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Publisher: Concordia University Wisconsin / Ann Arbor

4090 Geddes Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105

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Introduction

We, the editors, are proud to offer the first issue of the seventh volume of *CTJ* in service of University and Church, especially our own Concordia University System and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The journal continues to receive generous financial support from the Bartling Endowment through Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor (CUWAA), for which we are grateful.

As a reminder to our readers, *CTJ* is now in its second year of the reboot, which features the entire Concordia University System and is double-blind peer reviewed. In addition to the print journal, *CTJ* can be found online at our webpage (www.cuaa.edu/ctj) and is listed on ATLASerials™ with the full-text of each article available on ATLASerials Plus™. The purpose of *CTJ* is to provide space for interdisciplinary, academic conversation within the tradition of Confessional Lutheranism on matters affecting the church and Christian higher education. To this end, while we want to focus on academic offerings from the universities' and colleges' theology departments, we are open to interdisciplinary work as well that would include faculty in other academic departments at CUS schools, such as biology, anthropology, English, etc. Please see our website for instructions on how to submit articles for consideration.

As in the previous volume, this issue is truly a joint venture of the Concordia University System. No theme unites these essays; rather, they are an eclectic mixture of theological disciplines, all featuring quality academic work on topics as diverse as the backgrounds of our faculty. In the first essay, former professor at Concordia University Portland, now President of Concordia University Irvine, Michael Thomas writes on the relations of Jews and Christians in Northern Mesopotamia during the first four centuries after Christ based on three ancient texts and each's respective *Sitz im Leben*. Thomas' insightful analysis of these texts gives a rare picture into Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity. In the second essay, Theodore Hopkins (Concordia University, Ann Arbor) offers an analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* in relation to Martin Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Hopkins shows how differences in theological tools conceal a broader similarity of task, in condemning idolatrous works and constructing the Christian through the Word. In the third essay, David Loy (Concordia University, Irvine) explores the theological confession of Lutheran Universities. Although Christian Universities are tempted to put aside theology in favor of numbers, Loy shows the importance and even necessity of Lutheran Universities holding fast to their confession. In the final essay, Paul Puffe (Concordia University, Texas) dives into Hebrew grammar, arguing that the common translation of מַטַּשׁ as "be shaken" is mistaken, and the word is better translated as "collapse." Even if you don't know Hebrew, Puffe's close reading of the Bible will help you read the texts in question and

see why the translation of a word matters in understanding the Christian life.

Finally, a word about the cover art. This issue was originally put together at the beginning of January, 2020, and it was at that time that we decided to include a picture of Concordia University – Portland (CUP) on the cover due to the great support given to the journal by their theological faculty, both in terms of providing articles but also in helping with our process of blind peer review. However, as we were waiting for the journal to be printed, the closure of CUP at the end of April 2020 was announced. As editors, we decided to keep the cover as it is as tribute to the work that God has done on CUP’s campus for the last 115 years. Memory eternal.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Theodore J. Hopkins and Scott E. Yakimow (CUAA), editors

Editorial: “Doctrinal Narcissism” and Its Discontents

Editorials are strange beasts in terms of genre and perhaps can best be understood in modern parlance as that of a thoughtful blog post. In that light, I take as a beginning point an extended Facebook post by Nicholas Adams, Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, where he seeks to find an explanatory structure by which to analyze the recent and quite surprising Tory electoral landslide at the polls.¹ In it, he introduces the term “moral narcissism” in order to describe the attitude adopted by those on the political left. Before directly describing what it is, however, he offers an oblique definition by way of analogy to a more easily accessible term, “logical narcissism.” Logical narcissism displays itself in the Cartesian “desire for definitions” that are clear, easily accessible, and without confusions or contradictions. It is found in the belief that “if one can clarify one’s terms and simplify one’s constructions... this will to a significant extent clear of the confusions [of the real world] and resolve the contradictions.” This, of course, has no significant relationship to the real world that is riddled with contradictions and confusion, but it does create a paper world that “is readily combustible.” It offers an ephemeral, peaceful, logical structure, and it is this structure that beguiles the thinker to the point that examining and refining the structure becomes the focus of his efforts while the real world is largely ignored. Rather than investigating the world “out there,” the logical narcissist continues to adjust and shade the structure into perfection, sitting back and contemplating it satisfyingly, thereby making it a subspecies of narcissism more generally.

Having thus suggested that seeking clear and distinct definitions for real world phenomena is a narcissistic endeavor, Adams tentatively seeks to clarify the semantic field referenced by the term moral narcissism. He offers two different ways to look at it. First, there is the move to clearly define moral narcissism by its essence (a move a logical narcissist would take) where it is “your beliefs, not your actions, [that] constitute[] your person and your goodness.” If one’s beliefs are morally pure, then one’s actions are largely irrelevant; one can still be morally good while acting badly or failing to act in the world. Finding the essentialist, clear-and-distinct definition deficient, he then goes on to describe moral narcissism by looking at the effects it may have on one’s life in practice (a pragmatic approach). Here, the moral narcissist is noisily fixated on being “emphatically right and others being emphatically wrong,” examples of which may be labeling those with whom he disagrees as being somehow wrong-minded or evil, many times by using some type of label that ends in -ist (racist, sexist, etc) or -phobe

¹ Nicholas Adams, “What is moral narcissism?,” Facebook, December 21, 2019, 4:02 am EST.

(homophobe, transphobe, etc). Moreover, a moral narcissist frequently ends up being paralyzed into inaction due to an inability to figure out what one can do or say that would make the moral narcissist look most moral—because looks are the point, after all. For example, what should one say to a statement that lifts up the rights of women to control their own uteruses when not all women have uteruses and some men do?² In common parlance, a moral narcissist is the stereotype of a “social justice warrior” whose righteous fury pours out from the keyboard over the interwebs.

Adams then posits that Labour’s defeat is at least in part attributable to a conflict between moral narcissists and simple narcissists. On the one hand, there are those fixated on and fascinated by appearing to be moral (Labour), and on the other, there are simple, run-of-the-mill narcissists who are merely self-absorbed but in a more general rather than specific manner (Conservative). In cases where these two impulses clash during an election, “narcissists beat moral narcissists,” Adams asserts. If I am understanding him correctly, this is likely because a subset of a larger group remains a subset, and the larger group will, by definition, have more votes.

Whether or not Adams is right in proposing an axis by which to understand elections in the UK is not the point I desire to make here. Rather, I think that he offers an interesting philosophical tool that can be extended to the theological sphere as well, something that I will call “doctrinal narcissism.” Narcissism is already a useful concept in understanding the nature of sin as being self-focused in our desires and our intentions, putting ourselves into the center of the world and seeking to make the world revolve around us. A wise man many years ago once called this being *incurvatus in se*. In appending the term “doctrinal” to it, I want to explore if it cannot also be applied to a certain set of habits that theologians exhibit from time to time. While the logical narcissist focuses on clear and distinct definitions placed within non-contradictory systems of thought and the moral narcissist desires to always appear morally pure even as he downplays the role of acting in morally pure ways, a doctrinal narcissist makes achieving a pure system of doctrine the ultimate endpoint of the theological endeavor. The point of the theological game (in a Wittgensteinian sense) for the doctrinal narcissist is chiefly and above all to elucidate a systematic theology that is both faithful to Scripture and coherent within itself. Once the system has been achieved, all that is left is for the real theologian, according to the doctrinal narcissist, is to expand and expound upon its details to other like-minded doctrinal narcissists or to argue for their truth over and against those whose systems contradict it. Pure doctrine is

² There is a split in the feminist movement where some feminists believe that only females can be women and others that trans-women are also just as much women. The latter group and its allies have derogatorily labeled the former group as “TERFs” (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) and sought to marginalize them.

what is most important; other concerns are, strictly speaking, ancillary to achieving this goal.

What the doctrinal narcissist loses is like that which is also absent from the logical and moral narcissist (and narcissists more generally)—a deep and abiding connection to the real world. It is another expression of being *incurvatus in se*, twisted in upon oneself, such that one's logical system, moral perceptiveness, doctrinal expression, or entire being (the simple narcissist) is the entire point, rather than a focus upon the Lord of the Church and the active life of faith in the world. The point of doctrine in a healthy theological *habitus* is to clarify, protect, and foster the proclamation of what the Father has done in the world through His Son by the power of the Spirit on the cross and in the empty tomb such that people might hear this good news and in hearing be transformed as they cling to Christ in faith and engage the world with his love. It is not doctrine for doctrine's sake; it is doctrine for the sake of the proclamation of what Christ has done so that lives might be transformed by the encounter. Focusing on doctrine as the ultimate or most important goal of the theological endeavor misses the point which has always been the spreading of the Kingdom of God in the world. The Word of God is living and active in the world, and a theological *habitus* characterized by doctrinal narcissism considers such an encounter secondary, beside the point, rather than being the main point.

As an important aside, the qualifying adverbs and adjectives in the preceding paragraphs are important here. Note that what I have in mind is a theologian whose “ultimate,” “chief” goal “above all” is to create a system of doctrine where other goals are “ancillary” to this “most important” goal. What I am most emphatically *not* saying is that doctrine is unimportant, that it is okay to have a little bit of heresy in one's doctrinal understanding, or that one should not seek to clarify, expand upon, and protect good, scriptural doctrine. What I *am* saying is that if that a theologian focuses on doctrine for the sake of doctrine, he may want to consider whether he is acting like a doctrinal narcissist.

Instead of focusing on doctrine for the sake of doctrine as a doctrinal narcissist might, I suggest that a truly Lutheran understanding of the goal of the theological task is that of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel, and that this is a task that can only be lived out in the real world and not in the safety of the study. In this task, doctrine does not lose its crucial importance for the theologian—far from it. Rather, it is properly situated as that which fosters, protects, enables, and paves the way for the proclamation of the Gospel in the present time. As I mention above, doctrine is not the ultimate goal; fostering the encounter of the sinner with the Lord of the Church by applying Law and Gospel is. A Lutheran theological *praxis* should always place this dynamic, practical moment in the forefront of its consideration because Lutheran theology is keyed around a concern for the real-life, flesh-and-blood, children of God that one encounters on a day-to-day basis, and the

goal of theological reflection is to serve as a training ground for being able to speak the Word of God that that person needs to hear in the present time. Doctrine serves to ensure that what is spoken is indeed the Word of God, but this is a regulative role, not the end goal. A doctrinal narcissist sees the point of theology in the creation of pretty systems; a true theologian sees that good theology must always faithfully push its way into actual practice. It must drive toward bringing the sinner into the presence of the Savior. Good, sound, pure doctrine is crucial in this endeavor, but it is not the point of the endeavor. Freeing the sinner from their boundness to sin and clothing them in the righteousness of Christ is. This is why the fundamental Lutheran impulse is to be found in a *praxis*—that of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel—and not in creating a clear and concise system of doctrine for its own sake, and why the principle task of the Lutheran theologian is being a *Seelesorger*, a carer for souls, and not of words or propositions only.

Scott E. Yakimow

Co-Managing Editor of CTJ

Articles

The Conversions of Adiabene and Edessa in Syriac Christianity and Judaism: The Relations of Jews and Christians in Northern Mesopotamia in Antiquity

Michael Thomas

Abstract

This paper examines the conversion legends of Adiabene to Judaism and Edessa to Christianity in the first century and the role these stories played in the relations of Jews and Syriac Christians in Northern Mesopotamia to the 6th century AD. Syriac Christianity retained closed connections to Judaism well into the fourth century. Why then did this relationship sour afterwards? These legends preserve evidence of a reorientation of the Christian community from its Mesopotamian Jewish-Christian roots to Antiochean, Gentile Christianity and thus provide an explanation for the collapse of positive relations between Jews and Christians in Mesopotamia.

The *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene* (recorded by Josephus) recounts that Queen Helena and Prince Izates converted to Judaism in the first century. Similarly, Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* preserves the legend of the conversion of King Abgar of Edessa to Christianity. This Christian legend reflects a positive relationship between Syriac Christians and Jews. This is due in part to the Roman/Parthian stalemate which isolated Syriac Christianity from the more anti-Jewish, Antiochian Gentile Christianity.

After the Romans seized control of Edessa, Syriac Christianity established new connections with Antioch and the Roman Empire more generally; relations with Jews of Northern Mesopotamia deteriorated. These changes are witnessed in a sixth century adaptation of the *Legend of Abgar: The Doctrine of Addai*. As Syriac Christianity reoriented to Antioch, the *Legend of Abgar* was changed to reflect this new reality. By examining the social, cultural, and religious context that gave birth to the conversion legends of Edessa and Adiabene, the increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric in Syriac Christian writings is more easily explained.

Introduction

The history of the relationship between Jews and Christians in

Northern Mesopotamia is difficult to reconstruct. In part this is because there is a paucity of early and reliable documents. What texts that do exist are encrusted with layers of polemical redaction which must be carefully removed. While the task is difficult and the conclusions are understandably tenuous and incomplete, fortunately three extant texts preserve the legendary accounts of the conversions of the cities and residents of Adiabene and Nisibis to Judaism and Edessa to Christianity respectively.¹ Using these documents, it is possible to sketch a rough outline of Jewish-Christian relations in this region between the 1st and 5th centuries AD.

The *Legend of Abgar* purports to record the conversion of King Abgar V Uchama (“the Black”) of Edessa to Christianity through the direct testimony of a disciple sent personally by Jesus of Nazareth. The account, if historically accurate, preserves the very first conversion of a gentile kingdom to Christianity.² Curiously, this legend bears a remarkable similarity to the story concerning how Judaism became the religion of the region of Adiabene. The *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene* records the conversion of Queen Helena and her son Izates to Judaism in the first century AD at the behest of two different Jewish traders.³ After becoming Jews, they showered Jerusalem with gifts, established a precedent that the royal sons of Adiabene be educated there, and decreed that their bodies be buried in the holy city upon death. Close ties bound Jerusalem and Adiabene together for more than a century, and many Jews from Adiabene fell to Roman swords while standing with their Jerusalem brethren in during the Jewish War in 70 AD. The third extant text is entitled the *Doctrine of Addai*. It is a late fourth century revision of the original *Legend of Abgar*.⁴ Apart from recording the original story of the correspondence between Jesus and Abgar and the subsequent conversion of Edessa, many additional legends have been woven into the *Doctrine of Addai* which simultaneously indicates an increasing tension between Gentile Christianity in the west and the Jewish communities to the east.⁵

¹ Refer to Figure 1: Map of Northern Mesopotamia.

² The *Legend of Abgar*, which was originally written in Syriac, is extant only in a Greek translation preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*. All citations of the *Legend of Abgar* in this essay are cited from the English translation provided in Loeb Classical Library: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.13.1-22; 2.1.6-7.

³ The *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene* was preserved by Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*. The English translation of this text is found in the Loeb Classical Library: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 9.20.34.

⁴ English citations of the *Doctrine of Addai* are found in the bilingual text edition (Syriac and English) by George Howard: *The Teaching of Addai*, trans. and ed. George Howard, Texts and Translations of Early Christian Literature Series, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁵ In this essay, the phrase “Gentile Christianity” refers to the community of Greek-speaking, Gentile Christians from the Mediterranean basin. While the development of Christianity in this area was complex, Gentile Christianity, following the Apostle Paul’s argument, proclaimed that Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews, i.e. undergoing circumcision, following dietary laws, celebrating Jewish festivals, and/or subscribing to all the regulations of the Torah. “Jewish-Christianity” by contrast affirmed the Jewish heritage of Christianity. According

While these three texts emerged from a complex intertwined history of Jewish and Christian communities over several centuries, a careful reconstruction of the political, theological, and polemical motivations behind these documents provides a window through which these texts can be examined. Once these texts are placed in their original *Sitz im Leben*, they reciprocally cast light back upon the world which birthed them. In this way, these three texts become an avenue for examining Jewish-Christian relations in these early centuries. Using the reconstruction of their original settings, answers to the most puzzling questions may be uncovered: Why is *Legend of Abgar* which purports to recount the conversion of Edessa to Christianity patterned after the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene* to Judaism? What might this indicate about the original impetus for the legend and about the relationship of Syriac Christianity to Judaism in Northern Mesopotamia in the first centuries AD? If this relationship is generally positive, what impetus accounts for the vitriolic, anti-Jewish emendations which are found in the later *Doctrine of Addai*? What might account for the apparent conflict between Syriac Christianity and Gentile Christianity represented in the much later *Doctrine of Addai*?

Comparison of the two accounts of the Syriac conversion legend will demonstrate that these two documents were most likely produced by the Jewish-Christian church in Edessa to establish simultaneously a claim of *prestige de l'origine* against Gentile Christianity based in the Mesopotamian world and to reorient the community away from its original Jewish roots. Although Jewish-Christianity in Edessa was originally tied closely to the Jewish communities in Nisibis and Adiabene, this relationship began to sour in the third century as Edessan Christianity reoriented itself from its traditional Mesopotamian Jewish-Christian roots to the Gentile Christianity found in the Mediterranean world. Due to this reorientation, the anti-Jewish elements that are found in some documents produced by Gentile Christians began to filter into Edessa, and the tension between Syriac Christians and their Jewish neighbors escalated. The *Doctrine of Addai*, which is filled with vitriolic, anti-Jewish statements, bears witness to a later stage of this development.

The relationship of the Jewish-Christian community in Edessa with Gentile Christianity however was not without its own difficulties. By appropriating the original Abgar legend, the *Doctrine of Addai* restated the Edessan claim to be the original church founded through the correspondence of Jesus Christ himself. This document intentionally sought to undermine the primacy and thus the authority of the Greek-speaking Gentile Church.

to this viewpoint, Gentiles could become Christians by first becoming Jews (i.e. following traditional Jewish practices). For all intents and purposes, Jewish-Christians were Jews who identified Jesus of Nazareth as the resurrected Messiah (Christ) of God. By utilizing the terms "Gentile Christianity" (also known by the label "Pauline Christianity") and "Jewish-Christianity," the author hopes to provide a convenient way of comparing these two distinctive Christian traditions.

As the diocese of Antioch exerted more and more ecclesiastical control over the Edessan church, tensions between these two versions of Christianity and between these Christianity and Judaism more generally escalated.

Legend of Abgar

The earliest account of this Syriac legend is a truncated Greek version that was preserved by the early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* which was completed ca. 325 AD. In Book 1 of this text, Eusebius records the purported literary correspondence between King Abgar V Uchama of Edessa and Jesus of Nazareth.⁶ Eusebius, as is often the case in his *Ecclesiastical History*, provides an introduction to this document. We learn that Abgar is a successful monarch in Mesopotamia who suffers from an unnamed, chronic disorder.⁷ When he hears of miraculous healings being carried out by Jesus of Nazareth, Abgar dispatches a letter to him requesting his presence in the city of Edessa so that he might be healed. As if to sweeten the pot, he also offers his kingdom as a place of refuge from the Jews who are mistreating him. Jesus replies that he is not able to travel to the region of Osrhoene—the capital of which is Edessa—, for he is bound to accomplish his appointed task in Jerusalem. But he promises to send one of his disciples to heal him and to bring the word of salvation to him and his kin.⁸ According to Eusebius, after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the apostle Judas Thomas sends Thaddaeus, one of the seventy, to Edessa in order to heal the king and proclaim the teachings and deeds of the Christ.⁹ Thaddaeus is the Greek version of the Syriac name Addai.

After this introduction, Eusebius presents the purported correspondence. According to Eusebius's testimony, the *Legend of Abgar* was translated from Syriac originals held in the Edessan archives.¹⁰ The correspondence is recorded by Eusebius as follows:

Copy of a letter written by Abgar the Toparch to Jesus and sent to him at Jerusalem by the courier Ananias:
Abgar Uchama, the Toparch, to Jesus the good Savior who has appeared in the district of Jerusalem, greetings. I have heard concerning you and your cures, how they are accomplished by you without drugs and herbs. For, as the story goes, you make the blind recover their sight, the lame

⁶ The *Legend of Abgar* is the sole reference in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* to a Christian community beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire. For an analysis of this, see Sebastian Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, eds. Harold Attridge and Gohei Hata, *Studia Post Biblica*, vol. 42, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 212.

⁷ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.13.4.

⁹ The later Syriac redaction of the *Legend of Abgar* entitled the *Doctrine of Addai* records that Thomas sent the disciple Addai to heal Abgar and the preach the gospel. All citations from the *Doctrine of Addai* will be based on the numbering of the Syriac text found in George Howard's edition of *The Teaching of Addai*.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.5.

walk and you cleanse lepers, and cast out unclean spirits and demons, and you cure those who are tortured by long disease, and you raise dead men. And when I heard all these things concerning you, I decided that it is one of the two, either that you are God, and came down from heaven to do these things, or are a son of God for doing these things. For this reason, I write to beg you to hasten to me and heal the suffering which I have. Moreover, I heard that the Jews are mocking you, and wish to ill-treat you. Now I have a city very small and venerable which is enough for both.

Jesus' reply to the Toparch Abgar by the courier Ananias:
Happy are you who believe in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen me will believe and live. Now concerning what you wrote to me, to come to you, I must first complete here all for which I was sent, and after thus completing it be taken up to him who sent me, and when I have been taken up, I will send you one of my disciples to heal your suffering, and to give life to you and those with you.¹¹

Eusebius next recounts how Thaddaeus arrived in Edessa and stayed at the “house of Tobias, the son of Tobias” and healed many upon his arrival.¹² The king, when hearing rumors of the miracle worker, surmised that this was the one whom Jesus had promised to send. After summoning him, Thaddaeus went to the palace of the king. Eusebius records the following miracle: “As soon as he entered, a great vision appeared to Abgar on the face of Thaddaeus. And when Abgar saw this, he did reverence to Thaddaeus...and he asked Thaddaeus, ‘Are you truly a disciple of Jesus, the Son of God, who said to me, I will send you one of my disciples who will heal you and give you life?’ And Thaddaeus said, ‘Since you have had great faith in him who sent me, I was sent to you for this reason.’”¹³ Abgar testifies to his faith in a vitriolic tone: “I have such belief in him as to have wished to take force and destroy the Jews, who crucified him, had I not been prevented from this by the Roman Empire.”¹⁴ Upon hearing King Abgar’s confession, Thaddaeus healed his illness and many others in the court.¹⁵ Afterwards, Abgar requested that the apostle relate the events of the life of Jesus to

¹¹ Ibid., 1.13.6-10.

¹² The name Tobias is presumably Jewish. The fact that Thaddaeus stays with Tobias indicates a positive relationship between Christians and Jews. It may also suggest that Christianity in Edessa started first within the Jewish community. Gilles Quispel suggests this too. See Gilles Quispel, “The Discussion of Judaic Christianity,” *VirChr* 22 (1968), 81-93. Cf. Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.11-14.

¹³ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.14-15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.13.16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.13.17-18.

himself and his retinue. Thaddaeus willingly agrees but requests that the audience of the entire city be in his hearing.¹⁶ The following day the citizens were assembled, and Thaddaeus preached the Christian *kerygma* to the citizens of Edessa, and this resulted in the conversion of the “whole city of Edessans” to Christianity.¹⁷ The account ends with the statement: “These things were done in the 340th year.”¹⁸ The 340th year of the Edessan era is equivalent to the year 30 AD.¹⁹

The *Legend of Abgar* has piqued the interest of scholars throughout the years. However, claims of historical authenticity of the *Legend of Abgar*, which purports to record the actual correspondence between King Abgar V Uchama and Jesus in the early first century, have long been rejected by the academic world. It is indeed hard to imagine that, if this text contained both the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus and the account of the conversion of the first gentile king to Christianity, it would not have been celebrated throughout all of early Christendom and reflected many early Christian documents. It is equally difficult to believe that Syriac Christianity started from direct apostolic transmission within a few years of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In fact, there is no reference either in the New Testament or any other Christian document from the first century to any “official” missionary activity in Northern Mesopotamia. W. Stewart McCullough states that no New Testament figure even seems concerned about taking the gospel to this region.²⁰ The dearth of historical evidence has led some early scholars to dismiss the *Legend of Abgar* as a completely fictional account created from “whole cloth” in the late second or early third century. In his definitive history of the early church, Walter Bauer states: “Eusebius is not tracing the actual course of history but is relating a legend...today the only thing that remains to be asked is whether the church father’s presentation is completely useless for shedding light upon the origin of the Christian church in Edessa or whether in the justifiable rejection of the whole we may still single out this or that particular trait, in order to derive therefrom some sort of tenable insight for ourselves.”²¹ Recent scholarship has worked with this latter assumption: some aspects of the story might contain historical value. In fact, the prevailing consensus over the last few decades is that Christianity did enter Edessa during the reign of King

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.13.19-20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.1.6-7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.13.22.

¹⁹ Krisopp Lake converts the Seleucid calendar date to the equivalent in the Gregorian calendar: “The three hundredth and fortieth year of the Edessene era, which began in 310 B.C., would be A.D. 30, which agrees with the date of the crucifixion given by Tertullian...” Eusebius, *E.H.*, vol. 1, 97, n.2. Cf. J. B. Segal, “When did Christianity come to Edessa?,” *Middle East Studies and Libraries: A Felicitation Volume for Professor J. D. Pearson*, ed. B.C. Bloomfield, (London: Mansell, 1980), 180.

²⁰ W. Stewart McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, Scholars Press: General Series, no. 4, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 21.

²¹ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed, eds. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996), 4.

Abgar.²² But this did not happen while King Abgar V, a contemporary of Jesus, ruled Edessa between 9-46 AD but when King Abgar IX, known as “Abgar the Great,” sat upon the throne (177-212 AD). In other words, the *Legend of Abgar* seems to date from the reign of Abgar the Great, but it was cast as if it were recording the actual events from one hundred fifty years earlier. To support this claim, scholars cite evidence which substantiates that Christianity came to Edessa during King Abgar IX’s reign.

The evidence for the historicity of some aspects of the account found in the Abgar legend is compelling. Four pieces of evidence corroborate that Christianity was operative in Edessa during the late second century. The first piece of historical evidence comes from the later redaction of the Abgar legend: *Doctrine of Addai*. Although we shall have occasion to examine the *Doctrine of Addai* in detail below, one aspect of that text is best dealt with at this juncture. The *Doctrine of Addai* records that when the evangelist Addai died, he was succeeded by Aggai as bishop of Edessa.²³ After some years, one of the sons of Abgar succeeded him to the throne but rejected the Christian faith of his father. When Aggai did not follow the decrees of the new king, it is reported that Aggai’s legs were broken. Since he died quickly from his wounds, he was not able to consecrate Palut as his ecclesiastical successor.²⁴ The *Doctrine of Addai* recounts the conclusion to the story: “Palut himself went to Antioch and received ordination to the priesthood from Serapion, bishop of Antioch. Serapion himself, Bishop of Antioch, had also received ordination from Zephyrinus, Bishop of the city of Rome from the succession of ordination to the priesthood of Simon Peter who received it from our Lord.”²⁵ Since Serapion of Antioch served as bishop from 190-211, it is plausible to calculate an approximate date for Addai’s career in Edessa. McCullough concurs: “If this is a sound tradition... Addai’s career might then be put somewhere in the period 150-190.”²⁶

The remaining three pieces of evidence regarding the presence of Christianity in Edessa during the reign of Abgar the Great (177-212 AD) are external sources to the *Legend of Abgar* and provide strong evidence that indicates Christianity was operative in Edessa at this time and may corroborate the historicity of the conversion of Edessa during this time. The *Edessan Chronicle*, compiled in the late sixth century AD from earlier sources, records that the “temple of the church of the Christians” was

²² F.C. Burkitt in *Early Eastern Christianity* was the first scholar to propose that the *Legend of Abgar* may contain historical information about the conversion of Edessa to Christianity, although he suggested that Christianity came into the region during the reign of King Abgar VII. Other scholars have adopted his historical analysis but have argued that the story recounts the conversion of Edessa during the reign of King Abgar IX. For a thorough history of this approach, see Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” 212.

²³ *Teaching of Addai*, f. 32b.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 32a-f. 33a.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 32b-33a; see also, Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” 215; J. B. Segal, “When did Christianity come to Edessa?,” 180.

²⁶ McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 25.

destroyed by a great flood in 201 AD.²⁷ The *Chronicle*, if it can be trusted to provide an accurate accounting of Edessan history, records that there was an established worshipping community in Edessa prior to 201 AD. Secondly, extant fragments from the works of the Christian philosopher and theologian Bardaisan (Bar Dayṣān; ca. 154-222 AD) demonstrate that a Christian author was writing in Edessa during the late second century.²⁸ Lastly, the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*—a work produced by the school of the philosopher Bardaisan at the beginning of the third century—states that the king was a recent convert to Christianity and that he forbade castration in the city, which was a common pagan practice in Edessa.²⁹ Bauer summarizes the importance of this external source: “Thus we have reference to a Christian King Abgar by an Edessan author at the beginning of the third century. Since, on the basis of what is known, Abgar V does not qualify, one may think of the ninth Abgar, who probably would have been a contemporary of that author.”³⁰ The internal textual evidence of the *Doctrine of Addai* coupled with these external sources suggests that Christianity had reached Edessa in the latter half of the second century. If this is the case, why does the *Legend of Abgar* state that Christianity arrived in Edessa in the first century through a disciple sent by Jesus himself?

Whether or not the *Legend of Abgar* preserved by Eusebius (and the later *Doctrine of Addai*) records actual historical events concerning the entry of Christianity into Northern Mesopotamia is not the most compelling issue. The more interesting question concerns why the Syriac legend was promulgated in the first place and what purpose it served in Edessan Christianity. In order to answer these questions, one must attempt a plausible reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Abgar legend. Once one understands the social, political, and theological setting out of which this document emerged, the more interesting aspects of the story will be illuminated and a tentative thesis concerning the impetus for the creation of the legend can be presented.

Cultural, Social, Political, and Theological Setting of Edessa in Antiquity

The Abgar legend purports to recount the conversion of the city of Edessa (modern Urfa in Southern Turkey), the capital of the region of Osroene in Northern Mesopotamia. Edessa lies east of the Euphrates and was connected by trade routes to the city of Nisibis and the region of Adiabene (the capital of which was Arbela).³¹ Both were important centers of

²⁷ The Syriac text of the *Chronicle of Edessa* is found in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO): *Scriptores Syri*, ser. 3, vol. 4, 1-13.

²⁸ These fragments are preserved in the works of Ephraim the Syrian (ca. 306-373).

²⁹ The Syriac text with English translation of the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* is found in H.J.W. Drijvers, *Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, Semitic Texts with Translations, 3 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965).

³⁰ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 5; see also Segal, “When did Christianity come to Edessa?” 281.

³¹ J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 41-42.

Judaism. Throughout antiquity there was constant traffic between Edessa and Adiabene through Nisibis. Trade was enhanced through the shared oral language of Aramaic and common Mesopotamian culture, including the religion of Judaism. Throughout various towns and cities extending along the “fertile crescent” from Edessa to Babylon, there was a sizable contingent of Jews. Helmut Koester states: “In most of these cities the Jewish communities were not very large. Adiabene is a special case...it had a strong Jewish population, perhaps remnants of the exiles from the northern kingdom of Israel brought there by the Assyrians at the end of III [sic] BC.”³² It is also likely that Jewish populations increased in these urban centers after the catastrophic events of 70 and 135 AD as refugees fled eastward.



Figure 1: Map of Northern Mesopotamia³³

Many Jews who inhabited Northern Mesopotamia participated in the merchant activities associated with the trade routes, and the fledgling Jesus movement likely came into this region via these same trade routes.

³² Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age: Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 222.

³³ This map illustrates the Northern Mesopotamian region, Euphrates and Tigris rivers systems, locations of various cities (e.g. Edessa and Nisibis), and regions (e.g. Osrhoene and Adiabene) that are important to the argument of this paper. The blank map, populated by the author of this essay, was created by Tom Elliott for the Ancient World Mapping Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Merchants were probably among the first to spread information about the fledgling Jewish sect in Palestine.³⁴ J.B. Segal in *Edessa: The Blessed City* also attributes the rise of Christianity in the region of Osrhoene to the presence of Jews in Edessa and beyond: “The swift progress of Christianity at Edessa is sufficient testimony to the influence of the Jews. It is a truism that the advance of the new religion was most rapid in those places where Jews lived firmly established and in security.”³⁵ Since the Jesus movement generally spread first in Jewish communities, it is very likely that Christianity arrived in Edessa from the eastern region of Adiabene and the cities of Arbela and Nisibis and not from the west. Segal offers this very reconstruction: “It seems likely that Christianity, like both the most celebrated theologians of Edessa in the first centuries, Bardaisan and St. Ephraim, originated in the East. We would expect it to have been conveyed along the high-road through Nisibis.”³⁶

The location of Edessa east of the Euphrates River isolated the city from extensive contacts with the western world during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. This great river prohibited easy travel from the Hellenized west to the Semitic east through the regions of Osrhoene. The great trade routes skirted to the north and to the south of Edessa leaving it a bypassed enclave.³⁷ Thus Edessa was more or less isolated from the west during the time of the appearance and development of early Christianity in the first century. The result is that Christianity most likely entered Northern Mesopotamia along a northern route which bypassed Edessa and entered and took root in the more heavily populated Jewish areas of Nisibis and Adiabene.³⁸ Christianity then arrived in Edessa as it moved westward from these regions. The implication of this reconstruction is profound: the earliest forms of Christianity in the Mesopotamian region reflected a strong Jewish character since it was promulgated first among Jewish communities; therefore, the earliest form of Christianity to reach Edessa was likely Jewish-Christianity.³⁹

³⁴ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 20.2.3-4; cf. *The Teaching of Addai*, f. 4a.

³⁵ Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 42; see also L.W. Barnard, “The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries AD,” *VirChr* 22 (1968): 161-175.

³⁶ Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 42. See also, McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 22.

³⁷ Segal, “When did Christianity come to Edessa,” 183; cf. Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114-242 CE*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 16. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 277-374; Robert Murray, “The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity” in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, eds. N.G. Garsoian, T. Mathews, and R.W. Thomson (Washington, D.C., 1982), 3-16; A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 1, CSCO: Subsidia 14, (Louvain, 1958).

³⁸ Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion*, 85.

³⁹ Many scholars have followed Segal’s reconstruction: the Christian faith was first established east of Edessa (in Nisibis or Adiabene) and that it reached Edessa from the east rather than from the west: J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 69; cf. Jacob Neusner, “The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity,” *Numen* 13 (1966), 144-150; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4-24; Han J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966), 215. In contrast, Han Drijvers in

This thesis, proposed most comprehensively by J.B. Segal in *Edessa: The Blessed City*, demands a more detailed examination, for it provides the most plausible reconstruction of the social, theological, and cultural setting of Edessa from which the Abgar legend emerged. Segal's central claim is that Northern Mesopotamia can be best understood in light of the two great rivers systems that dominate the landscape. The Tigris presents some difficulties in navigation, but for the most part, and this is true especially of the headwaters region, "the river and its tributaries were a means of communication, not a barrier to movement."⁴⁰ The Euphrates, on the other hand, was a firm barrier to movement. In fact, the segment of the Euphrates which seemed to present the greatest difficulty was "the great curve in the neighborhood of Edessa."⁴¹ As will be shown below, Roman military movements in these areas confirm that nearly always legions moving from Antioch in Syria eastwards swung north towards Armenia before turning south to enter Mesopotamia. The Euphrates River stood as the *de facto* border between the Roman and Parthian empires, for it was difficult to cross and thus served as a natural barrier from easy invasion.

The Euphrates River served as a boundary not only for military forces but also for cultural and intellectual exchange since trade did not pass easily across this water way. This is illustrated in the demise of Hellenistic influence when the Seleucid Empire began to lose control of the region to the Parthians in the second century BC. Although the Seleucids had brought Greek art, science, and religion into this region after the death of Alexander, Hellenistic culture which to date had been intertwined with these cities began to unravel.⁴² The Mesopotamian culture of the Parthians began to infuse itself into these regions and gradually Hellenism withered.⁴³ The demise of Hellenism is witnessed in archeological finds during this period. By the first century AD, there is a dearth of Greek inscriptions, and native princes are inscribing their coins with Syriac instead of Greek.⁴⁴ The

his more current research has presented a very different portrait in which Edessa, Nisibis, and Adiabene are thoroughly Hellenized. He argues that these cities, due to their location on the Silk Road, are participating in a direct relationship with the cities and provinces situated on the Mediterranean. Greek and Aramaic are used interchangeably, which suggests the area had a very diverse population. For Drijvers, Christianity entered Edessa from Antioch, the main center of Christianity in the Roman world, in much the same way that Christianity spread west throughout the Roman Empire. Drijvers rejects the notion that Edessan Christianity, connected via trade routes and in remarkably close proximity, would not have been heavily influenced by Antiochian forms of Christianity. See Han J.W. Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 125-127. In my opinion, however, Drijver's thesis does not take into account Roman military maneuvers which intimate that the Euphrates was a great barrier to movement of troops and therefore likely trade goods. If traders moved easily into Edessa from the west, why would the Roman military not follow a similar route when moving into this region? This central issue will be treated below.

⁴⁰ Segal, "When did Christianity Come to Edessa?," 181.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴² Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 12-13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁴⁴ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 2.

Parthian empire completely controlled the Mesopotamian region when the Romans marched into the eastern Mediterranean world in the first century BC.

As Rome emerged as the dominant player in the Mediterranean basin, she began to move eastward in order to secure the commerce and trade routes running through Mesopotamia to Iran, India, and China. It was along such routes that silk and silk garments came from China, muslin, spices, metals, drugs, and precious stones from India, and carpets from Iran.⁴⁵ Just as the Romans could not afford Parthian control over these routes, the Parthians were unwilling to relinquish their sovereignty over the major east-west routes. Koester summarizes the stakes: “The wars of the Romans with Parthia for possession of Mesopotamia involved in part the attempt to control this important trade route.”⁴⁶ Thus, conflict erupted over the control of the sweeping bend of the Euphrates River east of Edessa. But control was not easily gained, and security was even more fleeting.

The Roman Governor of Syria, Marcus Licinius Crassus, led his legions against the Parthians in 53 BC. Instead of taking a northern route through Armenia and then swinging southward to attack Northern Mesopotamia, he opted to cross the Euphrates at Zeugma, losing one of his own horses to the river.⁴⁷ He led seven legions into Parthian territory, but they immediately came under fire from opposing cavalry employing the famed Parthian shot.⁴⁸ With their backs against the river, communication, and more importantly, retreat strategies were impossible. The legions and Crassus himself were slaughtered and the famed Roman standards were captured. The Battle of Carrhae, on the eastern side of the Euphrates was one of the most humiliating defeats in Roman history.⁴⁹ Marcus Antonius’s own Parthian invasion also ended in defeat in 36 BC. Although his own life was preserved, his legions were decimated and their standards were likewise captured.⁵⁰ When Augustus became Emperor, he refused to venture across the Euphrates to engage the Parthians but accepted the river as the boundary of his empire. The biographer of Augustus, A.H.M. Jones, who sycophantically paints Augustus as the unassailable warrior of Rome, acknowledges the great power of the Parthians: “It is evident that Augustus had no ambitions for eastern conquests and fully realized how dangerous an operation an invasion of Parthia was.”⁵¹ In 20 BC this peaceful strategy was to pay off: Phraates IV, king of the Parthians, returned the military standards, the spoils, and the

⁴⁵ McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 7.

⁴⁶ Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, 86.

⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, 19.1-3.

⁴⁸ Plutarch, *Life of Crassus*, 20.1.

⁴⁹ Marcel Le Glay, et al., *A History of Rome*, 3rd ed (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵¹ A.H.M. Jones, *Augustus* (New York: Norton, 1970), 57.

prisoners taken in 53 and 36 BC.⁵²

In 114 AD Emperor Trajan, exercising a more innovative plan, ventured to the far north of Edessa into Armenia, outflanking the Euphrates. He thus overran the Armenian region, including the main city of Elegeia, from a more accessible route.⁵³ From that territory, he swung south, and after crossing the Tigris, he secured Nisibis and left a garrison there to protect his flank.⁵⁴ As the campaigning season was coming to an end and he wished to return to Antioch for the winter, he marched westward from Nisibis towards Edessa.⁵⁵ Trajan established a temporary, military crossing point at the Euphrates near Edessa so that he might use Antioch as a base of operations for a renewed campaign the following spring campaign. This crossing, albeit more dangerous as Crassus's campaign suggests, did cancel the need to follow the long, circuitous, yet safer, campaigning route to the north; moreover, he had already conquered Armenia.⁵⁶ During 115-116 AD, Trajan's six legions conquered the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys and ventured as far south as Babylon. While Trajan had won the battles and the Senate even conferred the cognomen "Parthicus," he failed to win the war of conquest and annexation of the Parthian lands. After the death of Trajan, Hadrian abandoned both the Mesopotamian conquests of his predecessor and the newly established crossing point, and he accepted the Euphrates River as the border once again.⁵⁷ This withdrawal issued in a fifty year reign of peace between Rome and Parthia.

Marcus Aurelius broke the peace with renewed invasions of Mesopotamia. Utilizing the same northern approach as Trajan, the Roman

⁵² Augustus considered the recovery of these standards as one of his most important acts as emperor. He included a reference to this action in his *Res Gestae*: "I compelled the Parthians to restore to me the spoils and the standards of three Roman armies and to seek the friendship of the Roman people as suppliants; and I placed these standards in the inner shrine in the temple of Mars the Avenger." Augustus, "Res Gestae-29," in *Rome: The Augustan Age: A Source Book*, trans. and eds. Kitty Chisholm and John Ferguson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9. The importance of this event is also enshrined in a remarkable image on the cuirass of the famous statue of Augustus from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta. The cuirass contains a myriad of images symbolizing the "new ideology of victory." Paul Zanker, in his book entitled *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, interprets the central image on the cuirass of Augustus: "In the center of the composition, the Parthian king extends the legionary eagle, attached to a battle standard, to a cuirassed figure in military pose, either a representative of the Roman legions or perhaps the embodiment of Mars Ultor himself...[which represents that]...on the cuirass relief the victory over the Parthians is celebrated as the culmination of a perfect world order." Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 189.

⁵³ Stephen Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome: The Definitive History of Every Imperial Legion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012), 414; see also, McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 4.

⁵⁴ C.S. Lightfoot, "Trajan's Parthian War and the Fourth Century Perspective," *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 80 (1990) 117.

⁵⁵ Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome*, 415. Lightfoot notes that Trajan stayed in Edessa for the winter of 114 AD instead of traveling 150 miles southwest to Antioch (Lightfoot, "Trajan's Parthian War," 118).

⁵⁶ McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 4.

⁵⁷ Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome*, 420.

legions penetrated as far as Seleucia-Ctesiphon. As a reflection of the weakness of the Parthians toward the end of the second century AD, the kingdom of Osroene, of which Edessa was the capital, welcomed the Romans during this campaign. Segal summarizes the dramatic event:

Henceforth, after 164, acquaintance with and friendship with the people of Osroene were taken for granted by Rome. The King of Edessa now became a reliable ally of the Empire. When the Parthians invited King Abgar the Great to cooperate in the recapture of Nisibis from the Romans, he refused. Instead, he accepted the invitation from Emperor Septimius Severus to visit Rome, and he was given an extravagant reception there. Now the crossing of the Euphrates from Antioch to the neighborhood of Edessa had become secure and familiar.⁵⁸

As the Romans pushed the boundary of the empire further into Mesopotamia, a more permanent crossing of the Euphrates near Edessa became invaluable. Control of this area militarily enabled the Romans to create a more direct, west-to-east trade route which brought Edessa directly into the orbit of the Roman Empire. Finally, during the reign of Emperor Caracalla (198-217 AD), Edessa is mentioned as a major stopping point east of the Euphrates, noted both as a trading station and a military outpost.⁵⁹ Edessa turned to look westward.

Not surprisingly, the city of Edessa and the region of Osroene were annexed as part of the Roman Empire during the reign of King Abgar IX the Great.⁶⁰ This watershed event dramatically changed the orientation of Edessa. The opening of the trade routes to the east via Edessa linked Northern Mesopotamia with the Roman Empire through the great city of Antioch. This was a dramatic shift. With the Roman military firmly in control of both shores of the Euphrates and with a more permanent crossing established, trade could move directly from Antioch through Edessa thus shortening substantially the trade route into Mesopotamia.⁶¹ Cultural trends, new modes of thinking, and religious ideas began to flow into Edessa from the west instead of through the cultural filters of Adiabene and Nisibis in the east as had been the case earlier. The implications were staggering, especially for Christianity in Edessa. Gentile Christianity from Antioch, which had heretofore been largely denied direct contact with the enclave of Edessa, was suddenly thrown together with the established Jewish-

⁵⁸ Segal, "When did Christianity Come to Edessa?," 185.

⁵⁹ Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 17.

⁶⁰ Le Glay, *A History of Rome*, 372-373.

⁶¹ McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 7-8.

Christianity which had previously arrived through the filters of Nisibis and Adiabene and developed *in vacuo*.

By the late third or early fourth centuries AD, two distinctive types of Christians churches existed side-by-side in Northern Mesopotamia: one was Jewish-Christian and the other was Gentile Christian (under the ecclesiastical supervision of Antioch).⁶² Both churches used Syriac as the language of liturgy and teaching, but they differed widely in their theological approaches. The existence of two different types of Christian groups in this region by the middle to the end of the third century AD is corroborated by a very unusual source. Gilles Quispel has demonstrated that Jewish-Christianity did not die out completely after the destruction of Jerusalem and the decimation of the church of James in Jerusalem (70 AD) but flourished in Mesopotamia for centuries. In fact, he cites an arresting inscription that was erected by the Zoroastrian Grand Inquisitor Kartir: "I banned from the empire and destroyed: Jews, Shamans, Brahmans, Nazorees, Christians, and Maktaks were crushed in the Empire."⁶³ As Quispel points out, this Zoroastrian priest distinguishes two types of Christianity: "Nazorees" are the Jewish-Christians in the Persian Empire; "Christians" refers to the Gentile Christians from Antioch.⁶⁴ That they are labeled as separate communities is significant. Segal, however, went even further than Quispel by suggesting that the two distinctive types of Christianity found in the third century were the progenitors of the two divisions later found within the Syrian Church: "The west Syrian church became in the course of time the Jacobite church; it was largely the product of Christians west of the Euphrates. But there was also in eastern Mesopotamia a church that... [had]...sympathy with Judaism...it clung obstinately to Jewish practices that had been cast off by Christians in the West. Even in the first half of the fourth century the theologian Aphrahat testifies to the eating of unleavened bread at the Passover and to the removal of blood before meat was eaten."⁶⁵ However, Segal's connection of a direct relationship of the Jacobites and the Nestorians with the two-stage evangelization of Edessa likely extends beyond the evidence.

Given the complex historical reconstruction of the social, cultural, and religious setting of Edessa in the late second and early third centuries, some preliminary conclusions can now be drawn regarding the *raison d'être* of the Abgar legend. There is no plausible argument that claims Christianity came to Edessa through direct apostolic contact in 30 AD. As has been shown, Christianity likely came into Edessa at first through the Jewish regions of Adiabene and Nisibis. This community of Christians clung to many Jewish practices, including perhaps circumcision, dietary regulations, holidays, etc. Gentile Christianity later exerted its influence and ecclesiastical control from

⁶² Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 13-22.

⁶³ Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁵ Segal, "When did Christianity Come to Edessa?," 190.

the west through Antioch as this region was annexed by the Roman Empire. Why then was the Abgar legend originally created? The answer to this question hinges on when the Syriac legend first was promulgated. Comparison of the Eusebius's account of the *Legend of Abgar* and the Syriac text of the *Doctrine of Addai* led Rolf Peppermüller to conclude that these writings go back to a common Syriac source which dates to the second half of the third century AD.⁶⁶ Peppermüller's analysis is significant since it suggests the likelihood that Eusebius had access to a Syriac version, or a translation of such, when he wrote the *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius states several times that the legend comes from the Syriac, and there is no plausible reason to posit that Eusebius "invented" this story, for it does not seem to serve any overall purpose in his writings that would warrant such a creation.⁶⁷

It is very plausible that the new alignment and orientation of the Edessan community to the Roman Empire is the cause for the creation and promulgation of the Abgar legend. The introduction of Gentile Christianity through Antioch coupled with the fact that Edessa came under the control of the diocese of Antioch suggests the impetus. The confrontation between Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity, which Segal suggests might be reflected in the factional split of later Syrian Christianity, produced a climate in which the Syriac-speaking, Jewish-Christian church defended its authority. This legend was likely produced by Jewish-Christians to respond to the inevitable questions posed by this confrontation. The Syriac legend explains where Edessan Christianity came from and why it is authentic. In truth, it claims to be *more authentic* than Gentile Christianity for King Abgar converted to Christianity through direct correspondence with Jesus himself. The legend makes an even more dramatic claim: Abgar confessed the divinity of Christ before the crucifixion.⁶⁸ Abgar's letter provides the evidence:

For, as the story goes, you make the blind recover their sight, the lame walk and you cleanse lepers, and cast out unclean spirits and demons, and you cure those who are tortured by long disease, and you raise dead men. And when I heard all these things concerning you I decided that it is one of the two, either that you are God, and came down from heaven to do these things, or are a son of God for doing these things. For this reason I write to beg you to hasten to me and heal the suffering which I have.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Rolf Peppermüller, "Griechische Papyrusfragmente der *Doctrina Addai*," *VirChr* 25 (1971): 289-301. Walter Bauer came to a similar conclusion concerning the dating of the Syriac source well before Peppermüller, see Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 10.

⁶⁷ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.5, 11, & 22.

⁶⁸ Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 66.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.6-8.

The Abgar legend undermines the primacy of Gentile Christianity (i.e. Pauline) since Abgar confessed Christ well before Saul encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. The legend might also suggest Abgar's preeminence over other followers of Jesus since he had never encountered Jesus. Jesus purportedly called attention to his remarkable faith, even at a great distance: "Blessed are you who believe in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and that those who have not seen will believe and live."⁷⁰ By rooting the story in the direct correspondence between Abgar and Jesus, the Syriac legend not only proclaimed how Christianity arrived in Edessa but lent Edessan Jewish-Christianity authority and prestige over the newer Gentile Christianity that had just arrived with Roman hegemony.⁷¹

If the Abgar legend was created for this purpose, did the author merely invent the names and themes which are central to the story or were they borrowed from a common source? Recall that Jewish-Christianity in Edessa shared a close relationship with the Jewish communities in Nisibis and Adiabene: "Jews of Edessa looked eastward to more powerful Jewish communities in northeast Mesopotamia. In Adiabene, the ruling family adopted Judaism in the first century AD."⁷² Given the close connection of Jewish-Christianity with Judaism, one can assume that the Edessans knew the legend of the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene*. Needing to compose a foundation legend to counter Gentile Christianity, the author of the Abgar story drew upon the motifs and characters that were so familiar from the Adiabene conversion story.⁷³

Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene

There are several parallels between the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene*, as recorded in Josephus, and the Edessan Abgar legend. During the first decades of the first century AD, Monobazus, king of Adiabene, and his wife Helena had a son whom they named Izates (meaning, "Divine One"). Throughout his childhood, Izates was favored more than his brothers by Monobazus so their hatred of him grew intense. While Izates was still a young man, Monobazus decided, for his welfare and safety, that he should go and live within the royal palace of Charax Spasini, the capital of a nearby kingdom. Now during the time when he lived in that territory, a certain Jewish merchant named Ananias (or Hannan) visited that palace and taught the women Judaism. Izates was also converted to Judaism through the agency of a merchant, although he was not at the time circumcised. His father, having grown old and approaching death, requested to see him so Izates and Ananias traveled to Adiabene. Upon arriving, Izates learned that

⁷⁰ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.10. The author of the Legend of Abgar is clearly drawing on Jesus' statement in the Gospel of John (Jn 20:29).

⁷¹ Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," 227.

⁷² Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 41.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 67-69; cf. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 8-9

his mother had also become a Jewish proselyte through the teaching of another Jewish merchant. His father died shortly after Izate's arrival, and the son ascended to the throne in 36 AD. While he was at first reluctant to declare his allegiance to Judaism openly to the people, he eventually was circumcised and acknowledged his religious commitment publicly. While the royal families of Adiabene were scandalized by his rejection of the ancestral religions, the commoners joined their king in the practice of Jewish monotheism. Thus, according to the conversion legend, it was during Izate's reign that the region of Adiabene and Nisibis became Jewish.⁷⁴

The parallels with the Abgar legend are striking. Izates ascends to the throne in 36 AD and thereby is a contemporary of King Abgar V Uchama. Secondly, the young prince is converted to Judaism through a Jewish merchant named Ananias. This trader shares the same name as Abgar's emissary sent to Palestine in the Abgar legend.⁷⁵ It is Ananias who delivers Abgar's letter to Jesus and carries the Lord's response back to the king. In both stories, merchants, especially Jewish ones, play crucial roles in the transmission of monotheism. But the kings themselves convert to Judaism and Christianity respectively and thus render their sovereign territories monotheistic. The similarity of motifs and names led Robert Murray, in his book entitled *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, to declare that these parallels are more than a coincidence: "The Edessan story of the conversion of Abgar was *borrowed* by...Christians from their former Jewish brethren to the east. It was, perhaps, a garbled memory (though retaining not a few similarities) of the true story about the first century royal conversions in Adiabene."⁷⁶ Once the stories are compared, it is difficult to deny that the author of the Syriac legend appropriated large sections of the Adiabene conversion account to craft a story concerning the conversion of Edessa.

This process of appropriation of the legend intimates a fairly amicable relationship between the Jewish-Christian community in Edessa and the Jewish communities of Adiabene and Nisibis at least in the third century when the Abgar legend was created and promulgated. Had there existed a bitter schism between these communities, it is hard to imagine that the Edessan Christian community would have promulgated a conversion story which so closely resembled the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene*. This is not to say that anti-Jewish elements are not found in Eusebius's account of the *Legend of Abgar*. Indeed, King Abgar offered Jesus a refuge

⁷⁴ I have not attempted to offer an analysis of why the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene* was written. Others have ably treated this issue. See Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources" in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 293-312. See also Jacob Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity," *Numen* 13 (1966): 144-150; Jacob Neusner, "Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism: A New Perspective," *JBL* 83, no. 1 (1964), 60-66.

⁷⁵ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.8-9; *Teaching of Addai*, f. 1a.

⁷⁶ Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 8.

from the Jews who were seeking to do him harm.⁷⁷ More poignantly, King Abgar expressed the desire to kill those Jews in Jerusalem who put his Lord Jesus to death.⁷⁸ While these statements clearly reflect a tension between Edessan Christianity and Judaism, it is not surprising that an extant text such as the *Legend of Abgar* would contain anti-Jewish elements. What can be said definitively is that the anti-Jewish statements found in Eusebius's copy of the *Legend of Abgar* pales in comparison to what is found in the *Doctrine of Addai* which dates from the late fourth or early fifth century. Something dramatic happened within the Edessan community that created the occasion for a new redaction of the Abgar legend which features caustic, anti-Jewish rhetoric.

If the cultural, social, political, and theological reconstruction offered above is accurate, that dramatic event was the continued influx of Gentile Christianity into Edessa via Antioch.⁷⁹ As Gentile Christianity exerted more and more pressure on Jewish-Christianity in Edessa, the anti-Judaism of this strain of Christianity seeped into Northern Mesopotamia. The Abgar legend was then reformulated to reflect this new perspective on Judaism. However, the *Doctrine of Addai* also contains elements which suggest that the author

⁷⁷ Eusebius, *E.H.*, 1.13.8-9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.13.16.

⁷⁹ Due to the paucity of evidence, one cannot prove definitively that the *Legend of Abgar* and the later redaction of this legend found in the *Doctrine of Addai* were products of a Jewish-Christian community defending its authority against the influx of Gentile Christianity. But this thesis makes the most sense of the evidence. Han Drijvers, however, has suggested another impetus for the creation of this *Legend*. He claims that the rapid success of Manichaeism in the northern Mesopotamian region was the impetus for creating a religious document which undercut the authority of the Manichaean disciple Addai. He suggests that an interested member of Syrian Christianity created a document that usurped the name Addai and made this figure into the early Christian apostle that brought Christianity to Edessa around 35 CE. By utilizing the name Addai, the Syrian Christian could appropriate the energy of the Manichaeans for his/her cause. But there are serious flaws with Drijver's thesis. He fails to show convincingly that Manichaeism could actually provide a strong impetus. One can hardly deny that Manichaeism was a new, active religion in the early fourth century, but it seems that Drijvers overestimates how rapidly Manichaeism could have spread after the death of Mani. He seems to suggest that the "threat" of Manichaeism to undermine Christianity in northern Syria was great. This seems implausible. Secondly, his thesis assumes that Christianity would borrow the name Addai from Manichaeism. It seems unlikely that a fledgling religion would wield enough power to warrant the Christian writer's usurping of the name of the main Manichaean disciple. More convincing is the likelihood that the nascent Manichaean religion would attempt to utilize a name familiar in the area from a legend or story to gain credibility for itself. New religions often utilize existing myths, legends, or figures to gain authority within a new geographical setting. Finally, his thesis cannot account for two key features of the *Doctrine of Addai* which will be explored below. First, how, in light of the supposed anti-Manichaean rhetoric, can one explain the curious story of Protonike, the wife of Claudius? This story has obvious parallels with the Helena legends found in western histories of the Church, but no parallels with Manichaeism. This significant element in the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai* cannot be ignored. Secondly, the anti-Jewish elements strewn throughout the legend are also difficult to explain utilizing Drijver's theory. For a complete survey of Drijver's thesis, see Han J.W. Drijvers, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 36 (1985): 88-102; *ibid.*, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 124-146. Cf. Han J.W. Drijvers, "Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1982): 160.

also wished to undermine the authority and prestige of Gentile Christianity.

Doctrine of Addai

The redacted Syriac version of the Abgar legend is entitled the *Doctrine of Addai*. As the *Legend of Abgar* in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, this text features the correspondence between King Abgar and Jesus of Nazareth. However, the *Doctrine of Addai*, as the name suggests, provides a detailed description of Addai's preaching and healing in the region of Edessa.⁸⁰ The reader learns that pagan priests and many Jews were converted through Addai's sermon. But the Syriac version contains other curious accretions. One is the legend of Protonike, the wife of Claudius, who recovers the true cross and locates the most important Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.⁸¹ The *Doctrine of Addai* also records the anti-Jewish correspondence between Abgar and the Roman Emperor Tiberius concerning the evils perpetrated by the Jews of Jerusalem against Jesus of Nazareth.⁸² Both of these additions are post-Eusebian and seemingly emerge from the historical setting of Edessa in the late 4th and early 5th centuries when the Jewish-Christian church is simultaneously asserting its heritage and prestige vis-à-vis Gentile Christianity and breaking definitively with its Jewish roots.

Jewish-Christians found themselves in a difficult position by the fourth and fifth centuries. On the one hand, Gentile Christianity had exerted an enormous influence on Edessa. For decades Antioch exercised ecclesiastical control over the area. In addition, theologians such as Aphraates and Ephraim the Syrian used their theological acumen to propagate Greek Christian theology in the region. Both were aware that many Syriac Christians still engaged in Jewish practices and encouraged them to sever all ties with Jewish customs.⁸³ Whereas Aphraates's writings are more tempered, Ephraim's writings display an acerbic, anti-Jewish tenor which represented a new level of hostility not previously seen in Edessan Christianity. He states that the Jews are a slanderous and murderous people

⁸⁰ Sidney Griffith, in his study of the *Doctrine of Addai*, declines to treat the Abgar legend. He argues conversely that the theological teaching found in the document should be the central focus of inquiry. The author of the *Doctrine of Addai* employed the legends and traditions found in the earlier *Legend of Abgar* to present "a normative Edessan Christianity that he hoped would play an authoritative role in the largely Christological controversies of his own day." Griffiths theological exploration is compelling and offers collaborative proof that Edessan Christianity reorients itself toward the Christianity of the Mediterranean world in the late 4th and early 5th centuries, see Sidney Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century," *Hugoye* 6:2 (2003), 1-46.

⁸¹ *The Teaching of Addai*, f. 7b-11a.

⁸² *Ibid.*, f. 25a.

⁸³ John Chrysostom faced a similar problem with his congregation in Constantinople. He preached numerous sermons, including some with strong anti-Jewish language, exhorting his parishioners to refrain from Jewish practices. For a detailed study of these matters, see Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978).

who must be avoided at all costs: “Crucifiers” and Christians are not to be friends.⁸⁴ The *Doctrine of Addai* reflects this new reality. It is a rewriting of an earlier Syriac Christian legend that seeks to establish Jewish-Christianity as the authentic and original faith rooted in the ministry of Jesus himself. At the same time, the redacted account shares the increased anti-Judaism of the Christianity of Aphraates and Ephraim.⁸⁵ The dating of the earliest manuscript of the *Doctrine of Addai* corroborates this setting.⁸⁶

The legend of Protonike undermines the more familiar western Christian legend of Helena’s (i.e. Constantine’s mother) journey to the Holy Land. It certainly attempts to appropriate the authority of the western myth in order to establish the importance, if not prominence, of Syriac Christianity.⁸⁷ It is not far-fetched to assume that the author of the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai* sought to establish an authoritative position within the Church by undermining the authority of the Helena legends. This was done by claiming that he knew of an older version of the Helena story. Just as the Abgar legend claims to witness the establishment of the first Christian kingdom, so too does the Protonike story claim to be the original. How might one postulate such an interpretation? The similarities of the two stories suggest that there was a relationship between them. Since the Helena legends were well-established in the early fourth century AD, it is likely that the Helena legends were earlier than the Protonike story in the *Doctrine of Addai*.⁸⁸ Secondly, if the Helena story was not created previous to the Protonike story, it is difficult to imagine how the Protonike story, concerning the wife of Claudius, worked itself into a Syriac Christian text. Since we know that Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*—which contains a truncated account of Helena’s journey to Jerusalem and the subsequent building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—was available in Syriac in the late fourth century, it is likely that the Syriac legend of Protonike was created and then circulated to undermine the western legend. In so doing, the author of the *Doctrine of Addai* is offering what he argues is the authentic history of Christianity, albeit a Syriac one.

⁸⁴ McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, 25.

⁸⁵ Segal confirms that the anti-Jewish themes found in the *Doctrine of Addai* are contemporaneous with those of Ephraim the Syrian, see Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 102.

⁸⁶ Most scholars posit that the *Doctrine of Addai* was written in the late 4th or early 5th centuries. See Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity”, 213. The only complete Syriac manuscript is usually dated to the sixth century, see William Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864; reprinted, Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), 1-9.

⁸⁷ The earliest accounts of the Helena legends are found in Cyril of Alexandria and Eusebius’s *Life of Constantine*. Additional accounts of the legends are found in the writings of Socrates Scholasticus, Theodoret and Sozomen who attempted to write histories of the Church modeled on Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*.

⁸⁸ The visit of Helena to Jerusalem and the subsequent building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is mentioned by Eusebius (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.26-33). Socrates Scholasticus recounts an extended version of the discovery of the cross in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1.17). Sozomen records a nearly identical story, save accretions concerning the finding of the tomb (Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.1).

The Protonike story, recorded in the *Doctrine of Addai*, claims that after she was converted by Simon Peter she traveled to the Holy Land with her daughter in search of the sites connected with the Savior.⁸⁹ After arriving, she hears that the Jews have taken over the sites and will not allow Christians into these areas. Furthermore, the three crosses that stood on Golgotha are guarded by the Jews as well. Protonike, requesting a meeting with the High Priest Onias, demands that the Jews allow her into the sites.⁹⁰ Coming into the tomb that contained the crosses, she is perplexed to determine which one is the true cross of the Savior. Curiously enough, at that very instant her virgin daughter “fell down and died without pain, illness, or any cause of death.”⁹¹ Conveniently, the death of the daughter is the tool by which she would be able to identify the true cross. She orders the servants to bring her daughter, and they place each cross over her body. The first two failed to bring her back to life; however, the third cross—of course, it is always the last one—is placed on her daughter, and she is miraculously healed.⁹² By Protonike’s actions, the true cross of Christ was recovered for Christendom. The *Doctrine of Addai* claims that these events happened in the early first century AD.⁹³ The Syriac version is usurping the western account by more than three hundred years!

The similarities of the Protonike story with the Helena legend are remarkable. Helena, the mother of Constantine, traveled to the Holy Land in search of the sites of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The tomb, covered and hidden by a temple to Aphrodite, was found by Helena with divine guidance. After destroying the temple and opening the tomb, she discovered three crosses and the *titulum* on which Pilate had written the charges against the Savior. The *titulum* was removed from the cross so that one could not determine by sight which one was the true cross. Bishop Marcarius of Jerusalem suggested to Helena that God would provide a sign. The sign was this: a certain woman, on the point of death, lived nearby, and the bishop arranged for the woman to be brought to the tomb. One by one the crosses were placed on her body. The first two, which were not the Lord’s, left her in a moribund condition. However, the remaining cross was placed on her body, and she was instantly healed and regained her strength. Helena had found the true cross.

The two stories share many of the same motifs. Although the author of the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai* seems to have borrowed the main stories from the Helena legend, certain features in the *Doctrine of Addai* are added to lend to the appearance that the Protonike story was earlier and more credible. First, the claim that Protonike’s husband was Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD) suggests the desire of the Syriac author to root the story in the first century.

⁸⁹ *Teaching of Addai*, f. 7b.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 54b.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 54b.

⁹² *Ibid.*, f. 8b-9b.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, f. 7b-11a.

Secondly, the frail girl on the point of death is the very daughter of Protonike. This suggests, it would seem, more intensity concerning the emotional impact of the story; there is more at stake than just a local woman's life. But the clearest indication that the Protonike story is the product of a Syriac redactor from the later fourth or early fifth century is the deliberate inclusion of anti-Jewish rhetoric.

As mentioned above, the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai* contains several anti-Jewish statements and stories that can only be explained fully when considered within a late fourth or early fifth century Syrian milieu. The anti-Jewish theme in the Protonike story is illustrative. The Jews have withheld the holy sites from the Christians.⁹⁴ Protonike orders Onias to relinquish the sites against his will. In addition, the *Doctrine of Addai* contains another legend in which King Abgar writes Emperor Tiberius because he is unable to “pass over into a country of the Romans to enter Palestine and kill the Jews, because they crucified the Messiah.”⁹⁵ Tiberius, instead of dismissing the letter, sends an emissary to look into the matter. Aristides, after hearing Addai's testimony concerning Jesus' crucifixion at the hands of the Jews, purportedly related the atrocities to Tiberius who in response sent troops against Jerusalem. When the troops arrived, they killed several leaders of the Jews. When Abgar heard the report concerning the massacre, he rejoiced greatly.⁹⁶ There is no evidence, however, that these reported events are historical. First of all, one must ask why Tiberius would be concerned about the death of an insignificant Jewish peasant in the backwaters of the Roman world. Secondly, why would Tiberius send troops into Jerusalem at the behest of a king from a province that was not controlled by Rome in the first century? Clearly, this anti-Jewish rhetoric fits much better in a fourth or fifth century setting.

The *Doctrine of Addai* does, however, ostensibly contain a handful of favorable comments about Jews. Jesus is said to have stayed with Gamaliel. Presumably, this is the famous Rabban Gamaliel of Jerusalem under whom Saul was reported to have studied.⁹⁷ Likewise, Addai dwelt in the “house of Tobias, the son of Tobias,” when he first entered Edessa.⁹⁸ As the result of Addai's mission, “even the Jews who were learned in the Law and the Prophets and who traded in silk, submitted and became followers and confessed that the Messiah is the Son of the Living God.”⁹⁹ But it is clear that the favorable comments concerning Jews are found in the earliest strata

⁹⁴ Ibid., f. 54a-54b.

⁹⁵ Ibid., f. 23b. Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, in a recent article, dismisses entirely that this account is connected to a religious controversy between Christianity and Judaism. She proposes that the *Doctrine of Addai* testifies to a political connection between King Abgar the Black and Tiberius. See Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, “The Possible Origin of the Abgar-Addai Legend: Abgar the Black and Emperor Tiberius,” *Hugoye*, vol. 16.2 (2013), 325-341.

⁹⁶ Ibid., f. 18a.

⁹⁷ *Acts of the Apostles* 22.3, cf. 5.34ff.

⁹⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.13.11-14.

⁹⁹ *Teaching of Addai*, f. 22a.

of the Abgar legend. Indeed, the retention of these positive comments may suggest the opposite meaning: Jews who continued to practice the traditions of their ancestors proved themselves to be stubborn and intractable. Addai's farewell address sums up the negative portrayal of Jews in the *Doctrine of Addai*: "Make the path and road smooth in a rough place, between the crucifying Jews and the erring pagans...beware of the crucifiers and do not be friends with them, lest you be responsible with those whose hands are full of the blood of the messiah."¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

This study has attempted to place these three legends in their proper social, political, and theological settings. Using the *Legend of Abgar*, the *Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene*, and the *Doctrine of Addai* as the primary sources of information, it has been shown that Syriac Christianity underwent an enormous transformation. The Jewish-Christianity originally found in Edessa was heavily indebted to the Jewish communities of Adiabene region and the city of Nisibis to the east. However, after the Roman conquest of the Osrhoene region and the city of Edessa, Syriac Christianity came under the influence and ecclesiastical control of Gentile Christianity found in Antioch, one of the four Eastern sees of the Christian Church. The Abgar legend was created to explain the origins of Syriac Christianity and to make a claim for the authenticity and *prestige de l'origine* of Syriac Christianity vis-à-vis Gentile Christianity. The *Legend of Abgar* found in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, however, betrays the community's cultural indebtedness to their Jewish heritage since it reflects the motifs of the conversion legend of Adiabene. As time passed, the Syriac Christian community came under the increasing influence and ecclesiastical control of Gentile Christianity. Edessan Christianity gradually adopted the more anti-Jewish interpretation found in the theology of Gentile Christianity. This transition is seen in the later redaction of the Abgar legend: the Syriac *Doctrine of Addai*. Curiously, this document simultaneously attempted to undermine the authority of Gentile Christianity by presenting in Syriac the true history of the Church and to attack Judaism as a false and debased tradition which perpetrated the execution of the Messiah of God. By comparing these three documents, the history of the relations of Jews and Christians in Northern Mesopotamia are illuminated even if a final, conclusive reconstruction is still obscured by shadows.

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid., f. 26 b and f. 27a.

Luther and Bonhoeffer on the Sermon on the Mount: Similar Tasks, Different Tools¹

Theodore J. Hopkins

On the surface, Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer appear to be direct contrasts in their interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount. On the one hand, Luther regularly calls for the proper distinction between two realms, the *weltliche Reich* or temporal realm and the *geistliche Reich* or spiritual realm.² In the preface to his commentary, Luther complains that the “schismatic spirits and Anabaptists” “do not recognize any difference between the secular and the divine realm, much less what should be the distinctive doctrine and action in each realm.”³ On this basis and reinforced by Luther’s distinction between office and person, some scholars take this distinction of the spiritual and temporal realms to be the (or at least a) primary hermeneutic used by Luther in his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount.⁴

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, disdains any notion of two *separate* realms structuring God’s reality. Against theologians like Paul Althaus, who interpreted Luther’s two kingdoms as a strict separation between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world,⁵ Bonhoeffer

¹ This essay was first penned for Dr. Robert Kolb in the seminar “Luther and Authority” in the Spring of 2013 at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

² For helpful literature, see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of his Theology*, trans. Karl H. Hertz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); Robert Kolb, “Luther’s Hermeneutics of Distinctions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 178–79; and F. Edward Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther’s Thought on Justice, Law, and Society*, 2d. ed. (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1998), originally published in 1959.

³ Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 21 of *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 5. Hereafter LW 21.

⁴ E.g., William J. Wright, *Martin Luther’s Understanding of God’s Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 126; Jarret A. Carty, ed., *Divine Kingdom, Holy Order: The Political Writings of Martin Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 206–7; and Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 61–82.

⁵ Althaus posited the *Eigengesetzlichkeit* (autonomy) of the realms, which allowed for National Socialist goals to dominate the temporal realm without Christian criticism. For detail on Althaus, see Robert P. Erickson, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 79–119. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Ilse Tödt, et al., vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 56n.36. More than twenty years after Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, Althaus continued to assert, “In fact he [Luther] does not claim that Christ is lord within the *orders* as such but only in the *men* who act within these orders. Thus, the secular kingdom does not stand under the lordship of Christ in the same way that the kingdom of Christ or Christendom does” (*Ethics of Martin Luther*, 79).

claims that there is “only *the one realm of the Christ reality*.... The whole reality of the world has already been drawn into and is held together in Christ. History moves only from this center and toward this center.”⁶ In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer utilizes his understanding that Christ stands at the center of reality⁷ to criticize the Reformation distinction between office and person which was being used to justify violence and war while sidelining the Word of Jesus.⁸ Hence, Bonhoeffer refuses to separate church and state, redemption and creation, from each other, focusing instead on the one reality of Christ and the totalizing nature of Christ’s call to discipleship.

Despite these differences, this essay argues that Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount stands in continuity with Luther.⁹ Both interpreters use the sermon for three purposes. First, they use Christ’s Sermon on the Mount as caustic salt¹⁰ to tear down all human projects and pretensions that try to please God or find salvation apart from the Word. Second, they center the Christian life on the Word itself, which justifies sinners through the promise. Third, they offer the Word of God to structure the Christian life in their respective contexts. In these first two purposes, Luther and Bonhoeffer are quite similar even though they are directed at different opponents and use different tools. Both use God’s Word to condemn sinful human works and bring Jesus and his promises to sinners, traditionally called the distinction between law and gospel. Even though the law and gospel distinction is often overlooked by Bonhoeffer scholars,¹¹

Certainly, what Althaus says here is partly true in that Christ’s lordship is hidden in the world. However, by placing the lordship of Christ only over people and not over the orders—which differ how from the principalities, powers, and elemental spirits of the world in?—Althaus retains the autonomy of the orders since they operate independently from the Word of God.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 58. Emphasis original.

⁷ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 93–96. Bonhoeffer often proclaims Christ as the “mediator” of all things, against any notion of “immediacy” in one’s understanding of or relationship with any person or thing. In other words, Christ is in the “middle,” “between me and the world, between me and other people and things” (93–94).

⁸ Referring to Matthew 5:38–42. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 134–35.

⁹ As such, my work can be situated within the recent scholarship that focuses on continuity between Bonhoeffer and the Lutheran tradition. The best recent monograph is Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer’s Reception of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Other recent, helpful texts include Klaus Grünwaldt, Christiane Tietz, and Udo Han, eds., *Bonhoeffer und Luther: Zentrale Themen ihrer Theologie* (n.p.: Velkd, 2007); and H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther’s Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer’s Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). On Scripture, see Stephen Plant, “God’s Dangerous Gift: Bonhoeffer, Luther, and Bach on the Role of Reason in Reading Scripture,” in *God Speaks to Us: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Ralf K. Wüstenberg and Jens Zimmermann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 37–54.

¹⁰ LW 21:55: “Salting has to bite. Although they criticize us as biters, we know that this is how it has to be and that Christ has commanded the salt to be sharp and continually caustic, as we shall hear.” Compare LW 21:67: “[Christ] Himself starts salting and shining as an example to teach them what they should preach.”

¹¹ For instance, Clifford Green, “Christus in Mundo, Christus pro Mundo. Bonhoeffer’s Foundations for a New Christian Paradigm,” in *Bonhoeffer, Religion and Politics*, 4th International Bonhoeffer Colloquium, ed. Christiane Tietz and Jens Zimmermann (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 22–23: “Bonhoeffer simply did not structure his theology on the law-gospel, two-kingdoms way of thinking—though those ideas can be found in his work.” In light of this paper, law and gospel are

Bonhoeffer's use of the Sermon on the Mount mirrors Luther not by articulating doctrines of law and gospel but by using God's Word to condemn and construct, exposing self-invented pieties for what they are and creating faith through Christ's promise. What Bonhoeffer means by "Word" differs slightly from Luther and Bonhoeffer uses different tools to expose and comfort, yet Bonhoeffer largely mirrors Luther in using the Sermon to do the two tasks of law and gospel. In the third purpose, a larger difference between Luther and Bonhoeffer becomes apparent. Luther focuses more on God's commands fulfilled in a person's vocation in society while Bonhoeffer emphasizes the visible community of the church in which Christ is followed and his life embodied. Throughout their interpretations of the Sermon, Bonhoeffer may not say what Luther says, but he uses the Sermon on the Mount to do what Luther did. Bonhoeffer proclaims the law that exposes the "lovely disguise"¹² of "self-invented and self-chosen piety"¹³ and proclaims the gospel that carries Christ the Savior to sinners, forgiving them and calling them to a new life of obedience to his Word.

This essay will first explore selections of Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, particularly his exposition of the beatitudes. Luther's central concern becomes evident: justification by faith alone and sanctification as the fruits of faith. We will also see that Luther structures the entire Christian life according to God's Word, criticizing those who do otherwise. In this context, Luther uses the various two-realms distinctions¹⁴ as tools to criticize his opponents and concretize the Christian life in sixteenth-century Saxony. From there, I turn to Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, showing that Bonhoeffer's polemic against cheap grace is an argument against separating sanctification from justification. The intimate connection of justification and sanctification is reinforced in Bonhoeffer's argument that "immediacy is an illusion."¹⁵ Then, I will sketch Bonhoeffer's description of the Christian life through his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Bonhoeffer's tools are different, but like Luther Bonhoeffer places the Word of God at the center of the Christian life and condemns the best the world has to offer so that people turn to the Word. Finally, in the conclusion, I note the similarity in the tasks of law and gospel and analyze two differences: the

not merely *found* in his work. Bonhoeffer uses God's Word law and gospel, even if he uses different tools to condemn and construct the Christian life. Compare Peter Frick, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Gerhard Ebeling: An Encounter of Theological Minds," in *Engaging Bonhoeffer: The Impact and Influence of Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought*, ed. Matthew D. Kirkpatrick (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 239–58, who shows that Bonhoeffer considers law and gospel to be problematic, but in need of "renewal" not outright rejection (249).

¹² LW 21:180. Luther is commenting on greed, but this characterization fits with all sins that pretend to be virtues.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 70.

¹⁴ I am referring to a number of distinctions Luther employs throughout his commentary on the Sermon: spiritual and temporal realms, office and person, the person-in-himself and the person-in-relation, and the Christian person and the worldly person. While these different distinctions, Luther uses them to do similar things: to call his opponents to repentance for confusing God's ways and the world's ways, the two kinds of righteousness, and to concretize Christian life in the world.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 94.

primary referent of “Word of God” and the primary place where the Christian life happens. In short, Bonhoeffer is a faithful *Lutheran* interpreter of Scripture who rejected part of the Lutheran legacy in order to proclaim clearly God’s Word as condemning law and transforming gospel.

Luther on the Sermon on the Mount

Luther’s commentary on the Sermon, published in the fall of 1532, was originally presented as a Wednesday sermon series from 1530–32 during the absence of the usual Wittenberg pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, who was supervising the reformation in Lübeck.¹⁶ In the preface to his commentary, Luther sets his agenda against two adversaries. On the one hand, Luther interprets the Sermon against the Roman Catholic “jurists and sophists” who have turned the commands of God in the Sermon into “twelve ‘evangelical counsels,’ twelve bits of good advice,” which do not apply to all Christians but only to those who desire “to attain a perfection higher and more perfect than that of other Christians.”¹⁷ For Luther, turning the sermon into evangelical counsels is problematic for three reasons. First, it makes “Christian salvation dependent upon works apart from faith,” also creating levels of Christians as if salvation did not depend on the same Word and same baptism for all. Secondly, it makes Christ’s commands optional by denying the applicability of Jesus’s words to all Christians.¹⁸ Third, it allows the jurists and canon lawyers to rule the church instead of Christ, which also supports the papal claims to temporal power.¹⁹ For Luther, the Sermon is directed to all Christians to live sanctified lives, as the fruits of faith, according to God’s command in established society.

On the other hand, Luther interprets the Sermon against a second adversary, “the new jurists and sophists, the schismatic spirits and Anabaptists.”²⁰ According to Luther, these Anabaptists disrupt the stable order of society, refusing to participate in secular government by denying that Christians can hold office or take oaths, rejecting a Christian’s right to protect his family, and condemning all who own private property. Thus, Luther claims, “They do not recognize any difference between the secular and the divine realm, much less what should be the distinctive doctrine and action in each realm.”²¹ For Luther, these Anabaptists not only deny the divine ordinance of the secular realm, but they also “mislead whole crowds of people” by making justification by faith dependent upon good works. They substitute the true Word of God for “glorious words” like “Spirit” and “fruits of the Spirit.” Instead of listening to these glorious words, a Christian “must

¹⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, Introduction to Volume 21 of *Luther’s Works*, LW 21:xix–xxi.

¹⁷ LW 21:3–4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* This is only implicit in the preface. Luther writes, “They [the jurists and sophists] are trying to re-establish their cursed, shabby canons and to reinstate the crown on the head of their jackass of a pope.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

pay attention only to the Word, which shows us the right way of life that avails before God.”²²

Although Roman Catholics and Anabaptists appear to be nothing alike, Luther critiques both on the same three counts. Most importantly, they oppose Christ and his gospel by failing to recognize the distinction between grace and merit, obscuring faith in Christ which makes works good. Luther emphasizes the difference between God’s grace and a life of works: “Let all merit be simply discarded here [before God] in favor of the conclusion that it is impossible to obtain grace and the forgiveness of sins in any other way, manner, or measure than by hearing the Word of God about Christ and receiving it in faith.”²³ Secondly, both the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists reject or shroud God’s Word and command for the whole of life by “institut[ing] false good works and fictitious holiness,” which suppress the true good works done according to God’s command in one’s walk of life.²⁴ Third, they reject the divine institution of society, denying that God’s commands are to be followed within established society.

Luther’s primary task in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is to proclaim God’s Word of law and gospel that works first as caustic salt against the glorious-looking good works and pieties of the human project before the Word brings faith and new life in Christ. Luther uses the two-realms distinctions to distinguish between justification by faith and sanctification as the fruits of faith against those who confuse grace and merit. Luther’s second task, interconnected with the first, is to structure the Christian life according to God’s Word within sixteenth-century Saxony. To see this, we will examine Luther’s exposition of the beatitudes.

Luther on the Beatitudes

Luther’s interpretation of the beatitudes at the beginning of his commentary sets the stage for the entire exposition. Almost every important theme in the commentary finds a place in the beatitudes: the two realms distinction, the distinction between office and person, the emphasis on sanctification as the fruits of faith, and most importantly the Word of God as that which condemns human pieties and leads the Christian to do God’s will for the good of the neighbor. The central verse for Luther’s understanding of the beatitudes is verse 8: “Blessed are those of a pure heart, for they shall see God.”²⁵ At the center of Luther’s interpretation is his understanding that

²² *Ibid.*, 254. That Luther calls the Anabaptists “the new jurists and sophists” in the preface points to the fact that Luther sees part of their error as obscuring the gospel with law, even if it is not explicit in the preface.

²³ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32–39. Besides the first beatitude about the poor in spirit, this is also Luther’s longest commentary on any one verse of the beatitudes, which gives a sense of its importance. While my statement is an assertion more than an argument at this point, the centrality of verse 8 will become clear as the other verses are interpreted in reference to it. In other words, verse 8 will open up the rest of the beatitudes, which justifies my assertion of its centrality.

God's Word tears down the glorious works of humanity and calls instead for humble service to the neighbor according to God's command.

According to Luther's antisemitic interpretation, Jesus preaches the beatitudes against a Jewish understanding that the good life is a life that appears good to human wisdom.²⁶ These Jews "did not want to suffer, but sought a life of ease, pleasure, and joy; they did not want to hunger nor to be merciful, but to be smug in their exclusive piety while they judged and despised other people. In the same way, their holiness also consisted in outward cleanliness...."²⁷ Not only the Jews, however, hold such a doctrine according to Luther, but "the whole world" also believes the "delusion" that wealth, prosperity, and health, good-looking outward works, indicate God's blessing rather than the Word of God.²⁸ At the heart of this delusion is a belief that the best life is lived according to human standards beyond and apart from God's Word. What the world counts as pure and good is considered the main criterion for good works and purity of heart instead of the Word.

The problem of self-made holiness was not confined to Jesus's day but continues in the lives of the old and "new monks" of the sixteenth century, Roman Catholics and Anabaptists.²⁹ According to Luther, the monk tries to become pure of heart by running "away from human society into a corner, a monastery, or a desert, neither thinking about the world nor concerning himself with worldly affairs and business, but amusing himself only with heavenly thoughts."³⁰ The Carthusian monk "thinks that if he lives according to his strict rule of obedience, poverty, and celibacy, if he is isolated from the world, he is pure in every way."³¹ Anabaptists too isolate themselves, marking their purity by separation from society. For Luther, this delusion calls the commands of God evil and creates a new good work from one's own heart and mind. In fact, Luther claims that the "delusive doctrine" of monasticism has "committed the murderous crime of calling 'profane' the act and stations which the world requires and which, as a matter of fact, God Himself has ordained."³² If God has commanded a vocation, such as being a spouse or parent, then it must be sacred when a Christian does the work. "For God has commanded all of this. Whatever God has commanded cannot

²⁶ Luther misattributes Jesus' words as against the Jews as a group rather than directed at the hearers of Jesus' sermon or certain religious leaders. In so doing, Luther's interpretation is antisemitic. I affirm with my church body: "While The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod holds Martin Luther in high esteem for his bold proclamation and clear articulation of the teachings of Scripture, it deeply regrets, deploras, and repudiates statements made by Luther which express a negative and hostile attitude toward the Jews." ("Frequently Asked Questions—LCMS Views," accessed 11/8/2019, <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/lcms-views#antisemitic>.)

²⁷ LW 21:33. Cf. LW 21:10–11, 17, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5. Cf. A monk is anyone "who takes it upon himself to start something special that goes beyond faith and the common occupations...., though he may not affect the same manner or habit or bearing" (*Ibid.*, 259).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

be profane (Acts 10:15); indeed it must be the very purity with which we see God.”³³ Whether it is a Roman Catholic monk who runs away from society to live in prayerful solitude or an Anabaptist monk who makes a new society apart from established government and institutions, Luther believes that such a self-made holiness violates God’s command to love and care for the neighbor in society.³⁴

Purity of heart does not come from doing works that appear good to the world, even following Jesus’s Sermon perfectly in order to be seen by others—these are likely to be mortal sins.³⁵ Purity of heart comes from hearing God’s Word and letting it condemn one’s glorious words and works, creating a new heart that is filled with the Word of God.³⁶ Hence, Luther calls for preaching of the Word of God as law and gospel, tearing down “self-made sanctity and self-chosen worship” that threatens the true gospel³⁷ and instructing people about Christ and faith before also teaching the importance of good works according to Christ’s Word and command.³⁸ Thus, the Word of God first acts as corrosive, purifying salt, calling all to repent for living according to their own notions of piety and ignoring the duties God has blessed and given to them. Christians must constantly struggle to rely on God and his Word, to trust how God sees reality instead of understanding purity and holiness from a “natural” point of view. In this vein, Luther exhorts the Wittenbergers: “Be on guard against all your own ideas if you want to be pure before God. See to it that your heart is founded and fastened on the Word of God. Then you will be purer than all the Carthusians and saints in the world.”³⁹ The second task⁴⁰ is teaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ as a light of revelation, by which salvation comes by faith alone without works, leading to teaching good works as fruits of faith according to God’s Word.

For Luther, “everything depends on the Word of God.”⁴¹ The Word of God is the light which reveals what is true, holy, and pure in God’s eyes, and nothing else matters. If Jesus says that the poor in spirit are blessed, then a Christian should not abandon her family or society,⁴² but ought to use God’s

³³ Ibid., 32.

³⁴ Ibid., 69–70. Luther sees Jesus as confirming God’s law in the Old Testament, especially the Ten Commandments, which establish the Christian life in relationship with others in society.

³⁵ Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 3: “Although the works of man always seen attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.” (Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer: I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, vol. 31 of *Luther’s Works* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957], 43.) Luther’s understanding that ‘good’ is determined by God’s Word and not human perception even (or especially) when they contradict is a facet of his theology of the cross. For a synopsis of Luther’s theology of the cross, see Robert Kolb, “Luther on the Theology of the Cross,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 443–66.

³⁶ LW 21:33–34.

³⁷ Ibid., 56–57.

³⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁰ Second and first are a theological, not a chronological order. After all, both tasks are continual necessities because sin persists in the baptized.

⁴¹ Ibid., 35.

⁴² Ibid., 13.

gifts like a guest, willing to throw away all possessions as soon as God calls for it.⁴³ If Jesus blesses those who mourn, a Christian should not try to escape mourning and sorrow like the world does (nor seek it) but accept it as “God’s good pleasure” with the promise of God’s coming reign.⁴⁴ If Jesus says the meek are blessed, then a Christian ought not to shy away from suffering, but should speak the truth of God and do God’s commands even if it entails suffering.⁴⁵ If Jesus blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, then a Christian should instruct her neighbors in the Word of God and do her duty in her walk of life so that a little corner of the earth is made better even if the wicked abound, making flight and rebellion seem like good options.⁴⁶ If Jesus blesses the merciful, then a Christian should treat his neighbors with compassion so that justice is tempered with mercy.⁴⁷ If Jesus blesses the peacemakers, then a Christian prince must not start a war even with just cause, but “must advise and support peace while he can.”⁴⁸ If Jesus blesses those who are persecuted for his sake, then a Christian should see himself in a battle against Satan and the rebellious world, “ready to suffer for the sake of [Christ’s] Word and work.”⁴⁹ This is not to say that Luther understands the beatitudes as only as command; they are Christ’s promise for Christians who are suffering and treated wickedly by the world. At the same time, however, God’s Word of promise also calls Christians to a certain kind of life, in which the Christian can say, “I feel sorry, misery, and sadness of heart; but still I am blessed, happy, and settled on the basis of the Word of God.”⁵⁰ The Christian comes to see reality through the Word of God, trusting in God’s mercy through Christ no matter what happens, and following God’s commands in her walk of life.

The Christian Life in Society According to the Word

In the beatitudes, the center of Luther’s concern is for the Word of God to shape the Christian person as a whole, in faith and in life. This concern is primarily about justification and sanctification. God makes one pure by the Gospel of Christ received in faith, which then shapes the Christian to do good works as fruits of faith according to God’s command. Thus, for Luther, the Word is both “the Word of faith” and “the Word of understanding.” The Word of faith purifies the person by creating faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord while the Word of understanding “teaches him what he is to do toward his neighbor in his station.”⁵¹ The one Word of God does two things for the Christian *qua* Christian in purifying and teaching, but it remains the one

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27–28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29–30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44. Cf. *ibid.*, 39–40.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45–47, quoting 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ Ibid., 34.

Word of God which structures all of reality.

Since the Word of God is also a Word of understanding that teaches the Christian how to live in society, Luther's commentary must also address a second concern: What should the Christian life look like in sixteenth-century Saxony? It is significant that Luther does not ask what the church should look like,⁵² but what the individual Christian life should look like. Heinrich Bornkamm has noted that Luther did not consider the church a separate institutional body in the modern sense "for he was not acquainted with the distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical communities based on their differing constituencies."⁵³ For Bornkamm, this means that Luther got to the heart of the matter with the question of the Christian in the world. In light of recent scholarship on Constantinianism,⁵⁴ however, Luther's Constantinian situation likely prevented him from seeing the importance of the church as a community distinct from the world with its own kind of life and social ethics. After all, for Luther reforming the church and reforming society were practically coterminous.⁵⁵ Luther's focus, then, in ethics tended to be the individual: How should a Christian live in sixteenth-century Germany?

For Luther, the Christian lives from the Word of God both in his vocations and in himself.⁵⁶ Luther makes this clear in his comments on Matthew 7:16-20, the good tree that bears good fruit. For Luther, the good tree is "one who conducts his life, existence, and behavior according to the Word of God, pure and unadulterated."⁵⁷ This is not only true for the Christian as he is in himself, in his attitude of faith toward God and love toward the neighbor, but this is also true as he lives for others in his offices and stations, which Luther specifically emphasizes. Good works, for Luther, are those done within a vocation that God has commanded and given his blessing:

⁵² More accurately, Luther rarely (if ever) asks this question when he's talking about social ethics or politics, but this is an important question when he's talking about ecclesiology. In fact, Luther's understanding of the church as a creation of the Word has social and political consequences which ought to be explored. See, for example, Luther's treatise "On the Council and the Church" for a good example of this notion of church (Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, vol. 41 of *Luther's Works* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], 9–178). Also see Luther's exposition of Psalm 110 for an example of his understanding of church that begins to look like an alternative polity to the civil realm (Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms II*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 13 of *Luther's Works* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1956], 228–348). Psalm 110 is probably as close as Luther gets to understanding the ecclesial community as distinct from the civil community.

⁵³ Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*, 13.

⁵⁴ For a brief example, see John Howard Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics" in *Priestly Kingdom* (1984; repr., Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2011), 135–47.

⁵⁵ Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

⁵⁶ Cf. LW 21:39–40. In another good example of how God's Word structures one's external life in vocation as well as one's internal life of attitude and faith, Luther demands that a Christian prince should seek peace according to Christ's Word, even in cases where secular law would allow for war with just cause.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

It all depends, therefore, on really knowing and maintaining the definition of what Christ calls good works or fruits: a good work is one that is required or commanded by the Word of God and proceeds on the basis of that commandment. So a wife who is pious and faithful in her marriage can claim and boast that her station is commanded by God, that it is supported by the true, pure, and unadulterated Word of God, and that it heartily pleases God. Hence her works are all good fruit.⁵⁸

In a similar way, Luther also says that the man who hauls manure is actually hauling “precious figs and grapes” in God’s sight, even though such work is condemned by reason, since the Christian man is doing his calling in a station that helps his neighbors in society. God’s Word of promise, which justifies the sinner and makes the tree good, and command is what makes a Christian’s work good and holy, nothing else.⁵⁹

Therefore, the main question for Luther is what the Word says and what God calls his people to do. God’s Word establishes the stations that Christians inhabit and use for the good of others. It does not call the Christian to pursue perfection apart from society either in a monastery (Roman Catholicism) or in an alternative society (Anabaptism); rather, God calls Christians to love and care for their neighbors in good vocations already established in Saxony. For Luther, living the *Christian* life in vocation is a distinctive life since so many opponents disparage and dishonor the lives of servants, judges, and parents, denying that these stations are good callings from God. In fact, those who humbly follow God’s Word in vocation *are* the persecuted and the meek as they perform their duties.⁶⁰

Luther does not quite allow a secular idea of vocation and reason to establish the Christian life in the world, although Luther does speak this way at times.⁶¹ The Word of God teaches the Christian to love and care for the neighbor, but it does not always give specific commands about how to structure society, especially in Christendom where Christians have political and societal power, which is alien to the New Testament perspective. Reason is thus essential for forming a good, just, and peaceful society.⁶² At the same

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 262–63.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁶⁰ *Cf. Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ *E.g. Ibid.*, 110: “You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law.”

⁶² A good example of this is Luther’s comment on marriage: “For marriage is a rather secular and outward thing, having to do with wife and children, house and home, and with other matters that belong to the realm of the government, all of which have been completely subjected to reason (Gen. 1:29). Therefore we should not tamper with what the government and wise men decide and prescribe with regard to these questions on the basis of the laws and of reason” (*Ibid.*, 93). Significantly, Luther goes on to say how *Christians* ought to think about and act in marriage in distinction from non-Christians. How would Luther respond if the Christian way of marriage was being abrogated by “what the government and wise men decide”? That such a possibility was not on Luther’s radar with regard to marriage or any other matter is another “fruit” of the Constantinian situation.

time, Luther does not believe that nude reason, apart from God's Word, will fulfill God's commands and structure society appropriately. Luther's understanding of reason is Christianized reason, which thinks and acts within the framework of the God of Jesus who commands a person to love his neighbor. In other words, God's Word is the foundational category in which reason finds its proper place; God's Word sets limits for reason and gives it its proper role.⁶³ Hence, Luther claims, "A Christian may carry on all sorts of secular business with impunity—not as a Christian but as a secular person—while his heart remains pure in his Christianity, as Christ demands. This the world cannot do; but contrary to God's command, it misuses every *secular* ordinance and law, indeed, every creature."⁶⁴ The world misuses *secular* law because, for Luther, there is no secular in a modern sense. The society he knows has been shaped and formed by God's Word, and his world wants to follow God's command (in appearance when not in fact). After all, Luther argues with his opponents over *which* commands of God should be implemented in society, not *whether* such commands are appropriate to society. The appropriateness of God's law is presumed.

In this sense, Heinrich Bornkamm is right when he argues that natural law, reason, and love are all equated for Luther,⁶⁵ but Luther's understanding of love, rooted in the Word of God, remains at the heart of reason and natural law. The Word must be the center for Luther because God's Word acts as salt, corroding, burning, and purifying reason, natural law, and even love so that God's Word structures all of life. Luther could practically equate reason, natural law, and love only because Christianized Germany looked to the divine law to clarify matters of the natural law, and everyone reasoned within Christian limits.⁶⁶ God's Word did not need to condemn and purify the structures of Christian Germany in Luther's mind; instead, Luther directed his preaching toward the old and new monks, who were trying to be perfect Christians outside of established society.

⁶³ See Theodor Dieter, "Martin Luther's Understanding of Reason," *Lutheran Quarterly* 25 (2011): 249–78. Dieter concludes on the basis of Luther: "A critique of reason is thus not a rejection of 'reason' on theological grounds, but instead a *recognition of its limitations* through a clear distinction between philosophy and theology" (270, emphasis added).

⁶⁴ LW 21:113. Emphasis added. Cf. LW 21:50, 265–66.

⁶⁵ Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*, 14. Bornkamm understands love to be universal for Luther and suggests these three ought to have equal weight in interpreting each other. Bornkamm interprets Luther this way because he fails to recognize (to be fair, Bornkamm was probably too early to do so) the pervasive effects of the Constantinian situation on Luther's thought. Additionally, for Luther, if you do not fear and love God, you cannot truly love your neighbor. Thus, proper love is distinctly Christian for Luther. See Luther's Small and Large Catechisms on the Ten Commandments: Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 351–54 and 386–431.

⁶⁶ One of the interesting examples of this is the discussion over bigamy with Henry VIII. Certainly, politics was the larger factor, but politics happened in the interpretation of Scripture. For the history of this situation, see Neelak Serawlook Tjernagel, *Henry VIII and the Lutherans: A Study in Anglo-Lutheran Relations from 1521–1547* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965) and Erwin Doernberg, *Henry VIII and Luther: An Account of Their Personal Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).

In sum, Luther uses the Sermon on the Mount to proclaim God's law and gospel to his hearers, which not only kills and makes alive but also structures life according to the Word of God. Against Roman Catholic and Anabaptist interpretations, Luther first proclaims the centrality of justification by faith alone and the necessity of sanctification as fruits of faith. God's Word creates faith in the heart, condemning all attempts to be holy before God by works, and places the person back into the world to love the neighbor according to God's command. As part of this task, Luther regularly uses the image of the good tree that bears good fruit.⁶⁷ This image distinguishes between faith and works, righteousness before God and righteousness before the neighbor, but also requires interconnection. While this first task emphasizes the person's relationship of faith to God that leads to love to the neighbor, Luther's second task describes the Christian life in the world on the basis of God's Word. To do this, Luther uses the two realms to condemn the monastic way of life that dishonors the Christian's duty in society and to form a positive view of how the Christian ought to live in society. This positive view both justifies the status quo and shapes a positive view of the Christian life in the world rooted in vocation. Luther might have asked: Do you wonder how you should live as Christians? Look at your vocations! You are a father, a lawyer, and a neighbor, just to name a few. These vocations give you neighbors to serve. Follow the Word of God as you care for them, love them, and instruct them in God's Word.⁶⁸ As such, Luther uses the Sermon on the Mount not only to condemn and justify but also to set Christians back in the world to fulfill their vocations according to God's command.

Bonhoeffer on the Sermon on the Mount

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's commentary on Jesus's Sermon, which was published in 1937 under the title *Nachfolge* or *Discipleship*, was written in the midst of turmoil and persecution. Unlike Luther's situation, where he was writing and preaching to Christians in power in Saxony, Bonhoeffer's context was closer to the church in the New Testament. Bonhoeffer's leadership in the Confessing Church put him in direct conflict with Nazi ideology and the government-sponsored German Christian church.⁶⁹ Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey explain the gravity of the situation:

⁶⁷ Luther uses a variant of "fruit" in reference to fruit of faith 96 times (2 of these are ambiguous whether it is literal fruit or fruit of faith) in his commentary, without counting quotations of Scripture (Matt. 7:16-20). Half of those come in Luther's exposition of Matt. 7:16-20, but the other 48 are used throughout the commentary. This in itself indicates the importance of justification by faith and the resulting fruits of sanctification for Luther. (Search accomplished with Libronix software on April 30, 2013.)

⁶⁸ This is essentially what Luther does in his *Haustafel* or Table of Duties of the Small Catechism. See Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 365-67.

⁶⁹ For an historical account of the confessing church before the war, see Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18-154. For the ideology of German Christians, see Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

“Subsequent [to the Barman and Dahlem Synods] state regulations had squeezed this opposition into narrow enclaves tarred with ecclesiastical illegality. Acts of brutality and psychological coercion followed, as well as imprisonment of dissident pastors, as the Nazi government tightened its control over the ecclesiastical sphere and thus impeded any putative church opposition.”⁷⁰ The Confessing Church in Germany in the 1930s was under persecution and attack, and Bonhoeffer preached, lectured, and wrote to pastors and lay people of the Confessing church who would be imprisoned for the gospel as well as to those who bore the name Christian but were still trying to be “good Germans” as defined by National Socialism.

Despite the opposite situations confronting Bonhoeffer and Luther, Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the Sermon follows Luther’s trajectory. Like Luther, Bonhoeffer wrestles with the questions of justification and sanctification, the priority of Christ’s call and the necessity of discipleship according to God’s Word.⁷¹ In a letter to Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer commented that the main questions of *Discipleship* are “those of the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount and the Pauline doctrine of justification and sanctification.”⁷² While Luther engages with Christians who are trying to achieve something before God with their works and need to hear Christ’s Word of *faith* and obedience, Bonhoeffer deals with Christians who have made justification into “cheap grace” and need to hear Christ’s call as one to *obedience* and faith.⁷³ To do this, Bonhoeffer uses the language of “costly grace,” the gracious call of Christ into discipleship where Luther had used the image of the good tree that bears good fruit. With the different language, both yet use the sermon as caustic salt that condemns human sinfulness and as the gospel that brings Christ and sets the Christian on the path of faith and obedience. In addition, the second question Bonhoeffer addresses is the same as Luther, What is the shape of the Christian life in *this* world, 1930s Germany? Unlike Luther who concretized the Christian life in the duties of society, Bonhoeffer looks to the visible church as the community of Jesus Christ, and calls Christians to a distinctive life within the church.

The analysis of Bonhoeffer will begin with his understanding of costly grace and his rejection of immediacy to anything except Christ. These themes emphasize justification and sanctification and are used as caustic salt against

⁷⁰ Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, “Editors’ Introduction to the English Edition,” *Discipleship*, 2.

⁷¹ See Mary L. Vanden Berg, “Bonhoeffer’s Discipleship: Theology for the Purpose of Christian Formation,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 44 (2009): 333–50, for another perspective on the importance of justification and sanctification in Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship*, which Vanden Berg analyzes under the category “moral formation.”

⁷² Kelly and Godsey, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Discipleship*, 4.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer is particularly concerned with obedience to Jesus over Germany. The Sermon on the Mount was a Scriptural battleground of sorts for this debate since Ludwig Müller, Reich Bishop and leading German Christian, had written his own Germanization of the Sermon on the Mount in 1936. See Oliver Heil, *Die Auslegung der Bergpredigt im Dritten Reich* (Norderstedt, Ger.: GRIN Verlag, 2011).

complacent Christians who have capitulated to Nazi ideology. Then, I will proceed to describe Bonhoeffer's understanding of Matthew chapter five, including the beatitudes and the importance of the visible church-community.

Costly Grace Versus Cheap Grace and Jesus as the Mediator in *Discipleship*

Bonhoeffer begins *Discipleship* with a direct question that focuses the Christian life on Jesus alone: "What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help us to be faithful Christians today? It is not ultimately important to us what this or that church leader wants. Rather, we want to know what Jesus wants."⁷⁴ In this way, Bonhoeffer centers the Christian life on the incarnate Word of God: Who is this Jesus and what does he want? To ask any other question is to avoid God's commandment with human words and works. It does not matter if Jesus's commands seem too difficult for normal Christians; Bonhoeffer rejects the notion that the Sermon on the Mount is optional. Rather, he places *every* Christian under the yoke of Jesus.⁷⁵ In fact, following the Sermon may require painful separations from family and nation. Regardless, the Christian is called to simply obey,⁷⁶ following Jesus under his light and easy yoke (Matt. 11:28–30). No matter how difficult such a life is, because Jesus is the one who leads, Bonhoeffer can claim, "Discipleship is joy."⁷⁷

Having centered discipleship on the Word of God enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth—just as Luther focused the Christian on hearing, believing, and living according to the Word proclaimed and written—Bonhoeffer distinguishes between "cheap grace" and "costly grace." Bonhoeffer uses this distinction to do three things: to expose the self-invented pieties of twentieth-century Germany, connect Christians to Christ alone, and call them to a concrete life of discipleship in the body of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is not really grace at all; it is an idea of grace rather than the concrete favor of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer asserts, "Cheap grace means grace as doctrine, as principle, as system. It means forgiveness of sins as a general truth; it means God's love as merely a Christian idea of God.... Cheap grace is, thus, denial of God's living word, denial of the incarnation of the word of God."⁷⁸ Cheap grace replaces the true God with a deified idea of grace; faith is not placed in the God of Jesus but in the abstract concept that the world is justified by grace.⁷⁹ Thus, cheap grace denies the living God who speaks and works in the church today, rejecting justification as an event of the living Word of God. Cheap grace makes justification simply a concept with which Christians can console themselves and feel good about their lives. Moreover, it denies the connection of justification and sanctification, grace

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 37.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 38–40.

⁷⁶ Cf. Bonhoeffer's chapter called "Simple Obedience." *Ibid.*, 77–83.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

and discipleship; cheap grace rejects Jesus's call for Christians to follow him in his church. Instead, the Christian is to "live just like the rest of the world" since grace justifies the world and demands no self-denial or difference between the Christian and everybody else.⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer concludes his opening diatribe against cheap grace:

Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.⁸¹

Costly grace, on the other hand, is "*simply* grace."⁸² It is the call of Jesus, like the disciples received, to leave behind the nets and follow the master. This grace is costly because "it condemns sin," and "costs people their lives."⁸³ It does not allow the Christian to live as she did before, wallowing in her sin. To use Luther's language, costly grace is caustic, condemning sin yet also graciously justifying the sinner. Above all, Bonhoeffer writes, grace is costly because it cost God the life of his Son. At the same time, this costly grace is *grace* since it calls people to follow Jesus, forgives their sins, and brings them under the yoke of the incarnate God who died to give them life.⁸⁴ Costly grace, then, emphasizes the connection between justification and sanctification in the concrete call of Jesus Christ. "Faith and obedience cannot be separated from each other at all."⁸⁵ The Word of Jesus justifies the sinner, and he calls her to a life of discipleship, simply obeying and following him in the church.⁸⁶

According to Bonhoeffer, Luther's own struggle with monasticism was part of the struggle for costly grace. Monasticism initially had been "a living protest" against a cheapening of the Christian life, but over time Christendom relativized monasticism and turned it into a "special meritoriousness" for a select few.⁸⁷ Luther saw through the façade of

⁸⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Jonathan D. Sorum, "Cheap Grace, Costly Grace, and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer's Defense of Justification by Faith Alone," *Lutheran Forum* 21, no. 3 (1993): 20. Emphasis original. Sorum's essay is a good analysis of Bonhoeffer's distinction between cheap and costly grace that shows it is fundamentally Lutheran.

⁸³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 45.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁵ Florian Schmitz, "Only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe." Notes on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutics with Reference to *Discipleship*," in *God Speaks to Us: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Ralf K. Wüstenberg and Jens Zimmermann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 171. Though Schmitz is commenting on a different dialectic in *Discipleship*, the point applies here.

⁸⁶ Schmitz calls Bonhoeffer's notion of "simple obedience" the "leading principle" in *Discipleship's* hermeneutics. Bringing together faith and obedience, justification and sanctification, individual and church, *Discipleship* uses simple obedience as critique of those who separate life from faith and to offer new life in Christ by faith. Schmitz, "Notes on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutics," 182–86.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 47.

monasticism's costliness to see the sin embedded within it: "Luther saw the monk's escape from the world as really a subtle love for the world," which left intact the most glorious work of the world, the "pious self."⁸⁸ For Bonhoeffer, Luther condemned the sinful pretensions of the world, exposing the purity of monasticism as self-love, by calling Christians to live as Christians *in the world*. Luther did not justify the world or secular vocations as such; he rather called Christians to be disciples in the midst of their vocations. "A Christian's secular vocation receives new recognition from the gospel only to the extent that it is carried on while following Jesus."⁸⁹ For Bonhoeffer, this is costly grace.

Bonhoeffer not only uses the distinction between cheap grace and costly grace to condemn the "bourgeois-secular existence" of many Christians and call them to simple obedience following the commands of God,⁹⁰ but he makes a similar point by witnessing to Jesus Christ as the Lord who justifies the sinner and calls her to the extraordinary life of discipleship. For Bonhoeffer, the important point is not *how* Jesus calls his disciples, but *who* Jesus is.⁹¹ There is only one important reason why Jesus calls and his disciples obey: "Because Jesus is the Christ, he has authority to call and to demand obedience to his world. Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God."⁹² Jesus's call is not abstract doctrine or a concept of grace but a gracious call that "creates existence anew." The call itself creates faith and brings one into a community of those who obey Jesus by following him.⁹³ Because Jesus is the authoritative Son of God, the call cannot be made into an idea or abstraction, it must remain the authoritative Word of the Son of God which condemns self-invented and self-chosen piety and justifies the sinner, calling him to follow his Lord in obedience.⁹⁴

Thus, the central point of the Christian life is Christ himself, his person and his work, his call and his commands. All things are secondary to Jesus Christ: in fact, everything—the world, vocation, and even one's spouse—must be seen and understood through Jesus only:

In becoming human, [Jesus] put himself between me and the given circumstances of the world. I cannot go back. He is in the middle. He has deprived those whom he has called of every immediate connection to those given realities. He wants to be the medium; everything should

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49. Cf. LW 21:259–68, Luther's comments on the good tree that bears good fruit.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹¹ This is a distinction Bonhoeffer uses in his "Lectures on Christology" of 1933 at Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Berlin 1932-1933*, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth, vol. 12 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 302–8.

⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 57.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69–74, quoting 70. The story of the rich young man (Matthew 19) is Bonhoeffer's illustration of Christ doing this.

happen only through him. He stands not only between me and God, he also stands between me and the world, between me and other people and things. He is *the mediator*, not only between God and human persons, but also between person and person, and between person and reality.⁹⁵

Since Jesus is the mediator, “the illusion is immediacy,” and “anytime a community lays claim to immediacy, it must be hated for Christ’s sake.”⁹⁶ This is true for families—if parents and spouses claim an immediate connection or duty that does not come through Christ, they must be hated for Christ’s sake—and also for nations—if Germany claims an immediacy to the *Volk* that bypasses Christ, it too must be hated for Christ’s sake. In other words, Christ has come as the caustic salt that condemns glorious words like “Germany,” “family,” and “*Volk*,” and calls Christians to an entirely new community. To those who hear Christ’s call and follow, Jesus takes them out of their old communities and places them in a new community, his church. Those who lost everything by following Jesus “find themselves again in a visible community of faith, which replaces a hundredfold what they lost. A hundred fold? Yes, in the mere fact that they now have everything solely through Jesus, that they have it through the mediator.”⁹⁷

Bonhoeffer’s distinction between cheap grace and costly grace and his understanding of the Jesus as the sole mediator accomplish similar tasks. Both function as caustic salt against the sinfulness of the age. The polemic against cheap grace condemns the glorious works that seem so good to the world, in particular obedience to the Führer and to Germany, and directs the Christian instead to Jesus, the crucified Son of God and costly grace in him. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Jesus as the sole mediator also rips the Christian out of other relationships that shape the Christian life—condemning any separation of the Christian’s life in society from obedience to Jesus and his Word—and brings the Christian to abide in Jesus both for faith and for life. In so doing, Bonhoeffer refuses to separate justification and sanctification, the call from the commands of Jesus. Instead of life structured by a society that perpetrates injustice, hate, and violence, Bonhoeffer argues that the shape of the Christian life must be structured *completely* by the Word and life of Jesus through the church.

Bonhoeffer’s Exposition of Matthew 5

When Bonhoeffer turns to his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, the same themes abound. Bonhoeffer focuses the Christian life on following Jesus and doing his commands, that is, simple obedience to the Word of Jesus. As such, Bonhoeffer often preaches Christ’s Word as caustic salt against those who obscure Christ’s Word. To change the metaphor, one of

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93–94. Emphasis original.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

Bonhoeffer's goals is to clear out all self-invented piety so that Jesus's Word will be heard for what it is, the command of the Son of God. At the same time, Bonhoeffer constructs a positive view of the Christian life, focusing on following Jesus in the new community of the church.

In his interpretation of the beatitudes, Bonhoeffer points out three distinct groups standing on the mountain: the disciples, the crowds, and Jesus. Jesus is the central figure, who has called his disciples apart from the crowd and preaches to his disciples.⁹⁸ Jesus's call has visibly separated them from the crowds, foreshadowing the enmity between them and the world that will occur on account of Christ.⁹⁹ To these disciples in the midst of the crowds, Jesus speaks his "Blessed!" It is not that the disciples are blessed for their own actions—neither being poor nor suffering is worth anything in itself. Rather, Jesus's call and promise has made them blessed at the same time that it has made them "poor, tempted, and hungry." "The only adequate reason" for being blessed, Bonhoeffer asserts, "is the call and the promise, for whose sake those following him live in want and renunciation."¹⁰⁰ Thus, for Bonhoeffer, Jesus's Word, his call and his justification of the sinner, makes the disciples blessed, and this call entails a particular life of discipleship apart from the world, one which Jesus describes in the Sermon with his promises. Like Luther, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Jesus calls all Christians to this visible act of discipleship, not just a select few. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, Jesus's Sermon not only blesses his followers and teaches them about their distinctive life together, it also invites the crowd into communion with Jesus, calling them to join this visible community of disciples.¹⁰¹

For Bonhoeffer, "Every additional Beatitude deepens the breach between the disciples and the people. The disciples' call becomes more and more visible."¹⁰² Each blessing describes another aspect of the disciples' renunciation of the world, including the things that the world thinks are holy and pious. In a similar way to how Luther used the beatitudes to condemn the outward pieties of the monastic life and construct the Christian life as doing God's command in one's vocation, Bonhoeffer condemns the glories of nation, prosperity, and power as he also describes the visible shape of the church-community and its relationship to the world.

According to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the beatitudes, the world blesses "those powerful, respected people, who stand firmly on the earth inseparably rooted in the national way of life," but Jesus blesses "those who live thoroughly in *renunciation and want* for Jesus's sake."¹⁰³ "The world shrieks 'Enjoy life,'" but the disciples mourn and grieve at the guilt of the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100–1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 101–2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

world and the coming judgment.¹⁰⁴ The world lives based on rights and justice, but the disciples renounce all their rights and leave all justice to God.¹⁰⁵ The world tries to grasp righteousness for itself, but the disciples renounce their own righteousness and hunger and thirst for God's.¹⁰⁶ The world seeks after honor and glory, progress and possessions, but the disciples renounce their own dignity to "share in other people's need, debasement and guilt."¹⁰⁷ The world values autonomy, determining good and evil for oneself, but the disciples "renounce their own good and evil, their own heart" so that Jesus "alone rules in them."¹⁰⁸ The world thrives on violence and hate, but "Jesus's disciples maintain peace by choosing to suffer instead of causing others to suffer."¹⁰⁹ The world relies on "property, happiness, rights, righteousness, honor, and violence," but Jesus's disciples renounce these things, which will involve suffering for the sake of Christ and his church, a truly just cause.¹¹⁰

Just as Luther's interpretation of the beatitudes denounced the ways of monasticism for using the criteria of the world to determine what a good work and a good life is, Bonhoeffer also criticizes the malaise of German Christians that has allowed worldly values like patriotism and power to overcome the Word of Jesus and shape the Christian community. Bonhoeffer, like Luther before him, interprets the Sermon as caustic salt against any notion that what is good and right can be determined apart from the Word of God—for Bonhoeffer particularly, Jesus himself.

Although Bonhoeffer and Luther both understand the Sermon in this same critical way—tearing down human pretensions and rooting life solely in Christ and justification—Bonhoeffer's construction of the Christian life differs significantly from Luther. This difference becomes apparent as Bonhoeffer concludes his exposition of the beatitudes: "Here at the end of the Beatitudes the question arises as to where in this world such a *faith-community* actually finds a place."¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer has contrasted the way of the world with the way of Christian discipleship throughout his exposition. At this point, Bonhoeffer makes clear that Jesus is not merely describing individual virtues but the church in discipleship. This church looks like its Lord, the crucified One, who is the meekest, the most tempted, and the poorest of all.¹¹² Like its Lord, the church will suffer, and like its Lord, God will vindicate it. Thus, the beatitudes are great promises for the church at the same time that they call for faithfulness to Christ above all.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 104–5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 109. See also the chapter "Discipleship and the Cross," 84–91.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 109. Emphasis added.

¹¹² Ibid.

The importance of the church as a community comes more into focus as Bonhoeffer moves from the beatitudes to the next section of the Sermon, Matthew 5:13-16 on salt and light. Bonhoeffer rejects Luther's understanding that the "office" of the disciples, the preaching of God's Word, is to be salt and light.¹¹³ Instead, Bonhoeffer claims, "What is meant is their whole existence, to the extent that it is newly grounded in Christ's call to discipleship, that existence of which the Beatitudes speak. All those who follow Jesus's call to discipleship are made by that call to be the salt of the earth in their whole existence."¹¹⁴ Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the disciples are salt and light precisely as they become visible to the world, a visible community of faith separate from the world.¹¹⁵ The world will not praise and adore these visible marks—such is usually a sign of self-invented piety anyway—rather, it is the visibility of being poor, strangers, meek, peacemakers, and of course being rejected and persecuted as Jesus was. In short, Bonhoeffer says that it is all one work: "bearing the cross of Jesus Christ."¹¹⁶

In this way, the Christian community is "extraordinary," and it makes space for the "extraordinariness" of the Christian life.¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Jesus's antitheses stresses this point. The Christian church is a community of simple obedience to God's law in a world of lawless faith, which is enthusiasm;¹¹⁸ it is a community of reconciliation and forgiveness in a society of power;¹¹⁹ it is a community of chastity and purity in a world of unlimited desire;¹²⁰ it is a community of truth where sin is uncovered and confessed in a society that shrouds sin and glorifies self-denial;¹²¹ it is a community of peace and non-violence in a world where might makes right;¹²² it is a community of love that prays for its enemies in a society that exiles and kills the Jews.¹²³ These "extraordinary" elements of the Christian community are immanently visible, which means that they have to be *done* by Jesus's disciples. Such deeds are to be accomplished not in a flashy or showy manner but "in the simplicity of Christian obedience to the will of Jesus."¹²⁴ To be clear, the disciples are not blessed for these deeds; they are

¹¹³ Ibid., 111. Bonhoeffer's accusation that the reformers "equate the disciples' message with salt" is only mostly true. Luther emphasizes the preaching of God's Word as caustic salt and revealing light, but Luther also places suffering for the sake of the gospel as a kind of salt and light alongside teaching and preaching. Luther writes, "What [Jesus] calls 'good works' here is the exercise, expression, and confession of the teaching about Christ and faith, and *the suffering for its sake*. He is talking about works by which we 'shine'; but shining is the real job of believing or teaching, by which we also help others to believe" (LW 21:65, emphasis added).

¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 112.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 113.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 144–45.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 115–20.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 120–25.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 125–27.

¹²¹ Ibid., 128–31.

¹²² Ibid., 131–37.

¹²³ Ibid., 137–43.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 145.

blessed because of the call and promise of Jesus. Jesus's disciples are merely servants who are doing their duty according to the Word and command of God.

To summarize Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the Sermon, Bonhoeffer stresses the interconnection of justification and sanctification, the call and command of Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer, when Christ justifies a sinner, he always calls her to an extraordinary life in the visible church. Any notion of grace that does not include simple obedience to the commands of Jesus in the visible church is cheap grace and not the real call of Jesus. Although Bonhoeffer does not often use the language of law and gospel, he does proclaim Christ's Sermon both as condemnation against the self-invented pieties of the German Christians and as a promise to the church that stands separate from the world as a visible, obedient witness to Christ's reign.¹²⁵ As Bonhoeffer considers how the Christian is to live in the world, he looks to Christ and the community that follows him. Christ gives the command and example to follow in living the Christian life, which does not take place alone, but happens in a community of disciples shaped by the Word and promises of God to simply obey the Lord Jesus.¹²⁶

Bonhoeffer and Luther: Similarities and Differences

Luther and Bonhoeffer accomplish the same tasks in their interpretations of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. First, both proclaim the sermon to expose and condemn all human projects that exist apart from the Word of God, even the most beautiful. That is, both clearly and unabashedly proclaim the law. Second, both proclaim the gospel of justification as a matter of faith in Christ alone, trusting in him, so that the Christian lives only by faith in the Word. Third, the Christian life is constructed and shaped according to the Word of Christ. On this third point, differences emerge between Luther and Bonhoeffer, but on the proclamation of law and gospel in the narrow sense, the two theologians do similar tasks.

For instance, the difference between Luther and Bonhoeffer on justification and sanctification is only one of emphasis. The Wittenberg theologian opposed the Roman Catholic and Anabaptist theologians who made salvation dependent on works instead of God's Word. In response to this salvation by works, Luther distinguished between justification and sanctification and prioritized justification; the *tree must be good* by faith before it will bear good fruit. The Berlin theologian, on the other hand, opposed those who made Christianity irrelevant to public life, justifying their hatred for the Jews and love of war by making Jesus's words irrelevant to the

¹²⁵ Jonathan Sorum argues that Bonhoeffer follows Barth's *intentions* in his ordering of gospel-law, but retains the traditional Lutheran order of law-gospel. "Barth's 'Gospel and Law' and Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*," in *Reflections on Bonhoeffer: Essays in Honor of F. Burton Nelson*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1999), 210–27.

¹²⁶ On the place of God's Word and sacraments in shaping the church, see Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 225–30.

public sphere. In this situation, Bonhoeffer refused to separate justification and sanctification; the good tree *must bear* good fruit. Bonhoeffer's tools are slightly different but he intends something similar to Luther: exposing sinful works that masquerade as God's will and locating faith and life in the Word. Bonhoeffer does so by emphasizing the connection of justification and sanctification whereas Luther highlights the distinction.

Moreover, Luther and Bonhoeffer agree on the essence of the Christian life: the Christian is lived according to the Word of God. The only good, pious work is one that is done in faith according to God's command. In fact, for Luther and Bonhoeffer, *all* good works are done according to God's Word and command. Hence, God's Word must expose and critique all other attempts at good works, all of the glorious words and works of self-invented piety. For Luther, the Word of God must be preached as caustic salt against any attempts at a monastic withdrawal from the world because God calls his people to a loving service of the neighbor, which takes place in the world. For Bonhoeffer, Jesus calls his disciples to separate visibly from the world into the church so that church's words and life are a constant critique of the world's sinfulness, especially sin cloaked in glory and power. For both theologians, God's Word is the only standard by which the Christian can and must live even though the Word criticizes different works and emphasizes different parts of the Christian life in sixteenth-century Saxony than twentieth-century Germany.

Although Luther and Bonhoeffer both use the sermon to condemn sinful human works and call sinners to the justifying Word of God, this essay shows the two theologians differing in two main ways. First, Bonhoeffer and Luther mean slightly different, although overlapping, things when they say "Word of God." For Luther, the Word is primarily the preached and written Word of God, the proclamation of law and gospel and the Old and New Testaments. Jesus authorizes this preaching and serves as its subject—in two senses of 'subject' since Jesus is both the preacher and the focus of the preaching—and Jesus is also the authorizer and subject of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the Word is primarily the preached and written Word, not the incarnate Word. Hence, Luther argues that the preaching of the Word, particularly the true exposition of Holy Scripture, is the salt and light of the earth.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Luther conceives of Christ's office fundamentally as the office of preaching.¹²⁸ In his commentary on the Sermon, Luther's first observation is that Christ sits down on top of the mountain to preach, which contemporary preachers should emulate.¹²⁹ Throughout his exposition, Luther returns to the necessity of preaching the Word truthfully, hearing the

¹²⁷ LW 21:59.

¹²⁸ Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1970), 51.

¹²⁹ LW 21:5–9. Luther draws out three things for preachers to learn: stand up publicly, proclaim the truth vigorously and confidently, and limit themselves to the spiritual matters on which the Word speaks.

Word in faith, and loving the neighbor in society as God commands.¹³⁰

For Bonhoeffer, however, the Word is primarily the incarnate Son of God, Jesus himself. Jesus authorizes the proclamation of law and gospel in his church, and the Scriptures are the authoritative norm of Jesus's life and ministry, but at the heart of the Christian life is a person, Jesus of Nazareth. While Luther would say the same thing about Jesus,¹³¹ for Bonhoeffer, the centrality of Christ also means that the Christian looks to Christ's life and commands for how to live as a Christian. If Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who calls people into discipleship, then there is no Christianity without following Jesus.¹³² To be a Christian is simply to obey Jesus's words and follow where Jesus trod. To do otherwise—to add to Jesus's words, to reinterpret them, or make them irrelevant to public life—is to choose one's own path. "It could be an ideal path or a martyr's path, but it is without the promise. Jesus will reject it."¹³³

The centrality of Christ for the Christian life is also at the heart of Bonhoeffer's argument that Jesus is the mediator of *all* things. Bonhoeffer will not allow anything to come between the Christian and Jesus, not even part of God's good creation. To trust in Christ as the mediator is to give up all relationships to the world except as mediated by Christ. This is not a renunciation of creation; in fact, it is an affirmation of God's good creation, but only through Christ. To know creation as God's is to know creation through Jesus.¹³⁴

In Bonhoeffer's concept of immediacy, the essential difference between Luther and Bonhoeffer is evident. Luther indeed proclaims the centrality and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, but he fundamentally works within the given bounds of society and helps Christians love their neighbors in the existing world. Luther could do so since the existence of God and the Bible's authority were presumed in his Christendom. Without these assumptions, however, the distinction between secular and spiritual separated the commands of God and the person of Jesus Christ from public life. With that separation in Bonhoeffer's Germany, people could claim to be Christians while they hated the Jews, fought in unjust wars, and gloried in their Führer. Hence, the Berlin theologian asserted the centrality of Jesus not only for the individual

¹³⁰ E.g. *ibid.*, 118–29 and 235–41. Commenting on Matthew 6:34, Luther sums it up nicely in one sentence: "The kingdom of God requires you to do what you are commanded to do, to preach and to promote the Word of God, to serve your neighbor according to your calling, and to take whatever God gives you" (*Ibid.*, 209).

¹³¹ Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 79: "Three traits of Luther's doctrine of Christ have emerged persistently in our study of this theme: its historical realism, its soteriological orientation, and its insistence on the uniqueness, necessity, and all-sufficiency of Christ. This last characteristic becomes so predominant that in it consists not only the thrust of his doctrine of Christ but the focus and pivot of all his theology, to which even the doctrine of justification is ancillary" (emphasis added).

¹³² Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 59.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92–99.

Christian life, but also for understanding nation, vocation, and public life. For Bonhoeffer, the Word that structures the Christian life is fundamentally Jesus rather than the written and proclaimed Word, which still remain essential in Bonhoeffer's thought.¹³⁵

The second major difference is how they conceive of the *locus* where the Christian life takes place. Against the new and old monastics who established pure Christianity apart from established society, Luther places the Christian in the world.¹³⁶ Luther uses the two realms distinction to emphasize that the Christian is called to love the neighbor in society and not apart from it. Thus, Luther employs the concept of office or vocation to concretize the shape of the Christian life in the world.¹³⁷ For Luther, Christians are called to do their duty—as parents, neighbors, merchants, servants, princes, and/or pastors—and it is precisely in doing their duty in society that they follow God's commands to love and serve their neighbors. Luther pointed Christians to follow territorial law¹³⁸ not because secular law was good and right as such, but because the laws of sixteenth-century Germany were often derived from Christian sources.¹³⁹ Territorial law agreed with divine law and pointed Christians to love their neighbors by doing their duty. In this way, Luther focuses the Christian life on how the *individual* acts in the world in relationship to her neighbors.

Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, centers the Christian life on the community of faith without neglecting individual responsibility. The beginning of *Discipleship* is a call for each individual to listen to Jesus and follow in obedience. At the same time, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Jesus's call is always a call into the body of Christ, the faith community of the Lord.¹⁴⁰ For example, Bonhoeffer writes that baptism, like the call into discipleship, is a "public act," in which "we are incorporated into the visible church-community [Gemeinde] of Jesus Christ."¹⁴¹ Thus, the Christian is situated primarily in the church: "The body of Jesus Christ is the ground of our faith and the source of its certainty; the body of Jesus Christ is the one and perfect gift through which we receive our salvation; the body of Jesus

¹³⁵ On the centrality of the external word for Bonhoeffer, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "Verbum Externum: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Bethel Confession," in *God Speaks to Us: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Ralf K. Wüstenberg and Jens Zimmermann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 189–215.

¹³⁶ See Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*, 13.

¹³⁷ For Luther's notion of vocation, see the classic text Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

¹³⁸ LW 21:110: "You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law."

¹³⁹ See, e.g., John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *Christianity and Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ E.g. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 98–99, 109–14, and part II, 201–88. Bonhoeffer says that what the synoptic gospels express as "following the call to discipleship," Paul calls baptism (207).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

Christ is our new life.”¹⁴²

By centering the Christian life on the church, the most important question for Bonhoeffer is not how the Christian should live in the world but, what is the structure and order of the church? For Bonhoeffer, the church is the living body of Christ. He explains,

Jesus Christ lives here on earth in the form of his body, the church-community. Here is his body crucified and risen, here is the humanity he assumed. To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the church-community, a member of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ means to be in the church-community. But if we are in the church-community, then we are also truly and bodily in Jesus Christ.¹⁴³

Just as Jesus is the center point of the Christian life—his commands and example are the heart of discipleship—so the church is the body of Christ, the bodily community of Jesus, and cannot be known apart from him.¹⁴⁴ This means that the church corporately is formed into the image of Jesus. For Bonhoeffer, this is especially evident in the persecution and suffering of the church: in the church, “we take part in Christ’s suffering and glory.”¹⁴⁵ It is not that each individual Christian is necessarily called to suffer; rather, the entire body of Christ suffers and some are permitted to suffer on behalf of the body. In a sense, this “vicariously representative action and suffering” is a *vocation* given to some of the members in order to serve the whole body of Christ.¹⁴⁶

Bonhoeffer also emphasizes the visibility of this community: “The body of Christ takes up physical space here on earth.”¹⁴⁷ Just as Christ himself claimed a place among humanity in the incarnation, so the Church must be a visible community that claims a space on earth for God and his Word.¹⁴⁸ How does it do this? First, the church makes itself visible in its worship, in the

¹⁴² Ibid., 213.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 218.

¹⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer’s understanding has some similarities to Robert Jenson’s notion of the body of Christ as Christ’s own presence and availability, making Eucharist and church truly Christ’s body. The body of Christ then is not a mere metaphor but his presence in the world, though Bonhoeffer does more to distinguish Christ and the church than Jenson. See Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–99), 1:201–6 and 2:211–15. Michael Mawson sees similarities between Jenson and Bonhoeffer but also argues that Bonhoeffer offers a corrective to Jenson’s tendency to over-equate Christ and the church, losing ecclesial sinfulness: “The Spirit and the Community: Pneumatology and Ecclesiology in Jenson, Hütter and Bonhoeffer,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 4 (2013): 453–68.

¹⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 221.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 222.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 225.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 225–52. Stanley Hauerwas highlights this aspect of Bonhoeffer’s theology: “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Political Theology,” in *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 34–53; and “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Howard Yoder,” in *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman, Timothy Larsen, and Stephen R. Spencer (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 207–22.

preaching of the Word of God that witnesses to Christ and creates faith in individuals and in the sacraments which incorporate believers into the church-community.¹⁴⁹ Second, the church is visible in its communal life, in which there is a diversity of gifts and a diversity of peoples.¹⁵⁰ Christians recognize each other not in this church not as Jew or Greek—Jew or German could not have been far from Bonhoeffer’s mind—but as one in Christ. In this community, Christians live by peace, sacrifice, compassion, and truth whereas the world seeks power and profit by way of lies and violence.¹⁵¹ As such, the church has an impact upon the world by being set apart from it for visible witness to Jesus Christ.

Although Luther and Bonhoeffer differ in these two respects—the primary referent of “Word” and the locus where the Christian life takes place—they share much in common. In fact, their differences are largely attributable to the different contexts in which they originated. Luther’s Constantinian situation shaped his articulation of the Christian life in important ways. Because God’s will and societal law were basically coterminous, Luther could direct Christians to their duties and offices in society to follow God’s commands. Bonhoeffer’s context in an anti-Christian society, however, forced him back to the basics of following Jesus in the church. In order to put flesh on the Christian life, Bonhoeffer held up Christ himself, the Word made flesh, and life in the church as the place where Christians visibly live in obedience to Jesus. Bonhoeffer’s criticism of the world may have been new, but this use of Jesus’s Sermon was not since Luther too used God’s Word as caustic salt against the glorious words and works of the world and as the gospel that brings sinners forgiveness by faith in Jesus. Both used the sermon on the Mount to proclaim the Word that cuts human pretension down to size and exposes sin, leaving only Jesus and his word of justification to recreate the sinful heart and make the person new. Bonhoeffer may not have used the explicit language of law and gospel very often in his theological corpus, but his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount shows Bonhoeffer using law and gospel in a similar way to Luther: condemning human works and connecting sinners to the Word that creates faith and shapes the whole of the Christian life. What Bonhoeffer said was different from Luther, but in what Bonhoeffer did he largely mirrored Luther.

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¹⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 226–29.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 237. See also Stanley Hauerwas, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics,” in *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 55–69.

Confession of a Lutheran University

David W. Loy

I. Introduction

It is a tough time to be a Lutheran university. Lutheran students do not reflexively choose Lutheran higher education, and Lutheran church bodies provide little to no direct financial support. The economics of higher education favor economies of scale, but the pool of college-bound students is projected to decrease in the next decade. As a result, Lutheran institutions of higher education compete with other colleges and universities to attract any and every academically qualified student regardless of religious background. In such a difficult environment, a Lutheran university may be tempted to hide its lamp under a bushel, so to speak. Required theology courses may be replaced with subjects deemed less divisive, and the objective content of the Christian faith may even be relegated to the safe confines of a poorly enrolled religion major. The university may be tempted to forego a public confession. Would it be wrong for Lutheran university to do so? More specifically, must a Lutheran university and its faculty maintain a substantive, public theological confession that informs the academic life of the institution—not merely in the theology department but across all departments?

Tom Christenson and Darrell Jodock have argued that a Lutheran university need not maintain a public theological confession. Christenson contends that a Lutheran university reflects its theological commitments when it provides an education in the technical skills necessary for good work in society and the wisdom necessary for good decisions in society.¹ Jodock argues that the university serves primarily the left-hand kingdom of God. What makes a university Lutheran is a theologically informed conception of the purpose of education—namely, preparing students to pursue justice in their future vocations.² Both Christenson and Jodock articulate an understanding of the Lutheran university that is grounded in the doctrines of the two kingdoms and vocation but does not require the university to have a public theological confession.

¹ Tom Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College? Values, Vision, Vocation* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011).

² See, for example, Darrell Jodock, “The Lutheran Tradition and the Liberal Arts College: How Are They Related?,” in *Called to Serve: St. Olaf and the Vocation of a Church College*, ed. Pamela Schwandt, Gary De Krey, and L. DeAne Lagerquist (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1999).

This article argues that a Lutheran university must, in fact, maintain a substantive, public theological confession. The argument falls into two parts. The first part examines Luther's 1524 letter "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" and the 1530 sermon "On Keeping Children in School," showing how the concept of vocation as concrete social relationship provides guidance about the ends schools ought to pursue.³ The second part turns from Luther to the contemporary Lutheran university to identify the social relationships that give rise to its vocations. The argument focuses on two vocations in particular: to society at large and to the church. Both vocations require the Lutheran university to provide a liberal arts education within the framework of a substantive, public theological confession.

II. Luther on Education

To quote John Donne, "No man is an island." Each of us lives in a variety of social relationships within which God uses us to care for one another. Lutheran theology identifies these particularized social relationships as our vocations.⁴ The doctrine of vocation affirms the spiritual worth of the works associated with these relationships. It also presupposes that each vocation has associated norms based on the particular social context that constitutes it. The overriding norm is, of course, love. However, love is always embodied, and as such it is always enacted within a specific social context. The husband's love of his wife is different from his love of other women—his sisters, his mother, his grandmother, or even his daughter.⁵ We expect a husband to love his wife differently than other women, because his relationship to her is different from his relationship to other women. The norms of love for these various relationships are different because the relationships are different. These norms govern the ends to be

³ Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools (1524)," trans. Albert T. W. Steinhauser, in *Christian in Society II*, vol. 45 of *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 347–78; Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School (1530)," trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Christian in Society III*, vol. 46 of *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 213–58.

⁴ On this point, see Gene Edward Veith, *Working For Our Neighbor: A Lutheran Primer on Vocation, Economics, and Ordinary Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian's Library Press, 2016), 7; Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957; Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1994), 72; and Kenneth Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 259. The story is actually slightly more complex: an individual's relationships constitute the person's stations [*Stände*], and the Christian's calling within those stations constitute vocations.

⁵ See Gene Edward Jr. Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, Focal Point Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 84. On the more general point, see Martin Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount (1532)*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, in *The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, vol. 21 of *Luther's Works: American Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 237.

sought within each vocation as well as the means to be used in achieving them.

As social institutions, Lutheran educational institutions might also be said to have vocations. Each exists in relationships with other institutions and individual human beings, and its particular social context generates norms that govern the ends it ought to seek. In fact, when Luther addressed the importance of educating children, his argument rested on the nature of the school's relationships to other social institutions, particularly the church and the city. This section of the paper examines two of Luther's main works concerning education: "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" and the sermon "On Keeping Children in School." It argues that vocation-specific norms underlie Luther's argument in both of these works and shape his conception of the purpose and content of education.

"To the Councilmen" is the earlier of the two works. Written in 1524, it addresses two movements in Germany: the breakdown of the educational system in evangelical territories in the wake of religious reforms and the occupation-oriented mindset of parents concerning their children's education. As cloisters' property was expropriated by the princes of the various territories, the schools attached to them were shut down. However, many municipalities did not step in to open new schools in their place.⁶ Luther wrote "To the Councilmen" to urge them to do just that.

His argument rests on vocation-specific norms. He anticipates the objections municipal leaders are likely to make against his admonition, beginning with the claim that a child's education properly belongs to the parents. Luther points out that parents are not doing the job—sometimes out of laziness, sometimes out of ignorance, and sometimes because they do not have the time or resources. "It therefore behooves the council and the authorities to devote the greatest care and attention to the young," Luther writes.⁷ The task belongs to them for two reasons: first, because they have the financial means for achieving it, and, second, because they are responsible for the present and future well-being of the city. "Since the property, honor, and life of the whole city have been committed to their faithful keeping, they would be remiss in their duty before God and man if they did not seek its welfare and improvement day and night with all the means at their command."⁸ Luther urges city leaders to establish and maintain Christian schools because the schools exist within a social network consisting of a city (with its need for educated laity), the church (with its need

⁶ See John Witte, Jr., "The Civic Seminary: Sources of Modern Public Education in the Lutheran Reformation of Germany," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995–1996), 177–78, 185–201, for further background.

⁷ Luther, "To the Councilmen," 355.

⁸ *Ibid.*

for educated clergy), children, parents, city leaders and church leaders. The councilmen, as leaders of both the city and the local church,⁹ have vocational obligations with respect to schools because of their responsibility to the city and its people as well as the church and its people.

Naturally, once Luther establishes the vocational obligation of city leaders to establish and maintain schools, he offers advice about the schools' curriculum. Occupational training alone is not sufficient, because "a city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens."¹⁰ These traits will be developed by students who "hear of the doings and sayings of the entire world, and how things went with various cities, kingdoms, princes, men, and women."¹¹ Luther turns to history not simply so that students imitate it; rather, if they study history, "they could then draw the proper inferences and in the fear of God take their own place in the stream of human events. In addition, they could gain from history the knowledge and understanding of what to seek and what to avoid in this outward life, and be able to advise and direct others accordingly."¹² Luther is arguing that students who study history can learn from the mistakes (and successes) of others rather than having to amass their own experience.¹³

Moreover, for Luther, Christian schools exist to undermine the work of Satan. "If he is to be dealt a blow that really hurts, it must be done through young people who have come to maturity in the knowledge of God, and who spread His word and teach it to others."¹⁴ Preaching and teaching God's word requires students to know the original languages in which it was written. The schools must therefore teach Greek and Hebrew. They must also teach Latin, according to Luther, although his argument on this point is not as well developed as his argument for teaching Greek and Hebrew.¹⁵ It appears that he valued Latin because it, along with Greek and Hebrew, is a great "ornament, profit, glory and benefit, both for the understanding of Holy Scripture and the conduct of temporal government."¹⁶ Since Latin was still the *lingua franca* in both civil and churchly realms, "without a basic

⁹ See Lewis Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince as *Notbischof*," *Church History* 22, no. 2 (June 1953):114–115; and Witte, "The Civic Seminary," 175–177.

¹⁰ Luther, "To the Councilmen," 356.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹² *Ibid.*, 369.

¹³ Cf. Jodock, "The Lutheran Tradition," 17–18.

¹⁴ Luther, "To the Councilmen," 350.

¹⁵ Just four years later, in the Saxon visitation articles, Luther would write, "In the first place, the schoolmasters are to be concerned about teaching the children Latin only, not German or Greek or Hebrew" (Martin Luther, *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528)*, trans. Conrad Bergendoff, in *Church and Ministry II*, vol. 40 of *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958], 315).

¹⁶ Luther, "To the Councilmen," 358.

knowledge of Latin one could not fully participate in theological dialogue or in the worship life of the church,” much less the business of government.¹⁷

Luther’s argument identifies the numerous relationships within which the school exists. Its curriculum must be driven by the needs of the constituencies it serves. It serves the city by shaping the boys and girls who will eventually step into leadership roles in the family, governance, and work—in Luther’s words, “. . . in order to maintain its temporal estate outwardly the world must have good and capable men and women, men able to rule well over land and people, women able to manage the household and train children and servants aright. . . . Therefore, it is a matter of properly educating and training our boys and girls to that end.”¹⁸ It serves the church by preparing boys for further theological study. Luther’s curricular suggestions are undergirded by his understanding of the social relationships of the school and the vocation-specific norms that go along with those particular vocations.

Luther’s later work, the 1530 “Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” follows a similar method. As Luther indicates in the introductory letters, the sermon is aimed at parents. Some city leaders had already listened to Luther’s 1524 admonition and provided schools for the children of their cities; in other cities, pious and faithful citizens had pushed their city councils into action. However, in some cities schools were underutilized because parents came to believe “the dastardly notion that because monkery, nunning, and priestcraft no longer hold out the hope they once did, there is therefore no more need for study and for learned men, that instead we need to give thought only to how to make a living and get rich.”¹⁹ Luther is bold enough to claim that clergy must encourage and admonish parents to take advantage of the schools for the sake of the church and the city.

Luther mercilessly criticizes the claim that occupational training is a sufficient education.²⁰ His rhetoric is harsh. He points out that parents who refuse to permit their boys to be educated may well be robbing the world of future pastors.²¹ They might thus be contributing to the eternal damnation of many souls who would otherwise have been saved through the preaching of these young men, had the parents only sent them to the schools provided by

¹⁷ Thomas Korcok, *Lutheran Education: From Wittenberg to the Future* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 70.

¹⁸ Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 368.

¹⁹ Luther, “On Keeping Children in School,” 217.

²⁰ This is not to say that Luther was opposed to occupational training; on the contrary, in “Letter to the Councilmen” he explicitly states, “My idea is to have the boys attend such a school for one or two hours during the day, and spend the remainder of the time working at home, learning a trade, or doing whatever is expected of them” (370). His point is that occupational training alone is not enough to provide the kind of life that God would have Christians enjoy.

²¹ Luther, “On Keeping Children in School,” 222–23.

the city.²² Later in the sermon he lauds the work of civil servants, claiming, “We shamefully despise God when we begrudge our children this glorious and divine work and stick them instead in the exclusive service of the belly and of avarice, having them learning nothing but how to make a living, like hogs wallowing forever with their noses in the dunghill, and never training them for so worthy an estate and office.”²³ Luther calls withholding a good education from children “service of Mammon,” “caring for their bellies,” “horribly ungrateful,” and idolatry.²⁴ To people who do so Luther says, “you want God to serve you free of charge both with preaching and with worldly government, so that you can just calmly turn your child away from him and teach him to serve Mammon alone.”²⁵ As beneficiaries of the social order and Christians who are to love their neighbors, parents have a duty to ensure their children receive a proper education.

Such an education requires students to learn the important languages of the day, the wisdom of the intellectual tradition, and the ability to think and write. This is true for both boys and girls, but it is particularly true for any boy who might eventually become a theologian. Luther argues that even boys of lesser ability should receive such an education. “They ought at least to read, write, and understand Latin, for we need not only highly learned doctors and masters of Holy Scripture but also ordinary pastors who will teach the gospel and the catechism to the young and ignorant, and baptize and administer the sacrament. That they may be incapable of doing battle with heretics is unimportant.”²⁶ Latin is a necessary part of their education. Likewise, boys who might serve in civil administration or the private sector need such an education, because “it is not the law of the fist but the law of the head that must rule—not force but wisdom or reason—among the wicked as well as among the good.”²⁷ An education in Latin and the classics provides youngsters with the linguistic facilities, cultural literacy, and body of wisdom they need to help preserve the law (in the case of civil administrators) or help run businesses wisely.²⁸ Luther concedes that not every boy will become a pastor or civil servant. Nevertheless, his education will not “hurt his capacity to earn a living. On the contrary, he can rule his house all the better because of it, and besides, he is prepared for the office of preacher or pastor if he

²² *Ibid.*, 229–30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 213–214; 219; 223; 216. The epithets cited here are merely a sampling.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁸ Luther sometimes sounds like the prognosticators of our own age, as when he says “There is not a nobleman who does not need a clerk. And to speak also about men of ordinary education, there are also the miners, merchants, and businessmen” (*ibid.*, 244). In other words, a liberal arts education will give young people skills and knowledge that will guarantee them jobs. Luther would have been at least vaguely familiar with the need for educated employees among businessmen, since his father ran mines.

should be needed there.”²⁹ A proper education prepares students to love their neighbors more effectively in all of their future vocations.

As in the “Letter,” the educational objectives Luther articulates in “Sermon” flow from the vocations of the Christian school. The school has an obligation to the church to prepare boys for further theological study. It has an obligation to the city to prepare students to read and write in the legal language of the day, understand the subtleties and complexities of civil service or private business, and engage the riches of the culture in order to provide wise direction for home, business, and state. “The jurists and scholars in this worldly kingdom are the persons who preserve this law, and thereby maintain the worldly kingdom,” Luther writes.³⁰ What the Lutheran school should teach can be inferred from its concrete vocation in its specific time and place. Given its vocation to the church, a substantive theological confession is a necessary part of its curriculum.

III. The Modern Lutheran University

Like schools in Luther’s day, the university in the modern United States exists in social relationships with numerous people and institutions. These include students, students’ parents, state and local governments, the federal government, accrediting agencies, and the various disciplines taught at the university, to name only a few. Many Lutheran universities also have direct relationships to congregations of their own denominations, other congregations, and their own church bodies.³¹ Despite this vast web of relationships, public discourse tends to focus almost exclusively on the relationship between the university and its students. The student pays tuition, and in exchange the university provides an education and credentials. The government requires what we might call “full disclosure” and “truth in advertising” so that students and parents can make fully informed decisions about which university students should attend. Clearly, universities have obligations—and significant ones—toward students and their parents.

As institutions whose immediate task is to provide students with an education and evidence of successful completion of that education (i.e., a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 239. He later clarifies, “Now when I speak of the jurists I mean not only the doctors but the whole profession, including chancellors, clerks, judges, lawyers, notaries, and all who have to do with the legal side of government; also the counselors at the court, for they too work with law and exercise the function of jurists” (240). I have collected these various offices under the umbrella of civil service. Luther mentions what I am calling the private sector as an aside in a few passages: I have given it equal weight with civil service because of its greater relative importance in our own day compared to Luther’s.

³¹ One could argue that non-Christian universities also have relationships with congregations and church bodies, but these relationships are at best indirect, as when they provide academic credentials for individuals who will be called to serve at congregations.

degree), Lutheran universities through the ages³² have not escaped the forces that affect all of higher education. In our own day, as in Luther's, many students, parents, and governments demand that universities and colleges provide occupationally useful skills rather than a liberal arts education, and even fewer people—even within the church—value a specifically Christian liberal arts education. This devaluation of a Christian liberal arts education is driven by many factors, including the declining influence of Christianity in our culture at large, the perceived irrelevance of the Christian faith (even among Christians) to issues of everyday life, the rising cost of a college education, economic and occupational uncertainty, and many others. At the same time, an increasing percentage of the population has been attending college over the decades because governments and businesses have looked to higher education to provide technical education and credentials for an increasing number of fields. On the other hand, declining birth rates in recent years mean that the pool of traditional undergraduate students is shrinking, even as the maturation of online education has created the capacity for universities to reach non-traditional students across the country who might otherwise have sought an education at local institutions. Universities thus find themselves competing for students.³³

In the face of such forces, Lutheran institutions that have traditionally maintained a substantive theological confession or strong ecclesial connections face the temptation to retreat from both in the interest of institutional survival.³⁴ The difficulty of finding Lutheran faculty, the graduate-level training of those faculty in universities that do not attend to theological questions, and the disciplinary autonomy fostered by research specialization only heighten the difficulty of maintaining a substantive confession that informs the entire academic life of the institution. A variety of factors thus conspire to put the Lutheran university onto the horns of an apparent dilemma: either it remains attractive to a broad range of students by diminishing its public confession, or it maintains its confession at the risk

³² See Russell Dawn and Jeff Mallinson, "A Genealogy of Lutheran Higher Education," in *The Idea and Practice of a Christian University*, ed. Scott A. Ashmon (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 42–44 for a discussion of the social context of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheran universities.

³³ See Perry Glazer et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017) for a historical overview of some of the forces at work from a Christian perspective; John McGee, *Breakpoint: The Changing Marketplace for Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015) for an account of the forces from the perspective of contemporary university administrator; and Nathan Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018) for a nuanced analysis of the so-called demographic storm based on regional variations in the birth rate as well as variations in college attendance among different demographic subgroups.

³⁴ Such forces are not new, nor is the temptation to retreat. See James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), especially ch. 5, as well as George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

of alienating potential students.³⁵ This section argues that Lutheran universities should not abandon their public confessions in the face of these challenges. They have obligations toward parties besides students, their parents, and the government. Two vocations in particular are important for the argument: the vocation toward society and the vocation toward the church. Each vocation requires the Lutheran university to maintain a substantive, public theological confession that informs not just instruction in theology but instruction across the entire curriculum.

Universities in the United States exist as corporations by leave of the state.³⁶ States grant this corporate status and its associated privileges because the university stands in a particular relationship to society at large: it is composed of people from the society's communities, it draws students from those communities, and it promises to provide benefits to the communities (or at least to the students drawn from those communities). In other words, the university has a vocation to the community, and with that vocation come specific obligations. The university has an obligation to shape and form students to make positive contributions to the communities. Certainly, these positive contributions can be medical, technical, and economic. In fact, even universities which claim not to inculcate any moral values are at least providing occupational training to students, and occupational training prepares students to make such medical, technical, and economic contributions. However, as Luther says, "the welfare of a city does not consist solely in accumulating vast treasures, building mighty walls and magnificent buildings, and producing a goodly supply of guns and armor."³⁷ The city also needs people with the wisdom to use its medical, technical and economic goods well.

This means that the Lutheran university must, for the good of society, form and shape students not only to pursue occupations but to pursue them responsibly, to contribute to their professions and communities in wise ways, and to analyze social and political issues not only from a technical perspective but also from a broader, moral perspective.³⁸ Christenson puts

³⁵ For various *diagnoses* of the problem, see Robert Benne, *Quality With Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), ch. 2; Jodock, "The Lutheran Tradition," 13–38; John W. Wright, "How Many Masters? From the Church-Related to an Ecclesially Based University," in *Conflicting Allegiances: The Church-Based University in a Liberal Democratic Society*, ed. Michael L. Budde and John Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 13–28.

³⁶ In the United States, non-profit colleges and universities are generally organized as public benefit or religious corporations. See Cindy Steinbeck, "Fulfilling Laws and Advancing the Mission: The Vocation of the Board of Regents," in *The Idea and Practice of a Christian University*, 147–150.

³⁷ Luther, "To the Councilmen," 355–56.

³⁸ The argument here is not based on what society requests from universities. Rather, it is grounded on the observation that university graduates, who make medical, technical, and economic contributions to society, do so more or less wisely. Given its responsibility to society, the university ought to attend to the cultivation of wisdom among its students as it trains them to make medical, technical, and economic contributions. In the words of L. Deane Lagerquist, students at Lutheran colleges and universities "are equipped to use their gifts—talents, training, and opportunities—in

the matter succinctly: “Learning in a Lutheran university also means that the pursuit of knowledge is interwoven with concern and care.”³⁹ Although we can achieve amazing technical feats, “many of the successes of the technological project of mastery make us all feel less rather than more in control of our destinies. Moreover, a purely technological education fractures community.”⁴⁰ In the Lutheran tradition, the means for developing wisdom have been both the Scriptures and the liberal arts.⁴¹ In his treatment of Reformation-era pedagogical reforms in evangelical lands, Thomas Korcok observes that the general disciplines to be taught included religion (catechesis), Latin, literature (beginning with *Aesop’s Fables*, which Luther and other reformers praised), history, and music.⁴² Each discipline was chosen to help students develop wisdom and good character. In our contemporary context, the selection of disciplines will likely differ. However, the key is to inculcate wisdom through value-laden reflection on technical issues, and such reflection requires the liberal arts.

If the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Ps 111:10, Pr 1:7, 9:10), then the liberal arts alone are not sufficient for developing wisdom in its fullness. The Gospel will also be necessary. While the purpose of the Gospel is not to legislate regarding matters of God’s left-hand reign in the world, the content of the Christian faith nevertheless has implications for our understanding of and relationship to the world in which we live. That the Father gave his Son to redeem sinful human beings shapes the way Christians understand authority. That Christ shed his blood for every human being informs the way Christians relate to those around us. The Scriptures are therefore indispensable for cultivating wisdom in the fullest sense of the word. The point is not that the liberal arts without a clear Christian confession are useless. They are not. They can and do contribute to a certain level of civic righteousness. However, the Christian faith also contributes to

ways that benefit their communities” (“The Vocation of a Lutheran College in the Midst of American Higher education,” in *The Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education*, ed. Jason A. Mahn [Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2016], 44). For a similar argument from a different perspective, see Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College?*, 76.

⁴⁰ Mark Schwehn, *Exiles From Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 134. See also Darrell Jodock, “Vocational Leadership,” *Intersections*, no. 41 (2015), passim.

⁴¹ Here the distinction between the two kingdoms which Jodock so ably lays out becomes important. The Scriptures serve God’s right-hand work—that is, his work in the world to reconcile sinners to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Human wisdom unaided by the Scriptures serves God’s left-hand work—that is, his work to provide for the basic human needs in this life. The Scriptures can provide some guidance in left-hand matters, but human wisdom cannot provide any guidance in right-hand matters. Luther had severe words for those who believed that Christians can dispense with a liberal arts education because we have the Bible.

⁴² Korcok, *Lutheran Education*, 76–84. The meaning of the term “liberal arts” is itself hotly contested; for a helpful historical overview see Bruce Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, expanded edition (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995).

wisdom and informs our understanding of the world. For that reason, the Lutheran university's vocation toward society requires it to maintain a substantive, public confession.

The Lutheran university also has a vocation toward the church—that is, those called and gathered by the Holy Spirit to faith in Christ. In the Lutheran tradition, one significant component of that vocation is to prepare church workers to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ.⁴³ In Luther's day, that meant pastors; in our day, it means students bound for seminary as well as those preparing to serve in auxiliary offices. Students preparing for such vocations ought to be well-versed in the Scriptures, exegetical methods, the Lutheran confessions and Lutheran doctrine, the history of the church, and the like. Those headed toward seminary should also, when possible, be prepared to read the Scriptures in the original languages. Moreover, congregations and church bodies rely on universities to certify that each candidate for a church work office has the relevant knowledge and competencies. The student's education is thus not simply about the student. It is also about the churches which students will serve—about the young people and adults with whom students will share the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ. For this reason universities ought not simply rubber stamp degrees and ought to hold students to high standards.

A second component of the Lutheran university's vocation toward the church is to help students called by the Spirit to faith in Christ to understand, share, defend, appropriate, and apply the Christian faith in their various vocations as family members, citizens, community leaders, congregation members, and so forth.⁴⁴ The basis for this task is not merely students' desire for such an education. It lies more fundamentally in Paul's admonition to all Christians: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rm 12:2).⁴⁵ This component cannot be relegated to the status of a co-curricular activity to be accomplished by the campus ministry or student life team. Such a relegation implies that the Christian faith neither touches on the life of the mind nor involves objective content.

⁴³ Colleges of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod started off focused on this vocation. However, during the 1960s and 70s, LCMS colleges faced a variety of challenges. "Of greatest significance for the Missouri system were the persistent challenges to the single-purpose character of the higher education program. The major contributing factor was the growing rate of 'general,' or non-church-worker, students to the preparatory and teachers colleges" (Richard W. Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985], 343). Burtchaeall, *Dying of the Light*, 524–25, 528–32 describes forces that contributed to this trend.

⁴⁴ Cf. Lagerquist, who claims, "For church bodies (especially the ELCA), Lutheran education additionally aims to cultivate in their members the skills and virtues that are necessary for faithful participation in congregational life and to provide lay and clerical leadership" ("The Vocation of a Lutheran College," 44).

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Yet the Christian dogmatic tradition has long affirmed that “Christian faith” must be understood in terms of both the individual’s trust in the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and the objective content of the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3)—both *fides qua creditur* and *fides quae creditur*. Christian theologians through the ages have followed the example of Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets in applying the objective content of the faith to the issues facing Christians in the various vocations in which they find themselves. The Lutheran university should do the same for its Christian students. If it fails to do so, it fails to show the relevance of the doctrines of the Christian faith to the Christian’s life in society.

In this regard Jodock’s and Christenson’s accounts of Lutheran universities fall short. Both Jodock and Christenson acknowledge that the Lutheran university has some obligation to the church, but both argue that the obligation is fulfilled when the university aims “to instill a sense of the whole, to cultivate the priority of service, and to equip persons with wisdom as well as knowledge.”⁴⁶ While both Jodock and Christenson reach nearly the same conclusion, they deploy different arguments. Christenson writes,

The assumption seems to be that learning, thinking, and teaching (the primary activities of academics) is not itself church. But what (returning to our prism or rainbow analogy) if learning and teaching are ways in which the love of God is refracted into the world? Is teaching a vocation? As such is it a service of the deep needs of the world? It should be. Is it a service of the real needs of our students? Is it not, therefore, *Gottesdienst* [worship]?⁴⁷

Jodock, on the other hand, insists that “college education serves primarily the second [that is, the left-hand] form of divine governance. Its purpose is to enable young men and women to discern what makes for justice and what preserves and enhances human dignity.”⁴⁸ In more recent writings, Jodock suggests that the college can be likened to a bridge: its theological commitments serve as footings, its educational values as the pillars, and the daily activities as the deck of the bridge.⁴⁹ The theological commitments inform the educational values and thus the activities taking place “on the deck,” but those commitments may not be explicitly visible in the daily activities.

Yet these arguments understate the Lutheran university’s vocation to the church and its correlative obligation to engage the objective content of the Christian faith in the curriculum, both in preparing servants of the church

⁴⁶ Jodock, “The Lutheran Tradition,” 19.

⁴⁷ Christenson, *Who Needs a Lutheran College?*, 101–102.

⁴⁸ Jodock, “The Lutheran Tradition,” 18.

⁴⁹ See Jodock, “Vocational Leadership,” 6 and Jodock, “The Third Path, Religious Diversity, and Civil Discourse,” in *The Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education*, 84–85.

and in helping all Christian students understand the implications of the faith for their various vocations as well as its implications for justice in society, human dignity, the environment, and other vital issues. Jodock's image suggests that the university's theological commitments can be safely hidden, as it were, in the metaphorical footings of the bridge: theological commitments simply bear the weight of the university's everyday activities without any visible effect on their character. The nature of the commitments is irrelevant so long as the footings support the deck. However, the relationship between theological commitments and a university's everyday activities is much more complex. To cite just one example, atheistic, materialistic commitments support an entirely different understanding of the human being than do Christian theological commitments, and our understanding of justice cannot be easily separated from our understanding of the human being. Lutheran universities' vocation to the church—and to Christian students—thus requires them to articulate how the faith informs a variety of important issues.⁵⁰ That, in turn, requires that Lutheran universities maintain a substantive, public confession of faith.

In fact, as Ernest Simmons has observed, our culture is one within which intelligent, corporate reflection on religious issues is neither prevalent nor welcome.⁵¹ A Lutheran university can and should model for its students how to engage in intelligent reflection on such questions, and it should draw students into such reflection and train them to engage in it. O. P. Kretzmann writes,

Having rooted its educational approach in historic Christianity, the essential task of the instruction is to establish the relevance of Christian truth to all areas of human knowledge and life. The method of doing this may vary from course to course, but the objective is always the same. The instructor in chemistry may do it one way, the professor of history in another, and the teacher of English in still another.⁵²

A Lutheran university with substantive theological commitments is in a unique position to show the relevance of the Christian faith in this way. First, it has a solid set of core commitments. Christian faith is important for the university, as is reflection on the implications of that faith for students'

⁵⁰ Which is not to say that the Christian faith has "all the relevant data and knowledge about our life in this world, but it does claim to offer a paradigm in which those data and knowledge are organized, interpreted, and critiqued" (Benne, *Quality With Soul*, 6). Cf. Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. II, God and His Creation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), ch. 7.

⁵¹ Ernest L. Simmons, *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction for Faculty* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 8–9, 40.

⁵² O. P. Kretzmann, "Christian Higher Education," in *Readings in the Lutheran Philosophy of Education*, ed. L. G. Bickel and Raymond F. Surburg, Thirteenth Yearbook (River Forest, IL: Lutheran Education Association, 1956), 133.

various vocations. Secondly, because Lutherans believe that the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to bring people to faith in Christ, Lutheran universities can admit non-Christians students in obedience to Christ's command to make disciples of all nations without requiring students to convert. Finally, because Lutherans believe that the stations of the left-hand kingdom are common to all, Lutheran colleges can admit non-Christian students without requiring a faith statement of any kind.⁵³ Having non-Christian students opens the door to true dialogue about religious questions. The existence of such conversations does not call into question the core commitments of the university; instead, faculty can represent the university's core commitments within that conversation.

This has implications for the hiring of faculty, as Russ Moulds points out:

Teacher identity, then, is a critical feature of two-kingdom education. The church needs such teachers [those committed to a substantive theological confession] because we not only have the Gospel to teach, we also have much to teach about the Gospel. Without both this community perception and the teacher's self-understanding of identity as a teacher of the church, our education will lapse into secular drift and simply regress to the mean.⁵⁴

In order to articulate how the faith informs our understanding of the various disciplines taught in the university and the issues addressed by those disciplines, a Lutheran university must have faculty members who are conversant with their respective disciplines, with the broader issues to which their disciplines speak, and with the objective content of the Christian faith. Thus, to remain faithful to its vocation toward the church, a Lutheran university must maintain a substantive confession of faith among its faculty—not simply among its theological faculty, but among a critical mass of faculty across all disciplines.⁵⁵

This claim will certainly raise the objection that requiring a substantive theological confession of faculty will, at best, suppress the kind of dialogue that makes the liberal arts so helpful and, at worst, turn the university into a center for indoctrination that is both intolerant of diversity

⁵³ In fact, if preparing students to live as wise citizens is one vocation of the Lutheran university, and if that wisdom can be acquired in part through the liberal arts, then a Lutheran university can happily admit—and graduate—non-Christian students without displeasing God.

⁵⁴ Russ Moulds, "One Kingdom Teaches the Other: The Two Strategies of Lutheran Education," in *Learning at the Foot of the Cross: A Lutheran Vision for Education*, ed. Joel D. Heck and Angus J. L. Menuge (Austin, TX: Concordia University Press, 2011), 93. Burtchaell observes: "For although it is the vocation and mission of the Lutheran venture in higher education that most counts, Lutherans are likely to be the only people who could be committed to it enough to dedicate their careers and their very lives to it" (*Dying of the Light*, 538).

⁵⁵ See Benne, *Quality With Soul*, 49 ff. for the various ways in which critical mass can be interpreted in this context.

and irrelevant to contemporary society.⁵⁶ Such concerns are not unfounded, but the danger is not exclusive to universities with a substantive confession of faith. George Marsden has observed, “While American universities today allow individuals free exercise of religion in parts of their lives that do not touch the heart of the university, they tend to exclude or discriminate against relating explicit religious perspectives to intellectual life. In other words, the free exercise of religion does not extend to the dominant intellectual centers of our culture.”⁵⁷ If marginalization of competing views can plague secular and secularized universities as well as universities with a substantive theological confession, then the confession itself is not the problem. The problem is more likely the character of the faculty. Faculty who are intolerant of competing views display a disposition to eschew dialogue in favor of monologue and to discount positions contrary to their own. As a result, they are unable or unwilling to entertain the kinds of dialogue that explore issues of significance for contemporary society in the spirit of inquiry associated with the liberal arts.

If intolerance has more to do with the character of the faculty than their confession, then requiring faculty to hold a confession need not suppress dialogue. Naturally, Christian faculty should conduct such conversations in accord with St. Peter’s admonition, “in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1Pt 3:15–16). This kind of gentleness and respect flows from the virtue of humility. Mark Schwehn has argued persuasively that humility is an important prerequisite for learning:

Humility on this account does not mean uncritical acceptance: it means, in practical terms, the *presumption* of wisdom and authority *in the author*. Students and faculty today are far too often ready to believe that Kant was just, in a given passage, murky or that Aristotle was pointlessly repetitive or that Tolstoy was, in the battle scenes of *War and Peace*, needlessly verbose. Such quick, easy, and dismissive appraisals preclude the possibility of learning from these writers. Yes, some of these judgments may be warranted, but the practice of humility at least prevents them from being made summarily. *Some* degree of humility is a precondition for learning.⁵⁸

Such humility is also a precondition for meaningful dialogue. If we assume that our interlocutors have nothing worthwhile to say, we are more likely to

⁵⁶ For this objection, see for example, Jodock, “Vocational Leadership,” 7 and Jodock, “The Third Path,” 82–83.

⁵⁷ Marsden, *The Soul*, 6. See also Benne, *Quality With Soul*, 31.

⁵⁸ Schwehn, *Exiles From Eden*, 48–49.

write them off or ignore their contribution. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that reasonable people can come to differing conclusions about important issues, we are more likely to be open to dialogue with them. Having a substantive theological confession does not predispose one toward pride, nor does the lack of a theological confession predispose one toward humility. In fact, if the kind of inquiry associated with the liberal arts is an important feature of Lutheran higher education, and if humility is a precondition for that kind of inquiry, then their own confession requires faculty at the Lutheran university to cultivate humility in themselves and to seek to inculcate in their students as well.⁵⁹ A Lutheran university that encouraged pride in its faculty would not be living up to its own ideals.

IV. Conclusion

I have argued that we can understand what makes a university Lutheran by explicating the obligations associated with its vocations. On this account the liberal arts are important because they prepare students to reflect in a value-laden way on technical, medical, and economic problems that face society. They provide the material that 1) shows students how to reflect on significant questions, 2) engages students in substantive answers to those questions—including answers informed by the Christian faith, and 3) exposes students to threads and currents that have formed our contemporary culture's answers to those questions. The liberal arts tradition exposes students to the best of human wisdom in hopes of helping students down the road toward wisdom. This account also makes clear that the Lutheran university has a significant vocation toward the church. Both vocations entail an obligation to maintain a substantive theological confession, both so that church-work students receive an excellent grounding in the teachings of the Scriptures and so that all Christian students appropriate and apply the objective content of the faith to the challenges they face in their present and future vocations.

The challenges facing higher education in the next decade are significant, and the challenges facing Lutheran and other Christian universities may be even greater. The challenges, however, are not new. Our Lord called the earliest church to confess him in the face of opposition and even outright persecution, and he promised to be with his church until he returns again. His promise does not entail a guarantee that no Lutheran university will ever close. His promise ought, however, to provide a Lutheran university with boldness in the face of difficult challenges, including the boldness to maintain a substantive, public theological confession that informs academic life across the entire curriculum. In fact, it is precisely because the influence of Christianity in our culture at large is declining that Christian students need to hear humble, thoughtful, Christian faculty reflect on the

⁵⁹ For a helpful account of humility, see Martin Franzmann and F. Dean Lueking, *Grace Under Pressure: Meekness in Ecumenical Relations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 4.

relevance of the Christian faith for their disciplines and professions—and for the pressing questions that our nation and world face. This can happen only if the faculty members themselves maintain a clear confession of the Christian faith. A Lutheran faculty that maintains a substantive theological confession helps ensure that the church has people who are prepared to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ accurately for the salvation of God’s people, and it helps to ensure that Christians are prepared to live out their faith wisely, intelligently, and humbly in a complex and fallen world.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Scott A. Ashmon for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

מוט MEANS “COLLAPSE,” NOT “BE SHAKEN”

Paul Puffe

My thesis in this paper is that the definition of the Hebrew verb מוט (not to be confused with the verb מוטת) means “to collapse,” and not “to be shaken,” as it is primarily defined in all the lexicons. Chart A shows the definitions offered for the Qal, Niphal, Hithpoel, and Hiphil stems of מוט in several commonly used English lexicons or dictionaries. As can be seen by the entries highlighted in bold print, it is not a new idea to see the concept of collapsing or falling attached to this verb. All of these dictionaries, however, see the basic idea as “shake” and then adjust the meaning in particular passages as they feel the particular context requires. My argument is that the verb nowhere means “shake,” and everywhere means “collapse.” Therefore, I believe the basic definition ought to be modified.

The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) is of special interest here, in that one would expect this reference work to provide the most thorough discussion of the meaning and use of this verb. Surprisingly, in the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament A. Baumann¹ strives hard to remain rooted to the basic sense of “totter, waver.” He begins by stating that the West Semitic term means “to totter, waver,” but also “to ponder (in the sense of to weigh),” and “to sink.” He points out that “the root *mwṭ* is attested only in the West Semitic languages” (152), and he lists attestation in several of these cognate languages.² He links the verb to the

¹ A. Baumann, “מוט,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 152–58. Citations to this source hereafter are in-text.

² The information provided in the lexicons regarding cognate verbs does not seem to support the traditional definition. BDB (Francis Brown, Edward Robinson, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], s.v. מוט) lists an Assyrian cognate “*matu* is *dwindle, diminish, grow weak*,” which would seem to support something about decline rather than an idea of shaking or vibration. However, Baumann in TDOT states that “the root *mwṭ* is attested only in the West Semitic languages: in Jewish-Aramaic, Syriac, Aramaic, and Palmyrene *mwṭ* means ‘to totter, waver,’ in part also ‘to ponder (in the sense of to weigh),’ ‘to sink.’” Both TDOT and BDB list an Arabic cognate as “to deviate, retire,” “remove, retire ... repel, push, thrust”; that does not seem to support a sense of shaking or tottering. Both of these sources also list an Ethiopic verb meaning “to turn, bend.” But HALOT (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1995], s.v. מוט) lists only cognates in Jewish, Syriac, and Palmyrene Aramaic, and then also in Arabic and Ethiopic, but suggests that these cognates stem from the verb *nwṭ* instead of *mwṭ*. Baumann tries to keep all of the similar words tied to the same root idea, but he acknowledges that such a connection does not seem to be within the recognition of the Jewish writers. In short, the cognate language verbs do not seem to support a

similar nouns מוט and מוֹטָה, both of which mean “carrying pole, yoke,” and tries to accommodate this relationship in his discussion of the definition. However, he also points out that the Hebrew noun מִטָּה “staff, branch” derives from the root נוטה, rather than the root מוט, and that these nouns may be connected to that other verb instead. Baumann notes that the verb מוט and the nouns מוט and מוֹטָה “nowhere occur in the same context” (152), which suggests that they may not be related. Based on my discussion below, I think the connection between these nouns and the verb מוט should be severed. Baumann, however, maintains this connection and offers the harmonization that “the common notion seems to be the deviation from an accustomed position, of the kind observed, e.g., in the beam of a scale or in the bending of a pole” (152). The only reason to mention “bending” or “deviation from an accustomed position” is that he wants to connect these words for staff or yoke to some kind of movement which he can then link to the traditional definition involving “shaking.” He then brings this supposed connection between bending poles and shaking to his discussion of the usage in the Bible by stating that “the basic meaning of mwṭ is probably ‘totter, waver,’ whereby the reference is always to something firm, such as the human body or bodily parts, or the earth or its foundations. ... The root is not suited for descriptions of fear in its external and internal manifestations. Rather, the root mwṭ suggests primarily the stability or firmness—threatened or secure—of a solid mass” (153). Baumann wants to distinguish the type of physical shaking denoted by mwṭ from the shaking that is associated with fear and trembling. I do not find this distinction convincing. The trembling that results from human fear is not something that can be distinguished from the shaking that is involved when a person is tottering on the edge of a fall: both are the vibration of a physical body. The verb is not used of wavering such as when a person’s voice is quivering or shaking, so he is correct that it is associated with the motion “of a solid mass,” but this connection does not necessitate any derivation from a bending pole. Baumann illustrates the usage of the verb and its connection to the movement of physical things by quickly summarizing much of the usage in Scripture. In all of this he continues with the sense of “totter, become unsteady,” a sense which I argue he has assumed and not really demonstrated. Thus Baumann: “A person’s steadiness is threatened especially when his feet slip or otherwise become unsteady” (153). The earth will “not totter.” He ties the use of the verb to earthquakes in Isaiah 24 and Psalm 46. In his discussion of Job 41 the Leviathan’s flesh “does not move.” In the Psalms the foundations of the earth “shake and totter.” Even in Isaiah 40–41 the idols must be nailed so they do not “totter” or “wobble.” He notes: “Since idols are such a shaky thing, how can one

sense of shaking or quaking, and the argument of this paper against a sense of shaking may well be able to be extended to the other later Jewish texts. That would mean there is little but tradition to support the sense of shaking or wobbling. Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* ([1903] Reprint, New York: the Judaica Press, 1992), 740 lists the standard definition for both the Hebrew and Aramaic verbs, but all of the examples cited therein can be better interpreted as “collapse.”

expect them to exhibit stability (kwn) or strength (hʒq) when they themselves need stabilizing?” (156). In regard to the psalms about the righteous man’s safety under God, without God he would “totter,” but Yahweh will never allow the righteous to “stagger.”

Chart B further illustrates the current situation by listing the translation used in various English versions in particular passages to be discussed below. Though the translations switch to a sense of collapse when they feel necessary, they all clearly begin with a sense of shaking or tottering. In order to contest these translations, let me first describe how this verb is used in the Bible, and then examine more carefully many of the actual passages where this verb occurs.

The verb מוט occurs 40 times in the Old Testament (in 3 or 4 cases there are suggestions to amend the text to another verb). There are 13 Qal uses, 25 Niphal, and once each in the Hiphil, and Hithpoel stems. The English translations of the Qal and Niphal are practically identical, though the uses in the Qal (4 as participles) seem to focus attention on the act of collapsing, while the 25 Niphal uses can be viewed as focusing attention more on the result: something like “I will not be collapsed.”¹ The verbs with which it occurs in parallel are: מוך “be low, be humbled,” מוש “give way,” מור “be changed,” מוג “melt,” the passive of לקח “being taken,” and רעע and פּרר in the Hithpoel “be smashed” and “burst.” It occurs in contrasting parallelism with the verbs סעד “support,” שׂוה (Psalm 16) “set up,” כּוּן (Niphal) “stand firm, be stable, be lasting,” יסד “found firmly,” בּהּ (forever), ישב “sit (forever),” and שכן “dwell, inhabit.” The following paragraphs describe the types of expressions found.

One common usage of this verb מוט is to signify the endurance of the earth or of mountains. An example is Psalm 93:1:²

*Indeed the world is established,
it shall not collapse.*

אַף־תִּכּוֹן תִּבְּלָה
בְּלִיתִמוֹט:

The traditional sense that the world will not “be moved” or “be shaken” fits fine here. But it must be observed that the sense of what is being said here is not a matter of vibration, but a matter of endurance. When one says that the world “will not be moved,” what one means is that the establishment by God will not be undone. The earth is so stable and permanent that it cannot even be rocked. But we are already using this sense of non-movement to indicate non-collapse, not something more proper to shaking, wavering, or reeling. Similarly in Psalm 104:5 God “set the earth (אָרֶץ) upon its foundations, [and] it shall not collapse forever and ever.” In contrast, in Psalm 82:5 due to the

¹ Baumann counts two apparently Niphal infinitives as Qal infinitives, as do some other lexicons.

² English translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

disobedience of the lower אֱלֹהִים (gods), God observes that “they do not know, they do not understand, in darkness they walk about, all the foundations of the earth collapse.” In this passage it is not the case that the divine order is being threatened or simply shaken; it is being undone, it is collapsing. Psalm 96:10 and 1 Chronicles 16:30 contain phrases nearly identical to Psalm 93:1. The contrast stated in 1 Chronicles 16:30 is worth noting:

*Writhe/tremble before Him, all
the earth.
Indeed the world is established,
it cannot collapse.*

חִילוּ מִלְפָּנָיו כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
אֶרֶץ־תִּכּוֹן תִּבְלַל
בְּלִי־תַמוּט:

In the first line the poet exhorts the world to tremble and shake; obviously he is not asserting a contradiction in the second line, namely that the earth cannot shake. In Isaiah 54:10 we read:

*For the mountains may give way,
and the hills collapse,
but My devotion with you will not
give way,
and My covenant of shalom will
not collapse,
says your compassionate one,
YHWH.*

כִּי הָהָרִים יָמוּשׁוּ
וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמוּטְנָה
וְחֶסְדִּי מֵאֲתָךְ לֹא־יָמוּשׁ
וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמוּט
אֲמַר מְרַחֵמְךָ יְהוָה:

Again, the emphasis is on endurance, not freedom from vibration or movement.

The verb occurs three times in Psalm 46. In verse 3 we read that:

*Therefore we will not fear
though the earth should change,
and though the mountains
collapse into the heart of the seas.*

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נִירָא
בְּהִמְרֵי אָרֶץ
וּבְקוֹט הָרִים בְּלֵב יַמַּיִם:

It is true that in verse 4 the mountains are shaking under the pounding of the seas' waves, but that is not the issue in verse 3. In verse 3 the psalm states that believers in God need not fear even though the world itself collapses around them. Verse 4 shifts from discussing the possible end result, the collapse, to the period of terror leading up to that result, the fear and shaking under the pounding threat. This threat is then contrasted with the water under God's control that brings joy to God's city. Thus, in verse 6 we read that “God is in [the city's] midst, she [the city] will not collapse.” The city will be threatened from time to time; it will know fear and shaking; but it will not be defeated: its walls, its structure, its government, its society will not collapse. In verse 7 the contrast is made between the effect of human political raging, and God's rage:

*Nations roared: kingdoms
collapsed;
He [God] uttered with His voice:
the earth melted.*

הָמָו גּוֹיִם מָטוּ מִמְּלָכּוֹת
נָתַן יְקוּלָּו תְּמוּג אֶרֶץ:

Notice should also be given to Psalm 125:1, where “All those who are trusting in YHWH are like Mt. Zion, (which) will not collapse, forever it will sit.” It is not the case that Mt. Zion has never known an earthquake or shaking, but it will never collapse: it will endure and sit securely forever.

Psalm 125:1 also leads to the next major subject used with this verb, which is people. Psalm 125:1 effectively stated that “those who trust in YHWH” will not collapse. A large number of verses indicate that this will be the case for the “righteous.” In all these cases it is not that God’s followers will never be troubled and shaken, but that in spite of these attacks they will never collapse, they will never give way and be lost. Thus, we have Psalms 15:5, 21:8, 55:23, 62:3,7, 112:6, and Proverbs 10:30. In all these passages the sense is that the person of God will not fall and be destroyed; the focus is not on whether they might experience threats that may rock them. The following quotations are from the NIV with a correction indicated.

Psalm 15:5 ... who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken/collapse.

Psalm 21:8 (Eng. 7) For the king trusts in the LORD; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken/collapse.

Psalm 55:23 (Eng. 22) Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken/collapse.

Psalm 62:3 & 7 (Eng. 2 & 6) Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken/collapse. ...Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken/collapse.

Psalm 112:6 Surely the righteous will never be shaken/collapse; they will be remembered forever.

Proverbs 10:30 (ESV) The righteous will never be removed/collapse, but the wicked will not dwell in the land. (NIV “be uprooted”).

In Proverbs 12:3 we read that “a man shall not be established through evil, but the root [probably: progeny, or family line] of the righteous ones shall not collapse.” In a related sense we also find the statements both of the believer and of the wicked in Psalms 30:7 and 10:6 that they thought they would never collapse or cease to be prosperous, happy, and secure. In Psalm 13:5 the idea of complete destruction is evident:

Lest my enemy say, I have finished him, my adversaries rejoice because I collapse.

פְּנֵי־אֹיְבִי אֵיבִי יִכְלְתֶינִי
צָרִי יִגְּלוּ כִּי אָמוּט:

Another passage deserving comment is Proverbs 25:26:

A muddied spring and a polluted fountain is a righteous one collapsing before a wicked one.

מַעְיֵן גְּרָפֶשׁ וּמְקוֹר מְשֻׁחָת
צָדִיק מֵט לְפָנֵי־רָשָׁע:

It is not simply the idea that the righteous one is threatened and wavering under the pressure of the wicked that is so offensive; it is the fact that the opposite of what is right has occurred. The spring is full of mud/dirt; the fountain spews contamination instead of clean water; wickedness has triumphed and justice has failed, not merely wavered but collapsed.

Leviticus 25:35 and Proverbs 24:11 express somewhat similar ideas. The Israelite is exhorted to rescue those in the process of collapsing:¹

When your brother becomes low/poor and his hand collapses among you, then you shall take hold of him, (foreigner or resident), and he shall live among you.

וּכְיִימְוֶה אָחִיךָ
וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ
וְהִחַזַּקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשָׁב
וְתִי עִמָּךְ:

Prov. 24:11:

Rescue those being taken to death, and hold back those collapsing to death/murder.

הַצֵּל לְמֹתִים לְמוֹת
וּמָטִים לְהֶרֶג אִם־תִּחְשָׂוּ:

The concept of the righteous believer collapsing before the wicked is also expressed in a slightly different form. In six cases we have the word “foot” or “steps” used with the verb. Psalm 94:18 illustrates this well:

¹ In the Leviticus passage the idea of taking hold of the hand is attractive, but *yad* is feminine and the pronoun is masculine, and the following words “sojourner or resident” seem to be appositive to the pronoun. “Hand” may signify his power or ability here, thus “when he becomes humble and his ability to provide for himself collapses ...”

*If I said, my foot is collapsing,
Your devotion, O YHWH, supports
me.*

אִם־אָמַרְתִּי מָטָה רַגְלִי
חֲסִדְךָ יְהוָה יִסְעָדָנִי:

Similar passages are Psalms 38:17(E16), 66:9, and 121:3. Deuteronomy 32:35 expresses the opposite outcome, that God will take vengeance upon Edom and “their foot will collapse.” In all these cases it is clear that the foot is not just shaking or slightly slipping; the foot is ceasing to support the psalmist (or Edom) and is causing him to fall.

In fact, we should probably understand “foot” in these passages as “lower leg,” and thus find an expression very similar to the English phrase “my legs collapsed under me.” If the yad “hand” signified not only the apparatus below the wrist, but also the lower arm up to a point somewhere below the elbow, it may be that the regel “foot” also signified the limb above the ankle, up to somewhere below the knee. This would explain 1 Samuel 17:6 where Goliath wore bronze greaves (shin guards) upon his “feet” (though some understand a type of boot here).¹

A slightly different idea in regard to feet is present in Psalm 17:5. Here the psalmist is pleading his faithfulness to God's directions:²

*My tracks have held firmly in
your wagon-tracks,
my steps have not collapsed.*

תַּמְךָ אֲשִׁירִי בַמַּעֲגָלוֹתֶיךָ
בְּלִי־נַמוּטוֹ פְּעָמַי:

In other words, not only has the psalmist followed the correct path, but he has persevered and has not quit.

Further support for the argument that the verb means “collapse” and not simply “totter” comes from the two usages for idols in Isaiah 40:20 and 41:7. The idol is “set up” (כּוֹן Hiphil) and it is nailed up so that it will not

¹ Matthew Henry says in connection with this verse that “he wore brass boots” (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994]). Likewise John Wesley defines the greaves as “boots” rather than shin guards (*John Wesley's Explanatory Notes*, accessed November 7, 2019, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/>).

² BHS reads this verb as the infinitive absolute of מָנַח with a plural subject (tracks), and the editors suggest a different clause structure for the words of verses 4-5: “My tracks held fast (to) the rugged paths, and in Your track-paths my steps did not collapse.” But is this indeed the verb מָנַח? We could read the verb בָּרַח/מָנַח/מָנַח with the meaning: “My track (singular?) descended [i.e. followed] in Your track-paths and my steps never gave out [collapsed]”; or with the alternate phrasing: “My track descended (in) the rugged paths, and in Your track-paths my steps never collapsed.” Cf. A.A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible, vol. 1 (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1972), 149; and Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I*, Anchor Bible, vol. 16 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 95–96.

“collapse.” As in Isaiah 46, the idols must be supported or held up by people, rather than these empty gods supporting the humans.

Psalm 140:11 contains a kethib/qere variation of this verb, with the Hiphil written, but the correction made to a Niphal. The Niphal is indeed to be preferred because there is no appropriate plural subject for a plural Hiphil verb. The Niphal verb in this case clearly contains the concept of something falling over; notice the other two verbs in this verse:¹

*May charcoals collapse upon
them,
in the fire may He cast them,
in watery pits may they not arise.*

יְמוּטוּ עֲלֵיהֶם גְּחָלִים
בְּאֵשׁ יִפְּלוּ
בְּמַהְמָרוֹת בְּלִיָּקוּמוֹ:

The one instance of the Hiphil usage of this verb also demonstrates the sense of something falling, and not just something moving. In Psalm 55:4 the psalmist is suffering from the onslaughts of foes:

*... from the voice of the enemy,
before the pressure of the wicked
one,
for they caused harm to collapse
upon me,
and in anger they bear a grudge
against me.*

מִקּוֹל אוֹיֵב
מִפְּנֵי עֲקַת רָשָׁע
כִּי־יִמְיֹטוּ עָלַי אֹנָן
וּבְאַף יִשְׁטְמוּנִי:

What evidence is there for the standard lexicon definition of the verb מוט as “shake, reel, totter”? Three passages may be presented, but in my opinion each of these actually favors the sense “collapse” better. These three passages are Psalm 46:3, Psalm 60:4, and the Hithpolel usage in Isaiah 24:19. In these three cases there is a verb in either the same or the following verse that signifies “shaking.” The opportunity is thus presented to interpret the verb מוט as parallel to this verb of shaking. Psalm 46:3 was discussed above, where I argued that the proper parallel is “to be changed, transformed,” and that the concept of quaking is not yet in view in verse 3. In Psalm 60:4-5 we read:

¹ BHS suggests a different clause structure from that indicated by the accents of the Masoretic text: “May charcoals collapse upon them in the fire; may He throw them into miry pits (where) they shall never arise.” Also, follow the qere reading for the first verb.

*You caused the earth to quake,
 You split it open.
 Heal its breaks, for it is
 collapsing.
 You have made Your people
 experience harshness,
 You have made us drink wine
 [that causes] staggering.*

הִרְעִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ פְּצַמְתָּהּ
 רָפָה שְׁבָרֶיהָ כִּי־מָטָה:
 הִרְאִיתָהּ עִמּוֹן קָשָׁה
 הִשְׁקִיתָנוּ יַיִן תְּרַעְלָהּ:

If in interpreting the parallelism one assumes an implied verb in the noun “break” and associates the second verb of verse 4 “split” with this “break,” then one could associate the first verb “quake” with the final verb of verse 4, מוט. This would make מוט parallel to “quake.” But in fact the third verb of verse 4 is “heal.” The first half of verse 4 refers to the shaking and splitting effects of an earthquake. The second half of this verse refers to repairing the damage, because it is “broken” and “is collapsing.” Without God’s repair and support, the earth will crumble away and cease to exist. Verse 5 goes on to mention staggering, but the subject has changed to the human population. The earth suffers; the people suffer. Nothing in this passage forces the conclusion that מוט means “shake, quake.”

A similar situation applies to the one instance of the Hithpolel verb in Isaiah 24:19. In verse 19 three verbs are used. Each is prefaced by a Qal infinitive absolute form, followed by a Hithpolel form. These three verbs all signify the destruction of the earth. The following verse 20 shifts the image to that of shaking or tottering, but it also shifts the sentence structure: the first verb (after the infinitive) is Qal, rather than Hithpolel, the second verb is Hithpolel but is not preceded by a Qal infinitive absolute. Most importantly, both of the phrases in this half-verse are similes, rather than simple descriptions. Verse 20 continues to speak about a heavy burden, falling, and not arising:

*Smashed up is the earth,
 burst open is the earth,
 collapsed is the earth.
 Totters the earth like a drunk,
 it sways like a (shaky) night-hut.
 Heavy upon it is its transgression,
 and it fell, and will not arise
 again.*

רָעָה הִתְרַעְעָה הָאָרֶץ
 פֹּרַח הִתְפּוֹרְרָה אֶרֶץ
 מוֹט הִתְמוֹטְטָה אֶרֶץ:
 נֹוֹעַ תָּנוּעַ אֶרֶץ כַּשְׁפוֹר
 וְהִתְנוּדָה כַּמְלוּנָה
 וְכָבֵד עָלֶיהָ פִּשְׁעָה
 וְנָפְלָה וְלֹא־תִסָּרַף קוֹם:

Shall the verb מוט be associated with the first two verbs, and thus signify the destruction of the earth, or shall it be associated with the following two verbs,

and thus signify the shaking of the earth? In the context of the whole, the first choice is better. The conclusion of verse 20 signifies the destruction and collapse of the earth (“it has fallen and will not arise”). Verse 19 tells the result that the earth is destroyed. Verse 20 backs up and tells us the same story, this time dramatizing both the process (in the first three lines of verse 20) and result of the destruction (in the final line).¹

One final instance of the verb מוט seems to be of no help in determining the meaning of the verb. However, it may be that this improved understanding of the verb may aid in interpreting this passage. In Job 41 Leviathan is described as a terrifying creature that cannot be mastered by humans. This is most likely the picture of a terrifying crocodile. In verse 15 of this description we read:

מִפְּלֵי בְּשָׂרוֹ דָּבְקוּ יְצִיּוֹק עֲלָיו בַּל-יִמוּט:

English translations of this verse differ. The first part of the verse has a plural noun and a plural verb. In the second part of the verse the verb מוט occurs in the singular. If we assume that the first noun signifies the droplet-shaped scales of the crocodile, then I suggest that the second verb refers to the word “flesh” in the sense of the crocodile's armored hide. One may translate thus:

*The scales of his hide cleave firm upon it,
it [his armored hide] does not collapse.*

Because of the consistency of meaning found in every usage in the Bible, and because of the clarity provided by selecting a different English word, I argue that the verb מוט is an intransitive verb meaning “collapse” and not “shake, stagger.” It is a verb signifying a change of condition, and not a verb of motion (such as go, walk, enter, exit, etc.) or vibration.

This improved understanding is particularly valuable when interpreting the many passages above that refer to God's disciples. If one uses the current definition referring to shaking, then the passages would seem to assert that the followers of God always stand firm and confident, never wavering or experiencing any doubt in the walk of discipleship. Such an understanding is highly idealized, and contrary to real experience. In real life the Christian experiences many instances of being threatened with danger, or with the possibility of being overwhelmed by events, or with difficult situations or questions that inspire significant confusion and doubt. With this improved understanding the import of these passages is not that the believer will not waver under such buffeting, but that he will not be

¹ It should be noted that the greater context of verses 17–23 contains other references to both shaking and falling.

overcome: he will not collapse, he will not succumb, he will not be defeated. The presence of God with the believer will carry him through the ordeal, and he will come out secure on the other side. This kind of assurance is not necessary if the people of God are the kind who never stagger under the attacks of the Tempter, but it is of great value for real humans who experience genuine spiritual difficulties. The improper understanding of this verb (“to quake”) provides an opportunity for the Tempter to attack the disciple when he reads that as a follower of God he should never waver in his faith or discipleship, and his personal experience is that he does not measure up to such a strong faith. This may also lead him to focus attention on the quality of his discipleship or the strength of his faith, and turn him away from relying on the power and promises of God. The proper understanding of this verb (“to collapse”) provides the assurance that even though disciples are assailed by the forces of the Tempter in many ways, the connection with the Savior will uphold them and carry them through whatever they have to face.

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CHART A: DEFINITION OF מוֹטַט IN COMMON LEXICONS

Lexicon	Qal 13x	Niphal 25x	Hithpolel 1x	Hiphil 1x
BDB ¹	totter, shake, slip	be shaken, be moved, be overthrown	be greatly shaken	dislodge, let fall, drop
KB-2 nd 2	totter	be caused to totter, be caused to reel, stagger	be tottering constantly	
KB-3 rd 3	sway	be made to stagger, be made to totter	reel; also, extra-Bib. re ship “tossed about”)	
Holladay ⁴	waver, reel, totter, stagger, flinch	be made to stagger, stumble, totter, be made to wobble	shake, reel	
Jastrow ⁵	incline, waver, decline ; give way , bend	be shaken, bent	be declining, sink	bend, shake

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

² Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1953).

³ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vols. 1-4. (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁴ William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁵ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* ([1903] Reprint, New York: The Judaica Press, 1992).

CHART A (Cont.): DEFINITION OF מוּטַּח IN COMMON LEXICONS

Lexicon	Qal 13x	Niphal 25x	Hithpolel 1x	Hiphil 1x
TDOT ¹	totter, waver			
Analytical H-C Lex. ²	totter, shake (re foot) slip, slide (re hand) be weak, fail	be moved, shaken		cause to fall or come down
Langenscheidt ³	waver, totter, quake	totter, stumble, fall , tremble	“same as Q & N”	cause to totter, cause to fall , precipitate
Alcalay, dictionary of modern Hebrew ⁴	totter, shake, quake, waver, collapse , fall , decline , bend, become poor, slip	waver, fall , totter, be shaken, be destroyed	collapse , be shaken, be moved, come down , decline ; also Polel: collapse , shake, move, overthrow , knock down	cast , throw down , humble oneself , bring disaster to/on

¹ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

² Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

³ Karl Feyerabend, *Langenscheidt's Pocket Hebrew Dictionary (English and Hebrew Edition)* (London: Methuen & Company, 1955).

⁴ Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete English-Hebrew Dictionary* (Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1959).

CHART B: ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF מוט IN SELECTED PASSAGES (Bold text indicates fall instead of shake)

Version	NIV	NASV	NKJV	NRSV	REB	NAB	JB
Deut. 32:35 Q pf	will slip	will slip	shall slip	shall slip	slips	lose (their footing)	make a false step
Psalms 13:5 (E4) N impf	fall	am shaken	am moved	am shaken	downfall	downfall	stumble
Psalms 15:5 N impf	be shaken	be shaken	be moved	be moved	unshaken	be disturbed	shake
Psalms 16:8 N impf	be shaken	be shaken	be moved	be moved	be shaken	be disturbed	shake
Psalms 17:5 N pf	slipped	slipped	slip	slipped	faltered	faltered	slip
Psalms 46:3,6,7 (E 3,5,6) Q inf, N impf, Q pf	quake, fall , fall	quake, be moved, tottered,	shake, be moved, were moved	tremble, be moved, totter,	quake, be overthrown , overturned	be shaken, be disturbed, totter	tottering, fall , tottering,
Psalms 55:4 (E3) Hi impf	bring down	bring down	bring down	bring upon	heap	bring down	Bring down
Psalms 60:4 (E2) Q ptc	quaking	totters	shaking	tottering	shattered	tottering	tottering
Psalms 82:5 N impf	are shaken	are shaken	are unstable	are shaken	giving way	are shaken	under-mining
Psalms 93:1 N impf	be moved	be moved	be moved	be moved	immovably	be moved	(un-) shakable
Psalms 94:18 Q ptc	is slipping	has slipped	slips	is slipping	slipping	slipping	slipping
Psalms 104:5 N impf	be moved	totter	be moved	be shaken	be moved	be moved	(un-) shakable
Psalms 125:1 N impf	be shaken	be moved	be moved	be moved	be shaken	immovable	(un-) shakable
Psalms 140:11 (E10) N impf	fall	fall	fall	fall	be rained	rain	rain down
Proverbs 12:3 N impf	be uprooted	be moved	be moved	be moved	be disturbed	be disturbed	shakes
Proverbs 24:11 Q ptc	staggering	staggering	stumbling	go staggering	hauled off	tottering	being dragged
Proverbs 25:26 Q ptc	gives way	gives way	falters	give way	gives way	gives way	trembling
Isa. 24:19 (Ht pf + Q inf. abs.)	shaken	shaken	shaken exceedingly	shaken	reels wildly	be convulsed	shiver and shake
Isa. 40:20, 41:7 N impf 2x	topple , topple	totter, totter	totter, totter	topple , be moved	secure, secure	be unsteady, steady	sturdy
Isa. 54:10 (2x) Q impf 2x	be removed	shake	be removed	be removed	shake, be shaken	be shaken	keep it steady
I Chron. 16:30 N impf	be moved	be moved	be moved	be moved	immovably	be moved	(un-) shakable

CHART B: ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF מוט IN SELECTED PASSAGES (Bold text indicates fall instead of shake)

Version	GWTN	TEV	CEV	ESV	CEB	HCSV
Deut. 32:35 Q pf	will slip	will fall	will slip	shall slip	slips up	will slip
Psalms 13:5 (E4) N impf	been shaken	downfall	am defeated	am shaken	downfall	am shaken
Psalms 15:5 N impf	be shaken	be secure	stand firm	be moved	stumble	be moved
Psalms 16:8 N impf	be moved	shake	(protect me from fear)	be shaken	stumble	be shaken
Psalms 17:5 N pf	slipped	strayed	stumbling	slipped	slipped	slipped
Psalms 46:3,6,7 (E 3,5,6) Q inf, N impf, Q pf	shake, fall, topple	shaken, be destroyed, shaken	shake, be shaken, fall	tremble, be moved, totter,	shake, crumble, crumble	quake, be toppled, topple
Psalms 55:4 (E3) Hi impf	Bring down	bring on	(treat terribly)	drop	bring disaster	bring disaster
Psalms 60:4 (E2) Q ptc	fall apart	fall apart	trembling	totters	shaking apart	shudders
Psalms 82:5 N impf	shake	has disappeared	tremble	are shaken	shake	are shaken
Psalms 93:1 N impf	be moved	be moved	be moved	be moved	be shaken	be shaken
Psalms 94:18 Q ptc	slipping	falling	slipping	slips	slipping	slipping
Psalms 104:5 N impf	shaken	be moved	be shaken	be moved	fall	be shaken
Psalms 125:1 N impf	shaken	be shaken	be shaken	be moved	shaken	be shaken
Psalms 140:11 (E10), N impf	fall	fall	dump	fall	fall	fall
Proverbs 12:3 N impf	be moved	stand firm	be secure	be moved	be disturbed	immovable
Proverbs 24:11 Q ptc	staggering	--	--	stumbling	staggering	stumbling
Proverbs 25:26 Q ptc	gives in	gives in	gives in	gives way	giving in	yields
Isa. 24:19 (Ht pf + Q inf. abs.)	stagger	split open	--	shaken	teetering, tottering	shaken
Isa. 40:20, 41:7 N impf 2x	fall over, won't move	fall, (fasten in place)	fall, fall over	move, be moved	move, move	fall over, fall over
Isa. 54:10 (2x) Q impf 2x	shake, change	(never end)	disappear, won't break	be removed	be shaken	shake, be shaken
I Chron. 16:30 N impf	be moved	be moved	be shaken	be moved	be shaken	be shaken

CHART C: FULL LIST OF USES OF THE VERB מוּט, WITH STEM AND ASPECT NOTES.

(Usages not cited in Chart B are marked with *.)

*Lev. 25:35 Q p	Psalm 104:5 N y
Deut. 32:35 Q y	*Psalm 112:6 N y
I Chron. 16:30 N y	*Psalm 121:3 N i
*Psalm 10:6 N y	Psalm 125:1 N y
Psalm 13:5 (E4) N y	Psalm 140:11 (E10) N y
Psalm 15:5 N y	*Proverbs 10:30 N y
Psalm 16:8 N y	Proverbs 12:3 N y
Psalm 17:5 N p	Proverbs 24:11 Q ptc
*Psalm 21:8 N y	Proverbs 25:26 Q ptc
*Psalm 30:7 N y	Isa. 24:19 (2x) Q i, Ht p
*Psalm 38:17 Q i	Isa. 40:20, 41:7 N y, N y
Psalm 46:3,6,7 (E 3,5,6) Q i, N y,	Isa. 54:10 (2x) Q y, Q y
Q p	*Job 41:15 N y
Psalm 55:4 (E3) Hi y	
Psalm 55:23 Q i	26 in chart B + 14 not in chart B
Psalm 60:4 (E3) Q ptc	=total 40
**Psalm 62:3,7 N y, N y	
*Psalm 66:9 N i!	Q 13 2p 3y 4ptc 4i
Psalm 82:5 N y	N 25 1p 22y 0ptc 2i
Psalm 93:1 N y	Hi 1y
Psalm 94:18 Q ptc	Ht 1p
*Psalm 96:10 N y	

Book Reviews

Briggs, Richard S. *Theological Hermeneutics and the Book of Numbers as Christian Scripture*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. 333 pp. \$55.00 cloth.

Numbers, the fourth of the five books of Moses, is frequently overlooked as a source of theological insight for Christian readers. Richard Briggs, lecturer in Old Testament at Cranmer Hall, St. John's College, Durham University, offers a unique expedition through several key chapters in his exploration of theological hermeneutics. Following the work of Brevard Childs, Briggs finds the canonical text of Numbers to be both informative and formative for Christian theology. While he considers his work a kind of commentary, his approach is unique (even idiosyncratic) in that he does not explicate the text verse-by-verse, but selects sections which become theological foils for his "ascriptive realism" (6), by which he says Christians can approach the text as something more than a mere historical narrative.

Jacques Derrida, Stanley Fish and Henry James are used to introduce chapter one, which seeks to determine the most beneficial way to understand the book of Numbers. Focusing on a short story by James, Briggs chooses the image of a Persian rug, which contain several interlocking figures. He then moves to modern interpretive methods, affirming Child's approach, but then asserts, "The best argument for looking at the book of Numbers as a unit is that it is a traditional one" (23), that is "people took the text of Numbers seriously as sacred scripture" (24). Reviewing several recent commentaries on Numbers, he concludes, "We will need to consider how the reader is shaped by theological commitments" (32).

"Approaches to a Holy Text That Invites Little Approach," is the subtitle of chapter two, "Trust and Suspicion." Here Briggs continues his prolegomena with reference to the modern use of suspicion in literary study. He argues that Jewish readers often used rabbinic sources to ease their suspicion of texts and that, indeed, the book of Numbers is worthy of some suspicion. The contrast, he says, is trust. He states, "If the text is inherently trustworthy, then the interpreter has the task of seeking a way of reading it that allows its voice to emerge in and through its surface features, and to say what it would want its readers to hear" (41). Using the account in Numbers 5 regarding a woman suspected of adultery and then the accounts in Numbers 14, the spies' report, and Numbers 20, Moses striking the rock to bring forth water, Briggs suggests that each should draw the reader into self-examination regarding suspicion and trust and be moved toward faith.

In the next three chapters, Briggs begins what seems to be a more commentary-style exploration of the text of Numbers, highlighting specific verses and commenting on them in context. Chapter three deals with Numbers 10–12 in which Briggs draws out a distinction between reality and history, using ideas reminiscent of Marcus Borg. He distinguishes between descriptive and ascriptive narratives, arguing that the biblical texts are more

ascriptive, yet affirms “that much of what is related in the book of Numbers probably does correspond to some degree or other with events that did happen in the wilderness” (59). In chapter four, Briggs begins with what he calls his “theological reading of the text,” showing by contrast how Karl Barth’s understanding of sloth in Numbers 13–14 imposes Barth’s own dogmatic goals onto the text rather than reading the text as Scripture. In chapter five, Briggs first shows how the legislative material of Numbers 15 has been understood by other commentators, concluding that his theological interpretation only needs to look at “the overarching narrative” (129). He then plunges into the difficult story of Korah’s rebellion in Numbers 16, making his point that a purely descriptive approach is difficult for modern ears to accept and noting how the New Testament book of Hebrews views these narratives.

The only chapter which actually emphasizes a Christian (that is, Christocentric) reading of Numbers is chapter six, “The Rock Was Christ.” Briefly surveying the text of Numbers 20:1–13, Briggs moves quickly to his theological approach, which “seeks to relate the claims of the text in some manner to the claims of (or for or about) Christ” (168). Thus, he cites “1 Corinthians 10 as an exemplar of a critical theological hermeneutic in practice” (169). A Christian reading of a text will “find Christ,” to use Luther’s noteworthy phrase. As Briggs notes, “Paul reads Numbers literally. As long as it is understood that ‘literal sense’ is not here in this traditional way. In this ascriptive sense the rock is ‘literally’ Christ...” (183).

Returning to the commentary-style approach, Briggs’ second-to-last chapter looks at Numbers 25, the account of a plague among the Israelites because of sexual encounters with Moabite women. The priest, Phineas, reacts with zealous aggression, killing the couple in their tent and stopping the plague. After looking at the textual material, Briggs reviews recent studies which vary among laments over violence, commending such zealousness, and disgust with the sexualization as expressed by feminist readers, pointing out that “the interpretive framing and questions are always from a specific vantage point or perspective” (210). He concludes, “Readers are forced to engage with the politics of hermeneutics” (220).

Although he claims to draw his thesis together in the last chapter, Briggs engages in another foray of sorts, drawing upon Numbers 6, 22–24, and 33, as exemplars of his “theological and hermeneutical engagement with (Christian) scripture” (224). Regarding the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6, he finds Luther’s appropriate use of it in the eucharistic liturgy as invoking God’s presence upon the people and then asks “why the practice of enjoining such blessings upon Christian worshipers would be frowned upon by Christians” (229). In the Balak-Balaam account in Numbers 22–24, Briggs again provides a variety of interpretations, finally affirming that “the word of God is neither defeated nor distorted, and cannot be co-opted to human ends” (240). Following Origen and Henri de Lubac, Briggs sees a helpful way to

apply the text to contemporary situations—as homiletical material for our Christian journey.

My own assessment of this work is somewhat undecided and imprecise, particularly because there are so many avenues by which to critique the work. Brigg’s writing style is winsome and easy to follow. His thesis is quite clear, yet the diversity of his chapters (each could be self-contained) and the variety of sub-methods he employs is disconcerting. He uses some historical-critical tools, yet dismisses them as being pointless on other occasions. He admires modern scholarship, yet advocates returning to pre-modern approaches. Although somewhat frustrating, I found the work to be enlightening, engaging, and informative overall. Certainly, it is worth reading in light of the lack of significant commentaries on the book of Numbers. The work provides a fresh look at important biblical passages and wrestles with ways to apply God’s Word to contemporary situations.

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Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. 522 pp. \$39.99 hardcover.

Some people would assert that loss of respect for the law and the failure to teach time-tested religious ethical standards in schools could be some of the reasons explaining the rise of immorality and the loss of civility in contemporary western culture. Therefore, it is vital that educational institutions of all levels offer classes in ethics, but teaching ethics from a biblical perspective is often met with skepticism by students, parents, or faculty, even in Christian institutions of higher education. Scott Rae, professor of Christian ethics and dean of faculty at the Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, has written *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics* to address this predicament.

This textbook is organized topically into sixteen chapters. The first four chapters cover the basics: why morality matters, ethical theories, the basics of Christian ethics, and ethical decision making. The next four chapters delve into issues involving life at the margins such as abortion, contraception, stem cell research, genetics, cloning, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, and withdrawing treatments at the end of life. The last eight chapters cover various ethical issues in no particular order: capital punishment, war, sexual ethics, environmentalism, the ethics of work, violence and gun control, race, gender, and diversity, and immigration issues. The back of the book has twenty-four pages of footnotes, a Scripture index, and a general index.

A companion DVD has sixteen 30-minute discussions matching topics in each chapter of the book. These short videos are suitable for showing in class. Key

words or concepts are highlighted on the screen as they are being discussed. On the Zondervan Academic website, students can access companion materials. They include five-minute videos and “flash cards” of terms from each chapter. Instructors can register to receive teaching resources that include convenient PowerPoint slides and an instructor’s manual having helpful chapter summaries, learning objectives, and a bank of test questions.

Moral Choices has many strengths. Scott Rae begins by making the case for a transcendent, objective, and universal moral law, in contrast to contemporary society’s appeal to ethical relativism. The core assumption of Rae’s ethical teaching is that “the *ultimate* source for morality is not God’s commands but God’s character” (68, emphasis his). I agree with Rae that “at its heart, Christian ethics is a blend of both virtues and principles” (68). He is an unapologetic proponent of the sanctity of human life and the traditional one-man, one-women marriage. While these hot-button topics are sometimes difficult to discuss in the classroom, Rae writes and presents those topics in a winsome way which should not give offense to those students who might have competing views. Rae has a lucid writing style, but he does not hesitate to dive into complex philosophical concepts (e.g., “The Ring of Gyges” and the Euthyphro dilemma). The text is replete with biblical passages and textboxes that highlight chapter themes with real-world cases or biographical material. He does highlight the work of Martin Luther (77–78). Summaries of what was discussed, review questions, suggestions for further reading, and cases for class discussion appear the end of the chapters. As an added bonus, *Moral Choices* is extremely affordable as compared to other ethics texts.

Now for some of the weaknesses of *Moral Choices*. Since Rae is an evangelical, he emphasizes the sovereignty of God rather than the Theology of the Cross. Rae founds normative ethics on God’s character “as clarified by Jesus” (68), but he might have been more intentional about grounding Christian ethics on the person and work of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. Rae does briefly mention vocation but only in passing, and it is not listed in the index. While Christian ethics is properly founded on law and gospel, Rae does not emphasize that the chief motivation for moral behavior is the gospel. As many ethics textbooks do, he conflates teleology with consequentialism (40), but classical teleology, as seen in the Roman Catholic tradition as developed by Thomas Aquinas, has a *telos*, i.e., a goal or purpose, for our lives and imposes limits to moral behavior, whereas consequentialist ethical theories like utilitarianism and egoism do not. For teaching purposes, it would be helpful to have the chapters organized as units, e.g., introduction to ethics, biblical themes, the edges of life, the callings of the Christian, and societal issues. The classical Principles of Biomedical Ethics (autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice) are mentioned only in passing. While they have limited use in ethical decision making and character formation, health care students need to be aware of them since almost all secular ethical discussions in today’s medicine use that terminology. I found the videos quite helpful, but they would not be suitable to show at every class session. While the content is

very good, the videos consist of short presentations by Rae, which are rather dry and could stand to be improved with images and other visual content. Another shortcoming of the DVD lectures is that they sometimes refer to chapter and page numbers that match older editions of the text, which can be confusing.

I recently adopted *Moral Choices* for a Christian Ethics course, and, so far, I am glad I did. I got a sense that students *did* read the book (in contrast to other textbooks I had used in the past). While Lutheran instructors will find the need to explain some textbook content in light of confessional teaching and make some tweaks to the PowerPoint slides, much of the content can be used as is. Scott Rae is an unabashed advocate for the dignity of the human person from conception until temporal death. He does not apologize for applying normative biblical principles. The textbook is most suitable for a university setting, but it could also be used in upper-level high school courses and even for an in-depth Bible class series about Christian ethics. Rae presents biblical ethical principles in a straightforward way so that instructors with a minimal amount of theological and/or philosophical training can teach ethics competently.

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Prior, Karen Swallow. *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018. Hardcover. 267 pages. \$19.99.

Literature is a powerful medium for communicating moral and spiritual truths. The subtitle of this book points to a Christian understanding of “the Good” by means of Christian virtues. In twelve chapters, Prior, an acclaimed author and prolific English professor at Liberty University, illustrates and illuminates the four cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, and courage), the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity/love), and the five heavenly virtues (chastity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility) using, as she states, “works of enduring quality, notable for their form as well as their content” (10). She asserts in her introduction, “Reading literature, more than informing us, forms us” (22).

According to Prior, “reading well is, in itself, an act of virtue, or excellence, and it is also a habit that cultivates more virtue in return.... Reading virtuously means, first, reading closely, being faithful to both text and context, interpreting accurately and insightfully. Indeed, there is something in the very form of reading—the shape of the action itself—that tends toward virtue” (15). Her advice is simple, yet remarkably profound: “Read books you enjoy, develop your ability to enjoy challenging reading, read deeply and

slowly, and increase your enjoyment of a book by writing words of your own in it” (18). With such guiding principles, she explores the characters (flawed and/or faultless) in twelve stories by Henry Fielding, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Shusaku Endo, Cormac McCarthy, Leo Tolstoy, Edith Wharton, John Bunyan, Jane Austen, George Sanders, and Flannery O’Connor, offering insights and observations on a specific virtue as well as etymological facts, quotations from classical authors, and refreshingly personal reflections.

No one chapter stands out, since they are all well-constructed and, indeed, worthy of comment. For this review, I will allow Prior to draw you in to her magnificent manuscript as she extols the three theological virtues. Using Shusaku Endo’s, *Silence*, as her foil, Prior writes: “To read about an experience of faith as it falters is an opportunity to seek resolution not in the work of fiction but in the work of our own faith” (108). Citing Luther about faith being a gift, she concludes: “We can grow in faith only when we recognize that our faith is imperfect. Our faith is perfected only in Christ, not in ourselves or our understanding” (119). In defining hope, Prior says, “The four conditions of hope are that it regards something *good* in the *future* that is *difficult* but *possible* to obtain” (121). Regarding the virtue of charity/love, she asserts, “How we die will depend on how we live and how we love, as *The Death of Ivan Ilych* helps us see. Its vision of charity—love given and received—is the image of the servant who, by tending the feet of others, bears their suffering” (156). Each chapter has nuggets of insights and provides many opportunities for biblical and sermonic illustrations.

This book is wonderfully written and intentionally beneficial. As a gifted writer herself, Prior engages the reader as she brings in a depth of well-researched background information. My only frustration was with the subtitle, which led me to assume that Prior would be utilizing one of lists of the “Great Books” tradition (between Mortimer Adler’s 500 and Harold Brown’s 2,000). In fact, she only included a few (*Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby*, and author Jane Austen). While not quite what I expected, the selections provided a wealth of illustrations of contemporary significance, worthy of being read again and again, which dealt with great ideas and issues (three criteria for a great book as proposed by Mortimer Adler).

Judicious reading is a joyous experience, especially with a guide such as Kathy Prior. From a Christian perspective, Prior does not force theology into her work, but draws theological insights from the texts themselves as noted above. This work has much to offer, especially for readers who desire to see value in fiction as avenues for growing spiritually. Each chapter is self-contained, yet the overall read is uplifting and even at times devotional. This is the kind of book that encourages reading good literature which also has real value for the Christian’s daily duties and delights. Students of theology will be amazed at and benefit from the approach Prior takes in reading “secular” literature. Pastors who love reading and preaching will find a

wealth of ideas for homiletic illustrations, too. It's time to take up one of those books, now, and read well.

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McKnight, Scot. *It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says About Infant Baptism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018. 128 pages. \$16.99 paperback.

Addressing the perennial topic of infant baptism (in the last decade or so, several books have addressed the subject), Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois, brings a unique perspective on the issue. Raised in the Anabaptist tradition, he “converted” to Anglicanism and was ordained as a priest in the Anglican Communion in 2014. He is a popular speaker, blogger, and writer, employing a very comfortable writing style on this important theological issue.

Noting his own “conversion,” Bishop Todd D. Hunter’s *Foreword* sets the tone for this short, very readable book. Hunter was also evangelically trained and questioned (even disavowed) baptism as regenerative (baptized as a Methodist, he was rebaptized as a leader of the Vineyard Movement). His conclusion, after studying the subject more carefully, is that infant baptism is theologically, biblically, historically, and personally the most credible position a committed Christian can take (xi). The endorses McKnight’s book, which McKnight admits is designed “for those who are considering infant baptism in the Anglican Communion” (15).

Giving a brief introductory *Preface*, McKnight launches into his presentation with his chapter: “Our Baptism: First Six Words.” The key words are family, Bible, gospel, conversion, debate, and heritage. Here Lutheran readers will already pause, since we would most likely look at Jesus’ invitation (John 3 and Matthew 28) as well as His promises. Regarding family, he states: “infant baptism is the deepest, wisest, and most historic Christian way of forming our children into the faith” (3) Admitting that “there is no text in the New Testament that explicitly reveals the *practice* of infant baptism in the apostolic church” (4), he does affirm that implicitly “a *theology* for infant baptism is to be found” (5) there (citing Acts 2:38 [although he misses v. 39]; Galatians 3:27; and 1 Peter 3:21).

Leaning heavily on these six words, McKnight delves into the Anglican context of baptism. Following the Anglican baptismal liturgy from the *Book of Common Prayer*, McKnight shows its biblical connections. He emphasizes the family context for baptism and its covenantal significance. Although this approach is not completely convincing, he does make some interesting points about our contemporary American individualism as well as a helpful analogy to citizenship: “one’s citizenship was established at birth by an act of

Congress. So with infant baptism: it is granted by God's grace..." (28). McKnight has a process-perspective of baptism and conversion as he speaks of "a journey into spiritual maturity [which] begins at baptism" (28). Relying on a cleverly titled book by Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith*, McKnight underscores the creedal aspects of the baptismal liturgy, noting that "totally absent is anything about what we can do or have done" (42). He concludes that chapter by saying, "The work of Christ in which the infant is baptized is what brings redemption" (46).

In two key chapters, McKnight opens the biblical perspective on infant baptism. This is undeniably the strongest and most helpful chapters in the book. He begins chapter 4 by saying, "As a Bible professor, I believe our theology and our practice ought to be established by the Bible" (47), an approach I wish he had used to structure this book. He sets out three major themes: union with Christ, Spirit and church reception, and redemption. Curiously, he begins with Romans 10:9-10, but then goes to Matthew 28 and Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; and 19:5, followed by Romans 6:1-14 and Colossians 2:6-15, concluding that "Baptism is an act in which God brings us into union with Christ and all the blessings Christ has accomplished" (53). He returns to several more biblical texts (again Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 6:4-8; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21), but for some reason omits John 3. He ends this chapter with "five major terms...defining what happens at baptism for our redemption: sign, seal, symbol, sacrament, and seed" (58), but misses many of the promises Lutherans associate with baptism. In chapter 5, McKnight explores in more detail his biblical understanding of the importance of infant baptism through a study of "household" (65-71) in Acts and early Christian authors. He continues with an emphasis on covenant theology as related to circumcision and baptism.

Concluding his presentation with a return to the Anglican liturgy, McKnight describes "The Act of Baptism" (chapter 6) and his own personal testimony (chapter 7). These shorter chapters cover the actual act of baptizing, which McKnight sees as symbolically important: "The Bible's emphasis is a whole-body spirituality and a whole-creation redemption and a building-based, utensil-shaped, and ritual-ordered worship in the temple" (87). Referring to Peter's connection of baptism to Noah, McKnight is apparently unaware of Martin Luther's "Flood Prayer," only referencing the *Book of Common Prayer's* prayer. Affirming that *baptizein* does not require immersion (90), McKnight does appreciate the practice of the use of oil for chrismation (92). His concluding "personal testimony" includes an unfortunate quote from two Anglican theologians (Stott and Motyer) regarding baptism that "the reception of the sign, although it entitles them to the gift, does not confer the gift to them" (103). This seems to be a denial of baptisms regenerative power (in Titus 3). The book ends with an *Afterword* by Gerald McDermott, who was a Baptist, but also came to Anglicanism. McDermott draws on John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 as support for his "conversion" to belief in infant baptism.

Anglicanism is a self-proclaimed middle-of-the-road denomination (xi). The biblical material in this book is fairly good, but the major concern I have with McKnight's understanding of baptism is that he sees conversion as a process. Already in chapter one, he says "Infant baptism is the first public step in nurturing our children in the faith" (1). Shortly thereafter he patently states, "Conversion is a process, and it begins when the infant is baptized" (12). This theme is woven throughout the book, which weakens the fact that baptism creates the faith it requires (Titus 3:5-6). His emphasis on the liturgy also limits this book's usefulness for non-Anglicans.

Noting these concerns, I still found this book helpful, although not totally satisfying due to the liturgical context (the family of faith) receiving more press than the biblical truths and the numerous promises associated with baptism. My preference for helpful and apologetic works on infant baptism are Uuras Saarnivaara's *Scriptural Baptism: A Dialogue Between John Bapstead and Martin Childfont* (Wipf and Stock, 2003), Joachim Jeremias's two careful studies, Andrew Das's *Baptized into God's Family* (Northwestern, 1997) and Gaylin Schmeling (Northwestern, 1999). While McKnight has done a fine job for Anglicans, a Lutheran approach emphasizes the action and promises of God above all else.

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