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THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

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To foster scholarly discussion of ideas among evangelical scholars relevant to the defense of the historic Christian Faith in accordance with the Doctrinal Statement of the Society.

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A Critique of Pascal's Wager Argument against Natural Theology

Douglas Groothuis

In this paper we will consider Pascal's objection that natural theology is doomed because the concept of God's infinity renders theistic proofs logically impossible.

The Role of Infinity in the Wager Argument

In the prologue to the wager argument, Pascal argues for the rational unknowability and undemonstrability of God by virtue of divine infinity. The overall strategy of the wager proper, which we will not flesh out, is essentially to render the existence of God unknowable through reason in order to set up a prudential calculation which favors belief over unbelief. Because "the finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite and becomes pure nothingness" so "it is with our mind before God."[1]

[1] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 418/233.

Before continuing with Pascal's argument, this phrase "the finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite" demands scrutiny. Pascal seems to mean that since the infinite is without limit it infinitely transcends or eclipses anything finite, no matter how great the finite might be. So, the finite when compared to the infinite becomes "pure nothingness." Pascal might want to say that it is comparatively "pure nothingness" because of the greatness of what it is being compared. But he cannot mean this "pure nothingness" literally, though, because something finite is still some (finite) thing, however disproportionate it might be with the infinite. It exists, and what exists is not nothing. Pascal could say that the distance or the discrepancy between the finite and the infinite is unlimited because of the nature of the infinite, but this still leaves the finite as more than "pure nothingness." In fact, ascribing the adjective "pure" to nothingness seems redundant or even wrongheaded. If the finite is "pure nothingness" when compared with the infinite, then what is the nonexistent when compared with the finite or with the infinite? Would it be an even "purer nothingness"? If so, nonsense is being multiplied. Nothingness is, it seems, an all-or-nothing concept that does not admit of degrees; neither can anything finite be nothingness, pure or otherwise.

Pascal goes on to say that we may know that the infinite exists, but we cannot know the nature of that which is infinite. This is shown by the example of an infinite number. Pascal says:

We know that the infinite exists without knowing its nature, just as we know that it is untrue that numbers are finite. Thus it is true that there is an infinite number, but we do not know what it is. It is untrue that it is even, untrue that it is odd, for by adding a unit it does not change its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is even or odd.[2]

Although Pascal doesn't develop the point, he seems to be saying that if we can form some concept of an infinite number—even though we can't say what it is--we can conceive of its existence; an infinite number is, then, logically possible, though mysterious. (We will take this up below after further developing his argument.) Elsewhere he says that "everything that is incomprehensible does not cease to exist."[3]

God, says Pascal, is "infinitely beyond our comprehension, since being indivisible and without limits, he bears no relation to us."[4] Therefore, we are "incapable of knowing either what he is or

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 149/430.

[4] Ibid., 418/233.

whether he is. That being so, who would dare to attempt an answer to the question? Certainly not we, who bear no relation to him"[5] Pascal means we are incapable of knowing God except by faith apart from reason. His tack is to reject proofs because they are conceptually impossible given the nature of their object. If we cannot conceptualize the infinite we cannot prove the infinite because we have no idea what we are proving. The finite cannot ascend by reason to the knowledge of the infinite because the disproportion between the finite and the infinite is too great.

But even though God is infinitely beyond our comprehension, Pascal still wants to affirm that an infinite God, like an infinite number, is not impossible to conceptualize in the most minimal manner—even if reason can neither fathom its nature nor prove its existence. Either God is, or he is not; but "reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong."[6] Like the infinite number, we can conceive of its existence because it is not logically impossible, but we are unable to fathom it. Unlike the infinite number, which presumably (but mysteriously) exists, we are unable to prove or disprove God's existence. But Pascal, nevertheless, thinks we can believe in God's existence even if it is beyond proof because what is incomprehensible may still exist. His

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

elaboration of divine infinity is meant to preclude proof, not render belief impossible. This concomitant dismissal of proof and retaining of belief will be disputed in a few pages after we further develop his argument.

Pascal then defends Christians who claim that reason cannot establish the existence or nature of God, because he believes such proof is impossible given the very notion of God's infinity. Nevertheless, the coin falls only one of two ways; God either exists or he does not.

Infinity and the Impossibility of Proof

Pascal's infinity argument implies a terminal epistemic agnosticism. The logical choice is a simple case of exclusive disjunction: either God exists or God does not exist. The coin has only two sides. But no evidence can be adduced on either side. We are at an absolute impasse. Pascal may have wanted to entice the most hardened religious skeptic here, one who would not find any theistic argument compelling or even suggestive. In this case, Pascal would have been granting for the sake of argument a premise which he himself did not hold. We cannot explore this in relation to the wager, but the a priori exclusion of natural theology on account of divine infinity is worth exploring in its own right.

Pascal's essential argument, then, runs as follows:

1. God is infinite.
2. Finite knowers cannot comprehend the infinite through reason.
3. We cannot prove what we cannot comprehend.
4. Therefore, we can neither prove nor disprove the infinite God's existence or know God's nature through reason.
5. Because of 4, Christians are not epistemically disadvantaged by the dearth of proofs; they could not be expected to prove the existence of an infinite God.

The natural theologian would be especially offended by this maneuver because conclusion 5 attempts to make the absence of proofs an epistemic virtue instead of a vice. But Pascal's argument, as stated above in lines 1-4, is valid whether or not the natural theologian would be satisfied with the epistemic implications of the conclusion. Should Pascal's argument succeed it would be a powerful a priori prohibition of natural theology because it eliminates any imperative to attempt theistic proofs. Premise 3 is not directly affirmed by Pascal, but seems to be assumed in his argument. We will grant premise 3 to Pascal for the time being (although we will later claim that it entails a problem) and pursue

the truth of premise 2 in order to determine whether his argument is sound.

Comprehending an Infinite Number

Pascal uses the example of an infinite number to establish two points: First, he wants to say that finite knowers cannot comprehend the infinite because of its mysterious properties. Second, he wants to argue nonetheless that one can at least formulate the concept of an infinite number—and so believe in its existence—even if one cannot comprehend it. He seems to be saying that something may be mysterious and opaque to reason, but still be logically possible. But Pascal's argument breaks down if the very idea of an infinite number dissolves upon closer inspection.

We have some notion of infinitude or limitlessness and we have some understanding of number. But less than a fruitful union occurs when the two are conjoined. Any possible number—say a positive integer—is always one integer less than a still higher integer; and that integer is one less than a still higher integer; ad infinitum. The process of progressive addition is infinite (hence ad infinitum) because it allows of an unlimited increase. But it is a confusion to speak of an infinite number (singular) because any specifiable integer is always a limitation or a demarcation in a series of which it is only a finite part. Therefore, there doesn't seem to be

an infinite number because the series doesn't allow an upper or maximal limit occupied by only one integer. We might be permitted to say that the set of positive integers is infinite, but any given number can never be infinite because it is always a limitation. Infinite series of numbers is one thing; an infinite number is another thing entirely—and something not philosophically helpful. Samuel Johnson made just this point in a slightly different but illuminating manner:

> Numeration is certainly infinite, for eternity might be employed in adding unit to unit, but every number is in itself finite, as the possibility of doubling it easily proves: besides, stop at what point you will, you find yourself as far from infinitude as ever.[7]

When Johnson speaks of "numeration" he is describing what I've called the process of progressive addition. He captures the finitude of any number not by specifying their place in a series as I've done, but by the interesting fact that they can be doubled and that any number is equally distance from infinitude.

If these reflections are correct, Pascal cannot use the mysterious properties of an infinite number as an analogy for the

[7] Samuel Johnson as quoted in D. Elton Trueblood, *A Philosopher's Way* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1978), 77.

mysterious properties of an infinite God. We cannot comprehend the end of a limitless series of numbers simply because it has no end. But we can comprehend the idea of the limitless series itself. And any given number can be comprehended.

The incoherence of Pascal's idea of an infinite number, it seems, does little to elucidate the meaning or bare possibility of an infinite God. He claims that it is an example of what we can believe in without comprehending. Yet if the concept of an infinite number is (as argued) itself a muddle, and there is no such thing, the example must fail. Of course, Pascal's entire argument does not rest on the comparison of God to an infinite number. But even if these criticisms fail to undermine Pascal's comparison, he still faces other stiff challenges.

For instance, it should be inquired whether it is possible to even believe in the existence of what is incomprehensible. Belief, if it is to make sense, requires a purported and comprehensible subject of that belief—otherwise nothing intelligible is signified by the belief itself. No one can believe that "green ideas sleep furiously" because that sentence is incomprehensible, despite its grammatical form; it is meaningless because it fails to single out a comprehensible subject available for assent. Pascal seems to have inadvertently perched himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he affirms that God is incomprehensible (in order to eliminate proof or disproof), this excludes belief itself; but this is just what he wants to

preserve—belief without proof. If he permits God to be comprehensible, this allows for belief but also introduces the possibility of proof and disproof, something Pascal earnestly wants to disallow.

The Theological Sense of Divine Infinity

Premise 2 states that finite knowers cannot comprehend the infinite through reason. This has been questioned by our discussion of infinity with respect to numbers. But Pascal also thinks that God's infinity, which is even more mysterious than that of numbers, renders God infinitely beyond our rational comprehension. Yet if divine infinity can be legitimately construed as more comprehensible than Pascal granted, it may not follow that finite knowers would be incapable of knowing God's nature and therefore incapable of either proving or disproving God's existence.

Since Pascal ultimately wanted to defend the biblical idea of God and not the "God of the philosophers," it seems out of character for him to appeal to such an abstruse notion of infinity in order to preclude proofs and commence his prudential wager argument. Pascal may be wanting to stress the uniqueness and transcendence of God such that the skeptic realizes that the epistemic procedures or requirements applied to other aspects of knowledge do not apply to

God. God, after all, is not an item of everyday experience as are material objects.

Nevertheless, a case could be made that the introduction of the term "infinite" in the manner proposed by Pascal tends to create a pseudo-problem because the God of the Bible is not presented as being infinite in the manner alluded to in Pascal's discussion of "infinite number." Pascal's own words should guide us here: "Anyone who wishes to give the meaning of Scripture without taking it from Scripture is the enemy of Scripture. St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* [III-27]."[8] In other words, let the Scriptures give the meaning of the word "God," not mathematical or philosophical speculation.

Pascal might respond that this fragment was meant to apply to believers engaged in biblical exegesis, and not to apply the task of persuading skeptics to wager on God. Further, a Christian philosopher is advised to use nontheological language to communicate Christianity to those outside its ranks. It is true that if one desires to communicate with those outside the religious ranks it would be appropriate to translate theological terms in ways that reach a secular audience. Believing philosophers of religion routinely do this. But if Pascal wants to present the idea of God to the skeptic in a secular manner, he should not misrepresent his own

[8] Pascal, Ibid., 251/900.

tradition's theology. The project of translation should not end in self-subversion. This is the concern to which I will now attend.

The New International Version of the Bible never translates any Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word as "infinity" or "infinite," although many passages speak of God's perfections and incomparability. The King James Version uses the word "infinite" only once to refer to God: "Great is the Lord. . . his understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). The significance is that God's knowledge is comprehensive and transcends what any human or every human could know. But Salomon Bochner notes that "the Old Testament exulted in the omnipotence of the Creator, but it did not initiate problems about the unboundedness of His power."[9] (This is also true of the New Testament.) For instance, when King David reflects on God's knowledge he says: "You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD" (Psalm 139:4). He also says, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them. Were I to count them they would outnumber the grains of sand" (Psalm 139:17, 18).

[9] Salomon Bochner, "Infinity," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Philip P. Wiener, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 4 vols. 2: 604.

To put it philosophically, for David, God knows all true propositions to be true. Put another way, he knows all that is logically possible to know. But, for David, this has nothing to do with God having no relation to us because of divine infinity. Rather, God's knowledge is without restrictions; ours is limited. David confesses that "such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain," but far from lapsing into epistemological despair, he says that God's thoughts (at least the ones he can fathom) are "precious" to him. No philosophically troublesome notion intrudes on David's reflection on God's supremacy in the area of divine knowledge.

The same situation applies to references concerning God's omnipotence and omnipresence. Jeremiah reflects on God as the Creator and exclaims: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:7). If God can create the universe, nothing can resist his power. Similarly, no place is foreign to the presence of God. Solomon exclaims, "The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I built!" (1 Kings 8:27). For the Apostle Paul, God's status as Creator also insures his noncontingency or aseity:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by

hands. And he is not served by anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:24-25).

Paul is explaining that since God created all things and transcends the human environment ("doesn't live in temples built by hands"), he requires no external assistance in any respect ("is not served by human hands"); on the contrary, he uniquely imparts life and existence to all creation. Although Paul doesn't use the philosophical term, he surely has noncontingency in mind, as opposed to the ontological status of the finite gods of Greek fascination.

The canonical writers marvel over God's supremacy but never take this to imply an absolute barrier between God and human knowledge of God. They do not worry over any philosophical implications of infinity (as employed by Pascal in a mathematical sense of an infinite number) because the concept itself is alien to their thinking. The whole prospect of comparing God to an abstract mathematical concept seems wrongheaded in principle and is nowhere suggested by the biblical writers, nor does it seem to be implied by any of their statements.[10]

[10] This differs from cases where biblical writers describe God in nonphilosophical ways that, nevertheless, can be translated into philosophical terms or that have philosophical implications.

Mathematical infinites, whatever they may be, have to do (roughly) with numerical series. They concern numerical quantities. Yet when we are speaking of a personal being, we are not speaking of a numerical units in a set. Instead of speaking of mathematical quantities we are speaking of a divine person with a determinate character. Thus the kinds of problems and paradoxes attending mathematical infinities seem to have little or no effect on the infinitude of God.[11] But in what manner could God rightly be considered infinite?

Divine Infinity: Adverbial Predication

It is often claimed that whether or not the biblical writers bring up philosophical problems associated with the knowledge of God, the knowledge of God would be impossible or unreliable given the supposed ontological discrepancy between God and humans. God is uncreated, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, perfectly good, etc., while humans have no such status. Yet we will argue

[11] This is not to say that philosophers haven't puzzled over supposed paradoxes resulting from a reflection on God's attributes, such as the paradox of the stone (can God make a stone too heavy for God to lift?). My point is that Pascal's invocation of the mathematically infinite at this point is illegitimate.

below that God's transcendence, when properly elaborated, need not exclude meaningful predication.

Many of the problems envisaged by Pascal and others seem to stem from their use of "infinite" as an imprecise adjective to modify God. To say that "God is infinite" is a very general and abstract description because we have not qualified or specified to what the infinity refers (beside God). The word "infinite" can be applied in any number of ways. We have already questioned Pascal's use of the term for God which trades on a dubious mathematical analogy. In light of our previous discussion, it makes more sense and is more consonant with Judeo-Christian theism to use "infinite" adverbially, rather than adjectivally. We can say that God is infinitely powerful, infinitely just, infinitely loving, etc. Construed in this way, "infinite" does not denote an attribute simpliciter but qualifies all the divine attributes. Similarly, if we referred to someone as "an amazing person" we would know little about that person because we could not determine in what sense he was amazing. Is he amazingly strong, amazingly beautiful, amazingly weak, etc.? But if he is amazingly intelligent we begin to understand something of the person. The generic adjective when applied without qualification directly to the noun God is

descriptively inadequate; the adverbial qualification of the adjective gives the determinative meaning to the noun in question.[12]

I will henceforth use "adverbially infinite" to mean a particular specification of divine attributes; but it is granted that this meaning could also be rendered adjectivally by saying that "God's mercy is infinite" or "God's power is infinite" because these two sentences express, respectively, the same propositions expressed in the following two sentences: "God is infinitely merciful" and "God is infinitely powerful." What we want to rule out is simply an unqualified adjectival reference of the noun God as in: "God is infinite."[13] To this end, and for convenience sake, we will speak of adverbial infinity to refer to what was discussed above.

Anselmian Infinity: Maximal Greatness

[12] This is not to say that philosophers haven't puzzled over supposed paradoxes resulting from a reflection on God's attributes, such as the paradox of the stone: Can God make a stone too heavy for God to lift? My point is that Pascal's invocation of the mathematically infinite at this point is illegitimate.

[13] See D. W. D. Shaw, *Who is God?* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 60f; quoted in Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976-82) 1: 232.

If we can give some determinate meaning to God's infinity without metaphysically enervating the classical understanding of the divine attributes, then the idea of God as infinite need not rule out a proof for his existence. This counters premise 2 of Pascal's argument. We have already tried to give a more determinative meaning to the divine infinity through adverbial predication, but more work needs to be done.

God has been traditionally understood by those reflecting on the biblical materials, especially in the Anselmian tradition, as infinite in the sense of being the superlative or maximal Being who possesses the sum of all perfections, moral and metaphysical, to the highest degree logically possible. In Anselm's famous words from the Proslogion, God is a being "greater than which cannot be conceived."[14]

When Anselm is explaining the concept "greater than which cannot be conceived" he doesn't directly refer to God's infinity, although he uses the word elsewhere when he speaks of being "overwhelmed by [God's] infinity" and by the "largeness of the [divine] light."[15] In these cases he is certainly speaking of a being "greater than which cannot be conceived," that is, the greatest

[14] Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. II in Saint Anselm: *Basic Writings*, translated by S. N. Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1966), 7.

[15] Ibid., ch. XVI, 22.

possible being, a being Anselm believes must exist given the very concept of God. How does Anselm, then, combine the notion of infinity and what can be called maximal greatness? Although Anselm doesn't specifically articulate this relationship, his reflections suggest a likely and credible construal. For God to be the greatest conceivable or possible being God must be adverbially infinite in all the dimensions discussed above. If a being was anything less than infinitely good, powerful, or knowledgeable, we could easily conceive of a being of greater power; that is, one who possessed adverbial infinity in every possible dimension. But then the former being would be metaphysically and theologically disadvantaged with respect to the latter and could not be considered the greatest conceivable being. This *reductio ad absurdum* argument eliminates anything less than the possession of adverbial infinity in every divine aspect.

Therefore, for Anselm (and other classical theists) God's infinity means that: God knows all truths (it is inconceivable to know more); is able to perform any logically possible action (it is inconceivable to be stronger); is dependent on no other being for his existence or continuation or execution of his plans (it is inconceivable to be more independent); is everywhere present (it is inconceivable to be more available or able to act at any given point at any given time); and is totally and supremely good (it is inconceivable to be morally superior). I will be assuming that the

Anselmian tradition is fundamentally correct in its conception of God as the greatest possible being.[16]

Divine Actions as Expressions of Adverbial Infinity

To illustrate these maximal properties or attributes, the Scriptures give accounts of God acting in extraordinary ways. God reveals through his prophets and apostles what is normally unknowable by mere humans (expressing omniscience); he performs actions impossible for humans such as parting the Red Sea to insure his people's release from unjust bondage (expressing omnipotence and perfect goodness). I say that these actions "express" (rather than "demonstrate") omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness because in these kinds of examples the accounts of divine action underdetermine the attributes in question. But this is only to be expected. Neither omniscience nor omnipotence can be infallibly inferred from any finite set of observations because omniscience means unlimited knowledge and omnipotence means unlimited power. A mere human could never observe everything an unlimited God might do (to establish omnipotence) or discover everything that an unlimited God might know (to establish omniscience). Human

[16] It should be noted that the employment of Anselm's maximality categories doesn't demand that the ontological argument itself succeeds (although I think it does, in both of its formulations).

finitude in the face of unlimited knowledge or power eliminates this outright. Nor does the account of God delivering his people from Egypt or any other account in Israel's history prove that God is perfectly good. But these scriptural accounts are understood by the writers as examples of the actions of an almighty God. Because God achieves what no other being could achieve and because God declares himself to be Almighty, the biblical writers present God as the "Almighty" and interpret his great deeds as actions performed by omnipotence. For this reason they do not present God's actions as those of a very powerful being who falls something short of being all-powerful.

The biblical reports are logically compatible with God's adverbial infinity because an omnipotent or infinitely powerful God should be expected to be able to divide vast bodies of water, among other things. However, the reports fail to prove God's adverbial infinity. Similarly, the confession that God created the world and is therefore "almighty" provides a vivid sense of divine power as the universe-maker, but does not prove the point philosophically. The biblical writers assume that God created all things and understand this to be an indication of his unlimited power. They do not argue that God's creation of the world proves omnipotence.

The biblical idea of unlimited power is illustrated or indicated in an account from Genesis. God appears to a ninety-nine year old Abraham and declares, "I am God Almighty; walk before

me and be blameless. I will confirm by covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your number" (Gen. 17:1-2). God declares, as it were, his infinite power by calling himself "God Almighty," but this power is to be expressed through making the aged Abraham the father of many nations and his wife Sarah a new mother at the age of ninety. After Sarah laughs at the idea of conceiving in her dotage, God rhetorically inquires, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" The event illustrates just what it means for God to be almighty: two senior citizens will be miraculously enlisted to propagate (literally) God's purposes.

The faithful hear the declaration that God is almighty and then witness what they are told to take as an expression of almightiness. The assertion by God that he is almighty becomes their interpretive principle for viewing and understanding the following abnormal or extraordinary events. The believers are not inferring that God is almighty from these mighty acts because all that could be inferred would be that God possessed the power requisite for these acts. An almighty power which exceeds the power needed for these events would not have been demonstrated.

These observations show, I think, that an infinite God need not be understood as having no intelligible or coherent relation to finite beings. Biblically understood, God, the infinite being, reveals himself as one who transcends the powers of finite humans, and this revelation expresses (even if it does not prove) God's infinity. The

examples of divine action given above show that one can speak meaningfully about God's infinity through references to God's actions in the world as they are explained in Scripture. Nothing in what has been said commits one to admit the truth of these biblical accounts. They are enlisted to clarify the theological notion of divine infinity. The issue of truth surfaces later in the chapter when we address the matter of theistic proofs.

Yet if, as Pascal claims, an infinite God bears no logical relation to finite humans, we have not a clue how to describe God at all. No divine predicates are appropriate if God is infinitely beyond our comprehension. Or we might just as easily say that any predicate is as good as any other (except for the predicate "finite"). As mentioned earlier, if this is the case it is difficult to make sense out of even believing in God. We need some intelligible description in order to understand precisely what it is we are believing. Pascal's fascination with the mathematically infinite with respect to an infinite number seems here to imply an impermeable epistemic barrier between humans and God--and one that he, as a Christian philosopher, ought not labor to build.

If God's nature is in principle unknowable by reason, then no proof for God's existence is possible, simply because we can never know what we are trying to prove in the first place, let alone whether the proof is successful. An argument with no intelligible conclusion is no argument. The argument could never begin, just as

Alice in Wonderland could never successfully hunt the wild snark because she was never told what to look for (besides the fact that it was called a "snark").

Divine Infinity and the Exclusion of Attributes

The orthodox predicates of God also exclude attributes not fitting a superlative being. This exclusionary function is, in fact, a requirement of intelligible assertion. Coherent statements need to pick their referents out of the crowd and so exclude nonreferents. If I say that Babe Ruth was primarily a great homerun hitter, this excludes him from being predominantly a singles hitter like Pete Rose. In the case of God, being omniscient (infinitely knowledgeable) excludes ignorance; being omnipotent (infinitely powerful) excludes impotence; being omnipresent (infinitely available to act at any given place—an entailment of omnipotence) excludes being out of touch with any aspect of creation; being omnibenevolent (infinitely good) excludes evil. The adverbial use of infinity eliminates attributes which contradict the adjectives they modify.

God's adverbial infinity cannot be understood as the possession of all possible attributes, but rather the possession of all the attributes of divinity as stipulated in the biblical accounts and as articulated in orthodox theology. This distances the Judeo-Christian

view from that of Spinoza who affirmed a pantheistic deity who possessed an infinite number of attributes, of which only two are knowable: thought and extension.[17] This is antithetical to the biblical view that God has a determinate character which excludes certain attributes such as spatial extension.

God's adverbial infinity, as traditionally conceived, need not entail an infinite epistemic chasm between God and humanity if infinity is understood as the possession of divine moral and metaphysical attributes that are expressed and explained through the biblical accounts. God should not be understood as being a part of the creation or as being ignorant, weak, or immoral—all adjectives of deficiency. Any being possessing any of these attributes is not God, however exalted it may be in other respects.

In this sense, God's infinity (adverbially conceived) has its "limits." But here the word "limits" really means demarcation or definition, not deficiency or diminution in any respect. That God is personal as opposed to being impersonal is not a limitation; rather, being personal simply excludes being impersonal. God's attributes circumscribe or delineate what is meant by "God." (To say that Michael Jordan never played three bad basketball games in a row is not a limitation; it is rather a specification of athletic excellence.)

[17] See Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982), 31.

While surpassing human knowledge in many ways, the God of revelation is presented as having a determinate and describable character.

First- and Second-Order Assertions about God

Perhaps we can better understand intelligible statements about an infinite being by invoking the idea of first-order and second-order assertions. I can make a number of intelligible first-order assertions about the constitution and functions of a commercial jet aircraft. I know the number of engines mounted on a Boeing 747, that the pilot sometimes uses the automatic pilot, and that the loud sound before landing is the landing gear being engaged. Nevertheless, I know little about the actual workings of a jet aircraft. About these mysteries I can assert "I know there are four engines" (first-order), but I don't know how they work (second-order); I know when the landing gear is engaged (first-order), but I don't know how it works (second-order); etc. The second-order assertions exhibit my ignorance, but in the context of my knowledge. In other words, although I acknowledge the limitations of my understanding of a jet aircraft, I do nothing to thereby abdicate all claims to having any understanding of a jet aircraft.

Second-order assertions may also be understood as excluding certain things. My (second-order) assertion of ignorance about

certain aspects of X, Y, and Z does not mean that concerning those aspects I believe anything is possible. Some statements are excluded. I know that the engine of a 747 works, although I do not know how; but I do know that the engine is not run by a team of pygmies on treadmills. That is ruled out. With respect to God, I can understand what it means for God to be noncontingent and omniscient without knowing how this could be (besides knowing that only a divine being has these attributes); and I can understand that God's noncontingency rules out all ontological dependence on any other beings. I also understand that omniscience rules out all ignorance of any sort.

A theist can say that revelation discloses certain attributes of God which are intelligible (because expressed in the scriptural accounts), but that God still remains incomprehensible in many ways to a finite mind. I can't know precisely what I don't comprehend about God, but I can know that there are some things I don't comprehend. By being partial, my knowledge can encompass mysteries. The Old and New Testaments affirm that God is a personal agent who is like a father, a warrior, a shepherd, a friend, a counselor, etc. If we want to understand what it means for God to be like a father, we can refer to passages that speak of his care and provision for Israel and refer to his actions which exemplify this. If we want to understand what God's adverbial infinity or supremacy means to the biblical writers we can examine the conceptual

framework in which God expresses what is understood to be his unmatched (or infinite) attributes. The theological meaning of God as infinite is found in the biblical treatment, not in Pascal's very suspect mathematical analogy.[18]

Inconceivable and Conceivable Infinity

We can summarize the intelligibility of the divine infinity by comparing two somewhat similar, but crucially different, statements about God's transcendence. Pascal is eager to defend God's transcendence to the degree that proofs are impossible: they cannot reach their object because of its exalted state as infinite.[19] Metaphysically, he seems to be saying:

> M: God is completely dissimilar to anything finite because he is infinite.

This metaphysical affirmation certainly does defend the radical transcendence of God, but at the expense of meaningful predication about God--since we are left only with utterly inadequate finite

[18] The above discussion was prompted in part by Ninian Smart, *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1970), 51f.

[19] The general impetus for the following distinctions between metaphysics and epistemology in relation to God comes from Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 19-21; although I have adapted it for my purposes.

concepts. Given his understanding of infinity the following epistemological statement would follow:

E: God is infinitely beyond our rational comprehension.

We can call this position inconceivable infinity. When it is endorsed, we can grant that such a being could neither be proved nor even believed in, as we argued above.

But another way of defending transcendence entails no such expense in meaningful predication. As opposed to M, consider this metaphysical statement:

M-1: God is not completely similar to anything finite because he is adverbially infinite in the ways specified in Scripture.

This affirmation preserves the transcendence of God because it maintains that God is distinct from any finite creation. From this affirmation the following epistemological statement is entailed which differs significantly from E:

E-1: God, who is adverbially infinite, is not beyond our rational comprehension, although certain divine attributes are beyond our imagination.

E-1 follows because, as argued above, God's adverbial infinity is intelligible through the biblical accounts. Furthermore, the concept of adverbial infinity with respect to divine power or divine

knowledge is not incomprehensible, even though finite knowers could never imagine or picture such powers. This is why: While I can easily visualize a triangle, square or pentagon, I cannot visualize a chiliagon (a thousand-sided figure). Nevertheless, I can form a perfectly intelligible concept of a chiliagon because I understand what it means for a figure to have sides and I understand what is meant by a thousand. If I want to visualize to aid my understanding I can simply multiply the four sides of a square that I can visualize by 250 (or by some similar procedure combining visualization and multiplication). The same procedure holds true with respect to infinite power. I cannot picture omnipotence but I do know what power is and can picture actions performed by exercising power--say, the muscle power used by a man raking leaves. I can then multiply the notion of power by infinity in order to comprehend (but not imagine) omnipotence. The same kind of methodology is available for conceptualizing omniscience by applying the concept of infinity to knowledge. It can be argued that one cannot picture or visualize anything without limit because the imagination always frames or limits its pictures; but this hardly rules out the coherent and intelligible concept of infinite knowledge or power.

We can call the position so far outlined conceivable infinity. Isaiah speaks of God's transcendence in ways compatible with E-1: "'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One" (Isa. 40:25). Nothing in creation is God's equal; nothing

created is infinitely good, wise, or powerful. Yet this statement also preserves the possibility of finding some similarities between God and creation. It is also assumed that we can conceptualize God as unique. Earlier in Isaiah chapter forty-five this is affirmed of the unequaled one: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart" (Isa. 45:11). Since something is known of finite goodness, wisdom, and power (as with a strong and caring shepherd) which serves as a basis of comparison with the infinite God. We then take those known qualities and multiply them, as it were, by infinity in order to comprehend the concept of God's adverbial infinity.

Therefore, Pascal is not warranted in precluding theistic proofs because the theological and biblical understanding of divine infinity as articulated above--which, we have argued, he himself as a Christian ought to have faithfully represented--is a good deal more precise and comprehensible than his mathematical presentation would have it. On this basis, then, we can successfully reinterpret divine infinity such that premise 1 of Pascal's argument is understood as not contaminating the idea of divine infinitude as unintelligible (premise 2) and therefore incapable of proof (premise 3 and conclusion 4). If we can speak intelligibly about the character of God, a proof for God's existence is not thereby ruled out on the basis that we must remain ignorant of what we have set out to prove. If we can have some understanding of what an infinite being might

be like, and what actions would express that being at work, this eliminates one significant refutation of the possibility of theistic proofs (although other challenges are possible). This is not to sweep aside the many challenges to the coherence of religious language, but it is to show that the notion of God's infinity, when suitably qualified, need not arrest the kind of meaningful predication which itself is a prerequisite for the possibility of proving God's existence.

The Revelation of God: The Theanthropic Man and Book

Bill Roach

Introduction

Karl Barth, like most contemporary theologians, is Christo-centric in his approach.[1] That is, his theology found its focal point in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Methodologically Barth was dialectical in his approach. That caused him to create a necessary development whenever the flow of thought seemingly creates a contradiction between a thesis and antithesis. This necessarily created a new position not espoused in the history of thought. This dialectical approach can be observed in three of Barth's Christological positions: 1) Creedal Christology by creating synthesis between Alexandrian and Antiochian Christology; 2) Protestant Christology by creating a synthesis between a Lutheran and Calvinist understanding of the Lords Supper; 3)

[1] Ninian Smart, *Karl Barth* in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Vol. 1, 2nd ed. Donald M. Borchert, editor (Farmington Hills: Thomas Gale, 2006), 478.

Anthropological Christology by creating a synthesis between the sinless and sinful Christ.

Barth's revelational Christology and Bibliology taught a systematic unity and relationship between the incarnate personal Word of God and the propositional word of God.[2] This paper is going to argue that there is theological precedence to claim that Barth's dialectical Christology informed his Bibliology, laying the methodological ground necessary to substantiate the neo-orthodox understanding of the incarnational analogy, which affirms the sinfulness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. This paper will demonstrate this thesis by exploring: 1) Methodology and Christology: Barth's Innovation of Dialectical Christology; 2) Doctrinal Christology: The Systematic Nature of Christology; 3) Revelational Christology: The Living and Propositional Word of God.

[2] Note: This paper will properly employ Barth's distinction between the Word of God (Jesus) and the Word of God (Bible) when it is appropriate to understand Barth.

Methodological Christology: Barth's Innovative Dialectical Christology[3]

Theological method is essential to a person's doctrine. In his book *Proving Doctrine*, David H. Kelsey attempts to understand the various uses of Scripture in modern theology. While many conservative evangelicals would disagree with many of his conclusions, they can agree with the claim: "That sort of 'theological methodology' is at once part of Christian theology and yet logically prior to systematic theology."[4] The point being that a person's systematic theology is logically grounded in their theological method, and in order to understand a particular theologian they must understand and interpret that author according to their theological method.

The *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* includes a section titled "Interpreting Barth."[5] The authors confess that many

[3] Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[4] David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 6. See also: David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003); Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations In Christology.* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 8-33.

[5] John Webster, *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

theologians have noticed a development in Barth's theology. In one place Barth seems to affirm position 'X' and in another place he affirms position 'Y.' Webster states, "Barth's central role in the new trend which came to be called 'dialectical theology' demanded much of his energy and took him all over Germany, bringing him into alliance with figures such as Bultmann, Brunner and Gogarten."[6] Barth used this method to make syncretistic statements, balancing his theology by affirming apparently contradictory propositions. When applied to his Christology the *Cambridge Companion* states, "One point, however, has been almost universally overlooked. Barth is probably the first theologian in the history of Christian doctrine who alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochian' idiom."[7]

The dialectical method found its roots in Immanuel Kant's Transcendental Dialectic. Kant set out to affirm four sets of thesis and antithesis, but he did not resolve the dialectic of the antinomies with a synthesis.[8] It was his successor Johann Gottlieb Fichte who, in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wisenschaftslehre*, first introduced

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] Ibid, 130.

[8] See Graham H. Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1962); John E. Llewelyn, "Dialectical and Analytical Opposites," in *Kant-Studien* 55 (1964), 171-174.

into German philosophy the framed triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. It was followed by Friedrich Schelling, not by G. W. F. Hegel. Fichte did not claim that the antithesis could be deduced from the thesis; nor, did the synthesis achieve anything more than the uniting what both the thesis and antithesis had established.[9]

Contrary to popular opinion, Hegel was not the first individual to affirm a dialectical method. In fact, he did not actually use the terms of the triad. This method finds its roots in Plato's *Parmenides* and in the notion of "world process" in the thoughts of Heraclitus and the Neoplatonist Proclus.[10] What was new in Hegel's philosophy was the idea of a necessary movement. Though a formal contradiction could not be found in thought, nature, theology or society, the conceptual inadequacies were considered by Hegel as a leading necessity to further a phase of development in philosophical ideas. The impact this had upon later German dialectical theology is that when contradictions (not necessarily formal contradictions) are

[9] Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel,* 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1921-1924).

[10] Richard Robinsons, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1941; 2nd ed., Oxford Clarendon Press, 1953); James Adam, *The Republic of Plato*, Vol. II (U.K.: Cambridge, 1902; reissued, 1963), 168-179; Aristotle, *Topica,* translated by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge in *The Words of Aristotle,* Vol. I (Oxford, 1928); Ernst Kapp, *Greek Foundations of traditional Logic* (New York: Columbia Press, 1942); and Friedrich Solmsen, *Die Entwicklung der Aristotelischen Logik und Rhetorik* (Berlin, 1929).

discovered, inevitably the flow of thought necessitates a further development in ideas.[11] In particular, the dialectical method allowed for Barth to create a necessary development in theological Christology. *The Cambridge Companion* states:

> But by speaking now in an 'Alexandrian' idiom, and now again in an 'Antiochian' idiom, by switching back and forth between them dialectically, Barth hoped to provide as descriptively as adequate an account as might be possible of an event that was, by definition, inherently ineffable. The reason why a non-Chalcedonian Christology has been imputed to Barth, one way or the other, would seem to be rooted mainly in a failure to appreciate that he employs a dialectical strategy of juxtaposition.[12]

From this brief survey it should be clear that Barth's dialectical methodology is the framework for understanding his systematic theology, including his doctrinal Christology.

[11] See John M. E. McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic* (U.K.: Cambridge, 1896); and G. R. G. Mure, *An Introduction to Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

[12] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 132.

Doctrinal Christology: The Systematic Nature of Christology

Karl Barth was known for his ability to synthesize all of the disciplines of theology. He was very much aware of the creedal traditions within Christendom. In particular, those pertaining to and affecting Christology. In each of these respects Barth strategically worked out a dialectical method in his theology. This section will demonstrate that Barth's dialectic was applied to three areas of Christology, which later influenced his understanding of Bibliology and the incarnational analogy. The three areas to be explained are: 1) The Creedal Barth: Innovative Dialectical Christology; 2) The Protestant Barth: Christology and Sacramentology; 3) The Anthropological Barth: The Sinless and Sinful Humanity of Christology.

The Creedal Barth: *Innovative Dialectical Christology*

Many contemporary Barthian commentators debate Barth's Christological position. Some argue that he was Chalcedonian, others Alexandrian, and a third group who consider him an Antiochian.[13] The *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* states,

[13] Warren Frederich Groff, "*The Unity of the Person of Christ in Contemporary Theology"* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1954), 172, 209, 235-43; and William Richard Barr, *"The Enactment of the Person of*

"When Barth's Christology has been classified as other than Chalcedonian, it is alleged that he succumbs to one or another of these tendencies or extremes [Alexandrian or Antiochian]."[14] If it is correct that Barth taught a dialectical method would influence his creedal Christology. Hence, an interpreter would be warranted to claim that Barth was neither an Alexandrian nor an Antiochian, but adhered unto some form of a dialectical Chalcedonianism.

Alexandrian (Docetism)

One of the primary authors who considers Barth to be Alexandrian in his character is Charles T. Waldrop. In his book, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Characters*, he set out to demonstrate from the very beginning [that], "The principle part of this book is to demonstrate that Barth's Christology is predominantly Alexandrian rather than Antiochian in character."[15]

Christ: the Relation of Conceptions of Christ's Person and Work in Some Twentieth Century Christological Discussions" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1969.

[14] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 129.

[15] Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 1985), 1. Other authors within the Alexandrian tradition include: Walter Guenther, *Die Christologie Karl Barth* (Mainz: Gutenberg Universitaet, 1954), 27; Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 185-86; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man,* 2nd ed., trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 33.

Waldrop set out to prove this thesis by arguing for the position of the essential divinity and unity of person in Jesus Christ.[16] He claims that Barth was Alexandrian in his thought,[17] because he taught that Jesus Christ was directly identical with the eternal Son of God, divine by nature,[18] and in his second stage of existence he united to himself a human nature which is other than a complete person,[19] and that the title "Jesus" and its various uses denotes that he was a divine person, not merely a human person.[20] Waldrop is aware of the Antiochian interpretations of Barth[21] and claims:

> The features of Barth's thought which appear to support an Antiochian interpretation can be accounted for within an Alexandrian framework, while the reference is not always the case. For example, as the Antiochians emphasize, Jesus Christ is the form of revelation, and therefore he is, in some respects, distinct from God. Yet, as the Alexandrian perspective maintains, this distinctness from God does not

[16] Waldrop, *Cambridge Companion*, 87-127.

[17] Ibid., 85-86.

[18] Ibid., 88-101.

[19] Ibid., 106-128.

[20] Ibid., 106-128.

[21] Ibid., 19-85.

> preclude the essential divinity of the man, a fact which the Antiochian view can scarcely incorporate.[22]

Waldrop considers this interpretation of Barth to be correct because it properly accounts for the divinity of Christ. Furthermore, it is able to account for Barth's essential theology in the *Church Dogmatics.* In particular, this is the case pertaining to Barth's Christo-centric focus in his theology relating to the crucial doctrines pertaining to revelation, the trinity, election, and reconciliation.[23] Waldrop and others are not unaware of the problems of Barth's Alexandrian Christology, which is why there is the counterpart known as Barth's Antiochian Christology.[24]

Antiochian (Nestorian)

As a result of the prevailing controversies in the fourth century it became a creedal standard to affirm a two-nature Christology. Some authors who affirm the Antiochian interpretation of Barth are individuals such as John McTyre, Henry Bouillard, Fred Klooser, and Regin Prenter.[25] Donald Macleod in his book *The*

[22] Ibid., 164.

[23] Ibid., 165-172.

[24] Ibid., 172-177.

[25] Jones, Paul Dafydd. *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2011); McTyre, John. *The Shape of Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 154;

Person of Christ, explains that standard orthodoxy taught that Christ was truly God and perfectly man, and that it was the task of the theologian of the fifth century to debate: "What is the relation between these two natures? Do they represent separate persons or agencies? Are they mixed or comingled into one person? Or have they been fused together to produce a *tertium quid,* neither human nor divine?"[26] Macleod defines Nestorianism in these words: "The first phase of the controversy began with the emergence in Constantinople of a school of thought which, allegedly, so stressed the humanity of Christ and so distinguished it from his divinity as to convey the impression that the Mediator was two separate persons, one the Son of God and the other the Son of Man."[27]

The discussion about the unity of the person of Christ is understood by the way each proponent understood the identity of

Bouillard, Henry. *Karl Barth: Parole de Dieu et Existence Humaine*, 2 vols. (Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1957), 1:122; Prenter, Regin. *Karl Barths Umbildung der traditionelle Zweinaturlehre in lutherischer Beleuchtung," Studia Theologica* 11, Fasc. 1 (1957); Klooser, Fred. H. *The Significance of Barth's Theology: An Appraisal, with Special Reference to Election and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 94-95.

[26] Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 181

[27] Ibid.

Jesus Christ.[28] Waldrop elaborates upon the Antiochian-Nestorian tradition by claiming:

> The Antiochian tradition considers Jesus Christ to be a human person distinct from God. Therefore, he can be said to be divine only because of his relation to God, not his essence. The unity of Jesus with God is a fellowship of a divine person with a human person, established by God's grace. The name "Jesus" denotes a human person, not a divine one.[29]

Those who interpret Barth in an Antiochian manner believe they are justified because they claim that he advocates that Christ is divine only in relation and not in essence. Antiochain thought, while arguing that it is the Word who acted in the incarnation, has tended to interpret "becoming" as an "assuming." In that way, it was able to avoid the implication that the Word transformed into something other than his divine nature during the act of the incarnation. The

[28] W. Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate* (New York: Harper, 1959), 12-13. Pittenger makes it clear that he prefers the Antiochian view.

[29] Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology*, 85.

concept of "assumption" by God the Word plays a crucial role in his theology.[30] [31]

Dialectical-Chalcedonianism

Standard orthodox Christology in the Western Church has been Chalcedonian Christology, because it was considered to properly understand and communicate the two natures of Christ. It sets the parameters for theological discourse, keeping theologians away from the heretical positions affirmed in the previous

[30] G. Wingren, God and Human in Karl Barth (Gott und Mensch bei Karl Barth), *Studia Theologica* 1 (1948), 31-32. Barth *Church Dogmatics:* 1/2, p. 159-160.

[31] Ken Kantzer disagrees with this interpretation and claims: The formula "Mary, Mother of God" Barth defends as a safeguard against Nestorianism. The phrase, however, is not particularly happy because it has led in modern times to the Roman church's glorification of Mary. The virgin birth, therefore, the reality of which points to the lack of all human work in salvation, has led by Roman exaltation of Mary to a stress upon human participation in salvation. The reality of the human nature of Christ is guaranteed by the virgin birth but also by the clear gospel record of the full humanity of Christ. All forms of Docetism and Apollinarianism Barth repudiates as doing less than justice to the Biblical records. The humanity he ascribes to Jesus Christ, however, is no "speculative humanity." Man does not first figure out what is humanity and then discover Jesus Christ to be that thing, but he discovers in Jesus Christ what is really humanity (see: Kenneth Kantzer, "The Christology of Karl Barth," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 1.2 (Spring 1958), 25). See: *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 138, 139, and 140; I, 2, 172, ff; and IV, 1, 131.

generations.[32] Soteriologically, Chalcedon recognized that only in the proper understanding of Christ's two natures is he able to be our cure for sin.[33] But this raises the difficulty of the aforementioned discussion, is Barth Alexandrian, Antiochian or Chalcedonian? When Barth's Christology has been labeled as anything other than Chalcedonian, it is alleged that he is either one of the two extremes between Alexandrian or Antiochian.[34] The *Cambridge Companion* to Barth makes an interesting comment when it states: "One point, however, has been almost universally overlooked. Barth is probably the first theologian in the history of Christian doctrine who alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochian' idiom."[35] Furthermore:

> But by speaking now in an 'Alexandrian' idiom, and now again in an 'Antiochian' idiom, by switching back and forth

[32] Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh—A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 41-88.

[33] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 127. For others who think that Barth was Chalcedonian see: John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 16-18; Berthold Klappert, *Die auferweckung des Gekreuzigten; Der Ansatz der Christologie Karl Barths im Zusammenhang der Christologie der Gegenwart* (Neukirchen, 1971), 3-5; and Daniel Lee Deegan, "*The Doctrine of the Person of Christ in the Theology of Karl Barth"* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1958), 75-81.

[34] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 129.

[35] Ibid., 130.

> between them dialectically, Barth hoped to provide as descriptively as adequate an account as might be possible of an event that was, by definition, inherently ineffable. The reason why a non-Chalcedonian Christology has been imputed to Barth, one way or the other, would seem to be rooted mainly in a failure to appreciate that he employs a dialectical strategy of juxtaposition.[36]

This has caused people to wonder if Barth intentionally left theologians affirming both positions. Methodologically this does not seem to be the case because according to the dialectic he was not affirming one position to the absolute negation of the other. Instead, Barth affirmed both of them, even in what may seem to be a formal contradiction, because it furthered the necessary movement in the dialectic. In *Church Dogmatics* Barth claimed:

> The christologies of Alexandria and Antioch, Barth stated, '. . . mutually supplement and explain each other and to that extent remain on peaceful terms.' 'We are dealing with testimonies to one reality, which though contrary to one another, do not dispute or negate one another.' In their original New Testament forms, 'their relations are so interlocked, that if we are to understand one we must first do

[36] Ibid., 132.

> justice to one other and *vice versa*'. Certainly no 'systematic unity of principle' can be found that will eliminate the antithesis at stake in saying that Jesus was 'complete in deity' and 'complete in humanity' at the same time.[37]

Barth further applied this method to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Thoughtful readers, whether agreeing with Barth's method or not, can at least appreciate the innovation he brought into the theological discussion by emphasizing the traditional concepts of Chalcedonian Christology, while contemporizing the consequences of the incarnate Word of God.

The Protestant Barth- *Christology and Sacramentology*

Historical Background

During the Reformation there arose a sharp division between the Calvinists and the Lutherans concerning the topic of the *communication idiomata* ("communication of attributes") in respect to the Lord's Supper. If scholars were to examine this debate closely, they would quickly realize that the root of this debate was

[37] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 24. Also see: Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 132-133.

not so much a sacramental issues as a Christological issue. Donald Macleod states, "There remains a further question. Granted that the attributes of both natures are communicated to the person, can we also say that the attributes of one nature are communicated to the other?"[38] Both Luther and Calvin rejected the Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper, the Roman doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Borrowing from the metaphysical categories of Aristotle, Rome distinguished between an entity's substance and its *accidens*, an object's external, perceivable qualities. These qualities indicate what something appears to be on the surface. Beneath the surface or beyond the physical level is a thing's real substance, its very essence. For Aristotle the *accidens* always flow from the essence. One cannot have the substance of an entity and the *accidens* of another. Rome argued for a double miracle. The substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of Christ's body and blood while the *accidens* of bread and wine remain. The substance of Christ's body and blood are now present without the *accidens* of his body and blood, while the *accidens* of bread and wine are present without the substance of bread and wine.[39]

[38] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 196.

[39] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), chaps. 61-69 (252-271).

Luther argued that this double miracle was unnecessary. He insisted that the body and blood of Christ are truly present but they are supernaturally in, under, and through the bread and the wine. Luther was still left with the problem that the *accidens* of Christ's body and blood remain hidden to the senses. The Lutheran view is that Christ is present "with" (*con*) the elements of bread and wine. This view is often known as consubstantiation.[40] Calvin also insisted on the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In dealing with those who reduce the sacrament to a mere symbol, Calvin insisted on the "substantial" presence of Christ. While debating with the Lutherans, however, he avoided the term *substantial*, which may have been understood to mean "physical." Calvin affirmed the term when *substantial* meant "real," but rejected it when it meant "physical."[41]

[40] *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. III. *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, edited by Philip Schaff and Revised by David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), 90. Luther states, "What is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given unto us Christians to eat and to drink, as it was instituted by Christ himself." *Was ift das Sacrament des Altars? Antwort: Esift der wahre Leib und Blut unfers herrn Jefu Chrifti, unter dem Brot und Wein, uns Chriften zu effen und zu trinfen von Chrifto felbft eingefeßt.*

[41] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), Bk. IV. Chap. XVII (555-605).

For Calvin the issue was Christological. He denied Christ's physical, localized presence in the Lord's Supper, because body and blood properly belong to his human nature, not his divine nature. For Christ's physical body and blood to be present at more than one place at the same time, his body would need to be omnipresent. The Lord's Supper is celebrated at the same time in many places of the world. How can the physical body and blood of Jesus be present in all of these places? Calvin answered this by arguing that the person of Christ can be and is omnipresent. But his omnipresence is in his divine nature in that omnipresence is a divine attribute. Christ is currently absent from us in his physical body, but present with us in his deity. He insisted that the communication of attributes was purely verbal. Lutherans on the other hand thought that the communication of attributes was real. Calvin insisted that Luther's view of the Lord's Supper and Christology were a form of the Monophysite heresy. Lutheran theologians countered the Calvinists rejection of the communication of attributes considering it a form of Nestorianism, for they thought he had separated or divided the two natures.[42]

[42] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 196-199.

Karl Barth's Christology and Sacramentology

Karl Barth was very much aware of this discussion amongst the Reformers. Barth discussed both the Lord's Supper and Christology. Kenneth Kantzer in *The Christology of Karl Barth* states:

> In his [Barth's] discussion of the communication of the attributes of Christ he tries to hold a middle point between traditional Lutheranism and traditional Calvinism. Lutherans, he argues, are right on their main point that it is the divine and human Christ who is omnipresent but they are in constant danger of slipping into Eutychianism. Calvinists, on the other hand, are right in their main point that the natures are not to be confused, but they slip constantly into the danger of Nestorianism. The solution is to be found, so Barth avers, in the idea that the body of Christ is present everywhere but in a different sense from that in which the deity of Christ is omnipresent. Precisely what constitutes the difference Barth does not explain. . . . The Lutheran argument that the logos exists only in conjunction with the flesh is correct unless one means, as some Lutherans almost seem to say, that the humanity absorbs all the deity of Christ. The Calvinists were right when they said that the logos was not exhausted in the fleshly existence, but no Calvinist meant

> to deny that the whole logos is actually joined to human flesh.[43]

The key portion from Kantzer's description of Barth is the phrase "he [Barth] tries to hold a middle point between traditional Lutheranism and traditional Calvinism." This seems to be in continuity with Barth's strategy of synthesizing the juxtaposition of revile doctrines.[44] The *Cambridge Companion* claims, "On the other hand, Barth Came to hold what he called a 'neo-Zwinglian' position on the sacraments—affirming that baptism and the Lord's Supper are human actions, denying that they are sacraments."[45] This reiterates the fact that Barth's dialectical is constantly trying to affirm the new position, by not completely affirming either position.

Karl Barth agreed with the Reformers that there was a strong connection between ones Christology and their understanding of the Lord's Supper. In *Church Dogmatics* Barth insisted upon the Word of God in its threefold form – revealed, written, and preached.[46] He considered the sacraments to be products of the Triune God's

[43] Kantzer, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, 26. See *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 161 and 161; and II, 1, 488 ff.

[44] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 130-31; 195-211.

[45] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 195; Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* IV, 130.

[46]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, §8—CD I/2, § 18.

revelation, and most extensively as the Word of God proclaimed in the church; which includes preaching and the sacraments, word and action, neither are alone nor separate but "preaching with the sacrament, with the visible act that confirms human speech as God's act."[47] The *Cambridge Companion* comments again, "This proclamation, like the bread and wine of communion, *is* the very Word of God only as it *becomes* this Word of God. Proclamation is proclamation insofar as it is the proclamation of a hearing church as well as the teaching church."[48]

The essential point of interest from this section is that Karl Barth did not affirm a monolithic understanding of revelation, including Christology and the Lord's Supper. There are places in his writings when he considered both of them a sign and others where he considered them a sacrament, because he affirmed that both the bread and wine and Christ were the Churches sacraments.[49] Kantzer elaborates upon Barth's dialectic between Lutheranism and Calvinism, and one source claims Barth affirmed a form of Zwinglianism.[50] The apparent reason for this intentional tension is

[47] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 201; *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, §§19-21; §§22-4; *CD* I/2, 56-71.

[48] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 201.

[49] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 54f.

[50] Webster, *Cambridge Companion*, 195.

because of his dialectical method in order to affirm an essential progress and *tertium quid* position applied to all of the revelations of God—incarnate, propositional, and proclaimed/sacramental. Furthermore, there is a correspondence between the revelations of God—sacramental, propositional, and incarnational—all of which *become* the Word of God through either proclamation or activity (preaching and the distribution of the sacraments).

The Anthropological Barth--*The Sinless and Sinful Humanity of Christology*

Christian orthodoxy affirms that Jesus has two natures in one person, and that in his deity Christ was unable to sin, and in his humanity he was able to sin but he did not. German liberalism did not affirm this position. Instead they argued that Jesus Christ partook of sinful flesh and lived as a sinner like the rest of humanity. Barth recognized this tension amongst the diverging theologies, and just like the other Christological positions, affirmed a third position synthesizing the two extremes. Barth was clear to affirm the virgin birth of Christ. He thought that the purpose of the virgin birth was not to account for Jesus' sinlessness, nor even to explain the deity. Instead it was a sign to stress his humanity. Barth also affirmed the

deity of Christ, considering Jesus to be the sinless Son of God and the height of God's self-revelation.

Orthodox Christology has always taught that Christ was not tainted by sin in both his divine and human natures and that he never committed any acts of sin. The orthodox position has always affirmed that Christ had to be completely human and sinless in order to fully relate and serve as the penal-substitute for humanity. This does not entail that when Christ came in the likeness of "sinful flesh," that he was sinful. Instead it means similarity to a prototype; "sinful flesh" is human nature, which through the Fall came to be corrupted and controlled by sin. Christ's humanity was like ours in that he could be tempted, and lived his life as part of a fallen world of frailty and exposed to vast pressures. But he did not sin, and there was no moral and spiritual corruption in him. Had Jesus been corrupted in any way, he could not have fulfilled the Old Testament pattern, which required a sin offering to be "without blemish" (Lev. 4:3).

Barth on the other hand, by employing his dialectical method, affirmed both the sinlessness and the sinfulness of Christ. In his early Romans Commentary he declared that Jesus "stood as a

sinner among sinners."[51] In the *Church Dogmatics* he affirmed that Jesus partook of a sinful human nature but that he never actually sinned. As the eternal son of God sin is actually impossible for Christ.[52] In a later section of the *Dogmatics* he softened his position and affirmed the "weakness" of sinful flesh. His sinlessness, as the God-man, in any respect, consisted of his overcoming the sinful fleshly nature which he had assumed. In spite of the reality of his temptation Jesus refused to sin and by his death upon the cross he triumphed over sin.[53] Nevertheless, Barth taught that Christ was tainted by sin, and when worked out in other neo-orthodox theologians they affirmed that Christ committed acts of sin.[54]

Barth had the ability to masterly synthesize all of the disciplines of theology. His position did not strictly adhere unto any extreme, but sought for a middle position. In particular, Barth was able to synthesize the orthodox affirmation concerning the sinlessness of Christ and the liberal position advocating for the sinfulness of Christ claiming that Christ was not *absolutely* sinful nor *absolutely* sinless. Instead, according to Barth's dialectical

[51] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 97.

[52] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 150ff.

[53] Ibid., IV, 1, 159, 234, 252.

[54] See Footnote 62.

method, Christ's two natures were morphed into a *tertium quid*, affirming a being that was necessarily sinless and sinful.[55] This is obviously a detrimental position held by Barth, because if true, Christ was not able to serve as our penal-substitute. With this *tertium quid* Christology in mind, this brings us to the point of explaining how Barth's dialectical method affects his incarnational analogy between Christ and the Scriptures. In particular, how his understanding of the person of Christ allowed for him to affirm a *tertium quid* between the two and that Christ's nature was sinful and the Scriptures errant.[56]

[55] Note: As was stated earlier, the Hegelian dialectical method necessarily creates a new being through its "necessary movement."

[56] Note: This analogy could be lengthened to include an evaluation of Barth's understanding of Chalcedonianism or the Lutheran and Calvinism debate, but they are beyond the scope of this paper for these reasons: 1) Barth's understanding of the sinfulness of Christ has more pressing urgency upon an evangelical understanding of Christology and Bibliology, than his modified form of Creedal and Protestant Christology; 2) In contemporary theology most people follow Barth's method to advocate a sinful human Christ, instead of a modified Creedal or Protestant Christology; 3) The purpose of the Creedal and Protestant sections were to demonstrate that Barth created a *tertium quid* between two opposite positions, and that there is a theological precedence to advocate that he did this with his understanding of the sinlessness and sinfulness of Christ. Hence, that understanding of Christology was most likely his and other neo-orthodox theologian's train of thought pertaining to their understanding of the incarnational analogy.

Revelational Christology: The Living and Propositional Word of God

Inerrantists have long commented on the relation between God's living Word (Christ) and his written Word (Scripture). They have argued that just as Christ is both divine and human in one person (without sin), even so the Bible has both a divine and human nature in one set of propositions (without error).[57] The logic of the incarnational analogy can be stated as follows:[58]

1. God's living Word and his written Word are similar:
    a. They both have a divine and human dimension.
    b. These two dimensions are combined in one unity.
    c. Thus, both are without flaw.
2. Hence, both God's living Word and his written Word are without flaw:
    a. God's living Word is without sin.

[57] Norman L. Geisler and William Roach, *Defending Inerrancy; Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 306-18. See also: B.B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*. edited by Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: P&R Pub., 1948)*;* J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958)*;*; G. K. Beale *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL, 2008); Harold Lindsell. *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); R.C. Sproul *Explaining Inerrancy* (Orlando FL: Reformation Press, 2002).
[58] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy,* 126.

b. God's written Word is without error.[59]

In the work *Defending Inerrancy*, dealing with Barth and the incarnational analogy, the authors state: "There is a strong similarity between the neo-orthodox and orthodox view of Christ. Both affirm the full humanity of Christ and the full humanity of Scripture. Based on this, the reasoning seems to go something like this:

1. There is an analogy between Christ and Scripture.

[59] Article II of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics States: *WE AFFIRM* that as Christ is God and Man in One Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language. *WE DENY* that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin. The official commentary on the statement claims: Here an analogy is drawn between Christ and Scripture. Both Christ and Scripture have dual aspects of divinity and humanity, indivisibly united in one expression. Both Christ and Scripture were conceived by an act of the Holy Spirit. Both involve the use of fallible human agents. But both produced a theanthropic result; one a sinless person and the other an errorless book. However, like all analogies, there is a difference. Christ is one person uniting two natures whereas Scripture is one written expression uniting two authors (God and man). This difference notwithstanding, the strength of the likeness in the analogy points to the inseparable unity between divine and human dimensions of Scripture so that one aspect cannot be in error while the other is not. The Denial is directed at a contemporary tendency to separate the human aspects of Scripture from the divine and allow for error in the former. By contrast the framers of this article believe that the human form of Scripture can no more be found in error than Christ could be found in sin. That is to say, the Word of God (i.e., the Bible) is as necessarily perfect in its human manifestation as was the Son of God in His human form. Reproduced from *Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*. Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1983.

2. This similarity includes the fact that both Christ and the Scriptures are fully human.
3. But as fully human, both Christ and the Scriptures partake of human flaws.
4. Hence, the Bible, like Christ, partakes of human flaws."[60]

Karl Barth believed that "there are obvious overlappings and contradictions—e.g., between the Law and the Prophets, between John and the Synoptics, between Paul and James."[61] Why does he affirm this? Because he considers the Bible to be a fallible human book. Thus he wrote in *Evangelical Theology* that "the post-biblical theologian may, no doubt, possess a better astronomy, geology, geography, zoology, psychology, physiology, and so on than the biblical witnesses possessed."[62] Why is this so? Because "the prophets and apostles as such . . . were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their actions, and capable of and guilty of error in their spoken and written word. . . . But the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content."[63]

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[60] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 309.

[61] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 1/2.509.

[62] Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 31.

[63] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2.529; 1/1:509). See also: Andrew T. Lincoln and Angus Paddison, *Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary*

According to many errantists, following in the tradition of Barth, who advocate just like Barth that the humanity of Christ was fallible because it adapted unto sinful humanity; so too, the text of Scripture adapts unto error.[64] Errantist Kenton Sparks affirms and explains this position when he claims:

> The Christological argument fails because, though Jesus was indeed sinless, he was also human and finite. He would have erred in the usual way that other people err because of their finite perspectives. He misremembered this event or that, and mistook this person for someone else, and though—like everyone else—that the sun was literally rising. To err in these ways simply goes with the territory of being human. These errors are not sins, not even black marks against our humanity. They stem from the design of God, which God has declared to be very good. As a result, the Christological analogy cited in the Chicago Statement seems to be a good

Perspectives (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2007); Rogers, Jack and Rogers McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Fracisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

[64] Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946); Emil Brunner, *The Word of God and Modern Man*. Translated by David Claims (Richmond: John Knox, 1964); G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture.* Translated by Jack Rogers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Andrew T.B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007); Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle,* Second ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

> one, but it sends in a direction opposite of what the framers supposed. The finite, human form of Jesus tells us that Scriptures authors and their discourse will be finite and human.[65]

Sparks later goes on to insist that "if there is going to be an argument that frees the personalities, ideas, and temperaments of Scripture's human authors from fallenness and finitude, it will need to take a very different path. The Christological analogy ends before it can serve as an objection to the implications of accommodation."[66]

From the above citations, it is clear that many theologians like Sparks are advocating a Barthian charge against both the incarnation and the inerrancy of Scripture. The logic of the Barthian error can be stated this way:[67]

1. The Bible is a thoroughly human book.
2. Human beings can err.
3. Therefore, the Bible can err.
4. But a book that can err is not infallible (by definition, "infallible" means to be incapable of erring).

[65] Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Hands: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2008), 252-253.
[66] Ibid., 126.

[67] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 273.

5. Hence, the Bible is not infallible (i.e., incapable of error).[68]

This section concludes the synthesis of Christology and Bibliology by Barth and later neo-orthodox theologians. The point to recognize is that because humanity is sinful it necessarily entails sin and error; and since both Christ and the Scriptures are really human, then both of them contain sin and error.[69]

Summary and Evaluation

This paper has sought to demonstrate that there are two major issues pertaining to Karl Barth: 1) Barth affirmed a dialectical method, which causes him to create a synthesis between two opposing positions. He took the thesis of orthodoxy opposed by the antithesis of liberalism that he synthesized into neo-orthodoxy. Here the dialectical method has significantly less than biblical and

[68] The Christological charge can be summarized as follows: 1) Christ is a thoroughly human being; 2) Human beings can err; 3) Therefore, Christ can err; 4) But, a human being that can error is not infallible (by definition, "infallible" means to be incapable of erring); 5) Hence, Christ is not infallible (i.e., incapable of error).

[69] David David, *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 1997); H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: A Historical Study* 1700-1960. 2 vols. Twin Books Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

evangelical results, for while Barth accepted an orthodox view on many doctrines, he retained a liberal view of many others such as Christology and Bibliology. 2) Barth affirmed a doctrine of the incarnation which allowed for sin in the person of Christ and error in the propositions of Scripture. Each of these two issues will be evaluated.

Evaluation of the Barthian Dialectic

There are two ways to evaluate Barth's dialectic. The first way is to try to argue against the conclusions affirmed in the dialectic—e.g., the new Chalcedonian position, the middle ground between Lutheran and Calvinist Christology and the Lords Supper, and the sinlessness of Christ. The second way is to critique the method he used in order to arrive at those conclusions. The better of the two ways is the latter because by disproving the method of a theologian, one has in principle disproved all of the conclusions produced by that method.

The main critique against the dialectical method is that it is self-defeating. The first claim that advocates of the method affirm is that "all truth is in process." But this is not necessarily the case. Namely, those affirming a dialectical method believe that their position is true and that it does not change regardless of who uses it, what disciplines it touches, when it is used, where it is used, or why

it is used. Second, advocates for the dialectical method deny absolute truth. This position is also self-defeating. These individuals do not consistently affirm the proposition "all truth is relative." If they claim that it is absolutely true that relativism is true, this is self-defeating because they have affirmed at least one absolute truth. If on the other hand they claim that this is only a relative truth, then no one can really know if relativism is true. They are left with the dilemma: Either they affirm that relativism is absolute for everyone, which is an absolute claim, or they make an assertion that cannot be made, because the second it is affirmed one will fall into an infinite regress of relative claims. They only way to remove themselves from this painful dilemma is to affirm absolute truth. Third, it is false to claim that all truth is "both/and" and not "either/or." This is false because it is self-defeating. Advocates of this method do not claim that it is both the dialectical method and all non-dialectical methods, for they realize that would be self-defeating. Instead, by the very fact that they develop the method demonstrates that they believe it is either the dialectical method or another method, but not both.

Evaluation of the Barthian Sinfulness of Christ and Errancy of Scripture

The second issue plaguing Barth's method is the ramifications it has upon his understanding of the incarnation of

Christ and the incarnational analogy with the Scriptures. The orthodox evangelical position on Scripture is that the Bible is both a divine and human book co-authoring the autographic text. So the Bible is a "theanthropic" book. As Christ has a flawless union of the divine and human in one *person*, even so the Bible has an errorless union of the divine and human in one set of *propositions*. Whenever someone asks whether Christ or the Bible could error, they must find two answers: As God, Jesus was not able to sin (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). But as a man, the answer is, yes, he was capable of sinning for he was really tempted, but freely chose not to sin (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:3). In a similar respect, in the divine nature the text of Scripture was not able to error. But in the human nature of Scripture, it was capable of error, for it was truly human, but it did not error.

The Barthian charge against both Christ and the Bible is seriously misdirected because the Bible is also the words of the God who cannot error. Hence, as the Word of God, the Bible cannot err. In view of this, one must reformulate the logic of the divine-human natures of Scripture as follows:[70]

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is God's Word.

[70] Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 314.

3. Hence, insofar as the Bible is God's Word, it *cannot* err.
4. But the Bible is also human words.
5. Hence, insofar as the Bible is human words, it *can err,* even though it does not err.

Of course, as both God's Word and human words, the Bible *did not err.* There is no logical contradiction between "can err" and "cannot err" in this analogy because they are not used in the same sense or relationship. In short, both Christ and the Bible in relation to God cannot err, but in relation to humans, can err—but did not.

Karl Barth and those following him in this respect have created a Christological crisis. They have bought into the Gnostic idea that any contact with human fallenness makes error unavoidable. This argument should be rejected for what it is: neo-gnosticism. The logical implications of denying the incarnational analogy are that both the person of Jesus and the propositions of the Bible are tainted with error. Orthodox Christology and Bibliology have never affirmed that the Second Person of the Godhead or the text of Scripture erred in their person or propositions. Instead, orthodoxy has always denied the premise that *errare humanum est* (to error is human) and taught that God, in both Christ and the Bible accmmodated his revelation to human *finitude*, but never to human *fallenness.*

There are a few reasons to reject Barth's conclusions concerning the fallenness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. First, it is contrary to the very nature of the God of truth to accommodate to error (Titus 1:2; cf. Heb. 6:18). Second, it is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture which affirm the sinlessness of Christ (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:3) and the erorrlessness of Scripture (Matt. 22:20; John 17:17). Third, there are times in the life of Christ where he clearly did not accommodate to the human situations of his day. It was contrary to his life in that he rebuked the leaders for speaking error (Matt. 23:16-23; John 3:12); it was contrary to his character because both the believers and non-believers found him to be without moral flaw (Luke 23:4, 47; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 3:3; 4:17). Hence, the Barthian analogy should be distinguished from the orthodox analogy for two reasons: 1) God does *accommodate* himself to human *finitude*, but 2) God does not and cannot *accommodate* himself to *human error*. Karl Barth and those following him confuse these two statements. Whatever divine self-limitation is necessary in order to communicate with human beings, there is no error, for God cannot error. It is contrary to His very nature.

Conclusion

There are orthodox methods and unorthodox methods. Orthodox theological methods if applied consistently will lead to orthodox conclusions. Unorthodox methods if applied consistently will lead to unorthodox conclusions. In the case of Karl Barth's dialectical method, if it is applied consistently, leads to affirming an unorthodox Christology, Soteriology and Bibliology. Barth affirmed a dialectical Christology. He advocated for a middle ground between the Antiochian and Alexandrian creedal positions, a synthesis of the Lutherans and the Calvinists and affirming the sinlessness and sinfulness of Christ. Soteriologically this necessarily leads to affirming a *tertium quid* in the nature of Christ, where he is not really God nor man; hence unable to properly relate to both and serve as our true mediator. When this understanding of Christ was applied to his Bibliology, arguing for the incarnational analogy between the Person of Christ and the propositions of the Word of God, it was found that if consistently applied Barth must affirm the sinfulness of Christ and the errancy of Scripture. Both the method and the conclusions of Barth were found to be self-defeating and unbiblical. Nevertheless, in the end, modern theologians should be aware that while there are no new ideas under the sun, there are new ways of affirming those ideas. In each respect orthodox theologians should be prepared to handle the false doctrinal affirmations—whether in word or method.

1 Corinthians 10:14-22: An Argument against the Syncretism of Christianity and Pagan Religions

Mary Jo Sharp

Introduction

The syncretism of first century pagan religions and Christianity seems to be a prevailing popular-level argument that has reared its head, even within academia, once again. According to the argument, the doctrines of the Christian Faith are merely recycled pagan myths with a Judeo-Christian flavor. The similarities suggested range from the Lord's Supper feast as a copy of a pagan sacrificial feast to the Resurrection as a copy of a dying-and-rising god.[1] However, as with many of these arguments, the evidence available for the historical and cultural setting of the Christian Faith

[1] In a recent conversation with Shadid Lewis, a Muslim apologist, he compared Osiris' return from the dead and subsequent position of god of the underworld with Jesus' resurrection.

is often cherry-picked or ignored; namely the texts of the first century writers. The letters of the apostle Paul, along with other first-century writings of non-Christian authors must be addressed in any treatment of this topic. One particular text to be taken into account is Paul's specific rebuke of participation in pagan practices that would indicate a follower of Christ's willful *or ignorant* communion with pagan gods (whom Paul identifies as demons, in reality) in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. Once Paul's rebuke of pagan practices is set in its proper historical-cultural background, the message of his writing conveys a striking contrast to the surrounding cultural acceptance and worship of numerous gods. The reality of his text is that Paul, once a Pharisee, and later a leader of the rapidly spreading Christian faith among the Gentiles, specifically stated communion with the Lord Jesus Christ was exclusive of communion with any other pagan 'god.'

Historical and Cultural Background

Paul the Apostle

Paul was born in the region of Cilicia, in the city of Tarsus, into a Jewish home;[2] his family was of the tribe of Benjamin.[3] Tarsus was a great Roman port city with a mixed population.[4] A.N. Wilson, in his book, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*, suggests that the ancient writers speak of the people of Tarsus (of the time of Paul's youth) as worshippers of Mithras.[5] Wilson then attempts to establish Paul as influenced by the *taurobolium*, or the initiate "blood bath," along with other rites of Mithraism or as impressed by the worship of Herakles, a cult influenced by the dying and rising gods of other Mediterranean vegetation gods: the Syrian Adonis, the Babylonian Thammuz, and the Egyptian Osiris.[6] Wilson also questions Paul's "Jewishness" and points out that Paul's tentmaker occupation and his reading from the Septuagint would have been

[2] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 21. See also: A.N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 23.

[3] Philippians 3:5.

[4] A.N. Wilson, 25.

[5] Wilson cites Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithras*. Cumont, Franz *The Myteries of Mithras*, [book on-line]; available from www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/mom05.htm#fn_18; Internet; accessed 21 April, 2008.

Cumont utilizes Plutarch's writing on Pompeii as a reference on the presence of Mithraic worship in Cilicia.

[6] A.N. Wilson, 26.

questionable for a rabbinic Jew.[7] However, even Wilson admits that the texts referring to the possible uncleanness of the tentmaker occupation came a few hundred years after Paul, and that Philo, a great Jewish philosopher of the first century, also read the Hebrew Bible in Greek.[8] Not only does A.N. Wilson fail to provide references for a reason to doubt Paul's "Jewishness,"[9] he also fails to recognize the writings of Philo and Josephus, two first-century Jewish authors, as they both indicate that Jewish boys were instructed in the Scriptures and traditions from "earliest youth."[10]

Paul explicitly cites his Jewish background in Philippians 3:5-6, "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic

[7] Ibid., 30-31.

[8] Ibid., 30-31.

[9] Wilson states that we have too few sources on this and speculates that other sources may have been destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem, AD 70, 31-32.

[10] Josephus, "Against Apion, Book 2," *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1999), 971. "…beginning from the earliest infancy…";

Philo. *On the Embassy to Gaius,* 210. [text on-line]; available from www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book40.html; Internet; accessed on 21 April, 2008. "and having been instructed in this doctrine from their very earliest infancy they bear in their souls the images of the commandments contained in these laws as sacred"

righteousness, faultless." Here Paul describes himself as genuine "stock" of Israel by using the term *ek génous Israeél* ("of the people of Israel" in the NIV); he is not a proselyte.[11] In mentioning the tribe of Benjamin, Paul states that he is from the tribe that: 1) gave Israel her first king, 2) was the lone faithful tribe to Judah at the separation under Rehoboam, and 3) held a place of honor in the Israelite army; Israel's battle cry was "After thee, O Benjamin" (Jud. 5:14).[12] Paul also mentions that he was born of Hebrew parents, *Hebraíos ex Hebraíoon*, literally "a Hebrew from Hebrew parents."[13] He includes that he is a Pharisee concerning the law to give his reader an understanding of his basic doctrines (as compared to the Sadducees). As Acts 22:3 states, Paul was not just a Pharisee, but had come to Jerusalem to train under one of the greatest Rabbis of the first century, Gamaliel I.[14] Paul establishes that in all ways he was a Jew. Unless sufficient evidence can be given to the contrary, the evidence *that exists* points to understanding Paul as adhering to

[11] *Biblesoft's Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, s.v. "Philippians 3:5" [CD-ROM] (Biblesoft, Inc., 1997, 2003).

[12] *Biblesoft's Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*, s.v. "Phillipians 3:5" [CD-ROM] (Biblesoft, Inc 1997, 2003); *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Broadman Press, 1985).

[13] *Vincent's Word Studies*: Philippians 3:5.

[14] Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul,* 22.

the commonly described Judaism of his day; a Judaism that was exclusively monotheistic.[15]

In the debate over whether or not Christianity borrowed from pagan mysteries, Paul's background is crucial to the argument. Paul, being a first-century, exclusively monotheistic Jewish Pharisee, (who was persecuting believers in Christ for equating Christ with God: Phil. 3:5), would not be a likely candidate to incorporate surrounding religious influences into his conception of God. Quite to the contrary, the picture of Paul that emerges from the New Testament texts and from the description of the exclusivity of Jewish worship found outside the texts,[16] is one of a devout monotheist who despises any practice or social celebration that even brings to mind the worship of a pagan god.

[15] "…their religion demonstrates what we can call 'exclusivist monotheism.' Both in theology and in practice, Greco-Roman Jews demonstrate concerns for God's supremacy and uniqueness with an intensity and a solidarity that seem to go far beyond anything else previously known in the Greco-Roman world." Larry Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 130.

[16] Josephus, "Against Apion, Book 2," 972; Philo. *The Decalogue.* (53) [text on-line]; available from http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book26.html; Internet; accessed 28 March, 2008.

Corinth

When Paul came to Corinth, it was a cosmopolitan city with a population speculated to be between 150,000 to 600,000 people.[17] The city had rapidly revived in the previous one hundred years, since its destruction in 146 BC[18] Previously the people of Corinth had followed in an Achaian revolt against the Roman Empire. Roman military commander, Mummius, had led the Roman army in the complete devastation of Corinth; and the city lay in ruins for one hundred years.[19] In 44 BC, Julius Caesar determined the location of Corinth to be that of strategic commercial importance for the Roman Empire and had it rebuilt.[20]

[17] Several differing opinions from the various authors cited in this paper.

[18] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1984), viii. See also: David E. Garland. *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1 ; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1937, 1963), 10; Hans Conzelmann, "1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians," *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, trans. James W. Leitch, ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 11.

[19] Strabo, *Geography,* trans. H. L. Jones (ed.) [text on-line]; available from http://classics.mit.edu/Strabo/strab.6.html; Internet; accessed 8 April, 2008.

[20] MacArthur Jr, *New Testament Commentary*, viii. See also: Lenski, *Interpretation*, 10; Conzelmann, *Hermeneia*, 11.

Sea travel around the southern portion of Greece (the Peloponnesus) was a dangerous journey. It was so treacherous that Strabo, a first-century Greek writer, mentioned in his *Geography, "*And just as in early times the Strait of Sicily was not easy to navigate, so also the high seas, and particularly the sea beyond Maleae [the cape at the south end of the peninsula], were not, on account of the contrary winds; and hence the proverb, "But when you double Maleae, forget your home."[21] Therefore, most mariners chose to run their boats across the Isthmus on skids or rollers[22], from one harbor to the other, leading most of the marine traffic directly past Corinth; located just south of the middle of the isthmus that connected northern Greece to Southern Greece. Dio Chrysostom mentions the great numbers of people that pass through Corinth on account of its location in *Discourses, Book 8,* "For he observed that large numbers gathered at Corinth on account of the harbours and the hetaerae[23], and because the city was situated as it were at the cross-roads of Greece." Most important to note, for the purpose of

[21] Strabo, *Geography.* See also: MacArthur Jr., ibid., vii.

[22] MacArthur Jr., ibid., vii.

[23] Dio Chrysostom. "Diogenes" *Discourses*. 8.5. [text on-line]; from http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/home.html; Internet; accessed 8 April, 2008. Footnote from webstie on term, "hetaera": *Literally,"female companions." The name was applied to a wide class of women, ranging from those whose marriages lacked legal sanction all the way to the lowest harlots.*

this article, is the wide variety of people that passed through Corinth anticipating opportunity for trade and entrepreneurship; bringing their pagan gods with them.

Business, however, was not the only draw to Corinth; her amusements and entertainment brought throngs, as well. Corinth hosted one of the two great athletic festivals of the day, the Isthmian games; a showcase of the world's finest athletes, comparable in grandeur to the Olympian games.[24] Corinth was also known for its number of courtesans[25] and its licentiousness.[26] The ancients utilized a phrase, "to Corinthianize," which meant "to fornicate, [27] or *corinthiazesthai* ('to behave like a Corinthian') which "came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery."[28] The Apostle

[24] Lee Martin MacDonald and Stanley Lee Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 430. See also: Lenski, *Interpretations*, 12; MacArthur Jr, *New Testament Commentary*, viii; Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 4; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 8.6

[25] Dio Chrysostom, 8.5. See also: Strabo, *Geography*, 20.90.

[26] Conzelman, *Hermeneia*, 12. See also: *Biblesoft's Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*, s.v. "1 Corinthians" [CD-ROM] (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 1991); Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians,* revised ed. (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1985), 18.

[27] MacDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity*, 432.

[28] MacArthur Jr., viii. See also: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*, s.v. "1 Corinthians" [CD-ROM] (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 1991).

Paul comments on some of the vices found in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 as fornication, idolatry, adultery, effeminacy, homosexuality, stealing, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and swindling.[29]

Socio-Religious Aspect of Corinth

The people of Corinth came from many places and backgrounds, bringing with them the worship of numerous pagan gods. Craig Steven de Vos lists the gods and cults recognized in Corinth as "Apollo, Aphrodite/Venus, Asclepius, Athena, Athena Chalinitis, Demeter and Kore, Dionysus, Ephesian Artemis, Hera Acraea, Hermes/Mercury, Jupiter Capitolinus, Poseidon/Neptune, Tyche/Fortuna, and Zeus."[30] In ancient writings, such as Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, there is evidence of Egyptian mystery cults, including the worship of Isis, in Corinth.[31] R.C.H. Lenski states that this presence of Egyptian deities can be attributed to extensive trade

[29] MacArthur Jr., ibid., viii.

[30] Craig Steven de Vos, "Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities". *Society of Biblical Literature Disseration Series 168*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 192.

[31] Apuleius. *Metamorphoses* 11, quoted in Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary,* 9. See also: Lenski. *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*: 11.

with Alexandria.[32] The Roman culture was polytheistic, as demonstrated by the temple of Demeter in Pergamum, which had altars to the gods Hermes, Helios, Zeus, Asclepius, and Heracles;[33] also acknowledged by Paul in Acts 17:23 as he spoke in Athens at the meeting of the Aeropagus referencing altars to various gods, including the one to the "unknown God."

In addition to this pantheon of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods, the Corinthians also participated in Emperor Worship - the Imperial Cult - which was gradually instated by the Roman Senate in the first century.[34] Divinity was ascribed to the emperor by Roman emperors such as Augustus who saw the practice as a tool "to encourage patriotism and inspire political unity in the empire."[35] Other emperors, such as Caligula, openly sought worship for themselves.[36] The worship of the emperor was an important aspect of Roman life in the first century; for it demonstrated allegiance to the Roman state. The practice of honoring the emperor offering incense to his statue in his temple became increasingly problematic

[32] Lenski. *Interpretation,* 11-12.

[33] Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary,* 9.

[34] Thomas D. Lea, *The New Testament: Its Backgraound and Message.* 2nd edition, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 49.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

for the Christians who would not present any kind of worship to a being other than God.[37]

The general religious attitude prevalent of Greco-Romans was that of tolerance, inclusion, and syncretism. The Hellenistic world was a "great religious melting pot."[38] Thomas Lea, in *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, lists four points that characterized Greco-Roman religion:

- Greco-Roman religion was non-exclusive. A Roman who worshipped one deity could also give devotion to another deity. In Christianity such a compromise of worship would be unthinkable.
- In Greco-Roman religion the power of fate was thought to be quite strong. This belief led to a faith in astrology and a gullible respect for all forms of magic.
- Greco-Roman religion was corporate. Religion was to be practiced by society at large; it was not viewed as an essentially private matter.

[37] Garland, 11.

[38] Ibid., 472.

- Religion and morality were separated. The rules governing religions were those of ritual purity rather than ethical or moral guidelines.[39]

Paul's insistence of exclusive loyalty to one religion would have been considered uncommon in Corinth.[40] The people of Corinth were accustomed to joining in various sacrificial meals of various deities without an exclusive relationship with any one deity.[41] David Garland, in *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, states, "The relative disinterest in doctrine and the utilitarian interest in the power of individual gods to deliver a desired outcome also mitigated the potential for any theological friction." With the exception of the Imperial Cult – since all citizens were required to pay homage to the imperial cult – the Romans honored gods they thought were useful and believed in a sort of safety in numbers approach, so were more likely than not to worship several gods.[42] This is the cultural milieu in which the Corinthian church was planted and with which it struggled.

[39] Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 48.

[40] Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 472.

[41] Ibid., 472.

[42] Ibid., 472.

The Message of the Text

The Problems in the Corinthian Church

The Corinthian church struggled with succumbing to its surrounding environment. J.M.G. Barclay, in *Thessolonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity*, states that even though the two churches were founded within months of each other, "these sibling communities developed remarkably different interpretations of the Christian faith."[43] The Thessalonian Christians had a sense of alienation from their society and the conflicts they encountered included severe persecution (1 Thes. 1:6, 2:14, 3:4). By contrast, the Corinthian church seemed to have no troubles reconciling their faith with the pagan culture that was "inherently hostile to the wisdom of the cross,"[44] and demonstrated no signs of any persecution from Corinthian society, even though, as previously established, Corinth was noted for its licentiousness. Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 to the Corinthian church deals specifically with setting boundaries for the believers as to participation in idolatrous practices. Apparently, the problem was not that the church was in Corinth (as the Thessalonians experienced

[43] J.M.G. Barclay, "Thessolonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 47: 1992, 50, as quoted by Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 7.

[44] Garland, 8.

in their region), but that too much of Corinth was in the Church;[45] namely her tolerance of idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

From the outset of the passage, Paul uses unambiguous, emphatic language to demonstrate the importance of his admonishment against idolatry. Verse 14, "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry." *Dioper*, "therefore," in verse 14 is a stronger particle than that found in verse 12[46], *hoste*, "therefore," sometimes translated "so."[47] *Dioper* is a direct command serving as the conclusion to his previous arguments in 10:1-13.[48] Paul chose a stronger wording coupled with a unique statement of affection for the Corinthians "my dear friends" (*agapetoi mou*, "my beloved") to emphasize his deep emotion for his friends as he gives them counsel to take the right course.[49] Paul wants his readers to understand the grave nature of the act of idolatry; the vilest of sins against God. Verse 14 clearly reveals to the reader that Paul commands the

[45] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

[46] Morris, *Tyndale*: 142.

[47] *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. s.v. "hoste," [CD-ROM] (Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc., 1994, 2003).

[48] Garland, 473.

[49] Morris, *Tyndale*, 142.

turning from idolatry with utmost urgency, through the utilization of the present imperative, *feúgete* (flee), implying a continuance of the action to flee[50] and that this must be an "an unremitting battle."[51] David E. Garland, in his exegesis of First Corinthians, even goes so far as to say the interpretations of *feúgete* as "shun," found in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, or "have nothing to do with," from the Revised English Bible, are too weak of translations.[52] Garland suggests of Paul's wording that, "Idolatry is like radioactive waste: it requires them to bolt from this area immediately to avoid contamination and certain death."[53]

In verse 15, "I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say," Paul does not merely give a command and expect obedience; he desires an obedience that comes from personal conviction.[54] Because the term *fronímois*, "intelligent" or "wise,"[55] had previously been used in a sarcastic way by Paul in 4:10, commentators have differed on whether to treat the verse

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[50] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 406.

[51] Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 474.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Lenski, 407.

[55] *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. s.v. "fronímois," [CD-ROM] (Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc., 1994, 2003).

sarcastically.[56] However, in light of Paul's preceding use of *agapetoi mou*, "my beloved," *fronímois* here can be looked at as Paul appealing to the Corinthians power of discernment and sensibility. The aorist, *krínate,* "judge," solicits a "definite and final decision"[57] after the reader has read Paul's words; this judgment, once made, does not need to be made again.

Paul invites the Corinthians to investigate the validity of his message. He is about to explain to the Corinthians that communion with Jesus Christ is exclusive of any other "gods" or, as Paul describes, demons disguised as idol gods. The invitation in verse 15 to judge for themselves is important, because Paul's statements set Christianity apart from the surrounding pagan culture by commanding an exclusive worship of Christ.[58]

Verse 16, "Is the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" In this verse, Paul uses two rhetorical questions to establish his point; when we

[56] *Biblesoft's United Bible Societies New Testament Handbook Series.* s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:15" [CD-ROM] (Biblesoft, Inc. and United Bible Societies, 1961-1997).

[57] Lenski, 407.

[58] The general acceptance of all deities, including emperor worship, by the pagan Corinthians was common place. The exclusive worship of one god would have been an unusual practice for them; although the concept would have been encountered from their interaction with the Corinthian Jews.

participate in the Lord's Supper, we partake in *koinoonia*, or "communion," with Christ and with the body of Christ, the Church.[59] The "cup of thanksgiving" or "the cup of the blessing" alludes to the third cup of the Passover meal, which originally bore that name, *kom habberakah*, because a blessing was given over it.[60] The speculation has been put forth that Christ used the "cup of blessing" in the Upper Room when he introduced the Eucharist.[61] What matters here, for Paul's purposes, is establishment that "the cup is not just any cup but the Lord's, and it recalls his action at the Last Supper when he served as host to his disciples."[62] Participation in the cup of blessing and in the breaking of the bread, both actions of the Lord's Supper, create *koinōnia* with Christ; a spiritual binding together with Christ.[63]

Verse 17, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." Some translations of *hoti* use "for"[64] or "in that" instead of "because." The *Vincent's*

[59] Conzelmann, *Hermeneia*: 172.

[60] Lenski, 408. See also: David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, ed. John R. Stott (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 173.

[61] Morris, *Tyndale*, 143; Fee, 468.

[62] Garland. *Baker Exegetical,* 476.

[63] Morris, *Tyndale*, 143. See also: Garland, *Baker Exegetical*, 477.

[64] New King James Version.

Word Study on 1 Corinthians suggests that the better translation would actually be "seeing that,"[65] because Paul is deducing the mutual communion of the believers on account of their "partaking," *metéchomen*, with their common Lord[66]; "Seeing that there is one loaf…." Paul directly states that when Christians are partakers in the Lord's Supper, they become "in every way one with each other and with Christ."[67] The reader is also to understand that a partaker in the Lord's Supper cannot do so as a detached observer.[68] The partaker literally becomes one with the Lord of the table, that is, Christ.

[In the next verse Paul provides reasoning for his harsh admonition to avoid pagan practices.] Verse 18, "Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?" Paul utilizes the phrase, *Israēl kata sarka*, which means "Israel after the flesh," or literally physical Israel;[69] not *Israēl kata pneuma*, the spiritual Israel composed of both Jews and Gentiles

[65] *Biblesoft's Vincent's Word Studies*, s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:17"

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary,* 477.

[69] *Biblesoft's United Bible Societies,* s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:18". See also, Morris, 144; Lenski, 413; J. Smit, "Do Not Be Idolaters" Paul's Rhetoric in First Corinthians 10:1-22," *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 39, Fasc. 1, (Jan., 1997), 47.

(Rom. 2:28, 9:8).[70] Paul is making an historical reference to the practice in Leviticus 7:6, 15, which established that the sacrifice offered to God is to then be consumed on the same day, because that meat is holy; instituting a communal meal. [71] The communal meal was understood by Israel to bring communion with the God to whom the sacrificial altar belonged.[72] David E. Garland points out Paul may also be alluding to the golden calf Aaron built and burned sacrifices to, binding *Israēl kata sarka* to the "god" of that altar.[73] This allusion demonstrates that eating any food offered on an altar binds the participant to that particular altar. Paul uses the phrase, *koinoonoí toú thusiastteríou*, which literally means "communion with the altar."[74] As Paul will forthrightly expound, the *thusiastteríou*, or altar, in which the Corinthian Christians are participating amounts to *koinoonoí* or "communion" with demons.

Verses 19-20, "Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want

[70] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Epistles of Paul*. vol. 4, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 155.

[71] Conzelmann, *Hermeneia*, 172.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Garland, *Baker Exegetical*, 479.

[74] Robertson, *Word Pictures,*155. See also: J. Smit, *"Do Not Be Idolaters,"* 47: explained in footnote number 24.

you to be participants with demons." The English Standard Version of the Bible translated verse 19 a bit differently as, "What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?" Paul's question in the Greek, *tí oún feemi,* translated "what do I imply then," qualifies verse 18's injunction that participation in the altar is communion with the god of the altar.[75] Previously, in 8:4, Paul stated that an idol has no real existence, so Paul offers to explain himself, avoiding a contradiction.[76] The phrase, *daimoniois kai ou Theoo,* "to demons, and not to God," is from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:17, "They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded."[77] Paul uses the word, *daimonios,* which is the adjective form of *daimonia*, a neuter derivative of *daimōn*.[78] *Daimon* refers to an inferior deity or supernatural spirit of a bad nature,[79] and is the same root word used in Acts 17:18, when Paul was accused of "advocating foreign gods [*daimonίoon*]." Therefore,

[75] Garland, 479.

[76] Garland, 479; See also: Conzelmann, 173; Lenski, *Interpretation*, 414.

[77] Robertson, 155. See also *Biblesoft's Vincent's Word Studies*, s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:20"; *Biblesoft's United Bible Studies*, s.v. "1 Corinthians 10:20"; Fee, *First Epistle*, 472.

[78] Robertson, *Word Pictures,* 155; *Biblesoft's Strong's Concordance*, s.v. "daimonion."

[79] *Biblesoft's Strong's Concordance*, s.v. "daimon".

what Paul is "implying" is that he regards these idols as real beings (see 8:5), specifically, demons.[80]

In the final admonishment of verse 20, Paul again stresses that he does not want the Corinthian Christians to *koinoonoús*, "to partake," or "have fellowship," with *daimonίoon*. The phrase, "I do not want you to be participants with demons," is not as strong of language as "flee from idolatry," but it is a key phrase to understanding Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.[81] As Hans Conzelmann describes, "The thing is to behave accordingly, that is, not to participate in their [demons] cult, since otherwise we make them 'something'; and that is perverse. The presupposition of vv.19-20 is the same as of 8:5: behind the gods there lurk demons."[82] David E. Garland further summarizes, "The problem for Paul is not that Corinthian Christians join in camaraderie with

[80] Conzelmann, *Hermeneia.* 173. See also: Morris, *Tyndale*, 144-145 "Thus, when people sacrifice to idols, it cannot be said that they are engaging in some meaningless or neutral activity. They are sacrificing to evil spirits (cf. Dt. 31:16f)"; Fee, *First Epistle,* 472, "Paul's point is simple: These pagan meals are in fact sacrifices to demons; the worship of demons is involved."

[81] Garland, *Baker Exegetical*, 480.

[82] Conzelmann, 173.

idolaters but that they become actual partners with demons….however innocent the Christians' intentions might be."[83]

Verse 21, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons." The table of demons, *trapézees daimonίoon*, can be taken to literally mean the pagan's sacrificial feast where they ate the meat of the slain offering to their god and drank wine in communion with their god. Ancient sources evidence this kind of "table," such as in Virgil's *Aeneid*, book 8:

The loaves were serv'd in canisters; the wine

In bowls; the priest renew'd the rites divine:

Broil'd entrails are their food, and beef's continued chine….

Ye warlike youths, your heads with garlands crown:

Fill high the goblets with a sparkling flood,

And with deep draughts invoke our common god."[84]

[83] Garland, 281. Lenski, in *Interpretation*, concludes as well, "All altars, all sacrifices, and all worship that are not intended to serve the true God are thus actually though not necessarily consciously and intentionally devoted to these demons," 415.

[84] Virgil, *Aeneid,* Book 8, trans. John Dryden (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1937), 274, 277.

Frederic Louis Godet, in his book, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, further comments on the *cup*, or *poteérion*, of demons: "*The cup of demons* is an expression easily understood, when we remember that in the solemn feasts of the ancients the consecration of the banquet took place with that of the cup, accompanied by the libation in honor of the cups. The first cup was offered to Jupiter; the second to Jupiter and the Nymphs; the third to Jupiter Soter."[85] Many of the Corinthian believers were former pagans and would be familiar with the imagery of the contrasting tables Paul utilizes in drawing a definitive "line in the sand" for believers. It is interesting to note that Paul uses the word, *metechō,* (share, participate), in reference to the table of demons rather than *koinonia* (communion). Paul stresses that a believer, who has *koinonia* with Christ cannot also have *koinonia* with demons; so he utilizes *metechō* to highlight this contrast,[86] further clarifying the definitive aspect of his admonition. Gordon Fee also describes this contrast as a warning in

[85] Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 518-519.

[86] W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1976), 252.

addition to a prohibition: "one is not merely eating with friends at pagan temples; one is engaged in idolatry."[87]

Verse 22, "Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" Both A.T. Robertson and Frederic Louis Godet compare the Greek term, *parazēloumen* (to provoke to jealousy*)*, to that of the term used in Deuteronomy 32:21 of the impudence of the Israelites in inciting the Lord's jealousy.[88] The same word is, in fact, used in the Septuagint version of this Old Testament passage, which states, "They *made me jealous* [*parazhlosan*] by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols" [emphasis mine]. Paul again relates his warning to the Corinthians in verse 22 back to the example from Israel's history, in which Israel was rejected by the Lord for their idolatry.[89] He ends this section with a rhetorical question that shifts the focus from the problem of communion with demons to the problem of the jealousy of the Lord: "Are we stronger than he?"[90] Some interpreters have taken this last question to be directed at those in the Corinthian church who thought they were "strong" in

[87] Fee, *First Epistle,* 473.

[88] Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 156. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 519. Fee, *First Epistle,* 473-474.

[89] Fee, 474.

[90] Garland, *Baker Exegetical*, 282.

knowledge; thus secure, by reason, in their actions.[91] Others have taken this question not to be an ironic inquiry regarding the Corinthian Christians' knowledge, but have taken Paul's inclusion of himself ("we") as more of an all-inclusive address to the Corinthians.[92] Either way the question is interpreted, it surely implies a negative response[93]; no one is stronger than the Lord and thus they should not invoke God to anger as Israel has previously through idolatrous practices.

Practical Application of the Text

Against Syncretism of Pagan Practices

Though speculation abounds concerning the syncretism of pagan religions with Christianity, the message of 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 clearly defines for the reader that the worship of God, in the Christian faith, is exclusive of the worship of any other "god." Paul, being the author of these words, cannot conscionably be represented as a leader who incorporated pagan practices or concepts into his religious framework to formalize a worship of

[91] Fee, 474.

[92] Garland, 282.

[93] Ibid.

Jesus Christ.[94] David E. Garland succinctly states, "Paul adamantly rejects this syncretism and anything that might smack of it."[95] Though a thorough investigation into Paul and syncretism would include much more than one passage, certainly the evidence surrounding even just this one passage strains the interpreter to affirm a syncretistic view of Paul's Christology. On the contrary, this 1 Corinthians 10 passage, in its proper cultural and contextual setting provides compelling testimony to the exclusive nature of Paul's worship of Jesus as God. And, as this passage is part of one of the most well-attested and earliest biblical texts available to the critic today, it must receive attention when discussing syncretism.[96]

Polytheistic Environment and Paul

As previously established, in the Mediterranean world of the first century, it was perfectly acceptable and commonplace for

[94] See Garland, *Baker Exegetical*, 473.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Conzelmann, *Hermeneia*, 1. "The first letter to the Corinthians has been preserved on papyrus; Papyrus 46 [Chester Beatty] contains the whole epistle." As footnoted: "Kurt Aland dates P46 to ca. 200 A.D. and p15 to 3rd century. P 11 contains: 1:17-20, 20-22, 2:9f, 11d, 14; parts of chaps. 3,4, 5, 6, 7. In addition, p14 (from the same papyrus as p11?) has 1:25-27; 2:6-8; 3:8-10, 20. p68 has 4:12-17 and 4:19-5:3. The other papyri are p34 and p61. For more info, Kurt Aland, *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1966)."

people to worship more than one god or goddess.[97] Not only was it acceptable, but, as Richard B. Hays states, "it was probably a good bet to worship several gods as a way of diversifying one's spiritual investments."[98] This was the pluralistic environment in which Paul was raised, trained as a Pharisaic Rabbi, and in which Paul brought his message to the Corinthians. If Paul was influenced by the cultural environment of his day, that influence stopped short of his philosophy of religion. The apostle defied the inclusive philosophical nature of the Roman worship of many gods; for he strikingly contrasted the worship of pagan gods against the worship of the Lord (v.20). Paul told his readers to "flee from idolatry," because they could not divide their communion between God and demons (v.21). He even defined pagan idols or gods *as* demons; not just another form of worship, but *as actual participation with demons* (v.20).[99] The exclusivism Paul demonstrates in these passages was nothing like the Hellenistic culture of his day. Much more of a case can be made for the *difference* between Paul and the pagan culture of Corinth.

[97] Ibid, 472.

[98] Richard B. Hays, "First Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 170.

[99] David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, ed. John R. Stott (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 174.

Apologetic Value

Believers today can look at 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 as a main ingredient (among many others) in a case against the claim of rampant borrowing of pagan mystery religious patterns by the earliest believers of Christ. These verses serve great apologetic value, especially when added to a cumulative case against the syncretistic arguments; including arguments of anachronism, historical evidence, and Jewish cultural background. In simply dealing with 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, a myth-theory proponent would need to demonstrate: 1) these verses are not authored by the apostle Paul, 2) these verses do not demonstrate a strict admonition against idolatry and pagan practices, and/or 3) these verses contradict the majority of Paul's writing on this subject. However, this task will be difficult considering: 1) a majority of critical scholars agree on Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians, 2) the verses show a clear rebuke of paganism/idolatry, and 3) the verses line up with other Scriptures by Paul rebuking paganism and idolatry (Acts 15:20-29, 17:16; 1 Cor. 5:11, 6:9, 8:4, 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thes. 1:9). First Corinthians 10:14-22 provides a strong defense of the exclusively monotheistic mind of Paul.

Practical Apologetics: the Personal Application

Richard B. Hays, in "First Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, presents three practical ways to interpret the passage. First, believers must understand the danger of idolatry.[100] We do not want to find ourselves caught in the same cultural trap as that of the Corinthians: supposing there *is no real danger of idolatry* in our lives. There is a tendency for us to participate in whatever the cultural norms are for our day. However, 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, should remind us to "scrutinize our compromises"[101] realizing that we cannot feasibly share communion with our "idols" and our Lord; for in so doing, we are provoking the judgment of God. Second, worship creates communion, or fellowship, with God and with other believers.[102] This communion appeared to cost the Corinthian believers nothing; however, this communion includes religious ideology inherently incompatible with worldly ideology. Believers need to ask themselves what their fellowship with God and the Church has cost them lately. Has the fellowship required any sacrifice from social gain or worldly pleasures? Finally, we should learn to see ourselves

[100] Hays, "First Corinthians," 172.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

in Israel's story.[103] Hays describes this third interpretation as Paul paralleling Israel's history with Corinth's modern problems. Though I agree with him, I will offer a slightly different view on his interpretation. Believers must know what they believe and why they believe, in order to understand how to combat the false philosophy of their own time in history. The syncretistic argument of the pagan religions and Christianity, though it has been aptly refuted, may still find an audience with a believer who does not study their Scripture.[104] As 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us, we must all be ready to offer a defense for our beliefs. Instead of worrying about making the Biblical texts more relevant, or molding the Church into a palatable image for the world, all believers should strive to understand Biblical history's relevance to our lives through the diligent, tenacious study of the Word. In doing so, professors, preachers, and parishioners will be able to aptly combat false claims, as those found in the syncretistic arguments.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Most recently noted in the controversial Nooma video #15 with Pastor Rob Bell.

Icons and the Eastern Orthodox Claim to Continuity with the Early Church

John B. Carpenter

Introduction

The Eastern Orthodox claim that their church has an "unbroken" history back to the Apostles.[1] It's my object here to briefly examine that claim of continuity with particular reference to the early church's views on icons. Eastern Orthodoxy self-consciously makes icons a central part of their liturgy and tradition.[2] So, is the doctrine and practice of Eastern Orthodoxy today, with the prominent position it gives icons, really inherited from the early

[1] For example, "The Orthodox Church of today can trace its history back to the New Testament Church in unbroken continuity." (http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/readings/Orthodox_Church/origin.shtml)

[2] "That Orthodox Christians give a very special place to the Holy Icons is hard to miss. Our churches, homes, and even places of business are filled with them, often outside as well as in. Upon entering a church and before prayers at home, Orthodox Christians generally perform bows from the waist[1] and kiss the icons in reverence. During the worship services in an Orthodox Church, the Priest frequently incenses the icons and the worshipers frequently bow and even prostrate toward them. . . . [F]or Orthodox Christians icons are central to the Christian Faith." (http://www.orthodoxanswers.org/defenseofholyicons.)

church? Icons are more central to the Eastern Orthodox than for Roman Catholics. Further, Roman Catholics have developed a doctrine of a Holy Spirit led development of the church and its traditions which allows it to defend itself against charges of having departed from the Apostolic Tradition. A Roman Catholic may freely admit that the early church didn't look much like they do today but defend the development of their liturgy by insisting that God guided it. But because Eastern Orthodoxy stakes its claim to legitimacy on "unbroken continuity" with the early church, any proof of significant departure of the Orthodox from the practices of the early church would undermine their claim. To defend their current prominent use of icons, the Orthodox have to assert that their iconography goes back to the Apostles. Indeed, they insist that Luke himself made the first icon (of Mary).

Icons and the History of the Church

Early Jewish View on Icons

What does history say about this claim? Do the icons go back to the earliest church? First of all, many of the early Christians were Jews. Second-Temple Jews had very strict principles against representing God in images and severe restrictions against images of anything, for any reason. "Whereas a Jew was permitted to violate

the ordinances of the Torah under threat of death, an exception was made of idolatry, immorality and bloodshed, idolatry ranking first in importance."[3] The Talmud had detailed rules on what objects with images, and what kinds of images, that a Jew could have (in any context, for any reason). The Talmud taught, "Whosoever recognizes idols has denied the entire Torah; and whosoever denies idols has recognized the entire Torah" (*Sifre*, Deut. 54 and parallel passages).[4]

Here, we encounter one of the difficulties of this debate: Orthodox defenders will categorically deny that their icons can be referred to as "idols" and so historical references, such as the Talmud, which refer to "idols", they say, are inapplicable. That is, they would say that references to "idols" are to some other category of images than are the "icons" they claim the New Testament church adopted immediately upon inception and which they have faithfully preserved. But the Jewish polemic of the period was to pour scorn on idolatry including by the use of derogatory names.

> Although the Jews were forbidden in general to mock at anything holy, it was a merit to deride idols (Meg. 25b), and Akiba decreed that the names of the gods be changed

[3] http://www.come-and-hear.com/zarah/zarah_0.html

[4] "WORSHIP, IDOL," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/15027-worship-idol.

into derogatory names (Sifre, Deut. 61, end, *et passim*). Thus, Baal-zebub (II Kings i. 2, 6) is called Beel-zebul (בעל זבול = "*dominus stercoris*") in Matt. xii. 24, 27, and elsewhere, and the word with which the Talmud designates sacrifice to idols (זבל; Yer. Ber. 13b) literally means "to manure." The Hellenistic Jews also observed this custom, so that they applied the term εἰδωλόθυτος to what the Gentiles called ἱερίθυτος (Deissmann, "Die Hellenisierung des Semitischen Monotheismus," Leipsic, 5, 1903).[5]

Early Church View of Icons

The commitment of second-temple Judaism to build a "fence" around the Second Commandment was such that Jews of the period protested the Roman flags with images and the profile of Caesar on the coins. Therefore, we can surmise that had the early church immediately adopted the use of icons in their meetings, there would have been vigorous denunciations from the traditional Jews. Given the heated controversy over circumcision and eating ceremonially unclean meat, surely an innovation involving something Talmudic Judaism felt so strongly about as imagery in worship would have caused a heated debate that would have left some records.

[5] Ibid.

Furthermore, early Christians (and sometimes Jews) were commonly called "atheists" by the Romans.[6] They did so because the Christians (and Jews) did not have any images in their homes or churches and hence assumed that they had no gods at all. Polycarp (c. 156) was asked by the Romans to say, "away with the atheist", by which the Romans meant to include the Christians.[7] The Romans so conflated visible imagery with theism they assumed those without images were atheists. Hence, had the early church abounded in iconography, as Eastern Orthodoxy suggests they did, it is unlikely the Romans would have launched that particular criticism. Why would the Roman proconsul assume Polycarp is an "atheist" if his home and meeting places had images for worship or veneration?

The pagan philosopher and critic of Christianity Celsus made Christian rejection of all images a point of criticism, claiming that Greek philosophers understood that the images were not the gods themselves. According to Celsus, the Greek worship of the gods did not terminate on the physical object or icon, but through them passed into the actual god, never resting on the mere medium or icon. The image was a symbol for the god and not the god per se; honoring the symbol was therefore a way of honoring the god. This

[6] "The ancient world regarded the Jews as atheists because of their refusal to worship visible gods. 'Whosoever denies idols is called a Jew' (Meg. 13a, b)." (Ibid.)

[7] *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Chapter 9.

would later become exactly the theological defense of the veneration of icons in Eastern Orthodoxy. The Eastern Orthodox now insist that their bowing to icons is not idolatry because the honor they give the image is conveyed to God or the saint the icon represents.[8]

Origin (184-254) responded to Celsus by admitting that Christians used no images; he mocked the notion that images were helpful in worship, and, citing the Second Commandment wrote, "It is in consideration of these and many other such commands, that they [Christians] not only avoid temples, altars, and images, but are

[8] For example, see "Honoring God's Work", Orthodox Research Institute, http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/liturgics/cozby_honoring_God.htm.

They will often quote Basil, " . . . because the honor paid to the image passes on to the prototype. " (Basil of Caesarea, c. 330-379.) However, it is not at all clear here that Basil has in mind any reference to physical images in worship or implying that the church by his time used any such images. He is rather making a highly theological argument for the Trinity. Here is the frequently quoted phrase in context:

> So that according to the distinction of Persons, both are one and one, and according to the community of Nature, one. How, then, if one and one, are there not two Gods? Because we speak of a king, and of the king's image, and not of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one; because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype. Now what in the one case the image is by reason of imitation, that in the other case the Son is by nature; and as in works of art the likeness is dependent on the form, so in the case of the divine and uncompounded nature the union consists in the communion of the Godhead. (Basil, "The Holy Spirit" (*De Spiritu Sancto*), 18, 45.) http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3203.htm.

ready to suffer death when it is necessary, rather than debase by any such impiety the conception *which they have of the Most High God."*[9]

The Difference between Art and Icon

We should differentiate between art and icons. Eastern Orthodox will sometimes make that distinction themselves. "Contrary to popular, non-Orthodox belief, icons are not art."[10] Clement of Alexandria (c.150 – c. 215) wrote, "Works of art cannot then be sacred and divine."[11] That being the case then, the discovery of early Christian art does not mean the discovery of early Christian iconography. By "icons" I am specifically referring to religious symbols to which respect is paid in congregational worship.

I do not here want to get into the discussion of whether there is a legitimate difference between worship (*latria*) and "veneration" (*dulia*), but only to note that it is giving veneration to an image that constitutes the use of icons, as the Eastern Orthodox practice it, not the mere presence of images which may only be decoration. Therefore, the existence of decorations and imagery at catacombs

[9] Origin, *Contra Celsus*, Book VII, Chapter 64.

[10] All Saints of Alaska Orthodox Church, http://www.allsaintsofalaska.ca/index.php/the-orthodox-church/65-about-icons.

[11] Translated by Rev. William Wilson, The Stromata, or Miscellanies, Clement of Alexandria, Book VII, Chapter V.

does not necessarily prove that such images were used as icons. Opposition to icons does not necessarily suggest opposition to art or symbolism. At the Synod of Elvira (c. 305), as we will see, Christians were not necessarily discouraged from art, even of Biblical or Christian subjects, but were discouraged to have art in contexts that would tempt them to use it in worship.

While there is one small church in Syria (Dura-Europas) with decorations and the catacombs contained some early Christian art, there is no evidence from the early church of using decorations as "icons" (objects of "veneration"). That is, even if we granted the Orthodox distinction between "veneration" and "worship" and between "icons" and "idols," even Orthodox apologists are not able to put forward an incontrovertible example of the early church "venerating icons." Some Eastern Orthodox apologists for icons make much of Dura-Europas and now claim that archeology has proven the widespread use of icons in the early church.[12] However, the fact that one (or a few), small church(es) has (have) been found with images does not constitute evidence of anything other than an

[12] For example, Eastern Orthodox apologist David Withun consistently calls the decorations found at Dura Europas "icons." He writes, "The very presence of these icons at all [at *Dura Europas*] in fact attests to their veneration." Further, he assumes that Dura Europas is representative of early church buildings generally. On that basis, he concludes, "we've established that icons were present in the early Church." (David Withun, Pious Fabrications, "A Defense of the Holy Icons", December 11, 2010, http://www.piousfabrications.com/2010/12/defense-of-holy-icons.html.)

exception, an exception of allowing decorations, not even a clear exception of iconography.

Later Church Opposition to Icons

Of more substantial evidence is the explicit, written teachings of leaders of the early church. A synod of the church, meeting in Elvira, Spain about the year 305, appears to build a fence against encroaching idolatry by restricting even art in church buildings. Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira states, "Pictures are not to be placed in churches, so that they do not become objects of worship and adoration." Note the implicit distinction between mere decorations ("pictures") on the one hand, and "objects of worship and adoration" on the other. The prohibition was against any images in the church buildings to forestall the danger of those images becoming icons. Hence, the 19 bishops at the Synod of Elvira were objecting to the presence of art in a church because of the temptation it presented; for example, they would object to our stained glass, saying that it had the potential to become idolatrous. Hence they appear to be stricter at prohibiting decorations in churches than most modern evangelicals would be because they were aware of the potential for the decorations to become involved with worship. That it appears to be a warning against decorations so that they do not potentially become "objects of worship" suggests that there were no such icons in the early church by AD 305.

About the year 327 the early church historian Eusebius (c. AD 263 – 339), who lived in Jerusalem, received a letter from the emperor's sister, Constantia, asking him for a picture of Christ. Eusebius replied that he knew that such pictures existed in the marketplaces but he didn't believe that the people who make such things were Christians. He took it for granted that only pagan artists would make such representations. Eusebius wrote that even the incarnate Christ cannot appear in an image, for:

> The flesh which He put on for our sake … was mingled with the glory of His divinity so that the mortal part was swallowed up by Life. . . . This was the splendor that Christ revealed in the transfiguration and which cannot be captured in human art. To depict purely the human form of Christ before its transformation, on the other hand, is to break the commandment of God and to fall into pagan error.[13]

This reasoning would later be contradicted by John of Damascus (c. 675 –749), likely the most important theologian of iconography. My point here isn't to referee the validity of their competing theologies

[13] David M. Gwynn, *From Iconoclasm to Arianism: The Construction of Christian Tradition in the Iconoclast Controversy* [Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 47 (2007) 225–251], 227.

but to note that almost four centuries prior to John's defense of icons on the basis of the incarnation, Eusebius was making the opposite argument, to oppose images of Christ. For that he is deemed by some, like Jaroslav Pelikan, as "the father of iconoclasm."[14] But such a title assumes that Eusebius was unusual or the innovator. While apparently later iconoclasts took up Eusebius' theology to oppose icons, Eusebius seems here only to be theologically defending a practice of excluding icons that had been assumed for the first few centuries of the church. A tradition, such as Catholicism, could handle this development by arguing that the church evolved under the direction of the Holy Spirit. But a tradition that stakes its claim on "unbroken continuity" must argue that Eusebius was in error; that he was a rare dissenting voice. But even that doesn't dismiss the historical evidence that Eusebius's argument (as well as Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira) constitutes. Even if one argues that Eusebius and Elvira were wrong and hold no authority, both show that, at least, significant leaders in the early church opposed icons.

Another prominent example is Epiphanius (inter 310–320 – 403), considered a "saint" in the Eastern Orthodox Church. He was Bishop of Salamis, in Cyprus. He wrote in the last section of Letter 51 (c. 394), to John, Bishop of Jerusalem:

[14] Ibid., 243.

> I went in to pray, and found there a curtain hanging on the doors of the said church, dyed and embroidered. It bore an image either of Christ or of one of the saints; I do not rightly remember whose the image was. Seeing this, and being loath that an image of a man should be hung up in Christ's church contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, I tore it asunder and advised the custodians of the place to use it as a winding sheet for some poor person.

He goes on to tell John that such images are "contrary to our religion" and to instruct the presbyter of the church that such images are "an occasion of offense."[15] Hence, the archeological evidence

[15] Epiphanius, Letter 51, chapter 9, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001051.htm. Another letter from Epiphanius, to Emperor Theodosius, likewise has iconoclastic comments in it. There have been some questions raised about the authenticity of these letters, first raised by the "iconodules" when the iconoclasts cited Epiphanius for their cause. Ninth century iconodule Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Nicephorus (758-828) claimed that Epiphanius' iconoclastic letters were forgeries and that opinion held sway for over 1,200 years until Karl Holl (1866-1926) challenged them in his important 1910 manuscript *Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Epiphanius* (Gorgias Press, 2010). The questions do not appear to be text-based; that is, there are no copies of Letter 51 without the iconoclastic remarks. Steven Bigham is an Eastern Orthodox priest who has written a book making the case against Epiphanius' apparent iconoclasm, *Epiphanius of Salamis, Doctor of Iconoclasm? Deconstruction of a Myth* (Patristic Theological Library), Orthodox Research Institute, 2008. According to Istvan M. Bugár, of the

gives us some examples of Christian imagery but only very rarely in church buildings. The actual writings of the early church leaders are strictly opposed to the dangers of iconography, even to the point of restricting decorations in churches for fear they would lead to use in worship. As yet, I've found no written source of an early church leader defending the use of images in church buildings or as part of corporate worship prior to the fifth century, much less advocating for the kind of iconography now practiced by the Eastern Orthodox. I have not found an Eastern Orthodox advocate for iconography able to cite a verifiable source supporting icons, the quote from Basil (above in footnote 8) notwithstanding.

When did the use of icons arise then? That's a much larger question but we can ascertain that they rose to acceptability sometime after the fourth century. Yet these images of Christ and other "saints" caused great controversy. The icons were a source of discontent which emerged in the eighth century (the 700s) as the bitter iconoclastic controversy. To maintain the position that the Eastern Orthodox practices have preserved an "unbroken continuity"

University of Debrecen, Hungary, "the overwhelming majority of twentieth century scholars" accepted Holl's conclusions about the debated letters and Epiphanius' iconoclasm. Bugár dissents. (http://unideb.academia.edu/IMBug%C3%A1r/Papers/1687867/_What_Did_Epiphanius_Write_to_Emperor_Theodosius_with_the_edition_of_the_text_in_an_appendix_). Without texts omitting the iconoclastic comments, there appear to be no reason to not accept them.

with the practices of the early church, they would need to show that it was the iconoclasts who were the innovators, seeking to take away the Church from the Apostolic Tradition, from the fifth to eighth centuries. I know of no grounds on which they could support such a case.

Icons and Pagan Practices

Rather, it appears that iconoclasm was the inherited position and the acceptance of icons was the innovation. In the east the emperor was the major force in the leadership of the church and for a century many of the emperors were iconoclastic. They believed that the images were idols and that they were associated with the idolatry Christianity had displaced. They believed that the representations of Christ, Mary, and the Apostles, clearly borrowed from pagan idols. In this instinct there was a measure of truth. The representations of Christ as the Almighty Lord on his judgment throne owed something to pictures of Zeus. Portraits of the Mother of God were not wholly independent of a pagan past of venerated mother-goddesses. In the popular mind the saints had come to fill a role that had been played by heroes and deities.[16]

[16] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (The Penguin History of the Church, 1993), 283.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council and Icons

In 726, the emperor Leo started a campaign to eliminate the icons. In 754 the first "Seventh Ecumenical Council" (often known as the Council of Hieria) convened near Constantinople. The 333 assembled bishops condemned the icons:

> If anyone ventures to represent in human figures, by means of material colours, by reason of the incarnation, the substance or person (ousia or hypostasis) of the Word, which cannot be depicted, and does not rather confess that even after the Incarnation he [i.e., the Word] cannot be depicted, let him be anathema![17]

However, there was a great deal of controversy over this council, with none of the five patriarchs attending. So there was a great struggle in the Eastern Church. For much of a century the icons were prohibited but eventually they were allowed back. The Empress Irene convened the "Second Council of Nicaea," now known as the legitimate "Seventh Ecumenical Council" by the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. The Council established the use of icons and relics, anathematizing iconoclasm in 787. That, I believe, marks the true birth of Eastern Orthodoxy.

[17] Epitome of the Definition of the Iconoclastic Conciliabulum held in Constantinople, AD 754, Ninth Statement, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/icono-cncl754.asp

Summary and Conclusion

We set out to determine the validity of the Eastern Orthodox claim that their church has an "unbroken" history back to the Apostles. We examined that claim of continuity with particular reference to the early church's views on icons since Eastern Orthodoxy self-consciously makes icons a central part of their liturgy and tradition. But by looking carefully at the history of icons its origin was not found in the early church. Indeed, even when some churches later used pictures, there is no evidence they were as objects of "veneration." Rather, we discovered the true birth of Eastern Orthodoxy arose only after the "Seventh Ecumenical Council" which established the use of icons and relics, anathematizing iconoclasm in 787. Hence, whatever other continuity there may have been with Eastern Orthodoxy and the early Christian church apparently was not in the use of icons in their worship.

The Church Fathers and the Resurrection of the Saints in Matthew 27

Norman L. Geisler

The Biblical Passage in Question

"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God'" (Matt. 27:51-54 ESV).

The Current Challenge to Its Historicity

In his book on *The Resurrection of Jesus* (RJ), Mike Licona speaks of the resurrection of the saints narrative as "a **weird**

residual fragment" (RJ, 527) and a **"strange report"** (RJ, 530, 548, 556, emphasis added in these citations).[1] He called it **"poetical,"** a **"legend,"** an **"embellishment,"** and literary **"special effects"** (see 306, 548, 552, and 553). He claims that Matthew is using a Greco-Roman literary genre which is a "flexible genre" in which **"it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins"** (RJ, 34). Licona also believes that other New Testament texts may be legends, such as, the mob falling backward at Jesus' claim "I am he" in John 18:4-6 (see RJ, 306, note 114) and the presence of angels at the tomb recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 28:2-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:4-7; John 20:11-14; see RJ, 185-186).

Licona cites some contemporary evangelical scholars in favor of his view, such as, Craig Blomberg who denied the miracle of the coin and the fish story in Matthew (Matt. 17:27).[2] Blomberg also said, "All kinds of historical questions remain unanswered about both events [the splitting of the temple curtain and the resurrection of the saints]" (*Matthew***,** electronic ed., 2001 Logos Library System; the *New American commentary* [421]. Broadman

[1] Licona has subsequent questions about the certitude of his view on Matthew 27 but has not retracted the view.

[2] Craig Blomberg, "A Constructive Traditional Response to New Testament Criticism," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to the Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) 354 fn. 32.

and Holman, vol. 22). He also cites W. L. Craig, siding with a Jesus Seminar fellow, Dr. Robert Miller, that Matthew added this story to Mark's account and did not take it literally. Craig concluded that there are "probably only a few [contemporary] conservative scholars who would treat the story as historical" (from Craig's comments in Paul Copan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Baker, 1998). On the contrary, in terms of the broad spectrum of orthodox scholars down through the centuries, there are relatively "few" contemporary scholars who deny its authenticity, and they are overshadowed by the "many" (vast majority of) historic orthodox scholars who held to the historicity of this Matthew 27 resurrection of the saints.

The Biblical Evidence for Its Historicity

In spite of these contemporary denials, many scholars have pointed out the numerous indications of historicity in the Matthew 27:51-54 text itself, such as: (1) It occurs in a book that presents itself as historical (cf. Matt. 1:1,18); (2) Numerous events in this book have been confirmed as historical (e.g., the birth, life, deeds, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ); (3) It is presented in the immediate context of other historical events, namely, the death and resurrection of Christ; (4) The resurrection of these saints is also

presented as an event occurring as a result of the literal death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Matt. 27:52-53); (5) Its lineage with the preceding historical events is indicated by a series of conjunctions (and…and…and, etc.); (6) It is introduced by the attention getting "Behold" (v. 51) which focuses on its reality;[3] (7) It has all the same essential earmarks of the literal resurrection of Christ, including: (a) empty tombs, (b) dead bodies coming to life, and (c) these resurrected bodies appearing to many witnesses; (8) It lacks any literary embellishment common to myths, being a short, simple, and straightforward account; (9) It contains element that are confirmed as historical by other Gospels, such as (a) the veil of the temple being split (Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), and (b) the reaction of the Centurion (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). If these events are historical, then there is no reason to reject the other events, such as, the earthquake and the resurrection of the saints.

Further, it is highly unlikely that a resurrection story would be influenced by a Greco-Roman genre source (which Licona embraces) since the Greeks did not believe in the resurrection of the body (cf. Acts 17:32). In fact, bodily resurrection was contrary to their dominant belief that deliverance *from* the body, not a

[3] Carl Henry noted that "Calling attention to the new and unexpected, the introductory Greek *ide*—See! Behold!—stands out of sentence construction to rivet attention upon God's awesome intervention" (Henry, *God Revelation and Authority.*Texas: Word Books, 1976) 2:17-18.

resurrection *in* the body, was of the essence of salvation. Homer said death is final and resurrection does not occur (*Iliad* 24.549-551). Hans-Josef Klauck declared, "There is nowhere anything like the idea of Christian resurrection in the Greco-Roman world" (*The Religious Context of Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, 151).

Don Carson makes an interesting observation about those who deny the historicity of this text, saying, "One wonders why the evangelist, if he had nothing historically to go on, did not invent a midrash [legend] with fewer problems" (Carson, "Matthew" in *Expositors Bible Commentary; Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank Gabelein. Zondervan, 1984, 581).

Support from the Great Teachers of the Church

Despite his general respect for the early Fathers, Mike Licona refers to their statements on this passage as "vague," "unclear," "ambiguous," "problematic," and "confusing."[4] However, this is misleading, as the readers can see for themselves in the following quotations. For even though they differ on details**, the**

[4] Mike Licona, "When the Saints Go Marching In (Matthew 27:52-53): Historicity, Apocalyptic Symbol, and Biblical Inerrancy" a paper given at the November, 2011 Evangelical Philosophical Society meeting.

Fathers are clear, unambiguous, and unanimous as to the historical nature of this event. We have highlighted their important words which affirm the literal and historical nature of the event.

The apostolic Father Ignatius was the earliest one to cite this passage, and Licona acknowledges that his writings "are widely accepted as authentic and are dated ca. AD 100-138 and more commonly to ca. AD 110" (Licona, RJ, 248). He adds that these writings provide "valuable insights for knowledge of the early second-century church…" (ibid.). If so, they are the earliest and most authentic verification of the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27 on record—one coming from a contemporary of the apostle John!

Ignatius to the Trallians (AD 70-115)

"For Says the Scripture, 'Many bodies of the saints that slept arose,' their graves being opened. He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but **He arose accompanied by a multitude**" (chap. IX, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, 70. All emphasis in the following citations is added).

Ignatius to the Magnesians

"…[T]herefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master—how shall we be able to live apart

from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And **therefore He who they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead"** [Chap. IX] (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. l (1885). Reprinted by Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 62. Emphasis added in all these citations).

Irenaeus (AD 120-200)

Irenaeus also was closely linked to the New Testament writers. He knew Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John. Irenaeus wrote**: "…He [Christ] suffered who can lead those souls aloft that followed His ascension**. This event was also an indication of the fact that when the holy hour of Christ descended [to Hades], **many souls ascended and were seen in their bodies"** (*Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* XXVIII, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, Alexander Roberts, ibid., 572-573). This is followed (in XXIX) by this statement: "The Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they had particular stress upon the fact that Christ [should be] of the seed of David**. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire [to establish this point], took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is the seed of David…"** (ibid., 573).

Clement of Alexandria (AD 155-200)

Another second century Father verified the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27, writing**, "'But those who had fallen asleep descended dead, but ascended alive.' Further, the Gospel says, 'that many bodies of those that slept arose,'—plainly as having been translated to a better state"** *(Alexander Roberts, ed. Stromata, Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. II, chap. VI, *491***).**

Tertullian (AD 160-222)

The Father of Latin Christianity wrote: '"And the sun grew dark at mid-day;' (and when did it 'shudder exceedingly' except at the passion of Christ, when the earth trembled to her centre, and the veil of the temple was rent, and **the tombs burst asunder**?) 'because these two evils hath My People done'" (Alexander Roberts, ed. *An Answer to the Jews,* Chap XIII, Ante-*Nicene Fathers,* vol. 3, 170).

Hippolytus (AD 170-235)

"And again he exclaims**, 'The dead shall start forth from the graves,' that is, from the earthly bodies, being born again spiritual, not carnal**. For this he says**, is the Resurrection that takes place through the gate of heaven,** through which, he says, all those that do not enter remain dead" (Alexander Roberts, *Ante-*

Nicene Fathers, vol. 5, The Refutation of All Heresy, BooK V, chap. 3, 54).

Origen (AD 185-254)

"'But,' continues Celsus, 'what great deeds did Jesus perform as being a God?...Now to this question**, although we are able to show the striking and miraculous character of the events which befell Him**, yet from what other source can we furnish an answer than the Gospel narratives, which state that 'there was an earth quake, and that **the rocks were split asunder, and the tombs were opened,** and the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, and the darkness prevailed in the day-time, the sun failing to give light'" (*Against Celsus*, Book II, XXXIII. Alexander Roberts, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, 444-445).

"But if this Celsus, who, in order to find matter of accusation against Jesus and the Christians, extracts from the Gospel even passages which are incorrectly interpreted, **but passes over in silence the evidences of the divinity of Jesus, would listen to divine portents, let him read the Gospel, and see that even the centurion, and they who with him kept watch over Jesus, on seeing the earthquake, and the events that occurred**, were greatly afraid, saying, 'This man was the Son of God'" (Ibid., XXVI, 446).

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. AD 315-c. 386)

Early Fathers in the East also verified the historicity of the Matthew 27 text. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote: "But it is impossible, some one will say, that the dead should rise; and yet Eliseus[Elisha] twice raised the dead, --when he was live and also when dead…and is Christ not risen? … But in this case both the Dead of whom we speak Himself arose**, and many dead were raised without having even touched Him. For *many bodies of the Saints which slept arose, and they came out of the graves after His Resurrection, and went into the Holy City,*** (evidently this city in which we now are,) **and appeared to many"** (*Catechetical Lectures* XIV, 16 in Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. VII, 98).

Further, "I believe that Christ was also raised from the dead, both from the Divine Scriptures, and from the operative power even at this day of Him who arose,--**who descended into hell alone, but ascended thence with a great company *for He went down to death, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose* through Him"** (ibid., XIV, 17).

Cyril adds, "He was truly laid as Man in a tomb of rock**; but rocks were rent asunder by terror because of Him. He went down into the regions beneath the earth, thence also He might redeem the righteous.** For tell me, **couldst thou wish the living only to enjoy His grace,… and not wish those who from Adam**

had a long while been imprisoned to have now gained their liberty?"

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. AD 330-c. 389)

"He [Christ] lays down His life, but He has the power to take it again; and the veiI rent, for the mysterious doors of Heaven are opened;[5] **the rocks are cleft, the dead arise.** He dies but he gives life, and by His death destroys death. He is buried, but He rises again**. He goes down to Hell, but He brings up the souls; He ascends to Heaven**, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead, and to put to the test such words are yours" (Schaff, ibid., vol. VII, Sect XX, 309).

Jerome (AD 342-420)

Speaking of the Matthew 27 text, he wrote: **"It is not doubtful to any what these great signs signify according to the letter, namely, that heaven and earth and all things should bear witness to their crucified Lord"** (cited in Aquinas, *Commentary on*

[5] Despite the curious phrase about the "mysterious doors of Heaven are opened" when the veil was split, everything in this passage speaks of literal death and literal resurrection of Christ and the saints after His death. The book of Hebrews makes the same claim that after the veil was split that Christ entered "once for all" into the most holy place (heaven) to achieve "eternal salvation" for us (Heb. 9:12).

the Four Gospels, vol. I, part III: *St. Matthew* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), 964.

"As Lazarus rose from the dead, so also did many bodies of the Saints rise again to shew forth the Lord's resurrection; yet notwithstanding that the graves were opened, they did not rise again before the Lord rose, that He might be the first-born of the resurrection from the dead" (cited by Aquinas, ibid., 963).

Hilary of Poitiers (c. AD 315-c.357)

"*The graves were opened*, for the bands of death were loosed. ***And many bodies of the saints which slept arose***, for illuminating the darkness of death, and shedding light upon the gloom of Hades, **He robbed the spirits of death"** (cited by Aquinas, ibid., 963).

Chrysostom (AD 347-407)

"When He [Christ] remained on the cross they had said tauntingly, *He saved others, himself he cannot save.* **But what He should not do for Himself, that He did and more than that for the bodies of the saints. For if it was a great thing to raise Lazarus after four days, much more was it that they who had long slept should not shew themselves above; this is indeed a proof of the resurrection to come. But that it might not be thought that that which was done was an appearance merely,** the

Evangelist adds, *and come out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many"* (cited by Aquinas, ibid., 963-964).

St. Augustine (AD 354-430)

The greatest scholar at the beginning of the Middle Ages, St. Augustine, wrote: "As if Moses' body could not have been hid somewhere…and be raised up therefrom by divine power at the time when Elias and he were seen with Christ: **Just as at the time of Christ's passion many bodies of the saints arose, and after his resurrection appeared, according to the Scriptures, to many in the holy city"** (Augustine, *On the Gospel of St. John*, Tractate cxxiv, 3, Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, 448).

"Matthew proceeds thus: 'And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arise, and come out of the graves after the resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.' There is no reason to fear that these **facts**, which have been related only by Matthew, may appear to be inconsistent with the narrative present by any one of the rest [of the Gospel writers)…. For as the said Matthew not only tells how the centurion 'saw the earthquake,' but also appends the words [in v. 54], 'and those **things that were done'**…. Although Matthew has not added any such statement, it

would still have been perfectly legitimate to suppose, that as many astonishing things did take place at that time…, the **historians** were at liberty to select for narration any particular incident which they were severally disposed to instance as the subject of the wonder. **And it would not be fair to impeach them with inconsistency, simply because one of them may have specified one occurrence as the immediate cause of the centurion's amazement, while another introduces a different incident"** (St. Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels,* Book III, chap. xxi in Schaff, ibid., vol. VI, 206, emphasis added).

St. Remigius (c. 438-c. 533) "Apostle of the Franks"

"But some one will ask, **what became of those who rose again when the Lord rose. We must believe that they rose again to be witnesses of the Lord's resurrection.** Some have said that they died again, and were turned to dust, as Lazarus and the rest whom the Lord raised. But we must by no means give credit to these men's sayings, since if they were to die again, it would be greater torment to them, than if they had not risen again**. We ought therefore to believe without hesitation that they who rose from the dead at the Lord's resurrection, ascended also into heaven together with Him"** (cited in Aquinas, ibid., 964).

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

As Augustine was the greatest Christian thinker at the beginning of the Middle Ages, Aquinas was the greatest teacher at the end. **And he too held to the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27**, as is evident from his citations from the Fathers (with approval) in his great commentary on the Gospels (*The Golden Chain*), as all the above Aquinas references indicate, including Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Chrysostom, and Remigius (see Aquinas, ibid., 963-964).

John Calvin (1509-1564)

The chain of great Christian teachers holding to the historicity of this text continued into the Reformation and beyond. John Calvin wrote: "Matt. 27.52. *And the tombs were opened.* This was a particular portent in which God testified that His Son had entered death's prison, not to stay there shut up, but to lead all free who were there held captive…. That is the reason why He, who was soon to be shut in a tomb opened the tombs elsewhere. Yet we may doubt whether this opening of the tombs happened before the resurrection, **for the resurrection of the saints which is shortly after added followed in my opinion the resurrection of Christ. It is absurd for some interpreters to imagine that they spent three days alive and breathing, hidden in tombs. It seems likely to me that at Christ's death the tombs at once opened; at His**

resurrection some of the godly men received breath and came out and were seen in the city. Christ is called the Firstborn from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18)…. This reasoning agrees very well, seeing that the breaking of the tombs was the presage of new life, and the fruit itself, the effect, appeared three days later, as Christ rising again led other companions from the graves with Himself. And in this sign it was shown that neither His dying nor His resurrection were private to himself, but breathe the odour of life into all the faithful" (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, trans. A. W. Morrison. Eds. David and Thomas Torrance. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972, vol. 3, 211-212).

Summary Comments

Of course, there are some aspects of this Matthew 27 text of the saints on which the Fathers were uncertain. For example, there is the question as to whether the saints were resurrected before or after Jesus was and whether it was a resuscitation to a mortal body or a permanent resurrection to an immortal body (see Wenham article below)**. However, there is no reason for serious doubt that all the Fathers surveyed accepted the historicity of this account**. Their testimony is very convincing for many reasons:

First, the earliest confirmation as to the historical nature of the resurrection of the saints in the Matthew 27 passage goes all the

way back to Ignatius, a contemporary of the apostle John (who died c. AD 90). One could not ask for an earlier verification that the resurrection of these saints than that of Ignatius (AD 70-115). He wrote: "**He who they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead"** [Chap. IX].[6] And in the Epistle to the Trallians he added, **"For Says the Scripture, 'Many bodies of the saints that slept arose,' their graves being opened**. He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but **He arose accompanied by a multitude**" (chap. IX, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, 70). The author who is a contemporary of the last apostle (John) is speaking unmistakably of the saints in Matthew 27 who were literally resurrected after Jesus was.

Second, the next testimony to the historicity of this passage is Irenaeus who knew Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John. Other than the apostolic Fathers, Irenaeus is as good as any witness to the earliest post-apostolic understanding of the Matthew 27 text. And he made it clear that "**many" persons "ascended and were seen in their bodies"** (*Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* XXVIII. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, ibid., 572-573).

[6] See ibid., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *Ignatius to the Magnesians* i*n The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I (1885), reprinted by Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 62. Emphasis added in all these citations.

Third, there is a virtually unbroken chain of great Fathers of the church after Irenaeus (2nd cent.) who took this passage as historical (see above). Much of the alleged "confusion" and "conflict" about the text is cleared up when one understands that, while the tombs were opened at the time of the death of Christ, nonetheless, the resurrection of these saints did not occur until "**after** his resurrection" (Matt. 27:53, emphasis added)[7] since Jesus is the "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:23) of the resurrection.

Fourth, the great church Father St. Augustine stressed the historicity of the Matthew 27 text about the resurrection of the saints, speaking of them as **"facts"** and **"things that were done"** as recorded by the Gospel **"historians"** (St. Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels,* Book III, chap. xxi in Schaff, ibid., vol. VI, 206, emphasis added).

[7] See an excellent article clearing up this matter by John Wenham titled "When Were the Saints Raised?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 32:1 (1981): 150-152. He argues convincingly for repunctuating the Greek to read: "And the tombs were opened. The bodies of the sleeping saints were raised, and they went out from their tombs after the resurrection." While this affects the alleged poetic flavor of the passage, it is certainly Bizzare to hold like some that the saints were raised at Christ's death and then sat around the opened tombs for three days before they left. It also contradicts 1 Corinthians 15:20 which declares that Christ is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection and Matthew 27:53 which says they did not come out of the tombs until "after" the resurrection of Christ.

Fifth, many of the Fathers used this passage in an apologetic sense as evidence of the resurrection of Christ. This reveals their conviction that it was a historical event resulting from the historical event of the resurrection of Christ. Irenaeus was explicit on this point, declaring, "Matthew also, who had a still greater desire [to establish this point], took particular pains to afford them **convincing proof that Christ is the seed of David**…" (Irenaeus, ibid., 573).

Some, like Chrysostom, took it as evidence for the resurrection to come. "**For if it was a great thing to raise Lazarus after four days, much more was it that they who had long slept should not shew themselves above; this is indeed a proof of the resurrection to come***"* (cited by Aquinas, ibid., 963-964).

Origen took it as "**evidences of the divinity of Jesus"** (Origen, ibid., Book II, chap. XXXVI, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 446). None of these Fathers would have given it such apologetic weight had they not been convinced of the historicity of the resurrection of these saints after Jesus' resurrection in Matthew 27.

Sixth, even the Church Father Origen, who was the most prone to allegorizing away literal events in the Bible, took this text to refer to a literal historical resurrection of saints. He wrote of the events in Matthew 27 that they are "**the evidences of the divinity of Jesus"** (Origen, ibid., Book II, chap. XXXVI. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 446).

Seventh, some of the great teachers of the Church were careful to mention that the saints rose as a result of Jesus' resurrection which is a further verification of the historical nature of the resurrection of the saints in Mathew 27. Jerome wrote: **"As Lazarus rose from the dead, so also did many bodies of the Saints rise again to shew forth the Lord's resurrection;** yet notwithstanding that the graves were opened, they did not rise again before the Lord rose, that He might be the first-born of the resurrection from the dead" (cited by Aquinas, ibid., 963). John Calvin added, "Yet we may doubt whether this opening of the tombs happened before the resurrection, **for the resurrection of the saints which is shortly after added followed in my opinion the resurrection of Christ**. It is absurd for some interpreters to image that they spent three days alive and breathing, hidden in tombs." For "It seems likely to me that **at Christ's death the tombs at once opened; at His resurrection some of the godly men received breath and came out and were seen in the city.** Christ is called the Firstborn from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18" (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 3, 211-212).

Eighth, St. Augustine provides an answer to the false premise of contemporary critics that there must be another reference to a New Testament event like this in order to confirm that it is historical. He wrote**, "It would not be fair to impeach them with inconsistency, simply because one of them may have specified**

one occurrence as the immediate cause of the centurion's amazement, while another introduces a different incident" (St. Augustine, ibid., emphasis added).

So, contrary to the claims of critics, the Matthew 27 account of the resurrection of the saints is a clear and unambiguous affirmation of the historicity of the resurrection of the saints. This is supported by a virtually unbroken line of the great commentators of the Early Church and through the Middle Ages and into the Reformation period (John Calvin).

Not a single example was found of any Father surveyed who believed this was a legend. Such a belief is due to the acceptance of critical methodology, not to either a historical-grammatical exposition of the text or to the supporting testimony of the main orthodox teachers of the Church up to and through the Reformation Period.

Ninth, the impetus for rejecting the story of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27 is not based on good exegesis of the text or on the early support of the Fathers but is based on fallacious premises. (1) First of all, there is an anti-supernatural bias beneath much of contemporary scholarship. But there is no philosophical basis for the rejection of miracles (see our *Miracles and the Modern Mind, revised.* www.BastionBooks.com, 2013), and there is no exegetical basis for rejecting it in the text. Indeed on the same

grounds one could reject the resurrection of Christ since it is supernatural and is found in the same text.

(2) Further, there is also the fallacious premise of double reference which affirms that if an event is not mentioned at least twice in the Gospels, then its historicity is questioned. But on this grounds many other Gospel events must be rejected as well, such as, the story of Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11), and even the birth of Christ in the stable and the angel chorus (Luke 2), as well as many other events in the Gospels. How many times does an event have to be mentioned in a contemporary piece of literature based on reliable witnesses in order to be true?

(3) There is another argument that seems to infect much of contemporary New Testament scholarship on this matter. It is theorized that an event like this, if literal, would have involved enough people and graves to have drawn significant evidence of it in a small place like Jerusalem. Raymond Brown alludes to this, noting that "…many interpreters balk at the thought of many known risen dead being seen in Jerusalem—such a large scale phenomenon should have left some traces in Jewish and/or secular history!"[8]

[8] Raymond E. Brown, "Eschatological Events Accompanying the Death of Jesus, Especially the Raising of the Holy ones from Their Tombs (Matt.

However, at best this is simply the fallacious Argument from Silence. What is more, "many" (Gk: *polla*) can mean only a small group, not hundreds of thousands. Further, the story drew enough attention to make it into one of the canonical Gospels, right alongside of the resurrection of Christ and with other miraculous events. In brief, it is in a historical book; it is said to result from the resurrection of Christ; it was cited apologetically by the early Fathers as evidence of the resurrection of Christ and proof of the resurrection to come. No other evidence is needed for its authenticity.

A Denial of Inerrancy

According to the official statements on inerrancy by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI), the denial of the historicity of the Matthew 27 resurrection of the saints is a denial of the inerrancy of the Bible. This is clear from several official ICBI statements.

(1) The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy speaks against this kind of "dehistoricizing" of the Gospels, saying, "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, **dehistoricizing**, or discounting

27:51-53)" in John P. Galvin ed., *Faith and the Future: Studies in Christian Eschatology* (NY: Paulist Press, 1994), 64.

its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII, emphasis added in these citations).

(2) The statement add**: "all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual"** (Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy (EI)*, 43-44).

(3) ICBI framers affirmed, "Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history**, it is also redemptive *history***, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by **God actually occurred in the space-time world**" (Sproul, EI, 37).

(4) Again, "When the quest for sources produces a **dehistoricizing** of the Bible, a rejection of its teaching or a rejection of the Bible's own claims of authorship [then] it has trespassed beyond its proper limits (Sproul, EI, 55).

Subsequently, Sproul wrote: "As the former and only President of ICBI during its tenure and as the original framer of the Affirmations and Denials of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy, I can say categorically that **Mr. Michael Licona's views are not even remotely compatible with the unified Statement of ICBI"** (Letter, May 22, 2012, emphasis added).

(5) Also, **"We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual"** (*Explaining Hermeneutics* (EH), XIII). **"We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the**

traditions they incorporated" (EH XIV, bold added in all above citations).

(6) Finally, as a framer of the ICBI statements I can testify that Robert Gundry's similar view which deshistoricized parts of Matthew were an object of these ICBI statements. And they led to his being asked to resign from the Evangelical Theological Society (by a 70% majority vote of the membership). Since Licona's views do the same basic thing, then they should be excluded on the same basis. Gundry used Jewish Midrash genre to dehistoricized parts of Gospel history, and Licona used Greco-Roman genre and legends, but the principle is the same.

The Widow's Mite and the Word-Faith Movement

Kirk R. MacGregor

During church stewardship season each fall, a text frequently preached upon to encourage sacrificial giving is Mark 12:41-44 and its parallel in Luke 20:45–21:6, the account of the widow's mite. According to the standard interpretation, Jesus praised the widow for literally giving her last penny to God, such that we should do the same by giving to the church until it hurts. In Word-Faith circles,[1] this text is simultaneously used more dangerously and more palatably. It is used more dangerously in exhorting lower-class people who are already socio-economically disadvantaged to give up whatever meager funds they have to live

[1] A summary of Word-Faith theology can be found in Kirk R. MacGregor, "Word-Faith Movement, Its Theology and Worship," *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (ed. Daniel Patte; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 1329-30. For a critique of Word-Faith theology see ibid, "Recognizing and Successfully Averting the Word-Faith Threat to Evangelicalism," *Christian Apologetics Journal* 6.1 (2007): 53-70.

on to Faith churches, thereby exposing them to predatory lenders, exorbitant credit card debt, and even starvation. But it is used more palatably in promising that if people give all, then God will repay them one hundredfold, thereby providing them the financial security they so desperately seek. Both the danger and the allure were displayed by Juanita Bynum during a recent TBN Praise-a-Thon fundraiser:

> If you got $79.36, empty it out; empty it out at the voice of the prophet. O Jesus, if you got $79.36 I double-dare you to write your last check and declare your bank account empty. Close your account….if all you have is a nickel, wrap it in a tissue and put it in an envelope. If all you have is your clothes, send them…[God says,] give it to me and you will live. Give it to me and you will have more than enough….We're going together into a spirit of wealth.[2]

Some, though not all, Word-Faith teachers even proclaim that the reason the widow gave was because of her "want," or desire, for God to bless her financially and pull her out of her dire straits. The widow's *do ut des*, or "give to get,"[3] intent is

[2] Juanita Bynum, *Praise the Lord: Fall Praise a-Thon*, Trinity Broadcasting Network (8 November 2003).

[3] Max Weber famously identified *do ut des* as the defining characteristic of magic in his classic *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963)

articulated, along with some cheap shots at apologists and theologians who oppose it, by John Avanzini:

> Now watch this: but she [gave] of her want. She wanted something. She wanted something. And even though she was a widow, she was smarter than the apologists. She was smarter than the theologians. She knew how to get God's attention. And she cast it in. She threw it in because she wanted something from her God. And do you believe that you can get the attention of God and not get that which God promised to give to you?[4]

A number of unwarranted presuppositions plague both the mainstream and Word-Faith interpretations of this text. For example, what reason is there for the assumption that Jesus praised the widow, or for the assumption that the widow gave to God? What evidence exists that Jesus held out the widow as a positive example for us to follow? Concerning the Word-Faith interpretation, what reason is there for the assumption that God thereafter rescued the widow from starving to death, much less supplied her a hundred times as much as she gave? Why think the

27. To understand the Word-Faith Movement as teaching religious magic would not be far from the truth.

[4] John Avanzini, *Praise the Lord: Fall Praise-a-Thon*, Trinity Broadcasting Network (5 November 1990).

widow's motivation for giving was to receive something in return? This paper will argue that there is no warrant for any of these presuppositions and that, when approached through the canons of grammatico-historical exegesis, the text decisively points in the opposite direction of each one. To prevent possible misunderstanding at this point, let me emphasize that there are many passages in the Bible which, in context, teach that Christians should give, and give sacrificially, to meet the financial needs of poor members of the body of Christ, the poor in general, people who serve in vocational ministry, the local church, and the global church (*e.g.* 2 Cor. 8–9; Rom. 15:25-33; Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32–5:11). However, the account of the widow's mite is simply not one of them. Rather, this text stands in the prophetic tradition of condemning unscrupulous religious leaders who steal from the poor under the guise of their giving to God (*e.g.* Amos 5:11-12; 8:3-10; Isa. 3:14-15; 10:1-2; Jer. 23:1-2; Ezek. 22:26-31; Psa. 10:1-9; Prov. 22:16, 22; 1 Tim. 6:3-10; 2 Peter 2:2-3, 14-15; Jude 11). To demonstrate this fact, we will analyze the account of the widow's mite in its historical and literary context.

The Historical Context of the Widow's Mite

A virtual consensus has emerged among contemporary historical Jesus researchers across the liberal-conservative theological spectrum that Jesus was staunchly opposed to the

Temple and its leadership.[5] Previously in the Gospel of Mark (11:15-19), Jesus enacted a symbolic destruction of the Temple by overturning the tables of the moneychangers, preventing the sacrificial cultus from functioning, and denouncing the Temple for being a den of *lēstai* (revolutionaries) instead of the house of prayer for all nations that God intended. Under close examination, Jesus' actions constitute a deliberate evocation and performance of Jeremiah 7, where the prophet Jeremiah announced that the First Temple, which his sixth-century BC audience relied upon as a

[5] For verification see John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 357; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1984) 174, 384; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 1993) 257-69; Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 287-90; Ben F. Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master-Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1992) 262-4; Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (1989): 237-70; C. K. Barrett, "The House of Prayer and the Den of Thieves," in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. E. Earle Ellis and E. Grässer (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1975) 13-20; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 2; Fortress: Minneapolis, 1996) 413-28; Richard J. Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple," in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*, ed. B. Lindars (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988) 72-89; Scot McKnight, "Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Jesus Studies," in *Jesus Under Fire*, gen. eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995) 65; Ben Witherington III, *New Testament History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001) 137.

talisman for protection against invaders, must be destroyed due to the corruption stemming from the Jewish leadership and permeating the nation. Similarly, Jesus felt that the Second Temple no longer served as the house of God but had been co-opted by the Jewish religio-political leaders as the talisman of nationalist violence against Rome. Since the Romans had made the Jewish people slaves in their own homeland, reducing over ninety percent of the population to the poverty level and progressively robbing them of their religious liberties, the Sanhedrin propagated a violent messianic scenario as the solution to the Roman problem. Popularizing an interpretation of *mashiach* along the lines of previous national deliverers like the Judges, Saul, David, and Judas Maccabeus, the Temple leadership maintained that the messiah would be a powerful, royal military conqueror who would lead a successful revolt against Rome, drowning in cold blood Roman governors like Pilate and Jewish collaborators with Rome like Herod Antipas and ethnically cleansing Israel from all pagan, Gentile influence. Through this holy violence, Israel would become an independent nation-state once again, as it was (in whole or in part) during the United and Judean Monarchy (1020-586 BC) and the Hasmonean Dynasty (164-63 BC).[6]

[6] Kirk R. MacGregor, "Understanding 'If Anyone Says to This Mountain…' (Mark 11:20-25) in Its Religio-Historical Context," *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 2.1 (2009) 29-31.

The messianic "job description" put forward by the Jewish religio-political leaders stood in diametric opposition to the type of Messiah Jesus claimed to be. By embracing their leadership's violent messianic aspirations, Jesus proposed that the Jewish people found themselves in a far deeper slavery than simply to Rome: they had voluntarily become slaves to the kingdom of the world, the system of domination and oppression ruled by Satan according to which the world normally operates. In Jesus' assessment, the Sanhedrin backed by popular opinion were chillingly attempting to become the people of God by capitulating to the worldly kingdom, aiming to employ political zeal and military wrath to usher in God's great and final redemption and perpetuate it throughout the globe. But Jesus saw that any attempt to win the victory of God through the devices of Satan is to lose the battle. For by trying to beat Rome at its own game, the Jewish religious aristocracy had unwittingly become "slaves" and even "sons" of the devil, "a murderer from the beginning" whose violent tendencies they longed to accomplish (John 8:34-44) and who were blindly leading the people of Israel to certain destruction (Matt. 15:14; 23:15; Luke 6:39). Hence the Jewish leaders comprised the *lēstai* fomenting revolution in the synagogues, streets, and rabbinic schools who holded themselves up in the Temple. By uncritically accepting their program, Jesus contended that Israel had abandoned its original vocation to be the light of the

world which would reach out with open arms to foreign nations and actively display to them God's love.[7] Nowhere was this abdication of divine calling more clearly seen than at the Temple, as Gentiles were barred from entering the Temple proper on pain of death. All around the Temple proper was a nine-foot high terrace with stairs, surrounded by a five-foot high wall designed to keep out the Gentiles, namely, the "dividing wall" described by Paul (Eph. 2:14). Pillars on the wall bore the following inscription in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew: "No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death."[8] Ironically, the very Temple which was divinely ordained to be a house of prayer and sacrifice for all the nations (1 Kings 8:41-43; Isa. 56:3-7) had become so nationalized and politicized that the Gentiles were barred from the areas where prayers and sacrifices were offered daily. Accordingly, Jesus proclaimed that, when the Jewish people would ultimately go the worldly way of violence and follow a would-be messiah into war with Rome, the Romans would destroy the Temple. Since that destruction would be the result of Israel's point-blank refusal to carry out God's vocation, it would be no mere historical accident. It would constitute the wrath

[7] Wright, *Jesus*, 595.

[8] Peretz Segal, "The Penalty of the Warning Inscription from the Temple of Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 39 (1989) 79.

of God against Israel and its Temple, which had been taken over by Satan.[9]

Like the movements of John the Baptist and the Essenes, Jesus deliberately offered himself as a substitute to the Temple. What a person would normally get by going to the Temple—forgiveness of sins, purification, and restored relationship with God—Jesus freely offered to anyone, Jew and Gentile alike (Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), who chose to follow him.[10] At the close of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorted his hearers to build their house on the rock, not on the sand (Matt. 7:24-28; Luke 6:47-49), a clear usage of Temple language. Here Jesus communicated that the true Temple, the real house on the rock, would consist of the community that built its life on Jesus' words and actions. In short, Jesus was not only a one-man counter-Temple movement but also the foundation of a new Temple to be built from his followers, who served as its living stones (1 Cor. 3:10-17; 1 Peter 2:4-6).[11] For these reasons, it can be safely concluded that Jesus did not regard giving to the Jerusalem Temple as giving to God; in fact, he regarded it as unwittingly giving to Satan. Accordingly, Jesus sharply

[9] Wright, *Jesus*, 459-461.

[10] Ibid., 108, 132, 161.

[11] Ibid., 415-416.

condemned the means through which people were pressured to give to the Temple as human traditions that violated God's commandments. Regarding their directive that people designate whatever financial resources they would have otherwise supplied their parents as *korban* (a gift to the Temple treasury), Jesus declared to the Jewish religious leaders:

> You have a fine way of setting aside the commandment of God in order that your traditions might stand. For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother," and "Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die." But you yourselves say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is Korban (that is, an offering to the Temple)"—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, nullifying the word of God by the tradition which you received (Mark 7:9-13).

Hence none of Jesus' followers would have given to the Temple, a fact evidenced by the fact that, in the account of the widow's mite, neither Jesus nor his disciples contributed anything to the Temple treasury (Mark 12:41). Jesus wouldn't have wanted anyone to give to the Temple, least of all this poor widow. Per Torah, Prophets, and Writings, she was one of the people the Temple ministries should have provided for, not the other way around. As Yahweh stated in Deuteronomy 15:11, "Since there will never cease to be

some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land'" (cf. Isa. 25:4; 58:7; Psa. 41:1; 72:4, 12; Prov. 19:17; 21:13; 28:27; 31:9).

The Literary Context of the Widow's Mite

Structurally, the account of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44) is the middle section of an ABA "sandwich-like" structure where A begins, is interrupted by B, and then finishes. Highly characteristic of Mark, this stylistic device renders the frame A sections (the two "slices of bread") and the center B section (the "meat") as mutually interactive, portraying A and B as indispensable for the interpretation of one another.[12] (The same middle section is found in the Lukan parallel). As the "meat" or substance, the B section supplies the *raison d'être* for the content of the A sections (just as a hot dog link necessitates a hot dog bun and not a hamburger bun or other bread product on either side

[12] From a critical perspective, John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999, 105-106) asserts that this is one of seven intercalations in Mark; the others are 3:20-35 (A begins: 3:20-21; B begins and ends: 3:22-30; A ends: 3:31-35), 5:21-43 (A begins: 5:21-24; B begins and ends: 5:25-34; A ends: 5:35-43), 6:7-34 (A begins: 6:7-13; B begins and ends: 6:14-29; A ends: 6:30-34), 11:12-25 (A begins: 11:12-14; B begins and ends: 11:15-19; A ends: 11:20-25), 14:1-11 (A begins: 14:1-2; B begins and ends: 14:3-9; A ends: 14:10-11), and 14:54-72 (A begins: 14:54; B begins and ends: 14:55-65; A ends: 14:66-72).

thereof). Hence the A sections contain their particular content because of the B section: the first A section furnishes the necessary background for setting up the B section, and the second A section gives the ramifications or consequences of the B section. Looking at things from the opposite direction, the B section is a case study of the events which are foreshadowed in the first A section and whose results are summarized in the second A section. The middle section, of which the account of the widow's mite constitutes the meat, runs as follows:

> **A begins**: As Jesus taught in the Temple, he was saying, "Beware of the scribes (*grammateōn*), the ones desiring to walk about in long robes and to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have the chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at the banquets. They devour (*katesthiontes*) the houses of the widows and for pretense pray long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation" (Mark 12:38-40).
>
> **B begins and ends**: And having sat down opposite the treasury (*gazophylakiou*), Jesus was observing how the crowd threw copper coins into the treasury, and many rich people were throwing in much. And one poor widow came and threw in two lepta, which make up a quadrans (worth approximately one-

> fourth of a cent).[13] And having summoned his disciples, Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow threw in more than all the people throwing into the treasury; for everyone threw in from their abundance, but this widow from her poverty (*hysterēseōs*) put in everything, as much as she had, all her life" (Mark 12:41-44).

A ends: And as he went out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what great stones and what great buildings!" But Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? By no means (*ou mē*, the strongest possible negation) will one stone be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2).

This middle ("meat") section provides a failsafe test for ensuring the correct interpretation of the account of the widow's mite. The only valid interpretation of this account will be one whose background is furnished by Mark 12:38-40 (the first A section), whose ramifications are spelled out by Mark 13:1-2 (the second A section), and which forms a case study with the power to explain both Mark 12:38-40 and 13:1-2 (both A sections). The

[13] Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 729.

first A section shows Jesus condemning the *grammateis* (a collective designation for the Jewish religious leaders) to a greater punishment than other sinners specifically because they *katesthiontes* (devour in the sense of utterly reducing to nothing) widows' houses. In their authoritative *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida state that in Mark 12:40 *katesthiontes* (lexical form *katesthiō*) specifically carries the following connotation: "to take over by dishonest means the property of someone else – 'to appropriate dishonestly, to rob.'"[14] Like wolves in sheep's clothing, the religious leaders hypocritically covered up their criminal behavior by uttering elaborate prayers, sauntering about in priestly garb, and taking the seats of authority in the synagogues, leading the masses to trust and respect them as the guardians of sacred tradition. The second A section portrays a Jesus so angry over what has just taken place (in the B section) that he irrevocably sentenced the entire Temple compound to destruction, making it impossible for even one stone to remain upon another. Without even looking at the B section (the account of the widow's mite), we would expect for it to depict a widow getting taken for everything she is worth by the Jewish religious leaders, though in

[14] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1:585; cf. 1:758.

such a sly and deceptive manner that the masses are none the wiser. This depiction would comprise precisely the kind of case study that explains why the first A section prefigures widows' homes being devoured and why the second A section presents an irate Jesus satisfied with nothing less than the Temple's demolition. A careful analysis of the account of the widow's mite shows that our expectation is indeed the case.

The Grammatico-Historical Interpretation of the Widow's Mite

The first observation that surfaces in the account of the widow's mite is the system the Jewish religious leaders set up whereby people would make provisions for the Temple, which is literally what the text says Jesus was observing: "*how* (*pōs*) the crowd threw copper coins into the treasury." In direct violation of the Torah, this system for giving was not anonymous, or constructed so that the amount a person contributed was known only to oneself and to the officiating priest (Lev. 1–8). Rather, the amount was public and out in the open so that everyone knew what everyone else gave. The Temple authorities implemented this feature because it pressured people to give more than they otherwise would have, a practice contrary to Yahweh's command in Exodus 25:2: "Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from

all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me." Paul echoed this command while protesting the idea of giving under pressure: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). In short, the Jewish religious leaders constructed an unbiblical system of giving to the Temple where people, both implicitly and explicitly, competed against each other for greater levels of piety through greater offerings. By fostering the false attitude that one's closeness to God was proportional to the amount one contributed, this system victimized people who could not responsibly afford to give much or anything and still provide for themselves and their families. Since the Romans had driven over ninety percent of the *am ha'aretz* (people of the land) to the poverty level, the vast majority of Israelites were shamed by this predatory system into giving well beyond their means. This was accomplished brilliantly by putting the giving of the wealthy on the same stage as the giving of the poor. Hence we next observe precisely this contrast: "[A]nd many rich people were throwing in much. And one poor widow came and threw in two lepta, which make up a quadrans." Consequently, the Temple system cultivated a vicious circle: for the poor to draw close to God they needed to give at a level which threatened their survival, and when they did, they were shamed as not doing enough for God because of the comparative paucity of their offerings with the

offerings of the rich.

The focus on a poor widow is highly significant because it provides a direct link with the first A section of the text, which made devouring the houses of widows the fundamental indictment against the Jewish religious authorities. Since, by definition, the first A section of an text prefigures what happens in the B section and the B section furnishes a case study of what is prefigured, the only contextually possible interpretation of the widow's mite is that we are witnessing her house being devoured by the corrupt system the authorities have put in place. As Addison G. Wright astutely comments in his study of the widow's mite, "The context is immediately at hand. In both Gospels [Mark and Luke], Jesus condemns those scribes who devour the houses of widows, and then follows immediately the story of a widow whose house has beyond doubt just been devoured. What other words would be more appropriate to describe it?"[15] Because the present Temple revenue system was the only one Jesus' disciples and the crowds had ever known and was endorsed by all the rabbis they had ever encountered, they assumed its legitimacy and its conformity with Scripture. A revenue system which was *prima facie* unjust had become socially acceptable, as traditionalism had prevented the

[15] Addison G. Wright, "The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament?—A Matter of Context," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 261.

people from going beyond the surface and seeing the massive corruption taking place before their eyes. But Jesus would not let this invaluable opportunity be lost to expose the authorities' corruption. So immediately after the widow threw her two lepta into the treasury, Jesus "summoned his disciples" and declared, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow threw in more than all the people throwing into the treasury; for everyone threw in from their abundance, but this widow from her poverty put in everything, as much as she had, all her life." The three aspects of Jesus' response systematically disclose the widow's oppression. First, Jesus exposed the fallacy used to shame her—namely, that she contributed less than everyone else. Rather, she contributed everything she possessed as opposed to the rich, who contributed a minute percentage of what they possessed. Second, Jesus highlighted that she should not have contributed anything to the treasury by calling attention to her poverty. That "this widow [gave] from her poverty (*hysterēseōs*)" immediately refutes the eisegesis of John Avanzini that the widow gave from her "want" for God to prosper her. Here Avanzini exploits the KJV translation of *hysterēseōs* as "want" ("she of her want did cast in") and neglects to tell his hearers that, in Elizabethan English, "want" meant "poverty" and not "desire." Louw and Nida leave no doubt that *hysterēsis* (lexical form of *hysterēseōs*) has nothing to do with desire but denotes a deep state of poverty, namely, "to be lacking

in what is essential or needed."[16] Hence this widow was a person for whom the Temple should have provided, not the other way around. Her being pressured to give to the Temple at all was a flagrant violation of the social justice proclaimed by Amos, Isaiah, and other Hebrew Biblical prophets. Third, even though it looked like she gave practically nothing, Jesus insisted that this illusion was carefully crafted by the Jewish religious leaders in order to devour her house, to fleece her for everything she was worth while preserving the air of social acceptability. This, of course, is precisely what Jesus denounced the authorities for in the first A section: being criminals who cloak themselves in sacred robes. Thus Jesus insisted with threefold repetition that she was taken for "everything, as much as she had, all her life." This last phrase carries the clear implication that now the widow has nothing left to live on and will probably succumb to starvation. The very act which the widow falsely thought would bring her closer to God will likely lead to her death.

We can accurately paraphrase Jesus' response as follows: "Truly I say to you, this widow, and everyone else thinks she put into the Temple treasury much less than all the rich benefactors. Don't be fooled by this highly deceptive system the authorities have instituted—nothing could be further from the truth. Just think

[16] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:562.

about it proportionally. The rich each gave a tiny fraction of what they had, while the widow gave everything she had. Accordingly, the widow is the victim of spiritual fraud, since the false doctrine that she has given less than everyone else leads her to wrongly think that God is disappointed in her and that she is far from God. On top of that, this widow has been taken for everything she is worth by the authorities. For she was spiritually pressured to contribute literally everything she possessed. Her entire life is now gone. She has nothing to provide her with food, clothing, or shelter. The religious authorities have devoured her house. She will now likely starve to death, and if she does, the authorities are guilty of her murder." Addison Wright draws precisely the same understanding of Jesus' statement:

> Jesus' saying…is a lament, "Amen, I tell you, she gave more than all the others." Or, as we would say, "One could easily fail to notice it, but there is the tragedy of the day—she put in her whole living." She had been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to give as she does, and Jesus condemns the value system that motivates her action, and he condemns the people who conditioned her to do it.[17]

If our interpretation thus far is correct, we should expect to find in the second A section a furious Jesus who wants retribution for the

[17] Wright, "Widow's Mites," 262.

widow and explains how that retribution will unfold. This is precisely what we find. When one of his disciples was impressed by the grandeur of the Temple compound, Jesus told him using the strongest possible negation (*ou mē*) that not even a single stone will be left upon another and reiterates that all of the great buildings making up the Temple compound will be destroyed. As a result of robbing the poor widow blind along with countless other widows like her, it is literally impossible for the Temple or a single part thereof to avoid destruction.

We may now return to our failsafe test to verify the accuracy of our interpretation of the widow's mite over against previous interpretations. Here the question is: which interpretation explains the content of the surrounding A sections, such that the first A section foreshadows it and the second A section explains its consequences? Only the true interpretation can succeed in this regard. On our interpretation, Jesus did not praise the widow for giving to the Temple. Given Jesus' antipathy toward the Temple, he did not even want the rich, much less the poor widow, to give to this corrupt institution now controlled by Satan. Rather, he pointed out how the widow had been taken for everything she possessed by the corrupt Temple authorities, as well as how the revenue system set up by those authorities made the widow feel alienated from God for giving much less than the rich, so shaming the victim. This interpretation brilliantly explains why the first A section

castigates the Temple authorities for devouring the houses of widows and exposes their lengthy prayers, religious robes, places of honor in the marketplace, and seats of prominence in the synagogue as masks to hide their corruption. It also explains why the first A section sentences these authorities to a higher level of damnation. Likewise, this interpretation skillfully explains why the second A section features Jesus angrily sentencing the Temple itself to utter destruction, as the Temple's annihilation is the divine consequence of the widow's victimization. As Addison Wright summarizes, "[T]here is no praise of the widow in the passage and no invitation to imitate her, precisely because she ought not be imitated….the immediate context in both Gospels [Mark and Luke] is clear enough: devouring the houses of widows…, not one stone left upon another."[18]

No other interpretation passes the failsafe test. On any interpretation (traditional or Word-Faith) that Jesus praised the widow for giving sacrificially, nothing in the first A section foreshadows it. Thus any such interpretation manifestly fails to explain why Jesus condemns the scribes for devouring widows' houses at all or why he is upset about their receiving the traditional honors customarily due to religious leaders. If Jesus wanted the rich or people in general to give as generously as the widow, we

[18] Ibid., 262-263.

should expect to find some exhortation to sacrificial giving in the first A section, where there occurs nothing of the sort. Likewise, nothing in the second A section could plausibly be taken as a consequence of the widow's praiseworthy gift. If her gift were virtuous, we should expect to see in the second A section how her gift would bless the Temple and perhaps even ensure its protection from Roman attack, but the exact opposite is the case. Certainly it could never be said, per the literary requirements of the text, that Jesus' commending the widow furnishes a case study of his condemnation of the Temple authorities which yields the Temple's destruction as its inevitable result. In short, any interpretation that Jesus praised the widow and that we are to follow her example leaves us with no relation whatsoever between the B section and either of the A sections of this text, which renders the interpretation self-refuting. The Word-Faith versions of this interpretation present even greater absurdities. On the view that the widow would receive a hundredfold return, the scribes would not have been castigated but praised, since their devouring widows' houses would simply enable widows to get a hundred times more. There is no possible connection between a poor widow's receiving a hundredfold return through the Temple system and Jesus condemning that system (second A section) and its leaders (first A section) to destruction. As a champion of the poor (Luke 6:20-21), Jesus would have taken to the streets and

exhorted all who were in need to give to the Temple so that they could not only survive but thrive. On the view that Jesus praises the widow for her give-to-get motivation, we would find Jesus uttering an aphorism in the first A section like "Give to the Temple so that God will open up the windows of heaven to you." Since the second A section necessarily conveys the result of the B section, the second A section would report the now wealthy widow basking in her financial overflow. If either Word-Faith view were correct, we would find two remarkably different slices of "bread" around the account of the widow's mite than the slices we do in fact find.

Concluding Reflections

We have demonstrated that, in view of the religio-historical context and literary structure of the account of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44; cf. Luke 20:45–21:6), Jesus was actually pointing out how the Jewish religious leaders fraudulently took the widow for everything she was worth, leaving one of the most vulnerable persons in society with nothing to live on. On top of such robbery, the Jewish authorities so deceptively set up the system of Temple contributions that it appeared the widow gave far less than the wealthy, thereby shaming the victim into feeling she had not done enough for God. For actions such as these, the Jewish authorities

merit God's greater condemnation, and the Temple will be destroyed. While this interpretation fits like a hand in the glove of the section to which it belongs, the traditional interpretation that Jesus praised the widow for her act of sacrificial giving as well as its bizarre Word-Faith variants do not fit the glove at all. In light of this fact, it is surprising that our exegesis is unknown in the history of premodern interpretation and little known in contemporary scholarship. Apart from a brief comment by Quentin Quesnell (1969)[19] and the detailed study of Addison Wright (1982)[20] (whose results have been followed by Joseph Fitzmyer [1985],[21] Ched Myers [1988],[22] and Craig Evans [2001][23]), our exegesis appears to be absent from the literature. One cannot help but suspect that, rather than the proper function of

[19] Quentin Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark* (Analecta Biblica 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) 151: "Widow's Mite. The point is probably an elaboration of the way the Scribes 'devour the houses of widows' (12,40) so that rebuke and rejection of the wrongdoers is central."

[20] Wright, "Widow's Mites," 256-265.

[21] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke (X–XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Anchor Bible 28A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985) 1320-1321.

[22] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 321.

[23] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (Word Biblical Commentary 34B; Nashville: Word, 2001) 282-283.

critical exegesis informing church thinking and preaching, church interests and homiletic efficacy in fundraising have adversely affected critical exegesis in the history of the interpretation of this text. Our suspicion is brought home nicely by the poignant rhetorical questions of Addison Wright:

> [I]f any one of us were actually to see in real life a poor widow giving the very last of her money to religion, would we not judge the act to be repulsive and to be based on misguided piety because she would be neglecting her own needs? Do we really think that Jesus would have reacted otherwise? Do we really think that he would have enthused over such a donation?[24]

We could add to this suspicion the heretofore overlooked observation that the Gospel of John (8:12-59) furnishes an independent account of Jesus' teaching in the *gazophylakiō*, or Temple treasury (8:20), precisely where he taught in the account of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1). Here Jesus' direct and repeated affronts to the Jewish authorities overseeing the treasury, including "You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also" (8:19; cf. 8:54-55), "If you were

[24] Wright, "Widow's Mites," 256.

Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me" (8:39-40; cf. 8:37), "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires" (8:44), and "If I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you" (8:55), renders unthinkable the notion that Jesus would want anyone, not to mention an impoverished widow, to financially support their demonic administration. Why the Markan and the Johannine account have never been harmonized so as to mutually aid in the interpretation of the other despite their clear grammatical link is truly mind-boggling.

Our study carries profound implications for the use of the account of the widow's mite in authentically Christian churches and in Word-Faith churches. Christian leaders must be careful never to employ this text in an attempt to solicit money, despite the fact that it "preaches well," "has proven financially effective in the past because of its emotional appeal," or for any other reason. Not only would this commit "sacred dishonesty," but it runs the perilous risk of unwittingly devouring the widows and less fortunate in our midst, so placing the same verdict upon our leadership and our churches as Jesus proclaimed for the Jewish authorities and the Temple. Rather, Christian leaders should apply this text by carefully considering if the donation systems their churches have in place unwittingly abuse the poor by placing undue theological or social pressure on them to give beyond their

means. More than that, the account of the widow's mite calls Christian leaders to reexamine any structure in the church, financial or otherwise, whose legitimacy is taken for granted because of its longevity. All such structures must be evaluated against the yardstick of Scripture and, if failing to measure up, must be revised in line with Scripture or replaced with a model compatible with Scripture. Further, our study discloses that what many authentically Christian churches are in danger of doing to people in lower socio-economic classes through the account of the widow's mite, the Word-Faith churches overtly and deliberately do. In precisely the same manner as the Jewish religious leaders in the text, Word-Faith leaders twist the text to take advantage of the poorest and most vulnerable segment of society for the sake of greed. By telling people with next to nothing that the only way to get God's attention is to give all they have to Faith ministries, Faith leaders propagate the same false doctrine as the first-century Jewish religious leaders. By filling the indigent with the false hope that God will financially take care of them at all, much less give them a hundredfold return, for supporting Faith ministries, Faith leaders perpetrate an even bigger spiritual fraud than their Temple counterparts. For while the widow had no expectation of financial remuneration, Faith adherents are led to trust God to provide for them in exchange for sinfully giving to Faith ministries, and when God refuses to reward their sin, they lose confidence that God

loves them and cares for their well-being. Hence the end result of the Faith sham may be not only physical but also spiritual death. Can anyone doubt that, in God's perspective, teachers like Kenneth Copeland are responsible for the potential starvation and spiritual alienation of the destitute through sermons such as the following?

> Have you ever wanted to get God's attention? You can, you know. There's a certain kind of boldness, a certain kind of faith in giving that will get His attention every time. You can see that in Mark 12.
>
> Read that chapter and just imagine the situation it describes. Jesus was sitting by the treasury watching as people put in their offerings…. Right in the middle of it all, this poor widow walked up and threw in her offering. I can just see her in my mind's eye. I can hear her say to herself, "By the eternal Almighty God that liveth, I've had enough of this poverty. I'm fed up with having nothing but want. I may just be a poor widow now, but I'm not going to be a poor widow anymore. I'm going to be a *broke* widow if God doesn't do something here because I'm giving Him everything I've got!"
>
> Then, wham! She threw that last little dab of money she had into the offering….She gave in faith—not in fear. She didn't stop and calculate what she didn't have and say, "Boy, if I do this, tomorrow I won't eat." She just

> boldly threw in all she had, expecting God to take care of her in return.
>
> You and I need to catch hold of that same attitude. We need to start holding our offerings up to the Lord in confidence, throwing it boldly into His service, expecting His blessings in return.
>
> If you have a need right now, get God's attention by giving with boldness like that widow woman did. Throw open the door of your household by throwing everything you have at Jesus. Let God know that He is your source. Before long, the abundance of God will come pouring in![25]

Of course, one of the many ironies in Copeland's rhetoric is that Jesus wanted the widow to stop and think, "If I do this, tomorrow I won't eat." A further irony noted by Jesus is that the widow would not only likely perish but her offering would also go to nothing, as the Temple for which she contributed her very life would be destroyed by God. Consequently, the widow's offering and her death would prove vain. Tragically, those who heed the exhortation of Copeland and his ilk will not only descend into financial ruin, but the ill-gotten Faith financial empires to which

[25] Kenneth Copeland, "Throw Open the Door," in idem and Gloria Copeland, *From Faith to Faith* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 2011) 18; emphasis in original.

they have contributed will be devastated by Jesus on the day of his coming if not before.

In closing, I would charge and encourage Christian leaders to cultivate a culture of sound grammatico-historical exegesis of Scripture in their churches so that laypeople will learn not to believe just any interpretation of the Bible but to only accept an interpretation after they have proven for themselves that it represents the author's intent. Only then will the deceptive claim of the Word-Faith Movement to represent biblical Christianity be forever abated.

Book Reviews

A Critical Review of Donald Hagner's "Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship"

F. David Farnell and Norman L. Geisler

INTRODUCTION

Baker Books blog recently published on March 12, 2013, Donald Hagner's "*Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship*." These guidelines were then praised by Craig Blomberg in the first blog comment on the Baker blog where Blomberg noted immediately below Hagner's listing of ten guidelines, "Excellent, Don, excellent. And I'm so enjoying reading your book. I hope you still have several more good ones to come."

Here are Hagner's guidelines (and we suspect many more critical, evangelical scholars would concur with his list). We cut/paste verbatim from the Hagner's blog: *"Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship" by Donald A. Hagner:*

> Proposals for an evangelical criticism that affirms the indispensability of the critical method, i.e., being "reasonably" critical:

We must:

1. See what is there (avoiding maximal conservatism, anachronistic approaches, harmonizing and homogenizing, partial appeals to historical evidence).
2. Affirm the full humanity of the scriptures (the word of God in the words of men).
3. Define the nature of inspiration inductively (not deductively), i.e., in light of the phenomena of scripture (doing justice to it as it is).
4. Acknowledge that no presuppositionless position is possible and that the best we can do is attempt to step outside of our presuppositions and imagine "what if." (Only a relative degree of objectivity is attainable.)
5. Modify the classical historical-critical method so far as its presuppositions are concerned, i.e., so as to allow openness to the transcendent, the action of God in the historical process, the possibility of miracles, etc. Develop a method not alien but rather appropriate to what is being studied.
6. Maintain a unified worldview, avoiding a schizophrenic attitude toward truth and criteria for the validation of truth. That is, all truth is God's truth, including that arrived at through our rationality.
7. Acknowledge that in the realm of historical knowledge, we are not dealing with matters that can be proven (or

disproven, for that matter!), but with probability. Historical knowledge remains dependent on inferences from the evidence. Good historical criticism is what makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence.

8. Avoid the extremes of a pure fideism and a pure rationality-based apologetics. Blind faith is as inappropriate as rationalism. Faith and reason, however, both have their proper place. What is needed is a creative synthesis.

9. Develop humility, in contrast to the strange (and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance of critical orthodoxy (concerning constructs that depend on presuppositions alien to the documents themselves).

10. Approach criticism by developing a creative tension between intellectual honestly and faithfulness to the tradition (each side needs constant reexamination), with the trust that criticism rightly engaged will ultimately vindicate rather than destroy Christian truth.

Note: The Holy Spirit cannot be appealed to in order to solve historical-critical issues or in the issue of truth-claims. Nevertheless, it is true that for the believer the inner witness of the Spirit confirms the truth of the faith existentially or in the heart.

Concede: Our knowledge is fragmentary and partial, and all our wisdom is but stammering. Full understanding can only

come after our perfection, and then it will no longer be understanding alone but also worship" (italics added—not in original).

Analysis of Proposed Guidelines

Now let us respond to each of Hagner's ten evangelical scholarship "guidelines." The bottom-line is that critical evangelical scholars are becoming so much like their liberal counterparts that little differences remain on the whole. Ability to distinguish between these two groups in terms of presuppositions and conclusions is blurring rapidly.

***PROPOSED GUIDLINE ONE**:*

> *"See what is there (avoiding maximal conservatism, anachronistic approaches, harmonizing and homogenizing, partial appeals to historical evidence)."*

***RESPONSE**:*

1. Historical criticism is really the anachronistic approach, spawned by Spinoza in the 17th century and aided by hostile, negative presuppositions. Read N. L. Geisler's "Beware of

Philosophy," JETS 42:1 (March 1999) 3-18.

2. Historical criticism does not accept "what is there" but wants only to see what they *a priori* have chosen NOT to be there (e.g., the slaughtering of the babies in Bethlehem [Robert Gundry] or the resurrection of saints in Matthew 27:51-52 [Mike Licona]).

3. Historical criticism, no matter how "modified," assaults the integrity of God's Word, i.e. this is the automatic "fruit" of historical criticism. It attacks rather than affirms; it casts doubt, rather than confirms. Liberal scholars admit this, but evangelical critical scholars seem to be blind to such effects.

3. No matter how much Hagner would attempt to modify historical criticism, would true historical critics (i.e. non-evangelicals) accept that modification?

4. Plenary, verbal inspiration allows for harmonization, while historical criticism divides God's word into what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to the individual historical critic.

***PROPOSED GUIDELINE TWO**:*

"Affirm the full humanity of the Scriptures (the word of God in the words of men)."

Unfortunately, among many younger evangelical scholars the "humanity" of Scripture is understood in a Barthian sense in which humanness implies error. If so, this guideline so understood must be rejected. For the written Word of God (the Scripture) can no more error that the Living Word of God (the Savior) can err.

RESPONSE:

1. Although the full-humanity of Scripture is true, since God is author of Scripture and God cannot lie or err, the Scripture cannot err (John 14:26; 16:13; 17:17).
2. The Bible is fully human without error; it is God's Word as well as man's words (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Tim. 3:16). It is a theanthropic book, as Christ is a theanthropic person.
3. By Hagner's same logic, Jesus must have erred (and sinned).

PROPOSED GUIDELINE THREE:

"Define the nature of inspiration inductively (not deductively), i.e., in light of the phenomena of scripture (doing justice to it as it is)."

***RESPONSE**:*

1. This is a false disjunction since both induction and deduction are involved in determining the doctrine of Scripture, as they are in other doctrines as well (e.g., the Trinity).
2. The doctrine of inspiration is based on a complete inductive study of all of Scripture which yields two basic truths: a) the Bible is the written Word of God; b) God cannot error. From these we rightly deduce that: c) The Bible cannot err. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* put it, the basis for our faith is "The whole counsel of God… [which] is either expressly set down in Scripture*, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture* (Chapter I, VI, emphasis added).
3. Of course, the doctrine of Scripture should be understood in the light of the data of Scripture. However, as the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy [ICBI] put it, "We further deny that inerrancy is negated by the Biblical phenomena… (Article XIII). The data of Scripture do not contradict the doctrine of Scripture; they merely nuance and enhance our understanding of it (see Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, chap. 12).

PROPOSED GUIDELINE FOUR:

> *"Acknowledge that no presuppositionless position is possible and that the best we can do is attempt to step outside of our presuppositions and imagine "what if" (Only a relative degree of objectivity is attainable.)"*

RESPONSE:

1. While it is true that there are no presuppositionless approaches to Scripture, it is not true that we should try to step outside of our basic epistemological premises (e.g., the Laws of Logic or valid methods of interpretations).
2. The question is not *whether* one approaches Scripture with presupposition, but *which* presuppositions he uses and whether they are biblical and justifiable.

3. As evangelical scholars, we approach the Bible as the inerrant written Word of God by way of the historical grammatical method of interpretation (ICBI Article XVIII).

Current critical scholarship denies both of these in the historic evangelical sense.

4. As ICBI stated it, "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking in account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture" (Article XVIII).

5. ICBI adds importantly, "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text of quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII). But this is exactly what Hagner and his British trained New Testament cohorts do.

6. Hagner comes dangerously close to denying that one can truly obtain an "objective" interpretation of Scripture. Besides being a self-defeating claim to objectivity in denying objectivity, he apparently has not read and interacted with the excellent work by Professor Thomas Howe titled, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (Advantage Books: 2004).

PROPOSED GUIDELINE FIVE:

> *"Modify the classical historical-critical method so far as its presuppositions are concerned, i.e., so as to allow openness to the transcendent, the action of God in the historical process, the possibility of miracles, etc. Develop a method not alien but rather appropriate to what is being studied."*

RESPONSE:

1. If the "historical-critical method" needs to be "modified" before it can safely be used, then this is an admission that it is a dangerous method.
2. Further, if is it modified of its anti-supernaturalism, then why accept the method to begin with.
3. What value does this critical methodology have that could not have been gained by the traditional historical-grammatical method?
4. If it is not radically modified, then it does not help evangelicals. But if it is radically modified to suit evangelical, then why accepted it to begin with. If you have to radically modify a Ford to make a Cadillac, then why not start with a Cadillac?

5. Methodology determines theology, and an unorthodox methodology will yield unorthodox theology.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE SIX:

"Maintain a unified worldview, avoiding a schizophrenic attitude toward truth and criteria for the validation of truth. That is, all truth is God's truth, including that arrived at through our rationality"

RESPONSE:

1. As the ICBI framers put it, truth means "that which corresponds with reality" (ICBI Article XIII, official commentary), whether God revealed it in Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16) or in nature (Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:1-20), and God does not contradict Himself (ICBI Articles V and XIV).
2. We deny that truth is *"arrived at through our rationality*," as Hagner meant it, since God is the source of all truth, whether in general or special revelation. The ICBI framers declared emphatically, "We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is a relation given by God… [and] We deny that

the Bible …depends on the responses of men for its validity" (Article III). As for other alleged sources of truth, "We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth's history be properly used to overturn the teaching of Scripture …" (Article XII).

3. However, good reason must always be in accord with and enlightened by revelation and God's Holy Spirit. As Article XVII declares: "We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word. We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operated in isolation from or against Scripture."

PROPOSED GUIDELINE SEVEN:

"Acknowledge that in the realm of historical knowledge, we are not dealing with matters that can be proven (or disproven, for that matter!), but with probability. Historical knowledge remains dependent on inferences from the evidence. Good historical criticism is what makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence."

RESPONSE:

1. Historical knowledge can rise above mere "probabilities." One can have moral certainty about many things. Luke spoke of "convincing proofs" of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:3--NAU).
2. Luke begins his Gospel with the assurance to the reader that he "may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4-ESV).
3. In determining the truth of a historical presentation one certainly wants the interpretation that **"**makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence." However, it begs the question whether what Hagner means by "good historical criticism" is the best way to achieve this. As a matter of fact, as manifest in the writings of many contemporary scholars who have adopted this method, it clearly did not lead to the best conclusion. Certainly, it did not lead to the most evangelical conclusion.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE EIGHT:

"Avoid the extremes of a pure fideism and a pure rationality-based apologetics. Blind faith is as inappropriate as

rationalism. Faith and reason, however, both have their proper place. What is needed is a creative synthesis."

RESPONSE:

1. To speak of "blind faith" as one of the poles, is a straw man since one can be a Fideist without having blind faith. He can even offer some optional reasons for his Fideism.
2. True Christian scholarship involves "faith seeing understanding," as Bible exhorts when it asks us to "give a reason for the hope that is in us" (1 Peter 3:15). Indeed, God said through Isaiah, "Come let us reason together…" (Isa. 1:18). And Jesus commanded that we love the Lord our God with our "mind," as well as with our heart and soul (Mark 12:30).
3. There are other apologetic alternatives to Fideism and a rationally-based approach. Aquinas spoke of faith *based in* God's Word but *supported by* evidence (see Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*, Baker Books, 1991, chap.5). And Cornelius Van Til's transcendental reduction to the necessity of accepting the Triune God revealed in Scripture was certainly not a form of pure fideism or pure rational in apologetics (see *In Defense of the Faith*, 100-101).

4. Faith and reason both have a proper place and need a "creative synthesis," but they do not find it in critical method proposed by Donald Hagner's "Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship."

PROPOSED GUIDELINE NINE:

"Develop humility, in contrast to the strange (and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance of critical orthodoxy (concerning constructs that depend on presuppositions alien to the documents themselves)."

RESPONSE:

1. This guideline is an ironic example of the very orthodox view it is criticizing. It is hardly an example of humility to exalt one's own methodology and stereotype one's opponent as having a "strange (and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance." Humble statements do not condemn others as having unwarranted confidence and arrogance!
2. The humble thing to do would have been to show some respect of the orthodox view of Scripture (see John Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church* [Moody, 1984] and N.L. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy: The Historical Evidence* [Bastion Books,

2013] and the venerable historical-grammatical way of interpreting it (see *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements*, [Bastion Books: 2013]).

PROPOSED GUIDELINE TEN:

"Approach criticism by developing a creative tension between intellectual honestly and faithfulness to the tradition (each side needs constant reexamination), with the trust that criticism rightly engaged will ultimately vindicate rather than destroy Christian truth."

RESPONSE:

1. Certainly Hagner does not mean what he says, since he asserts that "intellectual honesty" needs "constant reexamination" too!
2. Further, "faithfulness to the tradition" one has should not be a goal. Rather, it should be faithfulness to the Word of God.
3. What is more, the phrase "rightly engaged" is bristling with presuppositions that Hagner leaves unstated, unspecified, and unjustified.

4. Judging by these 10 guidelines, Hagner is "engaging" in a form of biblical criticism that is ill-founded and destined to disaster. For **bad methodology leads to bad theology, and he has adopted a bad methodology**.

PROPOSED HAGNER NOTE:

"Note: The Holy Spirit cannot be appealed to in order to solve historical-critical issues or in the issue of truth-claims. Nevertheless, it is true that for the believer the inner witness of the Spirit confirms the truth of the faith existentially or in the heart.
Concede: Our knowledge is fragmentary and partial, and all our wisdom is but stammering. Full understanding can only come after our perfection, and then it will no longer be understanding alone but also worship."

RESPONSE:

1. This is an odd comment coming from an evangelical since Scripture affirms the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of His Word**:** John 6:63—"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" and 2 Peter 1:19—"And *so* we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you

do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19 NAU).

2. The Spirit of God never affirms anything contrary to the Word of God. Further, the Holy Spirit is essential in a proper interpretation and application of the Word of God (see ICBI Statement on Hermeneutics, Articles IV, V, VI). As the Holy Spirit lead the apostles in writing the Word of God (John 14:26;16:13), even so he leads the believers in understanding the Word of God (1 John 2:26-27).

3. Just because *perfect* understanding of Scripture does not come until heaven (1 Cor. 13:10-13) does not mean we cannot have an *adequate* understanding of it here. Nor does it relieve us of our obligation, to "test the spirits" to discover the "false prophets" and to know "the Spirit of truth" from "the spirit of error" (1 John 4:1, 6). After all, we have in Scripture "a sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19), and we are exhorted to use it to "contend for the Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

THE RESULTS OF FOLLOWING THESE GUIDELINES IN HAGNER'S WRITINGS

Now let us look at the consequences of these principles that Hagner's own recently published New Testament Introduction operates from, i.e. Donald W. Hagner, namely, *The New Testament A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).

The work is praised as follows on the Amazon website, reflecting similar wording on its jacket cover: "This capstone work from widely respected senior evangelical scholar Donald Hagner offers a substantial introduction to the New Testament. Hagner deals with the New Testament both historically and theologically, employing the framework of salvation history. He treats the New Testament as a coherent body of texts and stresses the unity of the New Testament without neglecting its variety. Although the volume covers typical questions of introduction, such as author, date, background, and sources, it focuses primarily on understanding the theological content and meaning of the texts, putting students in a position to understand the origins of Christianity and its canonical writings." The book includes summary tables, diagrams, maps, and extensive bibliographies. It is praised by such scholars as James D. G. Dunn, I. Howard Marshall, Craig Keener and Thomas Schreiner.

One may note two strategic factors regarding Hagner's New Testament Introduction: First, his work represents the cutting edge of evangelical, British-influenced and trained critical scholarship who are currently teaching the next generation of preachers and scholars in the United States, both on a college and seminary level. Second, Hagner's work will most likely replace the late Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction that was last revised in 1990. If one wants to know where evangelical critical scholarship is moving, Hagner's work provides that trajectory.

These two strategic factors are also the works gravest weaknesses. The work attributes the word "inspired" to the New Testament Scripture (4). Yet, Hagner maintains, "the inspired word of God comes to us through the medium of history, through the agency of writers who lived in history and were a part of history" which "*necessitate the historical and critical study of Scripture*" (p. 4). He says that the use of the word "critical" does not mean "tearing it down or demeaning it—but rather to exercising judgment or discernment concerning every aspect of it" (5). Therefore, Hagner asserts that "[w]e must engage in historical criticism, in the sense of thoughtful interpretation of the Bible" and "the historical method is indispensable precisely because the Bible is the story of God's act in history" (5). **What Hagner means by this is the need for historical critical ideologies rather than grammatico-historical criticism**. This is the first signal that British-influenced

evangelical scholars are shifting markedly away from the Reformation tradition of grammatico-historical criticism and training the next generation of preachers in historical-criticism that markedly differs in approach both presuppositionally, historically, and in the qualitative kind of conclusions such an ideology reaches. Like many British-influenced evangelical critical scholars, he believes that he can use historical-criticism and be immune from its more negative elements: "The critical method therefore needs to be tempered so that rather than being used against the Bible, it is open to the possibility of the transcendent or miraculous within the historical process and thus is used to provide better understanding of the Bible" (7). This latter admission is telling, since it is an admission, no matter how indirect, of the dangers of historical criticism. Hagner argues that "[k]eeping an open mind concerning the possibility of the transcendent in history does not entail the suspension of critical judgment. There is no need for a naïve credulity and acceptance of anything and everything simply because one's worldview is amenable to the supernatural" (7). Hagner apparently believes that he has discovered the proper balance of presuppositions and practice in the historical-critical method displayed in this work: **"It must be stressed once again that the critical method is indispensable to the study of Scripture. It is the sine qua non of responsible interpretation of God's word**. The believer need have no fear of the method itself, but need only be

on guard against the employment of improper presuppositions" (emphasis added). An old pithy saying, however, is that the "devil is in the details." Hagner's argument here ignores the marked evidence or proof from history of the presuppositions and damage that historical criticism has caused by even well-intentioned scholars who have eviscerated the Scripture through such an ideology. History constitutes a monumental testimony against Hagner's embracing of the ideologies of historical criticism as well as the damage that it has caused the church.

Hagner excoriates "very conservative scholars" and "obscurantist fundamentalism" that refused to embrace some form of moderated historical critical ideology. He commends Hengel's belief that "fundamentalism" and its accepting belief in the full trustworthiness in Scripture is actually a form of atheism (cp. Martin Hengel, "Eye-witness Memory and the Writing of the Gospels: Form Criticism, Community Tradition and the Authority of the Authors," in *The Written Gospel*. Eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald Hagner. Cambridge: University Press, 2005, 70-96), quoting and affirming Hengel's position that "Fundamentalism is a form of 'unbelief' that closes itself to the—God intended—historical reality" (Hengel, 94 n. 100). Hagner insists that "[r]epudiation of the critical Study of Scripture amounts to a gnostic-like denial of the historical character of the Christian faith" (10). Apparently, Hagner agrees with Hengel that, Fundamentalist polemic against the

'historical-critical method' does not understand historical perception" (10) and that "Fundamentalism is a form of 'unbelief' that closes itself to the –God intended—historical reality" (page 10 footnote 17). Apparently, Hagner (and Hengel) believes that since the Scriptures were mediated through history and human agency, this opens the documents up to the documents being fallible human products. Because of the Scripture being based in historical knowledge, one cannot use the word "certain" but only "probable," for Hagner insists that the "word 'prove,' although perhaps appropriate in mathematics and science, is out of place when it comes to historical knowledge" (9). In studying Scripture, compelling proof will always be lacking (9).

In response, Hagner (and Hengel) apparently do not understand the issue, for fundamentalism (e.g., *The Jesus Crisis*) never argued against criticism but only the kind of criticism utilized and the philosophical principle involved in such criticism that closed off the study of Scripture a priori before any analysis could be done, i.e., historical-critical ideologies. Historical criticism is a purposeful, psychological operation designed to silence Scripture and deflect away from its plain, normal sense implications, i.e., to dethrone it from influence in church and society. While left-wing critical scholarship will openly admit this, so-called "moderate" evangelicals like Hagner choose to ignore the intent of historical criticism.

With this operating assumption about understanding Scripture, some sampling highlights of Hagner's alleged "balanced" approach to historical-critical ideologies: First, "we have no reliable chronology of Jesus ministry" in the Gospels (63). Since the Gospels are "historical narratives" they involve "interpretation" by the evangelists and that "level of interpretation can be high" (63). Since the gospel writers largely (but not completely) reflect ancient Roman *bioi* as the "closest analogy" from antiquity" and since *bioi* were not necessarily always without interpretation (61), the "[t]he Evangelists compare well with the secular historians of their own day, and their narratives remain basically trustworthy." (65).

Second, like other critically-trained European scholars, Hagner accepts Lessing's "ugly ditch" and the German/British concept of *historie*- (actual verifiable events) vs. *geschichte*—(faith interpretations of events) of a dichotomy between the Jesus of the Gospels and the "historical Jesus." (83-104). Although critical of some historical Jesus research, Hagner concedes that "the Jesus of history was to some extent different from the Gospels' portrayal of him" and "if we cannot look for a one-to-one correspondence between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the early church's faith, we can at least establish a degree of continuity between the two" (97). Furthermore, "we are in no position to write a biography of Jesus" based in the information from the New Testament since the gospels are "kerygmatic portrayals of the story of Jesus" (98).

Third, Hagner embraces the idea that a book can have "pseudonymity" as acceptable in the New Testament canon. Hagner argues, "We have very little to lose in allowing the category of Deutero-Pauline letters. If it happens that some other person have written these four, or even six documents [e.g. Ephesians, Pastorals] in the name of Paul, we are not talking about forgery or deception" (429). "The ancient world on the whole did not have the same kind of sensitivity to pseudonymity that is typical in the modern world, with its concern for careful attribution and copyright" (429). "The authority and canonicity of the material is in no way affected" by books put into final shape by disciples of the prophets" (429). "The fact is that the Pauline corpus, with deuteron-letters as well as without them, stands under the banner of the authoritative Paul" (429). Hagner supports British scholar, I. Howard Marshall's view on "pseudonymous" writings in the New Testament: "In order to avoid the idea of deceit, Howard Marshall has coined the words "allonymity" and "allepigraphy" in which the prefix *pseudos* ("false") is replaced with *allos* ("other") which gives a more positive concept to the writing of a work in the name of another person (431). Hagner notes that another British scholar James Dunn has come to a similar conclusion (see I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 84). Hagner says, "We do not know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there are Deutero-Pauline letters in the Pauline corpus, but if in the weighing

of historical probabilities it seems to us that there are, we can freely admit that this too is a way in which God has mediated Scripture to us" (432). Apparently, to Hagner and others, God uses false attribution to accomplish his purpose of communication of His Word that encourages the highest ethical standards upon men! Thus, for Hagner, Paul most likely did not write Ephesians as well as The Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus) (428). They should be viewed in the category of Deutero-Pauline letters (429). Hagner even devotes a whole section of his Introduction to this category of Deutero-Pauline letters (585-642). He regards the book of James as possibly not written by James: "we cannot completely exclude the alternative possibility that the book is pseudonymous. Already in the time of Jerome it was regarded as such . . . Least likely of all, but again not impossible, the letter could have been written by another, little known or unknown, person named 'James'" (675). 2 Peter is "Almost certainly not by Peter. Very probably written by a disciple of Peter or a member of the Petrine circle" (714). The author of Revelation is "Almost certainly not by the Apostle John. Possibly by John 'The Elder' but more probably by another John, otherwise unknown to us, who may have been a member of the Johannine circle" (761).

In sum, Hagner's work represents what may well replace Guthrie's *New Testament Introduction*. One can only imagine the impact will be that British and European evangelical critical

scholarship represented by Hagner's assertions regarding his "balanced" use of historical-critical presuppositions will have on the next generation of God's preachers and teachers! As Machen said long ago, "as go the theological seminaries, so go the churches" (Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern world*, 65).