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NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN: BIBLICAL SYNTHESIS WITH GENERATIVE AI

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Introduction

Imagine a tool that can create computer code, generate novel images, and synthesize disparate data into meaningful information. This tool could also perform tedious tasks within a fraction of the time, format information with little user effort, and craft meaningful and persuasive output. As you imagine this unicorn tool, do you also feel some uneasiness? Perhaps even fear as to what may be lost using this tool?

The tool is real. It is no longer a unicorn. Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI or AI) is here and already in practical use. “47% of respondents invested in Gen AI for customer-facing functions, such as sales, marketing and customer service. IT functions were also a common area where generative AI investments take place, which includes software development, infrastructure and operations.”¹ John Burke (CTO at Nemertes, an emerging technology analysis company) also notes other areas of AI use, including entertainment and pharmaceuticals.

The tool is real, and the fear is profound, especially among those identifying as Christians. Barna Group reports Christians are 11% less likely to view AI as positive tool and 57% do not perceive AI as good for the church.² Beyond general apprehension about Gen AI in church, there are concerns about the impact on theology and Christianity. Jason Thacker, MDiv and expert on AI within the Southern Baptist Convention, concurs and notes, “While the benefits of AI are many, the threat to human dignity is real and must be addressed by thoughtful Christians.”³ Jake Doberenz, Master ThM, is aware of the felt trepidation, and recommends we take a spiritual tact when approaching the subject. “Some of those who doubt any legitimate use

¹ John Burke, “Successful Generative AI Examples and Tools Worth Noting,” Enterprise AI (TechTarget, October 20, 2023), <https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/tip/Successful-generative-AI-examples-worth-noting>.

² “How U.S. Christians Feel about AI & the Church,” Barna Group, November 8, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-ai-church/>.

³ Jason Thacker, *The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 30.

of artificial intelligence in business, life, or ministry are probably sitting in the pews at your church. Theologically considering technologies from a Christian perspective is thus crucial.”⁴ Doberenz has served as a minister and his company, Theophany Media, has a specialty in helping outreach through novel media.

This paper will demonstrate that Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI or AI) tools are useful for studying the Bible, accelerating understanding, and synthesizing new perspectives when the limitations of Gen AI are understood, and the user has the skills and knowledge necessary to interact with the system. Firstly, we will at a general (and non-technical) level understand what Gen AI is and does. It is important that we also review standard exegetical approaches to God’s word to ensure a solid foundation. Our journey will take us to the limitations of Artificial Intelligence, including experiments and results. Once the limitations are understood we can assess the user’s responsibilities, both practical and spiritual, when leveraging AI systems. Finally, we address the question, when and how is Gen AI useful as a tool for supporting and /or developing our Christian faith and how can it better amplify us as image bearers of the Creator? We will see that the challenges we face with Generative AI are as Ecclesiastes 1:9 (CSB) reads, “nothing new under the sun.”

What is AI?

Generative AI is comprised of components which allow the system to output novel content. The components consist of training input (data and user feedback), algorithms (Large Language Models or LLMs) which connect words, phrases, and concepts, and a Natural Language Processing (NLP) to provide meaningful human dialogue.⁵ Unfortunately, the definition of what AI is, alone, is not helpful. What does it do? And how does it do it? is a better approach. AI takes the user question or observation or request into a prompt in human understandable language. The system then runs the prompt through its backend processes, matching and mapping what the user input to what is known in the data. The mapping is more than simple if-then-else logic, the mapping is dynamic and fuzzy (not rigidly set) and allows for innovative synthesis of data. It then fulfills the request with a human readable output. The dataset or training material can be anything, including the Bible, commentaries, writings of theologians, and many

⁴ Jake Doberenz, *AI in Church and Ministry: Applications of Artificial Intelligence* (Theophany Media, 2024), 24.

⁵ “Glossary of Terms: Generative AI Basics,” *MIT Sloan Teaching & Learning Technologies*, August 30, 2023, <https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/glossary/>.

of the other sources often used by Christians. The output can be fresh comparisons and contrasts, tables of adjoining information, pattern identification, and even pictures. “In general, generative AI operates in three phases: Training, to create a foundation model. Tuning, to adapt the model to a specific application. Generation, evaluation and more tuning, to improve accuracy.”⁶

Limitations of Generative AI

Generative AI is not without issues. Because it requires outside input (training and tuning) it is susceptible to the influence of what it is fed. If the beginning data (training) has bias or inaccuracies, the system will likely output bias⁷ ⁸ and erroneous feedback. If the training or tuning contains ambiguous connections in its language model, the system may return suspect information or hallucinate.⁹ Let’s explore the betrothal type scene as written by Robert Alter, Emeritus Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at UC Berkley. When prompting Copilot with, “Provide two examples each of the betrothal type scene¹⁰ in the Apocrypha and the New Testament.” (using the Creative setting on a personal account with no plugins) the system responded with Tobit, 7:9-14 (missing the necessary well or water component for a betrothal scene), Judith 8:2-8 (not a type scene), Matthew 1:18-25 (annunciation of a hero type scene, but not betrothal), and John 4:7-26 (correctly identified as a betrothal type scene).¹¹ Thus, the responses range from correct to containing some elements of right to wrong.

Bias can also create limitations in AI responses. When Copilot is prompted with, “Tell me how immersion is part of the salvation process in the bible.”, the responses were about symbolism, public

⁶ “What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?,” *Ibm.com*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.ibm.com/topics/artificial-intelligence>.

⁷ Amy Kraft, “Microsoft Shuts down AI Chatbot after It Turned into a Nazi,” *CBS News*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/microsoft-shuts-down-ai-chatbot-after-it-turned-into-racist-nazi/>.

⁸ Cindy Gordon, “Google Pauses Gemini AI Model after Latest Debacle,” *Forbes*, February 29, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cindygordon/2024/02/29/google-latest-debacle-has-paused-gemini-ai-model/>.

⁹ “Glossary of Terms: Generative AI Basics,” *MIT Sloan Teaching & Learning Technologies*, August 30, 2023, <https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/glossary/>.

¹⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (London, England: Basic Books, 2011), 77.

¹¹ Text generated by *CoPilot*, *Microsoft*, September 14, 2024, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>.

declaration of faith, and obedience.¹² As an aside, it mentioned that some groups consider baptism necessary. The three listed sources for the response included two Calvinist sources and one Catholic origin. My prompt was itself biased (assuming baptism was part of the salvation process) and the sources cited referred more to commentators than the Bible. Whether you believe immersion is merely a symbol or effective component of the salvation process, the AI response requires unpacking and is not complete or exhaustive.

When attempting to, “Map the chiastic structure of the sermon on the mount.”, Copilot responded with an image of a map. The second time it was prompted it showed an image of a man on a hill speaking to a crowd. The response was detached from the prompt’s intended subject. I changed the prompt to remove the word, “map,” to “I want the literary structure of the sermon on the mount. Identify any chiastic sections.” The response was reasonable and showed some of the chiastic structure in the sermon on the mount.¹³

The questions used as prompts above and the ability to discern accuracy require the user to practice responsible exegetical processes. The limitations of Generative AI are often sourced from the users’ limitations. The power of Generative AI is wielded by those users who are disciplined in understanding what the original author and audience would have intended and understood, respectively.¹⁴

Exegetical Concerns

Each genre within the inspired word of God demands a distinct approach. The Bible was not written in a vacuum, nor do we read the Bible in a vacuum. *Sola Scriptura* requires more than *sola scriptura*. To interpret the scriptures we must consider context, both internal and external. The reader should diligently answer questions about who wrote the piece, who was the intended audience, when was it written, where did it take place, where was it written, and why was it written (the occasion). Finally, a keen analysis of the structures of the text will also help determine meaning.¹⁵

Unless the user of and AI system understands principles of interpreting scripture, she will not understand or be able to vet the output. Even the prompts (questions asked to the AI system) may be

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Text generated by CoPilot, Microsoft, September 14, 2024, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>.

¹⁴ Douglas Stuart and Gordon D. Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Fourth Edition* (Kentwood, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 21.

¹⁵ Ibid. 24.

dubious. When Gemini was prompted with, “Why do Genesis 24 and Genesis 29 repeat the same story?”, the (abbreviated) response follows.

There is a common misconception that Genesis 24 and 29 tell the same story. While both chapters involve marriages arranged by parents and the meeting of a potential spouse, they are distinct narratives with different characters and settings.

It's possible that the similarity in the general theme of arranged marriages and the meeting of a future spouse might have led to confusion. However, a careful reading of both chapters reveals their unique details and contributions to the overall biblical narrative.¹⁶

The prompt assumes Genesis 24 and Genesis 29 repeat the same story (they do not) and AI calls out each account as distinct. However, the source of the distinction provided by Gemini leans on arranged marriages. The plain interpretation indicates neither of the marriages were arranged, but the potential spouses were unknown. This could not be the source of commonality between the scenes.

If the user applies exegetical analysis to the two passages, they will know that the similarities are intentional and serve a purpose. The intention is to leverage a common story (betrothal scene¹⁷) to highlight distinct arcs for each character and their role in the larger covenant story. Thus, the informed user would use a prompt that incorporates this known interpretive process and question the response given above.

Gen AI User Responsibility: Thoughtful and Diligent Prompts

We have established the nature of Gen AI limitations. We also know that the user has responsibilities when operating the system. How do we synthesize limitations and responsibilities into a recipe for successful Gen AI usage? Artificial Intelligence data deficiencies can be mitigated by a diligent user who knows her subject (in this case, the Bible and information pertinent to biblical studies), who practices inputting informed prompts (questions to the system), and is able to elicit the underlying sources from the system (if not given voluntarily).

Knowing the Bible and how to wield it correctly when discerning the relevance of data is important in validating good AI responses, rejecting incorrect responses, and digging deeper on complex subjects. Using Genesis chapters 1-11 as an example, Meta AI

¹⁶ Text generated by, *Gemini, Google*, September 22, 2024, <https://gemini.google.com/app/>.

¹⁷ Robert Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 79-85.

responds to the following prompt, “Create a short summary of Genesis 1-11. Put the response in a paragraph.” with the following.

Here's a brief summary of Genesis 1-11:

Genesis 1-11 recounts the creation of the world and humanity's early history. God creates the world and the first humans, Adam and Eve, in six days, resting on the seventh day to establish the Sabbath. However, Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden introduces sin, leading to their expulsion. The early descendants of Adam, including Cain and Abel, continue the narrative, marked by violence and corruption. God responds by destroying the wicked world with a flood, saving only Noah's family and two of every animal, and establishing a covenant with Noah. After the flood, the narrative describes the table of nations, tracing the descendants of Noah's sons, and humanity's attempt to build the Tower of Babel, resulting in God confusing languages and scattering humanity. This foundational section introduces themes of creation, sin, redemption, and God's relationship with humanity, setting the stage for the rest of the Bible.¹⁸

The response is generally accurate. The Bible student may proceed to research a comparative analysis of the Genesis account of the flood with the ancient Mesopotamian creation and flood stories, looking for how they intersect as well as their distinctions. The reader's own understanding is not set aside when using Gen AI but is leveraged for deeper queries and more synthesized results.

Relatively few Bible readers are familiar with the world of the ancient Near East, centered in Mesopotamia and its most prominent city, Babylon. Egypt is crucial too, as this is where the Hebrews spent several centuries leading up to the Exodus. Lack of knowledge of the ancient world is unfortunate, because all too often it leaves the primeval narrative as a collection of Sunday school stories. What is lost is an awareness of the radical nature of the Genesis writer's retelling of the background narrative.¹⁹

¹⁸ Text generated by Meta AI, Meta AI, October 5, 2024, <https://www.meta.ai/>.

¹⁹ Paul Copan and Douglas Jacoby, *Origins: The Ancient Impact and Modern Implications of Genesis 1-11* (Newport News, VA: Morgan James Faith, 2019), 12.

Creating a synthesized result in AI will require a crafted prompt to produce an easily consumed and accurate output. The prompt follows.

Create a table of comparisons and contrasts of Genesis 1-11 creation and flood accounts with other ancient Mesopotamian sources. Sources will be the column headers. Each row will be an attribute compared and contrasted. Include source locations (chapter and verse) for each document's attribute. Include why some attributes are similar or different. Combine the Epic of Gilgamesh and Atra-Khasis into one column. Do not include the Sumerian King list. Focus on the following attributes: Creator Deity, Seven-Day Creation, First Humans, Human Purpose, and Flood Cause.²⁰

Note that the prompt requires the user to engage in the subject and not abdicate research to the AI system. The prompt also guides the system to address specific observations from the user and neatly display them. The specificity of the request also forced the system to provide sources.

Spiritual Considerations of Using Gen AI in Bible Study

The Bible is more than a collection of individual stories, scrolls, letters, and writings. The BibleProject summarizes one of the major threads in scriptures, ““The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.” And this isn’t just what we believe at BibleProject, it also describes a robust paradigm for how we engage with Scripture.”²¹ We engage with the word of God to connect stories as parts of a greater whole. Bible study is more than informational or academic, it is relational. We must know the source of the scriptures (1 Tim 3:16) and internalize (Heb 4:12) what we read. The exercise of engaging directly with the Bible (Rom 10:17) is part of our faith journey. Overreliance on Gen AI may short circuit the process.

Gen 1:27 tells us that we are made in God’s image. Humans have a unique relationship with YHWH. Our connection with Him is more than knowing about Him; it is knowing Him and growing into the image He intended for us (Rom 8:24-25). As we hear and read the words of the Bible, it stirs God’s image within us (1 John 1:1-4) and we are drawn more into community with one another and the trinity. Caution should be applied if we introduce an intermediary between

²⁰ The response is in Appendix A due to length and to preserve source system formatting for demonstration.

²¹ “About,” Bibleproject.com, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://bibleproject.com/about/>.

scripture and our reading. Gen AI, if used without consideration, could become that indiscriminate intermediary.

Another consideration in using the Bible for spiritual development are the disciplines of meditation²² and study.²³ Meditation scriptures call on the reader to internalize, reflect, and find joy in God’s commands and presence. Meditation is an internal and personal process. It drives intrinsic motivation. The outcome of realization from meditation is personal joy and YHWH’s pleasure. Study, similarly, has a personal component. When we dive into the scriptures and immerse ourselves in the stories and accounts, we should come away changed, ready for action, and grateful. The Bible shares the relational expectations of The Creator which are the impetus for our growth. There is a risk of circumventing these intimate relational disciplines by leveraging Generative AI and missing the richness found in quiet consideration of God’s message.

As meditation and study impact our vertical relationship with deity, so do the disciplines of mentorship and spiritual guidance impact our horizontal relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ. Mt 28:19-20 commands us to teach others (and by implication, we too should be taught) to obey Christ’s commands. Spiritual counselors and fellowship in life are the patterns of the New Testament. Horizontal relationships are essential for spiritual growth. Gen AI can emulate, but not replace those relationships. Caution is appropriate if we substitute human relationships with AI responses.

Here's a table of some Seleucid rulers and their corresponding high priests, ordered by the earliest to latest dates:

Seleucid Ruler	Reign	High Priest	Appointment Year
Antiochus IV Epiphanes	175–164 BCE	Onias III	175 BCE
Demetrius I Soter	161–150 BCE	Simon the Just	142 BCE
Alexander Balas	150–145 BCE	Jonathan Apphus	153 BCE
Demetrius II Nicator	145–138 BCE	Shimon II	141 BCE
Antiochus VII Sidetes	138–129 BCE	Onias IV	175 BCE
Demetrius II Nicator	129–125 BCE	Shimon III	141 BCE
Alexander Zabinas	129–123 BCE	Jason	175 BCE

I hope this helps! Is there anything else you'd like to know about the Seleucid Empire or its rulers?

Figure 1: Text Output Generated by CoPilot, Microsoft, October 26, 2024, <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>.

²² Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-2, Psalm 119:15-16, Psalm 119:97, Psalm 143:5, Psalm 19:14, Philippians 4:8
²³ Psalm 119:105, Psalm 119:11, 2 Timothy 2:15, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22-25, Proverbs 4:20-22

Advantages and Use Cases of Gen AI in Bible Study

Despite the previously identified risks associated with using Gen AI, there are also great benefits. If AI is a tool, then it is the user’s responsibility to know when to use the tool. The use cases below grow in efficacy in relation to the user’s knowledge and arguably, wisdom. Often the student of the Bible has a grasp of related information but needs it to be easily consumed and visually comprehended. Gen AI provides an easy way to create tables and outlines with comparative and contrasting ideas. It can also produce the output per the user’s (human understandable) language and does not require knowledge of other applications or complex data systems. AI will fill the gap between the prompter’s technical deficiencies and more complex requests and descriptions. We will prompt CoPilot with the following. “Create a table of Seleucid rulers and the corresponding high priest. Include dates of the rulers' reigns and high priests' appointment year. Order by earliest to latest date.” The response is captured in the Figure 1. Visually, the table provides an easy way to correlate the Seleucid ruler and which high priest(s) they appointed and worked with, providing insight into the spiritual and secular leadership of Israel during the late Intertestamental Period.

Gen AI also allows for easier topic and synthesized searches. Manually stitching topic searches can be tedious and time consuming. Using simple prompts can accelerate creating lists of scriptures for thematic investigation. For example, when prompting CoPilot, “Create a short list (5 items) on the topic of the red heifer in the Bible. Include the scripture, significance of the reference and possible symbolism.”, it returns a list that not only captures the words red heifer, but also the concept (Heb:13-14).²⁴ We can also more readily synthesize seemingly disparate ideas into a cohesive set of thoughts. “Create a table of intersections of the concept of the scapegoat, Israel, and Jesus, noting the reference scripture. Include comparisons and contrasts. Add the juxtaposition of the wilderness component to the analysis.” The output follows.

Concept	Scapegoat	Israel	Jesus
Reference Scripture	Leviticus 16:8-10, 21-22	Isaiah 43:1-4, Hosea 11:1	Isaiah 53:4-6, Matthew 27:32-34
Comparison	Both the	Israel was chosen by	Both the scapegoat

²⁴ See Appendix B for text.

	scapegoat and Jesus were designated to bear the sins of others.	God to be His people, a role with both privilege and responsibility, similar to Jesus' role as the Messiah.	and Jesus experienced rejection and suffering.
Contrast	The scapegoat was sent away to die, while Jesus' sacrifice was voluntary and led to resurrection.	Israel often failed to live up to God's expectations, while Jesus perfectly fulfilled His role.	The scapegoat's fate was permanent, while Jesus' sacrifice brought about eternal redemption.
Wilderness Component	The scapegoat was sent into the wilderness, symbolizing a place of isolation and desolation.	Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, a period of testing and purification.	Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan, foreshadowing His ultimate sacrifice. ²⁵

Another creative use for Generative AI is using it to interpret the Bible and spiritual subjects through lenses other than our own. Joshua Lindsey, professor at Master's Baptist College, demonstrates using AI to emulate discussions with various denominational ministers.²⁶ The results allow a more natural conversational style to research from another perspective. Configuring Gen AI to debate topics is another way to explore different thought patterns. Jon Oleksiuk (online producer and director) has produced several videos pitting one AI instance against another AI instance in traditional theological and biblical debates,²⁷ thus exposing the viewer to classical arguments with logic *sans* emotion.

Conclusion(s)

As already mentioned, the challenges with Gen AI are no different than other disruptive technologies; “there is nothing new

²⁵ Text generated by Gemini, Google, October 26, 2024, <https://gemini.google.com>.

²⁶ Joshua Lindsey, "Artificial Intelligence Attempts to Imitate Ministers," Ready to Harvest, April 25, 2024, video, 27:04, https://youtu.be/YpU_0IWW7xw?si=r3-5Olr6n3ce9ZF7.

²⁷ Jon Oleksiuk, *Jesus Is God? AI Debates Christian vs. Muslim* (YouTube, 2024), <https://youtu.be/GOOgHN24WcQ?si=FxJP2xVsOBDJpu5X>

under the sun.”²⁸ Thacker reminds us, “Technology is a tool that helps us live out our God-given callings. This is one of the most important things for us to learn as we engage the topic of technology and artificial intelligence.”²⁹ What other tools and technologies have shaped how we study and engage with the Word of God? What challenges has mankind had with previous innovations? The discussion turns now to how people have navigated the printing press, commentaries, and even the public delivery of God’s word.

The Bereans model conscientious engagement with the scriptures. Acts 17:11 (CSB) reads, “The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” The people of Berea took time to verify what was preached by Paul and company. Regardless of the source, whether Gen AI or Paul the Apostle publicly preaching, the message receiver has a responsibility to test and verify what is said or written from the Bible. The Bereans also did not allow Paul to become an intermediary between them and the scriptures. They were eager to directly engage with the text. If Paul’s message called for scrutiny and direct interaction with the Word of God, then Gen AI demands the same.

Commentaries on scripture have existed for centuries. These written perspectives and opinions on the Bible by men are helpful tools that many Christians often leverage. Before using a commentary, the reader should read the scripture, become familiar with the context and background, pray, and engage the scripture. Gen AI can also generate commentary, and the same best practices apply. The reader of the commentary and the user of an AI system have the same burden of responsibility to be informed. If one reads a Scofield Reference Bible, she should know that the commentary has a heavy bias toward young earth creationism, dispensationalism, and premillennialism. Similarly, using AI requires the user to have domain knowledge to understand the bias of generated answers.

The printing press was a disruptive technology allowing mass production of written works. This technology could also propagate errors more rapidly and with broader reach than scribed documents. In 1631, a King James Bible reprint by Barker and Lucas, was released. It became known (among other names) as the Sinners Bible, because of a mistype in Exodus 20:14 which changed a prohibition on adultery to a command for infidelity.³⁰ Gen AI also makes mistakes. However, just

²⁸ Ecclesiastes 1:19 (CSB)

²⁹ Thacker, *Age of AI*, 20.

³⁰ Alison Flood, “Extremely Rare Wicked Bible Goes on Sale,” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2015,

as we did not stop using the printing press because of mistypes, we cannot dismiss AI because of errors it produces. Again, it is the responsibility of the user to be informed and to wield God’s word diligently.

Generative AI is a new tool for students of the Bible. Though it is new, it presents the same challenges and demands on the user that previous technological and scripture delivery methods have presented. The student of the Bible must engage God’s word, know how to exegete scriptures, understand context, and be able to formulate questions that are meaningful. The medium has changed, but the principles have not. Gen AI is an excellent tool for synthesis, advancing and accelerating study, and making information from the Bible easier to consume. The serious Bible student should dedicate time to learning how to use this tool and embrace it.

Appendix A

Here is the table comparing and contrasting the Genesis 1-11 creation and flood accounts with other ancient Mesopotamian sources:

<i>Attribute</i>	Genesis 1-11	Enuma Elish (Babylonian)	Epic of Gilgamesh/Atra-Khasis (Babylonian)
<i>Creator Deity</i>	Gen 1:1 (Elohim, one God)	Enuma Elish, Tablet I (Marduk, chief god)	Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I (Enlil, Enki, etc., multiple gods)
<i>Seven-Day Creation</i>	Gen 1:3-2:3 (seven days)	Enuma Elish, Tablet VI-VII (seven tablets, not days)	
<i>First Humans</i>	Gen 1:26-27, 2:7 (Adam, created in God's image)	Enuma Elish, Tablet VI (Lullu, created to serve gods)	Atra-Khasis, Tablet I (humans created to alleviate gods' workload)
<i>Human Purpose</i>	Gen 1:28, 2:15 (stewardship, care for creation)	Enuma Elish, Tablet VI (serve gods, maintain order)	Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI (serve gods, seek immortality)
<i>Flood Cause</i>	Gen 6:5-8, 7:1-10 (human wickedness,		Atra-Khasis, Tablet III (gods' noise, overpopulation), Epic of Gilgamesh,

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/21/rare-sinners-bible-on-sale-bonhams-auction>.

	corruption)		Tablet XI (gods' fear, human noise)
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Sources:

- Genesis 1-11 (Bible)
- Enuma Elish (Babylonian creation myth, circa 1100 BCE)
 - Translated by E. A. Speiser (in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 1950)
- Epic of Gilgamesh/Atra-Khasis (Babylonian epic and flood myth, circa 2100-1600 BCE)
 - Translated by E. A. Speiser and W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard (in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 1950)

Notes:

- The similarities between Genesis and Mesopotamian sources suggest shared ancient Near Eastern cultural and literary motifs.
- The differences highlight distinct theological and philosophical perspectives: Genesis emphasizes monotheism, human dignity, and moral responsibility, while Mesopotamian sources focus on polytheism, human servitude, and divine motivations.^{31 32}

Appendix B

1. Numbers 19:2
 - Scripture: "Tell the people of Israel to bring you a red heifer without defect..."
 - Significance: The red heifer's ashes were used for purification from sin.
 - Possible Symbolism: Purity and cleansing; represents the ultimate sacrifice.
2. Numbers 19:6
 - Scripture: "The priest is to take cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer."

³¹ Text generated by Meta AI, Meta AI, October 5, 2024, <https://www.meta.ai/>

³² Formatting retained from source to demonstrate the ease of presenting and consuming the synthesized data.

- Significance: Incorporates various elements during the sacrificial process.
 - Possible Symbolism: The red heifer symbolizes the sacrifice needed for purification.
3. Hebrews 9:13-14
 - Scripture: "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them..."
 - Significance: Highlights the Old Testament rituals and their temporary cleansing power.
 - Possible Symbolism: Prefigures the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.
 4. Numbers 19:9
 - Scripture: "A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place..."
 - Significance: Emphasizes the careful handling and significance of the purification process.
 - Possible Symbolism: Represents ongoing, diligent effort in maintaining spiritual purity.
 5. Numbers 19:17
 - Scripture: "For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them."
 - Significance: Used to purify those who have become ritually unclean.
 - Possible Symbolism: Symbolizes the cleansing power of faith and repentance.³³

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THE SABBATICAL YEAR IN DEUTERONOMY 15: AN EXEGETICAL EXPLORATION OF GOD’S ECONOMIC AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANCIENT ISRAEL

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Introduction

“אֵין־כָּן אֶחָד צָרִיךְ”

“There will be no one needy among you.” Deuteronomy 15:4a.

In a world that screams for social justice, equity, and equality, knowing how much God addresses wealth, poverty, and social justice in His Word is surprising and thought-provoking. Bryan R. Dyer, in “Good News to the Poor,” states that “this notion of social justice is a theme... throughout the Hebrew Bible, particularly Deuteronomy (10:17-19; 15:1-11; 26:12-13).”³⁴ This paper will focus on the Sabbatical Year in Deuteronomy 15, God’s commands for His people to care for the needy and oppressed, its implications for Ancient Israel, and its lessons for today.

In Deuteronomy 15:4, there is a bold declaration written by Moses: “There shall be no one needy among you,” as he explains the regulations for a Sabbatical Year. The Hebrew word *shemitah* (שְׁמִטָּה) means a remission, suspension, or release (of debts). The word debt is not in the Hebrew text, and it was added to the English translation to clarify the meaning for the reader.³⁵ How could a Sabbatical Year benefit and provide for the less fortunate in The Land?³⁶ Could God have a plan for reducing or even eliminating poverty in His Word? Could these same principles be applied to the nations outside of Israel in the Church age? Indeed, God cares for His people outside the land of Israel as well. And what is our role as believers in this plan?

This research paper aims to provide an exegetical analysis of Deuteronomy 15, highlighting its intricate regulations for the

³⁴Bryan R. Dyer “Good News to the Poor: Social Upheaval, Strong Warnings, and Sincere Giving in Luke-Acts.” In *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church’s Urgent Call*, edited by Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer, 105. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015.

³⁵ H8059 - šmittâ (*shemitah*)- Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (net)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 24 Sep, 2023.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8059/net/wlc/0-1/>

³⁶ I capitalized both words, The Land (אֶרֶץ), as that is the way in Hebrew we refer specifically to the land of Israel.

Sabbatical Year and demonstrating how these laws served as a practical economic structure for Ancient Israel. They conveyed profound ethical principles rooted in justice, compassion, and stewardship, which I believe are still relevant to our society today. In this paper, I will focus on Deuteronomy 15:1-6 covering the multifaceted theological significance specifically regarding men and land. We will analyze the regulations of the Sabbatical Year as a fundamental aspect of Israelites' economic and ethical life. It reflected the values of economic justice, compassion, and faithfulness to God's covenant while also serving as a practical means of preventing economic oppression and providing relief to those in financial need. We will discuss the release of debts, the Sabbatical rest for the land, and the contemporary relevance and ethical lessons for today. It also focuses on how the theological significance of the Sabbatical Year reflects themes of trust, covenantal responsibilities, justice, and liberation for God's people in Ancient Israel.

Historical Background of Deuteronomy

The events of Deuteronomy take place toward the end of the Israelites' wilderness wandering, roughly 40 years after their exodus from Egypt. The generation that escaped Egypt has died off and Moses now is preparing a new generation to enter Canaan, the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy is often described as a covenant renewal document. It reiterates and reaffirms the covenant between God and the Israelites, emphasizing the importance of obedience to God's laws. It contains a significant amount of legal and ethical content and provides specific laws and regulations for various aspects of life, including religious practices, social justice, and governance. The heart of Deuteronomy teachings is in the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) along with Leviticus 19:18b. Jesus himself called it the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:36-40:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Torah?”
And He said to him, “‘You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”³⁷

The Shema is the watchword of the Jewish faith recited twice a day. The word *shema* in Hebrew, translated to English as “hear,” has a

³⁷ Unless specified otherwise, all Scriptures cited in this paper were taken from the Tree of Life Version Bible.

much deeper connotation, meaning to hear and to obey. God's statutes and regulations to His people always demand a response, an act of obedience, not motivated by fear of consequences, but motivated by love and complete trust in Him. Jesus' words in John 14:15, John 14:23–24, and 1 John 5:1-3 clearly illustrate that love and obedience go hand in hand:

Everyone who believes that Yeshua is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the one born of Him. We know that we love God's children by this—when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God—that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.³⁸

Deuteronomy gives a consistent call for faithfulness to God, obedience to His commandments, and avoidance of idolatry. The book emphasizes the idea that blessings come through obedience and curses through disobedience.³⁹ Deuteronomy marks a transition in the Israelites' history. As Moses prepares a new generation to enter the Promised Land, he reminds the Israelites that they were once slaves in Egypt and thus they should always treat each other with fairness and justice.

The Importance of Deuteronomy 15 within the Book

Deuteronomy 15 underscores the importance of social justice and economic fairness within Ancient Israel society. This release of debts particularly benefited vulnerable groups within society, such as widows, orphans, and the poor, who were more likely to incur debts and struggle with repayment. For example, Peter T. Vogt, in his article "Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy" states that, undeniably, Deuteronomy reflects tremendous concern for the dignity of all human beings.⁴⁰ It emphasized principles of compassion, social justice, and responsible lending, reflecting God's values and expectations for His people. He writes,

I will argue that Deuteronomy 15 extends the concerns of the laws of release in Exodus and Leviticus by establishing a system whereby even the landless poor are cared for. Significantly, care of the landless and poor is established in

³⁸ 1 John 5:1-3.

³⁹ See Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

⁴⁰ Peter T. Vogt, "Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 51:1 (2008): 36.

Deuteronomy as one of the most important measures of the effectiveness of the people of Israel in living out loyalty to Yahweh and, therefore, being the people of God. Thus, social justice is an important expression of relationship with Yahweh, and as such has at its core a profound theological and spiritual foundation, rather than a secularized humanitarianism.⁴¹

The book of Deuteronomy demonstrates that adherence to God's covenant includes ethical obligations to care for the less fortunate. This chapter focuses on the Sabbatical Year, a recurring seventh-year rest for the land first introduced in Leviticus 25:1-7.

Besides a Sabbath rest for the land, the Sabbatical Year regulations declare that debts are to be forgiven. This demonstrates the Israelites' dependence on God's provision and their obligation to release others from financial burden. Deuteronomy 15 provides a guideline for the release of Hebrew slaves, emphasizing the value of freedom and the need to treat fellow Israelites with dignity and compassion. It sets forth principles for lending and generosity, instructing Israelites to lend freely to those in need and to be generous in their assistance to the poor and needy. It shows that obedience to God's commands, including those related to economic and social justice, is a core aspect of the covenant relationship.

The chapter highlights the theological significance of economic practices by linking them to God's faithfulness and provision for the Israelites. It shows that ethical and even economic matters are inseparable from one's relationship with God. The principles outlined in Deuteronomy 15 have practical applications in the Israelites daily lives, demonstrating how their faith is meant to be lived out in tangible ways, especially in caring for the needy and the oppressed, resonating with James 2:14-17:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in shalom, keep warm and well fed," but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is that? So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

So much was the concern of the early Church in Jerusalem to care for the needy as part of their daily lives that Luke states in Acts 4:34: "No one among them was needy."⁴² Just as Ancient Israel was

⁴¹ Vogt, 'Social Justice,' 36.

⁴² Dyer, 110.

commanded to care for the needy, so are we who are God-fearing believers and followers of Jesus Christ commanded to do today. Robert Wafawanaka, in his book *Am I Still My Brother's Keeper?*, sums up this undeniable Biblical mandate in one call-to-action, provoking sentence: "In a nutshell, poverty will always be there unless we as human beings do something about it."⁴³

The Sabbatical Year Regulations

The first six verses of Deuteronomy 15 explain the Sabbatical Year regulations, wherein God commanded the Israelites to do a *shemittah*, every seven years. The Sabbatical Year was first established in Exodus 23:10–11 and Leviticus 25:1–7, although the word *shemittah* is only found in Deuteronomy.

The regulations for releasing debts from Israelites during this Sabbatical Year set Israel apart compared from other Mesopotamian laws that charged an exorbitant, high interest from their debtors. While the Code of Hammurabi demonstrated more regard for procedures, above properties, and lastly, persons, God's law showed a higher concern for persons first.⁴⁴

Exegesis of Verses 1-6: Translation of Key Hebrew Terms

מִקֵּץ שְׁבַע־שָׁנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה שְׁמִטָּה:

1 At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release.

The key Hebrew term used in verse 1 and the central theme of Deuteronomy 15 is *shemittah* (שְׁמִטָּה), from Strong's H8059, meaning emission (of debt) or suspension of labor): —release.⁴⁵ The Hebrew word שְׁמִטָּה (*šmittâ*) occurs five times in 4 verses in the Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC) Hebrew Bible: Deuteronomy 15:1; 15:2; 15:9; 31:10.

וְהָיָה דְבַר הַשְׁמִטָּה שְׁמוֹט כָּל־בֶּעַל מַשֶּׁה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשֶּׂה בְרַעְיוֹ לֹא־יִגֹשׁ אֶת־רַעְיוֹ וְאֶת־אֲחִיו
בִּי־קֶרָא שְׁמִטָּה לִיהוָה:

⁴³ Robert Wafawanaka, *Am I Still My Brother's Keeper?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc, 2012), 7.

⁴⁴ Thoralf Gilbrant and Gregory A. Lint, eds., *The Complete Biblical Library: The Old Testament. Volume 4: Study Bible, Deuteronomy* (Springfield, MO: World Library Press Inc., 1996), 159.

⁴⁵ "H8059 - *šmittâ* (*shemittah*)- Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 21 Oct, 2023.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8059/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

2 This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not dun his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the LORD.

In verse two, the key Hebrew term is בַּעַל (ba'al), translated as creditor. Interestingly, the word בַּעַל can be translated as man, husband, owner, lord, or master according to Strong's H1167. Proverbs 22:17 TLV states that "The rich rule over the poor, the borrower is a slave to the lender." Indeed, those who borrow are indebted and enslaved to their creditor (master/lord). Leslie J. Hoppe, author of *There Shall Be No Poor Among You*, points out that "apparently creditors were within their rights to compel delinquent debtors to become bondservants in case of default."⁴⁶

The Hebrew term מַשָּׁה יָדוֹ (hand loan) refers explicitly to loans or debts that one Israelite owes to another. Hoppe states, "Deuteronomy does not treat loans as business transactions but as a form of help to those in need."⁴⁷

At the end of verse 2 in Hebrew, we read כִּי־קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה (ki-kara shemitah l'Yahweh) reminding us that ultimately what the Israelites are required to do during the Sabbatical Year is for Yahweh. It glorifies God when we follow His Biblical mandate to care for the needy. This fulfills the two greatest commandments according to Jesus: love for God and love for others (Matthew 22:35–40, Mark 12:28–34, Luke 10:27a).

אַת־הַנִּזְכָּרִי תִגֹּשׁ וְאֲשֶׁר יְהוָה לָךְ אֶת־אֲחִיד תִּשְׁמֹט יָדְךָ:

3 You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

Verse 3 states that there is no release of debts to הַנִּזְכָּרִי (*hanākrî*), meaning the stranger, foreigner, or alien. It is essential to understand that the Hebrew adjective *nākrî* refers to Gentiles living in The Land. The Israelites were still "to exact" תִּגֹּשׁ (*tigos*) the non-Israelites for their debts, while תִּשְׁמֹט יָדְךָ (*tashmet yadecha*) meaning "releasing their hand" from their fellow Israelites.

אֲפֹס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה־בְּךָ אֶבְיֹוֹן כִּי־בָרַךְ יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן־לָךְ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

4 There shall be no needy among you—since the LORD your God will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—

⁴⁶ Leslie. J. Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in The Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 30.

⁴⁷ Hoppe, 30.

This verse is the heart of the message in Deuteronomy 15. The key Hebrew term in verse 4 is אֶבְיוֹן (*'ebyôn*), an adjective meaning: in want, needy, or poor. Strong also defines *'ebyôn* as a destitute, someone subject to oppression & abuse.⁴⁸ Hoppe writes that the concern for the needy was common in Ancient Near Eastern societies and that kings often boasted of being the protectors of the poor, widows, and orphans.⁴⁹ However, she writes, "In the Biblical tradition, all the people, not just kings, are responsible for the well-being of the poor."⁵⁰

רַק אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם:

5 if only you heed the LORD your God and take care to keep all this
Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day.

Verse 5 begins with an exciting play of words in Hebrew רַק אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע (*rak im-shamoa tishma*) emphasizing the importance of careful listening and obedience. The root of both words, שָׁמַע and תִּשְׁמָע is *shama*, meaning “to hear” or “to listen”. שָׁמַע (*shama*) is also the root of the word *shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4.⁵¹ The repetition of the root שָׁמַע, creates a rhythmic and emphatic effect in the Hebrew text. Unlike in English, in Hebrew, we don’t have a separate verb for “obey,” the word *shama* conveys the idea of both hearing and obeying. In the Hebrew mindset, listening is not merely a passive act of perceiving sound but an active engagement that leads to a response or action.⁵² The command to לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת (*lishmor laasot*) towards the middle of the verse, reinforces the concept of *shama*, literally meaning “to observe to do” or “to keep, to carry out.” It emphasizes the active aspect of obedience, not just listening but also putting the commandments into practice.

Another fundamental Hebrew term in this verse is מִצְוָה (*mitzvah*), meaning commandment, precept, law, ordinance, or instruction.⁵³ In Jewish understanding, a *mitzvah* is a divine commandment and a covenantal responsibility, never to be taken

⁴⁸ "H34 - 'ebyôn - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h34/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

⁴⁹ Hoppe, *There Shall Be No Poor Among You*, 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁵¹ "H8085 - šāma - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8085/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

⁵² This is my insight into the Hebrew language as a Messianic Jew and Hebrew speaker.

⁵³ "H4687 - mišvâ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4687/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

lightly and always expected to be obeyed. In plain language, verse 5 makes clear to the Israelites that the Sabbatical Year regulations are not an option but an obligation that Yahweh expects them to obey.

כִּי־יְהִינָה אֶל־יְדֶיךָ בְּרִכָּךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר־לְךָ יְהוָה וְהִעֲבַטְתָּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאַתָּה לֹא תִעֲבֹט וּמִשְׁלֶת בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים וּבָךְ לֹא יִמְשֹׁלוּ: {ס}

6 For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you: you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

Two main Hebrew terms in verse 6 are הִעֲבַטְתָּ and גוֹיִם. Yahweh commands the Israelites to הִעֲבַטְתָּ a verb meaning to lend. The root of הִעֲבַטְתָּ (*haavatta*) is עָבַט (*avat*), which means to take or to give a pledge (for a debt).⁵⁴ The Israelites were commanded to lend money to גוֹיִם (*goyim*), plural of גוֹי (*goy*). While the word *goyim* is translated as nations, in Jewish culture, it is the Hebrew word explicitly used for Gentiles, and in the Bible, it always refers to Gentile nations, meaning any nation outside the nation of Israel.⁵⁵ This word is still in everyday use today in Modern Israel. A third Hebrew term worth observing in this passage is the verb מִשְׁלֶת (*mashalta*) from the root מָשַׁל (*mashal*), meaning to rule over, to have dominion, or to reign. The Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon suggests that *mashal* could be also translated as “make like” or “assimilate.”⁵⁶

Prohibition of Debt During the Shemitah

During the Sabbatical Year (*Shemitah*), Israelites were instructed to forgive the debts of their fellow Israelites. This means that if someone owed money to another person, the debt was to be canceled, and the debtor was released from their financial obligation. The prohibition of debt during the Sabbatical Year is a key aspect of Deuteronomy 15. It reflects the principles of economic justice and societal welfare within the covenant framework of Ancient Israel. During the Sabbatical Year, which occurred every seven years, Israelites were instructed to forgive the debts of their fellow Israelites. This means that if someone owed money to another person, the debt was to be canceled, and the debtor was to be released from their financial obligation.

⁵⁴ "H5670 - 'ābat - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5670/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

⁵⁵ "H1471 - gôy - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1471/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

⁵⁶ "H4910 - māšal - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4910/NKJV/wlc/0-1/>

The prohibition of debt during the Sabbatical Year served as a form of economic reset. It prevented the accumulation of long-term oppressive debts and offered a fresh start to debtors who might have fallen into financial hardship. This provision reflects a commitment to justice. It ensured that economic disparities did not become entrenched within Israelite society and promoted the acceptable distribution of resources. By forgiving debts during the Sabbatical Year, the Israelites acknowledged their dependence on God's provision. It reinforced the idea that God was the ultimate provider, and human economic systems should reflect his values of compassion and fairness.

In addition to that forgiveness, the Sabbatical Year also mandated the release of Israelite bond servants or slaves, further emphasizing the principle of liberty and the humane treatment of fellow Israelites. The prohibition of debt during the Sabbatical Year was a specific command within the covenant between God and the Israelites. Obedience to this command demonstrated their faithfulness to God's covenant and ethical standards. This prohibition highlights the ethical considerations woven into ancient Israel's economic and financial practices. It underscored the importance of empathy, compassion, and responsibility toward one's neighbors. While the specific practice of a Sabbatical Year may not be observed the same way today, its ethical principles continue to be relevant. The concept of debt forgiveness and responsible lending is still a matter of concern in modern societies.

The Shemitah reflected the values of economic justice, compassion, and faithfulness to God's covenant while also serving as a practical means of preventing economic oppression and providing relief to those in financial need. Wafawanaka reminds us that "care of the poor and needy involves "a theology of activism" that exhorts us "to be *doers* and not just *hearers* of God's word."⁵⁷

Theological Significance of Deuteronomy 15:1-6

The Sabbatical Year was a period of rest for the land, where agricultural activity ceased. This cessation symbolized trust in God's provision and recognition that the land ultimately belonged to God. Theologically, it reinforced the idea of divine sovereignty and the Israelites' dependence on God for sustenance.

The Israelites demonstrated their trust in God's covenant promises by observing the Sabbatical Year. They believed that, even without working the land for an entire year, God would provide abundant harvests in the years to come in accordance with His covenant with Israel.

⁵⁷ Wafawanaka, *Am I Still My Brother's Keeper?*, 9.

The Sabbatical Year included the release of debt and slaves. This theological aspect emphasized God's desire for freedom and liberation. Just as God had liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they were expected to practice liberty and compassion in their treatment of others.

The concept of the Sabbatical Year reinforced the idea of holiness and consecration, justice, and restoration. By setting aside the seventh year for rest and observing the release of debts and slaves, the Israelites were reminded of their distinct identity as God's chosen people and the need to live in ways that reflected God's holiness. It also emphasized the covenantal responsibility of the Israelites to obey God's commands. It was not merely a matter of economic or agricultural practice but an act of faithfulness and obedience to the covenant established with God at Mount Sinai. The theological teachings in Deuteronomy often emphasized the pursuit of justice and righteousness. The Sabbatical Year demonstrated a commitment to justice, especially for the marginalized and vulnerable in society. Lastly, the *Shemithah* resonates with the creation narrative in Genesis, where God rested on the seventh day. It reinforces the idea that the Sabbath is a time of divine order and restoration, aligning the Israelite calendar with the creation narrative.

The theological significance of the Sabbatical Year is multifaceted. It reflects themes of trust, covenantal responsibility, justice, holiness, and liberation within the context of the Israelites' relationship with God. This observance served not only as an economic practice but also as a theological declaration of faith in God's provision and commitment to His ethical standards.

Release of Debts and Economic Implication

The release of debts and its economic implications in Deuteronomy 15 represent a unique aspect of the Sabbatical Year regulations. Deuteronomy 15:1-3 stipulates that during the Sabbatical Year, any financial obligations, loans, or debts between Israelites were to be canceled and not collected. The release of debts provided immediate economic relief to those who were in debt. It offered a fresh start to individuals who might have been burdened by their financial obligations, preventing them from falling into perpetual poverty. This practice prevented the long-term economic oppression of individuals who had borrowed money and could not repay their debts. Canceling these debts ensured that no one would be enslaved by their financial obligations. Moreover, the release of debts also prevented creditors' accumulation of wealth and power at the expense of debtors, fostering a more balanced distribution of resources. Hoppe points out that "if all

Israelites think of themselves as members of a single family and act accordingly, the effects of poverty could be minimized, if not eliminated from Israel.”⁵⁸

By forgiving debts, all Israelites would acknowledge God as the ultimate provider and recognize that He would sustain them even without pursuing financial gain in the seventh year. This practice also placed responsibility on those who lent money. Lenders were encouraged to be more cautious and compassionate in their lending practices, knowing that debts would be forgiven during the Sabbatical Year.

Historical Applications and Lessons for Today

The historical application of the regulations for the Sabbatical Year can be understood in the context of Ancient Israel’s agriculture and economic practices. These regulations provided specific instructions for how the Israelites were to manage their land, debts, and labor during this special year.

The primary agricultural aspect of the Sabbatical Year was the rest it mandated for the land. In ancient agricultural societies like Israel, continuous land cultivation could deplete its fertility. The Sabbatical Year allowed the land to lay fallow, recover its nutrients, and rejuvenate for the next planting season. This practice promoted sustainable agriculture and soil conservation.

The release of debts during the Sabbatical Year was a form of economic redistribution and equity. It ensured that individuals who had incurred debts and fallen into economic hardship would have the opportunity for a fresh start. This prevented the accumulation of perpetual debt and economic oppression.

The Sabbatical Year regulations had a social welfare aspect. They provided relief to the poor and marginalized members of society who might have been struggling with debt and poverty. This practice was an early form of social safety net, ensuring that no one would fall into extreme poverty due to indebtedness.

Observing the Sabbatical Year required faith and trust in God’s provision. The Israelites had to believe that even if they refrained from planting and harvesting for a year, God would provide for their needs. This practice reinforced their reliance on God and recognition of His sovereignty over the land. Observing the Sabbatical Year was an act of covenantal obedience, reflecting the Israelites’ commitment to following God’s commands and living out their covenant relationship

⁵⁸ Hoppe, 31.

with Him. By observing these regulations, they acknowledge God's authority over all aspects of their lives, including economic practices.

The release of debts and the rest for the land had practical economic benefits, preventing the overexploitation of resources and promoting economic stability. In its practices, the regulations of the Sabbatical Year in Deuteronomy 15 were not only a religious requirement but also had tangible benefits for land, economy, and society. In *Ecosystems of Jubilee*, Adam Gustine and Jose Humphreys III remind us that "the practice of Shabbat is the work of cultivating restoration in the people, land, and communities."⁵⁹ They reflected a holistic approach to life in ancient Israel, encompassing faith, ethics, and sustainable living.

The application of the Sabbatical Year regulations still has profound and relevant lessons for today. The emphasis on sustainable agriculture and soil conservation speaks directly to contemporary concerns about environmental stewardship. The release of debts as a mechanism for economic redistribution and preventing perpetual debt accumulation holds relevance in addressing modern issues of economic inequality. Furthermore, the social welfare aspect of the Sabbatical Year regulations serves as a reminder of the importance of community support systems, as every "community has an ethical responsibility toward everyone in it,"⁶⁰ including alleviating poverty.

The Sabbatical Year regulations offer a timeless blueprint for a balanced and just society, calling for a holistic approach that intertwines faith, ethics, and sustainable living. As we navigate the complexities of our time, the ancient wisdom embedded in these regulations encourages us to consider the interconnectedness of our actions with the well-being of the land, the economy, and society.

Conclusion

The Sabbatical Year regulations outlined in Deuteronomy 15 offer a profound insight into God's intricate design for economic and ethical structures within Ancient Israel. The theological significance of this divine mandate goes beyond mere agricultural rest or debt forgiveness; it reflects a deep commitment to justice, compassion, and faithfulness to God's covenant.

Exploring the release of debts and its economic implications, reveals that the Sabbatical Year was not just a religious observance but

⁵⁹ Adam Gustine and Jose Humphreys III, *Ecosystems of Jubilee: Economic Ethics for the Neighborhood*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), 94.

⁶⁰ Gustine and Humphreys III, *Ecosystems of Jubilee*, 57.

a practical means to prevent economic depression and provide immediate relief to the vulnerable.

Moreover, the historical application of these regulations reveals a holistic approach to life in Ancient Israel. Beyond its religious aspects, the Sabbatical Year had tangible benefits for the land, economy, and society. It promoted sustainable agriculture, prevented the accumulation of perpetual debt, and acted as a form of social safety net for the less fortunate.

In today's world, grappling with social justice issues and economic inequality, the lessons from Deuteronomy 15 remain relevant. The call to care for the needy and promote economic fairness is often an ignored and forgotten Biblical mandate that needs to be revived. As believers, the challenging question is: how do we integrate these timeless Torah principles into our modern lives and societal structures?

In the parable of the Righteous Judge in Matthew 25:34-36, Yeshua said:

“Now when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will put the sheep on His right, but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You? Or thirsty and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger and invite You in? Or naked and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ “And answering, the King will say to them, ‘Amen, I tell you, whatever you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

As believers, we are called to walk in obedience to God's Word. The Sabbatical Year shows the connection between faith and practice. It urges us to listen and obey, knowing that our actions for justice and compassion are acts of obedience to the divine mandate. As we reflect on the theological significance of Deuteronomy 15, it

inspires us to pursue justice, practice compassion, and live out our faith in tangible ways in the complex landscape of the contemporary world.

He has told you, humanity, what is good,
and what Adonai is seeking from you:
Only to practice justice, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.⁶¹

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⁶¹ Micah 6:8.

ANALYZING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IN THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE

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Introduction

The Kingdom of God is a theological and scholarly subject that has been much discussed yet remains a topic rich and ripe for further study. In America today, and in many nations around the world, the idea of a king and kingdom is foreign due to differing forms of government, from democracies represented by elected officials to communism. There is some familiarity with the idea of monarchies due to the prominence of certain royal families throughout Africa, Europe, and the Middle East; however, a more complete understanding of the concept of “king” and “kingdom” is still lacking. In his book, *The Everlasting Kingdom: The Kingdom of God in Scripture and in Our Lives*, Professor Emeritus of Bible at Abilene Christian University Everett Ferguson writes:

What is the "kingdom of God"? The basic meaning of "kingdom" in biblical language is "kingship, kingly leadership, rule or reign, an exercise of power." When we today use the word "kingdom," we think of a territory, a realm. Not so people in biblical times. They thought of the active, dynamic exercise of kingly power. To be a king was not an office but a function, not a title but a deed. The kingdom of God, therefore, refers to his sovereignty, the "rule of God" or the "reign of God."⁶²

The definition of terms provided here helps us better understand the biblical meaning of “king” and “kingdom” in modern terms. By comprehending the expressions, readers enter the world of the biblical authors to take hold of a theme that runs through Genesis to Revelation: God is King, “and his kingdom rules over all (Ps. 103:19).”⁶³ This paper analyzes the use of the kingdom of heaven and

⁶² Everett Ferguson, *The Everlasting Kingdom: The Kingdom of God in Scripture and in Our Lives* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1989), elec. ed., retrieved March 30, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1k3npps.3.2>.

⁶³ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV.

the kingdom of God in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to define the terms and bring an understanding of their use and context to Bible readers in this modern age.

Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

The concept of the kingdom of God begins in the Old Testament, specifically Genesis, when God created mankind in His image and gave them the command to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28). Prior to the fall, mankind had dominion over the earth and unobstructed access to and fellowship with God. After the fall, and sin entered the earth by man’s rebellion through Adam, that dominion and authority were transferred to “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph. 2:2). The relationship between God and mankind changed; now there was interference due to sin and a need for a Savior arose and a king able to reestablish God’s intended order.

In response, God began creating a people for himself when he called Abraham to be the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5), which resulted in a new people known as Israel (Gen. 35:10), miraculously rescued from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 6:6-7) and made into a nation ruled by God until they rejected Him as king (1 Sam. 8:6-9). As Ferguson underscores, “That kingdom of Israel was an imperfect manifestation of God’s rule, so plans were made for a righteous descendant of David to occupy his throne in the future.”⁶⁴ The Scriptures recorded by the Israelite people, which include the law, prophets, history books, and wisdom books, further support the idea of a kingdom ruled by God⁶⁵ with the future hope of “the King of Israel and his Redeemer,”⁶⁶ Jesus Christ, able to fulfill this prophetic expectation.

Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew

John F. Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary and scholar, notes in his article *The New Testament Doctrine of the Kingdom*, “The Gospel of Matthew, as many recognize, is the

⁶⁴ Ferguson, *The Everlasting Kingdom*, 17.

⁶⁵ Many verses/passages in Scripture point to God as King, e.g., Gen. 1:26-28, Ex. 19:6, Deut. 17:14-15, 2 Kings 19:15 & 19, 2 Chron. 13:8; 20:6, Ezra 1:2, Ps. 2; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:4; 45:6; 68:32; 74:12; 95:3; 145:1,11-13, Isa. 37:16 & 20, Dan. 2:44; 5:21; 6:26, Zech. 9:9, Mal. 1:14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

bridge between the Old and New Testaments.”⁶⁷ Matthew begins with the historical account of Jesus’ genealogy (1:1-17), an introduction to Joseph and his wife Mary, Jesus’ mother, who was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:18-24), an account of the Magi visiting the child Jesus, bestowing gifts upon Him and worshiping Him (2:1-12), the coming of John the Baptist proclaiming the coming of the Messiah (3:1-12) and Jesus preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (4:17). The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) evokes parallels to the giving of the law to Moses in Exodus 20⁶⁸ which Jesus declares he “did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17 NASB1995).

A key distinction between Matthew and the other synoptic Gospels, Mark and Luke, is the use of the term kingdom of heaven. Mark Allan Powell, author of *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, says, “Matthew often replaces the phrase “kingdom of God” with “kingdom of heaven” (e.g., Matt. 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15) because some Jews tried to avoid saying “God” out of respect for the sanctity of God’s name.”⁶⁹ This view differs from Walvoord who states, “As used in the New Testament, “the kingdom of God” always speaks of a realm of spiritual reality (that may include holy angels), but it never includes unsaved men. In contrast, “the kingdom of heaven” seems to refer to men alone and to include some who are merely professing Christians.”⁷⁰ With each opinion in mind, it is observed that the use of the phrase kingdom of heaven is used only in Matthew’s Gospel. This author suggests the reason may be because of the connection to the Old Testament and the use of language to describe “heaven and earth” as the dominion of God’s universal and eternal rule and reign. Jonathan T. Pennington, author of *The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew*, furthers this assessment when he writes, “While this expression *denotes* the same thing as the “kingdom of God,” it *connotes* many other things. Particularly, we sense that God’s (heavenly) ordering of life and society is radically different than the ways of sinful earth. Now that the new creation or new genesis (see Matt 19:28) has dawned through Christ, those who follow Jesus

⁶⁷ John F. Walvoord, “3. The New Testament Doctrine of the Kingdom,” in the series *Interpreting Prophecy Today* in *Bible.org*, (2008, retrieved April 1, 2024, <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-new-testament-doctrine-kingdom>).

⁶⁸ See also Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

⁶⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), Kindle ed., 210.

⁷⁰ Walvoord, “The New Testament Doctrine of the Kingdom.”

must align themselves with this coming radical heavenly kingdom.”⁷¹ Old Testament references to God as King of heaven and earth come to the fore in this Gospel in the teachings of Jesus to the Jews and eventually the Gentiles, which expresses God’s sovereignty, authority, and power as referenced in the phrase kingdom of heaven throughout Matthew’s account.

Kingdom of God in Mark and Luke

The phrase kingdom of God is primarily used in the Gospel accounts of Mark and Luke. Most scholars and theologians believe the term to be synonymous with the “kingdom of heaven, found thirty-two times, all in the Gospel of Matthew.”⁷² However, the “kingdom of God, found seventy-two times in the New Testament”⁷³ seems to indicate there are similarities and distinctions when used. Walvoord notes, “At least five passages in Matthew referring to the kingdom of heaven seem to be precisely parallel to passages in the other gospels in which the expression kingdom of God is used. These passages are Matthew 4:17 (cp. Mark 1:15), Matthew 11:11 (cp. Luke 7:28), Matthew 13:11 (cp. Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10), Matthew 13:31 (cp. Mark 4:30–31), and Matthew 10:7 (cp. Luke 9:2).”⁷⁴ With this in mind, this paper will further examine whether the use of these phrases always corresponds, or if context determines the differences.

“Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God”

Upon research, it seems the main difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God is the inhabitants of the kingdom. As previously recorded in this paper by Walvoord, the terms may extend to the presence of angelic beings. For instance, the kingdom of God includes angels and people in right relationship with Him. The kingdom of heaven includes people who are redeemed and those who are not.⁷⁵ This author would like to expound on the contrasting point made by Walvoord regarding the kingdom of heaven.

⁷¹ Jonathan T. Pennington, “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008), retrieved March 30, 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt12-1-04>.

⁷² John F. Walvoord, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124, no. 495 (1967), retrieved April 13, 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac124-495-01?highlight=kingdom%20of%20God%20in%20gospels>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Walvoord, “The New Testament Doctrine of the Kingdom.”

Since God is the “Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9), it would seem spiritual beings, whether human or angelic or good or evil, would comprise it based upon the definition of terms discussed in this paper. The idea of extending the term kingdom of heaven to include fallen angels is based upon this author’s reading of The Parable of the Weeds and its explanation in Matthew 13:24-43.⁷⁶ The parable tells the story of the good farmer and an enemy planting wheat and weeds in the kingdom of heaven, resulting in the growth of each crop, set to be pulled up simultaneously at the judgment.

Conversely, John 3:3 states, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” Therefore, those who consist of the kingdom of God “include holy angels”⁷⁷ and saved people who have received the Gospel of Jesus Christ and accepted Him as Savior. 1 Corinthians 15:50 agrees by stating, “I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” The capacity to enter into the kingdom of God and to experience and live out “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17) is available only to those who have been born again and are subjects to the rule and reign of Christ and God.⁷⁸ So, analysis determines these terms are mostly synonymous as used in the Gospels, and context

⁷⁶ ²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” ³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

⁷⁷ Walvoord, “The New Testament Doctrine of the Kingdom.”

⁷⁸ Walvoord, “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

would determine if the entirety of heaven and earth are in view, or more specifically, the Church, which consists of the people of God in this age.

Purpose of the Kingdom

The purpose of the kingdom of God is to announce the hope of reconciliation between God and mankind and is expressed in the sense that it “has come near” (Matt. 3:2, 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9), “is in our midst” (Luke 17:21), available to those “who are like children” (Matt. 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16) and believe the message of salvation available through Christ the King (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God coming near means the rule and reign of God has come and is made manifest in Jesus Christ. His authority and power are in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who believe His message are “born again” (John 3:3, John 3:7, 1 Pet. 1:23) and grow up anew in the kingdom of God because they have put their trust in Him for eternal salvation. Former New Testament scholar and author I. Howard Marshall notes, “The main theme of the Gospel is the identity of Jesus in his relationship to the kingdom of God.”⁷⁹ As the disciples become aware of Jesus’ identity as Messiah, even up to the point of His death and resurrection, they also become aware of what it means to be His followers, which will include suffering as well as joy. In *The Gospel of The Kingdom*, George Eldon Ladd summarizes that, “The Kingdom is a present reality (Matt. 12:28), and yet it is a future blessing (1 Cor. 15:50). It is an inner spiritual redemptive blessing (Rom. 14:17) which can be experienced only by way of the new birth (John 3:3), and yet it will have to do with the government of the nations of the world (Rev. 11:15).”⁸⁰ As Christ’s identity as the “King of Israel” (Matt. 27:42, Mark 15:32) is revealed, so the scope and breadth of His message and intent to unite all nations under His banner becomes further realized in the Synoptic Gospels, and this Good News remains the focus of New Testament doctrine.⁸¹

Conclusion

Definitions of terms matter, as does proper understanding of context and meaning. In this discussion on the kingdom of God and

⁷⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Kindle ed., 91.

⁸⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), Kindle ed., 18.

⁸¹ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 91.

heaven, it has been essential to bring a biblical understanding to the forefront of ideas that may seem relatively foreign to a modern-day reader. It is necessary to grasp, as our biblical counterparts would have in their time, the meaning of “king” and “kingdom of God” in order to represent the King and kingdom to the world faithfully. In this day and age, where terms and their meanings are subjective, we need to know that God’s Word “is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89), and His Word means the same today.

We also must remember that the kingdom of God and heaven are more than the meaning of terms and phrases. It’s about kingdom living, which includes the royal rule to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Luke 10:27). As the Gospels proclaim, we have a King in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9) we have a responsibility to share His message to the world. And we take heart in understanding that God in Christ is the King of the universe and that all created things are subject to His rule and reign, which brings a kingdom focus to our lives. As King, God has the right to determine how we live, and as kingdom subjects, we obey the royal rule of love out of obedience to Him.

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WHAT THE FATHERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH, MEDIEVAL ERA, AND REFORMATION THOUGHT ABOUT WOMEN

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on statements by respected early church fathers regarding women in the hope that the demeaning views among them might be rejected by the church today. The ordination of women is not discussed. However, expanding the view of women's place in ministry in broader ways than some traditionalists have previously allowed would increase women's dignity and value with affirmation for their ministry callings. Brief selections from eight early church fathers and Reformers will illustrate the prevailing ontological position that women are inferior to men and, therefore, not qualified to serve the Lord in ministry in any significant way outside of the home. This appeal is not to challenge any church's biblical, firmly held convictions for the sake of challenge. Instead, this is an appeal for significant reconsideration of church policy regarding any potentially unnecessary restraint upon women's ability to serve within the church that has been in place out of mere tradition or fear of what some conservative church leaders mischaracterize as a feminist "slippery slope."

Introduction

Many early church leaders and theologians disagreed on numerous doctrines. They took time and made profound revisions to arrive at new understandings or to revive previous biblical views on varying theological issues. Early church fathers disagreed on the Trinity, the foremost doctrine defining the deity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. These disagreements were rooted in different interpretations of the biblical text. Some thought Jesus and the Spirit were secondary and subject to God the Father, while others thought they were three equal but distinct persons within the Godhead. They accused each other of heresy, with some being excommunicated from their churches, banished from their towns, or even killed.

Some early church fathers held the belief that a person could be excommunicated and not restored, or maybe restored just once to church fellowship if they sinned after their baptism. This belief led to some delaying their baptism till their deathbeds to receive the most possible forgiveness. Would a Protestant theologian interpret scripture this way today? However, the ancient perspective of women as inherently defective with little or no official place in the church is

lingering in some schools of thought today, even though what God created was in no way naturally defective but was very good (Genesis 1:31, NASB).

This article is not intended to denigrate the faithful men of God who went before us but to underscore the idea that none were perfect in their hermeneutic. While antiquity certainly brought valuable standards to varying theological systems and doctrines, antiquity also birthed some incorrect interpretations of scripture that were later corrected, though not all. The disparaging views and demeaning comments made by the beloved church fathers underpin the ongoing debate on women's roles in the church. Views on women still hang in the balance in some systems today.

Origen, (c. 185 - c. 254 AD), Theologian and Greek Church Father

As a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at Abilene Christian University, Everett Ferguson describes Origen as "the most prolific Christian writer before Augustine. He was a pioneer in the scholarly study and interpretation of the biblical text, a creative thinker with a prodigious memory, who remained a ferment in Christian theology for centuries."⁸² Origen was born in Egypt to Christian parents. His father was martyred when Origen was a teenager. Origen led an ascetic lifestyle. John Stevenson, Division Chair, Biblical & Theological Studies at South Florida Bible College & Theological Seminary, says about Origen not wishing to be tempted by women who became his (Origen's) students, "It is said that he had himself castrated in order to follow Matthew 19:12 in a completely literal manner. He was later given the nickname Origen Adamantius, 'Origen the unbreakable.' "⁸³ The bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius, rebuked Origen for preaching in Caesarea without being ordained. He was ordained fifteen years later by the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem, angering Demetrius, who removed Origen from the school where he taught, had him excommunicated from the church, and banished from Alexandria. "Origen moved to Caesarea where he was accepted by the church. He began his own school there and spent the rest of his life in Palestine."⁸⁴ There is much to be thankful for from Origen's biblical teaching and apologetics. His notable works include the *Hexapla*, *Against Celsus*, and *On First Principles*. Below are his thoughts about women in the church.

⁸² Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 131.

⁸³ John Stevenson, *The First Five Hundred Years of the Church*, Reprint, (Hollywood, FL: Redeemer Publishing, 2021), 52.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Origen affirmed female deacons using Paul's commendation of Phoebe, a deaconess, in Romans 16:1-2. About this scripture, Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research quotes Origen as having written:

This text teaches with the authority of the Apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the church. This is the function which was exercised in the church of Cenchreae by Phoebe, who was the object of high praise and recommendation by Paul. He enumerated her outstanding works; she assisted everyone, he said — i.e., she helped them in their needs—she also helped me in my needs and my apostolic work with a perfect devotion. I readily compare her action with the hospitality of Lot, who never failed to welcome guests who presented themselves, and thereby deserved one day to grant his hospitality to angels. In the same manner, likewise, Abraham, who always came forward to greet his guests, deserved to have the Lord with his angels visit him and stay under his tent. Also this pious Phoebe, while giving assistance and rendering service to all, deserved to assist and to serve the Apostle himself. And thus this text teaches at the same time two things: that there are, as we have already said, women deacons in the church, and that women, who have given assistance to so many people and who by their good works deserve to be praised by the Apostle, ought to be accepted in the diaconate.⁸⁵

While Origen's commentary is favorable toward women serving as deacons in the church, academic researcher and author Roger Gryson says that Origen is reported to have written an overall unfavorable view of women in general, especially as teachers: "Men should not sit and listen to a woman."⁸⁶ "For it is improper for a woman to speak in an assembly,' no matter what she says, even if she says admirable things, or even saintly things, that is of little consequence, since they come from the mouth of a woman."⁸⁷ Origen is also quoted as writing, "What is seen with the eyes of the Creator is masculine, and

⁸⁵ Origen, Commentary on Romans 10:17; Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol.14, col.1278 A-C, quoted in Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, "Women Deacons," Accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.womendeacons.org/origen-on-phoebe/>.

⁸⁶ Origen, "Fragments on 1 Corinthians," 74 (JTS 10, 41-42), quoted in Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976), 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

not feminine, for God does not stoop to look upon what is feminine and of the flesh."⁸⁸ One might ask how this reconciles with the fact that God "stooped" to create a woman in the first place.

Tertullian (c. 150/160 to after c. 220AD), Father of Latin Theology

Tertullian "was born into a pagan family in Carthage. His early training was in the field of law. When he was converted to Christianity, he became a defender of the faith... Tertullian was the most advanced Trinitarian of his day, giving the church a theological vocabulary [three persons...one substance] that was borrowed from Roman law."⁸⁹ Providing the most significant quantity of Christian writings in Latin before the fourth century, Tertullian was also known as a committed rigorist and legalist for his views and rules on morals and how Christians should live. Leaning into asceticism and Montanism, he rejected the idea that sins could be forgiven if committed after a believer was baptized, opposing the church's practice of such forgiveness.

Tertullian view of the ontology of women is revealed as he notably referred to women as the "devil's gateway." in his *On the Apparel of Women*:

And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?⁹⁰

Being made in God's image is the theology called the *imago Dei*. It is clear from the excerpt above that Tertullian does refer to the woman as being made in God's image but calls her the destroyer of God's image, man. Augustine agrees that the woman was not created in

⁸⁸ Origen, quoted in "A Few More Whoppers," *More bad quotes from dead theologians* (blog), *Challenging Tertullian*, last modified March 28, 2017, <https://challengingtertullian.com/category/more-bad-quotes-from-dead-theologians/>.

⁸⁹ Stevenson, *The First Five Hundred Years of the Church*, 50-51.

⁹⁰ Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women" Book 1 Chapter 1, quoted in the Catholic Library, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=/Synchronized-EN/anf.000083.Tertullian.OntheApparelOfWomen.html;chunk.id=00000007>.

the *imago Dei* and is only seen as such when attached to a man. (See below.)

"Tertullian strongly opposed the idea of women exercising ecclesiastical functions."⁹¹ He did not want women to teach, heal, baptize, or perform any function performed by a man in the church. "The only kind of priesthood that they may exercise is the 'priesthood of chastity.'"⁹² Tertullian considered approved widows to be a type of clergy with special seating in the sanctuary. "Scholars...affirm without any reservation that Tertullian ranked widows among the clergy."⁹³ "Tertullian, however, because of his Montanist allegiance, made an exception in the case of prophecy.... [because] the Apostle [Paul]... while forbidding women to speak in church, implicitly recognized their right to prophesy, bidding them only to keep their heads covered."⁹⁴

John Chrysostom (349-407 AD), Bishop of Constantinople

John Chrysostom's primary Christian influence growing up was his mother, Anthusa, who was widowed when John was an infant. She provided him with a top education in the scriptures and the classics. Baptized at age eighteen, Chrysostom became a reader in the church. Attracted to an ascetic life, he spent two years in a cave, which ruined his health. Returning to Antioch, he was ordained as a deacon in 381 and as presbyter in 386. A preacher and great orator, Chrysostom became bishop of Constantinople in 398. Trying to raise the moral tone of the city, he met with jealousy and opposition and was finally exiled in 404 until he died in 407.

John Chrysostom espoused a varied view of women. In the role of teaching children, he highly esteemed godly women. The mothers of Chrysostom, Basil, Augustine, and others were primary influences in their sons' conversions. However, concerning roles within the church, Chrysostom had a unique perspective for his time. David C. Ford, Professor of Church History at St. Tikhons Orthodox Theological Seminary, states, "Concerning the crucial role of the laity vis-a-vis the clergy in the ministry of the Church, Chrysostom never makes a distinction between laymen and laywomen. They both, for example, can baptize in times of emergency."⁹⁵

While Chrysostom strongly believed in older women teaching younger women, he also believed that godly wives have a role in

⁹¹ Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁵ Ford, David C, *Women and Men in the Early Church*, (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Press, 2017), 150.

instructing their husbands in both their words and their works.⁹⁶ When it comes to teaching other men, Ford explains Chrysostom's view:

One specific example of a woman instructing a man in matters of doctrine is St. Priscilla teaching Apollos (Acts 18:24-28): 'This woman took him, instructed (*katechese*) him in the way of God, and made him a perfect (*apertisemenon*) teacher.' In part because of examples such as this, Chrysostom rejects a rigidly literalistic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 ('I do not permit a woman to teach'), saying that Paul only meant to prohibit women from teaching during Church services in the place of the priest.⁹⁷

Ford goes on to say that Chrysostom respected the role of women called deaconesses, and his view is "seen in his interpretation of I Timothy 3:11, ('The women likewise must be serious...' [RSV]), a verse which he is convinced substantiates the existence of deaconesses in the Apostolic Church:

Some have thought that this is said of women generally, but it is not so; for why would he introduce anything about women, in general, to interfere with his subject [in this passage, i.e., the requirements for the offices of bishop and deacon]? He is speaking of those who hold the rank of deaconesses (*diakonias*)... this order is greatly (*sphodra*) necessary (*anangkaion*) and useful and honorable (*kosmion*) in the church.⁹⁸

Though John Chrysostom's value of women in the church is commendable, his overall view affirmed the stereotype of the place and worth of women in society at that time:

Our life is customarily organized into two spheres: public affairs and private matters, both of which were determined by God. To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man, all the business of state, the marketplace, the administration of justice, government, the military, and all other such enterprises. A woman is not able to hurl a spear or shoot an arrow, but she can grasp the distaff, weave at the loom; she correctly disposes of all such tasks that pertain to the household. She cannot express her opinion in a legislative

⁹⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 151

⁹⁸ Ibid., 152.

assembly, but she can express it at home, and often she is more shrewd about household matters than her husband. She cannot handle state business well, but she can raise children correctly, and children are our principal wealth... God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of human life into two parts and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matters to the woman.⁹⁹

Augustine (354-430 AD), Bishop of Hippo, Renowned Theologian, Christian Philosopher

"The greatest of the church fathers was Augustine. He has been recognized as the greatest thinker and theologian of Christian antiquity."¹⁰⁰ Called the "Architect of the Middle Ages...Augustine has continued to be a major influence in theology for both Catholics (especially in his views on the church and the sacraments) and Protestants (especially in regard to grace and salvation)."¹⁰¹

Augustine's mother was a strong Christian, prayed for him, and following him to Milan, was able to see him and his son, her grandson, baptized before she died. Augustine returned to North Africa after her death and became Bishop of Hippo in 395. Gifted in rhetoric and a prolific writer, his most famous works are *The Confessions* and *City of God*, yet his catalog of works has served the later theological thinking of men like Luther, Calvin, and many pastors and teachers today. With all his theological giftings, Augustine stated this in *On the Trinity*:

When I was treating of the nature of the human mind, that the woman together with her own husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to her quality of *help-meet*, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *The Kind of Women Who Ought To Be Taken As Wives* 51.230, quoted in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Halton, Reprint, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), (First published Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 36-37.

¹⁰⁰ Stevenson, *The First Five Hundred Years of the Church*, 120.

¹⁰¹ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, 268.

completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.¹⁰²

In *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, Augustine expounded on the purpose of woman:

If it were not the case that the woman was created to be man's helper specifically for the production of children, then why would she have been created as a 'helper' (Gen.2:18)? Was it so that she might work the land with him? No because there did not yet exist any such labor for which he needed a helper, and even if such work had been required, a male would have made a better assistant. One can also posit that the reason for her creation as helper had to do with the companionship she could provide for the man, if perhaps he got bored with his solitude. Yet for company and conversation, how much more agreeable it is for two male friends to dwell together than for a man and a woman! . . . I cannot think of any reason for woman's being made as man's helper, if we dismiss the reason of procreation.¹⁰³

In the same writing, but concerning women's inferior intelligence, Augustine wrote:

How could he [Adam] have believed what the serpent said? For the serpent said that God prohibited them from eating the fruit of that tree because he knew that if they did so, they would become as gods by their knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:5)—as if God begrudged his creatures so great a blessing! That a man endowed with a spiritual mind could have believed this is astonishing. And just because it is impossible to believe it, woman was given to man, woman who was of small intelligence and who perhaps still lives more in accordance

¹⁰² Augustine, "On the Trinity," Chapter 7.10, quoted in New Advent, "Fathers of the Church/On the Trinity," accessed March 20, 2024. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis* IX,5, quoted in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Halton, Reprint, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), (First published Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 28-29.

with the promptings of the inferior flesh than by the superior reason.¹⁰⁴

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), Italian Priest, Philosopher, Theologian

Some consider Thomas Aquinas to be one of the greatest Christian philosophers in church history. His *Summa Theologica* is considered a masterpiece. Aquinas' writings continue to be read and referred to by seminary professors and preachers, both Catholics and Protestants, today.

Thomas Aquinas was born in Roccasecca, near Naples, Italy, and was the youngest son of Landulph, count of Aquino, and Theodora, countess of Teano. "Before Saint Thomas Aquinas was born, a holy hermit shared a prediction with his mother, foretelling that her son would enter the Order of Friars Preachers, become a great learner, and achieve unequaled sanctity."¹⁰⁵

Thomas Aquinas was sent to school under Benedictine monks at Monte Cassino at age five. At thirteen, he returned to Naples and finished his primary education at the Benedictine House, where the philosophies of Aristotle greatly influenced him. Attending the University of Naples, Aquinas became interested in the Dominican order of Monks and joined them c. 1243. "His family, strongly opposed to this, held him prisoner for fifteen months before relenting."¹⁰⁶ Going on to study under Albert the Great in Paris, Aquinas eventually earned his master of theology, doctorate of theology, and became highly sought after to preach, teach, and write.

In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas asks and responds to various practical, philosophical, and theological questions that reveal his beliefs regarding females. In answer to the question of whether a man ought to love his mother more than his father, Aquinas said:

Strictly speaking, however, the father should be loved more than the mother. For father and mother are loved as principles of our natural origin. Now the father is principle in a more excellent way than the mother, because he is the active principle, while the mother is a passive and material principle.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., XI, 42, 40.

¹⁰⁵ "Saint Thomas Aquinas," Biography.com/Famous Religious Figures/Philosophers, August 9, 2023, <https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/saint-thomas-aquinas>.

¹⁰⁶ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, 489.

Consequently, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more.¹⁰⁷

In response to whether woman should have been made in the first production of things, Aquinas concluded that woman, as an individual, is defective. However, woman, as part of nature in general, is not defective in her role in "generation," meaning procreation:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] observes (De Gener. Animal. iv, 2). On the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. Now the general intention of nature depends on God, Who is the universal Author of nature. Therefore, in producing nature, God formed not only the male but also the female.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, Aquinas believed the concept of females being subject to males is not a result of sin but existed before sin as males are naturally superior in their ability to reason and wiser than females:

Subjection is twofold. One is servile, by virtue of which a superior makes use of a subject for his own benefit; and this kind of subjection began after sin. There is another kind of subjection which is called economic or civil, whereby the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit and good; and this kind of subjection existed even before sin. For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ST II.II, q. 26, a. 10, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, online edition edited by Kevin Knight, 2017, quoted in New Advent, accessed May 16, 2024. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3026.htm#article10>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., q. 92, a. 1 <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1092.htm#article1>.

subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.¹⁰⁹

Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD) German Priest, Protestant Reformer

Born in 1483, Martin Luther was one of eight children, the second son of a successful miner, and a pious mother. Although from the peasant class, his father was able to send him to a preparatory school. He went on to university and law school. Luther left before finishing law school, entered a monastery, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1507.

Luther is most famous for his doctrinal position drawn from the public proclamation that justification necessary for salvation is by faith alone, *sola fide*. Having studied under Augustine's theology, the key verse that had a profound impact on the change in his understanding of the true Gospel was Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'¹¹⁰

Along with Luther's view that justification is by faith alone, contrary to the Catholic church's view at the time, he also "protested" some manners of corruption he saw. Luther wrote his *Ninety-five Theses* to expose the corruption that the power of indulgences had within the church and nailed this document on the door of the Wittenburg church. "To be sure, October 31, 1517, would indeed turn out to be the first hint that the Western world was about to be turned upside down. But Luther's act on All Hallows Eve in 1517 was not an act of rebellion. It was, in fact, just the opposite - the act of a dutiful son of mother church."¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the Protestant Reformation had officially begun.

"As a result of the Reformation, women were given new opportunities to be educated, participate in the church and in the family, and share the Gospel. Martin Luther proclaimed the priesthood of all believers, teaching that both men and women were equal before God and free to pursue their God-given vocational callings."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Rom. 1:17, (English Standard Version), (ESV).

¹¹¹ John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History, Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 107.

¹¹² Karin Stetina, "What the Reformation Did and Didn't Do for Women," The Good Book Blog, Talbot School of Theology Faculty Blog, October 31, 2017.

Nevertheless, whether performing duties of biblical study, evangelism, or teaching other women, a woman's primary place and vocation still remained in the home, in Luther's view, and not in the public as preachers.

Martin Luther's courage and deep spiritual conviction were commendable. He was, however, known to have a bad temper and was easily angered. Often described as combative and rebellious, he could be looked at as one who questioned authorities but sought truth in doing so. Though Luther did not rob women of being created in God's image as Augustine did, he did believe females are inferior to males based on his understanding of the creation account in Genesis 1:27:

Moses here mentions both sexes together. That woman might not appear to be excluded from all the glory of the life to come. For woman seems to be a creature somewhat different from man, in that she has dissimilar members, a varied form and a mind weaker than man. Although Eve was a most excellent and beautiful creature, like unto Adam in reference to the image of God, that is with respect to righteousness, wisdom and salvation, yet she was a woman. For as the sun is more glorious than the moon, though the moon is a most glorious body, so woman, though she was a most beautiful work of God, yet she did not equal the glory of the male creature.

However Moses here joins the two sexes together and says that God created them male and female for a further reason that he might thereby signify that Eve also being alike created of God, alike with Adam became thereby a partaker of the divine image and similitude, and also of the dominion over all things. Hence woman is still a partaker of the life divine to come, as Peter says, "As being heirs together of the grace of life," 1 Pet. 3:7. In all domestic life also the wife is a partaker in ruling the house and enjoys, in common with her husband, the possession of the offspring of the property. There is nevertheless a great difference between the sexes. The male is as the sun in the heaven, the female as the moon, while the other animals are the stars, over which the sun and the moon have influence and rule. The principal thing to be remarked therefore in the text before us, that it is thus written to show that the female sex is not excluded from all the glory of the human nature, although inferior to the male sex.¹¹³

¹¹³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. I: Luther on Creation*, Chapter II, Part VI, 27b, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, 1904, Quoted in

Luther's preaching greatly contributed to nuns leaving convents. He opposed the idea of isolating nuns and monks and he promoted the institution of marriage. He married an ex-nun, and they had six children. Luther's wife, Katie, often participated in Luther's famous Table Talks.

One of the more amusing, if not absurd, justifications Luther gives for his view that females are inferior and less intelligent than males rather than merely different from males (one might question whether Luther was teasing his wife) is quoted by authors Deborah Gill and Barbara Caveness:

Martin Luther wrote in *Table Talk*:

‘Men have broad shoulders and narrow hips, and accordingly they possess intelligence. Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon [keep house and bear and raise children].’¹¹⁴

John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) French Pastor, Theologian, Protestant Reformer

John Calvin was born in Noyon, France, in 1509. His mother died when Calvin was just five or six years old, and his father, an attorney for the Noyon cathedral in Calvin's early years, sent him to college in Paris for both general and theological studies. Calvin got his law degree in 1532, and by 1533 or 1534, he fully committed to the Protestant faith. He is best known for the magisterial *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-1539). Calvin's belief about the sovereign grace of God over salvation is a powerful and liberating theology, taking the ability to attain or keep eternal life off of man and placing it solely in the hands of Almighty God through the sacrifice and payment for sin made by Jesus Christ.

A master of theology and lover of Jesus, John Calvin, like the other historical church leaders mentioned here, was not perfect, nor

Project Gutenberg, Accessed May 27, 2024.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48193/48193-h/48193-h.htm#sect21>

¹¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Vol. 54, Table Talk*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 8.

were all his opinions infallible. Regarding women and 1 Timothy 2:12, Calvin writes:

There is no absurdity in the same person commanding and likewise obeying when viewed in different relations. But this does not apply to the case of woman, who by nature (that is, by the ordinary law of God) is formed to obey; for γυναικοκρατία (the government of women) has always been regarded by all wise persons as a monstrous thing; and, therefore, so to speak, it will be a mingling of heaven and earth, if women usurp the right to teach. Accordingly, he bids them be ‘quiet,’ that is, keep within their own rank...He therefore commands them to remain in silence; that is, to keep within their limits and the condition of their sex.¹¹⁵

Calvin goes on to say that while he does not believe that the creation order alone denotes superiority (using John the Baptist coming before Christ to make the point that Christ was the clear superior one), it does, however, indicate that males are superior to females:

Now Moses shews that the woman was created afterwards, in order that she might be a kind of appendage to the man; and that she was joined to the man on the express condition, that she should be at hand to render obedience to him. (Genesis 2:21) Since, therefore, God did not create two chiefs of equal power, but added to the man an inferior aid, the Apostle [Paul] justly reminds us of that order of creation in which the eternal and inviolable appointment of God is strikingly displayed.¹¹⁶

In his commentary on John 20:16-18, Calvin sees Christ instructing the women to go and tell the Apostles that He is alive, not as elevating the role of the women or as Christ giving honor to the women, but as a rebuke on the men:

I therefore conclude that Mary was sent to the disciples in general; and I consider that this was done by way of reproach, because they had been so tardy and sluggish to believe. And, indeed, they deserve not only to have women for their teachers, but even oxen and asses, since the Son of God had been

¹¹⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, (1856; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 68.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

teaching them long and laboriously. Yet this is a mild punishment when Christ has his disciples learn from the women, so that through them he may bring them back to himself... We should also, however, notice that this event was extraordinary -- we might almost say accidental... But, in doing so they are not acting like apostles; and, therefore it is wrong to derive a law from this command of Christ and to allow women to perform baptisms. Let us be satisfied that Christ displayed the boundless treasures of his grace in them when on one occasion he made them teachers of the apostles; he did not intend this unique privilege to be seen as an example... Yet it pleased the Lord to show a proof of his power by means of those weak and contemptible vessels.¹¹⁷

Contemptible vessels? Calvin reiterates his view that women are by God-given nature inferior to men in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11: "... God's eternal law, which has made the female sex subject to the authority of men. On this account all women are born, that they may acknowledge themselves inferior in consequence of the superiority of the male sex."¹¹⁸

John Knox (c. 1514-1572 AD) Scottish Protestant Reformer, Father of Presbyterianism

John Knox was born near Haddington, Scotland, and educated at the University of Glasgow and St. Andrews. Knox became an ordained priest around 1536 but did not become a Christian until 1543. He was the premiere leader of the Scottish Reformation.

Under Catholic regent Mary of Guise, Knox and others were captured from St. Andrews castle and taken to France, where Knox served as a galley slave for nineteen months. When he was released, Knox went to England and preached until Mary Tudor was crowned queen. Knox fled to France, Germany, and then Geneva, where he studied theology and Presbyterian structure under John Calvin and pastored English refugees. Upon the death of Mary Tudor, John Knox returned to Scotland. "He declared boldly that the mass was idolatry, and that Catholic churches and monasteries should be closed... Protestantism was established as the national religion, a confession of faith was formulated, and a constitution for the new church was drawn

¹¹⁷ John Calvin, *John*, eds. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 449.

¹¹⁸ John Calvin, "Calvin's Commentaries", quoted in Bible Hub, Accessed June 4, 2024, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1_corinthians/11.htm.

up."¹¹⁹ Though Knox had to contend with the new queen, Mary Stuart, who had him arrested, he was acquitted and his "[l]ast years were devoted to [the] ministry of preaching and counseling in Edinburgh and St Andrews. The triumph of the Scottish Reformation was complete."¹²⁰

John Knox wrote the famous treatise on Predestination, much of *The First Book of Discipline*, and his *History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*. Knox was married twice, had five children, and is reported to have had female friends, though he did seem to think females were inferior to males, a philosophy that permeated his era. His personality has been described as arrogant, cantankerous, and rebellious. After his journey with tyrannical Catholic queens, his harsh thoughts about women in leadership were evident, as stated in his famous *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*:

And first, where I affirm the empire of a woman to be a thing repugnant to nature, I mean not only that God, by the order of his creation, has spoiled [*deprived*] woman of authority and dominion, but also that man has seen, proved, and pronounced just causes why it should be...

Nature, I say, does paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment [leadership]. And these notable faults have men in all ages espied in that kind, for the which not only they have removed women from rule and authority, but also some have thought that men subject to the counsel or empire of their wives were unworthy of public office...

Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him.

God should say, 'Forasmuch as you have abused your former condition, and because your free will has brought yourself and mankind into the bondage of Satan, I therefore will bring you in bondage to man. For where before your obedience should have been voluntary, now it shall be by constraint and by necessity; and that because you have deceived your man, you shall therefore be no longer mistress over your own appetites,

¹¹⁹ Elgin Moyer, Revised by Earle E. Cairns, *Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982), 230.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 230-231.

over your own will or desires. For in you there is neither reason nor discretion which are able to moderate your affections, and therefore they shall be subject to the desire of your man. He shall be lord and governor, not only over your body, but even over your appetites and will.'

And that the Holy Ghost does manifestly express, saying: 'suffer not that woman usurp authority above man' (1 Tim. 2:12). He says not, 'I will not that woman usurp authority above her husband;' but he names man in general, taking from her all power and authority to speak, to reason, to interpret, or to teach; but principally to rule or to judge in the assembly of men.¹²¹

Throughout *The First Blast*, John Knox, while not at all careful in his manner or respectful in tone toward women, gives pointed and clear reasoning, from his perspective, for his interpretation of the often-quoted Pauline scriptures regarding women. Knox explains that while God has the right to do things, such as putting Deborah in leadership over Israel, He still did not give humans the right to overrule His commands. He believed that God has commanded that women be in complete subjection to their husbands of their bodies, wills, and desires, such that husbands tell their wives what they are permitted to do, think, and feel.

Conclusion

Some statements quoted above are steeped in the culture of their day and are damaging to views of God's perfect creation of woman. Their theology, such as Augustine's ontological view of women as inferior intellectually and not part of the *imago Dei* unless married to a man, is hurtful and incorrect. Space does not permit debate on these views, but all one has to do is read Genesis; "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"¹²² to see that both male and female share in the *imago Dei*.

This appeal to church leadership does not address the office of Senior Pastor or Priest. Some do ordain women to the office of Pastor,

¹²¹ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, (1558), Extracted from: *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*, Quoted in Still Waters Revival Books, Accessed June 10, 2024, <https://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualnls/FirBlast.htm>.

¹²² Gen. 1:27, (New International Version), (NIV).

but that is not the issue at hand here. The appeal here is to traditional churches, asking them to consider giving women official positions such as Deacon, as some church fathers proposed, and give the female deacons the same input as male deacons in decision-making. Even the nuns of old had decision-making authority over whom and how they served.

All Sunday School teachers are under the ultimate authority of the Senior Pastor, who is usually a male in conservative churches. Under such male leadership, the same appeal is made to consider allowing qualified women to teach a Sunday School or other classes that men choose to attend.

There are other areas in which women may be called to serve or teach. Today, we see highly qualified women speaking at church conferences and panel discussions, podcasts, radio, and television, all of which men can hear. However, there is still a contingency of churches that do not allow women of their fellowship to write devotionals for their Advent or Lenten booklets although men would be the editors and approvers of content. Some do not allow input from the women of their church on important congregational matters or do not allow women to be advocates for other women on ethics commissions where women are judged solely by a group of men in marital or other matters. There are numerous and varied examples of areas where women can contribute substantially to the church.

Just one year before this paper was written, a pastor who is also a national speaker and author and beloved by many in the evangelical church declared that women should not be allowed in leadership, even of parachurch ministries. A few years before that, another respected and beloved nationally known pastor-speaker-theologian stated that a woman who had been asked to speak on Mother's Day by the Senior Pastor of a local church (a man) should "go home." She was under a male pastor's authority and spoke by his request on motherhood. This woman had only been a women's Bible teacher, not a pulpit preacher, yet a renowned pastor rebuked her for complying with another male pastor's request to speak from a pulpit at all.

Even great theologians of the early church were not perfectly correct on all doctrines, and it would be fair to consider that they, and some modern-day theologians and pastors, may not be correct on all points regarding women in the church, either.

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NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY: A SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE ON THE OFFICE USING ACTS AND 1 CORINTHIANS

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Wayne Grudem articulates, “Beginning with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the gift of prophecy was widely distributed in the NT church.”¹²³ Grudem is an associate professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Pentecost is a pivotal moment in the prophetic ministry since it signifies continuance. Peter the emboldened apostle in Acts 2:14-17, vociferously clarified to his bewildered audience that what they were witnessing (post the outpouring of the Spirit), was not a state of drunkenness but rather fulfilled prophecy.¹²⁴ Joel prophesied (Joel 2:28) that in the last days these very gifts (prophecy) would be poured out in the manner that Peter’s audience witnessed. This is the hallmark of what prophecy and prophets resembled in NT period. However, today there are many debates as to who are to be considered prophets, what is the criteria for the office and how prophets/prophecies are to be judged.

Wayne Grudem is no stranger to this debate and is famous for his doctoral dissertation which later became a book titled, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. This paper seeks to get an understanding of NT prophets/prophecy using scholarly work on NT prophecy, as well as utilizing various rebuttals to the thoughts of pertinent scholars like Wayne Grudem, coupled with conclusions/assumptions/inferences drawn. An exegesis of the relevant NT scriptures will be conducted for deeper insight on NT and contemporary prophecy. The topic of prophecy/prophets has proven to be a contentious issue. As a result, there have been many misunderstandings of these terms, and as such, an understanding is appropriate at this juncture.

An Understanding of Prophecy/Prophets

It is with great expediency that the terms prophet and prophecy be explored for guided contextual clarity. Admittedly, there are those

¹²³ Wayne Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” waynegrudem.com (retrieved 18 April 2024, <https://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Prophecy-Prophets.pdf>). 707.

¹²⁴ Holy Bible – All scriptural references are taken from the ESV bible.

who have finessed definitions for ends and purposes, wittingly or unwittingly, to stir up reactions in the scholarly world. As a result, it is prudent that a scholarly meaning be established. According to *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Three Hebrew words are used in the OT to designate the prophets, namely, *nabi*., *ro’eh*., and *hozeh*... Each of these words designate one who is speaking for God. The use of *nabi* is illustrated in Exod. 4:15 and 7:1.”¹²⁵ It continues, “The two words *ro’eh* and *hozeh* perhaps have primary reference to the fact that the person so designated, sees the message that God gives him.”¹²⁶ Undoubtedly, this references one who has a deep relationship with God and has been chosen by God to be his mouthpiece, and therefore, tasked to vocalize what God wants revealed to the target audience. Stephen Kring wrote in his article concerning prophets, “A true prophet, therefore, speaks the pure word of God with divine authority.”¹²⁷ It is reasonable to expect one who speaks the pure word of God and speaks on behalf of God to speak authoritatively.

OT Prophets/Prophecy and NT Prophets/Prophecy

This authoritative delivery of the pure word of God description epitomized OT prophets like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha to name a few. As Grudem articulates, “Many OT prophets were able to speak and write words which had absolute divine authority., and which were recorded in canonical scripture.”¹²⁸ Indubitably, this divine authority continued in the NT era with John the Baptist, Jesus the prophet of all prophets and ultimately his apostles. Lending support to this view is James L. Boyer of Grace College who states emphatically, “To begin with, prophecy in the New Testament is the same as the Old Testament; it is a continuation of the same office and function.”¹²⁹ The office of prophet in the Old Testament and in the gospels produced prophecies containing certain consistent elements such as predictiveness, judgement, supernatural knowledge, supernatural acts and divine

¹²⁵ J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. by Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1174.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Stephen Kring, “An Evaluation of Wayne Grudem’s View on NT Prophesy,” [gfcto.com](https://www.gfcto.com) (retrieved 21 April 2024, <https://www.gfcto.com/articles/theological-issues/grudems-view-of-nt-prophecy>).

¹²⁸ Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” 707.

¹²⁹ James L. Boyer, “The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times,” *Grace Journal* GJ 01:1 (1960: retrieved 21 April 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/gj01-1-03?highlight=New%20testament%20prophecy-13>).

pronouncements.¹³⁰ Elijah for example, predicted that there would be a drought in 1 Kings 17. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, also predicted the coming of one greater than himself in John 1:15. Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection in Mark 8:31. These examples demonstrate a prophetic consistency shared in the OT and the NT gospels. Grudem has an alternative view of the title given to the gospel apostles suggesting that they were not necessarily regarded as prophets. He claims that though they are part of the OT way of prophetic function, they were not actually called prophets even by Jesus himself. They were called apostles and not prophets.¹³¹ But were the gospels the end of New Testament prophecy/Prophets?

Grudem's Understanding of Prophets/Prophecy

At the heart of the NT prophecy/prophet debate is a statement made by Grudem redefining what constitutes prophecy. Hence, he proposes redefining what makes one a prophet in the post gospel era. He argues that “Although several definitions have been given of the gift of prophecy, the NT indicates that it should be defined not as “predicting the future”, nor as “proclaiming a word from the Lord”, nor as “powerful preaching”, but rather as telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”¹³² This inevitably and drastically alters the meaning or understanding of prophecy, and deviates significantly from the early church’s view. However, this seems like a cleverly crafted compromise between the cessationists and non-cessationists. The cessationists believe that spiritual gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic period. Consequently, Grudem attempts to forge a compromise between the two views. F. David Farnell expresses this thought with utmost clarity. He writes, “The recent surge of interest in the prophetic gift has witnessed a crossing of traditional boundaries by some individuals in an apparent attempt to find a mediating position between the two perspectives. Grudem is a prominent example of this tendency. Belonging to the Reform tradition that is cessationist in background, Grudem has been influenced by the Vineyard movement.¹³³ Bruce Compton in his response to Grudem wrote, “Grudem begins his defense by defining New Testament prophecy and distinguishing it from Old Testament prophecy or what he calls

¹³⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹³¹ Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” 707.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ David F. Farnell, “Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today? Part 1: The Current Debate about New Testament Prophecy,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (1992): 279-280, retrieved 20 April 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac149-595-02>.

ordinary or congregational prophecy as someone telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”¹³⁴ There is evidently a synergistic thread running through Grudem’s thought process on this issue that bleeds through. He is postulating an impulsive, spontaneous, and probably off the cuff speech that involves more than likely some human influence. This will further be explored as this paper progresses.

Prophets/Prophecy in Acts

The outpouring of the Holy Ghost was a defining moment for the early church since Jesus was no longer physically present to lead, teach, heal, guide, and do all that a prophet of his stature was called to do. After all, he was the prophet prophesied about by his predecessors. Pentecost was indeed a watershed moment for the scared, probably anxious, timid, and concerned believers who were waiting patiently in the upper room. But Acts 2:14-18 describes a moment of reckoning and a vindication of their patience, as they were anointed for service. A vivid manifestation of the Lord’s majestic power was on display before the eyes of bewildered spectators. Peter confirms the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28) that the Holy Ghost would be poured out unto all flesh. Firstly, the Greek words for last days are crucial. ἐσχάταις and ἡμέραις denote the following as referenced in the Greek Lexicon. These words are referring to the final days, final time, or the last days.¹³⁵ The Pentecost phenomenon shows without a doubt that the farthest time or ends of time was not conclusively over at the end of the gospel period. Eckhard Schnabel wrote in his Acts Commentary,

Peter links the last days not with the coming of the Holy Spirit but with the entire ministry of Jesus. This was a common early Christian conviction that was often expressed: the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, with the climax of the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, constitute the beginning of the final epoch in history

¹³⁴ R. Bruce Compton, “The Continuation of New Testament Prophecy and a Closed Canon: Revising Wayne Grudem’s Two Levels of NT Prophecy,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 22:1 (2017): 16 retrieved 29 March 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/dbsj22-1-04?highlight=new%20testament%20prophecy>.

¹³⁵ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2nd ed, 2 Vols, New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), 611, 629.

when God has acted in a decisive manner to bring salvation through his son.¹³⁶

Similarly, Joseph Fitzmyer shares his thoughts on these verses in Acts by writing, “Luke changes the beginning of the Greek text of Joel from “after this” to “in the last days.” He further states, “Luke thus gives the quotation a new eschatological orientation and ascribes the prophet’s words to God himself. For Luke this is a new period in God’s salvation history: the Period of the Church...under the guidance of the Spirit.”¹³⁷ There is an obvious expression of the fulfilment of a prophecy in days considered by Peter, the eschaton. It is evident therefore, that this signaled a wave of prophecy through prophets, some of whom were not apostles or prophets in the gospel period. Acts 11:27-28 highlight the concept of a multitude of prophets who existed and operated in the role as prophets and recognized as such, as the canon reveals. These individuals were not apostles since they were not necessarily called as such. Therefore, they were, as written, prophets. James Boyer writes, “...we read that prophets went down from Jerusalem to Antioch, one of whom was named Agabus, who foretold that a great famine was coming.”¹³⁸ However, Grudem utilizes Agabus in Acts 21:10-11 to point out some inaccuracies in Agabus’ second recorded prophesy which is about Paul’s capture.¹³⁹ This point of inaccuracy will become extremely relevant as Grudem’s view of prophecy is further discussed.

Prophecy/Prophets in 1 Corinthians

Apostle Paul placed considerable value in the gift of prophecy in Corinthians 14. In verse 1 he declares that spiritual gifts are to be desired. However, special emphasis is placed on prophecy as a desirable gift. This crystallizes the point of how prominent a role prophecy played in the early church. Prophecy is critically important in building and encouraging people and the church, Acts 4:3-4. Grudem massages verse 3 by asserting that the building up is a spontaneous revelation of God’s insight into someone’s heart, thereby building up that person.¹⁴⁰ The spontaneity is an inference not captured in the

¹³⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament Acts* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 135.

¹³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer. *The Acts of the Apostles New Testament Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 252.

¹³⁸ Boyer, “The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times,” 16.

¹³⁹ Grudem, “Prophecy, Prophets,” 708.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 709.

verses, but it speaks loudly to Grudem's thought on prophecy. However, Paul lays out a methodology of operation for the office and function of prophets in the church, as laid out in Acts 14:29-33. Essential in this methodology of operation is the participation of the hearers. They were to weigh what the two or three prophets said. The Greek word used διακρινέτωσαν is in 3rd person present active imperative plural.¹⁴¹ This means that a command is given to the audience. The lexical form of this word is διακρίνω which means making a judgement based on detailed information or to evaluate. But the lexicon goes further as it pertains to 1 Cor 14:29 and suggests that it means evaluating carefully.¹⁴² Therefore, if an evaluation must be made, is it of the prophet or his prophecies? And are they one in the same? Does the prophecy prove prophethood?

David Farnell utilizes the Didache extensively in his dissecting of this command. Hence, he shares, "Similar to Paul's insistence that prophets be examined (1 Cor 14:29) and John's instruction to test a prophet and his prophecy (1John 4:1-3), the Didache asserted that prophets were to be tested."¹⁴³ Farnell is introducing literature of the early church which is presumed to have been written either the 1st or 2nd century AD. He is suggesting that beyond Paul's command, there was a method the church fathers used to sort out or sift through this conundrum. He writes further,

The test for a true prophet is given in 11.8 "Not everyone who speaks forth in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he has the kind of behavior which the Lord approves. From his behavior, then, will the false prophet and the true prophet be known." A prophet was to be judged on the basis of lack of greed for gain, consistency in doctrine and practice, and the demonstration of knowing the ways of God.¹⁴⁴

Obviously, there was room for speaking in the spirit in the early church, but not all of those who were used in those instances were called or deemed prophets. Additionally, there was to be consistency in the prophet's fruit and his utterances as measured by the word of God. According to this excerpt from the Didache, the test or evaluation of the prophet was not based on the sifting of utterances for falsehood and truth but on the man himself.

¹⁴¹ Greek New Testament (retrieved 21 April 2024, <https://www.laparola.net/greco/index.php>).

¹⁴² Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. 364.

¹⁴³ Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?," 285.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 285-286.

Prophets and Prophecy Today

David Farnell has much to say about Grudem's position on prophecy especially as it relates to the modern-day practice. "The current practice of the prophetic gift has been emphasized especially by the Vineyard and Signs and Wonders movements. Grudem's hypothesis has also directly contributed to the present turmoil regarding the nature and function of prophecy. His assertions about the prophetic gifts are now being used as a primary justification of the current practice of prophecy in these church movements."¹⁴⁵ To be candid, it is not entirely certain whether Farnell is a cessationist, but he identifies an area of concern which he deems as turmoil in the nature and function of the office.

Honestly, the prosperity gospel has opened the flood gates to prophets and prophetesses and Farnell's concerns about Grudem's ideas are valid. Prophets seemingly are coming out of the woodworks, popping up with prophecies that are sometimes very concerning. With Grudem's view of the spontaneity and expected inaccuracies/falsehoods which form part of his new definition of prophecy, eclipsing the OT and NT tests, the alarm needs to be sounded on some of these current day prophets. It appears from Grudem's viewpoint that inaccuracy is synonymous with prophecy. Agabus' prediction of Paul's capture to highlight inaccuracies was used as a clutch to emphasize his point on the reality of a new type of prophecy. Grudem makes the point that prophecies today (following the example of Agabus' inaccurate prophecy on Paul), are in a general sense revelation from God but not necessarily the "Word of the Lord" nor should be construed as strict as OT prophecies in the "Thus Says the Lord" epithet. Prophecies today are generally laced with human spirit speech. In other words, the prophet relays to the best of his ability the revelation which often, will have elements of inaccuracies.¹⁴⁶ Given this view, inaccuracies or what could be deemed falsehoods or erroneous speech can be expected in prophecy. Grudem's view radically augments the nature of prophecy by broadening its meaning with the injection of a measure of uncertainty of accuracy. One can therefore infer that Grudem seeks to normalize this iteration of prophecy.

This type of prophecy is very prevalent today. The typical prophetically distinct and authoritative epithets have morphed into more carefully crafted ones; Hence, many prophets today use phrases like, 'I feel the Lord saying' or 'I hear the Lord saying' all used in

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 303.

¹⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2000) 80-100.

meticulously nuanced ways to not sound arrogant, yet sound seemingly authoritative. A common ploy exploited by some prophets today is this phrase or some iteration of it, “I hear the Lord saying that there is someone in the audience who needs a job, or a promotion, and God is saying to you, give, give until it hurts. Give sacrificially so that God can release what you need.” This type of prophecy has invaded the pulpit and has been normalized. According to Benjamin B. Phillips, “Finally, contemporary Reformed theologians such as J. I Parker and Michael Horton have affirmed that preaching is prophecy. Michael Horton Notes that the office of prophet can be understood in either a narrow or broad sense. In the narrow sense, the term refers to the biblical prophets. In a broad sense, it encompasses Spirit-empowered speech by all believers.”¹⁴⁷ If this Spirit-empowered speech does not meet the criteria as suggested by James Boyer as referenced earlier, which are, predictiveness, judgement, supernatural knowledge, supernatural acts, and divine pronouncements, how can they be considered prophecies? If Grudem’s spontaneous speech theory riddled with inaccuracies is the standard, then has the meaning of prophecy truly changed? Are the cessationist right in their assessment of the discontinuation of prophecy/prophets since the close of the canon? Or does the book of Revelation provide an insight into the eschatological resurgence of prophets in the two prophets in Rev. 11 or does this signify the continuation of the office of the prophet that never ceased with the canon? These questions cannot be answered in this paper; however, further exploration is advised to get a better understanding of what God declares in his word about the office of prophets.

Conclusion

Incontrovertibly, the NT records the gift of prophecy throughout the Apostolic Period, and it has also been shown through the quotation by Farnell as he quoted from the Didache, that this function continued into the second century. Consequently, there is some hinting of the acceptance of prophecy as the church moved passed the Apostolic period. Conclusively, based on the Didache, criteria were set to be able to distinguish a true prophet from an imposter. Assuredly, there is validity to Grudem’s overall view of the continuation of the office. However, the change in standards through the new definition that he propounds is deserving of scrutiny. I conclude that Agabus’ prophecy on Paul’s capture does not serve as a blueprint for

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin B. Phillips, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Pulpit: Reconsidering Preaching as a form of Prophecy,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 16:1 (2019): 16, retrieved 22 April 2024, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/jbtml6-1-03?highlight=prophecy%20today>.

inconsistent or inaccurate prophecies. Grudem writing that “each prophecy might have both true and false elements in it, and those would be sifted and evaluated for what they were,”¹⁴⁸ is an inexcusable attempt at normalizing his view on prophecy today.

Further, it seems clear that prophecy did not cease with the closing of the canon of scripture as the cessationist promotes, nor has the standards of the office changed. However, what appears to have influenced prophecies today is the injection of either human derived speech, or as was prevalent in the Corinthian church, the demonic influence. Avowedly, prophecy ought to continue to form part of the church since it is an essential part of the edification or building up required for maturity and learning. The evaluation of prophecies is critically important to avoid Satanic influence from permeating through the vulnerable minds and spirits of the congregants who are innocently eager for solutions to the issues of life.

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¹⁴⁸ Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 61.

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A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN

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“Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.’ And they marveled at him” (Mark 12:17).¹⁴⁹

The “Muddled Entanglement” of the Church of England

The establishment, or what could be described as “entanglement” due to its complicated or compromising relationship between the Church of England with the UK parliament and the Royal Monarchy, is often bolstered as “The British Way,” but does this formal arrangement still exemplify the Gospel the way it was intended? The main objective of this study is to examine the establishment of the Anglican Church of England with the United Kingdom of Great Britain through a Biblical and theological lens. The question is whether the establishment serves to alter the Christian perspective promoted in the Gospel and in the church, and possibly hinders the church in its role. It is this author’s presupposition that the current establishment of the church and state in the UK is detrimental to this Biblical perspective of the church and its role. This thesis, therefore, argues that the formal establishment of the church and state in its current form is yet a shadow of what it was intended for and the bondage of an established relationship between the two entities shackles the true representation of the church.

There is no room for arguing against the fact that Christianity in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe as a whole, has been dwindling over the past century. In Douglas Jacobsen’s book, *Global Gospel*, he indicates, “Over the last hundred years, Europe’s share of the world’s Christian population has collapsed from about 65 percent to 25 percent, and it is still falling.”¹⁵⁰ Yet, even though the majority of countries within Europe have at some point instituted into their societies a formal relationship between church and state, Christianity, which was once a prominent aspect of life has been pushed aside for

¹⁴⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Douglas Jacobsen, *Global Gospel - An Introduction to Christianity on Five Continents* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 8.

secularist and humanist movements. A draft of the 2004 European Union constitution which was later rejected, reads,

Conscious that Europe is a continent that has brought forth civilization; that its inhabitants, arriving in successive waves from earliest times, have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason, drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage.”¹⁵¹

While the UK is no longer a member of the European Union, this idea that its country has “brought forth a civilization of humanism” is very prominent and pervasive in society and therefore raises an important question. To what degree do countries which were once predominantly Christian experience detrimental effects when the state is entwined with the church? Has it contributed to the loss of Christian faith among the populace? More specifically, in regard to the UK, does the establishment of the Anglican Church of England with the United Kingdom of Great Britain lead to the altering of church perspectives promoted in the Gospel, and possibly hinder the church in its role, a role given not by governmental or political authority but by the authority of God?

Many consider the establishment of church and state in England to be vital to the functioning of the English society, its political identity, and its tradition of the Royal Monarchy but the Church of England is only a shadow of itself compared with fifty to a hundred years ago. With decreasing numbers of Christians in the UK it seems a good time to revisit the seemingly archaic relationship of the establishment of the Church of England and examine if the current form of the relationship is beneficial or detrimental to the church.

The viewpoint of this thesis is coming from a UK expatriate who is now living in the US. From growing up in the UK and spending the first twenty years of my life in England before emigrating to America in the early 2000’s I have experienced both the established relationship of the church in the UK as well as no formal relationship between church and state in the US. While neither country can brag about having an overwhelmingly large Christian population today, there is also no question of mixed prerogatives or confused identity of

¹⁵¹ “Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe,” *Eur-Lex*, (July 18, 2003, retrieved November 18, 2023, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52003XX0718\(01\)&rid=1](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52003XX0718(01)&rid=1)).

the church in the US because it is not directly diluted or tangled up with political agendas. Some may argue against this thought and assert that the US church is indeed entangled politically in ways unbecoming to the Church. However, while it is fair to say that the American church has sided heavily with one political party there is no formal agreement or establishment made between the two entities.

From an American perspective, the establishment of affiliation between church and state is foreign to the American worldview because there has been a “separation of church and state” since the Bill of Rights was written in 1789. In David Barton’s book *Separation of Church and State – What the Founders Meant* (2023), he explains that the Congressional Record documents the conversations between the Founding Fathers when writing the Bill of Rights. He shares, “In those lengthy discussions that spanned months, the Founders repeatedly explained that they were seeking to prevent what they had experienced under Great Britain: the legal establishment by the national government of a single religious denomination in exclusion of all others (whether Catholic, Anglican, or any other).”¹⁵² It was also indicated how the word “religion” was often used interchangeably with “denomination” and so the First Amendment wanted to make sure there was no established relationship of any specific denomination like in England with the Anglican church and the English government. Unfortunately, today the understanding of the First Amendment has been somewhat skewed as Barton wrote “The result is that the First Amendment is now used to prohibit the very religious activities that the Founders themselves once encouraged under the same Amendment.”¹⁵³ Even with this understanding however, the separation of church and state allows for the church to be the church and for the political arena to remain undoubtedly separate. This type of distinct relationship doesn’t allow the possibility of any muddled waters between the two entities. But the reality for many countries around the world is that they have had a formal agreement established between the church and state for centuries and it is simply commonplace. This is true of the Anglican Church of England and the UK state where Anglicanism is the most common denomination and the most televised, so that when a typical citizen thinks of the church in England, they think of the Anglican Church.

The methodology for this thesis includes the literature review of the studies of Michael Turnbull and Donald McFadyen as presented in their book, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State*:

¹⁵² David Barton, *Separation of Church and State – What the Founders Meant* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilders, 2023), 6.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 7.

Reimagining the Church of England for our World Today (2012). Their book is in support of the establishment but understands the need for change. Michael Turnbull is a retired Church of England Bishop and was once Bishop of Durham which is the fourth most senior bishop position in the Church of England. Reverend Donald McFadyen is currently Vicar of the Warmington Benefice in the Diocese of Peterborough and Associate Tutor / Staff Mentor with the Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC) through the University of Cambridge. Other literature studies included will be Jonathan Chaplin's book titled *Beyond Establishment: Resetting Church-State Relations in England* (2022). Chaplin's book is in support of de-establishment of the Church of England for the good of the church. He is the Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics at Cambridge University. Also, this thesis will review the findings of a study titled *Seeing Ourselves as Others See US: Perceptions of the Church of England* by Stephen Vance, the current National lead for Evangelism and Witness for the Church of England and will also utilize additional literature on the topic from various theologians and authors.

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the current establishment between church and state in England serves to alter the Christian perspective promoted in the Gospel and in the church, and possibly hinders the church in its role. While this thesis explores this question, it does not aim to provide a concrete solution because it is beyond the scope of this paper, my expertise, and would require a much more detailed and thorough investigation into the particulars of disestablishment or a modified model of establishment. The discussion now turns to the historical establishment of church and state in the UK.

Establishment of the Church of England

“‘Establishment,’ writes sociologist Grace Davie, ‘refers to the complicated but definable links between the Church of England and the state’” To narrow it down further, “the 1970 Chadwick Commission described establishment as meaning ‘the laws which apply to the Church of England and not to other churches’”¹⁵⁴ This chapter explains how the establishment was created through its history, how it functions, and the viewpoints held by the establishment.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Partington, *Church and State – The Contribution of the Church of England Bishops to the House of Lords during the Thatcher Years* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 26.

Chaplin utilizes the definition of establishment from Paul Avis, an Anglican priest and theologian who is a defender of establishment and provides the following definition,

He sees the ‘core’ of Establishment as including four elements: the principle of partnership in service between the Church and civil society; the national pastoral mission of the Church that aims to reach the whole community, territorially understood; the State’s recognition of the things of God and its responsibility for the spiritual welfare of its citizens, in preference to a purely secular constitution; the acknowledged role of the Church in the debate over public issues.¹⁵⁵

History of the Establishment

Throughout history there have been different examples of relationships between church and state. Scottish theologian and pastor, A.T.B. McGowan wrote in his article titled “Church and State: The Contribution of Church History to Evangelical Models for Public Theology,”

In the history of the Christian Church, however, there have essentially been four views held concerning the relationship between Church and state. First, the view that the state should control the Church; second, the view that the Church should control the state; third, the view that there should be a separation of Church and state; and fourth, the view that Church and state should be in some mutually-binding relationship.¹⁵⁶

The best way to describe the model which is in place in the UK is that the “state controls the church” and it has been this way since the 1530s.

Prior to the creation of the establishment or reformation of the church in 1532, the Church of England was a Catholic church which can trace its roots back to as early as the 3rd century or even earlier. The writings of Tertullian in “An Answer to the Jews” provides the earliest reference to Christianity in the UK when he wrote, “For instance, by

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Chaplin, *Beyond Establishment – Resetting Church-State Relations in England* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2022), 16.

¹⁵⁶ A.T.B. McGowan, “Church and State: The Contribution of Church History to Evangelical Models for Public Theology” *European Journal of Theology* (2005, retrieved November 23, 2023, https://Biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ejt/14-1_005.pdf), 5.

this time, the varied races of the Gaetulians, and manifold confines of the Moors, all the limits of the Spains, and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons--inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ.”¹⁵⁷ In Everett Ferguson’s book *Church History – From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, he indicates “Three British Bishops were at the Council of Arles in 314,”¹⁵⁸ indicating the evidence of Christianity in the UK in the early 300s.

It was also at this time when the first missionaries visited the United Kingdom, therefore there are many noteworthy individuals in the history of Christianity who have laboriously helped shape the English church to become what it is today. St. Patrick and St. Augustine are the most recognized names but before them both was Ninian. “Ninian (360-432) was the ‘apostle of Scotland.’” ... who “was British but trained in Rome.”¹⁵⁹ He was known to work as a missionary between Hadrian’s Wall in Northern England and the Antonine Wall near current day Glasgow in Scotland.

Patrick (389-461), who later became known as St. Patrick, was kidnapped from England at a young age and sold into slavery in Ireland. Upon his escape and return to England he had a vision that he was to return to Ireland as a missionary and evangelize. Some several years later after completing his studies and ordination he returned to Ireland where he would be consecrated as the Bishop of Ireland and minister to the Irish people for approximately forty years.

The fact is that missionaries played a very significant role in the Christianization of the region. After the withdrawal of Roman troops early in the 5th century there was a rise in paganism due to the influx of Anglo Saxons. However, “When Roman missionaries came to England at the end of the sixth century, there were already three expressions of Christianity... (1) the old Romano-British Christians, (2) Irish Christians, and (3) Iro-Scottish Christians.”¹⁶⁰ Leading these Roman Missionaries was St. Augustine of Canterbury who stands as the most significant figure in the development of the Church of England. His admirable contributions to the church continue to impact the functioning and establishment of the Church of England. He was known as the apostle to England, who would later become the first Archbishop of Canterbury after founding the Christian church in the

¹⁵⁷ Tertullian, “An Answer to the Jews”, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, (retrieved November 12, 2023, https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/jews_answer/anf03.iv.ix.i.html).

¹⁵⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume one - From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 355.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 355.

¹⁶⁰ Ferguson, *Church History*, 356.

South of England. Ferguson wrote, “Pope Gregory in 596 dispatched Augustine and forty other monks to England.”¹⁶¹ It was the mission led by St. Augustine that would establish the Church of England. The conversion of the pagan society was one fraught with immense opposition to Augustine and Roman Christianity, but he diligently trudged on, nonetheless. Most of his work would take place in Canterbury which is how he received the name of Augustine of Canterbury. Ferguson states,

The correspondence of Augustine with Gregory gives details of the problems of adapting Roman Christianity to pagans. Gregory’s replies provide classic exposition of the Catholic strategy in missions: What was clearly inconsistent with Christianity was to be destroyed, but what could be taken over or adapted to Christian purposes was to be used in such a way as to provide as much continuity in the religious life as possible. Gregory’s mission policy meant to Christianize holy places and times.¹⁶²

The idea was not to destroy anything that could be used for the Christian faith in England but instead to utilize it to build the faith and bring unity to Christianity in the UK. The Church of England itself states,

What eventually became known as the Church of England (the *Ecclesia Anglicana* - or the English Church) was the result of a combination of three streams of Christianity, the Roman tradition of St. Augustine and his successors, the remnants of the old Romano-British church and the Celtic tradition coming down from Scotland and associated with people like St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert.¹⁶³

This formation of the establishment of the Roman Catholic church in England and the consequent creation of the Church of England would shape the British Christian faith and society to what it is today. Based on Augustine’s work in Canterbury he was appointed to the virtuous role of the Archbishop of Canterbury which solidified the city’s position as the spiritual center of England, a role it continues to

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 357.

¹⁶² Ferguson, *Church History*, 358.

¹⁶³ “History of the Church of England”, *The Church of England*, (retrieved October 28, 2023 <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/media-centre/history-church-england>).

play to this day. The Archbishop of Canterbury continues to steadily lead the church and serves as the primary spiritual leader for the Church of England.

In Michael Turnbull and Donald McFadyen's book, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State* (2012), they show the impact St. Augustine had on Christianity in the UK and write,

The church had a key role to play in the unification of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms into a nation with its own identity. The spread of the Christian faith brought opportunities for trade and the foundation of common law between the different tribes and kingdoms. Ethelbert's Law Code was produced by St Augustine's monks and written not in Latin but in the language of the people. The church also introduced literacy and scholarship into the country. The abbey which was founded by Augustine at Canterbury linked the country to the continent and the surge of learning which was carried through Europe.¹⁶⁴

In addition to understanding the role St. Augustine had on Christianity in the UK it is also important to understand what the Christian church understood at the time. In Stuart E. Prall's book, *Church and State in Tudor and Stuart England* (1993), he wrote,

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to outline briefly but fully the basic teachings of the Christian church as they were understood by the late medieval world.... people in this era really believed in God. They also really believed in Christianity as the true religion...The basic Christian message had been outlined in the early fifth century by St. Augustine in his short handbook, *The Enchiridion*. He wrote that human beings were the descendants of Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, or Paradise. To be human was to be a punishment for sin. Where Adam and Eve had been "created" in the image of God, their descendants are born as humans and will die as humans. Death will be followed by an eternity in Hell. A just God gives humans what they deserve-everlasting damnation. But God is merciful as well as just and provides a means of overcoming Hell and assuring salvation, or the reunion with God in Heaven. The goal of all humans is to

¹⁶⁴ Michael Turnbull and Donald McFadyen, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State* (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2012), 86-87.

overcome Original Sin and the expulsion from Paradise and to be restored to Paradise¹⁶⁵

To further understand the climate of the church in the UK during these times Ferguson shared that “church-state tensions were reflected in the conflict between King Henry II (1154-89) and Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury (1162-70).”¹⁶⁶ He reported on the account of how King Henry II ended up brazenly having the archbishop killed because of disputes over ecclesiastical courts versus those of the Monarchy.

The Church of England stayed under the power of the Catholic church until the reformation in the 16th century when the establishment would undergo a critical change. McGowan provides a valuable insight to how the previously Catholic-controlled country removed papal supremacy to become the Anglican Church of England instead of being controlled by Rome.

Both England and Scotland were partially controlled by foreign powers at the beginning of the sixteenth century, England by Spain and Scotland by France. Various alliances were formed because of these relationships one of the most significant of which was the marriage of Arthur, Prince of Wales to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Sadly, the marriage lasted less than a year and Catherine was left a widow. Henry VIII wanted to marry his brother’s widow and eventually persuaded Pope Julius II to permit this. There was considerable opposition to this marriage, not least from the Archbishop of Canterbury but Henry went ahead. The failure to produce a male heir led Henry to ask the Pope to annul the marriage, belatedly appearing to accept the Archbishop’s opinion that it had never truly been a legal marriage in the first place. The Pope refused, in part at least because of the influence upon him of Emperor Charles V, Catherine’s nephew. In 1529 Henry called a parliament and set about the Reformation of the Church, his main objective being that he, and not the Pope, would be the head of the Church of England, thus guaranteeing the Church’s complicity in his intended divorce. In 1531 Henry forced the clergy to accept this position and from that point on the Church of England has

¹⁶⁵ Stuart E. Prall, *Church and State in Tudor and Stuart England* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2003), 4-5

¹⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Church History*, 469.

never been able to make decisions for itself without royal approval. Parliament endorsed this and also passed other significant Acts, including one which prevented appeals to Rome.¹⁶⁷

While there was a back and forth of papal authority after King Henry VIII's death, the relationship between church and state in the UK still operates under the situation which was established in 1559 with the Monarch as the "Supreme Governor" over the Church of England.

Turnbull and McFadyen write, "The Church of England was born out of turbulence and it will remain a turbulent church. It is a church deeply embedded in the psyche and culture of the English people. It strives to be true to the Scripture and tradition while remaining open to what God is saying to the world today."¹⁶⁸

While some may argue that church and state tensions are recent this is not actually the case. In a document for the House of Commons Library titled, "The relationship between church and state in the United Kingdom" it lists "Historically, establishment was opposed in parts of the UK where most of the population were not Anglican. As a result of political and religious pressure, the church was disestablished in Ireland in 1871 and Wales in 1920."¹⁶⁹ These church and state tensions in the UK have been around for hundreds of years, which I emphasize when it comes to questioning the relevancy and appropriateness of the situation as it is with the Anglican English church today.

The Relationship of the Establishment between Church and State

One must remember that the establishment of the church and State in England only applies to the Anglican Church of England and not to any other denominations. This assigns a unique status to the Anglican church which many consider to be an exclusive privilege. Chaplin argues that "any 'special forms of privilege and responsibility' afforded to any church by the state are theologically problematic, even

¹⁶⁷ A.T.B. McGowan, "Church and State: The Contribution of Church History to Evangelical Models for Public Theology" *European Journal of Theology* (2005, retrieved November 23, 2023, https://Biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ejt/14-1_005.pdf), 6.

¹⁶⁸ Turnbull and McFadyen, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ "The relationship between church and state in the United Kingdom." *House of Commons Library*. (September 14, 2023, retrieved November 18, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8886/CBP-8886.pdf>), 5.

once we have recognized the peculiar histories by which they may have come about.”¹⁷⁰ This segment discusses the intertwined relationship of the Church with parliament and its relationship with the Monarch.

Relationship with Parliament

By baptism, upbringing, social position, and cultural convention, Churchill was a member of the Church of England. But he attended church services for family, social and ceremonial reasons, not for worship. As he explained in *My Early Life*, Churchill lost his Christian faith in his twenties. He had no belief in the divinity of Christ or in Christ as a saviour, and his speeches rarely referred to Jesus or Christ. While he relished the prose of the King James Bible and The Book of Common Prayer, he was indifferent towards the Church of England’s formularies. Nor was he interested in the doctrinal distinctions (rather than the social and political differences) between Anglican, Presbyterian, free, and Catholic churches. He would say (repeating a quip by a nineteenth-century prime minister) that he was not a pillar but a buttress of the church, supporting it from outside. Christianity was for Churchill a matter of moral and social utility, part of the fabric that held together free, tolerant, law-abiding, progressive, and prosperous communities and nations. He used the word “Christian” in a cultural rather than substantive religious sense, as a descriptor or accentuator for such terms as “ethics” or “civilization” as these related to the English-speaking peoples and European societies.¹⁷¹

The religious views indicated above of the highly decorated Prime Minister during WWII, Sir Winston Churchill, provide such a comprehensive and precise glimpse into the inclination of many people in the UK. The perceptions listed highlight the disposition of the British people and provide an insight to how the majority view the relationship between the church and government. This section will review how the relationship of the Church of England functions with parliament.

According to the House of Commons Library document titled “The relationship between church and state in the United Kingdom” the

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Chaplin, *Beyond Establishment – Resetting Church-State Relations in England* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2022), 17.

¹⁷¹ “Churchill and the Churches”, *International Churchill Society*, (retrieved November 22, 2023, <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-191/churchill-and-the-churches/>).

“King is ‘Supreme Governor’ of the Church of England... Anglican bishops are members of the House of Lords...” and the “Church of England Measures (laws) require parliamentary oversight.” The document also indicates,

Until 1919 the church was reliant on the UK Parliament for legislation to govern its affairs. Power was then devolved from Westminster to a new “National Assembly”, which assumed greater control of church affairs. This was replaced with a General Synod in 1970. A Second Church Estates Commissioner represents the Church of England in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister (or another delegated Minister of the Crown) is responsible for advising the Monarch on church appointments.¹⁷²

This relationship, even though it has changed over time, reduces the church’s autonomy as it answers to the Crown and to parliament.

According to the House of Commons and echoed by a report from Politics.co.uk, the Church of England has twenty-six automatic seats for the Bishops in the House of the Lords who sit in the Upper Chamber of parliament. The twenty-six seats have remained in place since the last altering of the constitutional position in 1847 as they previously held over two hundred seats.

One of the Bishops opens the House of the Lords each day with a prayer and then the bishops essentially act just like any other member of parliament since they examine legislation, ask questions, provide insight, and most importantly, vote. While they don’t represent a political party many have likened them to functioning as their own political party. Due to the fact many of the factors they speak on favor the needy and the vulnerable, many view them as somewhat leftist. National Lead for Evangelism and Witness for the Church of England and Anglican Priest, Stephen Hance in his report on “Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us – Perceptions of the Church of England,” writes,

If historically the Church of England has been the ‘Tory Party at prayer,’ its senior leadership is now perceived by some to sit comfortably and consistently with the pro-European soft left and reluctant to challenge its shibboleths. The leadership of the

¹⁷² “The relationship between church and state in the United Kingdom.” *House of Commons Library*. (September 14, 2023, retrieved on November 2, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8886/CBP-8886.pdf>), 5.

church can seem quite detached from the political centre of gravity in a nation which has elected a Conservative-led government in eight of the last eleven general elections. Some feel that the bishops and the church are out of touch with ordinary people. Some feel that the church contributes on issues which are relatively easy to speak about, without confidence to engage in thornier matters. Someone said, ‘The church hasn’t found its voice yet.’

While the Church of England has a strong view that they should continue to hold seats in parliament, the majority of the UK population disagree. The same report lists the following,

- Just 8% of people believe that Bishops should retain their seats in the House of Lords [Source: YouGov, 2017].
- Religious representatives are the public’s least favoured candidates for appointment to the House of Lords. [You Gov, 2003].
- 62% of Britons say there is “no place in UK politics for religious influence of any kind” [Source – Com Res – 2016]
- 70% of Christians believe it is wrong for Bishops to have reserved places in the House of Lords [Source – ICM Research – 2010]¹⁷³

Relationship with the Crown

Within the establishment, in addition to the relationship of the church and parliament, it also holds a very critical relationship to the Royal Monarch. The House of Commons writes,

The Sovereign holds the title “Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England”. These titles date back to the reign of King Henry VIII, who was initially granted the title “Defender of the Faith” in 1521 by Pope Leo X. When Henry VIII renounced the spiritual authority of the Papacy in 1534, he was proclaimed “supreme head on earth” of the Church of England. This was repealed by Queen Mary I but reinstated during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who was proclaimed “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England.

According to the canon of the Church of England, section A7 lists “Of the Royal Supremacy - We acknowledge that the King's excellent Majesty, acting according to the laws of the realm, is the

¹⁷³ “Bishops,” *Politics*, (retrieved November 2, 2023, <https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/bishops/>).

highest power under God in this kingdom, and has supreme authority over all persons in all causes, as well ecclesiastical as civil.”¹⁷⁴ This highlights the complexity of the role the Royal Monarch plays in the relationship.

General Synod

The Church of England’s legislative body is the General Synod, which was established in 1970, after renaming and reformatting the previous Church Assembly. The Church of England website indicates, “The General Synod is the national assembly of the Church of England... The General Synod considers and approves legislation affecting the whole of the Church of England, formulates new forms of worship, debates matters of national and international importance, and approves the annual budget for the work of the Church at national level.”¹⁷⁵ The UK government considers “Church of England measures are laws with the same force and effect as Acts of Parliament, but which relate to the administration and organisation of the Church.”¹⁷⁶ The issue is however that the measures made by the General Synod still require the approval of Parliament to go into effect. According to parliament, “Draft measures are considered by the Ecclesiastical Committee, formed of MPs and members of the House of Lords. If the Committee approves a draft, the measure is presented to both Houses for approval and then – if approval is granted – to the Monarch for Royal Assent.”¹⁷⁷ In effect, any measure established by the General Synod need the vote of parliament and then the approval of the Monarch to be approved. Proving once again the understanding that the Church of England is under the authority of the state.

¹⁷⁴ “Leadership and Governance – Canons of the Church of England,” *The Church of England*, (retrieved November 9, 2023, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/section#b7>).

¹⁷⁵ “General Synod,” *The Church of England*, (retrieved November 5, 2023, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod>).

¹⁷⁶ “Church of England Measures,” *UK Parliament*, (retrieved November 7, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/church-of-england-measures/#:~:text=Church%20of%20England%20measures%20are,approval%20to%20come%20into%20force>).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

The Role of the Church within the Establishment

The role of the Anglican Church of England within the establishment is somewhat convoluted, because according to the Church of England, their vision is that “the Church of England’s vocation is and always has been to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ afresh in each generation to the people of England.”¹⁷⁸ However, in a 2012 speech by the longest reigning and arguably most influential Monarch in British history and former Head of the Church of England, Queen Elizabeth said,

Here at Lambeth Palace we should remind ourselves of the significant position of the Church of England in our nation’s life. The concept of our established Church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, commonly under-appreciated. Its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country.

It certainly provides an identity and spiritual dimension for its own many adherents. But also, gently and assuredly, the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely. Woven into the fabric of this country, the Church has helped to build a better society – more and more in active co-operation for the common good with those of other faiths.

This occasion is thus an opportunity to reflect on the importance of faith in creating and sustaining communities all over the United Kingdom. Faith plays a key role in the identity of many millions of people, providing not only a system of belief but also a sense of belonging. It can act as a spur for social action. Indeed, religious groups have a proud track record of helping those in the greatest need, including the sick, the elderly, the lonely and the disadvantaged. They remind us of the responsibilities we have beyond ourselves.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ “Vision and Strategy,” *The Church of England*, (retrieved November 9, 2023, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy>).

¹⁷⁹ “A speech by The Queen at Lambeth Palace 2012”, *The Royal Household*, (February 15, 2012, retrieved November 10, 2023, <https://www.royal.uk/queens-speech-lambeth-palace-15-february-2012>).

Based on the words of the Monarch versus those of the Church of England there seems to be a disconnected and compromised expectation because the Church of England, which is inherently the church of Christ, cannot “proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ,” yet defends or almost promotes other religions or faith groups. The Church of England will not claim that it does this, but it has become so intertwined with the state that it has become more focused on the equilibrium of the other faith groups that it has lost sight of its God given purpose. In the study by Stephen Hance, he realized from his round table discussions that many people questioned if the church was embarrassed by God because they are so focused on works that many do not even know what the Church of England believes. He indicates, “One participant wondered aloud if we have stopped really believing in God and have decided to prioritise good works instead.”¹⁸⁰ He added that “one result of this is that people who are interested in exploring spirituality often do not consider the Church of England as a possible partner in that exploration. We are simply not associated with the spiritual experience at all.”¹⁸¹ This seems quite sad that many people do not associate the Church of England as a spiritual place or institution and would not turn to the church in their attempt to inquisitively discover more about Christ.

Current Climate and Status of Christianity in the UK

Historically, much of the English population was Christian or at least claimed to be. But for many years now, the UK population of those identifying as having Christian affiliation has been on the decline and there is evidence of this everywhere. Schools are phasing out the Christmas nativity story of Jesus, churches are gradually being abandoned, and the truth of Jesus is unquestionably being pushed aside. Many people are now several generations removed from the church and as time goes by the population continues to get further and further away from the church. The relevancy of the church is diminishing and so is its influence on the lives of the British people. This chapter will discuss the current status of Christianity in the UK and the effect of the establishment on the current climate of Christianity.

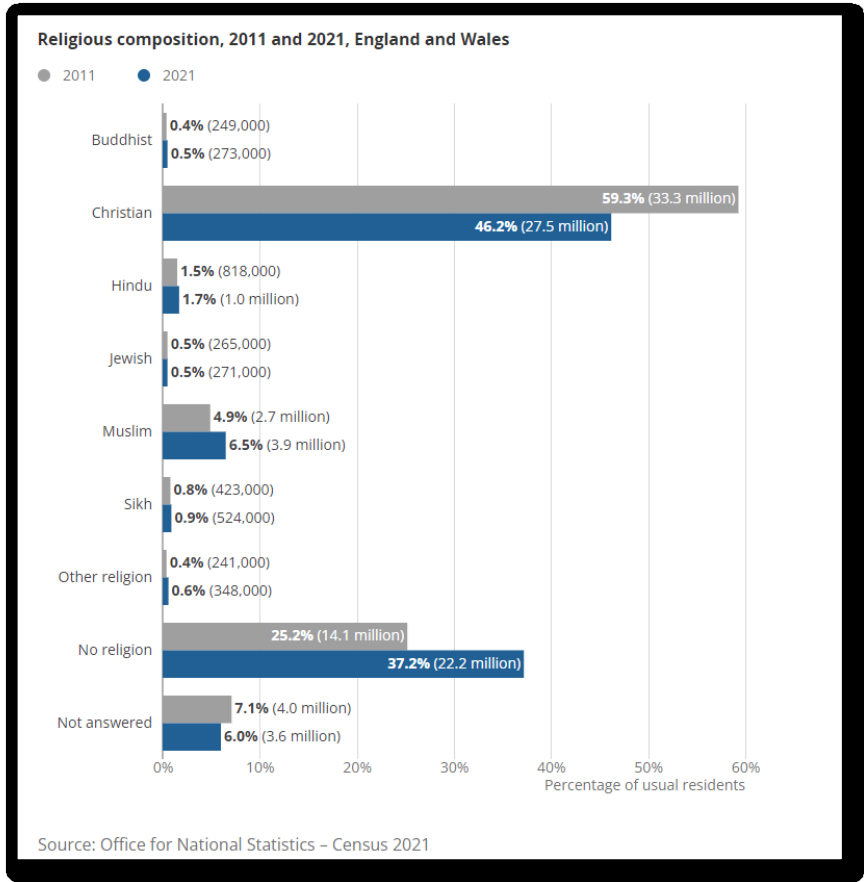
Christianity in the UK is on the decline and has been for several decades. Some may look at the data in this chapter and assume that a large portion of the population are practicing Christians but the numbers of people who claim they are affiliated with the Church of

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Hance, *Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us – Perceptions of the Church of England*, (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 2021), 19.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

England versus those who are practicing Christians and attend church regularly is vastly different. I have witnessed this personally and can even attest that I grew up in a family that claimed CofE (Church of England) but didn't own a Bible and never stepped inside a church except for baby christenings, weddings, or funerals. The unfortunate reality is that this is commonplace for most families in the UK.

The UK Office for National Statistics presented the following chart to indicate the changes over the last decade when it comes to faith in England and Wales. This chart indicates the faith group which a person affiliates with.¹⁸² The indications of the report are below.



From the chart, it is obvious to see the decline in Christianity from 59.3% or 33.3 million of the population in 2011 to 46.2% or 27.5

¹⁸² “Statistical Bulletin, Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021,” *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, (released 29 November 2022, retrieved November 13, 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>).

million in 2021. While the percentage declined for Christianity, it rose for Buddhists, Hindu's, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh's, and other religions. The sharpest increase however came from those who indicated no religion. The report reveals "For the first time in a census of England and Wales, less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million people) described themselves as "Christian", a 13.1 percentage point decrease from 59.3% (33.3 million) in 2011"¹⁸³

According to published statistics found on the faithsurvey.co.uk website, between 1980 and 2015 UK "church attendance has declined from 6,484,300 to 3,081,500 (equivalent to a decline from 11.8% to 5.0% of the population) ... England has the lowest percentage of the population attending church in 2015 (4.7%)."¹⁸⁴ The church denominations with the steepest decline in attendance between the period of 1980 and 2015 were the Anglican church with a 52% decline, the Catholic church with a 71% decline, and the Methodist church with a 67% decline.¹⁸⁵ New churches however increased by 121% and Pentecostal churches grew by 35%. The statistics also indicate, "The Fastest growing churches are Fresh Expressions (+273%) and the Romanian Patriarchate (+233%)." (Faith Survey 2016) The Fresh Expressions church is, "a movement of Christians who establish and grow new Christian communities where they don't yet exist."¹⁸⁶ The Church of England's approach to the fresh expressions is called Greenhouse which is a layperson led church. The Romanian Patriarchate church is a hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox church and has increased in size due to the migration of Romanians to the UK. The Orthodox times states, "According to official statistics, Romanians are the second-largest EU minority in the United Kingdom, after Poland. The Romanian community in the UK numbers about one million people."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ "Statistical Bulletin, Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021," *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, (released 29 November 2022, retrieved on November 13, 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>).

¹⁸⁴ "Christianity in the UK, Measuring the Christian Population in the UK.," *Faith Survey*, (retrieved September 12, 2023, <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ "Fresh expressions in the Church of England," *The Church of England*, (retrieved September 12, 2023, <https://www.Churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions-Church-england>).

¹⁸⁷ "Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe met with Romanian Ambassador to London," *Orthodox Times*, (March 9, 2022,

While Christianity is declining especially in the Anglican church, fortunately there are signs of hope in small pockets. In Douglas Jacobsen's book, *Global Gospel*, he indicates "It is often said that Christianity is dying in contemporary Europe. That is an overstatement, but the sentiment is understandable given the dynamics of religious life in Europe today. There are some signs of spiritual vitality in the region, but the overall pattern is one of deep and persuasive decline."¹⁸⁸

In an article by Hannah Rich in *Christianity Today*, titled "Anglican Churches in the UK Are Shrinking in Size but Not Impact," she writes,

The evidence for secularization, or at least for the declining importance of Christianity, is compelling. Christian affiliation in the UK fell from 66 percent to 38 percent over 25 years, with Anglicanism accounting for the sharpest decline in affiliation. By 2018, only 12 percent of the national population identified as belonging to the Church of England or its sister Churches in Scotland and Wales.¹⁸⁹

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger indicate in their book *Emerging Churches* (2005), "This decline began in the mid-1960s...The reported weekly church attendance in the US is 40 percent, while in the UK it is 8 percent...The decline in church attendance has been occurring for several decades longer in the UK, which means that churches, new or old, are now seeking to reestablish contact with people three or four generations removed."¹⁹⁰

On an encouraging note, over recent years even though the overall number of church attendees has declined sharply, also aided by the Covid-19 pandemic and strict lockdowns, there are denominations and pockets throughout the UK where there has been somewhat of a reawakening. One aspect that is possibly leading to a reawakening of the Gospel in the UK is the immigration of people from non-EU countries. Jacobsen notes in *Global Gospel*, "Europe is currently undergoing significant demographic changes because of immigration. More than 2.5 million immigrants now arrive in Europe every year,

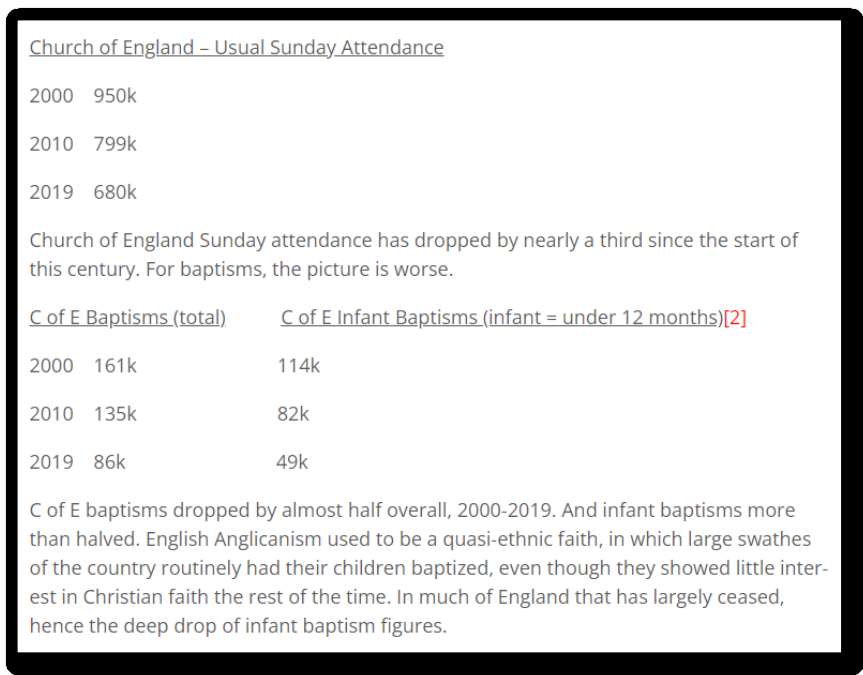
retrieved September 12, 2023, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/metropolitan-of-western-and-southern-europe-met-with-romanian-ambassador-to-london/>).

¹⁸⁸ Jacobsen, *Global Gospel*, 5.

¹⁸⁹ Hannah Rich, "Anglican Churches in the UK Are Shrinking in Size but Not Impact," *Christianity Today*, (November 24, 2020, retrieved September 14, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/november-web-only/Church-of-england-decline-theos-growing-good-social-action.html>).

¹⁹⁰ Ryan K. Bolger and Eddie Gibbs, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

coming mostly from Africa and Asia.”¹⁹¹ The main aspect of the reawakening to note however, is that it is all happening outside of the Church of England. The following diagram shows the decline in the usual Sunday attendance within the Church of England and the decline in baptisms and infant baptisms which were once very prominent in the UK.¹⁹²

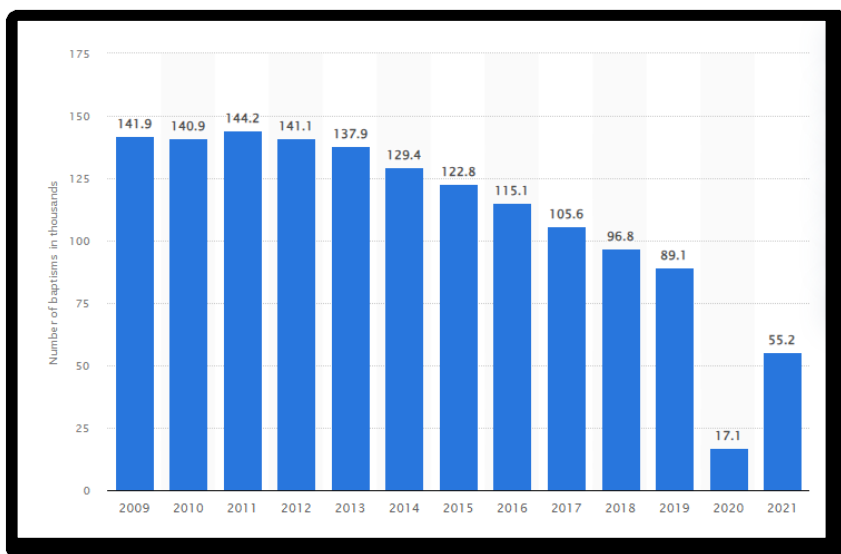


For a visual of the decline in baptisms the following chart from Statista shows the decline in baptisms within the Church of England from 2009 to 2021.¹⁹³ The numbers are slightly different based on the source but show the decline from approximately 141,900 baptisms in 2009 to 55,200 in 2021. These numbers did rise to 79,600 in 2022 but this is still half of what they were in a ten-year period. 2020 and part of 2021 were outliers due to Covid-19 lockdowns.

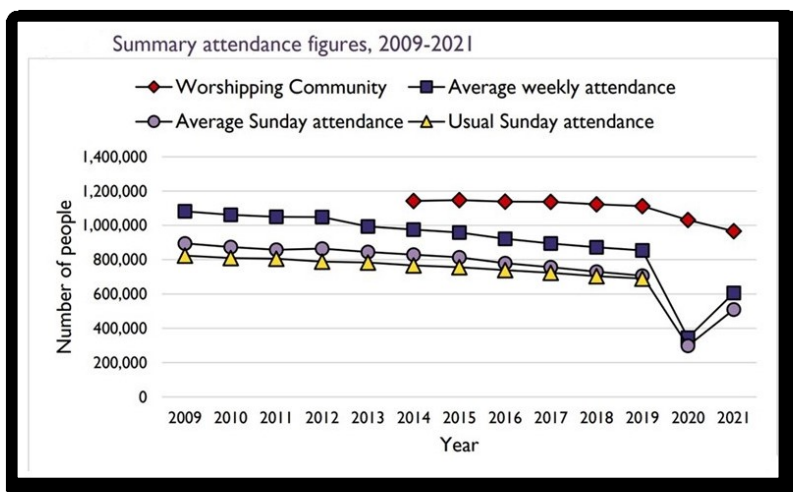
¹⁹¹ Jacobsen, *Global Gospel*, 130.

¹⁹² Rev. Dr. David Goodhew, “Whither The Church of England?”, *Covenant*, (September 3, 2021, retrieved November 12, 2023, <https://covenant.livingchurch.org/2021/09/03/whither-the-church-of-england/>).

¹⁹³ D. Clark, “Number of Church of England baptism and thanksgiving services 2009-2021”, *Statista*, (December 7, 2022, retrieved November 8, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/369110/church-of-england-timeline-baptisms/>).



A report listed in the *Church Times* below shows the summary of church attendance figures across the United Kingdom for the Church of England from 2009 to 2021. The “worshipping community” is recorded as occasional in-person attendance of once a month or more as well as online worship. The report indicates, “The figure for the worshipping community represents approximately 1.7 per cent of the total population of England.”¹⁹⁴



¹⁹⁴ Hattie Williams, “Church of England mission statistics record ‘another anomalous year,’” *Church Times*, (6 December 2022, retrieved November 8, 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/9-december/news/uk/c-of-e-mission-statistics-record-another-anomalous-year>).

The Effect of the Establishment

According to the Office of National Statistics for the UK, just over 50% of people in England and Wales reported their religion as Christian in 2019, while just under 40% reported “no religion.”¹⁹⁵ While 50% sounds like a high number only 5% of the population attends church regularly. As mentioned before, for many individuals the only time they will step inside a church is for baby christenings, weddings, and funerals. For the general British population, the church is seen as outdated and irrelevant for many people. While they may claim to believe in God or indicate that they are Christian on a survey, they don’t understand what it means to have a personal relationship with God and don’t see any benefit to going to church. This is likely the fault of the establishment between church and state. The establishment has caused the state to hold such a tight grip on the church that the church has not been able to lead as it should and bring people to Christ to experience an authentic relationship with Him. One could argue that the reason the Church of England has not been a good Shepherd of the people of England is due in part because of the tiptoe act they must maintain to keep the relationship with the state. God’s word is offensive to some. There is a narrow path to be in right relationship with God. That path is through Jesus Christ. To declare and fully profess that truth, the Church of England would essentially jeopardize its good standing with the people of England and would simply be less palatable to serve to an entire nation.

The consensus for a large portion of the population of the UK is that the church is out of touch with its people as it has not changed with the times in its approach to ministering to people. The church used to function as a community center for a city, town, or village where people would gather but this is no longer the case, and many churches are left empty. For a church that is inevitably led by the state and governed by the Monarch, it also creates an elitist mentality that only the wealthy attend church. This is only enhanced when there is a royal

¹⁹⁵ “Population estimates by ethnic group and religion, England and Wales: 2019,” *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, (December 16, 2021, retrieved November 16, 2023, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupandreligionenglandandwales/2019/pdf>), 6.

wedding or service where only the elite or wealthy are invited. The traditional Anglican Church of England is the only example of the church many British people will ever experience, which they experience by witnessing ceremonial and state events.

There are legal requirements placed upon schools because of the establishment whereby “in every school in England and Wales, there should be an act of collective worship in which each pupil can participate every day...” and it has to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.”¹⁹⁶ While it is great that students are learning about the story of Jesus during their time in school, this fades out quickly as the topic of religion is seen as a private matter in the UK. Britons rarely discuss their religious beliefs openly with one another, which indicates a disconnect somewhere between primary school and beyond.

Current Status of the Church of England

“The chair of St Augustine is now empty, as far as leaders representing an estimated 85 percent of the Anglican Communion are concerned.”¹⁹⁷

It would be doing this thesis a disservice if the current status or “schism” of the Church of England and the Anglican church is not also addressed. For an already fraught church, the decisions made this year have caused great division and some people have even called for the resignation of Justin Welby, the current Archbishop of Canterbury. At the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) earlier this year in Kigali, Rwanda the conservative primates withdrew their recognition of Justin Welby as the chair of the Anglican church. They indicated “We have no confidence that the Archbishop of Canterbury nor the other Instruments of Communion led by him (the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ Meetings) are able to provide a godly way forward that will be acceptable to those who are committed to the truthfulness, clarity, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture.”¹⁹⁸ This vote of no confidence has only increased with the recent decision on same-sex blessings in the General Synod.

¹⁹⁶ Caroline Wyatt, “Does daily worship count for anything?” *BBC*, (December 23, 2015, retrieved October 30, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-35161361>).

¹⁹⁷ John Sandeman, “Conservative Anglicans Reject Church of England and Archbishop of Canterbury”, *Christianity Today*, (April 21, 2023, retrieved November 7, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/april/gafcon-rwanda-anglican-communion-global-south-gsfa.html>).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

In early 2023 there were murmurs of discussions about the Church of England considering using gender neutral terms to refer to God to be more inclusive which reflects the detrimental effect of the establishment. While these discussions have not yet moved forward, the consensus is that many within the Church of England find the term “Father” offensive because it gives God a masculine pronoun even though the Bible consistently refers to God as “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36, Gal. 4:6) or “Father” (Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:19; Mal. 2:10, Matt. 6:9).

However, the main issue currently at stake is that the General Synod recently voted and approved “a test” of same-sex couple’s “blessings” which was supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York. This approval came after it was approved last month by the House of the Bishops. This has caused much outrage across the Anglican community and Church of England which has triggered some leaders and members to leave the church.¹⁹⁹ There are some comparisons to draw from this decision with that of the Methodist church after they experienced a schism in 2019 over theological differences and the role of LGBTQ+ individuals in the church. This split in the Methodist church caused approximately 25% of their churches to break from the denomination.²⁰⁰ If this percentage of decline is reflected in the attendance of members of the Church of England after this recent decision, it would be extremely detrimental to the continuation of the Church of England. GAFCON released a statement in response to this recent decision by the Church of England and stated “This week marks a tragic moment in the history of the Church of England... the Church of England has made it clear that they disagree with Holy Scripture. They have decided that they can bless that from which the Bible calls us to repent.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Catherine Pepinster, “Church of England General Synod approves a test of prayers for same-sex couples”, *Episcopal News Service*, (November 16, 2023, retrieved November 23, 2023, <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/11/16/church-of-england-synod-moves-forward-with-a-test-of-prayers-for-same-sex-couples/>).

²⁰⁰ “Methodist Church approves split of 261 Georgia congregations after LGBTQ+ divide,” AP News, (November 19, 2023, retrieved November 22, 2023, *Global Anglican Future Conference*, https://www.gafcon.org/sites/gafcon.org/files/news/pdfs/gafcon_primates_council_statement_on_church_of_england_0.pdf).

²⁰¹ “Methodist Church approves split of 261 Georgia congregations after LGBTQ+ divide,” AP News, (November 19, 2023, retrieved November 22, 2023, *Global Anglican Future Conference*, https://www.gafcon.org/sites/gafcon.org/files/news/pdfs/gafcon_primates_council_statement_on_church_of_england_0.pdf).

In an article titled “Whither the Church of England” by Church of England Vicar, Rev. Dr. David Goodhew, he discusses the collapse of the Church of England and writes “The primary common denominator is theology. Those trimming faith to fit in with culture have tended to shrink, and those offering a ‘full-fat’ faith, vividly supernatural, have tended to grow. This is as true of the ultra-liturgical Orthodox as it is of the ultra-informal Pentecostals.”²⁰² The article shares that all Church of England attendance is shrinking except for those in London where it has actually increased. Goodhew indicates, “Alongside theology, a key factor is ethnicity. Put crudely, churches appealing to what the census enumerators call the “white British” are shrinking and those which appeal to a wider ethnic mix are growing. The “new” churches, Orthodox, and Pentecostal churches are far better at this than Anglicanism.”²⁰³ This is the effect of the establishment caused by the pressure placed upon it from being intertwined with the state.

As the Church of England gets further away from the theological doctrine it has held to in the past, its members who stay true to the foundational interpretations of the Bible scatter. And because of the publicity being promoted of the Church of England, the church as a whole is put in a detrimental light. Most people in the UK only see the church as the Church of England and when they see what is happening there is no shadow of a doubt that it has an unfavorable effect on the view of the church, thus hindering it in its Biblical role. To elaborate on this further, the Royal events which include coronations, funerals, and weddings attract millions of viewers around the world and not just from the UK. Many of these people who tune in to watch these events are not Christians and yet this is the only experience of the church they may ever have. I used to think this was beneficial as someone may become a believer based on their experience but when the Church of England gets further from the truth of Scripture it ends up being detrimental. This view of the church of England is not what the church looks like in Scripture which the following chapter will discuss. There is even a belief amongst many in England that the Church of England is not even a Christian church anymore because it has drifted so far away from its Christian roots.

²⁰² Rev. Dr. David Goodhew, “Whither The Church of England?”, *Covenant*, (September 3, 2021, retrieved November 12, 2023, <https://covenant.livingchurch.org/2021/09/03/whither-the-church-of-england/>).

²⁰³ Ibid.

Theological Consideration of Church and State

It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time. In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. (C.S. Lewis)²⁰⁴

C.S. Lewis was a devout Anglican but shared his thoughts towards church and state in several of his writings. In *The World's Last Night: and Other Essays* (1984), he wrote, “Theocracy is the worst of all possible governments.”²⁰⁵ He also shared his thoughts of the church and state relationship when discussing marriage and wrote,

My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognize that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. This distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.”

²⁰⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Touchstone, 1996), 171.

²⁰⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night: and Other Essays* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1984), 29.

As C.S. Lewis states, the behavior of a Christ follower will be vastly different than that of an unbeliever. The expectations of these two groups cannot be governed in the same manner. The beauty in this distinction is the ability to see light from dark. A stark contrast is present when these two groups are distinct from one another. This is not so for the Church of England. Its entanglement with Parliament brings to play a mixture of light and dark, a mixture of right and wrong, a mixture of truth and lies according to the Bible.

To examine the Biblical teaching surrounding church and state we first need to understand what the church is and the role it plays within Christianity. Once we have a good understanding of this, the discussion will then move to reviewing what the Scriptures say about the relationship of the church with the state before moving to reviewing scholarly arguments on the topic.

What is the Church?

“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14–15).²⁰⁶

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The two examples of Scripture above from the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy and Luke writing the Book of Acts provide some of the deepest theological context in regard to the definition of the church from the New Testament. While the definition of the church may not be simple, the term "Christian church" generally refers to the community or assembly of people who identify as Christians and gather together

²⁰⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced employ the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

for worship, fellowship, and the practice of their faith. The Christian church encompasses all followers of Jesus Christ, regardless of denominational affiliations, each with its own traditions, beliefs, practices, and structures. The central doctrines of the Christian church include belief in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the divinity of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, and the inerrant authority of the Bible.

Well-known New Testament scholar and theologian Wayne Grudem describes the church as “The community of all true believers for all time. That is the church is made up of all men and women who have been, are, or ever will be true believers in Jesus...All true believers, regardless of what time period they lived in, make up the church.”²⁰⁷ What is the definition of a true believer as Grudem described above? I would argue that a true Christian lives a life of grace enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit and pursues a life of holiness to show a broken world the beauty and power of the kingdom of God. Hebrews 12:14 describes a pursuit of peace and holiness that the believer should run after as the Lord sanctifies each person during their personal walk with him. Likewise, Millard J. Erickson in his book *Christian Theology* (2013) offers a tentative theological definition “of the church as the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth. While universal in nature, it finds expression in local groupings of believers that display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.”²⁰⁸ In this description we see that a believer of Christ is any person made new by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Being made new is an incredible gift that God gives the true believer; the pursuit of the flesh has no hold, things that once mattered pale in comparison to the one true God and the truth of His word.

The Role of the Church

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

²⁰⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs – Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 124.

²⁰⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 957.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

“Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25).

The Scriptures listed above provide a simple explanation of the church by indicating its role is for the gathering of the saints for the exaltation of God, the teaching of His followers, and the evangelization of the world. Grudem lists it simply as “The church is supposed to minister to God, to its members, and to the world.” He also adds, “And the pattern of preaching in Scripture is clear: the message is to be given in both word (through evangelism) and deed (through ministries of mercy).”²⁰⁹

Erickson writes “The church was not brought into being by our Lord simply to exist as an end in itself. Rather, it was brought into being to fulfil the Lord’s intention for it. It is to carry on the Lord’s ministry in the world – to perpetuate what he did and to do what he would do were he still here.”²¹⁰ This includes evangelism, edification, worship, and social concerns for the needy and suffering. The church exists to gather together in unity to push the gates of hell back. The earthly hold of the enemy on the world is loosened by God’s faithful church.

Biblical Teaching Surrounding Church and State

The relationship between church and government has always been a difficult subject to comprehend because throughout history there have been many instances of formal relationships between the church and government. At the same time, there are also many people who believe it is not Biblical. Before an argument can be made for or against the establishment of church and state however, the Scriptures need to be examined on this matter.

Of all the Scriptures which speak on this, one of the most quoted is from Mark 12:17. When Jesus is responding to the religious leaders regarding taxes, He says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). This passage clearly provides a distinction to what is the government’s and

²⁰⁹ Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 128-129.

²¹⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 972.

what is God's. God's purposeful distinction of these two authorities cannot be overlooked. The NIV *Life Application Study Bible* indicates,

As God's followers, we have legitimate obligations to both God and the government. But we need to keep our priorities straight. When the two authorities conflict, our duty to God always must come before our duty to the government. The coin bearing the emperor's image should be given to the emperor; our lives, bearing God's image, belong to God."²¹¹

This explanation, related to the text in Mark 12:17, draws a clear line in the sand between church and state. The state must be given a portion of a valued object. God must be given the believer's life, fully devoted and immensely valuable, as it bears the image of God.

Jonathan Leeman, an elder and author, stated in his essay on the *Gospel Coalition* titled "The Relationship of Church and State," "God has given the power of the sword to governments and the power of the keys to Churches, and he intends for them to work separately but cooperatively toward the greater end of worship."²¹² What Leeman is referring to is the government having the power of the sword from what Paul wrote in Romans 13:4, "For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4). When he stated the "power of the keys to the Churches" he is referring to Matthew 16:19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). These, again, are clearly two different entities. In this peculiarity the power of the sword has no forgiveness and mercy. The church beautifully offers hope and freedom to those who turn from their flesh and pursue Christ.

The death of John the Baptist told in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke provides an insight to the corruption that can happen when mixing church and government. John the Baptist was imprisoned by King Herod for condemning him and his brother's wife who were living immorally. John the Baptist called out the sin of the country's leadership and was imprisoned and inevitably beheaded for doing so. The church should be able to call sin for what it is and not be enveloped within it.

One aspect of government that the Bible speaks clearly on however is the submission to authorities. Romans 13:1-2 says, "Let

²¹¹ *Life Application Study Bible*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 1695.

²¹² Jonathan Leeman, "The Relationship of Church and State," *The Gospel Coalition*, (retrieved September 14, 2023). <https://www.theGospelcoalition.org/essay/the-relationship-of-church-and-state/#footnote-1>).

every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (Romans 13:1-2). This is a clear indication that God’s people must submit to those in authority as they are appointed to their role by God. Whether they are a good leader or not, or if their policies don’t seem Biblical, God appointed them into their role for a purpose.

Review of Scholarly Arguments on Church and State

Many different scholars have written on the establishment of church and state, and the topic even recently saw a reemergence in the news with a question posed to the latest US House Speaker, Mike Johnson after he prayed on the House floor after being sworn in. When asked what his thoughts were on the topic, he referred to religion and morality as central to the government. ““They knew that it would be important to maintain our system,” he said. “And that’s why I think we need more of that — not an establishment of any national religion — but we need everybody’s vibrant expression of faith because it’s such an important part of who we are as a nation.””²¹³ Although this thesis pertains to the topic of church and state in the UK and not the US, it is important to remember that several of the Founding Fathers of America were from the United Kingdom and wanted to make sure that the United States did not go down the same path of creating an established entanglement of church and state.

In Stephen Hance’s report referenced earlier in this thesis, on the topic of the perception of the Church of England he states, “We anticipate that the position of the church at the centre of the establishment will be under continued scrutiny... It is likely that governments of both parties will be increasingly secular with diminishing understanding and appreciation of what the church brings to the table.”²¹⁴ In referring to the governments of both main parties he is referring to the two main political parties. However, I would also argue that the Church of England has become “increasingly secular” especially based on the recent decision at the General Synod concerning same sex union. This only adds to the scrutiny of the Church of England because it is currently a divided church. The Scriptures themselves indicate “If a kingdom is divided against itself,

²¹³ Rebecca Shabad, “Speaker Mike Johnson says separation of church and state is a ‘misnomer,’” NBC News, (November 14, 2023, retrieved November 19, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/speaker-mike-johnson-says-separation-church-state-misnomer-rcna125181>).

²¹⁴ Hance, *Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us*, 22.

that kingdom cannot stand” (Mark 3:24). Unfortunately, the Church of England is divided and the debate of dissolving the establishment will only intensify. One may question if this division will cause the Church of England to fall into a state of disunity that makes it unable to stand firm against the waging war of Satan.

In the writings of Turnbull and McFadyen in their book supporting the establishment but also outlining the need for change, it reads,

The place of some bishops within the House of Lords and therefore with easy access to government is often seen as one of the chief pillars of the Established Church...

However, this is a good place to signal that the establishment of the Church of England is one of its positive characteristics. Indeed, without it the church would lose a significant part of its identity. It is a church which is called to worship God, to serve the world and to witness to the death and resurrection of Christ. The Church of England by its history, its name and its contemporary situation works out its calling in England and from within the culture and identity of the nation.

Clifford Longley, the Roman Catholic commentator, wrote:

Establishment provides the bedrock of meanings and values upon which all other constitutional constructions, such as Parliament, the Crown and the law, can rest. Other countries have their written constitution, foundation documents which enshrine the core beliefs of that society. Britain has a coronation itself. Without either, the national identity would quickly be in confusion.

While the idea that the establishment is a large part of the identity of the Church of England is a true statement, and one that many who defend the establishment make, it is also a questionable theological viewpoint. Most theologians would agree that the church finds its identity solely in Jesus Christ and not in any form of establishment. If the establishment were to be taken away it would and should still find its complete identity through its Creator. I would also argue that the national identity of the British people cannot be reduced to simple terms, rendering attempts to do so confusing, because its identity is primarily secularist today. Based on the theological understanding as presented in the previous section that explains that the role of the church is to exalt God, teach His followers, and to evangelize the world, the scholarly view of Turnbull, McFadyen, and Longley is somewhat flawed because the establishment is not its identity. The

identity of the church is not parliament, the crown, or the laws but rather this belief of establishment seems to operate to a certain degree under the Old Testament covenanted nation theology, as will be explained below with the help of Chaplin.

Turnbull and McFadyen also argue that “retaining the Established Church of England is one way of ensuring that there is present within our political and social life a thread which is a present reminder of the crucial importance of the spiritual and cultural dimensions to the building of a good society.”²¹⁵ In their understanding, the “Establishment, in its national and local expressions, is not about a religious State, but the principles of Jesus pervading all that is done.”²¹⁶ The question that this belief evokes, however is, Is this beneficial to the church and consistent with the view of true Christianity as a whole, or is it detrimental? I argue that this entanglement of the political and Royal with the church is harmful. The reasoning for this is that while the church plays a large role in helping meet the needs of the society when government falls short, the negative connotation of the church being intertwined with politics surpasses this and makes the church appear as a “power hungry political party” rather than an abundantly loving church. It is difficult to justify having the Church of England continue to lead the “spiritual and cultural dimensions” of the British people when it is a majority secular state, and when most people indicate that the church is out-of-touch with the people. Some Christians in the UK, and I would argue around the world, contend that the presence of Christian traditions at Royal ceremonies and in parliament allows people to hear the Gospel when they normally may not. On the other hand, many Christians outside of the Church of England view it as detrimental because the Anglican church can be viewed as steeped in tradition but lacking the personal relationship with Christ. The Church of England also falls into the category of irrelevance especially when many British people are several generations removed from the church. It is also difficult to be loyal to a church that seems to shift its views as often as the wind blows based on the political pressures it faces. This thought is being solidified by the recent detrimental decisions that are plaguing the church with immense disunity.

In Chaplin’s book of disestablishment, he argues that Christianity is not based on the covenanted nation viewpoint because no nation is set apart yet all followers of Jesus are. He writes,

²¹⁵ Turnbull and McFadyen, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State*, 167.

²¹⁶ Turnbull and McFadyen, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State*, 168.

For Paul, since the arrival of Jesus on the scene of divine redemption, the very nature of the community of faith has undergone a radical and irrevocable change. God's redemptive purposes are no longer concentrated exclusively in a single territorial community but now embrace every nation. The covenant is now extended to 'the Gentiles': this was the 'scandalous' proposition that proved so bewildering to the first disciples and to the Jewish communities from which they emerged. The people of God are no longer envisaged as a single, unified religio-political entity embracing the totality of the life of a territorial community under divine positive law, and will never be again (in this age). There are no more 'covenanted nations' in that sense. Such a dispensation has been superseded for ever. The people of God have become a transnational, non-territorial, global fellowship of believers united in primary allegiance to Jesus Christ and in the mission to proclaim the gospel to 'all the nations'. A key implication of this notion of the church is that, where it exists, nations can never be religiously unified, because the mere arrival of the church in any society immediately introduces a religious distinction into it.²¹⁷

The Church of England opposes this argument because it assumes a territorial, religiously unified nation under God, but also tries to do so in a pluralistic and inclusive sense. It does this through the promotion of peace and tolerance between people of different faiths, but what may have once worked for a nation centuries ago when the majority of the population was predominantly Christian no longer works in a secularist society when the widely held viewpoint is the irrelevancy of the church. Many would also say that the British history of colonization belies exploitation under the banner of the church, as well.

The fundamental argument for disestablishment that Chaplin puts forward is based on the relationship of church and state being theologically flawed. He states, "Establishment amounts to a theologically problematic confusion of the spheres of authority of Church and State and that the Church should itself seek to terminate it."²¹⁸ To elaborate on this further Chaplin indicates, "The New Testament's theology of the relation of the church to political orders points clearly to a state that refrains from making judgements about religious truth and adopts a posture of impartiality towards the diverse

²¹⁷ Chaplin, *Beyond Establishment*, 59

²¹⁸ Ibid.

faiths represented in its territory. Establishment is founded on Biblically and theologically untenable notions of the Christian nation and the national Church.”²¹⁹ This belief reflects the Biblical teachings on the subject covered earlier in this chapter and echo the importance of keeping a nation’s church separate from the state.

Conclusion

“For where God built a church, there the Devil would also build a chapel” (Martin Luther - Colloquia Mensalia 1566).

The objective of this thesis was to examine the establishment of the Anglican Church of England with the United Kingdom of Great Britain through a Biblical and theological lens. It aimed to investigate if the establishment serves to alter the Christian perspective promoted in the Gospel and in the church, and possibly hinders the church in its role. This thesis argued that the formal establishment of the church and state in its current form compromises the relationship between the church, state, and Crown and shackles the true representation of the church described in the Gospel.

It was my presupposition going into this thesis that the current establishment of the church and state in the UK is in fact detrimental to the Biblical perspective of the church and its role, and this study has only heightened this belief. The assumption for this thesis was founded upon my personal experience of growing up in the United Kingdom and experiencing the decline in the relevancy of the Church of England, in addition to listening to the views of the British people and reviewing literature on the topic.

This thesis reviewed the history of the archaic and muddled relationship between the Church of England with the state and Monarchy from its tumultuous beginnings by King Henry VIII’s decision to break from the Roman Catholic papacy for his own fleshly desires. It also explained how the relationship between the entities function and what their roles are, which casts the light on the fact the Church of England is still at the whim of the parliament and the King because the church still needs the approval and assent respectively for new measures or laws. The role of the Church of England within the establishment was one aspect examined that demonstrates the priorities for the Church of England to be that of being a church for the secular nation. As discussed, it has, unfortunately, even laid aside its Christian roots to try and connect with the nation. The Church of England is being conformed by the world instead of being transformed and set

²¹⁹ Chaplin, *Beyond Establishment*, 59.

apart by the word of God. The consensus is that the Church of England seems to focus more on its works than it does on its faith, which has led some to wonder if the church still even believes in God itself.

This thesis then moved on to reviewing the current status of Christianity in the UK which highlighted the sheer decline in the number of Christians within the British population and stressed the fact that for the first time in history the census reported that less than half of the population self-identified as Christian. It also indicated how even though 46% of the population indicates they are Christian, less than 5% of the British population attends church regularly. The UK churches with the steepest decline in attendees are the Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist churches. However, on the positive side, there are signs of life in the church within small pockets of differing denominations across the country.

Of particular importance was the topic of the recent approval in the General Synod of the decision to begin trialing “blessings” and prayers to same sex unions in the Church of England. This decision has caused uproar in the Church of England and in the Anglican community around the world with many electing to leave the Church of England over this controversial topic. While the Church of England has indicated they are not changing their doctrinal statement regarding same-sex marriages, their support and “blessings” indicate otherwise. Based on this decision a large population of the Anglican community and other denominations have lost confidence in the Church of England and its leadership and questioned the Biblical beliefs of the Church of England as it blatantly reinterprets over and against traditional interpretations of the Scriptures.

The final chapter of this thesis dealt with the theological considerations of church and state by examining the church and its role as presented in the Bible, as well as considering the Biblical teachings surrounding Church and State. This chapter also reviewed select scholarly arguments from Hance, Turnbull and Mcfadyen, and Chaplin, on the topic. The findings highlighted the theological implications of church and state by stating that an established church and state relationship causes a country to operate under the Old Testament covenanted nation theology and assumes a territorial, religiously unified nation under God. To make matters worse it also tries to do so in a pluralistic and inclusive sense that is not reflective of the true Scriptures of God.

The Church of England was once a force that led the United Kingdom with sound Biblical teachings and morality based on the Scriptures of Christianity. As the country, itself, has inched further and further away from the Gospel, unfortunately, so too has its church. The Church of England has been too focused on keeping its relevancy that it

has secularized itself and ignored the Words of its own Creator. For many people, regrettably, the Church of England amounts to an irrelevant left-winged political party and not a Gospel centered church devoted to the advancement of the kingdom of God here on earth. The words of Martin Luther found in the opening of this conclusion, “For where God built a church, there the Devil would also build a chapel,” serve as a reminder that it is in the house of the Lord where the enemy prowls and tries to devour because he goes after the heart of God’s people.

This thesis could not have been written at a better time because this is a pivotal point in the history of the Church of England. How the Church of England responds will define its future. Will it continue to serve in an establishment that is not reflective of the church presented in the Bible or will it change its course and follow the true Biblical definition of the church? Will it stop “trimming the faith to fit in with culture” and instead offer a “full-fat” faith? Or will it continue its path to destruction and die a slow painful death? These questions matter because the future of the Church of England is held by the Alpha and Omega, the one true God, not the current reigning earthly sovereign of England. God’s sovereignty will remain steadfast in the midst of the shifting ideologies of the world and He will ultimately preserve His church the way it was intended to function.

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A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN APOLOGETICS

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Introduction

For centuries men have been defending their faith in accordance with the mandate found in the Holy Scripture. Peter writes, “But in your hearts honor 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.”²²⁰ The key word in the opening statement is “men” in reference to who have been defending their faith, where the intentional omission of “and women” demonstrates the normative treatment of women in Christian literature. It is likely that the absence of women in the field of apologetics reflects the fact that women have not been visible in Christian literature and have struggled to find a voice in the church for centuries.

Women have long suffered for their faith and for standing on the truths of the gospel; many have been martyred for their refusal to deny the faith. This essay will explore women throughout history who have defended their faith and look at women today who have found a place on the stage to defend their faith. The essay will not attempt to argue the egalitarian view of women pastors, as the role of apologist need not be conflated with be a pastoral position. Rather, this essay will explore the importance of the female voice in apologetics and suggest that more women should explore the field of apologetics, and in doing so, add to the diversity of voices defending the Christian faith, enabling the Church to reach a broader base with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First it is necessary to define apologetics from the biblical perspective and compare the biblical definition to the misunderstanding of the cultural understanding of the role of apologists. Next, the essay will look at biblical examples and third century women martyrs who died for refusing to deny their faith, which itself is a type of apologetics. It is also important to look at the opposing view of the church leaders who state that women should not ever speak in terms of theology, especially if men are present, a view which has impacted the issue greatly. Finally, the essay will highlight women who are making an impact in today’s marketplace of biblical and theological ideas by

²²⁰ 1 Peter 3:15 (English Standard Version) This version will be used through the essay.

defending the Christian faith. By exploring the struggles and victories that these women have experienced, we will see the importance of the female voice in apologetics today.

Defining Apologetics

It is important to define the term “apologetics” according to biblical etymology of the word. An understanding of apologetics is based on the verse presented at the beginning of the essay. Again, 1 Peter 3:15 reads, “But in your hearts honor 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,”²²¹ To fully understand and appreciate the term apologetics, it is important to look at the Greek translation of the verse, specifically the phrase “to make a defense.” The Greek term used is *apologia*, (Strong's G627) meaning “make a defense”²²² Peter is writing to the believers scattered throughout northern Asia who were suffering intense persecution. Upon further study of the text in context, it is easy to see that this mandate to “be ready to give a defense” is to all believers, not just the men in these areas.

In the beginning of Ch. 3, Peter addresses the women of the church, then he proceeds to address the men, specifically husbands, in verse 7 and then in verse 8 he writes, “Finally, all of you,...”²²³ Peter is addressing all of the believers that are scattered and suffering and he is reminding them of the importance of defending the hope that is in them. It is evident that Peter is addressing both men and women in this section of scripture and that the defense of the faith is intended for both. Every believer should practice apologetics according to the mandate given by Peter in this scripture. If the Bible is clear in its instruction for every believer to defend their faith (apologetics), why is it that for the past several centuries most of the apologists that have had the stage, at least in Christian literature, have been men?

A Cultural Misunderstanding of Apologetics

Men have dominated the stage in the area of apologetics for centuries due to a cultural misunderstanding of the mandate given by

²²¹ 1 Peter 3:15.

²²² “Thayer’s Greek Lexicon via *Blue Letter Bible*, G627 - apologia - Strong's Greek Lexicon (esv) (blueletterbible.org), accessed September 19, 2024.

²²³ 1 Peter 3:8.

Peter in the above-mentioned verse. Joel Furches in his essay “Apologetics: What is it and how do we use it?” states,

The word ‘apologetics’ came into popular use in the Christian world in the early 2nd Century, when a Christian philosopher named Justin Martyr wrote several ‘Apologies’ – books written to a Roman audience defending the virtue of the Christian life to the hostile culture surrounding them. Other early Christian writers followed suit and for a season Christian apologetics flourished in the ancient world. Since Martyr’s popularising of the term, the field of Christian apologetics has become a very specific school of theology focused on defending Christian beliefs against outside objections. Apologetics as a discipline was largely reserved for seminaries and history books until the 20th Century.²²⁴

In this quote Furches states that apologetics was used in seminaries and reported in history books. History reminds us that women have not always been welcome in these fields of study. As the church sees the growth of apologetics as a discipline of study in universities and seminaries around world, and as the table of theology has been open to women in many places since the 20th century until today, it is important that we understand, as previously stated, what Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:8, “All of you...” including women, need to be prepared to defend the faith. Giving a defense of the Christian faith is a discipline that every believer should practice as often as necessary and as often as the opportunity presents itself.

Evidence of Women Defending Their Faith in the Early Church

If Peter’s mandate was for all believers, it should be evident that in the early church women were defending their faith and even dying for what they believed, in spite of the opposition that they faced. The Bible is filled with stories of women who shared their faith with others and told of the good news through their own testimonies of the faith. In John’s gospel, Ch. 4, the story of the woman at the well is a notable example of a woman that Jesus ministered to who then went into town and ministered to many other people, both men and women. By the end of the chapter, we see a multitude of people coming to see who this man was that the woman was speaking about. John 4:39 states

²²⁴ Joel Furches, “Apologetics: What is it and how do we use it?” *Premier:UnBelievable: Faith Explored*. (October 26, 2022). Apologetics: What is it and how do we use it? | Article | Unbelievable (premierunbelievable.com).

“Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’”²²⁵ This verse reveals that the truth that Jesus shared with her, she then took and shared with others in her town, and, in addition, some of these beliefs would have been in contradiction to what the Samaritan’s believed. As we continue reading in the story, vs. 41 indicates that some of the people who came still had doubts about Jesus after hearing the woman’s defense of who Jesus was, so they came to see and question him themselves.²²⁶ The value that Jesus places on women throughout the Bible teaches Christians throughout the world that women have a place in ministry and should be greatly valued. Female apologist Rebecca McLaughlin recognizes this truth as she writes, “The ultimate man laid down his life for the billions of women who have trusted him with theirs. Does Christianity denigrate women? On the contrary. It lifts us into fellowship with God himself.”²²⁷ McLaughlin is responding to the question “Doesn’t Christianity Denigrate Women?,”²²⁸ which seems to be a widely held belief in the world today because of misinformation and misunderstandings of various passages of scripture. This fellowship with God empowers women to boldly proclaim and defend their faith, just as the Samaritan woman did.

Other women have also stood boldly to defend their faith in the midst of opposition and many of them were not received as well as the woman at the well. Take for example the 3rd century martyr Perpetua and her handmaid Felicitas, both of whom would lose their lives because of their bold proclamation of the gospel and their refusal to recant their belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. In the story of Perpetua, a young noble woman who was the mother of an infant son, she would be called on to defend her beliefs to her father first and then later to the public as she stood boldly and fought for what she believed in without denying her faith unto death. After Perpetua was arrested her father came to visit and asked her to recant her faith. Perpetua used an argument referring to a pitcher made of pottery that was in her cell. She said,

“Father, do you see this container lying here? Is it a little pitcher, or something else?” “It’s a pitcher,” he replied. Perpetua continued, “Can it be called by any name other than

²²⁵ John 4:39.

²²⁶ John 4:40-41.

²²⁷ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World’s Largest Religion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 152.

²²⁸ Ibid. 131-152.

what it is?” “No,” he said. Perpetua replied, “Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am -a Christian.”²²⁹

In this story, Perpetua defends her faith using an illustration that is easy for her listener (her father) to understand. This is an effective practice in apologetics, and it was a common practice demonstrated in the way that Jesus explained the faith using parables and illustrations that common people could understand. Perpetua and her handmaid would go on to face vicious beasts in the arena, and then gladiators. She and those with her would meet their end by the sword, never wavering from their faith, standing strong until they met their creator.²³⁰

These women do not fit into the model of how the church would define a modern-day apologist, but it is important to remember the true definition given to us by scripture. These women stood in the public arena and boldly offered their lives as a living testimony to the truth of the gospel. Amy Orr-Ewing, an internationally recognized theologian and apologist speaks of the importance of women like Perpetua and Felicitas when mentioning the history of women in ministry. She states, “Women play all kinds of roles in church, and in the early church women went to their deaths in the amphitheater, martyred just as the Christian men were.”²³¹ Despite a strong beginning, the voice of women in the practice of apologetics went quiet for many centuries, with few women speaking out in public arenas for their faith.

Why Has It Been So Hard for Women to Find Their Voice in Apologetics?

For centuries the church has been overseen by men. Women, therefore, have had trouble finding their place in the church. Hilary Morgan Ferrer, in her article from Cross Examined website writes, “Men have traditionally been the trailblazers. They are the pioneers, and the ones who take pleasure in conquering uncharted territory. Apologetics is no exception. But what happens when a field remains predominantly male for too long? You get something that looks similar

²²⁹ Timothy J Keiderling, “Perpetua: An early Christian arrested for refusing to worship Roman deities in North Africa prepares to face the beasts in the arena.” *Plough, Another Life is Possible*. (August 3, 2023) Perpetua: An Early Christian Martyr (plough.com).

²³⁰ Keiderling, Perpetua (2023).

²³¹ Amy Orr-Ewing, “Is Christianity Oppressive or Liberating for Women,” C.S. Lewis Institute, Broadcast Talks, May 1, 2018, Is Christianity Oppressive or Liberating for Women? - C.S. Lewis Institute (cslewisinstitute.org).

to the Wild West. . . or Lord of the Flies. Take your pick.”²³² Hiller suggests that since men have dominated the field for so long, many of them lack compassion and gentleness when sharing their faith, which has led to many harsh conversations, which typically leads people away from faith, not into the faith.

The issue of a woman’s place in the church has been a controversy for many years. Churches that consider themselves complementarians have often stated the belief that men and women have distinct callings, but in practice they often do not make space for women to practice spiritual gifts.²³³ Jen Wilkin, a female leader of The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas states, “I will say that because our leadership structures have been all male, or almost entirely male, that many of the systems that are in place just make it hard for women to be able to function as peers in those spaces.”²³⁴ In the above quote, Wilkin shows how difficult it is for women to find those spaces to exercise their gifts in churches that have long held traditional views of women in ministry. These stories and many other like them, express the difficulties women have faced in overcoming traditions.

Conversation about the role of women in ministry has developed throughout the years with the access of education in seminary being made more available for women than in the past. Krista Bontrager expresses this struggle of being the only female in a male dominated field of theology, when she writes, “I entered seminary in the early ‘90s. For the first few years, I was the only woman in my program. I labored in relative obscurity, wondering most days what I was even doing in the male-dominated world of theology.”²³⁵ History shows that the Christian mindset has not always been open to women studying theology and even when it was open in the early nineties, women such as Bontrager show that women in the field were rare and often felt out of place in seminary. Times are changing and there are more women entering the field of theology. Seminaries across the

²³² Hilary Morgan Ferrer, “Yes, Women Need Apologetics... But More Importantly, Apologetics Needs Women!,” Cross Examined.org, January 5, 2018, Yes, Women Need Apologetics, But More Importantly, Apologetics Needs Women ([crossexamined.org](https://www.crossexamined.org)).

²³³ Amy Petersen, “Jen Wilkin on Women in the Church with the Gift of Leadership,” November 9, 2021, in *Ministry Wives*, produced by North American Mission Board, podcast, MP3 Audio, Jen Wilkin on Women in the Church with the Gift of Leadership - North American Mission Board (namb.net).

²³⁴ Peterson, “Jen Wilkin,” 24:04-24:20.

²³⁵ Krista Bontrager, “Women in Apologetics on the Rise,” *Reason to Believe* (blog), June 18, 2018, Women in Apologetics on the Rise - Reasons to Believe.

United States are filled with women both in classes and in the role of professor. Bontrager goes on to say in the same blog post that she has been working in the field of theology and apologetics for about 25 years and that mostly it has been a male dominated field, but she also writes that this is changing.²³⁶ Women continue to find their voice in the field of theology and specifically in the field of apologetics. This is a welcome and important addition to apologetics, but while many are welcoming women at the table, there are still some traditional ideas that must be overcome.

Overcoming the Traditional Ideas of Women in Ministry

As mentioned in the previous section, women have not always been able to find a place at the table of theology or in the field of apologetics. Now that the door is open, women who have found a voice in the field, such as Amy Orr-Ewing and Mary Jo Sharp, have often been criticized for the strong leadership roles in the field. These women have been approached by well-meaning Christians that hold different beliefs about a woman's ability to speak with such authority on the topic of theology.

In a recent article called "Women in Apologetics: Overcoming sexism, societal expectations and vicious online attacks,"²³⁷ by Joel Furches, Mary Jo Sharp, a nationally recognized apologist and former professor, speaks about the opposition that she has faced while speaking at churches and conferences around the country,

Just within the past year, after one of my presentations at a large church, a gentleman approached me and said: 'When I saw you on the stage tonight, it was very difficult for me to think of you as having something intellectually sound to say. My culture views women as objects of beauty, not as having intellectual value.'

The other comment I hear frequently is that a woman of marked intelligence may come across as intimidating.²³⁸

²³⁶ Bontrager, "Women in Apologetics", 2018.

²³⁷ Article title is left in lowercase in the original document published online. See footnote 19 for link.

²³⁸ Joel Furches, "Women in apologetics: Overcoming sexism, societal expectations and vicious online attacks," Premier UnBelievable, July 26, 2023, <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/articles/women-in-apologetics-overcoming-sexism-societal-expectation-and-vicious-online-attacks/15989.article>. Free subscription required.

Statements such as these are to be expected from a culture that has not allowed women to speak in churches or study in seminaries for many years. It is not surprising that Christians would make statements such as these based on teachings resulting from the misinterpretation of certain scriptures about a woman not being able to speak in church, and that women would therefore be discouraged from pursuing theology pertaining to a defense of the faith. While Christians can be disappointing and often not truly represent the character of Christ, it is encouraging how women like Amy Orr-Ewing view the opposition. She states,

We shouldn't be surprised to be disappointed by Christians. After all, as my friend Elaine Storkey has said, the church recruits from the human race. Thus we're never surprised by negative behaviors by institutions or individuals. But I suggest to you this morning that we will never be disappointed by Christ. The promise of Christ is that coming to know Him is the key. Real change is possible when it's wrought by Him. People who claim to represent Him may do all sorts of things, but do their actions ring true to Him?²³⁹

It is important to recognize that these oppositions do not come from Christ and His Word, but rather from those individuals and institutions that are made up of broken people in need of God's grace and mercy as they grow in their faith and understanding of the Word of God.

Not Only an American Church Issue

The issue of women finding a voice in the church and at the table of theology is not only an American church issue, rather, we see it all over the world. In a Bible commentary expounding on the scripture of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 where Paul writes that women should learn in silence in the church, female pastor Nyambura J. Njoroge of Kenya writes, "Because of the deeply entrenched patriarchal, hierarchical and sexist attitudes and practices, and the male-dominated leadership in many of the churches in Africa, women have a critical and prophetic role to play in 'stirring the waters' and 'speaking the truth' by asserting their God-given humanity and gifts – not for their own sake but for the sake of the integrity of the gospel."²⁴⁰ Njoroge's statement regarding the patriarchal, hierarchical and sexist attitudes that permeate the

²³⁹ Orr-Ewing, "Is Christianity Oppressive?" (2018).

²⁴⁰ Nyambura J. Njoroge, "The Role of Women in the Church." In *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006) 1497.

church as a whole is revealing. There are seminaries around the world that don't let women enroll and study with men. "The fact is that in at least one West African seminary, Pentecost Theological Seminary of Ghana, women are not allowed to enroll alongside the men."²⁴¹ Droll's statement reveals that, while some cultures tend to be more open to women in various aspects of ministry, it is not uncommon for women to encounter men in their journey who are opposed to a woman being in the conversation or studying at seminary. As aforementioned, Sharp's encounter with the man who stated, "My culture views women as objects of beauty, not as having intellectual value,"²⁴² leads the reader to believe that this man was not of western culture, but rather outside of the US, in a culture that does not value women as equals and struggles, as we do, with valuing the public gifts of women. Many people, universally, hold these views because of their cultural upbringing and traditions.

It is important to return to scripture when one is speaking of tradition and theology. In Mark 7:5-8 Mark writes,

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' And he said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.

Therefore, men and women who must be "rightly handling the Word of truth,"²⁴³ are advised to be cautious not to allow the traditions of the church to outweigh the Word of God.

Throughout scripture women are used in various roles of ministry and their value to the ministry is esteemed by both Paul and Jesus. The author of Acts writes of the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla in Ch.18, how 'they' took Apollos aside to explain the Word of God to him.²⁴⁴ The example of Timothy's mother and grandmother cannot be overlooked as they raised Timothy in the way of the Lord by teaching

²⁴¹ Statement taken from Anna Droll, author of *Dreams and Visions in African Pentecostal Spirituality: The Sub-Saharan Horizon of the Pneumatological Imagination* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2023). She did research among seminarians at the seminary in 2017.

²⁴² Joel Furches, "Women in apologetics," 2023.

²⁴³ 2 Timothy 2:15.

²⁴⁴ Acts 18:24-26.

him the scriptures, all the while his father being an unbeliever.²⁴⁵ There is also the example of Deborah taking the role of a prophetess and leader (judge) in the book of Judges.²⁴⁶ The Bible is full of women who are actively involved in ministry and, therefore, one cannot allow tradition and cultural mandates to dictate our understanding of God's desire to use men and women in various roles of ministry. In a recent white paper document, "a research-based report which offers a focused description of a complex topic and presents the point of view of the author or body represented by the author,"²⁴⁷ the pastors, elders and church leaders at The Village Church²⁴⁸ write, "We celebrate the biblical picture of men and women serving the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ together. We rejoice in biblical examples of men and women using their gifts in the Church for the glory of God."²⁴⁹ The church should be celebrating the addition of women to the theological table in the area of apologetics and beyond, as they bring a much-needed voice that has been lacking for years. The female voice is one that touches hearts and lives in a different way because of the gifts and talents that God has granted women.

Conclusion: A Welcome Addition

Throughout the essay, various women have been mentioned that are currently working in the field of apologetics: Mary Jo Sharp, Amy Orr-Ewing, Hillary Morgan Ferrer, Krista Bontrager, Jen Wilkin, and Amy Petersen. These are just a few of the women that have battled to reach the level where their voice counts in the conversation; there are many others. Many of these women are celebrated and given the opportunity to speak at annual conferences held by a ministry that promotes women's education and spiritual formation called, Women in Apologetics.²⁵⁰ It is refreshing to see so many women interested in learning how to defend their faith and finding a voice in the public arena. Mary Jo Sharp writes, "With many trite stereotyping ideas about the interests of women, Christian women often have been left out of the engagement in the marketplace of ideas, leaving atheist women as the

²⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 1:5-7, 3:14-17.

²⁴⁶ Judges 4:4

²⁴⁷ Meg Shields, "LibGuides: White Paper Style Guide: When to Use a Whitepaper," [libguides.uml.edu](https://libguides.uml.edu/whitepaper_style), May 11, 2023, https://libguides.uml.edu/whitepaper_style.

²⁴⁸ A Baptist church in Flower Mound, Texas.

²⁴⁹ The Village Church, "The Role of Women at the Village Church," www.thevillagechurch.net (The Village Church), accessed October 13, 2024, <https://www.thevillagechurch.net/our-beliefs/statement-of-faith>.

²⁵⁰ <https://womeninapologetics.com/>.

main female representative voice in intelligentsia.”²⁵¹ In modern history, women have risen to positions of authority in many parts of society and have a strong voice, which has influence over our younger generations. Positive role models for younger women are necessary in the church. If the church wants a future generation of women who love the Lord and can defend their faith in the ‘marketplace of ideas,’ it is necessary for universities and seminaries to encourage young women to become educated scholars in the field of theology, especially apologetics.

Trisha Scribner writes, “It’s not a matter of whether she is permitted to do this sort of ministry, but that she is commanded to do so, as verified by Paul.”²⁵² She goes on to write in the same article “Regardless of one’s interpretation of passages discussing the woman’s role in the home and church, a Christian woman not only can do apologetics, but must, in order to obey Christ’s authoritative command to make disciples.”²⁵³ Scribner emphatically states that women ‘must’ have a voice in apologetics. This voice is powerful and needed.

In conclusion, I find myself, a male pastor and high school Bible teacher, writing on the importance of the female voice in apologetics because of the many students that have walked in and out of my classroom and learned to defend their faith. Each year my students are asked to read a book for my Christian Apologetics class, and it has saddened me that every book that I have had on the list has been written by a forty- to sixty-year-old male. While attending a conference in June of 2024, I was introduced to a new apologist, or at least new to me: Rebecca McLaughlin. A female apologist was something I had not encountered in my previous studies. I was intrigued to read her book entitled *The Secular Creed* where she writes about 5 contemporary claims that the secular world has embraced. Her voice is powerful, as she writes about the statement “Love is Love.” She states that she herself has struggled with same sex attraction for over 25 years and recognizes that it is sin and that she cannot live out that desire.²⁵⁴ What a powerful apologetic to someone struggling with same sex attraction, especially a young woman. Encountering many

²⁵¹ Mary Jo Sharp, “Relational Intentionality: Why Women Should Be Apologist, Too - Christian Research Institute,” Christian Research Institute, June 21, 2021, <https://www.equip.org/articles/relational-intentionality-why-women-should-be-apologist-too/>.

²⁵² Tricia Scribner, “Does Scripture Prohibit Women from Doing Apologetics,” Cross Examined, February 3, 2015, <https://crossexamined.org/scripture-prohibit-women-apologetics/>.

²⁵³ Scribner, “Does Scripture Prohibit?” 2015.

²⁵⁴ Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021), 34.

young people that struggle with same sex attraction, I am refreshed to have the voice of a female that has walked through the temptation and found victory. After reading this book I was drawn to her first book called *Confronting Christianity* where she tackles 12 common objections to the Christian faith. She writes about her time at Cambridge with the other doctoral students and describes each of their struggles with faith.²⁵⁵ The depth of knowledge and intellect that she possesses make her books engaging and profoundly educational. This led me to further conversations with other apologists in search of other women who have boldly entered the field of apologetics and are making a strong impact on today's culture. My findings written in this essay have been eye opening.

As a teacher of young people from the ages of 13-18 years of age and as a father of two young women, I find it reassuring that women, such as the aforementioned, are in the arena and fighting for the faith with such vigor and passion. Again, these women are showing the importance of the female voice in apologetics, and kindling the fire so that more women are inspired to study apologetics. While adding to the diversity of voices defending our faith, women apologists will also grow the churches' capacity to reach a broader base with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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²⁵⁵ McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 64.

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THE GLORIFICATION OF THE “SELF” VS. THE CALL TO LOVE

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Introduction

The Bible documents Jesus speaking to Peter concerning His Church in Matthew 16:18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (KJV). Jesus indicates ownership by His words, “my Church.” The Church is a congregation, an assembly, and a community.²⁵⁶ It is not a building. It is the people of God and an extension of Christ or otherwise called, the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). Apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 that the Church is the temple of God and is holy because the Spirit of God dwells there. Dr Mark Allan Powell, theologian and author, writes, “Paul says that the church is ‘the body of Christ’ and the individual members are like various body parts...The parts are quite different from one another, but all are needed and important.”²⁵⁷ Is the modern Church, the Body of Christ, demonstrating Christ’s characteristics and in doing so proving to be an extension of Christ?

This paper will examine Western culture’s glorification of the “Self” and how it incapacitates the Body of Christ as well as Christ’s call to love. The current worldview of Western culture and how it was formed will be discussed as well as the repercussions on society and the Church. An examination of scripture will be applied to critique the current worldview and to argue that selfless love is the result of Spiritual formation in the Body of Christ.

Western Culture’s Descent into Narcissism

Free will and self-governance comprise the foundation of American government and culture. The Protestant Reformation, which took place in sixteenth century Europe, inspired the *Mayflower* voyage and subsequent settlement of New England in the seventeenth century. The New England settlers desired the freedom and autonomy to

²⁵⁶ “Matthew 16,” Step Bible, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Matt.16&options=HVNUG>.

²⁵⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing The New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2018), 513, Kindle.

worship without government control or the Catholic Church's magisterium.²⁵⁸

The Age of Enlightenment, which took place in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, emphasized the importance of human reasoning and mathematical analysis in establishing the truths of the universe with mounting assurance in humanity's ability to ascertain knowledge without the need for divine revelation.²⁵⁹ This era produced a worldview centered around intellectualism, with the power of self-reasoning given superiority over religion. The belief that "the goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom and happiness" originated from the Enlightenment era.²⁶⁰

This belief system gained wide approval and infiltrated American culture, government and worldview. The United States Constitution, written during the Enlightenment era, directly demonstrates the worldview of that era evident by the Constitution's first amendment built upon the principles of individualism, autonomy and free will.²⁶¹ The doctrine of free will is the belief that a human being's actions depend upon their individual choices and is not pre-determined.²⁶²

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo, theologian, author and historian, writes, "The Enlightenment struck a second blow in favor of free will by posing a universe governed by irresistible natural law, and from which only indeterminism (in the form of an unfettered human will) offered a meaningful key to personal identity. In the American environment, the republican experiment placed human willing at the center of identity."²⁶³

In modern American culture the concept of free will is given absolute preeminence, which has resulted in an individual's thoughts, feelings, reasonings and self-identity having greater importance and

²⁵⁸ "The Protestant Reformation," National Geographic: Education, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/protestant-reformation/>.

²⁵⁹ Brian Duignan, "Enlightenment: European history," History & Society, Britannica, last modified March 28, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Enlightenment-European-history>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Robb S. Harvey, "Protestant Reformation," Free Speech Center: At Middle Tennessee State University, last modified March 15, 2024, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/protestant-reformation/>.

²⁶² "Free Will," Dictionary.com, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/free%20will>.

²⁶³ Allen C. Guelzo, "Free Will And The Descent Of The Protestant Reformation Into Narcissism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 81, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 257, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/wtj81-2-04>.

significance than the sum of its parts or the community as a whole. Dr. Leigh E. Conver, chaplain and theologian, states,

The “me generation” reflected in the attitudes and values of the “boomers, busters, and gen-Xers” is so naturally and completely oriented to their own personal agendas, interests, needs and desires that not to be “self-oriented” is considered to be controversial and anomalous at the least and pathological at the worst. Called by other names like “postmodern,” this idolatry of the “Self” places truth, morality, personal boundaries, political correctness, and spiritual experience at the individual discretion of each person.²⁶⁴

The American worldview has completely idolized the individual “Self” and has placed the human “Self” on a pedestal. Each individual person, how they feel and what they think, is more important than their family, their community, and their country.

Narcissism and the Church

Dr. Guelzo writes that the, “Modern American opinion on determinism, whether philosophical or theological, is dominated by a free-willism which supports a rabid narcissism wholly at odds with Augustine and divine predestination.”²⁶⁵ The focus of American culture on the idolization of the individual “Self” is producing narcissistic propensities. Dr. Conver writes, “Congregations are filled with narcissistically vulnerable parishioners who are rewarded with a theology of materialism, success, and excess rather than a theology of simplicity, sobriety, and surrender.”²⁶⁶ Narcissism and an emphasis on indulging the “Self” has indeed entered the Church. Dr. Chuck DeGroat, theologian and author of the book, *When Narcissism Comes to Church*, describes a narcissistic personality as egotistical, entitled and lacking empathy.²⁶⁷ He explains that narcissism can thrive in churches. The very traits that define a narcissistic personality are often misinterpreted as a leader being, “charismatic, gifted, confident, smart,

²⁶⁴ Leigh E. Conver, “Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 06, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 83, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt06-1-06?highlight=narcissism>.

²⁶⁵ Guelzo, “Free Will And The Descent Of The Protestant Reformation Into Narcissism,” 257.

²⁶⁶ Conver, “Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline,” 83.

²⁶⁷ Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes To Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional And Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 22, Kindle.

strategic, agile and compelling.”²⁶⁸ Christopher Lasch, historian and author of the book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, explains that instead of opposing America’s increasingly narcissistic culture, the church has conformed to its image and is a reflection of it.²⁶⁹

The consequence of this worldview is explained by Guelzo. He writes, “The principal casualty (of placing human willing at the center of identity) was any sense of community, which was sacrificed to benevolence, influence or interest.”²⁷⁰ By placing our individual selves as our sole priority, we have in effect, deprioritized our families, our communities and our churches. This is evident by the ever increasing divorce rates, the breakdown of the nuclear family and the de-churching of a vast majority of Americans. The idolization of our individual selves, prohibits the creation and fostering of meaningful relationships that are crucial for our psychological and emotional health.²⁷¹ God is a relational God. He created us to be in relationship with Him and with each other.

The Call to Love

Galatians 5:13-14 reads, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (NKJV). Liberty is translated in Greek as *eleutheria* which means, “freedom, liberty, not enslaved.”²⁷² Paul writes in Galatians 5:1 that Christ has made us free and we are to stand firm in that freedom and not to be ensnared again in the bondage of sin. The Greek word for bondage is *douleia*, which also means “slavery.”²⁷³ Christ has set us free from the slavery of sin and death.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 6.

²⁶⁹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979), 141, Kindle.

²⁷⁰ Guelzo, “Free Will And The Descent Of The Protestant Reformation Into Narcissism,” 257.

²⁷¹ Sheehan D. Fisher, “5 Benefits of Healthy Relationships: Why Healthy Relationships Are So Important,” Northwestern Medicine, last modified September 2021, <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/5-benefits-of-healthy-relationships>.

²⁷² “Galatians 5,” Step Bible, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=KJVA|reference=Gal.5&options=VNUGH&display=INTERLEAVED>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Robert Deffinbaugh, pastor and theologian, writes, “Paul’s words in verse 13 make it clear that the freedom which the gospel gives is not the freedom to sin, but freedom from sin. Biblical freedom does not cater to the flesh, but crucifies it (Gal. 5:24). Indulging the flesh is merely slavery to it, and thus is not freedom at all (John 8:34; Rom.7:16).”²⁷⁴ Prioritizing our selfish wants and desires is not true freedom because it leads to the bondage of sin. Dr. I. Howard Marshall, theologian and author, writes, “The life of God’s children is one of freedom (Gal. 5:2-15). The freedom, however, is not freedom to sin but is deliverance from the requirements of the law and from the power of sin in order to keep the fundamental commandment, which is to love.”²⁷⁵

Galatians 5:13 continues, “but through love serve one another” (NKJV). The Greek word for serve in this passage is *douleuō*, which means to be a slave or a servant.²⁷⁶ Paul is instructing the Galatians not to use their freedom as an excuse or opportunity to serve their own self-interests and desires, but in love to serve or become servants to each other. Powell writes regarding this passage of scripture, “Paul launches into a soaring treatise on the meaning of freedom, emphasizing its paradoxical fulfillment in loving service rather than in self-indulgence.”²⁷⁷ Deffinbaugh writes, “Rather than being an opportunity to sin, freedom is a call to love... Thus servanthood is the goal of freedom.”²⁷⁸ Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin so that we may serve in love. We are able to love freely, when we are not burdened down and held captive by our sins. We are called to serve and not to prioritize our selfish wants. Romans 6:18 reads, “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (KJV).

The Greek word for love in Galatians 5:13-14 is *agapē*.²⁷⁹ There are eight words in the Greek language that are used to describe

²⁷⁴ Robert L. Deffinbaugh, “15. The War Without and the War Within-Part 1 (Galatians 5:13-26),” Bible.org, last modified June 28, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/15-war-without-and-war-within-part-1-galatians-513-26>.

²⁷⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 219, Kindle.

²⁷⁶ “Galatians 5,” Step Bible, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=KJVA|reference=Gal.5&options=VNU GH&display=INTERLEAVED>.

²⁷⁷ Powell, *Introducing The New Testament*, 565.

²⁷⁸ Deffinbaugh, “15. The War Without and the War Within-Part 1 (Galatians 5:13-26).”

²⁷⁹ “Galatians 5,” Step Bible, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=KJVA|reference=Gal.5&options=VNU GH&display=INTERLEAVED>.

different types of love. Seven of those are *eros*, sexual love; *philia*, the love of friendship; *storge*, family love; *mania*, obsessive love; *ludus*, flirtatious love; *pragma*, practical love; and *philautia*, self-love. The eighth Greek word for love, *agapē*, is “defined as unconditional, sacrificial love. *Agape* is the kind of love that is felt by a person willing to do anything for another, including sacrificing themselves, without expecting anything in return.”²⁸⁰ Powell expounds upon Paul’s use of *agapē* love in 1 Corinthians 13. He writes, “Paul defines this love in terms of unselfish behavior. One shows *agapē* love by treating other people in ways that put their interests ahead of one’s own (1 Cor. 13:4-7).”²⁸¹

Christ is the ultimate example of *agapē* love. Romans 5:8 reads, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NKJV). God reveals His unconditional love for humanity through Christ’s sacrifice. The sacrificial death of Christ reconciled us to God when we were still sinners, for the forgiveness and remission of our sins. We are called to demonstrate this *agapē* love for each other. John speaks of Christ’s *agapē* love in 1 John 4:10-11, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (NKJV). Demonstrating *agapē* love to one another, is having the mind and Spirit of God (1 John 4:7-8), therefore loving as Christ has loved us. Powell writes, “Love is the sign and source of a true relationship with God (1 John 4:7-21).”²⁸² Throughout the New Testament God speaks of His *agapē* love which is evident by Christ’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. The New Testament is the love story of Christ to fallen humanity.

Spiritual Transformation

How does the modern Church show *agapē* love rather than reflect a narcissistic society and culture? The key to *agapē* love and sacrificial service is Spiritual transformation. Conver writes, “The healing of the narcissistic personalities of our generation is not complete unless there has been a significant spiritual transformation in the process.”²⁸³ Spiritual transformation and the subsequent development into Spiritual maturity is a process. Spiritual

²⁸⁰ “8 Greek Words For Love That Will Make Your Heart Soar,” Dictionary.com, last modified March 28, 2024, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/greek-words-for-love/>.

²⁸¹ Powell, *Introducing The New Testament*, 528.

²⁸² Ibid., 880.

²⁸³ Conver, “Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline,” 83.

transformation requires spending time with God in prayer, studying the Word of God and fellowship with the Body of Christ. Romans 12:2 reads, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV). Renewal of the mind takes dedication, time and consistency.

DeGroat explains the process as, “a ‘furnace of transformation’ each of us must pass through for the sake of growth and refinement. I’ve never seen real growth occur without suffering, humiliation, disappointment, and pain. The way of transformation is the way of the cross, a journey in which our sufferings make a way for resurrection (Phil. 3:7-11).”²⁸⁴ Spiritual transformation requires humility to submit to God’s process of refinement. It requires introspection, acknowledgement and confession of our shortcomings to the Almighty God who hears, forgives and heals. DeGroat uses Apostle Paul as an example of Spiritual transformation. “Jesus makes possible the redemption of an arrogant murderer and antagonist who becomes the ‘apostle to the Gentiles.’”²⁸⁵ DeGroat goes on to say that, “Paul’s conversion process, while seemingly instantaneous, requires three years in a wilderness, a place of refinement.”²⁸⁶

Christ knows this process is painful but necessary. 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 reads, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (NKJV). Powell writes, “Paul is certain that believers have divine assistance in living as God would have them live; they are transformed from within, by a renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1), and they are imbued with the Holy Spirit, who produces in them the fruit that is pleasing to God (Gal. 5:22-23).”²⁸⁷

Conclusion

Modern worldview has cultivated narcissistic attributes by making the idolization and glorification of the “Self” one of the defining characteristics of Western culture. Contrary to the worldview adopted from the Enlightenment era, the goals of humanity should not be superficial happiness obtained by gratifying our selfish desires. Modern society has replaced worship of God with the glorification and idolization of the “Self.” This has perpetuated a ferocious yearning to

²⁸⁴ DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes To Church*, 155.

²⁸⁵ DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes To Church*, 167.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Powell, *Introducing The New Testament*, 465.

please the flesh to illicit happiness, albeit a false sense of happiness resulting in loneliness and depression due to the lack of community, relationship, and purpose.

Prioritizing our families, our neighbors, and our Church family will foster a community that is both healthy and fulfilling. The Church, the Body of Christ, must submit to God's refinement process so that we can be vessels for His work. When we exhibit Christ's unconditional sacrificial love, we demonstrate the love Christ has for humanity. We grow closer to Christ through sharing in His suffering. We foster deep meaningful relationships and live a life of purpose. Galatians 2:20 reads, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (KJV). We do not live for ourselves, but we live because of Christ and for Christ. Powell writes, "Those who experience God's salvation through Christ are to live not for themselves but rather for Christ, who died and was raised for them (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and 'the only thing that counts is faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6)."²⁸⁸

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²⁸⁸ Powell, *Introducing The New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 464.

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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SHARED POSSESSIONS IN FOSTERING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND IN OVERCOMING THE DEBILITATION OF PERSECUTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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Introduction

As reported in the annals of early Christian history, the burgeoning community of believers faced daunting challenges. Chief among these trials were the relentless waves of persecution that sought to erode their faith, undermine their unity, and dismantle their nascent religious movement. In the face of adversity, however, the Early Church did not simply wither away; rather, it emerged with greater resilience, demonstrating a remarkable capacity to withstand external pressures. Central to this remarkable resilience was the practice of shared possessions among the believers, which notably extended its embrace to marginalized communities and ethnic groups within the early Christian fold. The disciples adopted and began to practice the grand example uttered by Jesus Himself in the temple located in Luke 4:18, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me...to preach the gospel to the poor... proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed.”²⁸⁹ Jesus in His ministry taught his disciples to regard the oppressed and the poor. Later in Acts 4:34 we find that they had no need among them because all needs were met as the need arose.

Dennis Johnson suggests that Luke, in Acts, intentionally echoes the language of Deuteronomy 15:4, conveying a message that contrasts Israel’s historical failure in caring for the poor with the renewed embodiment of God’s kingdom under Jesus as King – this restoration marks a kingdom where poverty has no place, in line with the vision presented in Revelation 21:1-4.²⁹⁰ Therefore, this thematic resonance between Deuteronomy’s call to eradicate poverty and Luke’s portrayal of a restored community in Acts underscores the pivotal role of shared possessions in manifesting God’s kingdom.

The implications of this narrative extend far beyond the historical context, offering insights into the enduring significance of communal support and unity in addressing issues of poverty and social

²⁸⁹ From the New King James Version.

²⁹⁰ Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 87-89.

justice. It is with this in mind that this paper explores the role of shared possessions in the early Christian community, shedding light on its transformative power in fostering unity and fortifying the church, arguing that the practice undoubtedly mitigated the debilitating effects of persecution. In this introductory section, we will lay the groundwork for this exploration, elucidating the significance of shared possessions, particularly in the context of marginalized and ethnic communities, and their catalytic role in nurturing unity and resilience within the early church. Shared possessions therefore, as exemplified in the scriptural accounts of the Early Church in the book of Acts, hold a pivotal place in the narrative of this Christian community.

I contend that shared possessions acted as more than just a socio-economic arrangement; rather, the practice of sharing possessions served as a conduit for the expression of Christian principles, for binding believers, and for including marginalized and ethnic groups in a common purpose and shared identity. The German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer opines, “The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from everyday Christian life in community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; for in the poor sister or brother, Christ is knocking at the door.”²⁹¹ In this statement, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is accentuating the profound theological truth that the presence of Christ is not only found in the powerful, successful, or prominent members of the Christian community but also in those who may be considered weak, insignificant, or seemingly useless by societal standards. Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35 stand as exemplary testimonies to this communal spirit, depicting a community where believers, irrespective of their backgrounds, held all things in common and distributed resources to each according to their need. Building upon this contextual framework, the subsequent sections of this paper will unravel the multifaceted significance of shared possessions within the early Christian community.

Our journey begins with an exegetical examination of the biblical and theological foundations of the practice of shared possessions. From there, we transition to present shared possessions as a model for unity, exploring its implications for community cohesion. This exploration then segues into a dialogue about overcoming hardship through community unity, where we explore the practical benefits of shared possessions in the face of adversity, and posits that sharing possessions was crucial to the community in times of persecution. Lastly, we navigate the terrain of contemporary relevance,

²⁹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, G. L. Müller and Albrecht Schönherr (eds), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 45–46.

probing how the timeless principles of unity and shared possessions continue to impact and shape the trajectories of contemporary communities and faith. Thus, this paper's overarching purpose is to explore the catalytic role of shared possessions, with a particular focus on their significance for marginalized communities and ethnic groups within the book of Acts. The paper aims to elucidate how shared possessions served as a potent force for fostering unity and resilience, all while overcoming the adverse effects of persecution that had befallen the Early Church.

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Shared Possessions

Examining the biblical and theological underpinnings of shared possessions within the early Christian community, this section addresses the pivotal role played by the verses in Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35 in establishing the scriptural foundation for communal living and shared resources. These are profound theological cornerstones fostering unity and growth within the community.

Greek and English Text of Acts 2:42; 44-46

Verse 42 ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς

Verse 44 πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά,

Verse 45 καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον, καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσι, καθότι ἄν τις χρεῖαν εἶχε.

Verse 46 Καθ' ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας.²⁹²

Verse 42 they continued and steadfastly doctrine in the apostles' and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Verse 44 signs through all and that believed were together, and had all things common

Verse 45 and their possessions and goods, sold and parted them to all as had everyone need.

Verse 46 daily and they, continuing with one accord in the temple, breaking and from house to house, bread did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

²⁹²Jay P. Green, Sr., *The Interlinear Bible Hebrew-Greek-English*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1986), 843.

The scriptural account in Acts 2:42-47 offers not only a glimpse into the daily life of the early Christian community but also provides a theological blueprint for their shared possessions. Their devotion to the “apostles’ teaching” forms the bedrock of their theological commitment to the Gospel. This commitment was not merely intellectual; it fostered a deep sense of unity and purpose. Analyzing the biblical text closely, we see that this devotion to teaching went hand in hand with “fellowship” and the “breaking of bread.”

This term “fellowship” originates from the Greek word κοινωνία, which signifies a deep communion, sharing, and participation. In secular Greek it could involve the sharing of goods. In writing to the church in Corinth, Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:13 seems to use this understanding.²⁹³ As I consider this carefully, the term conveys not just a casual association but a profound sense of shared life and unity. It brings to the fore the believers’ active involvement in each other’s lives and their common commitment to the teachings of the apostles. “They not only had a mutual affection to each other, but a great deal of mutual conversation with each other; they were much together.”²⁹⁴

Likewise, the phrase “breaking of bread” also holds rich theological significance. The word κλάσις, derived from κλάω, means “breaking” and is closely linked to the institution of the Lord’s Supper.²⁹⁵ It signifies not only a shared meal but also a participation in the body of Christ, symbolizing the believers’ spiritual unity and their identification with Christ’s sacrifice. The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to observe the Lord’s Supper (Communion) and they practiced it frequently.²⁹⁶ Therefore, in the context of shared possessions, the phrase “had all things in common” translates from the Greek ἔσχον πάντα κοινά. Here, κοινά directly relates to the term κοινωνία, emphasizing the shared nature of their possessions.

The language of the biblical text in verse 45 employs the imperfect tense, signifying that this was an ongoing, habitual practice among them because they regularly sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds as needs arose.²⁹⁷ Thus, it clearly reflects the theological underpinning of their unity, as they held all things in common not only in practice but also in principle. As mentioned, I

²⁹³ John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary Volume 26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 119.

²⁹⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume VI* (McLean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Company, 28).

²⁹⁵ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 119.

²⁹⁶ Thomas Hale, *The Applied New Testament Commentary* (Eastbourne, GB: Kingsway Publications, 1996), 73.

²⁹⁷ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 121.

contend that these aspects of communal life were not isolated practices; they were deeply rooted in theological expressions of shared identity and purpose. The erudite American Evangelical Old Testament scholar, Lloyd J. Ogilvie posited, “There was none of the defensive clutching of their own wealth which is so evident in churches today.”²⁹⁸ The ethos of Ogilvie’s assertions is that the early Christian communities exhibited a spirit of generosity and selflessness in contrast to the often materialistic and self-protective attitudes observed in some modern churches. This critical point in the early Christian community cannot be trivialized nor underestimated, because it demonstrates a contrast between the attitudes of early Christians who prioritized communal well-being over personal wealth and some modern church practices that may be perceived as more focused on individual accumulation and protection of assets. Selfishness and selflessness will always be eternal enemies. The breaking of bread, for instance, signified not just a common meal but also participation in the body of Christ, accentuating the intimate bond forged through shared possessions. Moreover, their willingness to “have all things in common” and to sell possessions when needs arose was not a mere economic arrangement but a theological manifestation of the command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” reflecting their commitment to embodying Christ’s teachings in practical ways.

Greek and English Text of Acts 4:32-35

Verse 32 Τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν ἡ καρδιά καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μία καὶ οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι ἀλλ’ ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά.

Verse 33 καὶ μεγάλῃ δυνάμει ἀπεδίδουν τὸ μαρτύριον οἱ ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, χάρις τε μεγάλῃ ἦν ἐπὶ πάντας αὐτούς.

Verse 34 οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ὑπῆρχεν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὅσοι γὰρ κτήτορες χωρίων ἢ οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τὰς τιμὰς τῶν πιπρασκομένων.

Verse 35 καὶ ἐτίθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων διεδίδото δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν.²⁹⁹

Verse 32 The and multitude of them that believed were the heart and the soul one, and not one anything possessions to him he said his own to be, but were to them all things common.

Verse 33 And with great power gave witness to the apostles of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and grace and great was upon them all.

²⁹⁸ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Communicator’s Commentary: Acts, Volume 5* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers, 1983), 75.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 845.

Verse 34 Neither for needy anyone was among them, as many as for owners of lands or houses were having land sold brought the values of those being sold.

Verse 35 And placed at the feet of the apostles; it was distributed and to each according to any need had.

Acts 4:32-35 further embellishes the point that Christians endeavored to love their neighbors with their actions, according to Christ's command. The passage reinforces the theological underpinnings of shared possessions, accentuating the voluntary nature of their communal living. Analyzing the biblical text, we find that the believers were "of one heart and soul." The phrase "of one heart and soul" stems from the Greek μία καρδιά καὶ ψυχή, calling attention to their profound spiritual and emotional unity.³⁰⁰ The word ψυχή seems to go beyond a mere sense of being; it conveys the essence of their beings existing in harmony and unity, indicating their shared identity and purpose. This unity, far from being superficial, had profound theological implications. This willingness to allocate all they had, emanated from their shared commitment to the Gospel and their deep sense of spiritual kinship. Thus, the term "shared" in "shared everything they had" NIV³⁰¹ is derived from ἴδιον,³⁰² which means "own" or "individual." Its use in contrast to the shared possessions accentuates the voluntary nature of their communal living. They willingly relinquished what was considered ἴδιον in support of the κοινωνία, demonstrating the authenticity of their unity and commitment to Christ's teachings.

Notably, the passage stresses the significance that "there was not a needy person among them." Consequently, this theological statement goes beyond mere economic equality; it brings into focus the transformative power of shared possessions in addressing the material needs of the community, aligning with the scriptural vision that there should be no poor among God's people. Beyond the specific scriptures, this theological foundation of shared possessions in the Early Church had far-reaching implications. It extended beyond mere resource-sharing and attention to financial equality. It fostered a profound sense of mutual responsibility within the community, creating a bond that transcended social, economic, and cultural differences. The shared possessions also served as a powerful symbol of their shared identity as

³⁰⁰ *The Complete Biblical Library, the New Testament Study Bible: Acts* (Complete Biblical Library, 1991), 103-104.

³⁰¹ *The Comparative Study Bible*, 2654.

³⁰² *The Complete Biblical Library, the New Testament Study Bible*, 104.

followers of Christ, representing their commitment to living according to His teachings.

As we explore further into the impact of shared possessions within the Early Church, we see it move beyond the practices of biblical and theological underpinnings to its implications for the life of the community. It becomes evident that beyond their providing a foundational principle to guide Christian life, sharing possessions significantly contributed to the life and growth of the community in three distinct ways: community building and solidarity, spiritual transformation and witness, and resilience in the face of persecution. Let us now explore these dimensions in turn.

Community Building and Solidarity

First, these shared possessions went beyond the pragmatic sharing of material goods; it fostered a profound sense of community building and solidarity within the Early Church. Believers were not mere acquaintances; they were interconnected as a spiritual family. This shared responsibility for one another's well-being created a culture of care, empathy, and mutual support. Acts 6:1-7, for instance, reveals how shared possessions influenced the equitable distribution of resources and addressed the practical needs of different segments within the community, such as the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews. In fact, Luke "holds up this congregation as a model of harmony and community."³⁰³ This spirit of inclusivity and care reinforced the sense of unity, transforming the Early Church into a vibrant and cohesive body.

Spiritual Transformation and Witness

Additionally, shared possessions were not only a response to material needs but also a vehicle for spiritual transformation and witness. "Luke is not shy at other places in Acts about the short coming of the Early Church in Jerusalem."³⁰⁴ For instance, in Acts 5:1-11, the account of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a stark reminder of the seriousness with which the Early Church regarded the integrity of this practice. In particular, the incident elevates the purity of intent required in shared possessions, deepening the reality that this practice was not about personal gain but rather about sacrificial giving. It communicated

³⁰³ Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer, *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 117.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

a powerful testimony to the world; the Christian community was so committed to its principles that it valued truth and transparency in all dealings. This integrity bore witness to the transformative power of the Gospel and contributed to the rapid growth and influence of the Early Church.

Resilience in Persecution

Lastly, it is probable that shared possessions played a vital role in fortifying the Early Church against the challenges of persecution. As the Church faced increasing hostility, their shared resources most likely provided a safety net for those targeted by persecution. Acts 8:1-4, which recounts the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, demonstrates, persecution was real, creating a context where shared possessions allowed believers to support one another during times of hardship. This resilience in the face of persecution bore testimony to the strength of their unity and their unwavering commitment to the principles of shared possessions. Their ability to withstand adversity became a compelling witness to the transformative power of faith in Christ.

Shared Possessions as a Model for Unity

In the theological reflections of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the phrase “Christ existing as community”³⁰⁵ encapsulates a rich perspective on the nature of the church. Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the communal essence of the church echoes the idea that the body of Christ is not a mere abstraction or an individualized experience; rather, it is a dynamic, living community where the presence of Christ is palpably felt among believers. Within this shared life in fellowship, Bonhoeffer illuminates a theological framework that extends beyond individual spirituality, highlighting the interconnectedness and communal fabric that define the essence of the church. It is in this theological context that we consider further the exploration of shared possessions as a model for unity, seeking to unravel the implications of communal living and mutual stewardship in fostering a unified, Christ-centered community.

³⁰⁵ John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015), 266.

Sacrificial Love as the Foundation

The model of shared possessions as a catalyst for unity is woven with the foundational principle of sacrificial love. We have seen that the account of the book of Acts presents the historical narrative of the early Christian community, where it illustrates instances where believers practiced sacrificial love through shared possessions. As mentioned earlier about what is found in Acts 2:44-45, we saw that the community is described as having all things in common, demonstrating a selfless sharing of resources. Additionally, Acts 4:32-37 further exemplifies this model, portraying believers selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds according to the needs of the community.

While there is not a direct instance where Jesus explicitly spoke about shared possessions as a model for unity in the New Testament, He however raised principles of sacrificial love and communal care, laying the groundwork for the practices taught which would later be observed in the early Christian community. There are several instances where Jesus spoke about sacrificial love and caring for others:

- a. **The Greatest Commandment:** In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus articulates the greatest commandment, raising the importance of the love of God and neighbor. This teaching lays the foundation for sacrificial love as a guiding principle for interactions within the community.
- b. **The Parable of the Good Samaritan:** In Luke 10:25-37 Jesus uses this narrative to illustrate the concept of loving one's neighbor sacrificially, regardless of social or ethnic differences. The Parable of the Good Samaritan becomes a poignant narrative supporting this model, showcasing sacrificial love transcending racial, religious, and ethnic boundaries.
- c. **The Widow's Offering:** In Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, Jesus observes a poor widow contributing two small coins to the temple treasury. Despite her poverty, Jesus commends her sacrificial giving, giving attention to the principle of giving out of one's substance.

Collectively, these passages offer a robust theology of sacrificial love, establishing it as a guiding principle for Christian living and communal interactions. The shared possessions model, as depicted in Acts, becomes an embodiment of this theological model, where sacrificial love is not only advocated but lived out in the tangible act of sharing resources for the collective well-being of the Christian community. The theological underpinnings of sacrificial love, as gleaned from these passages, not only inform but also actively shape the communal ethos of shared possessions within the early Christian narrative.

Stewardship and Divine Ownership

Acts provides glimpses into the stewardship and recognition of divine ownership embedded in the model of shared possessions. While Acts 4:32-35 depicts believers selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds according to the needs of the community, it further outlines believers' commitment to stewardship and acknowledging that their possessions are entrusted by God. This communal understanding transforms the act of sharing into a tangible expression of stewardship, emphasizing that believers are custodians of God's provision for the collective well-being of community. The absence of coercion in these acts, as seen in Acts 5:1-11 with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, further accentuates the voluntary nature of stewardship within the early Christian community.

There are passages in the New Testament that convey the principles aligned with this model for Christian living:

1. **The Parable of the Talents:** In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells the parable of the talents, illustrating the concept of stewardship. The servants are entrusted with different amounts of money, and they are expected to be faithful stewards of what they have received.
2. **The Parable of the Dishonest Manager:** In Luke 16:1-13, Jesus tells the parable of the dishonest manager. While the primary focus is on faithfulness in small and large matters, the passage underscores the responsibility of managing resources wisely.

These parables collectively contribute to another robust theology of stewardship and divine ownership. They assert that God, as the ultimate owner of all resources, entrusts individuals and communities with varying gifts and possessions. The responsibility lies in the faithful and strategic management of these resources for the common good. In the communal context, this theology aligns with the shared possessions model depicted in Acts, accentuating not only the act of sharing but the intentional, faithful, and strategic stewardship of God's entrusted resources for the flourishing of the Christian community.

Shared possessions as a model of unity carries the weight of the theological implications within Christianity as it manifests as a force that transcends entrenched boundaries, especially those of religion and ethnicity. Rooted in the teachings of Christ, the model challenges the divisive tendencies that often permeate religious and ethnic communities. Therefore, by promoting a communal ethos centered on sacrificial love and stewardship, shared possessions become a tangible

expression of Christian unity, thereby dismantling the divisive forces of religious exclusivity and ethnic particularism. This transformative paradigm gives attention to the inclusive nature of the Gospel, offering a compelling testimony to the ability of shared possessions to redefine communal identity. Embracing this model, believers go beyond societal constraints, fostering a harmonious Christian community where the shared life in Christ serves as a unifying force, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of oneness among individuals irrespective of their diverse backgrounds.

Overcoming Hardship Through Community Unity

The early Christian community faced formidable challenges, marked by intense persecution and hardship, as documented in the book of Acts. In chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Acts, the persecution of Peter and John unfolds after the healing of a lame man and their subsequent preaching. The religious leaders were hostile towards them and further arrested and brought them before the Sanhedrin council, subjecting them to vehement opposition. Acts 7 introduces the martyrdom of Stephen, an early deacon, whose powerful preaching before Jewish leaders led to his stoning, marking the inception of Christian martyrdom. The aftermath of Stephen's death is recounted in Acts 8, where a severe persecution erupted against the Church in Jerusalem, compelling believers to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 12 details the execution of James by Herod Agrippa I and the subsequent arrest of Peter. Miraculously freed from prison by an angel, Peter sought refuge in the house where many believers gathered and prayed for him.³⁰⁶ These episodes, while portraying the intense adversities faced by the early Christians, also give insight into the shared possessions that played a pivotal role in overcoming these challenges.

In actuality, sharing possessions was one of several factors that helped Christians to be resilient during times of persecution. The scriptures point to these listed below.

Strategic Geographic Movement: In the face of persecution in Jerusalem, believers strategically scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Initially driven by adversity, this dispersion evolved into a purposeful move to spread the Gospel to new regions, contributing to the expansion of the Christian community.

Preaching and Evangelism: Despite persecution, believers unwaveringly preached the Gospel (Acts 8:4). The scattered believers

³⁰⁶ Everett Fergusson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 34-36.

proclaimed the word, showcasing a commitment to evangelism that significantly contributed to the growth and resilience of the Early Church.

Unity and Mutual Encouragement: Acts 14:21-22 shows Paul and Barnabas strengthening and encouraging the disciples, fostering unity and mutual support, and this communal resilience played a vital role in helping believers endure the hardships of persecution.

Legal Defense and Advocacy: In Acts 22-26, the Apostle Paul strategically used his Roman citizenship to present legal defenses before governors and kings. This practical approach showcased an engagement with the legal framework to address challenges faced by the Early Church.

The Appeal to Higher Authorities: Confronted with opposition in Jerusalem, Paul, leveraging his Roman citizenship, sought justice by appealing to higher authorities, including Roman governors and eventually Caesar. This strategic recourse reflected a pragmatic approach to navigating challenges.

Prayer in Communal Gatherings: Acts 20:36 and Acts 21:5 depict moments of communal prayer in the life of Paul and the early church. These instances, along with others (Acts 1:14; Acts 1:24-26; 4:23-31; Acts 12:5, 12:12; Acts 16:25-34), emphasize the centrality of prayer in the communal response to persecution, highlighting the consistent reliance on God's guidance and support within the early Christian community.

This paper argues that possessions being shared featured prominently and created a communal dwelling, symbolizing a sanctuary of unity, endurance, and practical support. Again, Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-37 exemplify this communal living, where believers held all things in common, sharing their resources to meet the needs of the community. In times of persecution and hardship, these communal spaces became sanctuaries and refuges of emotional solidarity, providing solace and support. Additionally, the sharing of funds for the Church in Jerusalem, as seen in Paul's fundraising efforts detailed in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, further illustrates shared possessions as a means of offering practical support in times of adversity. In interpreting these passages, the Wesleyan-Arminian New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington III, elucidates key principles, emphasizing that individuals should contribute in proportion to their means (2 Corinthians 8:11). The overarching goal, articulated by Paul, is not merely temporary relief for some while others face hardship; rather, it

is the establishment of equality (2 Corinthians 8:13-14).³⁰⁷ The immediate context involves material assistance for the Jerusalem church, highlighting the reciprocal nature of communal support. It is to this end that Witherington writes that Paul anticipates a future time where the Jerusalem church may reciprocate if the Corinthian church faces a need.³⁰⁸

Witherington makes another salient point, “Paul does not advocate for communism of any sort, it is also clear that he does advocate for communalism, or communityism. He believes the Christian community must not allow any of its members to be in want.”³⁰⁹ Witherington’s assertion accentuates Paul’s advocacy for a form of communityism rather than traditional communism. Paul’s focus is not on abolishing personal property but on fostering a shared life within the Christian community, aligning with the biblical principle of stewardship. Therefore, this practical approach emphasizes the importance of mutual care, generosity, and social equality, ensuring that no member faces a lack while others have plenty. The Christian community, guided by these principles, becomes a sanctuary of unity and practical support, embodying Paul’s vision for a community where no one is left in want. It is with this in mind, that the act of fundraising, mentioned by Paul transcended mere financial assistance; it symbolized a communal commitment to the welfare of the broader Christian community, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. Moreover, the communal act of participating in the Lord’s Supper, as observed in Acts 20:7, is another benefit of shared possessions fostering spiritual strength. Therefore, this sacred ritual symbolizes the unity of believers in their shared identity in Christ, fortifying their spiritual resilience in the face of persecution. The early believers responded to persecution through strategic and resilient measures, fostering community amidst adversity.

Therefore, amid persecution, the early Christian community no doubt exemplified resilience and unity through shared possessions as seen in the historical narratives of Acts. As well, the strategic geographic movements, unwavering commitment to preaching the Gospel, legal advocacy, and the power of communal prayer emerged as vital strategies for overcoming adversity. The experience of communal dwellings and shared resources provided not only practical support but also fostered sanctuaries of endurance and emotional solidarity.

³⁰⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 146.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 146.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 149.

Additionally, these shared possessions, symbolizing a commitment to equality and mutual care, fortified the Early Church, transforming adversity into an opportunity for the benefit of Christian unity and strength.

Implications and Relevance for Today's Context

In contemporary church operations, the foundational principles of shared possessions hold significant implications for pastoral leadership, financial stewardship, and community outreach. Pastors who are inspired by the biblical model presented, are called to be transparent stewards of church funds, giving attention to sacrificial love and communal responsibility. This involves implementing financial literacy programs, ensuring that congregants understand the divine ownership of resources (1 Corinthians 4:2). The leadership, in turn, can exemplify sacrificial love by directing funds toward community needs and missions, fostering a culture of shared possessions.

Outreach to marginalized groups, including the poor, widows, orphans, and the homeless, should become a strategic focus. Churches can establish dedicated ministries that actively engage with these communities, drawing inspiration from Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-35. Additionally, ongoing workshops during Sunday school sessions can educate congregants on the challenges faced by these groups, promoting empathy and prompting tangible actions. Leadership seminars can also be another tool, which can guide pastors in aligning their financial decisions with biblical principles, ensuring that the church's resources are directed toward building a unified and supportive community.

The model of shared possessions, rooted in sacrificial love and divine ownership can reshape church operations and leadership strategies, when the pastoral leadership takes on a transformative role as pastors prioritize unity over individual gain, mirroring the sacrificial love exemplified by Christ (John 13:34-35). Financial decisions are guided by a stewardship mentality, with leaders directing resources toward initiatives that foster unity and address the needs of the congregation. Outreach ministries can become platforms for expressing sacrificial love in action, extending shared possessions beyond the church walls. Acts 4:32-35 serves as a guiding scripture, urging congregations to share not only material possessions but also their hearts and lives. Missions' workshops can focus on implementing shared possessions as a model for unity in global outreach, ensuring that funds are used collaboratively to make a lasting impact. Leadership seminars can equip pastors with practical strategies to cultivate unity

within the congregation, emphasizing the importance of shared values and communal well-being.

The practical implications of overcoming hardship through community unity are manifold. The strategic geographic movement, exemplified by the Early Church's response to persecution (Acts 8:1), should inspire modern churches to adapt and innovate in response to challenges. Therefore, while sharing possessions emerges as a central theme, it intertwines with sacrificial love, communal responsibility, and divine stewardship to create a comprehensive approach to Christian living. As we navigate the various understandings of contemporary church operations, leadership dynamics, and community outreach, the shared possessions model serves as a foundational principle that harmonizes with other transformative strategies. This holistic perspective underscores the interconnectedness of biblical principles, guiding pastors, congregants, and communities toward a united and resilient expression of their faith. Therefore, in implementing these strategies, let us not view shared possessions in isolation but rather as an integral part of a larger interwoven with threads of love, responsibility, and stewardship for the glory of God and the edification of His Church.

Conclusion

Our exploration of shared possessions as a model for unity in the early Christian community reveals foundational principles rooted in sacrificial love, financial stewardship, and resilient community building. Today, these biblical ideals resonate within the operational dynamics of modern churches. Pastors are challenged to lead transparently and sacrificially, fostering a communal identity grounded in shared possessions. This model prompts believers to break down societal boundaries, extending love to the marginalized and reflecting the transformative power of the Gospel. The early Christians' resilience becomes a call for today's Church to be a united, compassionate community, drawing strength from shared possessions for the greater good.

As we conclude, this exploration prompts reflection on the Church's identity and values, urging a steadfast commitment to unity, love, and endurance in our contemporary context. It emphasizes the enduring lessons of shared possessions as a catalyst for unity and resilience, highlighting the relevance of fostering unity through shared possessions in addressing challenges faced by modern communities. This, in turn, raises questions for further study and contemplation: How can the Church more effectively translate shared possessions into impactful outreach to the marginalized? What steps can be taken to

enhance financial stewardship within the modern Church? In pondering these questions, the journey into the biblical and theological foundations of shared possessions continues, offering an ongoing source of inspiration and guidance for the Church today.

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HOW THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF THE FOUR FEMALE DOCTORS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CAN INFORM CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON SCIENCE, HEALTH, POLITICS, AND SPIRITUALITY IN A POST-PANDEMIC SOCIETY

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Introduction

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” These resounding words spoken by Jesus at the end of chapter 16 of John’s gospel shows the unequivocal truth of His victory. And this victory is one of the rare points that are upheld as truth by every major Christian denomination. There are debates on how a person is saved, how one should be baptized, what the end of times will look like, and so forth. However, regarding Jesus’ victory over the world, we are all aligned with no major theological research saying otherwise. With this confidence of victory over worldly concerns, the Church, you would think, could maintain a quiet dignity. Nonetheless, our Christian society, during the COVID-19 pandemic, showed behaviors towards science, health, politics and spirituality that were in direct opposition to Jesus’ teachings. From unequipped preachers giving bad health advice and minimizing the seriousness of the pandemic, to Christian leaders replicating political rhetoric even when it differed from the Bible, the responses showed that regardless of denomination, misinformation and wrong teachings brought the opposite of the good cheer we were called to have.

However, this dire and troublesome picture just reiterates Jesus’ statement regarding tribulations. In an age of so much mistrust, looking back on our church history helps us to find many great examples of Christian faith lived out in various contexts. The four female doctors from the Catholic Church, however, not only are exceptional examples of obedience to the Lord, but each one of them provided great wisdom concerning four issues in their times, Hildegard of Bingen regarding science, Thérèse of Lisieux regarding health, Catherine of Siena in politics, and Teresa of Avila in her spirituality. This work begins with the data and information on the Christian perspectives about science, health, politics, and spirituality during, or after the pandemic, and follows with a brief explanation of the meaning of the title “doctor of the church” and how the featured women of church history were recognized as such. This research explains how their life and teachings can inform us today on how to approach issues pertaining to each one

of these spheres of life in a way that moves us forward towards unity, equality, and the good cheer Christ called us to live out.

Data on Christian Perspective during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote in his journals, “It is my opinion that sincerity is not enough for the preaching ministry. The minister must be both sincere and intelligent...I also think that the minister should possess profundity of conviction. We have too many ministers in the pulpit who are great spellbinders and too few who possess spiritual power.”³¹⁰ Almost seventy years later, unfortunately the same assessment could be made regarding many preachers today. With lack of intelligence or spiritual power, many leaders during the pandemic, stopped preaching solely from the Bible, even voicing conspiracy theories from the pulpit. They delivered divisive speeches causing parishioners not to follow health guidelines given by the government, or allowed many to think it was their Christian duty to put the US above other countries, causing an increase in xenophobia, especially against Asians and people of Asian descent. In order to show the state of Christian society in the U.S. during the pandemic, the discussion now turns to data regarding attitudes toward science, health, politics and spirituality.

Science

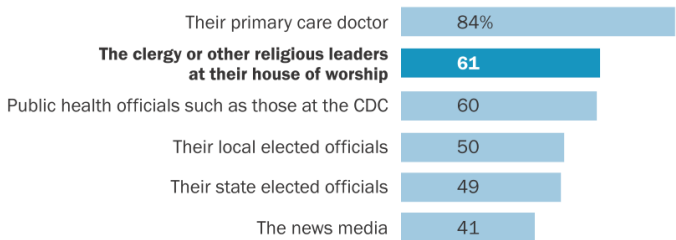
A survey conducted by Pew Research Center on September 2021 revealed that among those who attended religious services, most trusted more in clergy than in public health officials such as the authorities of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Although the difference is just of 1% percent, the research proves a high degree of trust in clergy on subjects that are beyond the scope of the Bible. Six-in-ten U.S. congregants responded that they had a fair amount of confidence in the clergy or other religious leaders to give them guidance of a purely scientific issue, as, for example, in the case of the COVID-19 vaccines, even though there is no requirement for these in religious professions to have any sort of medical knowledge.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Clayborne Carson, ed. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2001) 18.

³¹¹ Pew Research Center, *Most Americans Who Go to Religious services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy's Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines*. October 15, 2021. Accessed November 5, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/10/15/most-americans-who-go-to-religious-services-say-they-would-trust-their-clergys-advice-on-covid-19-vaccines/>

Among those who attend religious services, most trust clergy as source of information about COVID-19 vaccines

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly or attended in person in the last month, % who say they have at least ‘a fair amount’ of confidence in _____ to provide guidance about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine



Source: Survey conducted Sept. 20-26, 2021, among U.S. adults.
“Most Americans Who Go to Religious Services Say They Would Trust Their Clergy’s Advice on COVID-19 Vaccines”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

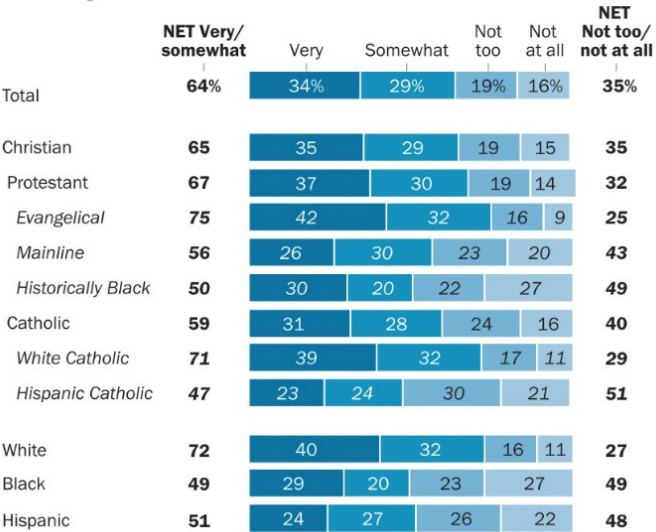
Figure 1

The trust in religious leaders in 2021 was also demonstrated in another survey conducted in July of 2020 which revealed the number of Christians who were either very or somewhat confident that they could safely attend religious services in person without catching or spreading COVID-19, as shown in Figure 2. Amongst Evangelicals, that percentage was 75%, and only 9% of Evangelicals were not at all confident that they could safely attend without either catching or spreading COVID-19. The second highest number was amidst White Catholic with 71%.³¹²

³¹² Pew Research Center, *Americans Oppose Religious Exemptions from Coronavirus-Related Restrictions*. August 7, 2020. Accessed November 5, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/08/07/americans-oppose-religious-exemptions-from-coronavirus-related-restrictions/>

More than six-in-ten regular attenders at least somewhat confident they can safely attend religious services without catching, spreading COVID-19

Among U.S. religious attenders, % who say they are ____ confident that they could safely attend in-person religious services right now without spreading or catching the coronavirus



Note: Religious attenders are those who said, in a 2019 survey, that they typically attend religious services monthly or more often, or who said in the new survey that they attended religious services in person in the last month. The survey did not obtain enough interviews with members of non-Christian religious groups in this category to analyze separately. Those who did not answer are not shown. Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey conducted July 13-19, 2020, among U.S. adults.
“Americans Oppose Religious Exemptions From Coronavirus-Related Restrictions”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2

Now the discrepancy between the Christian perspective shown in the previous data appears when we compare data about the severity of the pandemic during the same period as the Pew surveys. On July 9 of 2020, *The New York Times* published the article, “The Coronavirus Can be Airborne Indoors, W.H.O. Says.” Besides the information that the virus could be transmitted through air and not only by direct droplets of an infected person, the article explained that “in an updated scientific brief, the agency also asserted more directly than it had in the past that

the virus may be spread by people who do not have symptoms.”³¹³ The agency also reiterated, “In addition to avoiding close contact with infected people and washing hands, people should avoid crowded places, close-contact settings, and confined and enclosed spaces with poor ventilation,” the agency said and homes and offices should ensure good ventilation.”³¹⁴ This article reveals the facts. The survey of Figure 2 shows that 75% of evangelicals and 71% of white Catholics disregarded the information given by world renowned doctors from the World Health Organization, an organization that hosts professionals that, at least in the U.S., are required to have ten to fourteen years of education to become a fully licensed doctor.

Health

Although the facts presented in this section will be very similar to the ones from the section on science, the goal is to show the facts about the *actual actions* that stemmed from concern about the health of others and oneself, or *the lack of concern*, during that period. In the article “Culture Wars and COVID-19 Conduct: Christian Nationalism, Religiosity, and Americans’ Behavior During the Coronavirus Pandemic,” the main debates regarding procedures meant to battle against the virus are shown to be not only political, but religious. Specifically, polls and rapid-response studies have also shown that Americans who were more religious or religiously conservative (e.g., evangelicals) were more likely to distrust scientific and media sources over the President, and subsequently less likely to social distance, wear masks, or otherwise take recommended precautionary measures, while more secular Americans were more likely to follow these guidelines.³¹⁵

The renowned minister John Fullerton MacArthur, author of dozens of books including biblical commentaries, was the subject of the *Los Angeles Times*’ article, “L.A Megachurch Pastor Mocks Pandemic Health Orders, Even as Church Members Fall Ill,” published on November 8 of 2020. The article explains that although MacArthur fully complied with health orders requiring churches to close, and even

³¹³ Apoorva Mandavilli, *The New York Times*. “The Coronavirus Can Be Airborne Indoors, W.H.O. Says.” Published July 9, 2020. Updated October 5, 2020, Accessed November 5, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/health/virus-aerosols-who.html>

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Samuel L. Perry, Joshua B. Grubbs and Andrew L. Whitehead, “Culture Wars and COVID-19 Conduct: Christian Nationalism, Religiosity, and Americans’ Behavior During the Coronavirus Pandemic”, First Published: 26 July 2020, Accessed: November 6, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12677>

declared in an interview on March 28 of 2020 that the “defiance of safety measures is a ‘foolish’ thing to do and makes Christianity look anything but loving,”” the article declared that he soon “was echoing the same arguments and hyperbole that Trump and conservative media have spread about the pandemic” and stated that he was of the opinion that the “mainstream media have overhyped the pandemic; that not that many people have died and the data are wrong, and those who did succumb actually died from other illnesses; that it’s really just the flu — and saying it’s all the government’s ploy to control Christians.” This was said even fully knowing that he had parishioners who got sick. MacArthur is not only a pastor and an author, but a very respected and admired Christian figure whose opinions influence thousands of people worldwide. The awful impact this undoubtedly caused in the health of Christians who followed his declarations could never be measured, but was gravely observed and apparent around us.

Politics

There is no question that a majority of Christians hold to more conservative views, as most religious people do, even outside Christianity. So, it is no surprise that a conservative political party would have the majority of this sector of the population. In spite of new objections to the fact that the United States is a Christian country, founded on Christian values, it is true that it was founded by persecuted Christians immigrants from Europe, and that the Bible always had front and center place in the rendering of major decisions regarding laws and government. Separation of Church and State was a measure meant not to diminish the Church, but to ensure its freedom. However, today, instead of real Christian values influencing politics, especially in the case of a political party that identifies itself as conservative and based on Judeo-Christian’s principles, influences of a different nature are apparent. There are political agendas influencing Christians to a point where the Bible is used as a prop or an excuse to endorse their decisions, even when they are in complete opposition to what the gospel teaches.

One example of this can be observed in regards to racial issues. There is no denying of the awful history of slavery in the U.S. or the appalling Jim Crow Law that existed in some states until fairly recent. Although the United States was one of the first country of the Americas to have a black president, when Barack Obama won with the majority of votes in 2008, the amount of display of the confederate flags in the South even today shows that racism is real and still an issue to be dealt with as Christians. However, strangely enough, racial equality was not addressed as an ethical issue, but a politicized national issue. President

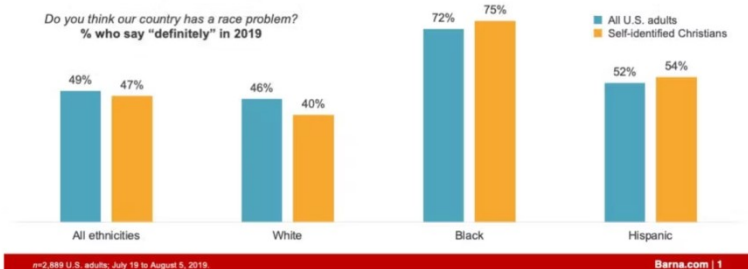
John F. Kennedy, from the Democratic party, spearheaded the support of the Civil Rights Movement, by associating himself with important figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. even though Jim Crow Laws were upheld by Democrats from the South. Since then, racial equality suddenly was a “left wing” standpoint, and thus, not a “conservative one.”

One example of racial politics influencing Christians during the time of the pandemic could be noted when George Floyd died on May 25, 2020 because of police brutality. Although similar tragedies had happened before, his death propelled a commotion worldwide in favor of discussions and real actions towards racial equality. But a survey conducted by the Barna group showed not an increase of awareness of this problem, but instead a decrease among those self-identifying as Christians. In 2019 the question “Do you think our country has a racial problem?” was answered “definitely” by 47% of self-identified Christians, compared to 49% of all US adults. The disparity appears when the same question is posed in a 2020 on a survey conducted from June 18 to July 17, the same time period when the entire nation was a stage of innumerable protests on the issue of race, protests that featured an overwhelming constituency of the young population. In spite of this social climate, the poll showed a decrease of 4% in US adults who felt there was a race issue in the U.S. (Figure 3). In fact, during that period, race was the only issue that overpowered COVID-19 news since the entire population was bombarded with news media and information on the matter. Yet, because the resistance to discourse about the issue was attached to a particular political party, some Christians that self-identified as the other party started even denying the obvious, as if to say that there was no issue, while the whole nation and dozens of other countries were having major protests about the matter.

Perceptions of Race Relations in America—2019

by Race / Ethnicity

Barna



Perceptions of Race Relations in America—2020

by Race / Ethnicity

Barna

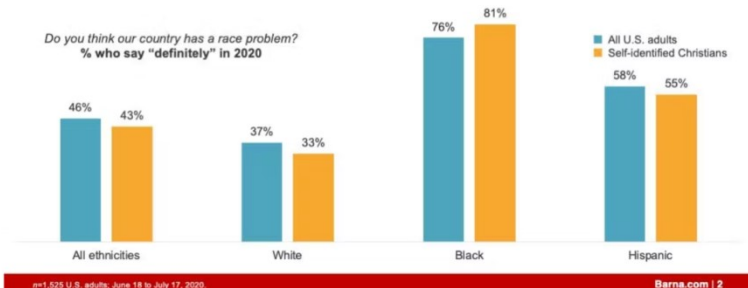


Figure 3

Spirituality

What is important to understand about Christian perspectives about spirituality is that data on spirituality deals with self-perception. A survey conducted by the Barna group from April 23 of 2021 to May 5 on spiritual health yielded an interesting result. One of the questions was, "Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, would you say you are presently more or less spiritually healthy?" And 49% answered "more" as compared to only 12% that answered "less" as seen in figure 4.

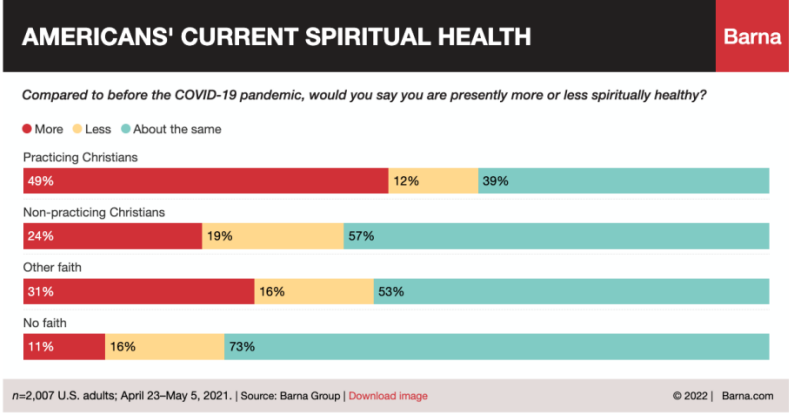


Figure 4

Data that reflects states of spiritual health, as portrayed in Figure 4, rely on a personal perspective, that is, on self-perception. The Bible teaches us that godly spirituality is contingent upon attitudes toward justice as well as just acts. In Jeremiah 7, we read the Lord speaking through the prophet at the gates of the Lord’s house to the people as they went to worship, it reads:

If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless (Jer. 7:5-8 NIV).

In Micah 6:8 we read the prophet stating, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8 NIV). Additionally, in Hosea’s writing it reads, “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (Hos. 12:6 NIV). Therefore, accurately assessing whether practicing Christians had indeed increased in their spiritual health, would require evidence of an increase of motivation to address injustice, this would be in keeping with what the Bible teaches, that is, according to God’s perspective “doing” justice is a requirement regarding Christian spirituality.

Moreover, in another Barna Group survey, results show that from 2019 to 2020 the number of self-identified Christians who perceived themselves as very motivated, motivated or somewhat motivated to address racial injustice in our society had declined. In fact, as shown in Figure 5, since prior to the pandemic until mid-June of 2020 there was a 100% increase of Christians who answered “Not at all motivated” to address racial injustice in our society. Yet, the Bible critiques such apathy. 1 John 4:20 states, “If anyone says, ‘I love God’, but hates his brother, he is a liar, for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” It is fairly easy to see that the survey results shown in Figure 4 actually reveal either a lack of self-awareness, or a lack of real Christian spirituality. Therefore, rather than presume that there was an increase of true piety, the opposite is reflected in the data.

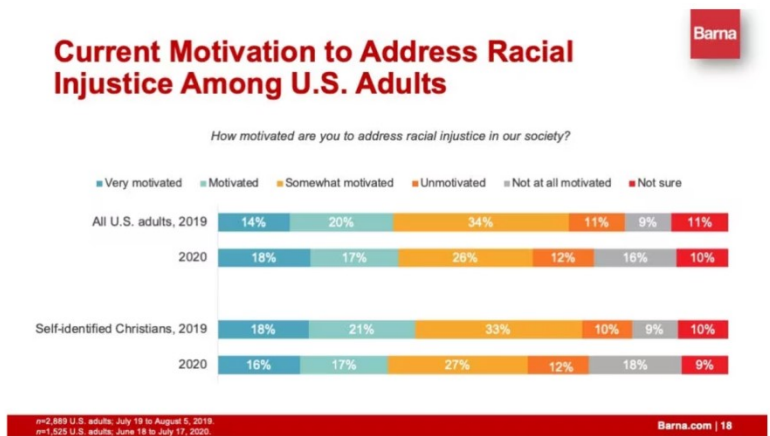


Figure 5

Returning to what Dr. King said, Christian ministers should indeed have depth in their Christian conviction, and should be sincere and demonstrate intelligence. The data presented showed that there was probably a lack of these traits in today’s Christian leadership in the United States. That is one of the reasons that it is so important to look towards leaders that history has proven to have been exemplary in dealing with adverse circumstance, such as these four exemplary ladies. In the next chapter we will see how they were deemed worthy of such an esteemed title as “Doctor of the Church” by the Roman Catholic denomination. Their reputations even exposed the injustice of the

abhorrent prejudice against the female gender, a prejudice that is still prevalent in today's Christianity.

Understanding What “Doctors of the Church” Means

In the Bible, the word “doctor” is the same as the word “teacher.” In Luke 2:46 in the King James Version it reads, “And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the *doctors*, both hearing them, and asking them questions.” The word *doctor* in this verse was rendered in the original text διδάσκω (*didaskalos*), which means “teacher” in Greek. Ephesians 4:11, in one of the most traditional Portuguese translations of the Bible, the Almeida Corrigida Fiel, translates the Greek word διδάσκω (*didaskalos*) as “doutores” (doctors) instead of “professores” (teachers). The same verse in Latin reads, “*et ipse dedit quosdam quidem apostolos quosdam autem prophetas alios vero evangelistas alios autem pastores et doctores.*” (Eph. 4:11 VUL) So, the Latin also renders διδάσκω (*didaskalos*) as “doctors,” if you translate into English. On the other hand, when the Bible refers to what we understand today as “medical doctor,” it is rendered as “physician.” For example, in Colossians 4:14 the apostle Paul refers to Luke as “the beloved *physician*” in the English Standard Version; “physician” is the English translation for the Greek ἰατρὸς (*iatros*).

Professor Elizabeth Dreyer, in her book *Accidental Theologians: Four Women Who Shaped Christianity*, explains that the title “Doctor of the Church” was given to those the Catholic Church deemed a saint and who had an outstanding way of interpreting and teaching Scripture and Christian doctrine. She also states that, “the term ‘Doctor of the Church’ first came into use between 400 and 600 C.E. It was associated with illustrious figures, mostly bishops, from the early Church, such as Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine.”³¹⁶

Therefore, following the biblical Latin translation of *didaskalos*, the Catholic Church designates the title “Doctors of the Church” to Christians proven to be someone whose teaching had historically greatly impacted the Church. The three requisites for the title of Doctor of the Church were a holy life, importance and orthodoxy of writings, and official recognition by the Catholic Church.

As of now, there are thirty-six people considered Doctors of the Church from the Catholic perspective. Of that thirty-six, only four are women: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Hildegard of Bingen. From a Protestant perspective, there could be an

³¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians: Four Women Who Shaped Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), 1.

inclination to be dismissive towards the bureaucratic hoops the Catholic denomination uses when selecting persons from the body of Christians in Church history on whom to bestow the right to be considered a doctor. We may view this denomination as old fashioned for setting apart only a few members to be considered in such high esteem, historically speaking. One may be of this opinion, for example, because of the understanding that everyone who has the Holy Spirit carries the possibility of meritorious achievements. That could be a valid perspective, but also, ultimately, a very hypocritical one. For example, take into consideration the Protestant church which, while not formally sanctioning individuals for emulation, does hold up only a few people in history as persons whose knowledge and impact are so weighty that they are deemed deserving of reverence. In addition, they are all male. Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, and Martin Luther are some examples of “informal” Doctors of the Church. Not one woman is viewed with the same notoriety among them, from a historical perspective. Therefore, although only thirty-six are considered for honor in the Catholic tradition, the fact that there is a list of clear qualifications for receiving the honor of “Doctor” seems more democratic than having none, and a female representation of eleven percent in the group, better than no representation at all.

After almost two thousand years, there was a significant change while Pope John Paul II was head of the Catholic Church. In 1970, he recognized not one but two female saints as Doctors of the Catholic Church, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. Pope John Paul not only championed female rights in the Church, he made sure to respect their individuality by requesting that the confirmation of the honor not take place on the same day, but rather, they each had their own special date and place in church history. With that, Teresa of Avila was recognized as Doctor of the Church on September 27, 1970, followed by Catherine of Siena on October 4 of that same year. Pope John Paul also recognized Thérèse of Lisieux as a Doctor on October 19, 1997. Later, although he was only head of the Catholic Church from 2005 to 2013, Pope Benedict XVI was the one to rightfully recognize the fourth female Doctor of the Church, Hildegard of Bingen. Although she was the last on this list, she was the earliest to appear in church history, having been born in 1098 and dying in 1179.

Besides the fact of their gender, there is another point that characterizes these four women altogether, and that is the fact that in their own time they dealt with most of the types of problems we are dealing with today. Daniel’s verse which opens this chapter states that

those who are learned and instruct many to justice should shine bright for all eternity. Following this concept, this paper sheds light on these four women who were a beacon of knowledge in their time, and who should continue to shine bright today for our own benefit.

Hildegard of Bingen and Her Teachings on Science

Hildegard of Bingen – Her Life

A lovely description of the early years of Hildegard of Bingen came from the monk Godfrey, from Disibodenberg, who acted as Hildegard's secretary and provost to the Rupertsberg's nuns. In his first book titled, *Vita Sactae Hildegardis (Life of St Hildegard)*, he portrays her as follows:

When Henry, fourth of that name, ruled the Holy Roman Empire, there lived in hither Gaul a virgin famed equally for the nobility of her birth and her sanctity. Her name was Hildegard. Her parents, Hildebert and Mechthilde, although wealthy and engaged in worldly affairs, were not unmindful of the gifts of the Creator and dedicated their daughter to the service of God. For when she was yet a child she seemed far removed from worldly concerns, distanced by a precocious purity (Vita, Bk 1).³¹⁷

From an aristocratic family, Hildegard of Bingen was born in Bermersheim, Germany, in the summer of 1098. Her father was a soldier for the Count of Sponheim, and her mother a noblewoman.³¹⁸ Being their tenth child, Hildegard was offered as a tithe to the Lord and, at around eight years of age, was sent to live in the hermitage of Jutta of Sponheim to begin her wholly dedicated life to the Lord.³¹⁹ The author of the book *Women of Hope: Doctors of The Church*, Terry Polakovic, explains that "this practice, also called an oblation, was popular among well-to-do religious families, even those who had fewer children."³²⁰

³¹⁷ Sabrina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen: A visionary Life*. (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1999), 1.

³¹⁸ Terry Polakovic, *Women of Hope: Doctors of The Church* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2021), 162.

³¹⁹ Mary T. Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church: Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 16.

³²⁰ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 162.

The hermitage later became a monastery under the direction of Jutta of Sponheim, the abbess. It was located near the Benedictine monastery of St. Disibod.³²¹ Hildegard received her veil as a Benedictine in her mid-teens. For the next several years, the monastery grew in fame and numbers.

In her book *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age*, Fiona Maddocks explains that there is a likelihood that Hildegard served as some sort of apprentice in Godfrey of Disibodenberg's infirmary when she was young, helping to treat not only the sick, but also the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the old. She points out that Hildegard's book *Causae et Curae* "has an extensive account of the appropriate use of bloodletting, the various methods, the illnesses the practice can treat and the suitable age or condition of patients on whom it is to be enacted."³²²

In 1136, at thirty-eight years old, Hildegard was elected abbess after Jutta's death. Throughout her life, she demonstrated a unique and profound spirituality. Hildegard lived during a great theological movement: the ancient monastic contemplative tradition.³²³ She describes receiving her prophetic calling when she was forty-two years old and seven months of age, in the year of 1141.³²⁴ Sabina Flanagan, in her book *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life*, explains regarding the prophetic calling that "there were both biblical and early Christian precedents for the role of female prophet. Moreover, a woman could be a prophet without upsetting the perceived natural order, since no particular attribute of her own were required, except, possibly, humility."³²⁵ Therefore, it would not have been out of the ordinary for a woman to understand her role as prophet in the church at that time.

From a young age, Hildegard had visions. There came a time when she experienced a call to write down her visions and to use them for the reformation of the Church. In that same year she began writing her work titled *Scivias*. Barbara Newman, author of the book *Visions: The Life and Music of Hildegard of Bingen*, explains:

Scivias consists of three books, each made up a series of visions – six, seven, and thirteen, respectively. In each case, Hildegard first describes her vision and then presents an exegesis delivered, she says, by a 'voice from heaven' (formulas such as 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying to

³²¹ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 16.

³²² Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 154.

³²³ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 15.

³²⁴ Ibid., 16-17.

³²⁵ Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 15.

me ...' mark the passage in the text from vision to explication). Her themes are many: the Trinity, the creation, the fall of Lucifer and the subsequent fall of Adam, the Incarnation, evil and temptation, the church and its sacraments, the work of the Holy Spirit, wisdom viewed as human knowledge illuminated by faith, the steps by which man will be saved, and the last Judgement.³²⁶

In 1150, Hildegard wrote the books *Physica* (*Natural History*) and *Causae et Curae* (*Causes and Cures*). Polakovic, in her book previously cited, *Women of Hope*, explains that being true to the Benedictine tradition of giving aid and comforting the sick, Hildegard was determined to help care for the many sick and afflicted that came to the monastery for assistance. She then started cataloging their illnesses, their cures, their treatment, and all the medications and herbs used. Polakovic also points out that:

The Middle Ages was a time of taxonomy. Europe was beset with a desire to classify, to make lists of things and group them in the worlds, and to order than like an index of the book of Creation...this was not empirical science but the necessary gathering of data which precedes it. Hildegard was as assiduous as any in her desire to catalogue, to comprehend, to control.³²⁷

Her love of God, people, and the church were displayed throughout her life. Besides her attentiveness toward physical health, she also pursued the means by which she could help regarding spiritual health and holiness. One area of constant attention was her efforts made toward church reform. Elizabeth A. Dreyer, in her book *Accidental Theologians: Four Women Who Shaped Christianity*, writes, "She made the Church the object of her extensive reforming efforts, speaking out against greed, dissent, and power struggles."³²⁸ She lived a very long life, passing away at the age of eighty-one at a time when life expectancy was half of that.

Hildegard of Bingen and Science

There is a holistic aspect to our existence as human beings. The body, the mind, and the spirit are all interconnected whereby one

³²⁶ Barbara Newman, *Vision: The Life and Music of Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Jane Bobko, commentary Matthew Fox (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 6-9.

³²⁷ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 192.

³²⁸ Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians*, 30.

always affects the other, for good or for bad. Hildegard took a holistic approach in all of her service for the Lord. Her encounter with and interest in science and medicine developed out of a pure willingness to help others in any way she could. However, she was fully aware that the Lord was the driving force of healing each step of the way. The impressive body of work she accomplished is duly noted. We should also consider that in those days, a woman reaching such social and religious status was disproportionately a more difficult achievement than in today's society. Gloria Hutchinson, in her book *A Retreat with Gerard Manley Hopkins and Hildegard of Bingen: Turning Pain into Power*, writes, "While Hildegard lived during a renaissance in learning, a time when the arts and science were flourishing, she and other women were denied access to a university education... Yet she wrote such scientific handbooks as the *Book of Simple Medicine* (or *Physica*) and the *Book of Compound Medicine* (or *Causes and Cures*)."³²⁹ Her first work, "Scivias, is a Latin form of expression that stands for the Trilogy, Scito Vias Domini, or *Know the Ways of the Lord*, Liber Vitae Meritorum (*The Book of Life's Merits*) and Liber Divinorum Operum (*The Book of Divine Works*)."³³⁰ In Hildegard's ministry life science and holiness were so intertwined that "even before Scivias was finished, word of Hildegard's wisdom and holiness had spread far and wide."³³¹

Fiona Maddocks, in her book previously cited, explains that "she gave practical, rather than specifically Christian advice, by letter and in person, on an extensive range of medical and physiological problems. Her works, including the visionary texts as well as the non-theological writings, offer opinions on an array of matters physical and biological."³³² This wide range of works gave Hildegard's voice and her perspective a platform not only in the field of science and spirituality but also theology. Polakovic describes that "Hildegard was a sensation wherever she preached. Laity and clerics alike packed the cathedrals to hear her rail against the corruption in the Church and prophesize[sic] about the end times. She was always firm in calling priests to be faithful, to turn away from abuses, and to focus on teaching the message of Jesus Christ."³³³

Hildegard is so important to our contemporary context because she exemplifies the bridging of the chasm between Christian

³²⁹ Gloria Hutchinson, *A Retreat with Gerard Manley Hopkins and Hildegard of Bingen: Turning Pain into Power* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995), 18-19.

³³⁰ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 17.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 163-164.

³³³ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 203.

faith and spirituality and science. Maddocks stated that, “Hildegard’s pragmatism, whether steeped in science and biology or not, can never be divorced from her theology. In her mind, they sprang from the same visionary and prophetic source.”³³⁴

The Word of God does not change, and theological principles are a sturdy place we can stand on despite the constant change in the world around us. Hildegard’s theology and spirituality can and should be a *source* of hope in today’s society. Moreover, one of the most incredible things about Hildegard’s ministry is her account of her scientific teachings. The scientific field is always evolving with new discoveries of methods to help prevent or treat illness making a lot of past practices obsolete. However, a lot of her teaching still holds true to this day. For example, Maddocks, in her book, also gives an account of the fact that “two German doctors recently constructed an entire pseudo-scientific curative theory based on Hildegard’s teachings, with treatments in the form of syrups, oils, salves, powders and teas for a range of conditions from breast cancer, AIDS and heart disease to halitosis and morning sickness.”³³⁵ Even though Hildegard lived hundreds of years prior the discovery of cancer, “they argue that her account of cancer, including the pre-cancerous stages of the disease, is wholly in keeping with modern scientific knowledge.”³³⁶

Another intersection of her scientific view with today’s scientific understanding that we see is “her notion that all illness stems from a single cause rather than an array of different ones has been compared with the holistic approach of alternative medicine today.”³³⁷ She also taught regarding fasting and abstinence, Christian practices that were often abused in those days, writing, “Do not lay on more strain than the body can endure. Immoderate straining and abstinence bring nothing useful to the soul.” Hildegard Von Bingen advocated a balanced diet, sufficient rest, alleviation of stress, and a wholesome moral life.³³⁸

Regarding science, more specifically social science, Hildegard is also responsible for another important ground-breaking approach. Although our perception of today’s society and of social science differs much from the perspectives of a theologian from the medieval era, nonetheless, her knowledge of female reproduction and women in

³³⁴ Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 183.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

³³⁶ Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 157.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ Hildegard Von Bingen. *Hildegard Von Bingen’s Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing. Translated from the Latin by Priscilla Throop.* (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 1998), 6.

general are impressive. “Hildegard was the first woman to write reflectively about women in the plan of God.”³³⁹ And “in addition to all her other laurels, these scientific writings have led her to be called the first woman doctor and the first woman scientist.”³⁴⁰

Thérèse of Lisieux and Her Teachings on Health

Thérèse of Lisieux – Her Life

Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin, later known as Thérèse of Lisieux, born on January 2nd of 1873, was the ninth and youngest child of two very religious parents, Zélie Guérin and Luis Martin. Before marriage, both parents had tried to join religious communities but had been rejected. Out of their nine children, four passed away during infancy, which included their only two sons. Nonetheless, they decided to give God their five surviving daughters: Pauline, Marie, Leonie, Celine and Thérèse. Being brought up with sanctity in mind, they were aware of the constant battle between good and evil, and the great human drama of separation from God through sin. Therefore, the essence of their lives revolved around closing the gap of this separation through suffering, obedience, and good deeds.³⁴¹

In 1877, after the passing of her mother, Thérèse, at the age of four, moved with her entire family to Lisieux, the same town of her father’s brother Isidore. The death of her mother was the most impactful event of her life. Thérèse’s grief was so debilitating that she suffered headaches, trembling, and was often in a semi-comatose state. The sense of orphanhood was so unbearable to her that she elected her older sister Pauline as her new mother, often referring to her as such.³⁴²

At nine years old, in 1882, Thérèse encountered another difficult time in her life. Pauline, her beloved sister and adoptive mother, departed to Carmel, the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, which led Thérèse to suffer a complete nervous breakdown. The long period that she suffered, from December 1882 to May 1883 required that she abandon school and stay at home to be nursed by her older sisters.³⁴³ For Thérèse, her emotional and then physical illnesses had two sources which were, “the mental and emotional strain she endured in losing Pauline which, in a sense, aggravated the yet unhealed wound inflicted

³³⁹ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 32.

³⁴⁰ Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*, 147.

³⁴¹ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 100.

³⁴² Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 120.

³⁴³ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 102.

by the death of her mother; and the anger of the devil over the harm that her family would cause him.”³⁴⁴

In her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, Thérèse describes three distinct periods of her life before her departure to Carmel. Period one was life before her mother’s death, from birth until four. Period two was “the most painful years of my life,” described as the years from the age of four until fourteen years old. Period three were the years before Carmel. And here she describes that although she was still crying a lot, on a Christmas night in 1886, she received a grace that completely changed her character, referring to it as her “conversion.”³⁴⁵

One year later she decided to enter Carmel early, but received from the male Carmelite General the information that twenty-one was the appropriate age. On that same year, Thérèse, her father, and her aunt went on a European Tour. They visited Paris, Milan, Venice, Padua, Bologna, Loreto, and then reached Rome, Thérèse had formulated a plan to personally ask the pope to help felicitate her entry to Carmel. The audience with the pope was on their last day in Rome. Although instructed to not address the pope, but only to kiss his floor, his hand, and then receive his blessings, Thérèse clung to the pope’s hands asking him to intervene on her behalf. Nevertheless, she received just a non-committal murmur about God’s will before being pulled away by the guards. Back home, after much more begging and finagling, she finally entered Carmel on 9 April 1888 at the age of 15 years old.³⁴⁶ Therefore, Thérèse joined her sisters Pauline and Marie at Carmel. After her father’s death in 1894, her sister Celine also joined them.³⁴⁷ By September 1890, Thérèse had received the Carmelite habit and her religious name of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.³⁴⁸

In December of 1891, around the same time her sister Pauline had become prioress, there was a bad flu epidemic in the Lisieux Carmel. Thérèse was one of the few who escaped and she relished the job of taking care of people. “She gradually abandoned her dreams of heroic suffering and discovered that it was here and now, in the ordinary everybody tasks and ordinary everyday relationships, that God was to be encountered. It was a question of attentiveness in each moment, and this was not the task of heroes, but of everybody.”³⁴⁹ In

³⁴⁴ Frederick L. Miller. *The Trial of Faith of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Alba House, 2005), 7.

³⁴⁵ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 119.

³⁴⁶ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 106.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁴⁸ Patricia O’Connor, *Thérèse of Lisieux: A Biography*. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1982), 78.

³⁴⁹ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 109.

1894, Pauline, now Mother Agnes, asked Thérèse to write an account of her childhood, and she began her autobiography, what would be known as *A Story of a Soul*. It was on the grounds of the important teachings in this publication that she was to receive the title of Doctor of the Church.

In her own words, Thérèse describes what had happened to her on Thursday and Good Friday in 1896: “I returned to our cell, but I had scarcely laid my head upon the pillow when I felt something like a bubbling stream mounting on my lips. I didn’t know what it was, but I thought perhaps I was going to die and my soul was filled with joy...It seemed to me that it was blood I had coughed up.” The next morning, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. However, instead of being frightened, she hoped soon to be with the One she loved in heaven. After eighteen months of suffering and going through the ultimate trial of faith, she died on September 30, 1897 at the age of twenty-four years old.³⁵⁰

Thérèse of Lisieux and Health

Thérèse of Lisieux struggled with her health throughout her whole life. Sometimes it dealt with her physical health, while at others times with her mental health. Sometimes she dealt with both at the same time. However, it is how she endured the trials in those phases of her life that brings hope to others. Readers have found in the life of this young girl an understanding of suffering as a means to glorify the Lord.

The concept of willingly embracing suffering in our society today seems abhorrent. However, not only did Thérèse embrace it, but she reflected on suffering in a way that would connect her to her beloved Christ. Patricia O’Connor, in her book, *Thérèse of Lisieux: A Biography* writes, “Thérèse used no words abstractly. Redemption through suffering was as real to her as the face of Christ. ‘Through his wounds’ said Isaiah, ‘we are healed.’ Thérèse had shunned the mentality of those who gloried in harsh bodily penances. But the cross was no self-imposed punishment.”³⁵¹

As already reported, after the long period of trials during that period she called her most painful years, she would finally fulfil her dream of going to Carmel. However, soon after she arrived, she encountered a new set of pains and trials that most of the people around her never noticed. Frederik Miller, in his book *The Trial of Faith of St.*

³⁵⁰ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 153.

³⁵¹ Patricia O’Connor, *Thérèse of Lisieux: A Biography*. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1982), 129.

Thérèse of Lisieux, presents Thérèse's own words regarding the sufferings she came across when entering the Carmel:

Jesus made me understand that it was through suffering that He wanted to give me souls, and my attraction for suffering grew in proportion to its increase. This was my way for five years; exteriorly nothing revealed my suffering which was all the more painful since I alone was aware of it. Ah! What a surprise we shall have at the end of the world when we shall read the story of souls! There will be those who will be surprised when they see the way through which my soul was guided!³⁵²

Her love of God and love of others brought joy to her. During the period of the flu epidemic of 1891, she was one of the few that did not get sick and was able to attend to others. During that period, she understood that she had to abandon every dream of heroic suffering, to instead embrace the holy trials the Lord provided for her. In her case, it was the opportunity to diligently attend to others and to help the sick.

In her last illness, as soon as she noticed that something was wrong, her soul was glad, for she understood Paul's famous words that "to live is Christ and to die is gain." However, during the eighteen months prior to her death, a period that she points to as being a trial of her faith, she endures an unbelievable amount of pain. In the book *Thérèse of Lisieux*, Monica Furlong explains, "Alongside this act of self-surrender Thérèse's long fascination with suffering had become manifest. Talking with her about her spiritual life, as Marie frequently did, Marie said to her one day that suffering was a path that she probably would not have to tread, that she 'would always be carried like a little child in the arms of God's mercy.'"³⁵³ The same author, explains also that, "she told the Prioress that she had never asked God for suffering, and that therefore it was up to Him to give her the strength to endure it. 'It seems to me you are made for suffering,' Mother Marie replied, truthfully enough, 'Your soul is tempered for it.'"³⁵⁴

One thing important to explain is that although there were sufferings, Thérèse never doubted God. "In spite of the constant distress it caused her, she continued to experience a deep inner peace. She realized that she could still give God pleasure in the humble acceptance of this darkness...In the midst of her trial, Thérèse doubted

³⁵² Frederick L. Miller. *The Trial of Faith of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Alba House, 2005), 41.

³⁵³ Monica Furlong. *Thérèse of Lisieux* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 56.

³⁵⁴ Monica Furlong. *Thérèse of Lisieux* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 112.

neither the existence of God nor Christ's love for her."³⁵⁵ There were never frustrations towards God. Her spiritual life sustained her during her dark periods, since she stood on the assurance of the Word of God. Regarding her book, "less than two months before she died, Thérèse expressed her desire for the text to be published as soon as possible after her death. She sensed that the world, at the brink of the twentieth century, needed to hear the story of her experience of God's mercy."³⁵⁶

Another important item to point out is the fact that although she understood the concept of suffering, and had inner peace, she indeed felt the pain. "In Thérèse's writings, she indicates a suffering far deeper than that inflicted by her personal circumstances. This becomes painfully obvious as she endured the 'trial of faith'."³⁵⁷ She was never oblivious to her pain. For example, "on the day of her death, Thérèse exclaimed: 'Never would I have believed it was possible to suffer so much. Never, never! I cannot explain this except by the ardent desires I have had to save souls.'"³⁵⁸ However, she let the pain of her poor health transform her making her a more mature theologian. Dreyer, in her book *Accidental Theologians* writes, "At the end of her life, she was painfully transformed by a kind of stripping that tested her faith and led to her mature theological reflections."³⁵⁹

Thérèse shows through her writings and life a theology of suffering that instructs others on how to understand the correct biblical approach toward health, or the lack thereof, in a very practical way. As demonstrated, even after having traumatic experiences growing up and accepting her own suffering as a godly pathway towards God, she did not lack compassion toward the suffering of others. Even while believing in the power and the grace of God regarding miracle healings, faith did not prevent her from intentional and practical acts of service toward the sick. She did not deny the sickness around her, quite the contrary, it led her to understand that God was also in the act of daily serving and helping others.

Christians today should not allow themselves to be stripped of their faith in the healing power of God. Nonetheless, this same faith should not be used as an excuse to not accept or to diminish the reality of a flu epidemic. Thérèse understood her role as a helper in the flu epidemic, being one of the few who had not fallen ill. In the 2020 flu pandemic, many Christian communities, instead of recognizing the opportunity to serve others by taking sanitary precautions that were

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 49.

³⁵⁶ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 155.

³⁵⁷ Miller. *The Trial of Faith of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, 41.

³⁵⁸ Frederick L. Miller. *The Trial of Faith of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (New York: Alba House, 2005), 49.

³⁵⁹ Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians*, 97.

very well established and accepted for decades, chose to suddenly disregard the basic health code directives, potentially causing harm to many people. On the other hand, the crippling fear and urge toward self-preservation also caused some Christians to distance themselves, not only physically but also emotionally, from others.

Thérèse's life demonstrated resistance toward complacency and a balanced attitude about how we can choose to endure and accept our own suffering and yet be ready and willing to help when those in the society around us are going through suffering, such as during a flu epidemic. Thérèse put into practice what James writes in 2:18, showing her faith through her actions towards others.

Catherine of Siena and Her Teachings on Politics

Catherine of Siena– Her Life

On March 25, 1347, Catherine Benicasa and her twin sister Giovanna were born in Siena to a prosperous family. They were the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth children, however soon after, her sister Giovanna died. Catherine grew up in a very challenging time for the Church and the world. The papacy had moved to Avignon, after which, from 1348 on, Italy and Europe were devastated by the Black Death. It is believed that at least one or two-thirds of Europe's population had died because of it. In her own house, tragedy also struck. Even before the Black Death, as many as half of her siblings had died, but further tragedy haunted their household during the plague.³⁶⁰

The terrible consequences of the plague on the Church would be most noticeable later on, when whole convents and monasteries had been wiped out and parishes left with very few members. The result of this was that less attention was paid to the quality of the candidates for ordinations or vows. Eager to replace lost religious and other clergy, church officials accepted even the most unsuitable ministers. "As Catherine was later to write Pope Gregory XI, the clergy were like 'demons incarnate' destroying the Church with their corruption."³⁶¹

Nonetheless, Catherine had a very joyful childhood until the age of six, when she had a vision of Jesus wearing a papal tiara. Since then, she became more austere, praying, and even avoiding food. Later, Catherine, demonstrating an incredible sense of self-possession and independence, refused to marry, regardless of her mother's efforts. However, she absolutely refused to become a nun. In her mid-teens she continued to deprive herself of food, and spent hours and hours in total

³⁶⁰ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 40.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

seclusion in her room totally devoted to prayer. During that time the foundations of her extraordinary life of prayer were laid.³⁶²

After much prayer, Catherine received a vision from the Lord showing the habit of the sisters of Penance of St. Dominic while a voice said, “Sweetest daughter, take courage and fear no obstacle, for you will undoubtedly put on this habit, as is your wish.”³⁶³ When she reached twenty-one years old, Catherine, guided by the Lord, left seclusion and started to demonstrate her love for God by loving others. One of the greatest contributions to Christian spirituality made by Catherine was the recognition of the truth that the love of God and the love of neighbor are inseparable, and that they increase or decrease proportionally.³⁶⁴

Catherine then started to acquire followers of all ages and social status. They joined Catherine in her charitable activities and prayers. Some served as her scribes. She considered them as her spiritual family. Polakovic’s book presents a testimony by Father Raymond on the subject. He writes,

Catherine was accompanied by a great number of men and women. There would have been many more too if she had not stopped them. Those who went with her put themselves in the hand of God’s providence by voluntary poverty, preferring to go on pilgrimage with the virgin and beg for their food rather than stay home where they lacked for nothing – except that they would have been deprived of her sweet and wholesome company.³⁶⁵

Between the years 1377 and 1378, Catherine dictated what would become her book titled *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, also known as *The Dialogue*. “In the prose of the Dialogue... An erudite person will find reminders of popular writings and stories current at that time, like paraphrases of St. Paul and St. Augustine and spiritual writers of the Middle Ages, just as, for the matter, in the discourses of our Lord related by the Evangelist there are paraphrases and reminders of the Old Testament.”³⁶⁶

³⁶² Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 42.

³⁶³ B. Raymond of Capua. *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena: The Classic on Her Life and Accomplishments as Recorded by Her Spiritual Director* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, INC, 2003), 47.

³⁶⁴ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 153.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁶⁶ Iglino Giordani, *Catherine of Siena – fire and blood* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1959), 154-156.

The book consists of conversations she had with the Lord. It is not a systematic work; however, it does represent something of a synthesis of her teaching, and a framework for her actions regarding Church reform.³⁶⁷ As Polakovic affirmed, Catherine's political and ecclesial activities were a large part of the final six years of her life, until her death at the age of thirty-three. The holy desire for unity in the Church was her clear motive.³⁶⁸

Catherine of Siena and Politics

In 1374 at the age of twenty-seven, she traveled to Florence, and in the same year Pope Gregory XI requested her prayers regarding the Church's unity and subsequently his leadership on that subject. Soon after, she found herself a participant trying to resolve some of the most complex political problems.³⁶⁹ Capua writes, "Only when the peace pacts had been made public did Catherine return home, and then she applied herself with all diligence to compiling the book which she dictated in her native tongue under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."³⁷⁰

In the book *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today*, Mary Catherine Hilkert writes, "Without the appropriate education or titles, she authored letters that changed people's lives and became classics of Italian literature. The theological and mystical classic for which she has been recognized as Doctor of Wisdom reflects the riches of the tradition, but also adds new insights to that same tradition."³⁷¹ In her same book, Hilkert gives us a little sample of Catherine's voice: "'The wretches' she declares, 'appointed to govern the city (but who can't even govern themselves) often turn away to keep from seeing when poor men and women are being robbed; they give them not a bit of justice but turn away lest those deprived of justice should receive it.'"³⁷²

That is similar to the point made by Paul Murray, author of the book *Saint Catherine of Siena: Mystic of Fire, Preacher of Freedom*, when he states, "Catherine could see that people occupying seats of power in her own city had sadly become slaves to their need for money and high position. Allowing themselves to be 'tainted by human

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 98.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 84.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 83.

³⁷⁰ Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 303.

³⁷¹ Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 146.

³⁷² Ibid., 7.

flattery,' they failed again and again to bring to justice individuals of worldly influence known to have committed an offence."³⁷³

Suzanne Noffke, author of the book *Catherine of Siena – Vision Through a Distant Eye*, addressing Catherine's influence regarding leadership wrote, "Catherine in her loving honesty and honest love would listen, but she expected those in authority to listen as well." Then she explains the distinction between Christ and the Church for Catherine, by saying, "that the Church is 'Christ on earth' not in any absolute authority but in all that the mission of Christ implies. Since all things – including authority- must be relative to that mission, she could not absolutize much that others seemed to make absolute even in the name of Christ."³⁷⁴

Another example of the range of political influence Catherine had can be seen in the letters below addressed to Pope Gregory XI; The King of France and to the Eight of War Chosen by the Commune of Florence:

Letter to Pope Gregory XI

*Alas, what confusion is this, to see those who ought to be a mirror of voluntary poverty, meek as lambs, distributing the possessions of Holy Church to the poor: and they appear in such luxury and state and pomp and worldly vanity, more than if they had turned them to a world a thousand times! On the contrary, many seculars put them to shame who live a good and holy life. But it seems that Highest and Eternal Goodness is having that done by force which is not done by love; it seems that He is permitting dignities and luxuries to be taken away from His Bride, as if He would show that Holy Church should return to her first condition, poor, humble, and meek as she was in that holy time when men took note of nothing but the honor of God and the salvation of souls, caring for spiritual things and not for temporal.*³⁷⁵

Letter to the King of France

The other matter is, that you maintain holy and true justice, let it not be ruined, either for self-love or for flatteries, or for any

³⁷³ Paul Murray Saint Catherine of Siena: Mystic of Fire, Preacher of Freedom (Park Ridge, IL: Word of Fire Institute, 2020), 7.

³⁷⁴ Suzanne Noffke, *Catherine of Siena – Vision Through a Distant Eye*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 57.

³⁷⁵ Saint Catherine of Siena. *The Letters of Saint Catherine of Siena: Translated & Edited with Introduction by Vida D. Scudder*, 1905, ed. Darrel Wright (Orlando, FL: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2016), 98.

*pleasing of men. And do not tacitly consent at your officials doing injustice for money, and denying right to the poor: but be to the poor a father, a distributor of what God has given you. And seek to have the faults that are found in your kingdom punished and virtue exalted. For all this pertains to the divine justice to do.*³⁷⁶

*Therefore I beg you, and will that you follow Christ crucified, and love your neighbor's salvation: proving that you follow the Lamb, who for hunger for His Father's honor and the salvation of souls chose bodily death. So do you, my lord! Care not if you lose from your wordly substance; for loss will be gain to you, provided that you can reconcile your soul with your brother.*³⁷⁷

Letter to the Eight of War Chosen by the Commune of Florence, at Whose Instance the Saint went to Pope XI

*But I complain strongly of you, if it is true what is said in these parts, that you have imposed a tax upon the clergy. If this is so, it is a very great evil for two reasons. The first is that you are wronging God by it, for you cannot do it with a good conscience...So I tell you that you would never reach an effective peace, unless by perseverance in humility, no longer insulting or offending the ministers and priests of Holy Church...For beside the evil I spoke of that comes from wronging God, I tell you that such action is ruin to your peace. For the Holy Father, if he knew it, would conceive greater indignation against you.*³⁷⁸

Teresa of Ávila and Her Teachings on Spirituality

Teresa of Ávila - Her Life

On March 28 1515, Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada was born to a fairly wealth and aristocratic family. Married at the age of fifteen, her mother had ten children before she died at the age of thirty-three. Right after her mother's death, she was sent to a convent boarding school. There she developed a series of strange illnesses that would accompany her for decades.³⁷⁹ Mary T. Malone writes, "The first forty years of her

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 125.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 126.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 129.

³⁷⁹ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 72.

life were plagued by mysterious illnesses, including, at one stage, three years of paralysis.”³⁸⁰

At the age of twenty-two, in 1537, Teresa professed as a member of Carmel, similar to Thérèse. At this time in Spain, there were various levels of devotion and carelessness. Teresa concluded that, in order to preserve her own spiritual life, constant prayer and poverty should be the hallmarks of the Carmelite life.³⁸¹ All her life, Teresa was disappointed with the lack of worthy spiritual guides, reporting several times of seasons in her own life when she had suffered through unwise counsel. However, at the age of thirty-nine she came across Francisco de Osuna’s book, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*, and experienced a total religious conversion. She learned the art of recollection and of passive prayer, making them the bedrock of her spiritual life.³⁸²

At the age of forty-seven, in 1562, Teresa founded her first reformed Carmelite house, the monastery of St. Joseph in Avila, and also wrote *The Book of Her Life*, her first book. Because of it, Teresa became famous across Europe among those who were searching for guidance in their spiritual life. Soon after, in 1565, she wrote the book *The Way of Perfection*. Then in 1573, she followed with *The Book of Her Foundations*.³⁸³

In her book previously cited in chapter three, Polakovic writes that, “Teresa’s written legacy also includes the Constitutions for her Carmelite Sisters, as well as ‘Spiritual Testimonials,’ soliloquies, poems, and a brief treatise, ‘On Making the Visitation,’ making Teresa one of the most prolific of the Doctors of the Church.”³⁸⁴ Polakovic also informs the reader that “during her lifetime, she wrote about fifteen thousand letters, of which fewer than five hundred are preserved. All of her letters were written in her distinct, firm, and well-defined handwriting on sheets of folded paper with ‘THS’ at the top. She signed them with her religious name, ‘Teresa of Jesus’.”³⁸⁵

In the book *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, there is a testimony from Sister Mary of St Joseph, Teresa’s contemporary, which reads, “God had given us a woman Doctor, graduated from the school of the Holy Spirit, in which this great Teresa became so wise that I hope she will be famous and great in the Church of God, not only on account of her life, but also for the doctrine she left in writing.”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 69.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 73.

³⁸² Ibid., 74.

³⁸³ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 75.

³⁸⁴ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 55.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 56.

³⁸⁶ Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, 435.

As observed in the life of the other doctors, there is always a connection between prayer and acts of service. “The prayer expert, however, sees things in better relationship to one another because his close union with the Creator gives him a better overall view of creation and the division of knowledge into the various fields of study.”³⁸⁷ Another point that prayer life seems to show is a humble simplicity as a trait. “Teresa always took the side of the ordinary people against what she called the ‘learned men’. This is a remarkable trait of so many women saints and mystics. As the ‘learned men’ emphasize the rarity of God’s gifts, the women welcome all – women and men – to enter the way of perfection, and provide the ingredients for following this life.”³⁸⁸ The guidance we receive from this inclusive aspect of her teaching is important for today’s society.

Teresa of Ávila & Spirituality

“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

1 John 4:20 (NIV)

Sometimes there is a false perception that one must choose between spirituality and reason. Quite the contrary, the Bible always reminds us that we must be reasonable within our own professed faith. Elizabeth Dreyer, featured above in Ch. Two, explains, “But we would be wrong to conclude that the use of rigorous logic and reason is not required for doing theology. While one theologian emphasizes logic and another the affections (both of which are subject to error and excess), no authentic theology can be devoid of head or heart.”³⁸⁹

The contemplative life, or a consistent prayer life, leads a person to one place only, to the service of others. While a greater union with God can be cultivated and lived outside a monastery or secret place, the service of other does require that we became physically available to others. The same way Jesus, God the Son, made himself physically available, we must follow the same guidelines.

Besides the virtue of service, the other important issue to address regarding Christian spirituality is the false notion that a robust spiritual and prophetic life is somehow disconnected or in opposition to theology. The truth is, only through theology, can one have a robust

³⁸⁷ Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church*, 457.

³⁸⁸ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 76.

³⁸⁹ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians: Four Women Who Shaped Christianity* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Franciscan Media, 2014), xii.

spiritual life, otherwise how does one ~~to~~ discern the voice of God? Rengers explains, “True mystical knowledge is a challenging frontier for our age. It is not, as some might think, something separated from all other kinds of knowledge. Rather, it integrates all other knowledge. It is not something for just a few. Rather, many, if they cooperate with God’s grace, can dispose themselves for it.”³⁹⁰

In the book *The Way of Perfection* by Teresa of Àvila, she writes, “Therefore, sisters, practice mental prayer, and if you cannot manage that, then vocal prayer, reading, and the colloquies with God which I will teach you later on. Never give up your hours of prayer: you do not know when the bridegroom will summon you, and you might share the fate of the foolish virgins.”³⁹¹

Conclusion

In the book *Political Writings by Augustine*, Ernest L. Fortin writes in its introduction that, “Some regimes are obviously superior to others but nothing suggests that any of them will ever be able to fulfill our deepest longings.”³⁹² Regardless of which political party presides in the United States, or any other nation, there will always be an enormous gap between the need of a society in a socio-economic perspective and the necessities provided by the Lordship of Jesus in one’s life. Dr. Fortin also explains that,

Christianity as Augustine understands it does indeed provide a solution to the problem of human life, but it is not a solution that is attainable in and through political society. Like that of the classical philosophers, it remains nonpolitical or, better still, *transpolitical*. To have made this point clear for the first time is arguably Augustine’s most precious contribution to the political theology of the West.³⁹³

By defining it as *transpolitical*, Fortin shows the fundamental tension Augustine navigated through his clear view of what a Christian’s role in every situation, including politics. There is the understanding that the ultimate solution to the issue will not and cannot

³⁹⁰ Christopher Rengers, *The 33 Doctors of the Church* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publisher, INC, 2000), 459-460.

³⁹¹ Teresa of Àvila, *The Way of Perfection*, (London: Aeterna Press, 2015), 72.

³⁹² *Augustine: Political Writing*, translated by Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries, eds. Ernest L. Fortin and Douglas Kries, (Indianapolis. IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1994.), xxvi.

³⁹³ *Augustine: Political Writings*, xxvi.

be attainable by human efforts. Therefore, although it is important for each Christian to act in society according to Christ's teachings, one should understand that politics, or any other realm in society, will never produce the perfect solution for human problems. As an example, we all know that until Christ returns, people will still be sick and still die, regardless of what a Christian, physician or not, may do, but that does not mean that Christians should not be physicians. In addition, nor are Christians excused for associating in any project they may encounter that goes against Christ's teachings. In the same way, politics should not be viewed as an ultimate solution, but that does not mean a complete lack of involvement with reasonable measures taken to lessen the suffering of a society.

Catherine of Siena showed that there is a way to engage in politics. This is necessary for the common good of a society, and is possible without having to disassociate with the Word of God, much less use the Word of God as an instrument to fulfill one's own personal desire. When a person focuses on a spiritual life, they will consequently be led to the area of service that they are most suited for. Although God does give physical means to improve in an aspect of our lives, He does also provide knowledge in an inexplicable way when a person has a personal and profound relationship with the Lord. All the doctors showed that the key to their brilliance in their field was favor from above.

Another key drawn from the guidelines demonstrated in the lives of the doctors is patience. For example, "in Hildegard, we find a woman whose life combines aspects of the three other women Doctors. She spent over twenty years as a contemplative nun, until God called her to a more active life when she was thirty-eight years old. It is reasonable to think that in those thirty-eight years, God was silently preparing Hildegard for an adventure like no other."³⁹⁴

However, the contemplative life has, at some point, to move us toward the world around us. On this balance between the contemplative and service, one must make the right personal assessment or rather become disconnected from the Lord's concerns. It is this relationship with the Lord first and foremost that will guide us regarding any subject. When we depend on receiving God's guidance by means of a mediator, either a pastor or a Christian leader, we put ourselves in a position of vulnerability that can cost us even our faith. There is only one mediator, Jesus Christ. We may, and should, strive for union in the Church, but that should never replace cultivating our union with God. Malone says, "These women were not unaware of the ways of the

³⁹⁴ Polakovic, *Women of Hope*, 213.

world, with perhaps the exception of Thérèse, but their lives were governed by the internal reality of their relationship with God.”³⁹⁵

Dreyer, in her book *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant*, wrote, “For Christians, spirituality is understood in the context of a trinitarian God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies humanity in the context of a community – the people of God.” She then clarifies by saying, “By naming all aspects of life as potentially infused by the Spirit, we acknowledge that spirituality embraces all aspects of the person – body, mind, spirit – and all dimensions of existence – family, sexuality, business, politics, education, media, the earth, and so on. Christian spirituality is imbued with a sacramental consciousness that notices the presence of God in and through all of creation.”³⁹⁶

Summing up the lives of the female doctors, church history, reveals that each one of them received recognition in one area more than others, but it is not a coincidence that they all experienced similar issues in their lives. They all passed through epidemics, plagues, and experienced illnesses; they each had to deal with politics either in government or on a smaller scale within their particular religious society. Above all, they each had a relationship with the Lord of total devotion, with an intimacy similar to that experienced in a marriage between the bride and the groom. Ultimately, their love for the Lord propelled them to help the society around them in a very practical way. Their lives and practical theology impacted many around them.

They were all exceptional theologians, despite the fact that some of them did not have proper education or were even illiterate. As Dreyer said, “The importance of laity (especially women) doing theology cannot be stressed enough. While few of us are professional theologians, we are all called by baptism to study and reflect on our lives in the light of the Good News.”³⁹⁷ Responsibility is not solely laid upon pastors and teachers to know how to navigate life applying the teachings of the Bible in good and bad times, but that responsibility holds true for every Christian. All of us, pastor, teacher, and layman or laywoman alike, are called to have the same relationship with God and to understand our daily Christian calling. The female Doctors of the Church, their lives and their teachings, have stood the test of time. In an era of so much distrust and false ideologies, learning from these established teachers from the past can also give us an extra layer of

³⁹⁵ Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church*, 118.

³⁹⁶ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005), xiv.

³⁹⁷ Dreyer, *Accidental Theologians*, xi.

protection so that we are not deceived, but rather, fulfill our own specific callings.

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JESUS AND THE PHARISEES: LESSONS FOR TODAY

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Introduction

In the New Testament world, various religious philosophies were embodied by the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people. Three of the more prominent religious groups during this time were the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Essenes lived separately in private communities³⁹⁸ and followed strict laws and standards to be admitted to and remain in the sect.³⁹⁹ Sadducees were very powerful in the temple system and were prominent among the Jewish ruling class– the Sanhedrin.⁴⁰⁰

The Gospels record some details of the Essenes and the Sadducees, but the most mentioned religious group during the time of Jesus is the Pharisees. Pharisees, literally “separated ones,”⁴⁰¹ are portrayed as the most influential sect in Palestine in the early first century.⁴⁰² The Pharisees were very concerned with faithfulness to the Torah as well as living a life with the highest level of sanctity and purity.⁴⁰³ In modern times, the Pharisees may now be best known for the conflicts and encounters that they had with Jesus as He became more and more prominent among the people during the time of His earthly ministry.

The Gospel writers recorded many of these encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees. These interactions happened in various ways: (a) Pharisees who confronted Jesus with questions intended to stump or trick him, (b) Pharisees whom Jesus confronted or addressed publicly while shedding light on their hypocrisy and burdensome leadership, and (c) interactions between Jesus and Pharisees that were non-confrontational. The purpose of this paper is to examine the scripture

³⁹⁸ Mark Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey 2nd ed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 44.

³⁹⁹ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 224.

⁴⁰⁰ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 43.

⁴⁰¹ Guideposts Associates Inc., *The Guideposts Family Concordance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. Publishers, 1982), 524.

⁴⁰² Lee-Barnewall, “Pharisees,” 218.

⁴⁰³ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 42.

passages that record those encounters and to formulate insights and lessons for today.

First, this study will explore the history, beliefs, and positioning of the Pharisees in New Testament times. Next, encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees will be explored with a look at the settings, motives, and outcomes of these interactions. Insights and lessons for today will then be shaped and discussed from that closer look at those exchanges.

The Pharisees

Pharisees appear to derive their name from a Hebrew word that means “separated ones”⁴⁰⁴ in the sense that they were very concerned with separating themselves from anything impure or unclean. Rather than physically separating themselves from society as the Essenes did, Pharisees lived this holy, separated life within their society.⁴⁰⁵ Their origins are somewhat unclear, but scholars theorize that they may have arisen from the Hasideans who emphasized knowledge and obedience to the law or from the post-exile era that also had a strong focus on following the law.⁴⁰⁶ The Pharisees believed that lay people should follow the same purity laws and rituals that were followed by the priests in the temples, and they were known for their ceremonial handwashing before all meals.⁴⁰⁷

The Pharisees are, perhaps, the most prominent religious group in the New Testament, and they had a reputation as “accurate interpreters of the law.”⁴⁰⁸ New Testament references seem to indicate that The Pharisees were an ubiquitous presence in New Testament times, especially around Jerusalem and in the temple. Many Pharisees had official religious roles as scribes and synagogue leaders.⁴⁰⁹ This prominence and this strictness of purity made the Pharisees influential, revered, and maybe feared, during New Testament times and during the ministry years of Jesus.

This notoriety causes the Pharisees to be mentioned nearly one hundred times in the New Testament.⁴¹⁰ Most of these references are encounters with Jesus. The majority of those encounters are contentious, but some are positive. The next section will detail various

⁴⁰⁴ Guideposts Associates, *Concordance*, 524.

⁴⁰⁵ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Pharisees,” 218.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 43.

⁴⁰⁸ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, “Pharisees,” 219

⁴⁰⁹ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 43.

⁴¹⁰ Guideposts Associates Inc., *Concordance*, 524-525.

types of encounters that Jesus had with the Pharisees, as recorded by the Gospel writers.

Gospel Accounts of Jesus with Pharisees

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) as well as the Gospel of John all include references and stories about the Pharisees. According to New Testament scholar Donald E. Cook, the Pharisees are portrayed as the most significant opponents to Jesus and his ministry,⁴¹¹ thus the majority of these references detail negative or contentious interactions between the Pharisees and Jesus. Another group of these interactions record the rebukes by Jesus toward the Pharisees (including the “woes” in Matthew and Luke). There are even a few references about Pharisees that are positive and non-confrontational.

There are some Pharisee references that appear in only one Gospel account. However, many of these accounts parallel in more than one Gospel, tending to closely align with the same details. Some of these references mention the Pharisees as a single group, and some cross over with other groups (elders, scribes, chief priests, Sadducees, Herodians) in those same passages. Table 1 in the Appendix defines those additional religious designations to better understand their significance to the Pharisee scripture passages.

Conflict Narratives

The Pharisees often confronted Jesus and his disciples about not following strict religious rules regarding dietary practices and the Sabbath. The Pharisees also confronted Jesus after healings and, at other times, after not giving them the signs that they wanted to see. These “conflict stories” or “conflict narratives”⁴¹² appear in all of the Gospels and encompass a great deal of what is known about the Pharisees and their posture toward Jesus and His disciples.

Dietary Laws and Cleanliness

As previously discussed, the Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to rules and rituals regarding dietary cleanliness. Mark 2 details a situation regarding the Pharisees’ concerns over table fellowship rules. After Jesus called Levi (Matthew) to follow Him,

⁴¹¹ Donald E. Cook, “A Gospel Portrait of the Pharisees,” *Review & Exposition* 84.2, 1987, 222.

⁴¹² Cook, “A Gospel Portrait,” 223.

Levi hosted a feast. Verses 15 – 16 record the Pharisees’ question to the disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”⁴¹³ The Pharisees are concerned that Jesus is fellowshiping with the low-class people (sinners) and even those who are hated by the Jews for cheating Jews out of their money for taxes (tax collectors like Levi). Matthew 9:9-13 relays this same account in a similar way, but adds Jesus’ additional response, “Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13). This additional statement is a direct reference to Hosea 6:6, a scripture that Jesus knew the Pharisees would know. Matthew often cited scriptures known to the Jews in his Gospel.

Luke portrays a similar account, but uses a slightly different term, “...and the Pharisees and their scribes *grumbled* at his disciples” (Luke 5:30). According to the STEP Bible, the Greek γογγύζω (gonguzō), translated *grumbled* in this passage means to “utter secret and sullen discontent and to express an indignant complaint.”⁴¹⁴ It is interesting that the Pharisees seem to secretly complain to the disciples, yet Jesus knows what they were saying and answers them even though they did not ask him their question directly.

Strict Observance of the Sabbath

Another area of strict adherence for the Pharisees was properly observing the Sabbath. Mark 3:1-6 details a healing that took place in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus saw a man with a withered hand and asked the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?” (Mark 3:4). The Pharisees were silent, Jesus healed the man, and the Pharisees proceeded to plot with the Herodians to kill Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke record this interaction and include wording that the Pharisees were closely watching and trying to accuse Jesus (Matthew 12:10; Luke 6:7). Luke also writes that after Jesus healed the man, the Pharisees were “filled with rage” (6:11) and discussed what they could do to Jesus.

Another incident about the strict observance of the Sabbath occurs in Mark 2. Jesus and His disciples were going through grainfields, and the Pharisees saw the disciples picking some grain. The Pharisees ask Jesus “Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (Mark 2:24). Jesus reminds the Pharisees of a time that David was in need and ate something unlawful. Jesus then proclaimed

⁴¹³ Unless otherwise stated, all Bible references are from the *Christian Standard Bible* (CSB), 2017.

⁴¹⁴ STEP Bible, <https://www.stepbible.org/>

himself “Lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:28). Matthew (12:1-8) also tells of Jesus’ response about David and once again adds that Jesus referenced Hosea 6:6 as he did during the meal with Levi.

Pharisees React to Miracles, Ask for a Sign, and Plot to Kill Jesus

The Gospels reveal the continued and heightened tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. John 9 details an account of a man who was born blind being healed by Jesus. That man and his parents were then interrogated by the Pharisees regarding whether or not he was actually blind, thus questioning the validity of an actual miracle. Matthew and Luke both detail the healing of a mute, demon-possessed man who was able to speak after Jesus cast out the demon. This time, the Pharisees did not question if that miracle occurred, rather they accused Jesus of “casting out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of devils” (Luke 11:15).

The Pharisees would witness the miracles performed by Jesus, find some way to discount them, and then ask Jesus for a “sign.” Matthew and Luke state that this was an attempt to “tempt” Jesus, thus baiting him into some type of performance that they could again discount or try to use against him (Matthew 16:1; Luke 11:16). Jesus refused and called them hypocrites for being able to discern the signs of the weather, but not the spiritual “signs of the times” (Matthew 16:2-4). These ongoing tensions continue, and they lead to the Pharisees’ ultimate desire - plots to kill Jesus.

Jesus Rebukes the Pharisees (Woes)

Some of the contentious interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees ended with simply a short teaching or reminder, and sometimes they ended with a direct rebuke from Jesus to the Pharisees. Two longer narratives of rebukes are recorded in Matthew 23:1-39 and in Luke 11:37-54. Because of the wording that Jesus used during these criticisms, these narratives are often referred to as The Woes of the Pharisees.⁴¹⁵ In Matthew’s Gospel, these woes are recorded right after Jesus has a conflict with both the Sadducees and the Pharisees while he was teaching in parables. The timing of this discourse is after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:8-9), after He cleansed the temple of the money changers (Matt. 12-13), and after the religious elite challenged His authority (Matt. 21:23). The chief priests and Pharisees understood that these parables were teachings against them,

⁴¹⁵ *New American Standard Bible* 1995, as found on <https://www.biblegateway.com/>, Headings in Matthew 23 and Luke 11.

and this became a time of high confrontation. The rebukes that are issued in Matthew 23 address hypocrisy with illustrations about differences between what the Pharisees say and what the Pharisees actually do. Table 2 in the Appendix lists the details of the woes as recorded in Matthew 23 and Luke 11.

In the Gospel of Luke, the woes are chronicled during accounts of Jesus teaching his disciples and then teaching to a wider crowd. Luke 11:14-16 contains a conflict narrative with the Pharisees after Jesus drove a demon out of a mute man. A Pharisee then asked Jesus to dine with him (Luke 11:37), a conflict about dietary rules arose, and Jesus pronounced the woes to the Pharisees as well as to the experts in the law. Similar to Matthew's account, these woes issued rebukes for these religious elite who, teaching one thing, would yet doing another for their own benefit.

Pharisees and Jesus in Non-Confrontational Exchanges

Although the Pharisees are perhaps best known for confrontational exchanges with Jesus, not all portrayals of Pharisees in the New Testament are negative. As previously stated, the Pharisees are credited with preserving and teaching the Jewish laws and customs. Prior to severely rebuking their actions, Jesus did acknowledge the societal position of the Pharisees and endorsed their teachings (Matt 23:1-3). Basically, Jesus seems to be affirming that the Pharisees correctly teach the Laws of Moses and have the authority to do so, but He is not endorsing their actual actions.

Luke reports that while Jesus was teaching in Galilee, a group of Pharisees warned him to leave because Herod wanted to kill him. Jesus tells them to inform Herod that He plans to continue his healing work. (Luke 13:31-33). Other Pharisee interactions seem to start positive with an invite to a meal, then turn into a conflict after Jesus is confronted with something. These encounters may have been sincere attempts to spend time with Jesus or they could have been setups that Pharisees used to test or confront Jesus.

Perhaps, the most well-known positive encounters that Jesus had with a Pharisee are the interactions with Nicodemus. Nicodemus first went alone and at night to see Jesus, possibly to avoid being seen (3:1-15). Later, Nicodemus diverted other Pharisees from trying to apprehend Jesus by citing their own laws (John 7:50), and after Jesus' death, Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus' body (John 19:39-42). Nicodemus' willingness to be associated with Jesus seems to evolve over time.

Table 3 in the Appendix contains a list of Bible references for the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees. That Table includes

references based on the types of interactions discussed above, and they are displayed in a parallel style that cites the same interactions as they appear in the various Gospel accounts. In the next sections, insights from these interactions will be discussed.

Discussion

The conflict narratives discussed above are well known passages of scripture, and they are often cited as examples of Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees being arrogant, judgmental and hypocritical. These conflicts were so pronounced that Cook considers Jesus' words to the Pharisees, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit" (Matthew 21:43) to be one of the "most cutting passages in the Gospel."⁴¹⁶ These passages may reveal more than just a difference of opinion, but also the deeper concept that Jesus would prioritize people above rules and traditions. He would heal on the Sabbath, He would dine with sinners who were considered unclean, and He would show mercy and kindness to those that the Pharisees viewed as outcasts. Agus Supratikno, Professor of Theology and Political Science in Indonesia, considers Jesus' actions more than just mere defiance for the sake of a confrontation. Examining the biblical passages regarding the Pharisees through the lens of the nation-state theory, Supratikno identified that there is a "sharp difference between the *national political vision* of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding Israel's national identity."⁴¹⁷ The Pharisees desired, even demanded, a national identity based on a separation necessary for ethnic and religious purity. Thus, the Pharisees marginalized and confronted any person or group that could potentially "contaminate"⁴¹⁸ that desired holiness and purity. On the other hand, Jesus presented and operated with a vision of "God's compassion"⁴¹⁹ and embraced those who were marginalized by the Pharisees.

As discussed earlier, there are two accounts of a sustained rebuke from Jesus to the Pharisees known as The Woes. Andrew Simmonds, an attorney in New York, evaluated the wording and style of those woes from a legal-argument perspective. Simmonds noted that each woe begins with a positive statement immediately followed by a

⁴¹⁶ Cook, "A Gospel Portrait," 233.

²⁰ Agus Supratikno, "National Political Differences as a Cause of Debate between the Phraisees and Jesus," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 8, no. 2 (July 2024): 154.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

negative statement.⁴²⁰ This, Simmonds reasons, is a strategy that Jesus used to have the Pharisees condemn themselves through their own words or actions. Part of this strategy is to reveal that the Pharisees say one thing but actually do something different. Another part of that strategy is to front with the answer that Jesus knew the Pharisees would respond with. He had been in enough confrontations to know how they would try to push the rebuke back at Jesus. The Pharisees knew the right things to do, but they allowed their arrogance, their need for position, and their hypocrisy to blind them from receiving any truth from Jesus.

As previously stated, among all of the confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees, there are some positive interactions. Jesus's affirmation of the societal position and teachings of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 is somewhat disputed in the scholarly community. While some view Jesus' statement as irony, Noel Rabinowitz, Associate Professor of New Testament in Jerusalem, views this passage as an actual endorsement by Jesus that the Pharisees did in fact occupy the seat of Moses (another disputed topic that is not in the scope of this study) and that their teachings were not the problem. The problem was the way that the Pharisees had "Forsaken the greater commandments of justice, [and] mercy."⁴²¹ Kenneth Newport, Professor of Christian Thought and priest in the Church of England, supports this view of the legitimate leadership position of the Pharisees who were held in high esteem by the common people.⁴²² So, even with legitimate authority, the general respect of the people, and the fact that Jesus acknowledged their position, the Pharisees still could not seem to lead with authentic and compassionate behaviors of their own.

Conversely, Nicodemus appears to be an example of how a Pharisee with deep religious knowledge and privilege should have acted. Steven Cox, Research Professor of New Testament and Greek, describes the arc of Nicodemus, "He sought truth and counsel with Jesus; he spoke out for Justice on behalf of Jesus; and he appeared to have remained a secret follower of Jesus when Jesus' disciples had abandoned Him."⁴²³ Nicodemus had seen the "signs" from Jesus, but unlike so many Pharisees around him, he recognized that those signs

⁴²⁰ Andrew Simmonds, "Woe to You...Hypocrites!" Re-reading Matthew 23:13-36," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:663 (July 2009):337.

⁴²¹ Noel Rabinowitz, "Matt 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He endorse Their Halakah?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 3 (2003):437.

⁴²² Kenneth Newport, "The Pharisees in Judaism Prior to A.D. 70," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29, no. 2 (1991):127-137.

⁴²³ Steven Cox, "Jesus' Teaching and Pharisaical Judaism," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 07:2 (2010): 36.

came from God, and he knew that he needed to approach Jesus humbly for himself.

Lessons and Implications for Today

These insights into the Biblical accounts of Jesus and Pharisees create the opportunity to cull some lessons that we can remember and apply in our own lives. First, a look at a 2013 Barna Group study⁴²⁴ can shed some light on how self-identified Christians (n=718) today compare to either Pharisees or Jesus based on 20 questions about their attitudes and actions. The results were then categorized in quadrants based on Christ-Like/Pharisaical actions and Pharisaical/Christ-Like attitudes. A majority 51% landed in the Pharisaical Attitudes/Pharisaical Actions quadrant and only 14% landed in the Christ-Like Attitude/Christ-Like Actions quadrant. It is reasonable to speculate that many of those research participants would be surprised by those results.

Since Christians may not actually realize they are using some pharisaical behaviors, what lessons, then, can we actually glean from this present study of interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees? First, as Christians, we should not let ideological, political, or philosophical differences, (Supratikno's "national political vision") cause us to (a) vilify others, (b) marginalize others, or (c) lose compassion for others. Being "right" or "pure" in our own eyes is not worth abandoning God's compassion. Next, Jesus was able to rebuke the Pharisees (the woes) by comparing the responsibility that came with their knowledge and position to their actual actions, which demonstrated the abandonment of that responsibility to the common Jew in favor of themselves. For Christians, especially for Christian leaders, we should behave and lead with authenticity and in line with what we say and teach. We must not become blind to our responsibility to others. We cannot properly represent the kingdom of God while at the same time behaving hypocritically and putting our own self-interests above others. Finally, like Nicodemus, we can acknowledge the privilege of our position as the redeemed while still humbly seeking truth and counsel. If, like Nicodemus, that journey starts out secretly and at night, we can also become more and more bold until we are publicly standing for Jesus even after others have left. Like Nicodemus, we can go from cautious-but-determined to openly

⁴²⁴ Barna Group. "Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?," Last modified June 3, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees/>.

standing for Jesus. Nicodemus even helped to fulfill prophecy⁴²⁵ that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

These are just a few of the many, many lessons that can be learned by studying the Pharisees and comparing their attitudes and actions to the attitudes and actions of Jesus. Maybe the widely known acronym WWJD should actually have two questions: What Would Jesus Do? and What Would the Pharisees do? We can then choose wisely.

Appendix

Table 1. Jewish Groups and Religious Roles in the New Testament

Jewish Groups and Religious Roles in The New Testament ⁴²⁶		
Jewish Religious Groups/Sects Referenced in the Gospels		
Group/Sect	Greek	Description
Herodians	Ἡρωδιανοί (hērōdianoī)	Supporters of Herod Antipas
Sadducees	Σαδδουκαῖος (saddoukaios)	Righteous ones, philosophically distinct from the Pharisees
Pharisees	Φαρισαῖος (farisaïos)	Separate ones, large and powerful sect, known for strict ceremonial observances
Jewish Religious Roles Referenced in the Gospels		
Religious Role	Greek	Description
Scribe	γραμματεὺς (grammateus)	Teachers of the law, qualified to teach in the synagogues, no political power, but leaders of the people
Elder	πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros)	Older, a leader in the Jewish community

⁴²⁵ Isaiah 53:9 - He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at death. (Note: All four Gospels detail that Jesus’ body was prepared and placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man. The Gospel of John includes Nicodemus in this narrative).

⁴²⁶ This Table was informed by the following two sources: William Vine, Merrill Unger, and William White, Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), various pages.

Chief Priests	ἀρχιερεύς (archiereus)	High priests from the Levitical order appointed for service in the temple, also ex-high priests and members of high-priestly families
Sanhedrin	συνέδριον (sunedrion)	The Great Council in Jerusalem consisting of high priests, elders, and scribes

Table 2. The Woes as Recorded in Matthew 23 and Luke 11

The Woes as Recorded in Matthew 23 and Luke 11⁴²⁷

Matthew 23	Luke 11
But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.	But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint, rue, and every kind of garden herb, and yet you ignore justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.	Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the seat of honor in the synagogues and personal greetings in the marketplaces
Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the offering that is on it is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, the one who swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And the one who	Woe to you! For you are like unseen tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.

⁴²⁷ *New American Standard Bible* 1995, as found on <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells in it. And the one who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.	
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!	Woe to you lawyers as well! For you load people with burdens that are hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may also become clean.	Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and you approve of the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs.
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.	Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering.
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You snakes, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?	

Table 3. Interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees in The New Testament

Interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees in The New Testament

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Pharisees try to question, tempt or trick Jesus				
Jesus heals the paralytic	9:18	2:1-12	5:17-26	5:8-9
Meal with Levi (Matthew)	9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32	
Plucking food on the Sabbath	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Jesus heals man with withered hand on Sabbath	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus heals man with demon	9:32-34	3:22	11:14-15	
Jesus Heals a man blind from birth				9:1-41
Pharisees seeking signs	12:38 16:1-4	8:11-12	11:16	
What defiles a person?	15:1-20	7:1-23	11:37-41	
Pharisees plot to kill Jesus				
Chief Priests and Pharisees	21:45			
Pharisees with the Herodians		3:6		
Jesus rebukes the Pharisees				
Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees	16:5-12	8:14-21	12:1	
Woes	23:1-39		11:37-54	
Jesus speaks of Pharisees regarding John	11:7-19		7:24-35	
Non-confrontational interactions				
Jesus affirms the <i>teachings</i> of the Pharisees	23:1-3			
Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod			13:31-33	
Nicodemus visits Jesus at				3:1-15

night				
Nicodemus defends Jesus in public				7:48-52
Nicodemus helps prepare and bury Jesus' body				19:38-40
Teaching moment at the home of Pharisee, Simon the Leper Mary anoints Jesus with ointment	26:6-13	14:3-9	7:36-50	12:1-8

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THE KING JAMES ONLY CONTROVERSY: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Are the modern translations of the Bible, such as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the New International Version (NIV), as accurate and reliable as the King James Version (KJV)? Or is the King James Version superior to all modern English translations, and therefore the sole preferred English translation to be used today (with the possible addition of the New King James Version)? This essay will argue that the primacy of the King James Version over modern translations is not accurate nor necessary.

D. A. Carson, in *The King James Version Debate*, lists the “best known evangelical defenders of the TR [Textus Receptus].” The term, “defenders of the TR” is the logical equivalent of the viewpoint that the King James Version is the best translation. The KJV was based on the only available ancient Greek documents at the time in Western Europe, which came to be labeled the “Received Text,” or in Latin, the “Textus Receptus.” These distinguished proponents of the primacy of the KJV are David Otis Fuller, Zane C. Hodges, Edward F. Hills, John W. Burgon (19th century), Terence Brown, Jakob van Bruggen, and Wilbur N. Pickering.⁴²⁸ The opposing camp of those Bible scholars who do not view the Textus Receptus and the KJV as uniquely superior are many textual experts as well. Among them are D. A. Carson himself, Daniel Wallace, James White, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon.

Background and Context

Christianity began in the Levant and Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey. As the autographs, the originals of the books of the Bible, got old and worn out, copying of the Scriptures began, and spread wherever Christianity spread. This rapidly encompassed the entire Mediterranean area, including North Africa. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the nascent Islamic religion began to spread through those same areas, spreading their religion primarily through military conquest. The Levant and northern Africa were conquered, but the

⁴²⁸ D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997 E-book ed 2011), 40.

Muslim advance met enduring resistance at the border of Europe and Asia; at the city of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire. The result was that copying of scripture was reduced in North Africa and in Palestine, but Constantinople became a center of biblical manuscript caretaking.

In A.D. 1453, Muslim forces conquered Constantinople. Christian scribes fled into Western Europe, bringing Greek manuscripts of the various sections of the Bible with them. Erasmus, a leading scholar of the Roman Catholic Church at the time, benefited from this influx of Greek manuscripts of portions of the Bible. Carson records that,

The first edition of the Greek New Testament to be published (though not the first to be printed) was edited by the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536) of Rotterdam, Holland. The work, published in March 1516, was done somewhat precipitately, with the result that there are countless hundreds of printing errors. To prepare his text Erasmus utilized several Greek manuscripts, not one of which contained the entire New Testament. None of his manuscripts was earlier than the twelfth century. For the Book of Revelation he had but one manuscript, and it was lacking the final leaf, which contained the last six verses of the book. Therefore Erasmus translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek and published that. Hence in the last six verses of Revelation in Erasmus's Greek New Testament, several words and phrases may be found that are attested in no Greek manuscript whatsoever.⁴²⁹

Scribes in Spain were also attempting to assemble the first Greek New Testament in Europe as well. Although the Spanish scholars completed their work first, Erasmus was the first to release the Greek New Testament on the market, beating the Spaniards.⁴³⁰

The significance of these developments for our topic is that four different manuscript "families" emerged in this historical and geographic context before Erasmus. Carson tells us that these families of documents are called "text-types." He lists them as, (1) the

⁴²⁹ Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, 33-34.

⁴³⁰ Erika Rummel and Eric MacPhail, "Desiderius Erasmus." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017): section 1.

Byzantine text, from the area in and around Constantinople, (2) the Western text, which reflects poor scholarship and is disputed, (3) the Caesarean text, from Egypt and Palestine, and (4) the Alexandrian text, from the area of Alexandria, Egypt, which reflects high quality work on the average.⁴³¹

All the manuscripts used by Erasmus, which would later be the foundation for the King James Version, came from the Byzantine text-type. As mentioned above, the Greek New Testament assembled by Erasmus came to be known as the Textus Receptus (TR). The TR was only a small portion of the manuscripts of the Byzantine text-type.

After the time of Erasmus, up until the mid-19th century, thousands of ancient Greek portions of the Bible were discovered. Starting around 1850, two British scholars named B. F. Wescott, and F. J. A. Hort began the project of comparing these manuscripts with each other, with the goal of getting closer to the autographs. They completed their Greek New Testament in 1881.⁴³² Shortly after that, modern English translations began to emerge, using the work of Wescott and Hort among others, including the American Standard Version (ASV), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV). This immediately gained the attention of those who used the King James Version. The obvious question arose: are these new English translations of the Bible as good or better than the KJV, or are there any flaws or dangers in the work of Wescott and Hort and the modern translation teams?

The advent of these modern English translations also prompted this question: what attributes of the KJV are superior to these modern translations? Although many users of the KJV loved the English style, and had developed an emotional attachment to it, that alone would not disqualify the modern translations. Many scholars who were not comfortable with the modern translations turned their focus to the Greek New Testament of Erasmus, comparing the TR to the work of Wescott and Hort, to see if any Greek language problems disqualified the modern translations.

For the Primacy of the King James Version

There are two arguments for the primacy of the King James Version that are the most potent. The first is that many modern English translations leave out scriptures that are found in the KJV. Three important examples of the many omissions are John 5:3b–4, Acts 8:37, and a phrase in 1 John 5:7–8 (labeled the “Comma Johanneum”).

⁴³¹ Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, ch 3.

⁴³² James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* 2nd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, (2009): 74.

The second potent argument springs from the first argument: the Byzantine text-type is claimed as superior to the other three text-types. The connection between the second argument and the first is that the Textus Receptus, which is a small portion of the Byzantine text-type, is the source for including the scriptures that modern translations often leave out.

This issue came sharply into focus with the discovery of many manuscripts in the 19th century, two of which were very significant. Very few ancient Greek manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are manuscripts of the *entire* New Testament. So, when two entire copies of the New Testament were discovered that dated from the fourth century, they were profoundly important. These were the Codex Sinaiticus (given the symbol א “Aleph” by scholars) and the Codex Vaticanus (given the symbol B). Scholarly defenders of the KJV immediately attacked these two manuscripts, because they differed from the TR in significant ways. John Burgon was a very influential 19th century scholar, who vehemently rejected these two manuscripts outright. His words are recorded by David Otis Fuller, in his book *Which Bible?*:

Here as you must see B and Aleph in faltering tones and with an insignificant following are met by an array of authorities which is triumphantly superior, not only in antiquity, but in number, variety, and continuity. In point of hard and unmistakable fact there is a continual conflict going on all through the gospels between B and Aleph... The nature and weight of these two codexes may be inferred from it. They will be found to have been proved over and over again to be bad witnesses, who were left to survive in their handsome dresses while attention was hardly ever accorded to any services of theirs.

For 15 centuries, in which the art of copying the Bible was brought to perfection, and printing invented, have by unceasing rejection of their claims sealed forever the condemnation of their character and so distracted from their weight.⁴³³

Burgon utterly rejected, in virulent terms, the use of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus for analysis of the Greek New Testament. Both ancient

⁴³³ David Otis Fuller, *Which Bible?* 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1980), 127.

manuscripts were not part of the Byzantine text-type. (As an aside, regarding the weight of the book *Which Bible?*, Carson states: “by far the most influential of these books is *Which Bible?*, which has gone through a half dozen editions.”⁴³⁴)

Numerous additional arguments have been offered by proponents of the KJV but are not as potent as the above two arguments, are often related to the above two arguments, and are beyond the scope of this essay. A very good summary of many of the prominent additional arguments are found in Carson's book the *King James Only Debate*, on pages 41–42.⁴³⁵ To summarize in popular terms, many people today who only use the KJV do so because “The modern translations have cut out portions of the Bible and use bad Greek sources.”

A plethora of additional arguments are circulating in this ongoing debate, but many are found wanting in factual support. Five such arguments will be summarized as examples, gleaned from the list by Carson that was cited above. The first is that the Byzantine text-type stands closer to the original autographs than any other text-type. Second, that the Alexandrian and Caesarean text-types are shorter because scribes who were Arian heretics made the copies. Third, the greater number of manuscripts within the Byzantine text-type prove that it is superior. Fourth, the fact that the Western church used the Byzantine text-type primarily for many centuries demonstrates divine protection and approval. Fifth, Westcott and Hort were modernist liberal scholars and unable to do unbiased textual analysis. The validity and seriousness of these points is beyond the expertise and scope of this essay and are left to the reader to investigate.

Against the Primacy of the King James Version

The first accusation of the King James only proponents is that scriptures have been omitted from many of the modern translations. This is a serious accusation. The most famous example of this is the Comma Johanneum of 1 John 5:7-8. What many are not aware of is that Erasmus, in his first two editions of the Greek New Testament, omitted the Comma Johanneum. The reason he omitted it was that it was not found in any of the Greek manuscripts of the original TR.⁴³⁶ Erasmus was accused of making a scholarly mistake but answered his critics by saying that if an ancient manuscript could be found with Comma Johanneum in it, he would include it in a later edition of the

⁴³⁴ Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, 40.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁴³⁶ White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 100.

Greek New Testament. James R. White reveals that, "... An Irish manuscript, Codex Montfortianus, that contained the disputed phrase, now at Trinity College, Dublin, was found. This manuscript is highly suspect, most probably having been created in the house of the Grey Friars, whose provincial, Henry Standish, was an old enemy of Erasmus and whose intention was simply to refute him."⁴³⁷ Erasmus, still protesting, included the Comma Johanneum in his third edition.

The issue highlighted in the decision to include or omit the Comma Johanneum is basically the same issue with the other scriptures that are omitted from many modern translations, such as John 5:3b-4 and Acts 8:37: many early manuscripts simply do not include them, they are only found in much later manuscripts. The accusation that modern translations are cutting out portions of the word of God appears neutralized by these facts, if not unfounded.

The second potent argument for the primacy of the KJV is that the Byzantine text-type that the TR came from is superior to the other text-types. Three things can be said in response. First, a larger number of manuscripts are found in the Byzantine text-type, but this does not ensure a more accurate or superior text-type. The larger number of manuscripts are probably due to the Muslim conquests in other areas. Also, even though the Byzantine collection is more numerous, most manuscripts have later dates. The Alexandrian and Caesarean text-types have fewer manuscripts, but many are of high-quality scholarship, and of earlier dating.⁴³⁸ Third, many scholars making use of the other text-types have been accused of being heretics. This is unproven speculation, and an ad hominem attack. Scholars such as Westcott and Hort could do quality academic work, regardless of their position on a spectrum of conservative to liberal.

A prominent argument not listed above, because it is not logically potent, is the view that the TR has been miraculously and preferentially preserved by God. Carson, in *The King James Version Debate*, offers 14 theses as refutations of the position for primacy of the KJV. His twelfth thesis is that "based on arguments that I have already refuted, such as the fact that the Byzantine tradition takes in the majority of the manuscripts or that it has been providentially preserved, the TR is claimed by its defenders to be the text that God has specially anointed."⁴³⁹ Carson is accusing proponents of KJV primacy of using circular logic. They seek to prove the primacy of the KJV by presupposing the primacy of the KJV. Carson's accusation is accurate, at least in the case of Edward F. Hills, an influential voice in the 20th

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁴³⁸ Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, 48-54.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 69.

century for KJV primacy, who wrote in his book *The King James Version Defended*,

Since 1881 many, perhaps most, orthodox Christian scholars have agreed with Westcott and Hort that textual criticism is a strictly neutral science that must be applied in the same way to any document whatever, including the Bible. Yet there have been some orthodox theologians who have dissented from this neutral point of view. One of them was Abraham Kuyper (1894), who pointed out that the publication of the Textus Receptus was "no accident," affirming that the Textus Receptus, "as a foundation from which to begin critical operations, can, in a certain sense, even deserve preference."⁴⁴⁰

Here we see that Hills admits to abandoning neutral analysis of ancient manuscripts, by assuming that the TR is somehow innately superior, and above neutral analysis. He attempts to buttress his argument by appealing to the point of view of Abraham Kuyper. This simply incriminates Kuyper as well in such circular reasoning.

Another impotent argument against other text-types is that many ancient manuscripts were copied by heretics, who were attacking the deity of Jesus Christ. An important example of this is Romans 1:16. In the KJV, for example, the verse begins with "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God..." In the modern ESV and NIV translations, for example, the words "of Christ" are omitted: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for (ESV) because (NIV) it is the power of God..." White asserts that:

Here is another place where KJV Only advocates insist that the modern versions are trying to denigrate Christ by removing his name from the Scriptures. Actually, these versions are following the most ancient manuscripts, while recognizing the tendency toward expansion found in the Byzantine manuscripts. However, the modern versions use "the gospel of Christ" elsewhere (it appears eight times in the NIV New Testament),

⁴⁴⁰Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, IA: The Christian Research Press, 1956), 224.

so again there is no logical reason to impute evil motives to these renderings.⁴⁴¹

A logical impasse appears to have been reached here, where KJV only proponents accuse those who use Alexandrian text-type of removing ancient text for heretical motives, whereas the opposing camp accuses the KJV only camp of using manuscripts that have interpolated text. What may tip the scales against this KJV only argument is the view that it is more likely for those who copied the Scriptures to deliberately add text (ostensibly to clarify), rather than to deliberately remove text from the word of God. It is noteworthy, in the quote above, that White refers to the “tendency toward expansion” of the Byzantine text-type.

Daniel Wallace, the Greek manuscript scholar from Dallas Theological Seminary, explains an example of expansion in a 1995 debate. He views the inclusion of John 5:3b-4 (which includes the phrase “for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred the water...”⁴⁴²) as the work of a scribe who needed to copy a manuscript of the book of John that included a marginal note. His logical explanation is that the scribe would make the conservative decision to include the marginal note, rather than overlook it. In this way, scripture could be expanded beyond the original autograph.⁴⁴²

Modern translations use a wealth of manuscripts to catch expansions like those referred to above. Erasmus, with the limited manuscript selection of the TR in the 15th century, did not have resources available to him to catch all these expansions. Yet KJV only proponents accuse the modern translation teams of removing holy scripture from the Bible, rather than catching expansions that were probably not in the autographs of the original writers. This is a crucial point in the KJV only argument. Many people hold to the KJV only because of their understanding that the modern translations have wrongfully removed John 5:3b-4, Acts 8:37, and 1 John 5:7, along with other texts. However, these texts have been shown to be the opposite: they should not be included in the Bible, except perhaps with a footnote, because through textual analysis of ancient manuscripts they have been shown to probably be interpolations. It is highly unlikely from the manuscript data that these texts were part of the autographs.

⁴⁴¹ White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 224.

⁴⁴² Daniel Wallace, “How Is the Bible Translated Today?” John Ankerberg Show, Daniel Wallace, James White, Samuel Gipp, et al. (1995): Accessed 12/5/2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-KjWHSwQAg>.

Conclusion

The King James Version is a quality English translation, especially considering the dearth of ancient Greek manuscripts available at the time. However, the arguments for the primacy of the King James Version over modern English translations are not persuasive. Three reasons for this conclusion are given here. First, the omissions of verses in the modern translations, such as Acts 8:37, are reflections of improvements in the Bible text stemming from the discovery of many manuscripts that surfaced after the KJV was produced. These “omissions” are actually seen as correcting expansions that were interpolations, and probably were not part of the autographs, from the data that we have today. Second, the superiority of the Byzantine text-type over other text-types is not clear. The arguments and scholarship on both sides of that debate have produced an impasse: the Byzantine text-type is not a clear winner. Finally, the quality of scholarship, and the reputation of the teams of scholars who have created the most respected modern English translations, such as the ESV, NIV, and NASB, are not widely doubted, but are greatly respected.

An uncomfortable but necessary issue to address in the KJV only debate is the emotional attachment of many people to the King James Version. Defenders of the KJV are often highly educated logical scholars, such as Burgon, Fuller, and Hills. It is the view here that, in reading their arguments in defense of the KJV, there is a common thread of an unreasonable preferential treatment of the KJV, driven by emotional attachment. This emotional attachment to the Scriptures found in the KJV could tempt a person to slant the truth unwittingly, because of a lens created by a strong bias founded on that emotional attachment. Although a search for the truth is always paramount, sympathy should be extended, because high emotions are understandable when discussing the very words of God.

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THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS

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Introduction

And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.⁴⁴³

Day one of the Church began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as promised to the Disciples by Jesus in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. “But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”⁴⁴⁴ Immediately after speaking these words, Jesus ascended to the Father in front of his Disciples.⁴⁴⁵ The ministry of Jesus needed to continue to be taken forward into the world. The ministry work that needed to be done could only be accomplished if the messengers of redemption by repentance for the forgiveness of sins were empowered by the Holy Spirit promised them.

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after

⁴⁴³ Acts 2:1-4, ASV.

⁴⁴⁴ Acts 1:8, ASV.

⁴⁴⁵ Acts 1:9-11.

worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.⁴⁴⁶

On the day of Pentecost, after Jesus' Ascension, the Holy Spirit arrived⁴⁴⁷ and the beginning of the Church was inaugurated as recorded in the Book of Acts second chapter. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Church in the book of Acts? Has this role continued since then, in the same manner, or has it changed?

To address these questions, the role of the Holy Spirit will be examined from the perspective of the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament (NT). Additionally, the role of the Holy Spirit will be examined from the Old Testament (OT) perspective to understand its historic role. Did the role of the Holy Spirit change from the OT to the NT, and if so, in what ways? And finally, has the role of the Holy Spirit changed in today's modern Church since Pentecost and if so, in what ways? What can be concluded about the role of the Holy Spirit for today?

Why Was the Holy Spirit Sent?

The Holy Spirit's coming could not be accomplished until Jesus ascended to the Father. Luke had ended his gospel with Jesus' teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit in Luke 24:45-53 (quoted above). And now, in the very beginning of the Book of Acts, Luke picked up where he left off in the ending of his Gospel. Significant in Luke chapter 24 was the phrase "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."⁴⁴⁸ Luke did not go into the detail of Jesus' entire teaching to him and the other Disciples on what OT Scriptures were discussed. Perhaps it included OT prophecies like Joel 2:28, "it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind...." This could explain why the Disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1:6 if Jesus was going to now establish the Kingdom. "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered them with, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority."⁴⁴⁹ The time had not yet come for that prophetic event to be fulfilled, there was still ministry work to be done. The proclamation of redemption needed to be taken to all the world by Holy Spirit-empowered messengers.

⁴⁴⁶ Luke 24:45-53, NASB.

⁴⁴⁷ Acts 2:1-4, quoted as the introductory opening statement.

⁴⁴⁸ Luke 24:45.

⁴⁴⁹ Acts 1:7.

How Did the Holy Spirit Manifest Himself?

The 120 who were gathered and praying together, awaiting the promise of the Holy Spirit, included the core Disciples along with Jesus' mother and brothers.⁴⁵⁰ The Holy Spirit manifested himself in the beginning of the second chapter of the Book of Acts as quoted below and expanded upon after this interlinear⁴⁵¹ quotation of Acts 2:2-4

2:2 And suddenly there came a sound (ἦχος) from heaven(οὐρανοῦ) as of a rushing (φερομένης) mighty(βιαίας) wind (πνοῆς), and it filled (ἐπλήρωσεν) all the house where they were sitting.

2:3 And there appeared (ὀπτάνομαι) unto them cloven (διαμεριζόμεναι) tongues (γλῶσσαι) like as of fire (πυρός), and it sat (ἐκάθισεν) upon each of them.

2:4 And they were all filled (ἐπλήσθησαν) with the Holy (Ἁγίου) Spirit (Πνεῦματος), and began to speak(λαλεῖν) with other(ἐτέραις) tongues(γλώσσαις), as the Spirit(Πνεῦμα) gave (ἐδίδου) them utterance (ἀποφθέγγεσθαι).

While the 120 were praying together in the upper room of the house where they were staying, without warning, the Holy Spirit arrived. The arrival was depicted as a sound coming down from heaven. The word sound, ἦχος | ἦχος,⁴⁵² means a confusing noise. And the word heaven, ouranoo | οὐρανοῦ,⁴⁵³ literally means sky but more so a reference to heaven as the abode of God. The “rushing (pherōmenas | ερομένης)⁴⁵⁴ mighty (biaios | βιαίας)⁴⁵⁵ wind (pnoēs | πνοῆς)⁴⁵⁶,”

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 1:12-15; 2:1.

⁴⁵¹ Interlinear references are edited to focus on specific words by this author. The interlinear quotations are from *The King James English-Hebrew/Greek Reverse Interlinear Bible* (Toronto, Ontario: Bible Learning Society, 2016), Kindle Edition.

⁴⁵² Strong G2279, ἦχος | ἦχος, a loud or confused noise, a roar. [all Strong Concordance (2016) notations are taken from the e-Sword Bible study software application as noted in the Bibliography.]

⁴⁵³ Strong G3772, ouranoo | οὐρανοῦ, the sky; by extension *heaven* as the abode of God.

⁴⁵⁴ Strong G5342, pherōmenas | φερομένης, to bring forth or carry, be driven.

⁴⁵⁵ Thayer, Strong G972 ((biaios | βιαίας), violent, forcible. [all Thayer Concordance (2016) notations are taken from the e-Sword Bible study software application as noted in the Bibliography.]

picturizes the sound of a powerful breath. The breath completely filled the entire house, “and it filled (epiplēroōsen | ἐπλήρωσεν)⁴⁵⁷ all the house where they were sitting.”

Verse 3 continued with the physical manifestation of the Spirit, “and there appeared, (optanomai | ὀπτάνομαι)⁴⁵⁸ unto them cloven, (diamerizōmenai | διαμερίζομεναι)⁴⁵⁹ tongues (glōssa | γλῶσσαι),⁴⁶⁰ like as of fire (puros | πυρός)⁴⁶¹, and it sat (ekathizen | ἐκάθισεν),⁴⁶² upon each of them.” This physical manifestation was of fiery tongues that came to rest individually on each person. The fire’s appearance had a lighting like intensity (puros⁴⁶³).

Verse 4 continued by describing the immediate effect of the Holy Spirit on the gathering. They were all filled completely (eplethasan [plēthō, root] | ἐπλήσθησαν),⁴⁶⁴ with the Holy Spirit (Pneuma | Πνεῦμα)⁴⁶⁵ and began speaking in tongues (glōssa | γλῶσσαι),⁴⁶⁶ “as the Spirit (Pneuma | Πνεῦμα)⁴⁶⁷ gifted (edidōu | ἐδίδου)⁴⁶⁸ them utterance (apophtheggomai | ἀποφθέγγεσθαι)⁴⁶⁹. The

⁴⁵⁶ Thayer, Strong G4157 (pnoēs | πνοῆς), breath, [the] breath of life, wind.

⁴⁵⁷ Thayer, Strong G4137 (epiplēroōsen | ἐπλήρωσεν), to make full, to fill to the full, to render full.

⁴⁵⁸ Thayer, Strong G3700, (optanomai | ὀπτάνομαι), to allow oneself to be seen, to appear.

⁴⁵⁹ Strong G1266, diamerizōmenai | διαμερίζομεναι, to partition thoroughly, literally in distribution.

⁴⁶⁰ Thayer, Strong G1100 (glōssa | γλῶσσαι), the tongue, as a member of the body, an organ of speech.

⁴⁶¹ Strong G4442, purus | πυρός, fire (literally or figuratively, specifically lighting): fiery, fire.

⁴⁶² Strong G2523, ekathizen | ἐκάθισεν, to sit (down); figuratively to settle (hover, dwell).

⁴⁶³ Strong G4442, purus | πυρός, fire (literally or figuratively, specifically lighting): fiery, fire.

⁴⁶⁴ Strong G4130, plēthō | ἐπλήσθησαν, to literally imbue, influence, to be filled.

⁴⁶⁵ Strong G4151, pneuma | Πνεῦμα, literally a current of air, breeze; figuratively a spirit or a divine spirit as in Christ’s spirit, the spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁶⁶ Thayer, Strong G1100 (glōssa | γλῶσσαι), the tongue, not literally the physical organ but the language or dialect used by a particular people distinct from that of other nations.

⁴⁶⁷ Strong G4151.

⁴⁶⁸ Thayer, Strong G1325 (edidōu | ἐδίδου), to give something to someone of one’s own accord; to bestow a gift.

⁴⁶⁹ Thayer, Strong G669 (apophtheggomai | ἀποφθέγγεσθαι), to speak out, speak forth; not a word of everyday speech but one of belonging to dignified and elevated discourse.

word filled (eplathasan) denotes complete filling resulting in the gifting (edidōu) to each one the ability to speak different languages (glōssa in the figurative sense). What is noteworthy of this was what Thayer pointed out about the language spoken in footnote 22, “to speak out, speak forth; not words of everyday speech but “belonging to dignified and elevated discourse.” This point by Thayer was certainly reflective of the response of the visiting Jews in Jerusalem who heard them speak in their individual languages from where they were from. They “were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language,”⁴⁷⁰ literally their own dialect (dialektos | διάλεκτος⁴⁷¹). “And they were all amazed and marveled, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans?”⁴⁷² John MacArthur, well known biblical scholar, educator, author and pastor of Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, CA,⁴⁷³ pointed out the significance of this statement; noted from his published study Bible:

Galileans [were] inhabitants of the mostly rural area of northern Israel around the Sea of Galilee. Galilean Jews spoke with a distinct regional accent and were considered to be unsophisticated and uneducated by the southern Judean Jews. When Galileans were seen to be speaking so many different languages, the Judean Jews were astonished.⁴⁷⁴

What Did the Holy Spirit Explicitly Do?

Of the seventy times that the word *spirit* is mentioned in the Book of Acts,⁴⁷⁵ forty-two of those times are specifically worded as the Holy Spirit. Of the remaining twenty-eight times, eleven were Spirit, in reference to the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, 2:17, 2:18, 6:10, 8:29, 10:19, 11:12, 11:28, 19:21, 20:22, and 21:4); eight were in reference to unclean or evil spirits (Acts 5:15, 8:7, 16:16, 16:18, 19:12, 9:13, 19:15, and 19:16), five were in reference to someone’s own spirit or spirits in general (Acts 7:59, 17:16, 18:25, 23:8, and 23:9); and, of the last four uses of the word *spirit*, two were “the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 5:9 and

⁴⁷⁰ Acts 2:6, NASB.

⁴⁷¹ Thayer, Strong G1258 (dialektos | διάλεκτος), 2) the tongue of language to any people; a dialect.

⁴⁷² Acts 2:7, ASV.

⁴⁷³ Biographical information on John F. MacArthur:
<https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B000APTHF4/about>.

⁴⁷⁴ John MacArthur, *Thomas Nelson NKJV, MacArthur Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), loc 6551, Kindle.

⁴⁷⁵ Appears as *spirit* or *Spirit* in the American Standard Version (ASV). Count of occurrences are from personal study.

8:39), one was “the Spirit of wisdom” (Acts 6:3), and, once was “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7).

Where the Holy Spirit was referred to either as the Holy Spirit, Spirit, Spirit of the Lord, and Spirit of Jesus in Acts, explicit events were also reported. Table 1, below, gives an overview of the roles and actions of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts.

Table 1. Roles and Actions of the Holy Spirit in Acts⁴⁷⁶

Role	Action(s)	Verse(s) in Acts
Gave the Gift of Tongues	The 120 received the gift of speaking the gospel in different languages (tongues).	2:4
Gave the Gift of the Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit is sent as promised	2:17, 2:18
Revealed and Judged Sin in the Church	Ananias and Sapphira's sin judged by the Holy Spirit.	5:3, 5:9
Gave Gift of Healing	Disciples heal the sick being brought to Jerusalem to them.	5:16
Granted Heavenly Wisdom	Selection of men to minister to the Church. Stephen's preaching not refutable.	6:3 6:10
Enables Prayer in the Spirit	Stephen surrenders to Jesus in death.	7:59
Granted Authority over Demons	Disciples cast out evil spirits.	5:16, 8:7, 16:18, 19:12
Guided the Church's Ministry	Spirit guides Philip. Peter guided to Gentiles. Paul prevented from going to Asia. Paul compelled to go to Jerusalem.	8:29, 8:39. 10:19, 11:12. 16:7. 19:21, 20:22.

What Did the Holy Spirit Implicitly Do?

The Holy Spirit was also implicitly active throughout the Book of Acts. This can be seen in the activities surrounding the Church, its growth and expansion, and its impact on communities through the lives

⁴⁷⁶ Table 1 is from a self-study analysis of Acts.

of believers. What follows is a short summary of implicit activities of the Holy Spirit in the Church in Acts:⁴⁷⁷

- The infant Church becomes a vibrant community marked by generosity, witnessing, growth, encouragement, and love: Acts 2:42-47, 5:14, 14:21-28.
- The Disciples perform miracles.
 - Healing of a crippled man: Acts 3.
 - Healing of the sick: Acts 5:15, 9:31-35.
 - Deliverance from evil spirits: Acts 5:16; 8:7.
 - Raising of the dead: Acts 9:36-43.
- Allows persecution to propel the Great Commission: 8:1-3.⁴⁷⁸
 - Growth of the Church outside of Jerusalem: Acts 8:4-13.
 - Growth of the Church includes Gentiles: Acts 10.
- Intervenes Peter's imprisonment: Acts 12.
- Protects Paul and Barnabas during the 1st missionary journey: Acts 13:13-51.
 - Protects Paul from death by stoning: Acts 14:19-20.
- Guides the dispute over circumcision of Gentiles: Acts 15.
- Continues the fulfillment of the Great Commission, continuing with Paul's other missionary journeys.
 - 2nd missionary journey: Acts 16-18:22.
 - 3rd missionary journey: Acts 18:23-21:26.
- Paul's protection during imprisonment and his continued evangelism: Acts 21:27-28:31.
 - Trip to Rome for Paul's appeal to Caesar, shipwrecked in route and no one perished: Acts 27:27-28:10.
 - Paul, while waiting to appeal before Caesar, teaches and preaches for two years under house arrest openly and without restriction: Acts 28:30-31.

The summary texts of these events in Acts predominantly do not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit actualizing them. But one cannot read the Book of Acts without seeing God's hand, through His Holy

⁴⁷⁷ Implicit list is from a self-study analysis of Acts.

⁴⁷⁸ Matt 28:18-20 is known as the Great Commission. Matthew stated this prophecy by Jesus to his Disciples at the end of his gospel. It correlates to Acts 1:8 and to the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4 which enabled it.

Spirit, in the lives of the Disciples and believers. The establishment of the Church in its infancy was a continuance of Luke's gospel, and the continuance of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ's work of redemption through His Church. Dr. Mark Allen Powell, professor emeritus at Trinity Lutheran Seminary,⁴⁷⁹ summarized this in his textbook on the NT:

The relationship between Luke and Acts is especially close. Many scholars have noted that Luke appears to have outlined the two narratives in ways that are remarkably similar. In the Gospel, the ministry of Jesus begins when the Holy Spirit comes upon him; then Jesus preaches a sermon claiming that a text from Isaiah explains why this has happened. In Acts, the mission of the church begins when the Holy Spirit descends upon the believers at Pentecost; then Peter preaches a sermon claiming that a text from Joel explains why this has happened. What do these parallels mean, and why would Luke arrange the two books this way? Perhaps it was simply an artistic way of telling the stories. Possibly he hoped that the similarities would serve a mnemonic function, helping people to remember key moments in the histories of Jesus and the church.

Theologically, he may have wanted to present the church's life and mission as a reduplication of the life and work of Jesus. At the very least, scholars agree, Luke wanted the two books to be read together.⁴⁸⁰

The Holy Spirit in Acts is Pivotal in the Canon

To fully understand the impact of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts there needs to be a basic understanding of how his role and function changed from the OT. Also, a look at the Gospels will show how the work and role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' ministry led to the pivotal aspect of the Book of Acts. Namely, God's Spirit begins to indwell in the hearts of all who believe in Jesus, ubiquitously, after Jesus' Ascension. Until Pentecost this had never happened. Pentecost was a significant pivotal transition of the OT canon to the NT canon in its fulfillment of prophecy. The pivotal significance can be better understood by looking at the work and role of the Holy Spirit in the OT and in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ as seen in the gospels.

⁴⁷⁹ Biographical information on Dr. Mark Allen Powell can be found at this hyperlink: [Mark Allan Powell Baker Academic Author | Baker Academic](#).

⁴⁸⁰ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2018), 371, Kindle.

The Holy Spirit as Revealed in the Old Testament (OT)

The OT also contains many references to the Holy Spirit. To exegete every reference exceeds the boundaries of this research paper. What follows is a short summary of some of the major references of the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit, in the OT.

Table 2. Role of God's Spirit in the OT⁴⁸¹

Phrase	Event / Comment	Verse(s)
his holy Spirit	God is Merciful with Israel	Isa 63:10, 63:11
thy holy Spirit	David's confession of sin	Psalms 51:11
his Spirit	Creation (Job) Judgment on Israel (Zechariah) Judgment on Edom (Isaiah) Rebuking Israel (Isaiah)	Job 26:13 Zech 7:12 Isa 34:16 Isa 48:16
my Spirit	Prophecy against alliance with Egypt [not of my Spirit] Noahic Flood Haggai prophesied to Zerubbabel Ezekiel's dry bones vision Covenant of the Redeemer Pour out my Spirit Restoration of Israel Prophecy God's choosing of Israel Wisdom - pour out my spirit upon you God's Promise of a new heart and Spirit Zechariah commanded to prophesy to Zerubbabel	Isa 30:1 Gen 6:3 Hag 2:5 Eze 37:14 Isa 59:21 Joel 2:28, 29 Eze 39:29 Isa 44:3 Prov 1:23 Eze 36:27 Zech 4:6
Spirit of God	Joseph's Rise to Prominence Bezalel - Lead Temple Artisan Came upon Azariah, he prophesied to Asa Job acknowledges every breath is from God Creation Balaam prophesied a blessing on Israel Job recognized that God's Spirit was in the act of creation Zechariah was stoned for prophesying Saul judges the Ammonites by the Spirit of God Saul's anointing by Samuel Saul's messengers prophesy	Gen 41:38 Exo 31:3; 35:31 2 Chron 15:1 Job 27:3 Gen 1:2 Num 24:2 Job 33:42 Chron 24:20 1 Sam 11:6-11 1 Sam 10:10 1 Sam 19:20 1 Sam 19:23

⁴⁸¹ Content in Table 2 is from self-study.

	Saul prophesied	
Spirit of Jehovah	Obadiah fears for his life in front of Elijah The Spirit of Jehovah in the midst of the assembly God is merciful with Israel Ezekiel's dry bones vision & prophesying Micah's prophesying Micah prophesied against Israel's sin David anointed by Samuel Isaiah foretells Jesus' ministry	1 Kings 18:12 2 Chron 20:14 Isa 63:14 Eze 11:5, 37:1 Micah 2:7 Micah 3:8 1 Sam 16:13 Isa 61:1
the Spirit	Temple's design by David was from the Spirit Isaiah's Prophecy about Jesus Amasai recognized David's anointing Ezekiel's call & visions Ezekiel's vision of God's glory returning to the Temple Eldad & Medad prophesied in the camp God gives His Spirit to chosen Elders (wilderness) Joshua to succeed Moses	1 Chron 28:12 Isa 32:15 1 Chron 12:18 Eze 2:2; 3:12,14,24; 8:3; 11:24 Eze 43:5 Num 11:26 Num 11:17,25 Num 27:18
The spirit of Elijah	The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha; Elisha succeeds Elijah	2 Kings 2:15
thy good Spirit / thy Spirit is good	God's provision of manna A sermon on God's Spirit as Teacher	Neh 9:20 Psalm 143:10
thy Spirit	God's Spirit in creation God's Spirit is Omnipresent God sent prophets by his Spirit	Psalm 104:30 Psalm 139:7 Neh 9:30

Referencing Table 2, the Holy Spirit's activity was limited and specific in the OT. The OT does not show or teach the Holy Spirit as a part of the triune Godhead as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To Israel, the work and Role of the Holy Spirit were understood as an

extension of God himself. Manifested in temporary empowerments, like the Judges of Israel, or the gifting of craftsmanship in the creation of the artifacts of the Tabernacle. The Spirit of the Lord was given to Moses, the appointed elders of Israel in the wilderness, and to both Saul and David for the empowerment of their leadership. These are just a few of the examples, along with the gifting of forth-telling and foretelling of the prophets, the Spirit of God is seen as an extension of him, given in special gifting and not given as an indwelling in the hearts of Israel. The Tabernacle and Temple were the primary residences of God, other than the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. God wanted to dwell in fellowship with Israel and be present with them as part of his covenant with them.

The covenant requirements were part of the calling out of Israel through the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel as a nation failed at keeping the covenant for hundreds of years as can be seen in the history of the OT. But God remained faithful to His covenant, the OT prophets foretold the coming of the final king and that God would make a new covenant with His people. We see the beginning of these prophecies being fulfilled with the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit in the Ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Gospels present the Holy Spirit as actively working through Christ during his ministry and through his Disciples for service as gifted to them by him. The Gospels can be viewed as a preamble to the Holy Spirit’s role prior to Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The stage was set for the risen redeemer king to empower his Church to give the message of redemption and salvation to the world. But first, the foundational messengers and establishers of the Church needed to be tutored, taught, and mentored personally by Jesus himself. Table 3 gives a summary of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels.

Table 3. Role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels⁴⁸²

Role	Event	Verse(s)
Affirmed Jesus as	The conception of Jesus was by the Holy Spirit.	Matt 1:18, Luke 1:35

⁴⁸² Robert L. Deffinbaugh, “Acts: Christ at Work Through His Church, 40, The Holy Spirit in the Gospels (Appendix A)” Bible.org, August 13, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/40>. The Holy Spirit in the Gospels (Appendix A) | Bible.org. [This table’s (Table 3) summary was extracted from the content of Deffinbaugh’s article.]

God's Son	Mary's cousin Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary was pregnant and visited her.	Luke 1:41-45
	Filling John the Baptist's father Zacharias at John's birth	Luke 1:67-79
	Simon, a man who had the Holy Spirit, recognized Jesus as Messiah at Jesus' infant dedication.	Luke 2:25-35
	Prophetess Anna in the temple at Jesus' infant dedication prophesied Jesus as the Redeemer.	Luke 1:36-38
	God the Father acknowledges his son Jesus at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist.	Matt: 3:17, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32-33
Led in Jesus' Ministry	Jesus was led into the desert for forty days and nights where Jesus was tempted by the Devil.	Matt 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1
	Jesus returned from the desert in the power of the Holy Spirit.	Luke 4:14
	Jesus declared his ministry and that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1.	Luke 4:18
	Jesus rejoiced over the report from the seventy he had sent and the further revealing of his sonship.	Luke 10:21-24
	John the Baptist acknowledged Jesus as the Savior to his Disciples.	John 3:25-36
	Jesus proclaimed he is the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1.	Matt 12:18
	Jesus drove out demons by the Holy Spirit as proof that the kingdom of God had arrived.	Matt 12:28
Will Testify of Jesus as Savior	Jesus' words are the words of the Spirit.	John 6:63.
	The work of the Holy Spirit will bring men to repentance.	John 16:8-11
	Have to be born of the Spirit	John 3:5-6,8
	Jesus declared that he gives new life, "living waters," to all who will come to him.	John 7:37-39
Will Indwell	Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to believers, to be in them forever.	John 14:16-17

Believers	The Holy Spirit will be given by God to all who ask for him.	Luke 11:13
	The Holy Spirit will be the presence of Jesus with his followers.	John 14:16-18
Will Empower Believers	The Holy Spirit will empower the Great Commission.	Matt 28:19, Luke 24:48-49, John 15:26-27
Will Guide & Teach	The Holy Spirit will guide worship with the Father.	John 4:23-24
	The Holy Spirit will guide testimony under duress.	Matt 10:20, Mark 13:11, Luke 12:12
	The Holy Spirit will teach and guide believers.	John 14:26, John 15:13, 16:15

In the Gospels, the role of the Holy Spirit went hand in hand with the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit descended and rested on Jesus at his baptism, this was testimony to John the Baptist, and the others present, that upon Jesus rested the full power and authority of God. Confirmed by God's acknowledgement, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."⁴⁸³ And from that event forward the entire ministry of Jesus was in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was during Jesus' ministry, before his Ascension, that he taught his Disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁴ He also gifted them the Holy Spirit⁴⁸⁵ and spoke of him as being part of the Godhead.⁴⁸⁶ It would be through the Holy Spirit that they, and others, would always have the presence of the Lord constantly with them.⁴⁸⁷ Jesus' ministry was the transition from the OT work of the Spirit of God to the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit that will dwell in the hearts of all believers as Jesus had promised.

The Holy Spirit in the Other New Testament (NT) Books

What the pivotal work of the Holy Spirit produced out of his work through the infant Church of the Book of Acts can be seen in the rest of the NT canon. The NT has many references to the Holy Spirit in the Epistles and in Revelation. To exegete each reference exceeds the boundaries of this research paper. The work of the Holy Spirit beyond

⁴⁸³ Matthew 3:17, NASB.

⁴⁸⁴ Acts 1:8.

⁴⁸⁵ John 20:22.

⁴⁸⁶ John 15:26-27; Matt 28:19.

⁴⁸⁷ John 14:16-18.

Acts is reflected in the continuous indwelling, empowering, gifting, teaching, and guidance of believers. Table 4 is a summary of the role and work of the Holy Spirit in the rest of the NT.

Table 4. Role of the Holy Spirit in the Rest of the NT⁴⁸⁸

Role	Epistle / Book	Verse(s)
Bearer of God's love in a believer's heart	Romans	Rom 5:5
Frees from the law	Romans, 2 Corinthians	Rom 7:6, Rom 8:2,4; 2 Cor 3:17-18
Gives Life and Peace	Romans	Rom 8:6
Lives in all believers	Romans, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, James, 1 Peter, 1 John	Rom 8:9-11, Eph 1:13, 2:22, 3:16; 2 Tim 1:14, 4:22; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22; James 4:5; 1 Pet 4:14; 1 John 3:24, 4:13
Put to death the deeds of the body	Romans	Rom 8:13
Grants sonship	Romans, Galatians	Rom 8:14-16, Gal 4:6
Intercedes for believers	Romans	Rom 8:26-27
Grants love, righteousness, peace, joy, unity	Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians	Rom 14:13-17; 15:30, Gal 5:5, Eph 4:3-5, Col 1:8, 1 The 1:6
Gives overflowing hope	Romans	Rom 15:13
Sanctifies believers	Romans; Galatians; 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter	Rom 15:16, Gal 5:24-25, 2 The 2:13; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:2
Spirit comes by Faith, not Law	Galatians	Gal 1:2-4, 14; 5:16-18
Fruits of the Spirit	Galatians	Gal 5:22-23

⁴⁸⁸ Content in Table 4 is from self-study.

Gives Eternal Life	Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 Peter	Gal 6:8, Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 3:6, 5:5, Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 3:18
Fills believers	Ephesians	Eph 5:18
Creates fellowship	Philippians, 1 Corinthians	Phil 2:1; 1 Cor 12:12-13
Guides worship	Philippians, Jude	Phil 3:3; Jude 20-21
Warns against false teaching	1 Timothy, 1 Corinthians, 1 John, Jude	1 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Cor 12:3; 1 John 4:1-6; Jude 19
Empowers believers, grants love and self-control	2 Timothy, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians	2 Tim 1:6, 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 6:6
Reveals God	1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation	1 Cor 2:10-14; 2 Cor 3:3; Heb 10:15-18; 1 Pet 1:12; 1 John 5:5-8; Rev 2:7,11,17,29, 3:6,13,22
Gifts of Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, Discerning of spirits, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues.	1 Corinthians, Hebrews, Revelation	1 Cor 12:7-11; Heb 2:4, 3:7-11, 9:8; Rev 1:10, 3:1, 4:2,5, 5:6, 14:13, 17:3, 19:10, 21:10, 22:17
Inspired all Scripture	2 Peter	2 Pet 1:21

The activities of the Holy Spirit are prominent throughout the NT. Beginning with the ministry of Jesus (Table 3) and establishing the beginning of the Church in Acts (Table 1), the Holy Spirit continued his work in the early Church as evidenced in the rest of the NT (Table 4).

It is interesting to note that in Ephesians 5:18, Paul used a similar word for filled by the Holy Spirit as used in Acts 2:4, in reference to admonishing believers to live lives of light in a dark and evil world. Paul wanted them to “understand what the will of the Lord is”⁴⁸⁹ and directed that believers open themselves to the Holy Spirit’s leading and living through them. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein

⁴⁸⁹ Ephesians 5:17.

is excess; but be filled (plēroōsthe | πληροῦσθε)⁴⁹⁰ with the Spirit.”⁴⁹¹ The filling here is the idea of cramming all you can into something, being so completely full that there cannot be room for anything else. Paul’s admonishment was reminiscent of the Holy Spirit’s filling at Pentecost in Acts 2:4.

Also, it is interesting to note in this verse that Paul used the metaphor of drunkenness. A state of being so filled with wine that it causes one to lose self-control. Being filled with the Spirit is to also be so filled up with the Spirit that it overwhelms our self-control. One cannot help but think of the immediate reaction by some of the Jews at Pentecost who thought that the 120 were drunk, “but others were mocking and saying, ‘They are full of sweet wine.’”⁴⁹² Paul could very well have been making a correlation to Pentecost here as well. Most definitely his admonishment was that believers give themselves over to the control of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life. The verses that immediately follow Ephesians 5:18⁴⁹³ are also reminiscent of how the infant Church in Acts, through the Holy Spirit, had a communion of fellowship, generosity, sharing, and subjection to one another in Christ as seen in Acts 4:32-37. This was all due to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Similarities and Differences in the Role of the Holy Spirit in the OT and NT

The Holy Spirit was limited in his filling and empowering of OT saints as opposed to how he has been given ubiquitously to all NT believers since Pentecost. God’s Spirit was given by him selectively in the OT. For example, God gave his Spirit to Joseph in his rise to prominence in Egypt.⁴⁹⁴ His Spirit was given for the establishment of the seventy elders to help Moses rule the sojourning nation.⁴⁹⁵ God gave his Spirit in the creation of the artifacts of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant to Bezalel (Exodus).⁴⁹⁶ God gave his Spirit to individuals of leadership, to do his work, as in the case of empowering the Judges and later in the anointing of Saul⁴⁹⁷ and David⁴⁹⁸ when the

⁴⁹⁰ Thayer, Strong G4137 (plēroōsthe | πληροῦσθε), Thayer: to fill to the full. Strong emphasizes the meaning to be to *make replete*, that is, (literally) to *cram*.

⁴⁹¹ Ephesians 5:18.

⁴⁹² Acts 2:13.

⁴⁹³ Ephesians 5:19-21.

⁴⁹⁴ Genesis 41:38.

⁴⁹⁵ Numbers 11:17,25.

⁴⁹⁶ Numbers 31:3; 35:31.

⁴⁹⁷ 1 Samuel 10:10.

⁴⁹⁸ 1 Samuel 16:13.

kingdom was inaugurated. God gave his Spirit to David in his design of the temple.⁴⁹⁹ And the Spirit was present and active in the beginning of Creation.⁵⁰⁰

By contrast, from Pentecost forward, God's Spirit is given to all NT believers, not just some or a few, but everyone! "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ."⁵⁰¹

In the textbook *A Survey of the Old Testament* by biblical scholars Dr. Andrew Hill⁵⁰² and Dr. John Walton,⁵⁰³ the authors made two significant statements that should be noted about how the role of the Holy Spirit in the OT differed from its role in the NT. First, the role of the Holy Spirit in the OT was limited in function:

The Spirit of the Lord did not explicitly indwell believers in Old Testament times as the Holy Spirit did after Pentecost. The text speaks of the Spirit's empowering individuals. This empowerment was not the same as the baptism of the Holy Spirit and need not imply spiritual regeneration. ... in both the Old and New Testaments, the Spirit gave people the ability or authority to do what they normally could not have done.⁵⁰⁴

The second differentiator between the OT and NT was how the OT saint understood who the Holy Spirit was. Judaism is monotheistic, Israel had no concept of a triune Godhead.

It is very likely that the Spirit of the Lord was understood by the Israelites, not as a separate entity, but as an extension of Yahweh's power and authority. In this sense the Spirit was viewed as something like "the hand of the Lord" (2 Kings 3:15; Ezek. 1:3; 3:14, 22; et al.; cf. 1 Kings 18:46 KJV). This discontinuity, however, need concern only perception, not reality. That is, we need not doubt that the Spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament was actually a manifestation of the Holy

⁴⁹⁹ 1 Chronicles 28:12.

⁵⁰⁰ Genesis 1:2.

⁵⁰¹ Romans 8:16-17a, NASB.

⁵⁰² Professor of Old Testament Emeritus at Wheaton College.

Background information link: <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-biblical-and-theological-studies/faculty/faculty-emeriti/andrew-hill/>.

⁵⁰³ Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. Background information link: <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/faculty/john-walton/>.

⁵⁰⁴ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 244.

Spirit. Only we cannot assume that the Israelites thought in those terms.⁵⁰⁵

This point was reflected in the names used in reference to the Holy Spirit in the OT as seen in Table 2: his Spirit, my spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Jehovah, the Spirit, the spirit of Elijah, Spirit of wisdom, thy good Spirit, the Spirit is good, and thy Spirit.

Three Connections Between the OT and NT in Relation to Pentecost

Biblical scholars see three major connections between the OT and NT in reference to Pentecost. The first connection has to do with the Tower of Babel. Warren Wiersbe, in his *Be Series* commentary on Acts chapter 1-12 stressed this observation:

Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other, but at Pentecost, men heard God's praises and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost was a ministry of humble submission to God. What a contrast!⁵⁰⁶

God originally confused language because of the pride and arrogance of men in the building of the tower of Babel. Based on God's reaction to the tower, men were not seeking God. They were acknowledging their own technical abilities. Instead of journeying out to populate the earth these first descendants of Noah were settling in proximity and choosing to embrace a common language. God's intervention scattered the descendants by confusing their language and initiated the repopulation of the earth.⁵⁰⁷

The second connection had to do with one of the prophetic books of the OT, the Book of Joel, from which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost to the Jews witnessing the event. Hill and Walton stressed

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12): Experience the Power of God's People (The BE Series Commentary)*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 38.

⁵⁰⁷ Genesis 11:4-9.

that Peter's reference to Joel's prophecy was not a misquote or misunderstanding of that prophecy.

The prophecy of Joel had an impact far beyond the audience that he personally addressed because later interpreters applied it directly to their own generations. This is particularly evident in the apostle Peter's use of Joel's prophecy in the birth of the church at Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came on those in the upper room, the change that occurred in them caused quite a stir among the many visitors who were in Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast. Peter spoke up and immediately explained the phenomenon as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy found in 2:28–32. ... This citation has sometimes perplexed scholars, for it is difficult to see how the endowment of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost had much if anything to do with the “day of the Lord” that was addressed in Joel. Peter's use of this passage, however, need not indicate that he considered the day of the Lord to have arrived. The apostles' situation had two significant similarities with the prophecy of Joel—the endowment of the Spirit, and the need of the moment to call upon the Lord and be saved. ... Peter was free to identify the events of Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel in the sense that there were certain ways that the events of Pentecost shed some appropriate light on what Joel had to say, and vice versa.⁵⁰⁸

Additionally, it must be noted that Peter's explanation to the confounded Jews was delivered by means of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. His entire sermon was a bold declaration of what God had just done with the arrival of the Holy Spirit that day. Under the direct guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter pointed to the prophecy of Joel as the explanation.⁵⁰⁹

The third connection also has to do with prophecy, Jeremiah's prophecy about the New Covenant.

The early Christians believed the Jewish Scriptures provided a record of God's covenant (or testament) with Israel. But Christians also believed God had done something new in Jesus Christ, and they found language to describe this in Jeremiah 31:31–34, where the prophet speaks of God making a “new

⁵⁰⁸ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 600.

⁵⁰⁹ Acts 2:14–36.

covenant” (see also Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).⁵¹⁰

The NT references listed in Powell’s quote for Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, and 1 Cor. 11:25 all have to do with the Lord’s Supper. In that event Jesus stated that his blood is the New Covenant. As stated in Luke, “this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”⁵¹¹ The prophetic passage in Jeremiah was the declaration of the Lord about a new covenant.

“I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it ... they will all know me ... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”⁵¹²

This third connection was that Jesus’ sacrifice brought about the beginning of the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost causes all believers to know God personally in their hearts through the New Covenant of the blood of Jesus.

Has the Role of the Holy Spirit Changed Today?

Pentecost was almost two thousand years ago. Ever since that event, the evidence of the promise of the Holy Spirit has persisted, through the centuries, in the hearts and lives of believers. Evangelicals acknowledge that it is the Holy Spirit who brings us to Christ and fills us at salvation. This role has continued in the ministry of the Church since Pentecost. Wiersbe notes, “It is important to note that God’s pattern for today is given in Acts 10:43–48: Sinners hear the Word, they believe on Jesus Christ, they immediately receive the Spirit, and then they are baptized.”⁵¹³

But beyond this, do all evangelicals agree as to how the Holy Spirit works today in the mission of the Church? Has the role of the Holy Spirit changed in today’s modern Church since Pentecost?

⁵¹⁰ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 89-90.

⁵¹¹ Luke 22:20, NASB.

⁵¹² Jeremiah 31: 31-34, NASB.

⁵¹³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Daring (Acts 13-28): Put Your Faith Where the Action Is (The BE Series Commentary)*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2009), 84.

Depending on a person's denominational faith practice, the role of the Holy Spirit today may be viewed differently. This writer's family background and faith practice has varied over a lifetime. These include: Latino Pentecostal (grandmother), Latino Christian Missionary Alliance (parents, when the author was a child), mainland USA conservative Baptist (when the author was adolescent), Covenant Presbyterian (post fundamentalist Baptist college), Non-denominational Evangelical (author's parenting years), Evangelical Charismatic (today) and Latino American Baptist (stepmom and late father, today). The importance of stressing Latino was necessary because the faith practices of this author's island origin, Puerto Rico, are different from the same practices in mainland USA. For example, American Baptists are a liberal denomination on the mainland. In Puerto Rico, American Baptists are evangelical and conservative, similar to the Latino Christian Missionary Alliance. Therefore, both are similar to mainland USA conservative Baptists. From this writer's background, there are two different beliefs about the Holy Spirit's role in the ministry of the Church. One belief is that the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Church is as fully vital and active today as it was since Pentecost and the Book of Acts. The other belief is that the Holy Spirit, in the ministry of the Church, is restrained today. Hence the question at hand, has the Holy Spirit's role changed today?

The controversy revolves around two different theological views of the current role of the Holy Spirit, cessationism vs continualism. Dr. Sam Storms, noted biblical scholar, teacher, author⁵¹⁴ and Pastor Emeritus⁵¹⁵ of Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, OK offered a concise definition of the opposing views in a Zondervan Academic Blog series summarizing different topics from his book, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, published by Zondervan:

A **cessationist** is someone who believes that certain spiritual gifts, typically those of a more overtly supernatural nature, ceased to be given by God to the church sometime late in the first century AD (or more gradually through the course of the next few centuries). Cessationists do not deny that God can on occasion still perform miracles, such as physical healing. But they do not believe the spiritual gift of miracles or the gift of healing is given to believers today. Whereas "healing" still

⁵¹⁴ Dr. Sam Storms authorship information from Amazon Books
hyperlink: [Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide: Storms, Sam: 9780310111498: Amazon.com: Books.](#)

⁵¹⁵ Dr. Sam Storms' current ministry information, Bridgeway Church
website hyperlink: [Bridgeway Church: Oklahoma City, OK > Sam Storms.](#)

exists in the life of the church, “healers” do not. God’s people may still experience miracles, but God no longer empowers “miracle workers.” A *continuationist*, by contrast, is a person who believes that all the gifts of the Spirit continue to be given by God and are therefore operative in the church today and should be prayed for and sought after.⁵¹⁶

Dr. Sam Storms is a cessationist and his position is common among many non-Pentecostals and some evangelical biblical scholars. Cessationists also include tongues in the definition of the “overtly supernatural” gifts from Storms’ definition, above. Scholars like John MacArthur and Warren Wiersbe share cessationist positions on the role of the Holy Spirit today. John MacArthur’s view from his study Bible states:

Miracles, healing, languages, and the interpretation of languages were temporary sign gifts limited to the apostolic age and have, therefore, ceased. Their purpose was to authenticate the apostles and their message as the true Word of God, until God’s written Word was completed and became self-authenticating.⁵¹⁷

MacArthur further stated that tongues have ceased since the early Church:

That tongues have ceased should be clear from their absence from any other books in the NT, except Acts. Tongues ceased to be an issue of record or practice in the early church, as the Scripture was being written. That tongues has ceased should be clear also from its absence through church history since the first century, appearing only sporadically and then only in questionable groups.⁵¹⁸

Warren Wiersbe made a point, in one of his commentaries on the Book of Acts, that the apostle Paul does not tell believers that they all must speak in tongues in his epistles.

Today, the gift of tongues is not an evidence of the baptism of the Spirit or the fullness of the Spirit. Paul asked, “Do all speak

⁵¹⁶ Dr. Sam Storms, “Understanding Cessationism from a Continuationist Perspective,” Zondervan Academic, ZA Blog, December 10, 2021, hyperlink: [Understanding Cessationism from a... | Zondervan Academic](#).

⁵¹⁷ MacArthur, *Study Bible*, 6908.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6917.

with tongues?” (1 Cor. 12:30), and the Greek construction demands no as an answer. When Paul wrote to his Ephesian friends about the filling of the Holy Spirit, he said nothing about tongues (Eph. 5:18ff.). Nowhere in Scripture are we admonished to seek a baptism of the Holy Spirit, or to speak in tongues, but we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. Read Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church and note the many references to the Holy Spirit of God and His work in the believer.⁵¹⁹

From the continuationist perspective, Donald Gee (1891-1966),⁵²⁰ one of the co-founders of the Assemblies of God (AoG) in the UK, summarized this position in his book (republished for Kindle 2012), *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*:

There is just one passage sometimes quoted that seems for a moment to give color to the supposition that some of the gifts of the Spirit are not for today. It is the statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8: “Whether there be tongues, they shall cease.” It is strange that some people always fasten on tongues and ignore the fact that prophecy and knowledge are included; these folk usually have a superabundance of the latter and would very strongly repudiate that it had vanished away in their case! But this passage is plainly referring to “when that which is perfect is come” (verse 10), and does not refer to now, when we see through a glass darkly; but to then, when we shall see face to face (verse 12). As a matter of fact, the whole passage strongly proves that we should expect spiritual gifts to remain right up till the end of this age because their divine purpose will not be achieved until that which is perfect is come. It will be generally agreed that this is not yet.⁵²¹

This controversy has no middle ground given the fact that each position centers around the same Scriptures as a proof text for their position, or that there is some silence in the NT after the Book of Acts.

⁵¹⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Daring (Acts 13-28): Put Your Faith Where the Action Is (The BE Series Commentary)*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 86-61.

⁵²⁰ Donald Gee was a noted pastor, teacher, author, and musician. A co-founder of the AoG in the UK. Biographical information by Tony Cauchi, “Donald Gee 1891-1966,” [revival-library.org biography hyperlink: Donald Gee 1891-1966](http://revival-library.org/biography/hyperlink:DonaldGee1891-1966) (revival-library.org).

⁵²¹ Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2007), loc 193, Kindle.

In either case, both positions take the stand that these two attributes support their position, respectively. They clearly stand apart.

So how can it be determined what the role of the Holy Spirit is in the ministry of the Church today? This author offers a solution by arguing that the facts regarding the Spirit and believers today can only be determined by the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual's heart. In the Epistles, every believer is admonished to walk by the Spirit,⁵²² live by the Spirit,⁵²³ be led by the Spirit,⁵²⁴ and pursue the filling of the Spirit.⁵²⁵ Paul admonishes the believers in Corinthians concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the appropriate way to relate to what the Holy Spirit gives to each believer individually. He used the metaphor of the human body. The various parts of the body do not exist in competition with one another but must work in harmony to function as a body. The metaphor is simple yet profound. How or why would a hand be envious or sad that it is not a foot or an ear? It is not meant to be anything other than what God created it to be. The Church as the body of believers needs to allow each part of our corporate spiritual body to exist as intended, whether or not, for example, outward signs of the Spirit are what God has given you.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a

⁵²² Galatians 5:16.

⁵²³ Galatians 5:25.

⁵²⁴ Romans 8:14.

⁵²⁵ Galatians 5:22-23.

hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.⁵²⁶

Conclusion

Since the founding of the Church in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit has been central to the building, empowerment, growth, and sustainment of the ministry of the Church through the centuries. Today, Christians are living proof that the Holy Spirit has been working in the hearts and lives of believers who, by faith, accepted Christ’s work of redemption through His death and resurrection.⁵²⁷ This is directly due to the work of the Holy Spirit as Jesus described and promised to his Disciples in Luke 24:45-53 as quoted in the Introduction. Without the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, the Church would not have been established nor persisted until today.

As a result of exploring the Holy Spirit in the Bible, a common thread must be acknowledged as running throughout the entire canon of the Bible. This common thread is that the Holy Spirit has actively worked both explicitly and implicitly throughout all of Scripture. At no time has the Holy Spirit worked apart from the will and purpose of God. In the OT, we saw in Table 2 that the Holy Spirit explicitly worked from creation, through the flood, in the choosing of Israel, in the building of the Tabernacle and Temple, in the establishment of God’s kingdom, and implicitly in the preservation of the kingly lineage of the King of Kings, Jesus.⁵²⁸

In the NT we saw the work of Christ explicitly in the power of the Holy Spirit (Table 3) and in his foretelling of his arrival. Implicitly the work of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the transformation of all who followed Christ during his ministry and faithfulness to their calling after his ascension. We saw the work of the Holy Spirit explicitly in the Book of Acts (Table 1) as empowerment and gifting of the apostles and believers, both Jews and Gentiles, in the ministry and initial establishment of Christ’s Church. The implicit role and action of the Holy Spirit intermingled throughout the Book of Acts demonstrated the

⁵²⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:1-18.

⁵²⁷ Luke 24:45-47.

⁵²⁸ For example, the Kinsman Redeemer, Boaz, in the Book of Ruth, preserved the Davidic lineage. This lineage is the very lineage of Jesus: Matthew 1:1-17.

vital indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the infant Church. And in the rest of the NT, we saw in Table 4 the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in his role of empowerment for living, ministry, and mission. We can also see the work of the Holy Spirit explicitly in the continuance today of his effects in our individual lives and can know within our hearts as believers that the role of the Holy Spirit, individually and corporately, is implicit in the way he guides us in fellowship⁵²⁹ and in truth.⁵³⁰

So, if all believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, why is it that there is a disagreement among evangelical Christians about the role and extent of the Holy Spirit in the Church today? This writer cannot answer the question in finality for every reader. The points of cessationism and continualism are seated in what appear to be opposite theological interpretations of the same points in Scripture, particularly in regards to the issue of restrained or constricted activity. One must determine which position has more merit within one's own personal convictions. But is that enough? Is it sufficient to flip a coin, so to speak, and pick a theological position that defines what we believe about the Holy Spirit being constrained or not in the ministry of the Church today?

There is a final consideration that must be weighed in this decision. The consideration of what one personally believes about the Holy Spirit. Not what a person attests to, but what a person lives out in their walk.

The role of the Holy Spirit today in a believer and in the Church is dependent upon several decisions, one of which is whether a particular theological point of view employs a filter of understanding by which the Holy Spirit can be seen as constrained or unrestrained. It is with caution that this approach should be adopted because it will directly impact the role of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life. This is where we find ourselves today and must ask a final question about the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life and in the ministry of the Church today.

Does your theological point of view put the Holy Spirit into a box, one wrapped as a nice little package, all tied up with completely defined theological limits and presuppositions on how the Holy Spirit can actualize in a believer and in the Church today? If so, the danger of this is that it could make God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit smaller than us. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are bigger than any man-made perception.

⁵²⁹ Philippians 2:1.

⁵³⁰ John 16:13, 1 John 2:20.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.⁵³¹

If the Holy Spirit is vibrantly active in your heart and mind and in your passion for others and faithfulness to the Lord, then the Holy Spirit is certainly active in you as a member of the body of Christ, in His Church today. What you believe about the Holy Spirit may very well define how much you allow the Holy Spirit to have license to in your life and walk. In 1st Thessalonians we are admonished not to quench the Spirit,⁵³² as in resisting him into silence. But rather, we are commanded to “walk in the Spirit.”⁵³³ The visibility of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church today may be directly correlated to how much of him is embraced or to how much of him is resisted.

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⁵³¹ 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, NASB.

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DEALING WITH DEATH, SUFFERING, AND GRIEF IN LIGHT OF THE SCRIPTURES

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Introduction

This project will explore what the Bible says about human death, including how to deal with grief with the provision of answers regarding the issue of death according to Scriptural teaching. The outcome for the reader will be the acquired understanding about death which will help Christians to deal with grief when they encounter it as a personal experience.

Death as a Universal Reality

Throughout human history, death's significance and its portrayal as an inescapable, universal human experience have profoundly influenced our cultures, beliefs, and perspectives. It serves as a common thread that transcends cultural, religious, and societal boundaries, uniting all individuals, regardless of their background or beliefs. This universality has given rise to the development of rituals, philosophies, and coping mechanisms to navigate the shared experience of mortality.⁵³⁴ Diverse cultures have crafted unique funeral customs, mourning rituals, and traditions to honor the departed and console the living. These practices reflect cultural values, beliefs about the afterlife, and strategies for managing grief.⁵³⁵ The study of death has spurred medical advancements, including a deeper understanding of its causes and methods to prolong life. This knowledge has contributed to public health improvements and the treatment of various diseases.⁵³⁶

The awareness of mortality can profoundly impact individuals psychologically, leading to the fear of death, known as thanatophobia, which can shape behaviors, decisions, and life goals. Grappling with mortality often becomes a part of personal growth and introspection. In essence, death's universal and inevitable presence in the human experience has molded our cultures, beliefs, and philosophies. This influence has given rise to a rich tapestry of responses, ranging from

⁵³⁴ Alicia Skinner Cook and Kevin Ann Oltjenbruns, *Dying and Grieving: Life Span and Family Perspectives* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1989), v.

⁵³⁵ Glen W. Davidson, *Understanding Mourning: A Guide for Those Who Grieve* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 39-48.

⁵³⁶ Cook and Oltjenbruns, *Dying and Grieving*, 24-31.

religious and spiritual interpretations to artistic expressions and philosophical inquiries. Thus, comprehending, and confronting death remains a fundamental facet of human existence.

Death in World Religions

When exploring the concept of death across various religions, one encounters a diverse spectrum of beliefs and interpretations. In contrast to certain religious doctrines, such as Christianity's traditional views, there exist perspectives that perceive death through a different lens. For instance, within some neopagan belief systems, death is not seen as a culmination or a spiritual crisis but rather as a part of an intricate cycle. The focus lies on embracing the harmony between the spiritual essence within the world and the natural progression of existence. This contrasts with prevalent Christian perspectives that often regard death as a consequence of a perceived "fall" or as an embodiment of imperfection. In this alternate viewpoint, death is not merely an end but signifies a transformation—an integral part of an ongoing cycle where cessation heralds the advent of renewal. Symbolized by a sunset and the subsequent emergence of a starry night sky, this perspective highlights the transition from one phase to another within the perpetual cycle of existence.

This parallel understanding of death resonates with the beliefs in certain neopagan traditions, where the sanctity of the natural cycles of birth, maturity, decline, and death is revered. Samhain, a significant observation, exemplifies a time when the influences of death and decay dominate, representing a phase where life gives way to an inevitable conclusion.⁵³⁷ This veneration of the natural order is echoed in various other belief systems where death is not worshiped, but rather its place in the sacred pattern of existence is acknowledged and honored. This comparison highlights the diversity in beliefs regarding death, underscoring how various religions and spiritual traditions perceive and interpret this fundamental aspect of existence, showcasing the richness and complexity of human understanding across different cultures and faiths.

Religions deal with death in different and varied ways, reflecting specific beliefs, rituals and practices. In Islam, for example, death is considered a passage to another life.⁵³⁸ After death, the person

⁵³⁷ Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland and Gerald R. McDermot, *Handbook of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2014), 545.

⁵³⁸ Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academy, 2011), 419-440.

is judged for their actions and taken to Paradise or Hell, according to their actions in earthly life. After death, there is a ritual washing of the body, prayers for the deceased and a quick burial. Belief in the resurrection is fundamental.⁵³⁹

In Buddhism, death is seen as a natural part of life and is considered a transition to another existence.⁵⁴⁰ Reincarnation is a central concept, and death is seen as rebirth. Buddhist rituals after death may involve prayer, meditation, and ceremonies to aid the passing of the deceased's soul.⁵⁴¹

In Judaism, death is seen as part of the divine plan and is treated with respect and reverence.⁵⁴² The burial is carried out as quickly as possible, following specific Jewish traditions. There are mourning rituals, such as the shiva period, in which mourners receive condolences and gather to pray and remember the deceased.⁵⁴³

In Hinduism, death is seen as part of a continuous cycle of rebirth (samsara).⁵⁴⁴ Funeral rituals include cremation of the body, with the belief that releasing the soul from the body is fundamental to its journey after death. After cremation, there are ceremonies and rituals that vary according to regional and family traditions.⁵⁴⁵

Practices and beliefs regarding death vary widely within each religion and can be influenced by different denominations, cultures, and geographic regions. The examples cited above are just a general overview and may vary in different religious and cultural contexts.

A Biblical Perspective on the Origins of Death

Part of the preparation to write about this subject was a conversation with Professor John Stevenson who mentioned the paradox with this idea: “Everybody wants to meet Jesus, but no one wants to die for it.”⁵⁴⁶ The subject of death is not very welcome as a topic of conversation. Therefore, the topic produces discomfort and reluctance to deal with the reality of death as a life experience. In sermons, preachers tend to paint death as a marvelous thing because, from a biblical perspective, those who die are going to meet the Creator. Sure, every Christian wants to meet Jesus in person, and that is only possible after death.

⁵³⁹ Muck, Netland and McDermott, *Handbook of Religion*, 151-156.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 81-86.

⁵⁴¹ Hexham, *Understanding World Religions*, 195-211.

⁵⁴² Muck, Netland and McDermott, *Handbook of Religion*, 115-122.

⁵⁴³ Hexham, *Understanding World Religions*, 293-303.

⁵⁴⁴ Muck, Netland and McDermott, *Handbook of Religion*, 49-55.

⁵⁴⁵ Hexham, *Understanding World Religions*, 131-137.

⁵⁴⁶ Informal conversation at the end of a class in May of 2023.

Navigating through the Bible for the purpose of learning about primary concepts that deal with the issue of death could help to alleviate the distress dealing with death when the time comes. The Bible mentions the fact that “people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”⁵⁴⁷ It also says that from “dust you are and to dust you will return.”⁵⁴⁸ Yes, death will come. Perhaps, some readers have never lost someone close, but those who have will be able to relate to the disorienting feelings that losing a loved one causes.

Death has always been a profound and universal human experience, transcending boundaries of time and culture. It is a topic that has been explored and contemplated by philosophers, theologians, and scholars throughout history. What is the significance of death in human history? As this project is focused on understanding death from a biblical perspective, it is important to examine the concept of human mortality and the account of death rooted in the story of Adam and Eve found in the book of Genesis, specifically in Gen. chapters 2 and 3. This narrative is foundational to the Judeo-Christian understanding of human mortality as linked to the consequences of disobedience to God's command. In summary, the first account of death happened right after the creation of Adam and Eve. In the early chapters of Genesis, God creates the first man, Adam, and places him in the Garden of Eden. Later, God creates the first woman, Eve, from one of Adam's ribs, and she becomes his partner.

Within the Garden of Eden, God places the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and commands Adam and Eve not to eat from it. God warns them that if they do eat from it, they will surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).⁵⁴⁹ After that, the serpent, often associated with Satan, tempts Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. Eve succumbs to the temptation and eats the fruit. Eve also offers it to Adam, and he eats it as well, even though he was aware of God's command (Gen. 3:1-6).⁵⁵⁰ As a result of their disobedience, Adam and Eve's eyes are opened, and they realize their nakedness. They arrange leaves to cover themselves. When God confronts them, they confess their disobedience. After this situation, God pronounces consequences for their disobedience, and

⁵⁴⁷ Hebrews 9:27. All the Bible citations will be from NIV version. In case of the use of a different version, the version will be mentioned.

⁵⁴⁸ Genesis 3:19.

⁵⁴⁹ “And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

⁵⁵⁰ Special attention to verse 6: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

one of the key consequences is the introduction of physical death into the world. God tells Adam that he will return to the dust from which he was formed: *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*⁵⁵¹ God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to prevent them from eating from the Tree of Life, which would have allowed them to live forever in their fallen state.⁵⁵²

This story is central to the understanding of human mortality in the Bible. It teaches that death entered the world as a consequence of human disobedience and sin. From a Christian theological perspective, this narrative also lays the groundwork for the need for redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ, who is often seen as the "second Adam" who offers the hope of eternal life to those who believe in him.

Based on the context mentioned above and according to F. Davidson⁵⁵³ and D. A. Carson,⁵⁵⁴ it is possible to comprehend that men were created as immortal living beings, however, when sin became a part of the life of humans, the inner glory faded away and humanity started to be defined by material aspects. This does not imply that humans ceased to be spiritual beings or lost any essential aspect of their nature. Instead, it means that they began living according to earthly and material concerns, rather than pursuing their intended higher purpose.

The book of Genesis lays the foundation for the understanding of human mortality and the consequences of sin in the biblical narrative. It illustrates the reality of death as a result of the fallen state of humanity and the need for redemption and eternal life through faith in God. Adam and Eve's history marks the beginning of human mortality, but it is only in Gen. chapter 4 that the first physical death occurs.

The story of Cain and Abel was the first situation recorded of human death in the Bible and illustrates the consequences of sin and the destructive nature of jealousy, leading to the first human death.⁵⁵⁵ The genealogies in Gen. 5 provide a list of early patriarchs and their lifespans. While many of them lived for several centuries, it is noted that "and he died" follows each patriarch's name, emphasizing mortality.⁵⁵⁶ Throughout this paper, it will become clear that, building

⁵⁵¹ Genesis 3:19.

⁵⁵² Genesis 3:22-24.

⁵⁵³ F. Davidson and Russell P. Shedd, *The New Bible Commentary* (Sao Paulo: Vida Nova, 2005), 87.

⁵⁵⁴ D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, *The New Bible Commentary* (Sao Paulo: Vida Nova, 2009), 106.

⁵⁵⁵ Genesis 4.

⁵⁵⁶ Genesis 5: 5, 8, 11.

upon Old Testament theology, Christianity interprets death as a journey to eternal life or judgment.⁵⁵⁷

Dealing with Mortality: The Fear of Death, Grief, and Mourning

Normally, people tend to ignore the issue of mortality. Some avoid talking about the topic, others choose just to ignore it and live as if there were no tomorrow. Fabricio Carpinejar is a Brazilian writer and has become popular in the past decade. He is the author of more than 40 books on varied subjects such as poetry, relationship advice, chronicles and journalism reports, and the holder of several literary awards. In 2020-2021, in the middle of the COVID pandemic, he decided to write a book titled *Later is Never*,⁵⁵⁸ which contains several accounts of relationship losses and grief. In the book, he emphasizes the difficulty that people have in dealing with death, and the fact that this subject is totally ignored in everyday life:

No one believes in death until it happens in the middle of their life, catching a person they love. Death is like the devil, it grows more in disbelief. Our habit is not to take it seriously due to overprotectiveness. Thinking about death is dying a little together, and being contaminated by it. In our relationships we don't talk about the end, we avoid talking about inheritances or insurance, we shake off bad feelings, we knock on wood three times. Only life matters, in a positive effort not to rush fatalities.⁵⁵⁹

Fear of death can be influenced by different cultural, religious, and personal beliefs. For many people, it is a natural fear, as death represents the unknown and the end of existence. However, acceptance of mortality can ultimately lead to a deeper appreciation of life and a greater prioritization of meaningful relationships and achievements. This fear of death is presented in Dr. Ana Claudia Quintarana Arantes' book based on treatments and experiences with people in palliative care. Her work as an on-call doctor became the House of Caring Association, a type of hospice focused on providing assistance in the final days of life.⁵⁶⁰ The aim of the association is also to teach others

⁵⁵⁷ James Watkins, *Death and Beyond: Answers to Teens' Questions About Death, Reincarnation, Ghosts, and the Afterlife* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1993), 37-45.

⁵⁵⁸ Translated by Google Translator Tool.

⁵⁵⁹ Fabricio Carpinejar, *Depois e Nunca* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil Ltda., 2021), 13. This portion was translated by Google Translator Tool.

⁵⁶⁰ Original name in Portuguese: Associação Casa do Cuidar – Located in São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

how to take care of people who are dealing with terminal diseases or cases of dementia and other conditions that can affect seniors. As a doctor of palliative care, she made the following observation, “Faced with the diagnosis of a serious illness, people suffer from the moment the diagnosis is made. The announced death brings the possibility of a quick encounter with the meaning of life, but it also brings the anguish of perhaps not having enough time to experience this encounter.”⁵⁶¹

The fear of death is one of the deepest and most universal concerns of the human condition. This fear can be attributed to several reasons, such as the fact that it represents the great mystery about what happens in the after life. Uncertainty about what to expect creates anxiety; it also incisively implies the loss of existence. Life is familiar, and the unknown of death is unsettling. Relationships and connections with others and the world are essential to the human experience. Death severs these connections, which can be distressing. Cultural and religious beliefs play a significant role in how people perceive death. Fear can be aggravated or alleviated by these beliefs. Death is often beyond our control. This can be scary, as human beings have a natural desire to control their lives and their destiny.

To face the fear of death, many people seek to understand and find meaning in life. This may involve setting goals, building meaningful relationships, and finding purpose. Furthermore, acceptance of mortality, although challenging, can lead to a deeper appreciation of life and the desire to live meaningfully. It is important to remember that fear of death is a common experience and, in many cases, a natural part of the human condition. Open conversations about death, as well as emotional and spiritual support, can help people deal with this fear healthily. Coping with the loss of a loved one is one of the most challenging and painful experiences human beings face. This becomes even more complex when we realize more acutely that all people will eventually die because this implies that loss is inevitable.

Stages of Grief

To deal with death and loss, psychologists and doctors around the world study and advocate informing people to help humans deal with death. Almost 50 years ago, motivated by curiosity and engagement with the experiences of her patients, Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross developed a theory worldwide known as “the five stages of grief” featured in her book *On Death and Dying*. Although the author had mentioned that her work was not created to be “a textbook on how to

⁵⁶¹ Ana Claudia Quintana Arantes, *A morte e um dia que vale a pena viver* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2019), 40.

manage dying patients” and not “intended as a complete study of the psychology of the dying,” the book became a reference for studies and discussions on grief.⁵⁶² Kubler-Ross’ theory states that grief has five phases, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, and people manage to deal with those feeling in the process of a loss. She also mentioned that “these stages overlap, occur together, or even that some reactions are missed altogether.”⁵⁶³

Based on the assumption that the fear of death is a universal concern and deeply rooted in the human experience, Kübler-Ross argues that people often go through several emotional phases when facing death, as mentioned. Basically, the phases consist of “denying the reality of death, often refusing to accept that they are facing their own mortality or that of a loved one,” followed by anger directed at various sources, including against the person who is dying, God, the health system, or anything that may be involved in the situation.⁵⁶⁴ The bargaining phase generates in the mourner an effort to find a way out.⁵⁶⁵ People generally make promises or try to negotiate in some way, seeking to postpone or avoid death, including looking for sometimes experimental treatments that prolong the patient's suffering. As the reality of the situation sets in, depression can deepen, leading to feelings of sadness and despair.⁵⁶⁶ Finally, according to the author, the last phase arrives, where many people come to accept death where they find a certain degree of peace and resolution.⁵⁶⁷ These phases are not necessarily experienced by all people or in any specific order, but they provide a framework for understanding the complex emotions associated with death.

The five stages of grief could be referred to as an elemental structure, also called “monomyth,” according to the experts in the field of the study of grief, Jason Holland and Robert Neimeyer.⁵⁶⁸ The idea is that “closure and hope” for the person suffering with the loss could be possible. However, Dr. Magda Romanska explained in her article about the difficulties of losing a loved one, especially the problem with the

⁵⁶² “Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and The Five Stages of Grief,” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation, accessed October 05, 2023, <https://www.ekrfoundation.org/5-stages-of-grief/5-stages-grief/>.

⁵⁶³ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation, “Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.”

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 63-96.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 93-96.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 97-122.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 123-146.

⁵⁶⁸ Magda Romanska, “‘5 Stages of Grief’ is a Myth — and Knowing That Helps Us Better Cope with Loss,” Academia, last modified August 11, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/106122121/_5_Stages_of_Grief_is_a_Myth_and_Knowing_That_Helps_Us_Better_Cope_with_Loss.

feeling that the person is immortal to you (as in living forever in your heart), though the deceased is already gone. She stated that it is not possible for the person grieving to be comforted in this mental state because the brain cannot “find” the person in the “virtual map” of the inner imagination.⁵⁶⁹

Coping with the loss of a loved one takes time, emotional support, and understanding. Each individual will face the grieving process in a unique way, but it is essential to recognize the importance of allowing oneself to feel, share emotions, and seek support from friends, family, or mental health professionals when necessary. The knowledge of our mortality can remind us of the importance of valuing our relationships and seeking meaning in life in the midst of facing the challenge of losing loved ones.⁵⁷⁰

Dr. Robert Neimeyer engages in a critique of Ruth Davis Konigsberg's work "The Truth About Grief" (2011), highlighting the tendency of grief theorists and researchers to uphold self-serving models of mourning.⁵⁷¹ These models tend to overlook the innate resilience often present in individuals experiencing grief and raise questions about the effectiveness and necessity of specific types of grief counseling. He concludes his review of her work stating:

The presumption that all loss is devastating and merits intervention, and the belief that treatment, whenever it is offered, is efficacious. But it also sometimes suffers from errors of commission and more often from errors of omission and simplification. As such, it can be counted a substantive as well as commercial success to the extent that it fosters, rather than forecloses, the reader's curiosity about a field of scholarship and practice that is quickly evolving, offering surprising new insights and interventions relevant to grief in its adaptive and less adaptive manifestations.⁵⁷²

Christian Redemption and Hope

Accepting death is a deeply personal and emotional issue, and different people try to cope in different ways. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach that considers religious, psychological, and

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Robert Neimeyer, “The (Half) Truth about Grief,” Academia, accessed November 2023, https://www.academia.edu/107261773/The_Half_Truth_about_Grief?email_work_card=view-paper.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

social elements can offer a more complete understanding of the topic. Grief psychology is a field of study that focuses on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions of people who are experiencing the loss.⁵⁷³ Yet, the religious resources are crucial, especially the biblical understanding at the core of the convictions that are part of Christian spirituality. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, death is treated as part of the human condition. However, the New Testament also brings the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ, which is seen as a response to the separation caused by sin. For example, in Romans 6:23, we read: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin introduced death into the human experience. Therefore, death became part of the human condition as a result of the fall. In short, the Bible does not talk about the creation of death as a specific event but describes death as a consequence of human disobedience and sin. In contrast to these considerations about the introduction of death, the New Testament also presents the hope of eternal life through redemption in Christ for those who have faith.

The resurrection of the dead and eternal life are essential concepts in Scripture, offering hope beyond death. The idea is that although death is a reality for all human beings, faith in Christ leads to eternal life in communion with God. Therefore, the belief that Christians do not need to fear death is a fundamental part of Christian theology and is based on the Scriptures and teachings of the Christian faith. According to Scripture, Christians traditionally should not fear death. The Bible teaches that death is not the end but the beginning of eternal life in the presence of God. This is based on the belief that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and offered the promise of resurrection to those who have faith in Him. Passages such as John 3:16 and John 11:25 affirm this belief in eternal life.⁵⁷⁴

In summary, Christians believe that death is not an eternal punishment but rather a step toward redemption from sins and reconciliation with God. Through faith in Christ, they trust in God's grace for salvation and forgiveness of sins, which lessens the fear of judgment after death.⁵⁷⁵ After death, those who believed will be in the presence of God, enjoying peace and communion with Him. This

⁵⁷³ "Grief," Psychology topics, American Psychological Association, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief#:~:text=Grief%20often%20includes%20physiological%20distress,%2Dneglect%2C%20and%20suicidal%20thoughts.>

⁵⁷⁴ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die'" (John 11:25).

⁵⁷⁵ Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27.

brings comfort and eliminates the fear of loneliness and the unknown after dying.⁵⁷⁶ The communion of saints is an integral part of the Christian faith, meaning believers believe they are united with other Christians, living in the afterlife in one spiritual body.

This offers comfort and spiritual support. Christians see death as a short-term defeat, but resurrection as the final victory over death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is seen as the guarantee that death does not have the last power over believers.⁵⁷⁷ These beliefs and teachings provide a solid foundation for the certainty that Christians do not need to fear death but, rather, can embrace it as a transition to eternal life with God.⁵⁷⁸

Scriptural Examples of Suffering, Mourning and Expressions of Grief

The Bible is full of accounts of individuals who faced death and its challenges, offering valuable lessons for modern life. Here the discussion explores some of these characters, their responses, and victories, and how we can apply these lessons today.

Within the Bible, the theme of suffering is approached in several ways, and there is a deep reflection on the nature of human suffering. Suffering is portrayed as an inherent reality of the human condition, but also as part of a larger context that includes hope, redemption, and purpose. Abraham faced God's painful test when he was instructed to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Demonstrating unshakable faith, he obeyed God despite the anguish it caused him. God provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac, showing that He honors faith and obedience. The story of Abraham teaches us to trust God even in the most challenging situations, knowing that He can provide surprising solutions.

Another example can be found in the book of Job. The Bible recognizes suffering as something present in the lives of all people. In the book of Job, for example, Job goes through great losses and suffering, questioning God about the reason for his suffering, but ends up finding comfort and understanding in the midst of his trials. He faced the loss of his health, possessions, and loved ones, questioning why God allowed his suffering. Still, Job maintained his faith despite the adversities, although he also expressed his suffering and questions to God. Ultimately, God restored Job's life twofold and revealed His

⁵⁷⁶ Revelation 21.

⁵⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

⁵⁷⁸ However, it is essential to note that interpretations and emphases may vary between Christian denominational perspectives, and not all Christians may have the same understanding of death and the afterlife.

sovereignty. Job teaches us to persevere in our faith, even when we do not understand God's purpose in the midst of suffering.

The apostle Paul faced persecution and death threats in his mission to spread Christianity. The New Testament, especially in Paul's letters, disserts about the importance of finding comfort and hope even in times of suffering. In Romans 8:18, Paul writes, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." The Bible also suggests that suffering can be part of God's greater plan. An example is found in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul talks about his "pimple in the flesh," a suffering that accompanies him, and how this keeps him humble and dependent on God's Redemption. Paul continued his work with courage and faith, facing countless adversities. He saw the church's growth and wrote inspiring letters that make up a significant part of the New Testament. Paul's life teaches us to persevere in our faith, even in the face of opposition, and to continue serving others.

Jesus faced death on the cross, one of humanity's most significant trials. He accepted God's will and offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. His resurrection symbolizes victory over death and the promise of eternal life. Even in the face of death, there can be hope and redemption, and Jesus is the way to eternal life. Death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to the Christian faith. Jesus' crucifixion is seen as a supreme example of redemptive suffering. This is mentioned in several passages, such as Isaiah 53, where it prophesies of the Messiah suffering for the sins of many. While the Bible recognizes suffering as a human reality, it also offers comfort, hope, and purpose, often through trust in God and the quest to understand His greater plan. It is important to note that different theological interpretations and viewpoints can shape individual understanding of the theme of suffering within the Bible. The biblical references mentioned are just a few among many that address this complex and multifaceted subject.

The stories of these individuals in the Bible show us that, in the face of death and challenges, faith, obedience, and perseverance are crucial. We can apply these lessons to our modern lives by maintaining our faith, trusting God in difficult times, and serving others with love and compassion. Furthermore, we can find hope in the promise of eternal life through our faith in Jesus Christ, remembering that, like these biblical characters, we too can gain victory over life's adversities.

However, the case that I would like to deal with in this section is the case of the prophet Elijah. His is a clear case of depression and mourning, not just for deaths, but also based on frustrations he experienced. The story of the prophet Elijah's depression, reported in the Bible in the book of 1 Kings, chapters 18 and 19, offers deep

insight into the emotional and spiritual condition of one of the most striking characters in the Old Testament. The prophet Elijah was known for his dedication to God, courage, and zeal to fulfill the divine will, but he also went through moments of deep sadness and despair. Elijah's depression is reported after one of the most notable events of his life, the confrontation on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal. In this confrontation, God demonstrated His power and protection to Elijah, consuming the sacrifice with fire from heaven.⁵⁷⁹ However, this spiritual victory was followed by a death threat from Queen Jezebel, who worshiped pagan gods and vowed to kill Elijah. Faced with this threat, Elijah fled into the desert, where his depression deepened.

Some important elements of Elijah's depression include isolation, exhaustion, guilt, and self-blame, interaction with God, and spiritual renewal. Elijah isolated himself in the desert, feeling alone and helpless. He desired death and prayed to God asking him to take his life. During his escape, Elijah was physically and emotionally exhausted. He had walked for an extended period and faced tremendous spiritual pressure. Elijah expressed feelings of guilt, believing that he had failed in his mission and that his efforts were unsuccessful. He felt unworthy of God's protection. God approached Elijah on Mount Horeb, where he asked him a series of questions and heard his lamentations. This demonstrates God's compassion and patience in the face of His servant's affliction. God gave Elijah specific tasks, renewing his purpose and calling. This helped restore the prophet's confidence and motivation.

Elijah's story is an example of how depression can affect even people who are deeply spiritual and dedicated to God. It shows the importance of social and spiritual support, as well as the need to take care of mental health. Furthermore, the story highlights God's understanding and compassion in the face of His children's struggles, offering a message of hope and spiritual renewal. It is important to note that the Bible does not explicitly use the term "depression" to describe Elijah's emotional state, but the narrative provides clear clues about the symptoms and emotional experience he was experiencing. Elijah's story continues to be a source of inspiration and encouragement for those facing similar emotional and spiritual challenges.

Scriptural Suggestions to Deal with Suffering and Help the Community

⁵⁷⁹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, trans. Noemi Valeria Altoe da Silva (Sao Paulo: Vida nova, 2018), 490-494.

The search for specialists, such as psychologists or mental health professionals, to deal with grief and other emotional difficulties is an attitude that finds support in the biblical perspective, as it reflects the search for care and help during times of distress. The Bible does not discourage seeking help from experts or counselors. On the contrary, it highlights the importance of wisdom, advice and support in difficult times. Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no counsel the people fall: but in multitude of counsel there is safety."⁵⁸⁰ This implies that seeking guidance from others is wise and can bring stability and help in times of difficulty.

Furthermore, the Bible emphasizes the importance of caring for mental and emotional health. In passages such as Philippians 4:6-7, the importance of prayer and seeking God's peace is mentioned, but the value of communicating concerns to God and seeking peace through various means, including through support, is also recognized.⁵⁸¹ The work of specialists, such as psychologists, can offer practical tools, therapeutic techniques and a safe space to deal with the emotions and traumas associated with grief. They help people understand their feelings, develop strategies to cope with grief and learn to live with loss, promoting a healthy coping process. Seeking professional help is not a sign of a lack of faith, but rather an important step towards self-care and the emotional healing process. God can use trained professionals to bring comfort, wisdom and guidance, contributing to the restoration and emotional strengthening of people who are experiencing grief. Therefore, in light of the biblical perspective, seeking help from experts to deal with the difficulties of grief is not only acceptable, but can also be a means by which God provides comfort and healing to people in their moments of pain and suffering.

The Bible offers several guidelines on how to deal with grief and support each other during times of suffering. Christians are encouraged to show compassion and offer comfort to those who are suffering. Romans 12:15 says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." This involves being present, listening, showing empathy and comforting those who are going through difficult times.⁵⁸²

The Apostle Paul enforces mutual encouragement as read in 1 Thessalonians 5:11. He encourages Christians to "encourage one another and build each other up," especially in times of difficulty. This

⁵⁸⁰ Bible version NKJV.

⁵⁸¹ "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

⁵⁸² Glen W. Davidson, *Understanding Mourning: A Guide for Those Who Grieve* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 93-98.

can be done through encouraging words, practical support and prayer. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul suggests service and practical support. Galatians 6:2 reads "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." This involves being willing to help in a practical way, offering support with daily tasks, providing meals, taking care of specific needs and offering assistance wherever possible.

Being present is also a helpful factor. Often simply being present, listening, and showing continued love and concern can be a powerful form of support. Proverbs 17:17 states: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."

The Christian faith often points to hope in God during difficult times. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 talks about the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.⁵⁸³ In short, the Bible encourages Christians to be supportive, compassionate, caring, and available to support each other during times of grief and suffering, through words, practical actions and prayers, demonstrating God's love and grace in action.

Suicide: The Topic Churches Never Talk About

The Bible does not explicitly address the topic of suicide directly. However, there are passages that deal with various subjects related to life, death, forgiveness and hope, which, in some cases, are associated with issues involving depression/suicide.⁵⁸⁴ Experiencing the aftermath of a loved one's death by suicide is an immensely challenging journey for survivors.⁵⁸⁵ The stigma attached to suicide often leaves them grappling with feelings of shame, embarrassment, and a sense of isolation. Instead of finding solace and communal support through funeral rituals, survivors might find themselves excluded or marginalized, exacerbating their sense of loss and depriving them of crucial avenues for comfort and solidarity during their grieving process.

Moreover, the social support that individuals typically receive after a suicide is notably lacking compared to other types of death.⁵⁸⁶ Friends and colleagues, feeling uncertain and uncomfortable, may

⁵⁸³ "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

⁵⁸⁴ James Watkins, *Death and Beyond: Answers to Teens' Questions About Death, Reincarnation, Ghosts, and the Afterlife* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1993), 95-99.

⁵⁸⁵ Cook and Oltjenbruns, *Dying and Grieving*, 436.

⁵⁸⁶ Watkins, *Death and Beyond*, 101.

withdraw from interactions with those closest to the deceased, inadvertently leaving the survivors feeling abandoned during their most vulnerable moments when they most desperately seek solace and understanding. For parents who have lost children to suicide, the mourning process is compounded by heightened fears and anxieties. They grapple with the constant worry that their other children might follow a similar path, leading to an overwhelming sense of vigilance and fear when disciplining or correcting their remaining children. These parents navigate a constant struggle between trying to protect their children and battling with the fear that their actions could inadvertently lead to more tragedy.

The impact of suicide on the family extends deeply into the emotional landscape of individual family members. Children left behind after a parent's suicide may grapple with severe emotional turmoil, feeling a sense of unworthiness or rejection, which can profoundly impact their sense of self-worth and identity formation. The complex emotions associated with the suicide of a parent can even lead to destructive behaviors, such as overidentification with the deceased or, in extreme cases, attempts at suicide by the bereaved. The anniversary of the parent's death, the method used, or even the location can become haunting triggers, emphasizing the depth of emotional distress and the struggle to cope.⁵⁸⁷ Furthermore, the dynamics within the family unit can suffer as the truth surrounding the suicide may be hidden or not openly acknowledged.

This secrecy leads to a lack of open communication among family members, fostering anger and bitterness when the truth eventually surfaces. Encouraging honest conversations about suicide within the family becomes crucial, as it not only allows for truthful processing of grief but also fosters trust and healthy relationships among family members, providing a foundation for effective coping mechanisms and mutual support.⁵⁸⁸

It is important to emphasize that the Bible does not offer a clear position on the eternal destiny of people who committed suicide. The main Christian teaching is about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross. Salvation is based on God's grace and mercy, not specific actions, and as per this author understanding, including suicide.

The Bible talks about the forgiveness of sins through Christ. John 3:16 highlights that the love God has for those who believe is supreme, and this could suggest the breadth of God's love and forgiveness surpasses the sins. The Bible emphasizes that only God has

⁵⁸⁷ Cook and Oltjenbruns, *Dying and Grieving*, 472.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 436-439.

the full knowledge and authority to judge people's hearts and circumstances. Romans 14:7, 8 states that everyone must be fully convinced in their own mind, remembering that God is the one who judges.⁵⁸⁹ Also, the Bible talks about God's mercy and compassion. Psalm 103:8 says, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." This passage suggests God's compassionate nature toward those who are suffering.

It is important that, when faced with someone's suicide, there is compassion, empathy and care for the bereaved survivors, without judgment or condemnation. The church and Christians must offer support, understanding, and assistance to people who are suffering or facing mental issues, encouraging the search for professional help and emotional support. It is common to see on social media some pastors judging or stating that they would not participate or preach in those memorial ceremonies, only making the family suffer more.

The biblical approach to dealing with suicide should be marked by compassion, love, and trust in God's mercy, while recognizing the complexity of these situations and the need for care for those who suffer. Dealing with the family of someone who has committed suicide requires a compassionate, loving, and grace-filled approach, especially in light of a biblical perspective. We are called to show genuine compassion and empathy toward the grieving family which involves listening carefully, offering emotional comfort, and being present without judgment. In Romans 12:15, the Bible encourages us to 'weep with those who weep.'⁵⁹⁰ Avoid making hasty judgments or expressing opinions about the deceased or the situation is substantial. The Bible teaches about forgiveness and understanding and urges us not to judge lest we be judged.⁵⁹¹

A great step to be made is to be available to help the family with practical needs, such as arranging a funeral, taking care of day-to-day tasks or simply being there to provide emotional support, as mentioned before. Pray for the bereaved family, asking God for comfort, peace and consolation. Consistent prayer can be a powerful source of strength and comfort, and is an act of love and compassion, especially when remembering that grief often does not go away quickly.⁵⁹² Continue offering support and love to the family after the

⁵⁸⁹ "For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

⁵⁹⁰ "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

⁵⁹¹ Matthew 7:1, 2 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

⁵⁹² Watkins, *Death and Beyond*, 123-130.

first few days of grief. Be willing to listen, to be present and to help as needed, even after the immediate impact of suicide has passed.

It is important to understand that each situation is unique, and the grieving and healing process for the family of someone who has committed suicide can be extremely challenging. Offering love, compassion, and practical support are essential ways to express the love of Christ and share the grace and hope found in the Christian faith.

Conclusion

Human beings die. However, this was not supposed to be a reality in God's creation. We were created in His image, and He is Eternal. Yet, we must face the certainty of death head-on, according to John Piper.⁵⁹³ He emphasizes the need to address death regularly, not just when it is unavoidable but also during times when it seems distant, to ready people for its arrival. He highlights two reasons for this strategy: firstly, death remains an integral part of life, influencing relationships, daily news, and personal encounters. Secondly, he underscores Christianity's unique perspective on death, providing remarkable hope compared to other belief systems that lack positive views. The primary focus revolves around Jesus Christ, particularly His death and resurrection. Christ's death lies at the core of the Christian faith, serving as the pinnacle of His achievements and forming the foundation of the gospel message. Although Jesus died, He is presently alive! This truth demands a continuous and profound contemplation of death as it intricately links with the gospel's core message following Christ.⁵⁹⁴

Piper encourages pastors to address death even when people might evade the topic. He believes ministers who genuinely engage with the reality of death will be sought out for guidance and support. He emphasizes Christ's role in conquering death, transforming its meaning for believers.⁵⁹⁵ However, is this supposed to be applied only in the lives of pastors? What about the body of Christ? Christ brought hope amidst sorrow, turned death into a passage to paradise, refined faith, assured the acquisition of God's glory, and redefined death as a homecoming. Moreover, Christ offered fellowship with God, promised eternal life, and restructured death as an act of worship. Rejecting this message would essentially mean rejecting the Son of God and the

⁵⁹³ John Piper, "Deal with Death," *Desiring God*, last modified May 25, 2008, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/deal-with-death>.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

salvation offered through His sacrifice. It urges a steadfast commitment to sharing the gospel's hope despite the unavoidable reality of death.

The Bible teaches that death entered the world as a result of sin.⁵⁹⁶ However, for believers, death is not the end, but rather the transition to eternal life. The text in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 proclaims victory over death through Jesus Christ. He conquered death through His resurrection, offering hope and eternal life to those who believe in Him.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Bible talks about the afterlife for believers as a state of communion with God. In passages such as John 11:25-26, Jesus states, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." Christians can grieve but grieve with hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 refers to the mourning of believers with the hope of the resurrection, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." Although grief is a natural reaction to the loss of loved ones, Christians are encouraged to grieve with hope, as death is not the final end.

Given this biblical perspective, Christians are called to view death as part of the human journey, but not as the ultimate end. Instead, it is seen as a transition to an eternal existence in the presence of God for those who have placed their faith in Christ. Therefore, dealing with death in light of a biblical perspective involves facing grief with hope, trusting in the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, and finding comfort in the certainty of resurrection for those who are in Christ.

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WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: HOW WOMEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE EARLY CHURCH

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Introduction

The Bible includes many examples of men and women (to a lesser extent) who were integral in God's plan for humanity. From Adam and Eve to the various prophets and disciples, men and women played important roles throughout biblical history. In the beginning, "God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."⁵⁹⁷ Consequently, it is clear God intended for men *and* women to fulfill His purpose and that each would have a role in that purpose. Although scholars, theologians, religious leaders, and believers do not question the *imago Dei*, there has been significant debate historically (which continues to current times) about the role women have had and/or should attain in ministry.

There are doctrinal distinctions that exist surrounding what men and women are allowed to do within the context of ministry which align with one of two points of view. The complementarian view is summarized in John P. Lathrop's essay, "Egalitarianism and Biblical Authority," in which he quotes a passage from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). CBMW states, "In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men."⁵⁹⁸ Conversely, the website of Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) which represents the egalitarian perspective states that, "CBE exists to promote the biblical message that God calls women and men of all cultures, races, and classes to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world. CBE's mission is to eliminate the power imbalance between men and women resulting from theological patriarchy."⁵⁹⁹ The debate continues today, resulting in churches and individuals experiencing

⁵⁹⁷ Genesis 1:27, New International Version, taken from YouVersion app.

⁵⁹⁸ CBMW, "Danvers Statement," Affirmation 6, point 2, *CouncilforBiblicalManhoodandWomanhood.org* (1987, retrieved March 20, 2024, <https://cbmw.org/about.danvers-statement/>).

⁵⁹⁹ CBE, "CBE's Mission and Values", *ChristiansforBiblicalEquity.org*, (1989, retrieved March 20, 2024, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-mission/).

considerable discord around the subject leading to disaffiliation and irreparable damage to churches and followers.

There are a plethora of books, essays, public discussions, and teachings covering extensively these doctrinal distinctions with specific corresponding exegesis and hermeneutical overviews. However, the purpose of this paper will not be to venture into that territory. Instead, I will focus on the impact of women in the New Testament during and following Jesus's ministry, and what impact certain women made on the early church in the early Parousia period. Ultimately, the reader will be able to envision how certain women during this time were perfectly placed, preferred, and positioned to participate in and promote the ministry of Jesus during His ministry and in the early church. The reader should also note my commentary is derived from an egalitarian perspective as Lathrop notes, "We hold on to the egalitarian position because we believe that it best represents the teachings of the Scriptures, which were given by the inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16-17)."⁶⁰⁰

I will examine the content of various scriptures primarily within the books of Luke and John, as well as Paul's letter to the Roman's. Emphasis will be placed on women who had considerable impact during the time of Jesus or were instrumental in their influence on and contributions to the early church following Jesus's resurrection. The women included in this essay will be Mary of Nazareth, Mary Magdalene, the woman at the well, and Phoebe. According to Mark Allen Powell in *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, "The number and prominence of the women mentioned in Romans 16 is striking: ten are mentioned in verses 1, 3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15. Three of these are especially noteworthy,"⁶⁰¹ which is why one is among those noted in this paper. There were certainly others named and unknown who were with the disciples (Luke 8: 1-3; 24:10-11, for example⁶⁰²), and who led in other ways during the early church but given the brevity of this submission only those noted earlier will be covered.

⁶⁰⁰ John P. Lathrop, "Egalitarianism and Biblical Authority", in Aida Besancon and William David Spencer, eds., *Christian Egalitarian Leadership: Empowering the Whole Church According to the Scriptures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020) 37.

⁶⁰¹ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary and Theological Survey*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018) 227.

⁶⁰² See Powell's list of verses from Luke in *Introducing the New Testament*, 167.

Women Making Their Mark

In an important book entitled *Women in the Mission of the Church*, Leanne Dzubinski and Anneke Stasson note that, “The New Testament shows that women were involved as leaders in the church from the earliest days.”⁶⁰³ They served in a variety of roles including those noted in Ephesians 4:11, “So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers.” These gifts were neither determined nor restricted by gender. And to reiterate, this discussion will not include arguments justifying the inclusion of women in ministry or within the church. However, we must recognize the important roles women played historically and highlight their roles in the ministry of Jesus, and in the development of the early church.

Consider Mary

It is evident from the New Testament that, “Jesus loved women, and women were an integral part of His ministry from the very beginning.”⁶⁰⁴ Consider the birth of Jesus - He was born of a woman, who carried Him physically for the same period characteristic of a normal pregnancy. F. Scott Spencer, a New Testament scholar and author of *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers and Savvy Widows*, suggests that:

When the biblical God elects someone for special service through some form of audiovisual revelation, negotiations seem fatuous, resistance is futile. It is better for everyone, including God, presumably, if the ‘chosen one’ embraces the divine call with joyful obedience from the outset. But that’s not necessary: God always gets God’s “man” in the end. God’s authority prevails to enlist God’s agent.⁶⁰⁵

He continues when presenting Mary’s unusual selection for her divine role. He compares her to other women who were called to “carry out some significant duty... (they) tend to be older, barren subjects selected to bear children (at last) – specifically, important sons in Israel’s

⁶⁰³ Leanne M. Dzubinski and Anneke H. Stasson, *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles Throughout Christian History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021) 15.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans, 2012) 55.

history.”⁶⁰⁶ He states that Mary is specifically chosen against the backdrop of what was the woman’s characteristically “limited agency in the bible.”⁶⁰⁷

Mary’s story is juxtaposed against another woman in the related story of Jesus’s birth – Elizabeth, the mother of John. Elizabeth was older (as was Zechariah, her priest husband) and was barren when her husband was visited by the angel, Gabriel. He informed Zechariah his wife would become pregnant (Luke 1: 5-23). Zechariah expressed his disbelief and suffered the severe consequence of his lack of faith by being rendered mute by Gabriel for many days. Readers of the Bible will recall the significance of John’s birth story. This was evidenced later during Elizabeth’s pregnancy when the fetus leaped in utero as she came in the presence of Mary and the holy baby within her. The ministry of an adult John was critical during the period before Jesus began His ministry. John’s role was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17b); he baptized Jesus before His ministry was launched (Mat. 3:13-17), and John continued to speak against sin irrespective of an individual’s status, which ultimately contributed to his death (Matthew 14:6-10).

In review of Mary’s own encounter with the angel Gabriel, we know it too was miraculous – or perhaps it would be best called a daunting opportunity. Mary was a young teen, had not been with a man, and was betrothed to Joseph, who was in the lineage of King David and the father of many nations, Abraham (Matthew 1:1-16). When considering two notable births - Isaac and John - the women were of an older age, prayed desperately for a child, and God eventually granted those prayers; the births were a part of His bigger plan for humankind. Mary, however, did not pray for the visitation or a child. Additionally, she appeared suspicious of the encounter, which is evident from her reticence at the angel’s appearance (“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be,” Luke 1:29). Spencer notes that her initial response to Gabriel’s assertion that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit, is not that of someone who initially sees this visitation as something divine. Spencer says, “Mary is not at all sure this is a blessed event.”⁶⁰⁸ She even wondered out loud, “How will this be...since I am a virgin?” (v. 34). Spencer further describes Mary’s reaction this way: “In sum, as an ordinary young woman, Mary accepts God’s claim upon her life as a willing follower...though not without doubts, desires, and demurrals

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 68.

appropriate to a freethinking agent.”⁶⁰⁹ Later she sings a song, the Magnificat, where she acknowledged the implications of bearing the Messiah which would usher in a “great reversal” and divine reconciliation. She sings, “His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has brought down the rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but sent the rich away empty” (vv. 50, 52-53). Mary recognized even in her youth the magnitude of accepting the role of Jesus’s mother, not only for all the people like herself (humble, lowly in status), but for generations to come. Additionally, Spencer indicates that, “Mary still emerges as a dynamic *dramatis persona*, a participatory agent in God’s redemptive drama.”⁶¹⁰

What is important to note is, “God the Father could have sent His Son in the world in any number of ways, but God chose childbirth...Mary carried the Son of God in her womb...(she) birthed him, nursed him, reared him, and urged him to do his first miracle...Mary was Jesus’s first teacher and first disciple.”⁶¹¹ Mary’s role is undeniably important in the Christology. Joseph A. Fitzmeyer is quoted in Dorothy A. Lee’s (Professor at Trinity College, Melbourne) *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament* as writing “She is, in effect, the first Christian in Luke’s narrative, the first to believe in, and respond wholeheartedly to, God’s calling” (1:26-38).⁶¹² She was divinely picked for this holy purpose.

The Other Mary – of Magdala

As mentioned earlier, among the disciples of Jesus were women (Luke 8: 1-3). Lee notes that while Jesus was proclaiming the good news of the gospel, those accompanying Him “fall into two parallel groups: the Twelve and Galilean women.”⁶¹³ Lee also quotes Carla Ricci, author of *Mary Magdalene and Many Others* writes, “There is an inner group of men and an inner group of women who continue to follow Jesus and engage in ministry with Him throughout

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁶¹¹ Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women in the Mission of the Church*, 15.

⁶¹² Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols. (New York, Doubleday, 1979), in Dorothy A. Lee’s, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021) 41.

⁶¹³ Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*, 47.

his career.”⁶¹⁴ She also notes that the women are a part of the discipleship team and provide reciprocal ministry support to Jesus and the others out of their own resources.⁶¹⁵ Finally, Ricci indicates, “Mary Magdalene is the leader of the inner group of women.”⁶¹⁶ But who is Mary Magdalene?

Nijay K. Gupta, professor of New Testament at Northern University, indicates in his book, *Tell Her Story*, that Mary’s last name is not a proper name but refers to a place, Magdala, which was her hometown.⁶¹⁷ She was among women who had been “cured of evil spirits and diseases” (Luke 8:2); Mary was “from whom seven demons had come out” (v. 2b). Gupta acknowledges that not much is known about Mary of Magdala, except he points out that her name is mentioned in each one of the Gospels. Additionally, once she was delivered from the demons’ possession she followed Jesus throughout His ministry, and likely helped fund His ministry out of her own resources (Luke 8:3). She was one of the women who joined Jesus’s mother as He died on the cross and was one of the first women to see Him once He was resurrected. Gupta includes a quote from W.D. Davis and Dale C. Allison who stated what Mary told the disciples describing what she had seen:

The Gospel of John picks up the story of Mary Magdalene’s commission. She arrived and proclaimed, “I have seen the Lord!” (Jn 20:18). And then she reported what Jesus said to her. In Eastern Christianity, Mary Magdalene is hailed *isapostolos*, equal to apostles (as in “another apostle”), because of her pivotal witness.⁶¹⁸

Gupta further states that Mary “was a woman who responded well to Jesus’s healing power and stuck with Him to the bitter end (even after the Twelve fled, scattered, and hid).”⁶¹⁹ And, ultimately, Jesus honored her faithfulness by commissioning her to be of the first to “testify about

⁶¹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2002), in Lee’s *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*, 47.

⁶¹⁵ Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women who Followed Jesus* (Tunbridge Wells, UK, Burnes & Oats, 1994) in Lee’s *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*, 47.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2023) 63.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

His living power and lordship.”⁶²⁰ Sr. Christina Shenk, co-founder of Future Church, in her work *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, adds her view of Mary’s role this way:

All four gospels show Mary of Magdala leading the other women disciples in accompanying Jesus to his death, anointing and burying his body, viewing the empty tomb, and experiencing his risen presence. That the message of the resurrection was first given to women is regarded by scholars as significant evidence for the historicity of the resurrection accounts.⁶²¹

Finally, Lee pinpoints the uniqueness of Mary’s role by saying, “the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the other Galilean women present at Pentecost are the first women to receive the gift of the Spirit, which ensures their shared vocation with men in the church’s mission.”⁶²² Mary Magdalene was perfectly positioned to be a part of the Good News testimony during a dark and uncertain time. Luke’s rendering of this woman’s story elevates her from a possessed outcast to a delivered hero.

The Woman at the Well

One of the stories in the Gospel of John is of the woman at the well (John 4:1-30). It is unique in many ways. The scriptures indicate that Jesus was on His ministry journey, and that He “had to go through a town in Samaria called Sychar” (v. 5a). Tired and thirsty, He approached Jacob’s well and sat down at midday. There a Samaritan woman approached to draw water who He asked to provide Him with a drink of the water. On the surface, there is nothing particularly unusual about this encounter. However, in the historical and cultural context of the time, Jewish and Samaritans held animosity towards one another. Both claimed for various reasons to be the “true Israelites,” that is, for reasons related to origin, the scriptures they recognized, and to their practices, and beliefs.⁶²³ Although the Gospels illustrate a diversity of people with whom Jesus engaged, given the very difficult history between the Jews and Samaritans, this interaction was unexpected (as the arriving disciples quietly contemplated). The woman was

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Christine Schenk, CSJ, *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017) 9.

⁶²² Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*, 62.

⁶²³ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 42.

overwhelmed and distraught from the beginning of this conversation, and was amazed, evident when she said, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)” (John 4:9). To add more intrigue to the conversation, Jesus revealed He knew a great deal about the woman’s living arrangements and personal history. Upon asking her to “call (her) husband and come back” (v. 16), she confessed she did not have a husband. Jesus stated He knew that she was not living with one who held the position of “husband”, and that her history included five husbands. She was surprised by how much He knew and realized that Jesus was no ordinary Jew. She acknowledged as much when stated in verse 19, “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet” (v. 19). Jesus finally revealed He was the Messiah by saying, “I, the one speaking to you – I am He” (v. 26).

The revelation of all the woman had experienced that day left her with no other choice – she left “her water jar...went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’” Lee notes that when this woman shared the revelation of Jesus being the Messiah, her action was “an affirmation of the woman’s apostolic role in bringing a village to discover Jesus as the giver of living water.”⁶²⁴ What is most remarkable about what follows this “well experience” is that,

The disciples, who will inherit the same mission, are still uncomprehending at this point, without any idea of the enormous gender and racial barriers that have been overcome in this conversation. They do not as yet comprehend that Jesus does not regard the woman as unclean but rather as worthy of an apostolic calling.⁶²⁵

The visit to the well by Jesus was neither a random stop along His travels, nor was it one that He used to show a woman how her life was wrought in sin. S. J. Nortje states in “The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel”, that “(H)e has a universal ministry in mind beginning with the Samaritans...Considering the narrative as a whole it is clear that the woman is allocated the role of emissary of Jesus to her people.”⁶²⁶ This woman, despite her desperate and questionable social and marital

⁶²⁴ Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament*, 84.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Nortjé, S. J. “The Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel.”

Neotestamentica 20 (1986) 25, retrieved March 21, 2024,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43049067>.

status, became one of the first evangelists because she was in the right place, at the right time for the right purpose.

Phoebe – Paul’s Trusted Proxy⁶²⁷

In their article, “Paul’s Most Beloved Letter was Entrusted to a Woman,” scholars McNutt and Peeler at Wheaton University provide a thoughtful synopsis of Phoebe, whom Gupta calls Paul’s “trusted proxy”, for her role of delivering what is known as the Pauline letter to the Romans. Before introducing this important figure, the authors remind us of Paul’s ministry and famous “letter writing campaigns” of which the one to the Romans was counted. In addition, McNutt and Peeler share:

As he reaches the end of his weighty theological letter, his tone becomes incredibly personal. He mentions 29 people, greeting 28 of them and commending one: Phoebe. To commend someone is to vouch for them, stand with them, attest that they can be trusted. Paul throws his apostolic weight behind Phoebe.⁶²⁸

It should be noted that many theologians consider this letter to the Romans of great importance because of the audience to whom it was written. Powell further indicates that this letter was responsible for notable conversions to the faith, including that of Augustine for influencing Martin Luther, and based on his commentary concerning the subject, for leading John Wesley to salvation.⁶²⁹ All three were powerhouse leaders of Christian faith.

While this letter may not be the first of those written by Paul following his ministry’s commencement,⁶³⁰ it is considered one of the most important. The letter reveals God’s righteousness; the revelation of God’s justification by grace; the obedience this grace requires (to God and surprisingly, to the government); the availability of salvation to all (Jews and Gentiles equally); God’s faithfulness to the Jewish remnant; and, the accommodation for the weak.⁶³¹ Given the letter’s significance, Paul trusting Phoebe to be the carrier, reader, and expert

⁶²⁷ Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 113.

⁶²⁸ Jennifer Powell McNutt and Beverage Peeler, “Paul’s Most Beloved Letter was Entrusted to a Woman”, *ChristianityToday.com*, 2020 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/november/phoebe-paul-women-new-testament-first-interpreter.html>).

⁶²⁹ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 271.

⁶³⁰ See Powell, box 12.5, 262.

⁶³¹ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 277-284.

on-site to answer any questions or provide interpretive responses is remarkable considering the cultural context of the time and how women were generally perceived.

So, who is Phoebe? Luke noted her hometown “is Cenchreae, the eastern seaport of Corinth” (Acts 18:18), some thousand kilometers southeast of Rome.⁶³² There is no mention of a husband, and the fact that she could travel on her own suggests she had the resources to do so. It is evident Paul had respect for Phoebe and thought highly of her. Romans 16:1 reveals this regard when Paul states, “I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.” At this point, a brief description of the word “deacon” is warranted. The Greek word *diakonos* has been exegeted as our current word for deacon. Some translations have used “servant,” or “deaconess,” as translations of the word, although scholars point out the feminine version of deacon is not found in the Greek language. While Phoebe’s role has been relegated to a lesser role of a servant or helper, it is important to note that the word *diakonos* was used to describe Jesus, “a servant of God ministering...as a part of God’s grand plan.”⁶³³ McNutt and Peeler add the following:

Although Paul paired Phoebe’s name with the masculine form of “servant” (*diakonos*), the term was quickly feminized to “deaconess” by church tradition. Importantly, both John Chrysostom and Origen interpreted Phoebe’s mention in Romans as evidence that women were ordained to the particular church office of deacon.⁶³⁴

The authors continue with the discussion of Phoebe’s role including that of a *prostatis*. The word is unique to the New Testament but in the Roman setting it was defined as “leader”. Gupta adds, “A *prostasis* was someone who stepped in with resources and influence to aid someone in need. Phoebe was (a) benefactor; Paul and many others were recipients.”⁶³⁵ Though scholars and theologians differ on the extent of Phoebe’s role beyond delivering this Romans letter, there is less disagreement on how Paul viewed her. It is clear he entrusted her with an important responsibility, and whether she read the letter or was on hand to answer questions (as N.T. Wright suggested in an interview with a church leader in San Diego⁶³⁶) that mere act positioned her in

⁶³² Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 115.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶³⁴ McNutt and Peeler, “Paul’s Most Beloved Letter.”

⁶³⁵ McNutt and Peeler, “Paul’s Most Beloved Letter,” 119.

⁶³⁶ Megan Briggs, “N.T Wright: The New Testament is Clear on Women Preachers”, *ChurchLeaders.com* (2020, retrieved March 19, 2024,

history as a testimony to the mutual role women like her played alongside of men, in the New Testament and early church. Phoebe was preferred based on her position in ministry and placed in history as an esteemed woman to one of the important ministry leaders of the time.

Conclusion

There were several women of note recorded throughout the New Testament who were preferred, placed, and positioned in a variety of ways to facilitate the ministry of reconciliation Jesus came to complete. There were only four mentioned in this brief paper. Each one has been the subject of pages and chapters extending beyond those here. I chose the women for a few reasons. First, they were all “single” at the time they were called to fulfill their role for the *misseo Dei*. Second, they were all strong women who clearly made a choice to fulfill that mission, in many cases at the exclusion of their male counterparts. Third, their contributions were recorded within the context of a culture that did not always value or recognize the woman’s role. Fourth, each story (including those not mentioned here) was scrutinized, sometimes changed (as in the name of Junia to the masculine Junias which did not exist in the Greek language, or as in the use of a feminized word *diakonos*) to make them more palatable to male philosophers, early church leaders, and scholars. The New Testament writings identify these women, giving evidence of the integral role they played in the ministry of Jesus, the disciples (such as Paul) and in the lives of believers. Finally, while the roles of women overall are less prominent (their names not mentioned) in the scriptures, those who were illuminated and mentioned repeatedly should give women (and men) encouragement about the power of faithfulness and obedience to God’s plan.

The review on women of the New Testament reminds me of what God’s perfect plan was from the beginning: “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals...” (Gen 1:26a). While the Fall nearly disrupted God’s original plan (temporarily), Jesus came to return the mutuality and shared responsibility of leadership, not from positions of rank and authority, but of humility, unity, and service. Although many of the stories surrounding the impact of women of our faith I did not learn through the pulpit, this examination (among other recent academic exposures) reaffirms for me that I am a part of God’s plan too.

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MARY OF BETHANY'S ANOINTING OF CHRIST: A WOMAN'S PERCEPTIVE ACT

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Introduction

³ And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that?" ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ **She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.** ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (bold mine). Mark 14:3-9 ESV

"Probably, she intended no more than to show the great honour she had for him before all the company, and to complete his entertainment."⁶³⁷

"Our Lord here, of course, alludes to the spices and ointments with which the Jews wrapped up the bodies of their dead before their burial. Not that this was what Mary intended. She could hardly have dreamed of his death and burial so near at hand. But she was moved by the Holy Spirit to do this, at this particular time, as though in anticipation of his death and burial."⁶³⁸

These excerpts come from two well-known commentaries: Matthew Henry's *Commentary* and the *Pulpit Commentary* respectively. They assert that the woman (identified as Mary of

⁶³⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible* (ed Matthew to John, volume 5; United States: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 441.

⁶³⁸ "Mark 14:8" *Pulpit Commentary* (retrieved 26 April 2024, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/mark/14.htm>)

Bethany in John's account⁶³⁹) did not know, in fact "could hardly have dreamed" that she was anointing Christ for burial.

This paper will argue that despite the Twelve's lack of discernment that Jesus' death was imminent, Mary likely understood what she was doing, and therefore her anointing of Jesus was *recognized* as a prophetic act by Christ, not *deemed* a prophetic act. Mary's posture as a disciple in Luke, and her designation as a disciple by the early church father, John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, will be explored. A brief examination of several other women in the gospel accounts will show that women were often the first to understand and act on their faith. Because God repeatedly granted wisdom and insight to women in the gospel accounts, Christian leadership in both ecclesiastical and academic settings will be exhorted to value the unique understandings and insights God has entrusted to women. Who was Mary of Bethany? How could she have *known* she was anointing Jesus' body for burial?

Mary of Bethany: A Disciple

Why is identifying Mary as a disciple of Jesus important when drawing conclusions about her act of anointing Jesus for burial? It is because her status as a disciple laid the foundation for her understanding.

Mary first appears in the Gospel accounts in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus (and presumably at least some of the disciples traveling with him) were welcomed into Martha's home. Luke tells us that Martha "had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching."⁶⁴⁰

Ben Witherington III, Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary wrote, "The phrase 'to sit at the feet of' in 10:39 is significant since there is evidence that this is a technical formula meaning 'to be a disciple of.'"⁶⁴¹ J. Lyle Story, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages at Regent University concurs, writing, "Mary's choice is based upon her

⁶³⁹ While all four Gospels have an account of a woman anointing Jesus with costly ointment, most scholars believe that Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8 refer to the same event (with some variations), while the Lukan account (7:36-38) refers to a separate anointing.

⁶⁴⁰ Luke 10:39 ESV

⁶⁴¹ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 101, retrieved 20 April 2024, <https://archive.org/details/womeninministryo0000with/page/n8/mode/1up>.

knowledge in that she has chosen to listen to his word and is sitting at his feet, which is a technical term for ‘being a disciple.’ Luke intends that his readers understand that Mary is a disciple whose activity is to be imitated.”⁶⁴² Luke uses a similar phrase in Acts when he records Paul’s speech to the Jerusalem mob that attempted to kill him. Paul says, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated *at the feet of* Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3 ESV).

Robert Kirschner, professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, writes that for a disciple, “attendance upon the master was more important than study itself.”⁶⁴³ Kirschner emphasizes the preeminence of the master to the disciple, preeminent in every relationship, including the disciple’s father.⁶⁴⁴ We can see the preeminence of Christ to Mary in her posture of attendance on Christ, and her disregard for her sister’s priorities. A disciple’s priority was to the master, so being at her master’s feet was far more important than serving Jesus and the other disciples.

Mary was recognized as a disciple by Early Church Father, John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople. Chris L. de Wet, associate professor at the University of South Africa, writes, “John Chrysostom (354 AD) can be described as one of the most prolific and eloquent writers among the Greek Fathers.”⁶⁴⁵ Chrysostom wrote many commentaries (homilies) on both the Old and New Testaments. In his Homily on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom wrote: “And Martha served [Jn. 12:2]; which establishes the fact that the meal was in her house, for they received Jesus as loving and beloved...Mary did not serve, *for she was a disciple* (emphasis mine).”⁶⁴⁶ In his article, de Wet highlights the fact that according to Chrysostom, Martha and Mary differed in status, noting that Chrysostom uses the word μαθήτρια *athētria*] (the feminine form of μαθητής [*mathētēs*]), which Greek scholar Bill Mounce defines

⁶⁴² J. Lyle Story, “The Discipleship of Women – From Jesus’ Birth to the Empty Tomb,” *Priscilla Papers* 21:1 (2007): 17, retrieved from Galaxie Software Electronic Publishing Database.

⁶⁴³ Robert Kirschner, “The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity,” *Vigilae Christianae* 38, no. 2 (1984): 117, retrieved 23 April 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1583058?seq=10>.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁴⁵ Chris L. de Wet, “John Chrysostom’s Exegesis of the Anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-8),” *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 89 (2007): 134, retrieved 23 April 2024, https://www.academia.edu/238301/John_Chrysostom_s_Exegesis_of_the_Anointing_at_Bethany_John_12_1_8_.

⁶⁴⁶ de Wet, “John Chrysostom’s Exegesis of the Anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-8),” 136.

as ‘learner, disciple.’⁶⁴⁷ As such, Chrysostom “includes Mary in the closest social circle of Jesus.”⁶⁴⁸

Luke’s first introduction of Mary in his gospel shows that she had already taken a position as a disciple (alongside the other disciples traveling with Jesus). The gospels do not record how long Mary had known Jesus, nor does it record her name in the groups of women who followed Him, but it is clear that she was welcomed both by the Lord and the other disciples *as* a disciple since the only objection to her being at Jesus’ feet was raised by her sister. It is important to note that the word “disciple” in the gospels is not used exclusively to refer to the Twelve. Mounce writes that the word *mathētēs* “refers not only to the Twelve but is used of the wider circle of adherents to Jesus’ message.”⁶⁴⁹ Karen Kogler, in her paper “Disciples in the First Century” mentions Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57), Nicodemus (John 7:45-52), a “large crowd of his disciples” (Luke 6:17), the seventy-two (Luke 10:1-20), “the whole multitude of his disciples” (Luke 19:37), and the 120 followers from which Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:15).⁶⁵⁰ Mark 14:16-17 makes a very clear distinction between the “disciples” and the “Twelve” when Mark records that it is the disciples who went into Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover, while later in the evening Jesus arrived with the Twelve. There were many people (including women – including Mary of Bethany) who were the Lord’s disciples and heard his teachings. The biblical text does not always clarify which disciples are present at any given teaching (the

⁶⁴⁷ William D. Mounce, D. Matthew Smith and Miles V. Van Pelt, eds., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2006), 183.

Note: While the title *mathētēs* is never applied to a woman in the gospel accounts, Karen Kogler argues that Mark’s use of the phrase “they followed him” in Mark 15:41 is formal discipleship language. She writes, “When Mark says ‘they followed him and ministered to him,’ there is no textual reason to combine the two verbs into one action, i.e., they accompanied him so that they could minister to him, rather than reading it as two actions: they were disciples, and they ministered to him.” [Karen Kogler, “Disciples in the First Century” (Masters in Theology thesis, Concordia University, 2009), 48-49, retrieved 24 April 2024, <https://theequipper.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Disciples-in-First-Century.pdf>]

⁶⁴⁸ de Wet, “John Chrysostom’s Exegesis of the Anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-8),” 13.

⁶⁴⁹ Mounce, Smith, and Van Pelt, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 184.

⁶⁵⁰ Karen Kogler, “Disciples in the First Century” (Masters in Theology thesis, Concordia University, 2009), 48-49, retrieved 24 April 2024, <https://theequipper.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Disciples-in-First-Century.pdf>

many, or the Twelve), but Peter's words in Acts 1 make it clear that there were others who had "been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us."⁶⁵¹

Mary not only sat at Jesus' feet alongside the Lord's other disciples, she "listened to his teaching." Reinhard Neudecker, professor of Rabbinic Literature at Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, provides important insight into a master's way of teaching a disciple. Neudecker writes, "Characteristic of the style of the rabbinic way of learning are frequent repetition...discussion among peers, and question-and-answer style for discourse between master and disciples. The disciple must not be bashful, for if he is ashamed to ask questions he will make no real progress."⁶⁵² A teacher (master) would repeat stories over and over until the disciple understood and could recite the same teachings in the same way. Through repetition, disciples learned how to emulate the master in speech, thought, and deed. Jesus himself said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."⁶⁵³

One message that Jesus repeatedly taught his disciples was that he was going to die. The first time Jesus predicted his death was immediately following Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ (Matthew 16:21-23, Mark 8:31-32, Luke 9:21-22). Matthew 16:21 reads, "*From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and on the third day raised to life*" (emphasis mine). Jesus predicted his death a second time in the gospels following the transfiguration (Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:30-32, Luke 9:43-45). In all three gospels, Jesus was teaching his *disciples*, not exclusively the Twelve. The only time that the gospel writers recorded that Jesus specifically pulled the Twelve aside to teach them about his death was on his way to Jerusalem, where he would be crucified. (Matthew 20:17-19, Mark 10:32-34, Luke 18:31-34). Luke 24:1-8 confirms that women disciples were present when Jesus taught about his death, burial, and resurrection as it is to the women who came to the tomb that the angel said, "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee;

⁶⁵¹ Acts 1:21-22 NIV

⁶⁵² Reinhard Neudecker, "Master-Disciple/Disciple-Master Relationship in Rabbinic Judaism and in the Gospels," *Gregorianum* 80, no.2 (1999): 253, retrieved 23 April 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23580264>.

⁶⁵³ Luke 6:40 ESV

The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”⁶⁵⁴

The final instance of Jesus teaching about his imminent death is in Matthew 26:1-2: “When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said *to his disciples*, ‘As you know, the Passover is two days away – and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified’ (emphasis mine). The very next story in Matthew is Mary’s anointing of Jesus for his burial.

To assert, as the *Pulpit Commentary* does, that Mary “could hardly have dreamed” that Jesus’ death and burial were imminent wrongly assumes that the lack of understanding and acceptance of Jesus’ death by the Twelve precludes Mary’s comprehension. The gospel accounts repeatedly highlight the perceptiveness and responsiveness of women to the salvific plan despite the unbelief and misunderstanding of others.

Other Perceptive Women in the Gospels

The Gospel of Luke opens with the first two people to testify that the Messiah was coming into the world, and they were both women.⁶⁵⁵ The first person to be *told* that the Messiah was coming was the priest, Zechariah; but he wavered in unbelief, and his questioning and doubtful testimony was muted until his son was born. It was his wife, Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognized the presence of the Lord in the womb of her young relative, Mary. Elizabeth makes the first recorded “Christological confession of Jesus’s Lordship”⁶⁵⁶ in Luke 1:43. J. Lyle Story said, “Elizabeth is the first to confess Jesus as ‘my Lord,’ and that even before He was born – long before Mary Magdalene’s ‘Rabbouni’ and Thomas’ ‘My Lord and my God.’”⁶⁵⁷

Elizabeth is also the first one to understand that Mary’s pregnancy was by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵⁸ Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, did not believe until an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream to reassure him (Matthew 1:20-21).

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the first person to understand that the baby she was carrying was the Savior of the world and that he would inaugurate a new kingdom. Her prophetic song in Luke 1:47-55

⁶⁵⁴ Luke 24:6-7 NIV

⁶⁵⁵ Luke 1:5-56 NIV

⁶⁵⁶ Story, “The Discipleship of Women – From Jesus’ Birth to the Empty Tomb,” 17.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

shows a deep and profound understanding of the Old Testament promises and their fulfillment in her son.

The Samaritan woman in John 4:4-42 is the first person outside of Israel to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and became the first recorded missionary. She understood not only who Jesus was, but that others needed to know him, too. Story writes, “She [Samaritan woman] reveals that she understands her mission; she becomes a vibrant witness, even an evangelist without a preparatory catechism class”⁶⁵⁹ Story goes on to compare her understanding of the inclusiveness of Jesus and his kingdom to the lack of understanding evident in the other disciples traveling with Jesus writing, “What an irony that she grows in faith in one day, while the disciples over months of association do not understand Jesus’ inclusive acceptance.”⁶⁶⁰

Finally, it was women who first encountered the risen Christ. The gospel accounts differ on some aspects of the events at the tomb, but all of them record that women were the first to see the Christ, and were commissioned by Jesus to go and tell the disciples that he was alive.⁶⁶¹ The gospels name several women – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, the other Mary, and others – who were present at the tomb. John’s gospel focuses attention on Mary Magdalene. In an article titled “Apostle of the Apostles”, Arthur Roach, British Cardinal of the Catholic Church, highlighted that for centuries the Catholic Church recognized “Mary of Magdala” as a first witness who saw the risen Christ and as the first messenger who announced the Lord’s resurrection to the Apostles.”⁶⁶² Roach writes that Mary is the “apostolorum apostola,” as Thomas Aquinas says, “because she announces to the apostles what in turn they will announce to the whole world.”⁶⁶³ While Mary Magdalene and the other women saw, believed, and proclaimed the risen Lord, Luke’s gospel records that when the women told the apostles they “did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”⁶⁶⁴

These four women in the gospel accounts show that women were often not only the first to comprehend the salvific plan, but they were the first to act on their understanding. Elizabeth and Mary

⁶⁵⁹ Story, “The Discipleship of Women – From Jesus’ Birth to the Empty Tomb,” 18.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Matthew 28:10.

⁶⁶² Arthur Roche, “Mary Magdalene, “Apostle to the Apostles,” Given Equal Dignity in Feast,” *Aleteia.org* (2016, retrieved 26 April 2024, <https://aleteia.org/2016/06/10/mary-magdalene-apostle-to-the-apostles-given-equal-dignity-in-feast/>).

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Luke 24:11 NIV.

believed and verbally testified about the yet unborn Messiah; the Samaritan woman recognized that Christ came for all people, not just the Jews, and went out and invited others to meet him; Mary Magdalene was the first to encounter and speak with the risen Christ and was sent to tell the apostles to wait in Galilee for his appearing.

In light of these other women, there is no reason to assume that Mary of Bethany was not fully cognizant of what her anointing of Christ meant. Jesus recognized and testified that Mary was anointing him with oil she intended for his burial,⁶⁶⁵ and was taking the opportunity to anoint Him beforehand.⁶⁶⁶ In contrast to Matthew Henry's Commentary and the Pulpit Commentary, the Baker Commentary on the Bible recognizes that "it is the woman who shows the most kindness to Jesus in his hour of greatest poverty, prophetically anticipating his cross and burial."⁶⁶⁷

Reflection and Implications

In nearly all surveys, women in the United States and Europe are shown to be more religious, more orthodox, more devout, more likely to report an experience with God, more likely to read Scripture, and more likely to volunteer in their local churches.⁶⁶⁸ However, Patricia Wittberg, Emeritus Professor at IUPUI, writes that despite women's greater religiosity, most young Catholic women no longer have confidence in religious organizations, and are beginning to leave the Church.⁶⁶⁹ She argues that the reason for women becoming disaffected from the church is that women have limited opportunities to use their gifts.⁶⁷⁰

In 2012, Barna research conducted a four-part research study entitled "What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church." The Barna research reports that 65% of Christian women say they are deeply spiritual, and 81% claim an "extremely close" or "pretty close" relationship with God.⁶⁷¹ While most women (73%)

⁶⁶⁵ John 12:7 NIV.

⁶⁶⁶ Mark 14:8 ESV.

⁶⁶⁷ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Commentary on the Bible: Based on the NIV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989), 793.

⁶⁶⁸ Patricia Wittberg, "A Lost Generation? Fewer young women are practicing their faith: How the church can woo them back" *Americamagazine.org* (2012, retrieved 26 April 2024, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/5129/article/lost-generation>), 1.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁷¹ "Christian Women Today, Part 2 of 4: A Look at Women's Lifestyles, Priorities and Time Commitments," *Barna.com* (retrieved 26

reported feeling they are using their gifts in meaningful ministry, 31% of women say they are “resigned to low expectations when it comes to the church,” and 41% report having more meaningful leadership opportunities outside their church than within church.⁶⁷² This amounts to millions of women in the United States who feel that they are undervalued members of their churches.

Wittberg writes that to address the growing risk of young women (and their children) exiting the church, religious institutions need to increase opportunities for them. She argues that “more researchers, media directors, authors, Web gurus, and theologians ought to be women.”⁶⁷³ She also proposes that women who already hold leadership positions in churches should be prominently profiled so that younger women can see that there are opportunities for them to meaningfully lead within the church.⁶⁷⁴

The gospel writers repeatedly referenced women who were indispensable to the gospel message, including them in the ranks of disciples and prophets. Mary of Bethany was one such disciple. In the two instances where Mary is found at the feet of Jesus in the gospels, Jesus commends and defends her, even going so far as to say, “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”⁶⁷⁵ Church leaders need to work on acknowledging that women are equally capable of true discipleship and they have unique insights into the mission of God in the world. They should be granted a voice, both in the church and in academia, because women often perceive, experience, and understand spiritual truths that others miss. Their perceptiveness is both enlightening and crucial to Kingdom work.

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⁶⁷² “Christian Women Today, Part 1 of 4: What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church,” *Barna.com* (retrieved 26 April 2024, <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-women-today-part-1-of-4-what-women-think-of-faith-leadership-and-their-role-in-the-church/>).

⁶⁷³ Wittberg, “A Lost Generation? Fewer young women are practicing their faith,” 7.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Matthew 26:13 NIV

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THE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE WORLD TODAY

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Introduction

Throughout history and as depicted in the Bible, God has revealed Himself to mankind through general and special revelation. Although the world, especially in the further developed nations, has changed and is more difficult to impact, God has not changed. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8 ESV).⁶⁷⁶ Today many Christians are alarmed at these developments but, this is nothing new. In Genesis 6 mankind had become so wicked that “the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth” (Gen 6:6). Despite the uprise of evil in the ancient world, “Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8). Throughout history mankind and his sinful fallen nature have repeatedly disappointed God. The Old Testament is full of examples of the Hebrews drifting away from God and then coming back with repentance. God’s judgment would come and then after the people repented, His infinite mercy would restore. Throughout these times He always preserved a remnant for Himself, “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (I Kings 19:18; Rom 11:4).

This paper will show that, despite social divisions and liberal theologies, urban living, biased news media, and information overload in the world today, God’s general revelation is still intact. Further, His remnant is praying, and He continues to reveal Himself to people all over the world through special revelation. Although the world seems to be unstable and there are “wars and rumors of wars” (Mark 13:7; Matt 24:6; Luke 21:9), New Testament scholars N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird state that “God’s goodness finds its way into our lives and homes despite the terror and trauma that ravages different regions of our world.”⁶⁷⁷

The Revelation of God

Arthur C. Headlam, Regis Professor of Divinity, Oxford 1918-1923, stated, “The primary question in theology must be, what is the

⁶⁷⁶ All Scripture references will be from the English Standard Version.

⁶⁷⁷ N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Powers: Christian Political Witness in an Age of Totalitarian Terror and Dysfunctional Democracies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024), chap. 1 pg. 6, Kindle.

source of our knowledge of God?”⁶⁷⁸ The answer to this question is that God reveals Himself to mankind through both general and special revelation. Millard J. Erickson, a renowned author, seminary professor, and theologian with a PhD from Northwestern University sheds great light on this topic in the third edition of his book, *Christian Theology*. He comments “Special revelation builds on general revelation. The two mutually require each other and are harmonious.”⁶⁷⁹ Both are explored in the following sections.

The General Revelation of God

Concerning general revelation, Erickson states that, “The general revelation of God has been found in three areas: nature, history, and humanity.”⁶⁸⁰ Below, the discussion turns to these three aspects of general revelation.

The General Revelation of God in Nature

The Bible clearly states that God has revealed Himself in nature. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork” (Ps 19:1). In both the ancient and the modern world, God’s handiwork has been clearly seen in the heavens and the sky. “Who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south” (Job 9:9). One must ask the question, “How did man in the ancient world know and name the constellations in the sky without some sort of divine revelation?” Ian Vail, a linguist, translator, and former director of Wycliff New Zealand has a website called Berean Insights where, among other things, he describes how the constellations represent good, evil and the message of the coming Messiah.⁶⁸¹ Yet, one does not need to study the constellations to come to the awareness of God, but just witness a sunrise to realize that the life-giving sun is God’s grace: our sources of food are being replenished daily, both on land and in the sea, for both plant and

⁶⁷⁸Arthur C. Headlam, *Christian Theology; The Doctrine of God* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1934), 7, quoted in Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 13.

⁶⁷⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 146.

⁶⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 121.

⁶⁸¹Ian Vail, “The Positioning of Constellations in the Mazzaroth is Intricately Detailed and Repetitive,” Berean Insights, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.bereaninsights.org/nugget/the-positioning-of-constellations-in-the-mazzaroth-is-intricately-detailed-and-repetitive/>.

animal, and man and woman.

The General Revelation of God in History

God has revealed Himself over and over in history. The Bible cites several events, such as the great flood, the parting of the red sea, God moving through ancient kings and kingdoms, the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus and many more. These can easily be discarded by many non-believers; however, the most significant undeniable historic event took place in 1948 when the Jews moved back into their land. I agree with Erickson when he says, “An example often cited of God’s revelation in history is the preservation of the people of Israel.”⁶⁸²

The General Revelation of God in Humanity

In several instances the Apostle Paul points out how God has instilled within a person His law and a knowledge of him. “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts” (Rom 2:14-15). Erickson points out that it is not clear exactly what is written in the hearts of people but “it appears that, without determining the content of the inner revelation, Paul is asserting that God has left within the human moral makeup some witness of His requirements for human beings.”⁶⁸³ So here we see that God has placed the knowledge of himself within the hearts of people! Now the discussion moves on to the special revelation of God.

The Special Revelation of God

Erickson explains that the fall of man damaged his personal relationship with God so a special revelation was needed to bridge that gap and bring salvation.⁶⁸⁴ “By special revelation we mean God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.”⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸²Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 124.

⁶⁸³*Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁸⁵*Ibid.*

The Special Revelation of God to Mankind

Aside from the incarnation of Christ, the greatest gift that God gave to mankind is the Bible, the written Word of God! In John 1:1, God reveals Himself as one with His Word. There is no other book like the Bible; when one picks up the book and begins to read the pages, life comes out of it. In the letter to the Hebrews, the Word of God is described as “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Paul states that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The prophet Jeremiah describes the Word of God as “a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jer 15:16). Jesus Himself says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Luke 21:33; Mark 13:31; Matt 24:35).

As Erickson points out, “The Bible provides both cognitive and affective knowledge of God. Knowledge of God is possible because God bridges the gap between himself and humankind.”⁶⁸⁶ The greatest example of God showing Himself to mankind is the incarnation and the revelation of Jesus, this is well documented in the Bible. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). When describing the revelation of Jesus, Erickson writes, “Revelation also took place in the very perfection of Jesus’s character. There was a godlikeness about Him that could be discerned. Here God was actually living among humans and displaying His attributes to them. Jesus’s actions, attitudes, and affections did not merely mirror the Father, but were the actual presence of God.”⁶⁸⁷

Because of the importance of the Bible to the Christian faith and to the work of the transmission of God’s special revelation to mankind, many scholars have worked tirelessly to validate the authenticity of the New Testament writings. One such scholar, F.F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, writes, “The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all

⁶⁸⁶Ibid., 143.

⁶⁸⁷Ibid., 157.

doubt.”⁶⁸⁸ He goes on to make the point that he welcomes the additional scrutiny put on the Bible, because the demands of the New Testament and its main character, Jesus, have universal implications and impact. In addition, the proof for the authenticity of the New Testament goes well beyond that of similar ancient writings of the era. This topic is one that is widely studied and there are numerous up to date articles and books on the subject. The fact is that over 5,000 Greek manuscripts or portions of manuscripts exist for the New Testament.⁶⁸⁹ Another key point in determining the authenticity of a document is the time lapse between the event and the writing of the event. Bruce states that the New Testament passes this test.⁶⁹⁰ Bruce goes on to cite comparative examples of ancient manuscripts using various means of literary criticism with overwhelming evidence in favor of the New Testament.⁶⁹¹

The special revelation of God to mankind is evident in His Word and in the incarnation of Christ, yet so much of mankind has missed it. Therefore, it is evident that a deeper, more personal revelation of God is needed!

The Special Revelation of God to Individuals

The most effective form of revelation is when God comes down and reveals Himself and His will to individuals. We see this over and over in scripture. One of the most extreme cases is the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. He sees a bright light and falls to the ground and Jesus tells him, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:3-5). God revealed His will to Mary the mother of Jesus, in Luke 1:26-38, by sending the angel Gabriel to speak with her. God revealed to Joseph in a dream that Mary was with child from the Holy Spirit and told him not to leave her (Matt 1:20-21). When God wants to send a message to someone, he does it through undeniable special revelation directly to the individual.

Bruce Demarest, Ph.D., University of Manchester and former director of Evangelical Spiritual Guidance, Denver Seminary, summarizes the thoughts of Karl Barth by stating, “That man, the hopeless sinner, is incapable of discovering God by his own resources,” and therefore, God must supernaturally show himself to man or general revelation is

⁶⁸⁸F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, 6th ed. (Bath, UK: Kingsley Books, 2000), chap. 2, sec. 3, Kindle.

⁶⁸⁹*Ibid.*, chap. 2, sec. 3.

⁶⁹⁰*Ibid.*, chap. 2, sec. 2.

⁶⁹¹*Ibid.*, chap. 2, sec. 3.

of no value.⁶⁹²

The Revelation of God Hampered by Society

Historically, societies have done a poor job when it comes to embracing a revelation of the true God. When Jesus came, the Hebrew society, which we would expect would affirm the knowledge of God, was in effect, leading people away from the true nature of God. One of Jesus's main missions was to confront the Hebrew religious leaders of the day and set the record straight, which ultimately led to His crucifixion. Like the Hebrew society, today's once Christian democracies have also resisted the knowledge of God. Wright and Bird write that this is "an age of ascending autocracies and dysfunctional democracies."⁶⁹³ They further state that "many liberal democracies find it impossible to reach any workable and equitable agreement on environmentalism, racial justice, healthcare, immigration, gun control, abortion, religious freedom and LGBTQ + rights, leaving people with only fresh disgust at the system itself."⁶⁹⁴ Today, more than ever, society is suppressing the revelation of God. The discussion moves to how urban living, biased news media coverage and information overload all further the problem.

The General Revelation of God Hampered by Urban Living

In developed areas, especially cities with dense populations, many people, due to the city lights and pollution, have not seen the stars! They have not seen a farm that grows food or raises cattle! What they have seen is large buildings, automobiles, air pollution, and other works of man. Therefore, the general revelation of God in nature can go entirely unappreciated by many. Erickson brings up a good point by saying, "Christianity is especially growing in areas outside of Western Europe and English-speaking North America. In many of these cultures, nature is held in high regard. Thus, we may expect an increased interest in a theology of created order."⁶⁹⁵ Therefore, it can be said that cultures with populations centered in more rural settings have an easier time of seeing God's hand in nature, as compared to cultures centered in urban settings.

The General Revelation of God Hampered by Biased Media Coverage

⁶⁹²Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 21.

⁶⁹³Wright and Bird, *Jesus and the Powers*, chap. 1 pg. 7.

⁶⁹⁴Ibid., chap. 1 pg. 5.

⁶⁹⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 123.

In the modern world people depend on the news media for information and as a result, multiple hours are spent every week seeking such information through television, smart phones, and computers. Wright and Bird tell us that, “America’s respective news channels and social-media platforms attract viewers and rake in massive profits by pouring gasoline on the fires of grievance and stoking the embers of indifference.”⁶⁹⁶ These media platforms promote fear and division which dim and distort the goodness and revelation of God.

Media bias is so prevalent today that numerous studies have been done on the topic. “Ad Fontes (founded 2018) has studied 3600 news sources, 700 podcasts and 474 TV/Video programs, evaluating them on a two-point methodology.”⁶⁹⁷ “News stories about domestic politics and social issues are becoming increasingly polarized along ideological lines according to a study of 1.8 million news headlines from major US news outlets from 2014 to 2022.”⁶⁹⁸ Some bias is normal, however, today’s extreme bias and consolidation of the news industry has worsened the problem.

The Special Revelation of God Hampered by Information Overload

In developed societies “Information Overload” is constantly distracting people. “Information Overload” is defined as, “a situation in which you receive too much information at one time and cannot think about it in a clear way.”⁶⁹⁹ The biggest culprit of this is the smart phone. A smart phone can be a constant source of distraction, as unwanted news and weather alerts; political, personal and advertisement text messages; phone calls; emails; financial market news; social media posts; You Tube videos; conspiracy theories; and more are all pulling at you right from your own pocket. Not only is the amount of information overwhelming, the quality and validity of the content is often questionable. Wright and Bird ask the question; “Are we more shaped by social media than Scripture?”⁷⁰⁰ Christians must be

⁶⁹⁶ Wright and Bird, *Jesus and the Powers*, chap. 1 pg. 4.

⁶⁹⁷ “News Media Across the Political Spectrum,” Harvard Library Research Guides, Updated Feb 11, 2024,
<https://guides.library.harvard.edu/newsleans/thechart>

⁶⁹⁸ Luke Auburn, “Study of Headlines Shows Media Bias is Growing,” University of Rochester, Updated July 13, 2023,
<https://www.rochester.edu/newscenter/study-of-headlines-shows-media-bias-growing-563502/>

⁶⁹⁹ Cambridge English Dictionary, accessed October 29, 2024,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/information-overload>

⁷⁰⁰ Wright and Bird, *Jesus and the Powers*, chap. 1 pg. 9.

more determined than ever to read the Bible and hear from God. The good news is that God is interrupting people, revealing Himself and piercing through the powers of darkness!

The Revelation of God Piercing the Powers of Darkness

More than ever people need a special revelation from God. Whether it is the Christian, who needs to be refreshed, encouraged and directed for God's purposes or the nonbeliever who desperately needs salvation through Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself in many ways but believers, as God's ambassadors on earth, are expected to participate through prayer. Wright and Bird affirm the need to be "people of prayer" especially during these times of disorder.⁷⁰¹

Piercing the Powers of Darkness through Prayer

God's special revelation to all believers, the Bible, teaches that prayer is an essential practice of the faith. Jesus set an example of prayer for Christians to follow and He taught us how to pray. "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt 6:6). To pray as Jesus taught in this passage, the believer must slow down, filter out the noise and get quiet before God. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells Christians to "Pray without ceasing" (I Thes 5:17). The power of prayer is never to be underestimated and is to be constantly exercised by God's people. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16). Paul states "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6). Wright and Bird state that we should pray for our leadership and "we can pray for peace, prosperity, justice and freedom as something to be enjoyed by peoples of every city, country and continent."⁷⁰²

"In the U.S. alone, the Great Awakening, the Civil War Revival, the Urban Revivals, and the Azusa Street Revival — all were preceded by prayer. The same has been true in countries like Ireland, Poland, China, South Africa, [Colombia], and Cuba."⁷⁰³ God wants to

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., chap. 1 pg. 6.

⁷⁰² Ibid., chap. 1 pg. 6.

⁷⁰³ Charles Morris "The Key to Every Revival and Great Awakening," Haven Ministries, Feb 24, 2023, <https://haventoday.org/blog/key-every-revival-great->

reveal Himself to the lost and the prayers of the saints encourage Him to do so! Wright and Bird tell us that we are to pray that the kingdom of heaven comes to earth.⁷⁰⁴ As God's people pray, He reveals Himself to the saved and unsaved alike through dreams.

God Supernaturally Revealing Himself Through Dreams

As previously discussed, people need to slow down and get quiet so they can pray effectively, the same applies for people to clearly hear from God. Fortunately, God has built into the human body the need to sleep. It is often during this time of rest that God speaks to those He wants to prepare for the next step in their lives. Whether a person is seeking God or not, He can interrupt their lives through special revelation by way of dreams in the night.

Anna Droll, Chair of the Doctor of Ministry Program at South Florida Theological Seminary, sheds great light on this topic in her book on dreams and visions. As she traveled in Tanzania, Africa, Droll encountered a woman who was ministering and speaking to underprivileged youth. The woman's opening statement was "I had a dream. In the dream, I saw the map of Tanzania and, when I woke up, I felt God was telling me that I must reach all of the youth of our nation. So I have begun here."⁷⁰⁵ God used this dream and gave this woman who was already serving in the kingdom, greater conviction, vision, and direction concerning her next steps in service to Him. As the powers of darkness beat down on His people, God gives them fresh special revelation to keep them going in the form of dreams while they sleep.

Droll further reports an amazing story told to her in a 2018 interview of a Pentecostal missionary, Karl Härgestam. He was on a missionary trip in Ethiopia and was helicoptered into a remote region. He "was greeted by the tribal chief and his linguist who immediately asked about Jesus Christ. Amazed by the question, Härgestam asked how the chief had come upon the name of Jesus Christ and the chief explained that he had dreamed of a shining man and of messengers who would come within 5 days from the sky to tell about the man. In the dream the man's name was revealed to the chief as 'Jesus Christ.'"⁷⁰⁶

awakening/#:~:text=In%20the%20U.S.%20alone%2C%20the,is%20stirring%20in%20Wilmore%2C%20Kentucky.

⁷⁰⁴ Wright and Bird, *Jesus and the Powers*, chap. 8 pg. 176.

⁷⁰⁵ Anna M. Droll, *Dreams and Visions in African Pentecostal Spirituality: The Sub-Saharan Horizon of the Pneumatological Imagination* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2023), 5,6.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 203.

William A. Dyrness, Professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, makes it clear that missionaries do not bring God in their suitcase, God is already there working on the people group to receive the gospel so change can occur.⁷⁰⁷ God is still supernaturally revealing himself to the lost to help with the harvest of souls!

Conclusion

God has kept His general revelation in place and continues to move in people's lives through unique and individualized special revelations. His word is still intact and as more information becomes available, the authenticity of the New Testament continues to be affirmed. For Jews and Christians alike, the existence of the Nation of Israel is a clear marker that God uses his divine providence to keep His promises to His people through the passage of time.

Although it seems like Christianity is on the decline and many churches have compromised with the world and are preaching watered down messages, as always, God has preserved a remnant for Himself. For the Christian in the United States, it is easy to be discouraged as Liberalism is now full grown and has made tremendous inroads in all areas of western culture and society. This force controls most of the mainstream media and rages against the revelation of Jesus, the Bible, and the "uncompromised" Christian; spreading hate, fear, and division. The western world and its democracies, once hailed as the protectors and facilitators of Christian religious freedom are now in a battle for their new identity. People living in urban areas struggle to see God through nature. Information overload, in the form of technological advancements, continues to distract people and as a result, the developed world faces greater barriers to hearing from God than undeveloped nations.

Despite these challenges, God's remnant continues to pray and seek Him through His word. People are praying in greater numbers than ever before and seeing results! Reports of revivals breaking out on college campuses and people being baptized in record numbers are filling social media sites. We read of God appearing to believers in dreams, giving them a fresh revelation and strengthening their faith, as well as preparing unbelievers to receive Jesus Christ and salvation into their lives and communities. God has given born again Christians the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of their salvation (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14), with the power to persevere and overcome until He returns. In all

⁷⁰⁷William A. Dyrness, *Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on new Christian Movements* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), chap. 1 pg. 29, Kindle.

of this, the Christian can be encouraged that He is coming back to receive His inheritance and He will put everything in order. Upon His return, the fallen world will be restored to God and His people. Maranatha, come Lord come!

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THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of the Holy Spirit throughout the New Testament, specifically relating to the empowerment of the Believers, sanctification of the Saints and communion with the Holy Spirit. Although the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a Believer did not occur until after the ascension of Jesus Christ, The Spirit of God was still an active person of the Trinity throughout the Bible and was first introduced in Genesis 1:2 “ Now the Earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”⁷⁰⁸ Πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) is the ancient Greek word for Spirit and its meaning implies a “current of air or wind.”⁷⁰⁹ The first operation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is portrayed in the book of Matthew. This event was in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, in which Mary the mother of Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18). Following the Gospels, in the book of Acts we see a demonstration of how the Holy Spirit birthed the church. The first 4 verses in Acts 2 read:

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The day of Pentecost was the day in which all Believers received the ability to operate in great power and spiritual giftings. Along with the empowerment of the Spirit of God in Acts, Apostle Paul writes several letters pointing believers to the vital role of the Holy Spirit in being the source of transformation that should and can take place in the life of all Believers relating to their character. Paul also sets

⁷⁰⁸ All Scriptures taken from the NIV.

⁷⁰⁹ Bible Hub. Accessed March 28, 2024.

<https://biblehub.com/john/14-26.htm>.

a great example and urges Believers to pursue fellowship with the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 13: 14, Paul writes “May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Although the word “Trinity” is not specifically used in Scripture the concept of the Godhead existing as 3 distinct persons is presented in both the Old and New Testament as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew we see the Trinity present at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:16-17). In the scholarship of Jimmy H. Evans, “The Third Person of the Trinity, How the Holy Spirit Facilitates Man’s Walk.” The author highlights the lack of knowledge concerning the Holy Spirit among Believers in the modern church. He further emphasizes his observation by affirming that the church has misunderstood much of who The Holy Spirit is and has not developed an adequate reliance on him. As a result of unawareness the life of a Believer may be marked with a lack of power, faith, transformation, and relationship with God. Evans states in his writings:

Man is able to walk daily with God because of the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit who, as the third person of the trinity, represents the actual presence of God in the life of the believer. Knowing this, learning to live in partnership with God, is the solution to the issues of ignorance and neglect among believers and the problems that arise from those issues.⁷¹⁰

The Holy Spirit is God, embodying every quality and characteristic of God the Father and Jesus. In the Bible, there are several verses that directly describe the role of The Holy Spirit. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as our advocate in John 14:26. The Greek word for advocate used in John 14 is transliterated to the word *paraklêtos* and means “someone who is called to one's aid, a helper or intercessor.”⁷¹¹ From understanding this word in its original language we are able to gain a deeper understanding of what the role of an

⁷¹⁰ Jimmie Evans, "The Third Person of the Trinity: How the Holy Spirit Facilitates Man's Walk with God," *Fidei et Veritatis: The Liberty University Journal of Graduate Research*: Vol. 1:1, Article 8. Available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/fidei_et_veritatis/vol1/iss1/8.

⁷¹¹ Bible Hub. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://biblehub.com/john/14-26.htm>.

advocate is. Jesus, also states that the Holy Spirit convicts us (John 16:8), guides and leads us into all truth (John 16:18). In Galatians chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit is introduced as being Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. These are the divine characteristics of God in all persons of the Trinity. Evans refers to John 15 as a crucial chapter in providing an understanding of how we become like God, this is through the power of the Holy Spirit within us and abiding in Christ.⁷¹² One may ask, how do we abide in Christ if he is no longer present in this age? The key here is to realize that the Spirit of Christ indwelling in us is the One whom we must abide in through fellowship. The Holy Spirit is the greatest person living on this side of heaven today and knowing this in itself can bring us to a point of great revelation and awareness.

Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

Marcos De Benedicto wrote a dissertation at Andrews University titled “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Enabling Believers for Ministry: an Adventist Perspective.” He shares an interesting perspective on the concept relating to being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” He states that although much argument has taken place in generating a conclusive interpretation of the filling of the Holy Spirit, he highlights the simplicity of this concept by explaining that “to be full of full of something is to share the essential quality of it, or even be controlled or overflowed by it.”⁷¹³ De Benedicto shares a statement relating to the writings of Max Turner by further stating, “To say that someone is ‘full of X’ is to say that that quality clearly marks the person’s life or comes to visible expression in his or her activity, rather than merely residing in him or her as an unexpressed potential.”⁷¹⁴ In Acts 2, the first sign that occurred confirming the filling of the Holy spirit was the enabling through the Spirit of God for the individuals to produce a result they could not have produced by themselves or before the day of Pentecost occurred. As Believers in this modern day, it is important to realize that the Holy Spirit has not ceased the ability to enable us. The Bible states that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).” The Holy Spirit indwelling in us today is the same spirit that created, led and empowered Jesus in his lifetime. If we know God has not changed, perhaps the question we

⁷¹² Evans, “The Third Person of the Trinity.

⁷¹³ Marcos De. Benedicto “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Enabling Believers for Ministry: An Adventist Perspective.” *Digital Commons @ Andrews University*, 2004. <https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dmin/37/>.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

should ask ourselves as Believers is, have we? In an article written by B. I. Ugwu, the author highlights the comparison between the pre-Pentecost and post-Pentecost lives of Believers specifically highlighting the actions and transformation that occurred in the life of Peter.⁷¹⁵ Prior to the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter betrayed Jesus three times, motivated by fear. Peter is also seen struggling to grasp the true will of God. This is displayed in his rebuke to Jesus relating to the coming death that Jesus would soon face on the cross. In Matthew 16:23 Jesus replies to Peter's rebuke by saying "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Though Peter walked closely with Jesus, closer than many of the other disciples, grasping the full spiritual understanding of God's will, deity and power did not manifest in his life fully until the day of Pentecost took place. Peter's character transformed dramatically and is seen early in the book of Acts. Peter demonstrates great power, confidence and authority, as he addresses the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14). Gregory A. Smith, Director of the Ephraim Law Program at Liberty University, highlights the importance of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the early church. In "The Holy Spirit in the New Testament," Smith discusses the prioritization of choosing and delegating matters of the church to Spirit filled Believers who have been clearly marked by their transformation. Smith states that the selection of Barnabas as a representative to Antioch was due to his nature of great faith, noble deeds and his state of being full of the Holy Spirit.⁷¹⁶ Through these examples, as Believers in Christ today, the experiences of the former Apostles and disciples paint a vivid picture of how the Holy Spirit of God was intended to operate in our life. The Holy Spirit is the source of our strength, power, and boldness to proclaim Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is our Joy in the midst of troubles and our active guide during times of confusion.

Sanctification of the Saints

The Greek word for sanctification is ἁγιασμός, οὖ, ὁ and is transliterated to the word hagioasmos: meaning concentration, or to be made Holy.⁷¹⁷ God, himself is a Holy God, and from the beginning of time he has desired for his creation to be Holy, set apart and perfect.

⁷¹⁵ B. I. Ugwu, "The Holy Spirit in Christian Life. Spiritan Horizons," 10. Retrieved from <https://dsc.du.edu/spiritanhorizons/vol10/iss10/9>

⁷¹⁶ Gregory A. Smith, "The Holy Spirit in the New Testament" (2000). Faculty Publications and Presentations. 68. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lib_fac_pubs/68

⁷¹⁷ Bible Hub. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://biblehub.com/john/14-26.htm>.

God made Adam and Eve in his image, being Holy, free from error and sin, as himself (Genesis 5 1-3). Due to the deception of Satan and the rebellion of man, sin was brought into the world bringing death to mankind, causing a separation between humans and God. God sovereignly planned a way for us to be reconciled back to him, and to receive imputed righteousness through the blood shed by his Son Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1: 30-31). The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ allowed for the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in Believers. Today, living through the power of the Holy Spirit is the only way we are able to live pleasing lives unto God. In John 14:16 Jesus actually refers to the Holy Spirit as our helper saying “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and remind you of all that I said to you.” However, many years before the first coming of Jesus, before his death, burial and resurrection, God chose a nation to be set apart, and Holy unto him, to be a light to other nations, demonstrating to the world that there is only one true God (Leviticus 20:26). The nation is called Israel. The Israelites were the people God gave what we know as the Ten Commandments. Throughout their history God also provided the Israelites with instructions, commands, and statutes that they would live by. The law of God was given to the Israelites, and never fulfilled, as perfect living could never be achieved by their own human effort. In the New Testament, Paul is given a revelation of the Law and explains that the Law in fact does not bring holiness but rather is intended to reveal our deficits before God.

Don Fanning, the Director of the Intercultural Studies Department along with The Center of Global Ministries at Liberty University wrote an article titled, “Romans 6: The Basis of Satisfaction.” He introduces the topic of sanctification by bringing illumination to the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness that we have been given through Christ by drawing attention to Romans 6.⁷¹⁸ In Romans chapter 6:3, Paul states that we are baptized into the death of Christ when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Fanning elaborates on this topic by sharing that the baptism of a Believer into Christ is not merely intellectual, but rather the participation in his death, having been immersed into his body, which died and rose again.⁷¹⁹ “This is the beginning of sanctification, it starts with the non-physical death of our flesh and resurrection of ourselves united to Christ. Fanning describes the process for sanctification as “a

⁷¹⁸ Don Fanning, "Romans 6: The Basics of Sanctification" (2009). *Romans Study Guide*. 6. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_rom/6.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

progressive maturing into the image of Christ.”⁷²⁰ The author unfolds four attitudes that play a functional role in the process of sanctification, starting with knowing the truth of being united to Christ, the principle that we have been crucified to our former selves, the truth that we should no longer be slaves to sin, and lastly that Christ’s death to sin produced the death of all sin for Believers.¹⁵ Sanctification is a process that every born again Believer goes through. Each individual matures at a different rate but the ultimate goal is that we all mature in our walk with Christ (1 Corinthians 13:11). Over time not only will we see and feel the change that the Holy Spirit is producing in our hearts and lives but others will notice also. The more we yield to the pruning of the Holy Spirit the more fruit we will bear, the more we allow the Word of God to take root in our hearts the more fruit can grow in our life (Mathew 13 18-23). In John 12, Jesus teaches a profound principle relating to the concept of dying to self, Jesus speaks: “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12: 24-26). As Believers we must embrace living the crucified life with Christ in order to walk intimately with his Spirit.

Fellowship with the Holy Spirit

Throughout the Bible it is clear that God places a high value on communion, community, and relationship. The Trinity itself is a picture of relationship, the great and divine relationship of God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament we see a perfect picture of oneness in Jesus’s submission to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Ugwu writes much of this communion and emphasizes the great beauty of communion we receive as Believers by baptism into Christ. Not only do we receive a family composed of other believers, but we receive God's most precious Spirit.⁷²¹ He also makes a direct point by expressing the consequences of not being in communion with God, this ultimately being death. In much of the bible the Holy Spirit is referred to by things that are abstract such as fire, a dove, air breath and cloud. Ugwu believes that this may be why the person of the Holy Spirit is often misunderstood with intimacy lacking in the life of some Believers. As Children of God, we must make the Holy spirit personal

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Ugwu, B. I. “The Holy Spirit in Christian Life.” *Spiritan Horizons*, 10 (10). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritanhorizons/vol10/iss10/9>

to us. Just as God created us with feelings and emotions, the Holy Spirit is a person who also has distinct feelings. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit of God can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). In order to develop intimacy with the Holy spirit it is crucial to understand who he is and live in an awareness of his presence.

Conclusion

Through the understanding of scripture, personal observation, and writings of scholars, there is clear evidence that proposes a deficiency in appreciation of the person of the Holy Spirit among the modern-day church. From biblical text we know that the Holy Spirit is fully God and can be credited for many great events that took place in the New Testament such as the birth of Jesus, the day of Pentecost, the administration of spiritual gifts and the indwelling presence of God that became available to all Believers. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to live victorious lives in Christ. The Holy Spirit has given us the ability to live full lives in Christ marked by love, joy, peace, purity, holiness; his power changes us from the inside out.

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