstrong who advocated that "the immediate objects of awareness in perception are physical entities that exist independently of our sense experiences of them" (10). There is no intermediate representation or image of any kind in my mind between the object and my knowledge of it, such as a sense datum of some sort. For Armstrong "physical objects cause veridical beliefs in us, ... there is a causal, reliable relation between the object and the belief caused" (14). Smith points out that such a causal view has a pretty serious problem, i.e. "our inability to traverse, or transcend, the causal chain (which seems to be a potentially infinite series of physical states) and have epistemic access to the originating, physical object itself in the world" (17). There is also a problem with the notion of reliability; how do we form such a concept to begin with? This issue of concept formation is one that Smith will return to numerous times in the following chapters.

In chapters two and three, Smith examines the direct realism of Dretske, Tye, Lycan, and John Searle. These chapters are quite technical and will only be readily accessible to specialists in perception theory and epistemology. This being the case, a few summary comments are in order. Direct realism denies theories of perception—such as sense-datum theory—which contend that when we perceive, what we are actually perceiving is not the external object before us, but some representation or image or sense datum in our mind of that object. So our perception is internal, i.e. we introspect on the experience in the mind, not on any external object. Direct realists all reject such views because they contend that these views lead to skepticism. If we are just perceiving an image in the mind, how do we know we have access to the physical world outside the mind?

Another important issue in direct realism is how to understand intentionality; thoughts are about things; there is of-ness. Is this a relation of some sort between a thought and an object of the thought or is it some kind of property of thought itself; in other words, is intentionality intrinsic to thought and the object of the thought?

All of the philosophers in chapters two and three are naturalists who are direct realists and reductive materialists. Yet they realize that one and the same “physical state can be characterized differently, using a different set of concepts” (40). However, as Smith points out, we need a way to form concepts in the first place; these philosophers are assuming that we somehow already have concepts, such as reliability, and we just apply them to objects we directly perceive. In fact, Smith notes that naturalism itself is a conceptual view of the world but “the view that everything is physical is not directly represented in experience; it too is a conceptualization. If we cannot form concepts, and if we cannot transcend our representations, and somehow compare what is represented in experience with our concepts, then their ontology cannot get started and somehow lift itself ‘off the canvas’” (54).

John Searle represents a naturalistic perspective which invokes the idea of collective intentionality imposed on human social agreements through language and symbols. For Searle, there are no “privileged conceptual schemes,” (64) only different and equally-valid ways to interpret the world. However, in light such theorizing, why should we not think that Searle’s own views on the truth of naturalism and his naturalized epistemology are just the way he happens to talk? What allows his own epistemic theory any sort of priority in the way it attempts to explain reality?

In Part II of his book, Scott looks at philosophers who are also physicalists, but they seek to explain direct realism through scientific brain processes. The first of these is David Papineau who sees the mental as the same substance as the physical; he is an identity theorist, that is, he views the “mind” and the “brain” as equivalent. But Papineau also derives a teleological approach in which mental representations are what they are because they have a biological purpose and mental states are products of selection which have developed over time to satisfy various desires. For Papineau knowledge is “the state...of having acquired a true belief from a process which generally produces true beliefs” (77). And this process is a biological evolutionary process which over time has successfully realized human desires and needs. However, Papineau does not think that we can ever do away completely with mentalistic notions; in other words, we need to be “conceptual dualists.” (81) But concepts are vague and slippery and because of this “scientific research will never be able to identify the specific material property, ‘which is guaranteed to make its possessor feel *like this*? (say, being in pain)” (82). Smith points out that experiences themselves are conceptualizations of brain states: “...experiences as such are not givens, which can be read directly off of matter” (84). Everything is a “taking of a material state to be something else” (85). So, on this theory, there has to be interpretation and there is no way to know reality as it is apart from our conceptualizations.

In the next chapter, Smith looks at Daniel Dennett, another physicalist who considers mental contents such as beliefs, desires, fears, etc. to be functionalist and not realist. In other words, “...all attributions of content are founded on an appreciation of the functional roles or the items in question in the biological economy of the organism...” (90). Function can be understood by means of what Dennett calls intentional stance; things are made for a certain purpose and we can predict behavior based on the thing’s design; this is true for both inanimate and animate objects, including human beings. So we can attribute intentionality but we do not have to accept the reality of any mental entities or nonphysical mental contents. But, as Smith points out, for Dennett all facts are interpretations, so why should we accept his materialistic, Darwinian view of reality? How would intentionality even

develop on a strictly evolutionary view? On such a view, all that exists in our world are blind, un-representing processes of natural selection; to have representation there has to be a mind applying concepts. But concepts are not real for Dennett. So, as Smith concludes, “The chief culprit is his position that we as humans only have access to takings as, and never to any givens” (106).

The next chapter deals with the Churchlands’ view, which is another eliminative materialism view. They hold to a “network theory of meaning,” (113) in which a creature uses a conceptual framework to adapt its behaviors, and this framework has both causal and semantic functions. Such frameworks are brain maps which are “constituted holistically by neural activation patterns,” and the brain can fine-tune its recognition and distinctions among natural types of environmental information, and by doing this, it can minimize error in our perceptions of reality. But then we must analyze and understand our perception with concepts, thus “perception is the prompting of the appropriate concept or judgment in the relevant context” (119). And the appropriate concept is the one that functions properly in the context to accomplish its purpose. However, Smith points out that “experience is a radically indeterminate means of discrimination. What is being discriminated, and the very fact of any act of discrimination, is not given at all in experience” (123). All we can know in experience is our brain states, not reality outside our heads, and therefore we have no theory-neutral way to evaluate the virtue of any theoretical frameworks, including that of the Churchlands’.

After examining some other direct realist views with which he disagrees, Smith concludes that “there is a complete failure on philosophical naturalism to give us knowledge of reality. But we do have clear cases of such knowledge in science and other disciplines.” So how is this possible? In chapter nine, Smith offers a positive account of our knowledge of reality based on some of Edmund Husserl’s early ideas on epistemology, which famously rely on a careful analysis of intentionality and mental function as well as mental contents. On this view, the intentional property of an act with its nature is “together with the object’s intensional properties due to their natures, or alternatively, their natural affinity for each other” (190). Through a process of verification through increasingly closer examinations of an object, we discover that the object we are thinking of or referring to is, in fact, what we think it is. Knowledge of objects, then, is based on an essential connection between a mental act and its object; the connection is not merely existential. Intentionality as a mental act alone is not sufficient for matching up with reality. “There needs to be a nonconceptual, direct kind of access to reality lest all our experiencings be conceptualizations” (193). And our intentional states must have natures or essences, and this is why they have a natural affinity for the “...intensional properties (which also are intrinsic, with their own natures) of their objects (actual or not)” (193). This, Smith argues, allows direct access to objects in the world, and thus allows us to have direct knowledge of reality.

In the book’s final chapter, Smith looks at various implications of his claims for direct knowledge of reality. He does not think that naturalism can get us direct knowledge. He thinks that to even begin doing science in a methodologically naturalistic manner “requires borrowing from a dualist ontology” (198), because it requires the kind of entities that only dualism can account for. Next Smith looks at religious knowledge and asks whether such knowledge is possible. He thinks it is; one of the things he here examines is the *kalam* cosmological argument for the existence of God, which argues that the universe had to have

a beginning and this beginning had to be the result of the act of a person or agent. Smith thinks there are things we can know beyond what is most readily accessible to our senses; we can know also about a creator and his universe. Similarly, we can have moral knowledge about certain moral universals upon which much of humanity agrees. There are acts we just know are wrong. We all also recognize a sense of oughtness in ourselves; we understand moral obligations because we are innately moral beings, and we know this. Smith also very briefly considers a few implications for bioethics, education, and public policy issues at the end of the book. This is probably the weakest part of the chapter and the book; it is too brief to be very helpful.

This book is definitely not for beginners in philosophy; it requires considerable background in theories of perception, epistemology, and metaphysics. It is quite technical in places, which is fitting for such a research monograph, but a general audience would have significant difficulty in navigating these tough philosophical waters. The most accessible section is the last chapter on the implications of direct realism. Smith has done an admirable job of laying out naturalistic theories of perception and pointing out their strengths and weaknesses, and I think he convincingly argues for direct realism based on a theistic worldview.

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***God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide.* By Thomas Albert Howard. Oxford University Press, 2011: 272 pp., \$45.00.**

A widely recognized cultural difference between contemporary Europe and the United States is the distinguishing secularity of the former and the equally characteristic religiosity of the latter. In *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide* (Oxford University Press, 2011), Thomas Albert Howard (Stephen Phillips Professor of History at Gordon College in Wenham, MA) examines the origins of today's "transatlantic religious gap" through the lens of intellectual history. Howard has previously explored various intersections between nineteenth-century German religious and intellectual history in his two earlier books: *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (OUP, 2006) and *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). In this latest work, Howard expands beyond the history of German-speaking Europe, utilizing assessments of American religious life written by European intellectuals between the late-eighteenth-century and the mid-twentieth-century to provide a much needed, long-term historical perspective on the present state of transatlantic cultural differences.

Indeed, as Howard persuasively argues, while the major national security and economic developments of the past two decades have revealed some substantial policy differences between American leaders and their European counterparts, these differences have rarely, if ever, been properly historically contextualized vis-à-vis the divergent trajectories of modern cultural development in the New and Old Worlds. Howard demonstrates how differences between modern American and European attitudes toward the proper place of religion in public life have been some of the more prominent causes of this cultural divergence. In Europe, attitudes on this issue have ranged from stalwart support for the state's

establishment of religion to fervent advocacy for state-sponsored elimination of religion. Conversely, while religious institutions have never possessed any formal state authority under the Constitution of the United States, the American people have historically expressed a considerable collective desire for religious commitments to exercise a high degree of influence on American political life.

In its exploration of these themes, *God and the Atlantic* deftly remedies the lack of consideration of the historical role of religion in debates about transatlantic cultural differences. Howard's study provides cogent analysis of how the differing relationships between political and religious authority in American and European societies—what Howard terms the American “double helix” and European “zero-sum dialectic” (197)—have significantly shaped America and Europe's divergent cultural outlooks. Thus *God and the Atlantic* will not only be of interest to those who have particular interests in American and European religious history, but also to those who would wish to more thoroughly ground their understanding of current-day transatlantic international relations with a deeper awareness of religion's culturally formative influence on both shores.

The potential scope of Howard's topic is massive, but he controls his methodological approach to prevent his subject matter from becoming unwieldy or scattershot. The aggregate observations of the European intellectuals whom he has selected comprise two basic critiques of American religious life: the “traditionalist” (28-84) and the “secularist” (85-135). Following his discussions of an impressively diverse array of primarily French and German thinkers who were negatively disposed towards American religiosity, Howard shifts focus in the second half of his work to consider case studies of two European intellectuals who both, after spending significant portions of their academic careers in East Coast institutions of higher education, ultimately came to highly positive assessments of American religious life: the Swiss-German Reformed church historian Philp Schaff (136-158) and the French Thomistic philosopher Jacques Maritain (159-192).

Howard acknowledges that his thesis is in part inspired by Louis Hartz's classic study *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*: “[W]hile Hartz's main aim was to demonstrate how the *absence* of feudal order and established church affected American institutions and political habits, I intend to show how the *presence* of a feudal order and established churches (and their dialectically precipitated poles of opposition: more thoroughgoing socialist and anticlerical tendencies) have structured European attitudes toward the United States, particularly toward the American experiment in religious freedom, and in the seemingly unabated religious vitality that this system has since produced” (11). The second component of Howard's thesis is that after the dissimilar socio-economic conditions in Europe and America gave rise to the differences in the respective publics' attitudes toward religion, Europeans gradually internalized these various (originally religiously inspired) criticisms of America in such a way that they subsequently came to inform anti-American sentiments more generally. “Such criticisms...locate cultural deficiencies and abnormalities in the earliest chapters of American history, posit their continuity until the present, and enframe them within habits of interpretation and historical expectation derived from European experience along with the (secularization) theories and narratives that have sought to make sense of this experience...This embedded hermeneutical proclivity, in turn, sustains a simmering cultural

resentiment, which can be aggravated by contemporary events and trends in American society, even as it significantly predates them” (133-4).

Those criticisms of American religious life—which Howard groups together under the umbrella term of the “traditionalist critique”—each deplored the absence of any kind of religious establishment in the United States and lamented what they perceived to be the resultant state of chaotic proliferation of religious sects, whose founders were the ecclesiastical equivalents of crass American commercial entrepreneurs. To be sure, there existed national variations on this theme. Anglican voices such as the Bishop of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce and the travel writer and sometime resident of Cincinnati, Ohio Frances Trollope especially mourned Christianity’s apparent loss of decorum and dignity as seen in the marked emotionality of frontier revival meetings and in the low levels of theological education possessed by many American ministers. German Romantics and Idealistic philosophers, such as Friedrich Schlegel, Heinrich Heine, and Arthur Schopenhauer, denounced America’s overall lack of history (*Bodenslosigkeit*, *Geistlosigkeit*, and *Geschichtslosigkeit*). Specifically, they criticized America for its lack of “organic” hierarchical social relationships of the throne-and-altar type as a leading reason for why America had no true culture (*Kultur*), even if Americans had managed to create a technologically advanced and materially prosperous society (*Zivilisation*). French, German, and Italian Catholic religious leaders saw the highly variegated expressions of ecclesiastical life in America as simply the inevitable manifestation of the internal logic of Protestant ecclesiology. Unrestrained by the state, American Protestants appeared to elevate personal private interpretation of the Bible above all other types of religious authority and further undermined ecclesiastical authority, in particular through their proclivity for forming new churches in response to differences of religious opinion. Particularly insightful is the way in which Howard is able to chart the chronological shift from disdain to fear in traditionalists’ attitudes towards American religion around the mid-nineteenth-century. The waxing geopolitical power of the United States seemed to traditionalists to herald the coming ability of Americans to project their cultural deficiencies and mediocrities upon the rest of the world.

Substantially, the “secularist critics” of American religiosity found the exact same aspects of American religiosity worthy of derision as the traditionalists did, however, the framework of their criticism was entirely different. Beginning with the earliest French sociological thinkers (the Marquis de Condorcet, Saint-Simon, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Auguste Comte) Howard traces the genealogy of the view that traditional religious faith itself was abnormal and something which ought to be transcended for the sake of cultural progress. This trend perpetuated through Hegel and the Left Hegelians, manifesting aggressively in Marx and finally in the Continental communists, socialists, and anti-clerical republicans whom his writings inspired. To each of these thinkers, the enduring religiosity of the United States challenged their theories that either regarded or prescribed secularization as the normative path to modernity, such that they became compelled to explain America as somehow either culturally aberrant or still immature. One of the most striking arguments that Howard makes in this section is how secularists seemed to have so totally absorbed the hegemonic religious paradigm of throne-and-altar traditionalism that they did not advocate for religious pluralism as much as they did for new, equally hegemonic secularist paradigms. Along these lines, Howard quotes the present-day Sorbonne sociologist Jean-Paul Willaime, who argues that contemporary France is in need of “the secularization of secularism” and a “demythologization of all the secular forms of absolutization” (204). Perhaps the most

fascinating evidence that Howard presents in this section concerns how certain German revolutionaries of 1848 were exiled to America, and in the midst of this exile actively perceived themselves as virtual missionaries for secularism among an overwhelmingly religious people (118-125).

Howard is fond of the French expression *les extrêmes se touchent* (the extremes meet) which he uses several times to identify similarities between the traditionalist and secularist lines of criticism. Howard's keen eye for comparison also led him to select Schaff (1819-1893) and Maritain (1882-1973), who while they belonged to different time periods, countries, and branches of Christianity, each experienced similar transformations of their views towards America while they lived and taught in the United States. In their own ways, Schaff and Maritain both desired to see higher levels of religious commitment to Christianity among Europeans; Schaff was an active member of the World Evangelical Alliance and Maritain consistently advocated for the formation of a new Christendom (*nouvelle chrétiente*) in the Old World. Rather than seeing the religious conditions of America as inimical to their goal of fostering religious renewal in Europe, Schaff and Maritain came to regard them as a model by which it might be pursued.

Howard's highly lucid and readable study may be recommended without reservation. However, one minor criticism arises out of Howard's detailing of ten examples of French, German, and Italian intellectuals who used the term "Puritan" negatively to characterize various aspects of nineteenth-century American religiosity. Given the numerous significant theological and cultural differences between early seventeenth-century New England Puritanism and nineteenth-century American Protestantism more broadly, European intellectuals' characterization of the latter in terms of the former is a rather striking historical oddity that raises questions regarding what "Puritan" meant to them. A small, but needful, addition to Howard's study would have been an exploration of why "the Puritan" was such a symbolically negative religious image in the minds of a seemingly wide array of Europeans and what influences had led them to this view.

Howard concludes his analysis with some thoughtful reflections on how Americans and Europeans can improve their mutual understanding by appreciating the differences between the historically attenuated, politico-religious arrangements of their respective societies. "The [dialectical version of European secularism] bears the lingering confessional imprint of the *Ancien Regime* that it reacted against and has historically presented itself as a liberating, crusading ideal, [and] a new *ecclesia militans*...the [double helix version of American secularism] reflects the messy, even cacophonous pluralism of the early American republic and has historically developed, sometimes haltingly, to permit, not rival or silence, a wide range of religious actors and voices (204). In light of the global spread of democracy and the unyielding personal importance of religion to a majority of the global population, Howard delivers a closing enjoinder to the intellectual descendants of European traditionalists and secularists to follow the examples of Schaff and Maritain and reconsider the "historical arc" (205) of the American double helix.

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***Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts. 2 Volumes.* By Craig Keener. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, 1172 pp., \$59.99.**

Though many scholars have addressed the subject of the “miraculous” in religion, Craig Keener's two volume *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* stands as a highly anticipated and much needed treatment of the topic's significance for the Christian tradition. At nearly nine hundred pages (sans the two hundred page bibliography), the work is both thoroughly documented and fairly exhaustive in its treatment of the various debates and issues which attend the apologetic and historical issues of miraculous accounts. Ultimately, Keener's work as a historian on the topic deserves to be read alongside the treatments of other influential thinkers like Richard Swinburne, J.L. Mackie, Ernst Troeltsch, and, quintessentially, David Hume. Given the extensive nature of the book I will first outline the central elements and provide minor commentary; then, I will remark on the effectiveness of Keener's two central theses and commend some of the study's strongest aspects.

The title of the book makes explicit the author's aim and purpose: he wants to analyze the credibility of the New Testament accounts, primarily in relation to Jesus' ministry and the early church as portrayed in Acts. Keener promotes two main theses throughout the work. His primary thesis is simply that people, of all backgrounds and religious identities, make miraculous claims. His secondary thesis—basically an attempt to make space for methodological supernaturalism—is that the miraculous should be a viable option within the field of scholarship as a possible explanation for such claims (1). Both theses, while being emphasized at different points, play into each other throughout the entire work.

The two-volume set is separated into four parts. In Part One, Keener analyzes the ancient data concerning miracles. He does not so much put forth any explicit argument as to why we should accept the ancient claims as he does offer several clarifying remarks on how early Christian claims of the miraculous compare to early Jewish and Gentile miracle workers. Here we find discussions of the historical reality of Jesus and his early followers as healers and exorcists, the “magic” versus “miracle” distinction, divine men parallels (i.e., Appolonius), and descriptions of holistic medicine in the ANE. Unfortunately, Keener's relatively concise engagement with the NT accounts and early Christianity, while helpful, may leave readers wondering why the subtitle of the book suggests a more extensive treatment of the NT documents. As we will see, there seems to be a kind of answer for this by way of analogy, but Keener's reputation as a leading NT historian renders his cursory interaction with those texts at least a bit perplexing.

In Part Two, Keener takes on the philosophical and theological objections to the possibility of miracles. For scholars who are mainly textual and historical in scope, philosophical discourse does not always come easily, yet Keener seems to understand that his secondary thesis depends presumptively on the veracity of a positive philosophical case. Here he asks two primary questions: 1) Should anti-supernaturalism or skepticism of miracles be considered an “authenticity criterion” (85); and 2) should we accept the claim that Hume and his followers have succeeded in establishing both a water-tight philosophical case against miracles and a justified rejection of any such claims (108)? The answer to both questions, Keener argues, is an adamant no.

Also helpful is his discussion of ancient skepticism concerning miracles. As he argues, the ANE held to a “tradition of suspicion concerning sensational claims about extranormal

phenomena” (105) thereby challenging a popular modern Western axiom that the ANE was overly accepting when it came to miraculous claims. This same axiom, as we shall see, is often assumed about Majority World cultures. Thus, to establish a more intellectually perceptive treatment of miraculous claims in the ANE may, likewise, help to build a case for Majority World beliefs on similar issues.

In Part Three, Keener seeks to establish his primary thesis: people claim miracles. As simple as this thesis is, he substantiates it by providing examples of literally hundreds of miracle accounts of various types, from both the Majority World and the West though with an emphasis on the former. Stories of skin diseases being healed, sudden disappearance of cancer, healing of the sick, etc. permeate chapters 8 through 11. In chapter 12 he focuses specifically on blindness, incapacity to walk, death, and nature miracles; such examples may fairly be said to be the most analogous to the Gospels and Acts. Though Keener is explicitly seeking to support his primary thesis that people make miraculous claims, it is somewhat obvious that he's attempting to obviate any potential skepticism concerning the causation and explanation of miracles. That is, if Keener's text has its intended effect up to this point, the reader may be left not simply with the understanding that people make claims but that these claims substantiate the existence and personal involvement of something beyond nature.

Thus, in Part Four, Keener attempts to wrestle with proposed explanations for supernatural claims like psychosomaticism, the placebo effect, fraud, etc. Keener's ultimate point in this section is not to suggest that all claims are supernatural. Indeed, he says often enough that many of them probably have sufficient explanations within nature. Rather, in providing hundreds of supernatural claims, Keener wants to suggest that many of them, if not most of them, defy natural explanation and, in seeking the best explanation for these events, the term 'miracle' is both legitimate and appropriate.

Finally, Keener provides five appendices. The first two concern demonology, possession, and exorcism. Appendix C deals with supernatural claims in later Christian hagiography; D briefly approaches the ancient view of natural law, and E engages claims of visions and dreams. These are certainly helpful, though one might wonder why the first two did not constitute a chapter of their own given their extensive length and thematic relevancy to Keener's definition of “miracle” (110).

Most scholars would not question Keener's first thesis. Indeed, he notes that his first thesis is the less controversial of the two. Many socio-intercultural surveys will confirm that all variety of people groups make claims concerning supernatural activity, divine healings, visions, etc. At first glance, then, Keener's primary thesis almost seems unnecessary. The more one actually digs into his book, however, one gets the impression that his primary thesis is not simply that people claim miracles, but that *lots of people* claim miracles (212). That is, he is not seeking to establish so much that people claim miracles or extranormal events (even Hume admitted such) but that hundreds of millions of people claim miracles and often enough these people, though not committed to the intellectual imperialism of the Enlightenment worldview, are intelligent, trustworthy, and generally reliable. One has little justification, then, for saying that these claims are rare enough to be ignored or made by such unreliable sources as to be presumed false.

Keener seems to have two sub-points to this thesis: First, he argues that many of these events are public events with reliable eyewitnesses. This is a straightforward rejection of Hume's suggestion that there has never been so "public" an event which demands the right to be believed. Hume stated that miracle claims come mostly from "barbarous nations" and, therefore, lack the strength of objective inquiry and reliable testimony. *Contra* such a claim, Keener seeks to establish that the legitimacy of the eyewitness tradition, especially in the context of public events, needs to be re-evaluated based on the number of claims available and the quality of those claims. He accomplishes this by documenting those claims which are most public and best attested. In a number of places, Keener documents miracle claims which would be highly inconvenient for the one making the claim (for example, claims made by respected anthropologists, sociologists, or doctors). At times he even relays testimony of his own first-hand observations or those of close family members. Given the Enlightenment assumption that miracle claims are made by the undereducated or arise out of an accumulation of legendary oral tradition, this is a wise move on the part of Keener to establish his case.

Secondly, Keener insists throughout the book that many claims of extranormal events are analogous to the NT. And it is on this point that one is reminded of the subtitle of Keener's book. Though this purpose often gets lost in the text, overlaid by story after story, the essential point is pervasively implicit throughout: the NT claims of the miraculous are strengthened by a vast number of modern analogies. If we can trust the reliability of modern claims based upon analogy and classification then we can at least consider the possibility that the NT claims are authentic and reliable.

The second major thesis of the work is, admittedly, more controversial, since it argues that miracles are not simply claimed but sometimes occasion a supernatural or even theistic explanation. Keener's first step, as one might expect, is to dismantle the philosophical case built up by David Hume. In doing so, he calls into question a number of the axioms of Enlightenment thinking (97-105) and suggests that the possibility for supernatural causation as a legitimate explanation for certain phenomena remain a viable option alongside of naturalistic explanations. After leveling the playing field he attempts to show why Hume's philosophical case against miracles ultimately fails to hold up to the popular conceptions it has garnished. All in all, his argument against Hume runs over a hundred pages, addressing the argument's validity on a number of levels. The end result of Keener's analysis is certainly expected, but well-justified by the length and rigor of the argumentation: David Hume's philosophical case is ultimately circular (161-166), and the impetus for its development was both anti-theistic (138-143) and ethnocentric (166, 222-225). Finally, Keener attempts to establish, in conjunction with the first thesis, that even if at one time Hume's argument was valid given the particular level of cultural knowledge, the tables have turned with our multi-cultural, globalized world and the particular sorts and qualities of miracle claims made today (171).

Keener's work on the topic is to be commended on several specific points. First, Keener's argument for miracles ultimately comes down to a desire to challenge the naturalistic "explaining away" of miracles within academic circles (2). In his view, the case for miracles need not be a solely philosophical or theological discussion but a historical one as well, especially given the descriptive—rather than prescriptive—definition of historical disciplines (98, 186-193). If historical investigation and writing is first and foremost a

description of what actually has happened and not, as some scholars assume, limited by a commitment to philosophical naturalism, then history has no problem pronouncing whether someone was healed of being blind, cured from deafness, or raised from the dead. Further if, as he suggests, one would be able to allow for divine causation where it seems to best fit the available data, both scholarly work on the gospels (100-103) and the modern approach towards healing and prayer may be redefined over and against popular Enlightenment paradigms.

Secondly, no one can state that miracle claims are rare or poorly attested. The extensive amount of footnotes and sources which have gone into Keener's work serves to blow a hole in this assertion. Hume's "barbarous people" reference simply does not hold water in a thorough analysis of either the ANE or modern societies. With the realization of both the quantity and quality of claims being made, a skeptic of miracles is left to grapple with whether all of these cases are false and can legitimately be explained away or if theistic explanations deserve warrant even based on a few outstanding, reliable, and convincing claims (603).

Third, Keener is to be applauded for his historical scrutiny. While Keener's conviction that miracles do occur is evident, one gains the impression that his conviction stems not from an attempt to prove his presuppositions but to follow where the evidence leads. His engagement with history, sociology, philosophy, theology, anthropology, and science suggest that he is trying to make a cumulative and coherent case based on data. He is evidently unafraid to challenge the status quo of presumptive anti-theistic or fundamentalist perspectives; fraud certainly happens and people lie, but we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Though there are certainly legitimate criticisms to be made (e.g. lack of medical documentation), Keener is to be highly considered for the case he puts forth. Indeed, while scholars and readers of Keener's work will, of course, leave the book with diverse and perhaps even vehemently opposing conclusions, the book deserves to be read as a definitive contribution to its subject area.

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***Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination.* By Thomas P. Rausch, SJ. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012. 169 pp., \$19.95.**

Thomas Rausch is the T. Marie Chilton Professor of Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Rausch and I were fellow graduate students in the Department of Religion at Duke University many years ago, and I am happy to have this opportunity to interact with this work by a former fellow doctoral student and now distinguished American Catholic theologian.

One of Rausch's primary concerns, as indicated in the book's subtitle, is the recovery, in Christology and liturgy, of the powerful eschatological imagination that was evident in the early church and New Testament, as regards the Kingdom of God and the hope of a New Creation. The author claims that in the subsequent centuries of Christian theological

development and liturgical practice, this distinctive imagination gave way to more individualistic understandings of salvation; in the West, it gave way further to a fear of the Last Judgment and to a focus of the faithful upon the presence of Christ understood to be in the physical elements. Rausch vigorously argues for a restoration of a more biblically informed, eschatological imagination, incorporating the themes of the Kingdom of God, the New Creation, and their imbedded connections between salvation, the realization of social justice, and the renewal and transformation of the natural order. In the process, Rausch interacts with a broad range of contemporary theological writers, including Rahner, Metz, Moltmann, Pope Benedict, Peter Phan, N.T. Wright and many others, demonstrating a careful and nuanced reading of their various emphases and claims.

At times the reader might wonder if there is a tension between the desire to recover a more robust eschatological imagination on the one hand and a somewhat reticent attitude toward actually imagining what such a New Creation might look like on the other: “We cannot imagine what this new creation will be like” (118). While a crude literalism in eschatological imagination is certainly to be avoided, is it not the case that a robust supernaturalism—one that explicitly looks forward to a bodily resurrection of the dead—can inform a Christian imagination that looks for *more* than we can imagine, and yet, at the same time does not imply *less* than we can imagine - in other words, a truly *analogical* imagination? Otherwise, it might seem that the faithful, in the midst of liturgical worship, are still left with the unsatisfactory choice between literalism and agnosticism.

Evangelical Protestant readers of this book might find the sections on “Church and Mission” (153-158) and “Purgatory” (110-113) to be of particular interest. In “Church and Mission” Rausch addresses issues of religious pluralism and notes that while “Catholicism does not teach that Christianity is the only way to salvation” [i.e., that the visible, sacramental ministries of the Roman Catholic Church are the sole mediators of saving grace], at the same time, “Jesus remains the one savior of all and the church must continue to evangelize” (154). The author criticizes modern theologians who appear to be in danger of reducing the Christian understanding of salvation to a social ethic and to a “regnocentric” understanding of the presence of God in the world, and thus marginalizing the role of the church and the uniqueness of Christ as the Incarnate One and Risen Lord.

In his discussion of current Catholic understandings of purgatory, Rausch states that this concept should be understood eschatologically, rather than being imagined “temporally or spatially” (112). This final purification of the redeemed, by which they are made fit for union with God and for communion with the whole people of God, may perhaps best be thought of as happening “in that personal encounter with God *that takes place at death*” (italics added). This latter thought is a fascinating theological suggestion that merits further consideration by Catholic and Protestant theologians alike. A more Protestant emphasis on the atonement as a once-for-all finished work (Heb.10:14), (while sanctification is understood as incomplete in this life), might be seen to be compatible with Rausch’s suggestion, insofar as the full merits of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ could be seen to be applied, experientially, formatively, and finally at the point of the believer’s death. If so, this could represent a remarkable point of convergence on an issue that has historically been a contentious and divisive one between Rome and Geneva.

Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology is a concise presentation of some important topical currents in recent Catholic theology. The author gives a sure-footed and balanced

assessment of the writers with whom he interacts. Both Catholic and Protestant readers will read this book with profit, and I happily commend it.

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***Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication.* By Crystal L. Downing. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. 342 pp., \$24.00.**

Crystal L. Downing's new book *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* is a fascinating and much needed text on semiotics from a Christian perspective. Downing's book could fairly be described as "cutting edge." She demonstrates how followers of Christianity can communicate their message in a relevant way while remaining true to the Christian tradition. She illustrates her approach with the image of a quarter standing on its edge. On one side of the coin are those who want to conserve the Christian tradition, whereas the other represents those who push for change. Downing describes this as the tension between "resigning" and "re-signing." Instead of advocating one side or the other, she instead argues that Christians should be on the edge, standing between these two poles. A Christian position on the edge therefore "looks to both the past and future, to tradition and change" (58). Downing coins the word "(Re)signing" to describe this process. She uses this word to capture the importance of signs and signing in the Christian life. According to Downing, signs "reflect the influence of both Christ and culture" while signing "expresses who we are and what we value" (22). (Re)signing conveys this balancing act. On one hand we are resigned to Christian truth, but on the other we recognize the need to re-sign that truth so that it may be effectively communicated. The term *(Re)signing* captures this two-way movement. The Christian (re)signs on the edge of the coin, remaining watchful that he or she does not "fall onto one side or the other so that the reverse or obverse is obliterated" (57). In essence, *Changing Signs of Truth* is an argument for the necessity of a Christian (re)signing relationship with contemporary culture.

Downing divides her book into four parts consisting of two to three chapters each. Her argument's progression moves from a description and explanation of signs, to a Christian understanding of signs, and finally shows how Christian signs can be communicated to a pluralistic world. Each section is thoughtfully constructed as she balances the works of important semioticians with her own experiences and reflections.

Part I explores the signs of Christianity and how signs function. She begins by looking at how signing has historically been a battle between those who believe in the superiority of an idealized past and those who denounce the immediate past. It could also be described as a struggle between those who believe in a "golden age" that we must return to, and those who look for a future utopia. She explores both the rise of Enlightenment humanists (Kant, Hegel, and Marx) who look toward an idealized future and Christian fundamentalists who enshrine the past. The tradition of both has contributed to the "liberal vs. conservative" debates which "close down communication rather than open it up: a fact recognized by people at both ends of the spectrum, many of whom acknowledge the need for new signs" (56). Downing wants to show that the goal is not to be on one side or the other but to remain on the (re)signing edge. Downing describes the edge as "rolling through the signs of

the times, attempting to be in them without being of them” (61). She uses the life and teachings of Jesus as an example of one who (re)signed rather than abolish or idealize. Jesus, Downing writes, “resigns himself to God’s law while at the same time re-signing it...Jesus recognizes that to be human is to be embedded in a particular society” (67). Jesus (re)signed the Hebrew tradition and gave it new signs so people could have a relationship with God in relevant ways. In the same way, Downing believes that Christians should resign to the truth found in Scripture while at the same time acknowledging the possibility and necessity of re-signing that truth. Doing this adequately requires Christians to understand how signs work, which is the focus of Part III.

Parts II and III comprise the heart of the work. Here Downing explores both the structure and function of signs. In Part II she examines structuralism and the impact it has had on semiotics and interpretation. Her examination of structuralism begins with a discussion of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the first semioticians. An analysis of Saussure’s notions of *parole* (“word”) and *langue* (“conditions of possibility”) and “sign/signifier” makes up much of this section. Downing compares *langue* to a kitchen cupboard which contains the “ingredients” of language. These “ingredients,” in relation to their context, comprise the material by which words and signs are created. Comprised of two parts—sign/signifier—signs bring a concept which is generated by an object before the mind. Saussure’s is seen in the works of later semioticians such as Roman Jakobson and Claude Levi-Strauss, along with the psychiatrist Jacques Lacan. These structuralists saw language and thought operating in terms of binaries. This consisted of looking at the differences between linguistic systems (different “cupboards”) and the relation between different signs. Downing compares this binary thinking to a machine where “signs enter the mind like coins entering a sorting machine...all machines produce similar-looking rolls of coin wrapped in similar colors of paper” (120). Individuals may produce different “rolls of coin” (e.g. creationism or Darwinism) based on their “cupboards” but the process is the same in each case. Downing is especially critical of radical structuralism, which took this process one step further. Instead of signs eliciting a response from human consciousness, signs are said to actually create thought which, in turn, makes human beings into nothing more than machines.

Downing finishes Part II with a look at how Karl Marx and later Marxists, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, fought against hegemonic forces which controlled meaning. Unlike the radical structuralists, Marxists believed that changing one’s embedded structure was possible. In this line of thought, changing the hegemony involved destroying the structure (revolution) or making an “add-on” (re-shaping the hegemony). Downing uses this comparison between structuralism and Marxism to suggest the possibility of a counter-hegemonic Christianity. Her question is “which Christian signs must be changed—and when—in order to fit new cultural contexts?” (164). In Parts III and IV she seeks to answer that question.

Part III begins with a look at Jacques Derrida and deconstruction. Downing believes that deconstruction is necessary in order to (re)sign truth. The process of deconstruction “tears down signs of belief we feel most passionately about in order to inspect them” (171). This process then helps us better understand our beliefs and the signs used to communicate them. Derrida exposed the limits of structuralism and the dangers it poses for both Christianity and secular humanism. Structuralism can lead to close-mindedness which inhibits dialogue,

understanding, and (re)signing. Downing uses Derrida's concept of "hospitality" as a necessary component of (re)signing. Hospitality means "opening ourselves to those who are hostile to us, to those totally foreign to us, both in lifestyle and thought" (185). Therefore, in order to (re)sign, openness to positions hostile outside oneself is essential.

Downing continues Part III with a look at the "triadic sign" model of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce remains the focus of the remainder of the book, over the course of which Downing builds her own Christian semiotic model. The triadic sign model of Peirce consists of *object*, *interpretant*, and *representamen*. Objects are viewed by an interpretant who brings the object before the mind where it connects a representamen (sign of an idea, movement, culture, etc.) to the object. The representamen differs depending upon the interpretant. The object remains an object but brings forth different representations. In a process called "semiosis," the interpretant is also an object which creates new a representamen and therefore new interpretants. New signs are generated through triadic relationships. Downing argues that this affects the communication of Christian truth. She uses this model as a method of interpretation for understanding Scripture, the Eucharist, and the Trinity. The triadic model is used to show how differing groups of Christians can interpret the same truths differently. Dialogue occurs when Christians understand each other as "community-defined interpretants" (220).

In the book's final part, Downing uses Peirce's triadic model to critique salvation as an "economy of exchange." She advocates that we must understand salvation as a gift. God the Giver (Object) bestows the Gift of Salvation (representamen) which is recognized and accepted by the interpretant. She believes that this model changes the way we should communicate the Christian faith. Unmerited love from God is given to humanity by which we communicate the power of that love by "our own gifts of love, refusing to reduce Christianity to an economy of exchange" (272). The triadic model is the way in which faith can be re-signed so that it may be better understood by contemporary culture. It is a process continually fueled by the Holy Spirit where "truth is verified by signs that endorse the gift" (273). Downing's goal is not to provide easy solutions to controversies. Instead her approach is a way to open up dialogue whereby Christians on "different branches" (330) can communicate with one another. (Re)signing is best when it is "on the edge."

Downing's ability to make complicated theories understandable without dumbing them down is masterful. She never fails to have a story or illustration which she uses to explain the many semiotic and linguistic theories found throughout her book. As if to demonstrate the argument of her book, she continually "(re)signs" theory into terms that can be easily grasped and understood. Her humor and wit permeates the text, making it not only informative but enjoyable. *Changing Signs of Truth* could easily be used for undergraduate and graduate courses, but her work is much more than a descriptive textbook. Downing's use of Peirce's model is smart and insightful. She establishes a model for communication and understanding that can help heal the divisions and closed-mindedness rampant in Christianity. In addition, with her use of Peirce, she demonstrates a new way to understand salvation and the Trinity. *Changing Signs of Truth* is a must read for anyone interested in semiotics, hermeneutics, theology and culture, and postmodernity.

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***God and the Cosmos: Divine Activity in Space, Time and History.* By Harry Lee Poe and Jimmy H. Davis. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 304 pp., \$24.00.**

Most Christians will not hesitate to affirm God's ongoing action in the world, but many of these, perhaps, will struggle to account for *how* God acts in the world. In *God and the Cosmos*, Harry Lee Poe (a theologian) and Jimmy H. Davis (a chemist) contend that the triune God of Christian confession acts in the world by inputting information into the unpredictable processes of a world receptive to God's direction. While not everyone will be convinced by their thesis, there is no doubt that Poe and Davis offer numerous reasons for Christians to be confident that modern science cannot rule out divine action.

God and the Cosmos is divided into two main sections. The first section contains four chapters, which serve to address the question: "What kind of God interacts with the world?" (31). This is a very important question, as most of those involved in the science and religion debates appear to assume that deity equates to some kind of Prime Mover, particularly the deistic God of the early modern period. However, the concept of deity or divinity differs widely among religions and philosophies, as do concepts of the world. Thus, to their credit, Poe and Davis offer brief analyses of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam before attending to the Christian faith, demonstrating that each of these religions or belief systems accounts for divinity and the world in different ways. Hinduism and certain forms of Buddhism regard divinity as immanent within the world but otherwise uninvolved; Islam holds that everything is subject to the transcendent will of Allah. Essentially, each religion or belief system focuses on either the utter transcendence of the divine or its pervasive immanence. Among the religions, the authors suggest, Christianity is unique, insofar as its concept of divinity finds expression within the doctrine of the Trinity, where God reveals Godself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (59, 68). This Trinitarian framework leaves room to interpret God as both transcendent and immanent, which means that God's relationship to the world must be conceived differently from how it is conceived in, say, Hinduism.

This is why, Poe and Davis continue, modern science developed within the northern European context. A belief in God as triune, and therefore as transcendent and immanent, allowed the natural philosophers of the medieval period to focus on studying the world in all its glorious variety and particularity. The rediscovery of Aristotle, the influence of nominalism, the search for academic integrity, the increasing rejection of ecclesiastical authority, and the desire for genuine religious reform—all these contributed to the rise of modern science, as theologians and natural philosophers alike looked to the original sources of Scripture and creation for their inspiration. That said, by the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian legacy was beginning to leave a stain on the tapestry woven by the scholars of the day, as Galileo Galilei, the Italian polymath, was charged with subverting Scripture with his heliocentric account of the heavens, when in fact his observations challenged the Aristotelian philosophical framework that pervaded the Roman church's reading of Scripture. Poe and Davis are sure that whatever disconnection there is perceived between science and religion is largely false; the actual conflict emerges from the clash of philosophical presuppositions (65–66, 133, 290–291).

This clash translates into an "either/or" situation. The Enlightenment period in particular witnessed the introduction of sharp distinctions between various phenomena, distinctions such as the Cartesian opposition of mind and body. According to Poe and Davis, this approach of categorization found an early champion in the Puritan William

Perkins, who popularized John Calvin's theology in ways that compartmentalized the decrees of God. On this account, God determines the fate of the human individual by divine decree, either to life or death eternal; but in the contemporary intellectual climate, this emphasis on the decrees of God also correlated to an acceptance that the various laws of nature being discovered were also divinely decreed, and so inviolable. When Isaac Newton, a generation after Perkins and René Descartes, argued for a mechanistic universe occasionally serviced by God, a new "either/or" was in the making: either God works directly to cause natural phenomena, or each natural phenomenon is subject only to its own governing laws. Charles Darwin naturally evolved from this "either/or" mindset; he discerned no middle ground between God's creation of all species by divine decree, or of God's total lack of involvement in the development of life on earth. Perhaps inevitably, this stance led to a position with which many today are only too familiar: if the account of human origins according to Genesis is true, then modern science must be false at best and a demonic delusion at worst (88, 95).

It is here, among the unhelpful "either/or" dichotomies, that the doctrine of the Trinity moves the discussion forward. The fact that the triune God is said to be both transcendent and immanent means that God is at work both within the world and (for want of a better word) outside it. On this account, the Father's presence is mediated to the world by the Son and the Spirit; the Son entered created space and time by becoming incarnate; and the Spirit exercises the power of God in created space and time. Put differently, there is no "either/or" in God or in God's activity, because in God there is always "both/and" (137–145).

This affirmation of the relevance of God as Father, Son and Spirit leads to Poe and Davis's second section, which, in five chapters, discusses the question, "What kind of world allows God to interact?" (146). As with that which shaped the first section, this, too, is an important question, for it could well be that the world is simply not open to divine activity. The authors explore cosmology, including big bang cosmology, and state that at various points in the history of the universe, complex systems have emerged from simple interactions at baser levels. On this account, the universe is a complex system of multiple levels of organization, with each level commanding its own disciplines and methodologies for research (e.g. atoms have emerged, so to speak, from elementary particles; chemistry emerges from, but is not reducible to, physics) (25–26, 167–168). So, in what way, if at all, is God involved in this process of emergence? Poe and Davis argue (largely following, it seems, the scientist–theologian John Polkinghorne) that God acts in the world through inputting information into the world, in a manner similar to the way in which the mind supposedly acts on the body; in fact, it is through inputting information into the early stages of the universe that led to the fine-tuning of the universe that allowed for life on earth to develop (201–202). Thus the universe must be open to God's activity, especially, it is reasoned, at the quantum and chaotic levels of created existence. Moreover, recent research in biology—particularly in the Human Genome Project—demonstrates that even at the level of (human) life itself, there is no such thing as a totally closed organism: even DNA can be manipulated to produce different biological entities than nature would have intended. In short, recent research in the natural sciences strongly indicates that the world is open both to the action of its inhabitants (and especially humans) and to the action of God.

With all this in mind, I detect four main themes running throughout *God and the Cosmos*:

1. Current popular and much academic thinking about God and the natural sciences is dominated by an Aristotelian framework that modern science has actually discredited. (Poe and Davis provide a helpful table on page 282 showing some of Aristotle's teachings and their refutation by modern science.)
2. Modern research in the natural sciences demonstrates that far from being a closed order, the universe is open to interaction, interference, modification, and so on by both humans and God.
3. The world consists of different levels of organization, and God relates differently to each level. This means that God could act deterministically at one level while indeterministically at another (120).
4. In all this, "God" must be understood as the triune God testified to in the story of Scripture. No other conception of God will do, as no other God is both transcendent and immanent.

God and the Cosmos is a little disjointed. Whereas the first section ("What kind of God...?") largely paints a panorama of Western intellectual history in very broad brushstrokes, the second section ("What kind of world...?") is heavy on scientific data and case studies. Also, there appears to be a lack of integration between some chapters. For example, after making their case for divine action by information input in the domain of physics (chapter 6), there is no mention of God acting by this means in the discussion of biology (chapter 7); but the idea is surely presupposed in the account of history and the human imagination (chapter 8). Is there a reason for the omission? Further, as outlined in this volume, the concept of information input as divine action is dissatisfying. There appears to be no definition of how "information" should be understood in this context; and while the authors have no doubt that God acts in the physical world, I do not think they have shown how information affects things in the physical world, especially when their focus is on the more abstract experiences of human existence such as the imagination, or the quantum and chaotic levels of physical reality. Finally, for all the emphasis placed on the concept of God as Father, Son and Spirit, and the difference this concept makes to an understanding of God-world relation, I found that the space given to elucidating all this was relatively small (a mere nine pages in its lengthiest exposition).

These things noted, *God and the Cosmos* is a lively read and utterly compelling in places. While I do not think the idea of God acting by inputting information is especially novel, the bold declaration that most people are still imprisoned within an Aristotelian philosophical framework demands consideration. The book is also notable for the amount of ground it covers; the authors discuss Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam; the rise of modern science via the Medieval and the Reformation periods; the early modern period and the Enlightenment; the intellectual climate in which Darwin devised his theories about evolution; and the role of cosmology, biology and history as disciplines. Major characters given a voice include Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, William of Occam, Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei, William Perkins, René Descartes, Isaac Newton, B.B. Warfield, G.W.F. Hegel, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne. My point is that *God and the Cosmos* is no basic introduction to the science-religion debate; Poe and Davis assume familiarity with the history of Western thought and an ability to grapple with the

detail of scientific theories. This book constitutes a worthy contribution to the current literature on divine action, and it warrants sustained attention.

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***From Billy Graham To Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism.* By D.G. Hart. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011, 252 pp., \$25.00¹**

Near the close of the 1976 U.S. Presidential campaign, *Newsweek* magazine famously declared 1976 the “Year of the Evangelical.” In subsequent years, Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority,” Pat Robertson’s “Christian Coalition,” and James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family” assumed leading roles on the stage of American political life. Each strongly identified with the Republican party and conservative public policy.

In the last decade, however, a new set of actors has appeared on this stage. Leaders such as Rick Warren, Jim Wallis, and Ron Sider—all bearing evangelical credentials—have bristled against evangelicalism’s longstanding identification with the Republican party. Promoting left-of-center public policies, these spokesmen do not appear to be speaking only for themselves. Polls suggest that a growing number of younger self-identified evangelicals have wearied of the policies and party affiliation of their elders. Forty years ago, Wallis and Sider were sideline figures in evangelicalism. Today, they are closer to the mainstream of evangelical sentiment than they have ever been.

What happened? In *From Billy Graham to Sarah Palin: Evangelicals and the Betrayal of American Conservatism*, Hart offers an account of and an explanation for this recent turn of events. He charts a deep and longstanding current within American evangelicalism—one that has paradoxically embraced both right-leaning and left-leaning public policies. He also argues that the tradition of American political conservatism offers evangelicals a constructive model for civil engagement—if they are willing to listen and learn.

The majority of Hart’s book is a narrative of evangelicals’ engagement in American politics since the mid-twentieth century. He begins with the National Association of Evangelicals, founded in 1942. The NAE positioned itself between fundamentalism and the theological liberalism of the mainline, and soon began to address such issues of civil and political concern as the threat of communism; alcohol consumption; and religion and public education. In doing so, Hart argues, the NAE demonstrated that it was “simply heir to the politics that had sustained Protestants since the middle of the nineteenth century”—unabashed patriotism, moral crusading (often invoking the power of government as a means to this end), and direct appeal to the Bible as norm for American public policy (40, 39).

Even so, most evangelicals before the 1970s opted out of direct political engagement. This decade, however, ushered in “a variety of Supreme Court decisions, policy initiatives, and protest movements [that] challenged the Protestant character of the United States and threatened evangelical institutions” (40). This sea-change precipitated the rise of the Moral

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Majority, whose ascendancy among evangelicals in the political sphere was sealed by the electoral victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Hart offers exposition and analysis of the publications of several influential evangelicals in the last quarter of the twentieth-century—Peter Marshall, Jr., Francis Schaeffer, Donald Dayton, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Chuck Colson, Ralph Reed, Marvin Olasky, James Skillen, Jim Wallis, Randall Balmer, Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Michael Gerson. Many of the right-leaning authors in this group, Hart observes, often appeal to a Christian origin to the United States, from which Americans and their government are said to have precipitously declined. This historical conception has inspired crusading political efforts to stem the tide of personal immorality and what is perceived to be the social and political assault on the family. Left-leaning authors, on the other hand, often appeal to a comprehensive social vision that they believe derives from the Old Testament prophets and Jesus’ teaching concerning the Kingdom of God. This vision prompts them to redress, through political means, racial inequity, injustice, poverty, and human rights. For all their differences, Hart concludes, these writers—right and left—often reflect an unbending and uncompromising moral idealism, appeal directly to the Bible as an authority in ordering the affairs of the United States, conceive the United States as playing a unique and divinely-assigned role in world affairs, demonstrate “theological naiveté about human depravity,” and fail “to see the links between political convictions and [the] legal and political forms” embedded in over two centuries of American “federalism, republicanism, and constitutionalism” (199).

We should therefore not be surprised at the political shift in evangelical sentiment over the last decade. Whereas evangelicals may have identified themselves with political conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s, this union really represents a marriage of convenience. Evangelicals saw the Republican party and its policies as the best hope for stemming what they saw to be the widespread assault on the traditional family. Evangelicals, however, are not reliably conservative because they do not—and never have—self-consciously operated from conservative principles.

So what are these principles? Hart acknowledges the sheer difficulty of answering this question. For one thing, conservatism “is inherently opposed to ideology.” Why? “Thinking about how to be traditional, as opposed simply to living with received customs, is an indication that tradition has ended” (207). Furthermore, twentieth century political conservatism has proven something of a kaleidoscope. Hart references George H. Nash’s famous analysis of mid-century conservatism as a cord comprised of three diverse strands—traditionalism, libertarianism, and anti-communism. These strands have not always co-existed harmoniously. Even so, conservatism is not altogether porous. Conservatism’s *paterfamilias*, William F. Buckley, Jr., after all, famously and unambiguously expelled both Ayn Rand and the John Birch Society from the household. Conservatism, then, has admitted and does admit of some definition.

For Hart, the traditionalist Russell Kirk provides as good a definition of conservatism as one will find. Kirk proposes six “canons” of conservatism

1. “belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience”

2. “affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of human existence, as opposed to the narrowing uniformity, egalitarianism, and utilitarian aims of most radical systems”
3. the “conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes”
4. “freedom and property are closely linked”
5. “faith in prescription, or ‘custom and convention, coupled with a distrust of’ sophisters, calculators, and economists”
6. hasty innovation may be a devouring conflagration, rather than a torch of progress” (186-7).

Hart prescriptively concludes the book by arguing that “evangelicals *should* be conservative” (207). What might this look like? Evangelicals should first “reconsider the source of American greatness” (216). American greatness rests not in what is said to be the United States’ Christian origins, but in her heritage of limited government, religious freedom, and of the prioritization of “culture and character formation” to “political solutions” (219). Evangelicals should also “reconsider the source of Christian greatness” (220). The “true mark of faithfulness is not evident in outward displays of power [but] in simple, ordinary, and spiritual ways, such as saints gathered for prayer and worship, catechumens learning the church’s creed, or the care of widows, orphans, and the otherwise dispossessed” (ibid.). If the church takes this standard to heart, then she will value “spiritual warfare” more than “the culture wars,” and understand herself to be a “pilgrim” and not a “crusader” (222,3).

Hart’s book rightly stresses that evangelicals, as citizens, ought not to withdraw from civic and political participation. His prescription is decidedly not quietistic. Evangelicals should, however, engage in more reflection and self-criticism when it comes to participating in public affairs. Conservatism offers a largely untested means by which evangelicals may contribute to the public good in ways that will not contravene but complement their most basic beliefs and commitments. Even if Hart does not detail a comprehensive overview of the diversity of the resources of American conservatism (Hart, for instance, mentions but does not explore the natural law tradition), he has sufficiently whet the reader’s appetite to pursue a promising way forward.

Hart’s book is also a timely reminder to the church not to seek worldly ends by worldly means. The Scripture has given to the church not only a mission all her own, but also the means to carry out that mission. There is no question or doubt about the outcome of that mission—even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the church. The question is whether evangelicals will summon the nerve and will to resist the siren calls of worldly power and goals, and invest her energies in an enterprise in which divine power is made evident in human weakness.

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***Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition.* By James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010, 160 pp., \$14.99.**

There are many books out there that describe Reformed theology and that invite people to become part of the Reformed tradition. However, most of these books are a product of

the years before the advent of this young, restless, Reformed reality that is all the rage today. Most such books predate the New Calvinism.

New to the field, and largely distinct from the rest, is *Letters to a Young Calvinist* by James K. A. Smith. This is one of the few books to speak directly to this new young, restless, Reformed movement. Written in the form of letters from a mentor to a young man who is investigating Reformed theology, the book offers a winsome 125-page introduction to the tradition and to the way it works out in real life. The author says “These letters don’t offer an apologetic defense of Calvinism, trying to defend it against all comers; rather, I envision the addressee of these letters as someone who has already become interested in this tradition and is looking for a guide into unfamiliar territory.”

Smith leads the young recipient of these letters into the tradition in a systematic way. He begins with words of welcome, expressing the way that Reformed theology leads us to seek out and discover deep wells of the Scripture. For example, “I think it is one of the hallmarks of the Reformed tradition that it has a long history of encouraging curiosity about creation. Unlike some of the places you and I have been, which really discourage questioning in order to get people to toe the party line, the Reformed tradition has long encourages a kind of holy intellectual riskiness.”

He warns of one of the most perilous sins of the Reformed: “Now is as good a time as any to warn you about one of the foremost temptations that accompanies Reformed theology: pride. And the worst kind of pride: religious pride (one of Screwtape’s letters speaks quite eloquently about this). This is an infection that often quickly contaminates those who discover the Reformed tradition, and it can be deadly: a kind of West Nile virus.”

Smith suggests that the best one-word summary of Reformed theology is grace. He speaks of grace going “all the way down,” by which he means that grace infuses every part of Reformed theology. And, indeed, Reformed theology is a theology of grace—grace in every part. He says (rightly!) that Reformed theology is not all about election and predestination; they are components of the theology but they are not all there is to it. “I often feel that Reformed theology is ill served by a myopic focus on these things, as legitimate as they are.” And he emphasizes that Reformed theology is inherently unfinished. “It seems to me very un-Reformed to prop up Reformed theology as a timeless ideal, a consummated achievement, when one of the Reformers’ mantras was *semper reformanda*—always reforming. You shouldn’t expect a lifetime of pursuing the truth to result in constant entrenchment into what you thought when you were twenty.”

Sooner or later, though, the author has to take sides in some of the issues that remain unresolved across the spectrum of the New Calvinism. And here is where he will inevitably lose some of his readers. The first of these issues regards confessions. Many who consider themselves Reformed today are explicitly non-confessional, meaning that they do not adhere to any of the catechisms or confessions that have long been Reformed hallmarks. Following this are a few discussions about the role of covenant within the tradition. Where Smith is sure to alienate even more readers is in his parenthetical attempt to suggest that Reformed theology ought to lead to an egalitarian understanding of gender roles.

As I look back on this book I see both strengths and weaknesses. The epistolary form is a wonderful choice. The tone is humble and helpful. The majority of what Smith teaches

lines up well with what I believe. But as a Baptist I had to disagree with, well, a good portion of it. And looking at the endorsements, I can see that others disagreed with him as well. Two of the book's endorsers, Tullian Tchividjian and Michael Horton offer caveats within their blurbs (Tchividjian: "No one will agree with everything here, but what I appreciate..." Horton: "Most of the time I cheered 'Amen!' as I read these letters, but even when I disagreed, I appreciated..."). In fact, conspicuous by their absence from the list of endorsers are any of the Baptist leaders of this New Calvinism.

So I guess I regard the book as a bit of a mixed bag. I felt that it got weaker as it went on. The best parts were largely the earliest parts. Of course if you are a paedo-baptist, if you are confessional, if you are covenantal, and/or if you are egalitarian, you'll probably agree with much more of it. But maybe that's the point. Thus far this young, restless, Reformed movement has been very ecumenical, with most people focusing on the commonalities, and especially the common understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation. Maybe the movement has grown up enough that people are now ready to begin discussing more of the particulars. And it's in the particulars that we are bound to find the most disagreement.

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***A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith.* By Brian D. McLaren. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011, 336 pp., \$14.99.**

Early in George Orwell's iconic *1984* is a particularly haunting scene. Winston, the hero of the story, is confessing to his diary a sexual encounter with a prostitute. Though Big Brother rigidly controls even sexual union and though sex is viewed as "a slightly disgusting minor operation, like having an enema," still Big Brother cannot remove from humanity the desire and the need for intimacy. One evening Winston spots a prostitute near a train station. "She had a young face," he writes, "painted very thick. It was really the paint that appealed to me, the whiteness of it, like a mask, and the bright red lips. Party women never paint their faces." In a society where abject fear and loneliness are the norm, Winston craves the intimacy of sex. But as he goes into this woman's apartment and lies with her, he turns up a lamp, casting a bright light on her face. And immediately he sees that the appearance of beauty was a lie. "What he had suddenly seen in the lamplight was that the woman was old. The paint was plastered so thick on her face that it looked as though it might crack like a cardboard mask. There were streaks of white in her hair; but the truly dreadful detail was that her mouth had fallen a little open, revealing nothing except a cavernous blackness. She had no teeth at all."

But, despite his horror, his revulsion, Winston continues. In his diary he writes "When I saw her in the light she was quite an old woman, fifty years old at least. But I went ahead and did it just the same." Though the woman loses all sexual appeal, Winston continues in this act. He continues because, though his desire is quenched, still sex is an act of rebellion. By sleeping with this prostitute he is engaging in an act of heart-felt rebellion against Big Brother.

It wasn't too long ago that I wrote about Brian McLaren and got in trouble. Reflecting on seeing him speak at a nearby church, I suggested that he appears to love Jesus but hate God. Based on immediate and furious reaction, I quickly retracted that statement. I should

not have done so. I believed it then and I believe it now. And if it was true then, how much more true it is [with] *A New Kind of Christianity*. In this book we finally see where McLaren's journey has taken him; it has taken him into outright, rank, unapologetic apostasy. He hates God. Period.

"It's time for a new quest," write McLaren, "launched by new questions, a quest across denominations around the world, a quest for new ways to believe and new ways to live and serve faithfully in the way of Jesus, a quest for a new kind of Christian faith." McLaren frames the book around "Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith." They cut to the very heart of the faith, foundational in every way. He asks:

- The narrative question: What is the overarching story line of the Bible?
- The authority question: How should the Bible be understood?
- The God question: Is God violent?
- The Jesus question: Who is Jesus and why is he important?
- The gospel question: What is the gospel?
- The church question: What do we do about the church?
- The sex question: Can we find a way to address human sexuality without fighting about it?
- The future question: Can we find a better way of viewing the future?
- The pluralism question: How should followers of Jesus relate to people of other religions?
- The what-do-we-do-now question: How can we translate our quest into action?

His purpose, he insists, is not to answer the questions, but to provide responses to them. Answers indicate finality, responses indicate conversation and openness. "The responses I offer are not intended as a smash in tennis, delivered forcefully with a lot of topspin, in an effort to win the game and create a loser. Rather, they are offered as a gentle serve or lob; their primary goal is to start the interplay, to get things rolling, to invite your reply. Remember, our goal is not debate and division yielding hate or a new state, but rather questioning that leads to conversation and friendship on the new quest." But that is mere semantics. Whether answering or responding (whether saying tomato or tomahto), what McLaren does through these ten questions is to completely rewrite the Christian faith. His "gentle lobs" rip the very heart out of the faith.

At the center of his remix of the faith is the claim that most Christians look at their faith through a flawed Platonic, Greco-Roman lens instead of through a biblical, Jewish lens. "God's unfolding drama is not a narrative shaped by the six lines in the Greco-Roman scheme of perfection, fall, condemnation, salvation, and heavenly perfection or eternal perdition. It has a different story line entirely. It's a story about the downside of 'progress'—a story of human foolishness and God's faithfulness, the human turn toward rebellion and God's turn toward reconciliation, the human intention toward evil and God's intention to overcome evil with good." This Greco-Roman God, the one that most Christians believe in, is a "damnable idol...defended by many a well-meaning but misguided scholar and fire-breathing preacher."

McLaren plays the all-too-typical "everyone else has it wrong" card. It turns out that most of us (all but a handful of enlightened intellectuals, as it happens) have been reading the Bible through the distorted lens of a Greco-Roman narrative. This narrative produced

many false dualisms, an air of superiority and a false distinction between those who were “in” and those who were “out.” These three marks of false narrative have so impacted our faith that we can hardly see past them. But Brian is willing and eager to play Moses, leading us out of the Egypt of our own ignorance and into the Promised Land of the new Christianity.

It would take more time than I’d be willing to give it to offer a point-by-point explanation of what responses McLaren proposes for each of the ten questions or to document the ramifications of his new theology. He denies the Fall, he denies original sin, he denies human depravity, he denies hell. And that is just in the first few pages. Needless to say, all of this leads him to a radically unbiblical view of the cross and the purpose and work of Jesus. Though he insists that he considers the Bible “inspired” (though certainly not in a traditional sense) he also says that most Christians have read it wrong, having viewed it as a kind of constitution in which God gives Spirit-breathed, inerrant revelation of himself. “I’m recommending we read the Bible as an inspired library. This inspired library preserves, presents, and inspires an ongoing vigorous conversation with and about God, a living and vital civil argument into which we are all invited and through which God is revealed.” After all, “revelation doesn’t simply happen in statements. It happens in conversations and arguments that take place within and among communities of people who share the same essential questions across generations. Revelation accumulates in the relationships, interactions, and interplay between statements.”

What does the Bible accomplish then? What does it teach us about God? “Scripture faithfully reveals the evolution of our ancestors’ best attempts to communicate their successive best understandings of God. As human capacity grows to conceive of a higher and wiser view of God, each new vision is faithfully preserved in Scripture like fossils in layers of sediment.” The Bible is an ongoing conversation about God’s character in which humans come to progressively more accurate understandings of who he is. There is no reason to think that any of them actually had it right. His reinterpretations of Job and Romans are a sight to behold, so muddled and so fabricated that they become absolutely nonsensical. There is a deliberate ignorance at work here.

The arrogance of it all is stunning. McLaren is angrier than he has been before and more scornful. Still, though, he presents his ideas coated with the veneer of a false humility. But, handily, he builds into the book the means he will use to answer his critics. He will simply accuse his detractors of having this old Greco-Roman understanding of the faith. We poor fundamentalists cannot be among the new kind of Christian until we have been enlightened to understand the Bible through an entirely new narrative structure. Only then will this all become clear. Until then, more to be pitied are we than any men.

Here, in *A New Kind of Christianity* it’s as if McLaren is screaming “I hate God!” at the top of his lungs. And swarms of Christians are looking at him with admiration and saying, “See how that guy loves God?” I don’t know what McLaren could do to make the situation more clear. In fact, his book is nearly indistinguishable from many of the de-conversion narratives that are all the rage today. Compare it with Bart Ehrman’s *God’s Problem* and you’ll see many of the same arguments and the same misgivings; you’ll find, though, that Ehrman is at least more honest. He at least has the integrity to walk away from faith altogether rather than reinventing God in his own image.

McLaren says he would prefer atheism over belief in the God so many of us see in Scripture. Well, he is not far off. This new kind of Extreme Makeover: God Edition Christianity is no Christianity at all. It is not a faith made in the image of Jesus Christ, but a faith made in the image of a man who despises God and who is hell-bent on dragging others along with him as he becomes his own god.

As Winston turned up the light, he saw that prostitute for what she really was. Here McLaren turns up the light and we see what his faith, what his Christianity, really is. We see it in all its toothless, caked-on horror. This new kind of Christianity is simply paganism behind a thick coating of false humility and biblical language. It is an expression of rebellion against God far more than it is a pursuit of new intimacy with the Creator.

And like Orwell's whore, many will go to this book seeking intimacy with God only to content themselves with rebellion against him. For each is satisfying in its own way.

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THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Apostles' Creed (Old Roman Form)

I believe in God the Father Almighty. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; [and] the resurrection of the flesh.

The Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such is also the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Spirit uncreate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal; just as there are not three uncreates or three infinities, but one uncreate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately to be both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both trinity and unity and unity in trinity must be worshipped. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity.

Who, although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of His humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead; at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved. Amen

The Definition of Chalcedon

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.