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PERSONAL PURITY: A BURDEN OF THE  
TESTAMENTS

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**Introduction**

The subject of personal purity may be approached from many angles. In this paper,<sup>1</sup> I have decided against an approach using word studies and the like, because I believe most if not all of us share a consensus as to the semantic content of the substantive term. I have also chosen not to approach it from the standpoint of systematic theology, because of the fact of our differing systems. These systems place us squarely into such varying camps that we often cannot talk to each other using terms on which we all agree.

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<sup>1</sup>Editorial note: This article was first presented at a CETA meeting in the late eighties at the JTS (where Dr Vassel served as professor of biblical studies and theology); it was later published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* 12: (1988), 359-368 (ERT). The following citation is from the ERT: "Vassell analyzes biblical characters in both the Old and New Testaments who exemplify this virtue of purity: Isaiah, Joseph, the Palmist, Paul, Peter, John. He convincingly shows how moral rectitude, a sense of God's Holy presence and true worship are its essential elements. He concludes that both the categories of the kingdom of God and parousia in the New Testament are fundamentally concerned with purity."

I have sought to take an approach that is more concerned with biblical theology. It is, therefore, an approach that seeks to identify a unifying motif throughout Scripture relative to the concept of personal purity. It assumes that there is a progressive clarification of the concept alongside the progressive revelation within Scripture. While the paper does not attempt to exhaust the subject, it seeks to identify some fundamental conclusions that may be reached using such an approach.

The motif that this paper identifies is that a personal appreciation of the living God inevitable ushers one into a life of purity in keeping with, and as a consequence of, that appreciation of him.

### **The Example of the Patriarchs**

Joseph is a shining example of personal purity among the Patriarchs in the Old Testament. He may rightly serve as a paradigm of the biblical concept of personal purity. The episode in his life that best demonstrates this is found in Genesis 39:1-20.

*A Relationship with the Living God.* The text establishes the crucial factor relationship with God in this story by the words 'The Lord was with Joseph' in Gen 39:2. These words appear again in verse 21 and 23 of this chapter, as the conditioning and constant factor in face of the changing situations of Joseph's life. They have vital significance in the book of Genesis, in relationship to the covenant relationship that God had established with Abraham and his descendants.

So, in Genesis 26:3, as God reaffirms his covenant commitment to Isaac, Abraham's son, God says, '*I will be with you . . . and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.*' The assurance of God's presence is thus associated inextricably with his covenant commitment. So in the words 'The Lord was with Joseph'. The covenant relationship between God and Joseph comes into sharp focus (cf. also Acts 7-9 – and note God and Joseph comes

into sharp focus (cf. also Acts 7:9-and note how Stephen emphasized this fact in his speech before the Sanhedrin).

*Personal purity: a function of the relationship with the living God.* Joseph's story develops in a way that demonstrates God's favour upon him. He is physically attractive and financial astute. He therefore rise to leadership and prominence in his master Potiphar's household. The narrative peaks, however, with a testing challenge to his commitment to personal motif rectitude. In the presence of ample opportunity and in the absence of any restraining group or written legal code, he is persistently enticed into a sexual relationship with his master's wife.

The personal purity of Joseph shines out in response to this challenge. He consistently and decisively refuses to cooperate. He states clearly his fundamental reason for consistently refusing in the famous words: 'How could I do such a wicked thing *and sin against God?*' With these words Joseph establishes that such an activity would scandalize the God that had graciously and faithfully committed himself in covenant to him, his ancestors and his descendants. The personal purity exemplified in Joseph's upright moral choice is shown to be a direct function of his consciousness of the living God in terms of a sacrosanct relationship. For him, the violating of this relationship was unthinkable.

### **The Experience of the Prophet Isaiah**

*A revelation of the living God.* The Prophet Isaiah remembers a critical point in time when he 'saw the Lord' (v.1). Unveiled before him was the absolute authority of the living God, his dazzling glory and his overwhelming holiness. (vv.2-4). It was awesome revelation to Isaiah. In the light of this revelation of God, Isaiah sees himself as one who stands condemned because he, a self-confessed 'man of unclean lips', has seen 'the King'. From an Old Testament perspective, no man expects to live, having seen God (cf. Gen. 32:30; Ex 33:20). The prophet realizes that, having seen 'the king', he is now completely at God's mercy.

*Personal purity resulting from revelation of the living God.* The revelation of God not only evokes what may be called 'Judgement day' honesty in the Prophet, shown in the admitting of his own 'uncleanness' before God, but also compels him to abandon any mitigating isolationist posture of individual self-righteousness ('and I live among a people of unclean lips'). He sees himself in the same way as all those around him. He recognizes and identifies himself with the common problem of his fellowmen which merits doom in the presence of a holy God. Thankfully, his woeful, impassioned cry does not go unnoticed. And so upon his humble and honest confession of his plight, instead of merited and expected condemnation, a gracious purging takes place which 'takes away his guilt' and makes atonement for his sin. He is now, *and only now*, able to speak God's words to his fellow men. Isaiah's explicit defenselessness before the holy God, and his implicit dependence upon him (being at his mercy), are theologically important precursors of the prophet's experience of personal purification and subsequent commissioning.

For the prophet, personal purification is not merely an end, but it is brought into the service of the public proclamation of God's will. Indeed personal purging is absolutely necessary if he is going to be God's prophet.

One notes with interest that the sin of which he is purged is that of having '*unclean lips*'. The focus on '*lips*' here indicates that the phenomenon of social relationships is implied. All social relationships are in fact mediated through oral communication, '*the lips*'.

It is reasonable to argue that since the Prophet's subsequently '*purged*' lips speak the word of God, which in this context is a word of justice truth and impartiality (cf. Is. 6:9-15), that the common sin which he shared with his fellow men ('unclean lips') points to conditions of injustice, falsehood and compromise which were systemic within and characteristic of contemporary society?

If this is the case, then the personal purging here which he experienced in the presence of the living God not only

delivers him from this damnable situation of corporate uncleanness, but also enables him to speak God's truth to it, and also necessarily against it.

### **The Expression of the Psalmist**

*A reflection upon God.* The Psalms highlight the religious reflection of ancient Israel upon God in the sacred context of worship. They are uniquely the repository of the nation's theology, and this is a theology that is decidedly *theocentric*. Of the many Psalms that could be cited in order to highlight this issue of personal purity, Psalm 24 commends itself and in the words of verses 3-6 brings the issue into sharp focus.

*Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord?  
Who may stand in His holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart  
who does not lift up his soul to an idol  
or swear by what is false.  
He will receive blessings from the Lord  
and vindication from God His Saviour.  
Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek your face, O God of Jacob.*  
(Psa 24:3-6 NIV)

From verses 3 and 5 we deduce that the quintessence of blessing, in the mind of the Psalmist, is to be enabled to stand in the presence of the living God completely vindicated by him. Verses 4 and 6 describe the character and the conduct of the one who participates in this blessedness. That one has 'clean hands' and 'a pure heart', 'does not lift up his soul to an idol', or 'swear by what is false'. And 'such are the generation of those who seek him', who seek the 'face' of the 'God of Jacob'.

*Personal purity as gift and demand.* The Psalmist seems to integrate all the elements of personal purity already alluded to in this paper. For him ritual purification is not enough to guarantee the blessing of the right entry into God's presence and to stand there vindicated. 'The exclusive stress is laid on the moral purity of the worshipper' (Weiser 1962).

In his moral choice and actions, 'clean hands'; in his moral attitude and integrity, 'pure heart'; in his fidelity to the living God of covenant, he 'does not lift up his soul to an idol'; and in his social justice and integrity, nor does he 'swear by what is false'. Note, however, that it is those who specifically seek a right relationship with the God of Jacob, the God who redeems twisted characters, who receive the blessed privilege of entry in to the holy presence. The really deep desire to be in God's presence is then *both the motivation* for actions and attitudes indicative of personal purity and *the means whereby* a gracious saving God purifies one, and thus enables one to be ready to come in. 'Clean hands', 'pure heart', and the rest-moral rectitude in relationship<sup>2</sup> to God and man-are then indicative of the personal purity which for the Psalmist is both responsibility and privilege, demand and gift. At the moment of desire for true worship, the openhearted worshipper both receives a gracious gift and also meets the holy demand in the presence of the living God-the God of Jacob.

### **The Evidence of Participation in the Kingdom of God**

*The Rule of God.* The New Testament presents the coming of God's Kingdom as central to its message. It has been argued convincingly that the failure to grasp the nature and centrality of this eschatological concept will lead to a serious misunderstanding of the whole New Testament (cf. Dodd, 50-51; Cullmann, 47-48; Ladd, 57-104).

Matthew's Gospel is particularly concerned with the concept of the eschatological Kingdom. It is often referred to in Matthew as the 'Kingdom of *Heaven*'.<sup>3</sup> This 'Gospel' is the Gospel of the 'Kingdom'. Jesus is presented as the Messianic King in the Kingdom of God. Matthew, therefore, presents the principles of the Kingdom. It describes the participants in this Kingdom and in its record of various

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew idiom 'his face' used in this context connotes the idea of favourable relationship (cf. Ps. 27:7-9).

<sup>3</sup> The author's sensitivity to his Jewish audience's concern for circumlocution of the divine name is no doubt the reason behind this phenomenon.



parables and narratives of Jesus, it clarifies the nature of the Kingdom.

My understanding of the teaching regarding the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, and especially in Matthew's Gospel, may be concisely summarized in the following way. In the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah, the Kingdom of God has broken decisively into history (Mt. 12:28). There are eschatological blessings associated with this inbreaking of the Kingdom, the foremost of which is the real possibility, here and now, of becoming a participant in this Kingdom of God. However, notwithstanding the present inbreaking, there is coming a fuller and final consummation of the Kingdom of God which is as yet future, and for which the New Testament urges constant anticipation and preparedness in the certain hope of its coming. So the Kingdom of God is 'already' present in some measure, but 'not yet' consummated in its fullness. It is 'already' but 'not yet' (Cullmann, 81-93).

In keeping with my understanding of the doctrine of the kingdom of God, I regard Matthew 5:3-10 as a description of the characteristics of the blessed participants in the Kingdom of God. Verses 3 and 10 are all-inclusive and provide the clues to this conclusion: the poor in spirit and the ones who are persecuted because of righteousness are the ones to whom the Kingdom belongs. The other six 'Beatitudes' (4-9) are 'Kingdom characteristics' which are shared by all those blessed ones who are truly participants in the Kingdom of God. These people enjoy here and now the favour of God. They *are* the blessed. They stand blessed in an 'already' sense and look forward to more blessedness in a 'not yet' sense.

So they all display in the 'now' the characteristics of blessedness: they sensitively mourn, they are meek, they hunger and thirst for righteousness. They also experience in the 'now' a measure of the associated eschatological blessings: they are 'already' experiencing comfort, they have begun to be filled with righteousness, and so on. However,

they also look forward to a future fuller experience of these eschatological blessings which will certainly be revealed when the 'not yet' comes.

*Personal purity as an evidence of the Rule of God.* Within the hermeneutical framework, Mt. 5:8 ('Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God') takes on tremendous significance for our discussion. Personal purity is identified as a characteristic of those who now stand blessed, being participants in God's Kingdom: the pure in heart are *now* the objects of God's favour. Their purity of heart, however, relates to the fact that they have 'already' in some sense, begun to 'see God', the vision of whom is both the motivation and the means to purity as we have already discussed above, (Cf. also Paul in 2 Cor. 3:18 and John in 1 John 1:5-7).

The term 'pure in *heart*' conveys the idea of a condition that is intensely personal. Stott points out that this blessed characteristic is best described as a disposition of absolute openness to God's scrutiny and correction (which he describes as a 'Christian counter culture'). In this situation, there is a social dimension as it also frees one to be transparent before one's fellow men. There is consequently an absence of hidden agendas and ulterior motives. The facades of play-acting become ridiculous to such an individual, for *deceptive double dealing* and *secret moral corruption* have no place under the holy scrutiny of the living God to which he has submitted himself. If there is absolute openness and honesty before God, whom the pure heart begins to 'see' in his transcendental holiness, what does he need to hide from his fellow men, with whom he shares common human mortality and fallibility?

### **The Expectation of the Parousia**

*Personal purity, vital sign of Christian hope.* Having discussed the issue of personal purity as it relates to the rule of God emphasized in the Gospels, the final consideration of this paper will be the relationship between the expected

return of our 'Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (the blessed hope' of every Christian), and the matter of personal purity. This will be examined in reference to the final phase of revelation, the Apostles' doctrine'.

*Paul.* For the apostle Paul, the triad of faith, hope and love, constitutes the essential, basic and sufficient element of genuine Christianity (cf. Col.1:3-5, 1 Cor. 13:13; I Th. 1:3-10). For Paul, these are three works of God in the lives of persons. Paul knows no genuine Christianity where these elements are absent. *All* true Christians love, all must have faith in Christ and *all* look in great expectation for his return.

In 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul gives personal advice to Timothy to whom he has assigned the demanding task of 'guarding the Gospel' (as John Stott's book title [1973] puts it) in Ephesus. In 1 Tim. 4:12 he assures Timothy that the 'only way to silence criticism' (Barclay 1975), is simply to be exemplary Christian, 'an example for the believers'. Timothy must be model, both in his speech and in his conduct, if he wants to be taken seriously. Paul elaborates the idea of exemplary Christian conduct in terms of three essential elements, '*love, faith and purity*'.

Here, the Pauline triad of essential Christian virtues seems at first glance to be disrupted. One would expect 'hope' to complement faith and love, in the triad; instead we see 'purity'. I believe, however, that there is a vital link between 'hope' and 'purity' in Paul's mind, and that the Pauline triad is not therefore violated. For Paul, *Christian purity* is simply and necessarily the corollary to *Christian hope*. The life of purity is the consistent reflection in this world of the life that hopes for the world to come. This emerges clearly if we allow Paul in Titus 2:11-14 to interpret Paul in 1 Tim. 4:12.

Paul writes to Titus in Crete a similar letter to that which he writes to Timothy in Ephesus. In the letter to Titus he makes unequivocally explicit the link between purity and hope.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14, NIV).

In the above passage, Paul explains concisely that the life of personal purity results from the disciplining<sup>4</sup> of God's saving grace. He further shows that this life is lived in light of the dynamic expectation of the 'blessed hope', the content of which is the 'glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ'. He concludes by asserting that it is Jesus Christ that gave himself in order to redeem us from all wickedness, and to produce a people designated as 'his very own' and characterized by moral purity, and an eagerness to do good.

Williams Barclay (1975), in commenting on Titus 2:11-14, says this:

Jesus Christ makes us able to live with the *prudence* which allows no passion or desire more than its proper place; with the *justice* which enables us to give both to God and to men that which is their due; with the *reverence* which makes live in the awareness that this world is nothing other than the temple of God.

He continues:

The dynamic of this new life is the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ.... The Christian is the man who is always prepared for the coming of the King of Kings....Jesus can purify us until we are fit to be the special people of God.

In the light of this passage in Titus, we understand Paul's advice to Timothy in 1 Tim 4:12 as being an

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek word translated 'teach' in the NIV text implies more than mere instruction; it has the force of 'training' of 'disciplining' (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich).

encouragement to demonstrate purity of life which, for Paul, is the corollary of Christian hope.

The apostolic witness of John and Peter corroborates the idea seen in Paul that Christian hope is inevitably reflected in Christian purity.

*John.* In John 3:1-3, the text speaks for itself, without the need for extensive comment. It says:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And this is what we are! The reason the world does not know us that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now are we children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The concepts of hope and purity are obviously explicitly linked here. The passage however sheds more light on the *nature* of personal purity by showing that the standard of personal purity is to be 'just as that one': Jesus Christ, for whom we wait. It is Christlike purity. He further shows that the hope of the Christian is indeed to realize just that-Christlikeness at the time of the unhindered vision of Christ, when we shall see Christ 'as he is'.

*Peter.* In 2 Peter 3, Peter speaks about the 'day of the Lord'. For him, it is the day when God comes in final judgement and brings complete redemption. In vv. 13 and 14 he says, 'But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth; the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him'.

The consensus of the apostolic witness is that, without doubt, personal purity is a function of genuine expectant hope for the return of the Lord.

### **Conclusion**

From this study, we have seen that throughout the Scripture there is the vital concept that an individual's deep

appreciation of the living God is a life-conditioning phenomenon. The occupation with the living God necessarily works out itself in history in terms of personal purity.

In the Patriarch *Joseph*, the consciousness of a relationship with the God of covenant informed his moral choices. It demanded moral rectitude, with no compromise. In the prophet *Isaiah*, his encounter in vivid revelation of the God of absolute power, glory and holiness draws out honest confession of defenselessness in his presence. This is the necessary precursor to God's gracious purging. In Psalm 24, reflection upon the awesome requirements necessary to approach the living God in true worship, leads the Psalmist to see beyond ritual purity to the many-faceted issue of moral purity, which takes in both relationship with God and man. He theologizes that it is both the holy demand of God, and the gracious gift of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen that one definitive quality of those that have personally accepted into their lives the rule of God which Gospel of the Kingdom announces, is the distinguishing characteristic of purity of heart. These people begin to 'see God'. They are transparent before him and before men. There is no place for deception and hypocrisy. There is also the anticipation of fuller purity in the anticipation of a fuller vision of God.

Finally, in the apostolic teachings of the New Testament, we found that there was complete consensus between Paul, John and Peter in articulating the concept that personal purity is the proper Christian disposition lived in the light of a knife-edged expectancy of the return of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Those who anticipate the consummation of the future, in the fulfilling purposes of the living God, live pure lives in hope and expectancy.

Bearing in mind our discussion of Titus 2:11-14 above, may we hear afresh the concluding challenge of the apostle Paul in reference to personal purity: 'These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.'

May we also resolve to be models, by God's grace, of that which we teach, rebuke and encourage. I am convinced that if we teach personal purity and also live pure lives, we will serve the Church in our time and our region in a way that glorifies the living God.

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CELEBRATING JAMAICANS AT  
HOME AND ABROAD  
PSALM 33:1-22

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**National Independence Service  
Calvary Baptist, Montego Bay, St. James  
July 30, 2017**

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### **Introduction**

To celebrate someone is simply to honour that person, and for the most part, that celebration is in the form of an event. Usually, the honouring of someone is the result of an achievement. An achievement which, in our eyes, is deserving of public recognition. Some feat which we believe should not go unnoticed because of its sterling quality.

### **Theme**

But the theme we have today has expanded, in my view, that concept as it calls for the celebration of all Jamaicans. It calls us to celebrate every Jamaican, for the simple reason that he/she is a Jamaican. A celebration devoid of any particular feat.

Some may think this is a “watering down” of the purpose for a celebration, but I think not, because for most of us, birthdays bring big celebrations, regardless of whether there be a specific achievement. Herein



lies the genius of the theme: Every human being, made in the image of God, **MUST** be celebrated.

Oftentimes, the birth of a new born is celebrated, regardless of status or creed. There are **NO** prerequisites for this celebration. Yet, as the child grows, there is almost a refusal to honour and lift high this human being because, in our eyes, he/she has fallen from the position of honour, not because he/she has disgraced him/herself but because he/she needs now to prove him/herself worthy of honour by doing some great feat. What a tragedy!

### **The Scripture**

The Christian understanding, however, clearly stated in Galatians 3:28 turns things on its head, for it declares that all the categories that divide men have been removed in Jesus and equality marks our way. We are equal, not in what we possess but in the fact that we are humans made in God's image. Without this understanding of equality, we will **NEVER** be able to celebrate all Jamaicans.

The lesson from the Psalm, read earlier, is the text for consideration. Psalm 33 is a typical Psalm of Praise that celebrates God. Verses 1-3, calls the people to celebrate God; verses 4-19 give the reasons for the celebration and the final verses provide a conclusion.

The call to celebrate the Lord, invites the people to do three things: Praise Him, rejoice in Him and sing to Him. I would want to suggest that when we celebrate a Jamaican, these kinds of actions would also be appropriate. Praise, rejoice and sing are all in the tense of command and therefore the people of Israel are commanded to celebrate God.

### ***Reasons***

This celebration of God (v.4-19) is predicated on:

1. His creation of the world by His words, echoing the creation story of Genesis one. His creative work is based on the faithful work and upright word of God. God, being a lover of righteousness and justice has filled the earth with His steadfast love. Thus, the Earth must *stand in awe of God* (verse 8). Notice, the emphasis is on God's character and not on His deeds, since His deeds flow from His character. Thus, our honouring of every Jamaican must be based on the fact of whom he/she is more than what he/she has achieved. Thus, I am declaring that being in God's image with the potential of reflecting Him must be the basis for celebration.
2. His activities in the history of the world must be recognised. What is clearly seen in the text is that God's activities are for the blessing of man. His celebration of man, if you please, is based on His desire to bless man.

Verse 12 declares that the nation that makes God, lord/master must be blessed, because such a nation works to fulfil God's plan. I believe that through the words of our National Anthem, Pledge and Song, our forefathers declared that this nation is a nation given to the fear of God. These national expressions are like covenants made with God; and as such we have enjoyed unqualified blessings in many ways. Many will recall how often hurricanes that were headed towards us, certain to hit, turned away at the last minute; many know of our enormous impact on the world in spite of our size and in academia our law students have dazzled the world, as year after year they outclass the Harvards, the Yales, and the like in the law debates. These are but a few of the achievements of this country that say that God has been on our side. It is Genesis

12:3 that declares that God desires more than anything else to bless people, or if you may, to celebrate people. He declared through Abraham that, “all the peoples of the Earth will be blessed” and John in Revelation 7:9 declared the fulfilment of this promise as he wrote that people from every nation, tribe, people and language were standing before the throne in white robes. This utterance signals the greatest blessing that can be achieved by any human being – life with God forevermore. So God desires to celebrate every Jamaican, those at home and those abroad.

But we, as a nation, have moved away from the place of blessing. Rather than the celebration of each Jamaican, we have worked to destroy our fellowman. Thus, we are filled with actions that show disregard for life and our fellow Jamaican: Injustice, intolerance, indiscipline and insolence. I therefore call us to return to the declaration of our forefathers and celebrate every Jamaican.

The Christian way turns things around like we read in the second lesson (Matthew 5: 33-45) today. We need to respond to those who hurt us with love. We need rather than to honour and celebrate only those who achieve, celebrate all by helping them to achieve. We will never be able to do that until we take Galatians 3:28 seriously. We need to know that we are all equal. I know this is hard to accept because we always want to believe that we are a little better because of what we have, where we were born and with whom we are associated. But, we are equal because we are all human beings made in God’s image and everything else we have represents privileges he have been given. These

don't make us better people, as the world teaches, but they *may* help us to cope better with the difficulties of life. We must come understand that the extras we have, we have to bless others, who are equal to us but less privileged than us. We **MUST** decide to honour every Jamaican by helping each person within our reach to achieve.

Verses 13-19 declare that God keeps watch over the Earth. Verse 18 declares that God's blessed action is upon those who fear Him.

If one fears God, then one must have regard for humanity. Jesus in His demonstration of what humans should be, never failed to other celebrate and honour people. He oftentimes celebrated those who were otherwise disregarded by humanity and He even earned the criticism of those 'looking on' but that did not deter him from honouring others. He kept on celebrating all of humanity. Yes! The call for us today and for this independence celebration, indeed all of the rest of our lives is to celebrate every Jamaican wherever he/she may be. Even in the face of criticism, like Jesus, we must be committed to help others at any cost, for it is in this that we will honour our fellowman.

### **Conclusion**

Finally the Psalm ends with a prayer for God's unfailing love to rest upon His people (verse 22). I think, if we are going to be able to celebrate every Jamaican, then the unfailing love of God must also rest upon us. And, as we pray continually for God's unfailing love for others, we will see ourselves as the instruments through whom God will honour and celebrate others. Thus, we will be able to look outside of ourselves and recognise that each man born

must be celebrated, and therefore we need to bestow honour on those we can reach.

Our national pledge is right: we **MUST** stand for justice, brotherhood and peace, being generous and honest in all our dealings.

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION  
AND THE CANONICAL NARRATIVE:  
TOWARD A HOLISTIC  
UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE

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**Abstract**

*Biblical interpretation is inherently contextual. Various social forces, ideas, and experiences shape the process of biblical interpretation. That admission also acknowledges the Bible's own particular historical, social, and religious contexts. Proper biblical interpretation is carried out in light of both the biblical and contemporary contexts. However, it is possible to attend so resolutely to context that we miss the integrated theology that holds the Bible's grand narrative together. God conveys the biblical message as a unified story that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The narrative develops through various plot structures that bring the message into focus. The Bible tells the story of God's boundless love for creation and his plan of redemption, centered in the life of Christ and whereby we are active participants, awaiting a final renewal. That story gives structure and meaning (and even correction) to a vast assortment of theological formulations. By recognizing the novel ways the biblical story unfolds, we can allow its message to have a holistic impact on Caribbean life and theology. Current practices of biblical interpretation in the Caribbean need to take the whole biblical narrative into greater consideration. This paper addresses the need for a genuinely holistic reading of the Bible by exploring an approach that pays attention to the canonical storyline. A holistic reading of Scripture is not a hindrance to contextualization but is an indispensable component of biblical interpretation for the sake of the church.*

## **Introduction**

Biblical interpretation is inherently contextual. People always read the Bible from their cultural perspective. That action can broadly be defined as “contextualization.” The term contextualization has become part of the Caribbean’s theological vocabulary. Bible scholars in the Caribbean support it as part allowing the biblical message to take deep root in our culture.

All theology, whether we admit this or not, is shaped by context. The values, feelings, traditions, history, and social structures in which we live affect our perception and reception of the Christian faith. Even the Bible conveys its message and stories from a particular contextual background. Either way, there is no culture free interpretation of the biblical message. The issue of contextualization is therefore inevitable in the interpretation of the Bible.

However, it is possible to attend so resolutely to context that we run the risk of missing the integrated theology that holds the Bible’s grand narrative together. The Bible relays a grand narrative of God’s boundless love for creation and his plan of redemption, centered in the life of Christ and whereby we are active participants, awaiting a final renewal. That overarching story gives structure and meaning (and even correction) to a vast assortment of theological formulations, such that its message can have a holistic impact on Caribbean life.

Bible readers, including pastors and theology students, need to take the canonical narrative into greater consideration as they seek to contextualize its message. This paper addresses the need for a genuinely holistic reading of the Bible by exploring an approach that pays attention to the canonical storyline. It advances the view that a holistic reading of Scripture is not a hindrance to contextualization but is an indispensable component of biblical interpretation and application for the sake of the church. In the end, the paper will present a case study interpretation of sin in the biblical canon and its reality in our social context.

## **Contextualization and Interpretation**

The term contextualization derives from the word context. Context involves all the conditions under which we live: socio-political, historical, and religious. Those conditions work together to encode in us an integrated assortment of beliefs, values, practices, and

worldviews that enable us to form communities.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, contextualization allows us to see what it means that Jesus Christ is authentically experienced in every human situation.<sup>2</sup>

Contextualization also suggests the capacity to understand the biblical message in a given cultural situation.<sup>3</sup> We view it is a necessary tool that enhances the encounter between God's Word and God's world.<sup>4</sup> There are different models of contextualization to help us discover ways of effectively expressing God's Word within a given cultural setting.

The models suggest possible starting points from where faith can come into contact with reality. I will share three models for our reflection. There is the *Anthropological* model that lays stress on listening to culture as a place where God's revelation occurs. There is the *Translation* model, which affirms the good news as coming into context, but needs cultural equivalents as bridges for its presentation. Then we have the *Praxis* model, which focuses on Christian identity from the standpoint of social transformation.<sup>5</sup> Let me simply say that these three models can positively benefit contextual biblical interpretation if they are used complementarily.

Biblical interpretation is intrinsically contextual. In a generic sense, interpretation has to do with understanding and expressing the views of another. Bible interpreters seek to understand and express the thoughts of Bible authors, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the divine author of the biblical message (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). Proper biblical interpretation involves faithfulness to the biblical message and the cultural context of the contemporary reader.

Contextual interpretation involves two key activities. First, it involves *textual analysis* (exegesis). This approach includes studying the Bible's historical, religious, cultural, and the literary context of individual books, chapters, verse segments, and words.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," in *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2003), 24–25.

<sup>4</sup>David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA, 2000), 31.

<sup>5</sup>The others are Synthetic, Transcendental, and Countercultural models. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Faith and Cultures Series, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 38–43, 55–57.



There is also the overarching canonical context, which the interpreter cannot overlook.<sup>6</sup> Those features are said to ‘come with the Bible’ and aid in understanding what a text *meant* given its historical backdrop.

The second activity has to do with *contemporary application*. This concept is based on the view that context shapes meaning. It does not mean context generates the story, events, and theological values found in the Bible. Indeed, the Bible renders and projects its own story and meaning. By ‘context shapes’ I mean we understand the implications and begin the application of a text when it brought to bear on our experiences. Author Daniel J. Treier comments, each text has a “reference” to reality by projecting a “world” for us to inhabit—a way of living.<sup>7</sup>

What Treier seems to be saying is that the ultimate goal of contextual interpretation is *application embodiment*—living righteously with a discerning engagement of local realities.<sup>8</sup> The notion Christian discipleship embraces and prescribes righteous living as the enactment of individual transformation towards social renewal. Contextual biblical interpretation can help to rally Caribbean believers to insert themselves in social situations in need of transformation, as part of what it means to embody the biblical canon. Practicing a contextual but canonical approach to reading the Bible can augment and enrich this exercise.

### **A Contextual but Canonical Approach to Reading the Bible**

Let me offer a biblical foundation for my proposition. I accept that the Bible is textually connected and narrates the history that bears witness to God’s revelation. The Bible speaks to all readers as divine revelation, which is thought of as lying within its canonical plot-structures.<sup>9</sup> It means the biblical message can be understood holistically as an overarching narrative, which overlaps with human experience under multiple circumstances. In his teachings, Jesus habitually interpreted and applied the scriptures by drawing on its overarching (canonical) narrative.

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<sup>6</sup> Micheal J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basis Guide to Students and Ministers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 78.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 39.

In the Emmaus dialogue (Luke 24:13–25), Jesus showed that proper interpretation arises from a canonical understanding. In the text, two disciples of Jesus were astounded by reports that Jesus was no longer dead. Hidden from their perception and in light of events in Jerusalem, Jesus interpreted the scriptures to them. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures (v. 27). In this and other instances, Jesus taught that Moses and the prophets must be interpreted in unity, with him at the center (John 5:46).

Jesus clarified for the two disciples how the scriptures anticipated his suffering. And he did it in a way that resonated with the men, such that their hearts burned within (Luke 24: 32). He helped the disciples to ‘work out’ how the Bible overlaps with events in Jerusalem. I am here suggesting that the Bible is properly understood when we read it holistically and work out its relevance for the church today.<sup>10</sup> In the quest for Caribbean renewal we need to discover the message of the Bible canonically, with Christ at the center, as we hold our hearts and bring our present situations, recent events, fears, and concerns under the voice scripture.<sup>11</sup>

### **Reading the Bible in the Caribbean**

An ongoing discourse about Caribbean renewal is a key concern of Caribbean Theology. Caribbean Theology relates the Christian faith as a prophetic protest against injustice in search of social transformation. It seeks contextualization by taking into account the socio-political and economic well-being of the region in light of scripture. Caribbean Theology prefers and employs a particular approach to reading the Bible in the quest for Caribbean renewal.

Garnett Roper, in his book *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*, offers some insights on reading strategies in the Caribbean. He speaks about a self-conscious reading strategy that is emancipatory and reader-centered, rather than text or author-centered. This approach focuses on what the *text means to the reader*, who is in search of meaning and social change. He admits that we read the Bible in a manner that is influenced by the conditions from which it is approached.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Y. Emerson, *Christ and the New Creation: A Canonical Approach to the Theology of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 14.

<sup>11</sup> John Corrie and Cathy Ross, *Mission in Context: Explorations by J. Andrew Kirk* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Garnett Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston, Jamaica: Jugaro, 2012), 84–88.

Be that as it may, Caribbean Theology (readers) draws on praxis model, rather than for example, the translation model as it reads the Bible. The praxis model focuses more on *right action* instead of the formulation of *right doctrine*. One of the built-in weaknesses of this style is its tendency to give absolute status to the analysis of the socio-cultural context rather than to the biblical text.<sup>13</sup> The results is a kind of ‘interest based reading.’ I believe that method of reading unconsciously inhibits the understanding and application of the biblical canon as a whole.

It is my argument that the process of contextualization is at significant risk when the full biblical message is not brought to bear within a cultural context. Those who pursue theological contextualization must give attention to what should be the proper role of the reader. The role of the reader is the interpretation of the grand narrative of the Bible, which puts the reader and his/her context into a larger context, which is rooted in God’s wide-ranging canonical intentions.

### **Toward A Holistic Understanding of the Bible**

The canonical narrative constitutes the history and circumstances in which God makes known his will to humans. It consists of a series of integrated events that follow a plot, which conveys a comprehensive message, centered in Christ and culminates with a plan of holistic restoration. The story is not merely a narrative that directs our social-action, but one that pervades with values for the moral, worship, mission, and knowledge life of all believers.

Understanding this canonical narrative is crucial for proper contextual interpretation. It helps interpreters to know how biblical texts relate to each other, it broadens the theological dialogue, and opens the possibility for holistic life transformation. The search for Caribbean renewal must take its point of departure in the belief that the whole Bible is profitable for discipleship formation and social transformation. When it comes to holding the canonical narrative in my head, I find it helpful to think of it as arranged around six plot-structures:

- Structure 1—God, creation, and human calling (Gen. 1–2)
- Structure 2—Creation in crisis (Gen. 3–11)

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<sup>13</sup> Kirk Franklin, “*Contextualization Models*,” Wycliffe Global Alliance ( March, 2015): accessed September 4, 2017, <http://www.wycliffe.net/articles?id=5962> .

- Structure 3—Exodus, exile, restoration (Gen. 12–Malachi)
- Structure 4—Redemption in Christ (Mathew–John)
- Structure 5—The Church of the Spirit (Acts–Jude)
- Structure 6—New Creation (Revelation).

What follows below is a sketch of each plot-structure that can help Bible interpreters acquire a (condensed but) holistic understanding of the biblical canon:

### **Structure 1—God, creation, and human calling (Gen. 1–2)**

The biblical narrative begins in the first two chapters of Genesis. It opens up by telling the story of how God created the heavens and the earth, and gives us a sense of his loving intentions for the world. We see a good world, filled with plants and animals; a world made for humans to enjoy and look after. In this opening sequence, we grasp that humans are bearers of God’s image and called to represent God in the world as they reproduce after their kind.

### **Structure 2—Creation in crisis (Gen. 3–11)**

This second episode captures a disruptive event and explains what went wrong in creation. It depicts the events surrounding Eve and Adam’s disobedience (the Fall), and the effects of their sin in human community. As the story unfolds in Genesis 3–11, we have a picture of the spread of sin in the earth, as the growing human population started to do more evil. Their evil displeased God, leading him to judge the world. The section ends with the nations attempting to build a major center of human activity.

### **Structure 3—Exodus, exile, restoration (Gen. 12–Malachi)<sup>14</sup>**

Stretching from Genesis 12 to Malachi, the Bible displays God’s interventions to correct the effects of the fall. It begins with the call and blessing of Abraham and traces his descendants into Egypt, where they became slaves for four hundred years. God performed a great deliverance on Israel’s behalf, freeing them from their bondage. He gave Israel the Torah to shape them as his people and an emerging nation, under his kingship. But due to Israel’s repeated moral and covenant unfaithfulness, God allowed them to be taken captive in Babylon and Assyria. They failed as God’s representatives, but he remained faithful to his promises to Israel’s forefathers and restored them to their land.

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<sup>14</sup> There are differences in the arrangement of these books in the Roman Catholic and Jewish Bibles.

#### **Structure 4—Redemption in Christ (Mathew–John)**

The Gospels trace the life, message, and mission of Jesus, the Son of God. The incarnation of Jesus represents a watershed event for the world and in God’s plan of redemption. The Gospels bear the good news that Jesus has come to secure the redemption and forgiveness of human sins, thus putting back the world on track with God’s creation intentions. Jesus died on a cross to save the world from the dominion of sin and to restore the right worship of God. The success of his mission ushered in the possibility of a new setting for human relationship with God, each other, and the natural world.

#### **Structure 5—The Church of the Spirit (Acts–Jude)**

The church, including both Jews and Gentiles, received the commission to carry on the ministry of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is to be a light in the world, by preaching the Gospel of the kingdom and making disciples from all nations. It is to live redemptively as a community of mutual support, edification, and service. As the body of Christ, the church is to care for creation, pray and praise, earn and give, raise family, and work constructively for the well-being of the public, while keeping the cross at the center of everything it does.

#### **Structure 6—New Creation (Revelation)**

This final structure points to God’s plan of a comprehensive restoration. God will complete this planned restoration by making all things new. The end of the book of Revelation anticipates the complete eradication of sin, the renewal of fellowship with God, the restoration of harmony between humans and the creation—ushered in by the coming of a new heaven and new earth. Believers are encouraged to hope to this end.

On the whole, as the scholar Christopher J. H. Wright explains, the Bible renders to us an account of the universe we inhabit, how things have come to be the way they are, and what we are destined for in light of the purposes of God.<sup>15</sup> As one reads the Bible with attentiveness to the six plot-structures above it becomes possible to integrate diverse tenets and values about the church’s moral, spiritual, and social life into the redemptive imagination of believers.

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15. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 55, 56.

Likewise, sound biblical interpretation includes recognizing how the biblical authors weave their message together, moving from creation, fall, intervention, to redemption, and new creation. Sometimes, a biblical author can recap multiple texts into one expression as Mark 1:2–3, which quoted Ex. 23:20, Isa 40:3, and Mal. 3:1. At other times, they can draw on the narrative structure moving between creation, fall, intervention, and redemption, as John chapter 8. Being able to discern how a particular text ‘fits’ into the larger canon can enable an interpreter to trace how specific themes are woven together by textual threads throughout the Bible.

### **The Matter of Sin: A Canonical Perspective**

Let me offer an example of how I think about sin from the Bible’s holistic treatment of this issue. I raise the subject of sin for two simple reasons. First, it permeates the Bible and must be interpreted canonically. Second, addressing the issue of sin, individually and corporately, can have a transformative effect on the hopes of Caribbean renewal.

In the opening accounts of the Bible, Genesis 3 is a counterbalance to God’s creative work in Genesis 1–2, as humans rebelled against him (3:4–6). Human sin represents an autonomous refusal to respect God’s boundary. Sin resulted in negative effects in the fabric of reality. Sin disrupted God–human fellowship, resulted in human-to-human inequality and violence (3:16; 4:8), caused disharmony between humans and the natural world (3:18), and the spread of social evils (6:1–3). As a consequence, God judged the world by a great flood (Gen. 7).

We further see the pervasiveness of sin despite God’s repeated acts of blessing Israel and his many provisions to atone for their iniquity. Rather than living righteously, Israel habitually dishonored the Lord (Deut. 31:27; 2 Kings 17:7–41). Based on Israel’s and the sins of the nations God classifies all humans as inherently sinful (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:23) and expressed a willingness to punish human iniquity (Is. 13:11; Rev. 21:8). But the Lord, being gracious, remains committed to making forgiveness available for humans (Ps. 32:1–2; 1 John 1:8–9).

In the biblical narrative, God’s plan to forgive human sin culminates in Jesus Christ, who exercised the authority (Matt. 9:1–7; Luke 7:48), died for (Matt. 26:28; Rom. 4:25), and ordered the preaching of forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). Given that fact, there is redemption—which is the forgiveness of trespasses in Christ—according to God’s rich grace (Eph. 1:7). Jesus now

makes forgiveness possible for all humans (Acts 26:20), thereby defeating the life destroying effects of Adamic sin (Rom. 5:12–21), and reconciling people to God the Father (2 Cor. 5:19).

As God's forgiven people, Christians are invited to live redemptively by resisting sin (Rom. 6:14; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23), which for the time being will remain a troubling reality for believers (Rom. 7:21; Gal. 5:16–17; 1 John 1:8–9). However, believers are to live as new creations through the strength of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:16–22). Joined to their redemptive lifestyle is a calling to seek the ethical transformation of community (Eph. 4:24), by their public denunciations of corporate and institutional forms of sin (Is. 59). They must become witnesses of God's redeeming and forgiving grace in Christ for all who repent (Luke 24:47).

Sin will persist in the human context for the foreseeable future. However, God promises believers victory over sin, as both a present and future guarantee (Is. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:55–57). God will permanently remove sin from the fabric of creation and human life when he ushers in the renewed "heaven and earth" (Is. 65:17; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Rev. 21:12). This renewal will be universal and ultimate, restoring God's creation intentions, which is to dwell in the midst of human community (Ez. 37:27; Zech. 2:11; Rev. 21:3).

When we interpret sin, as bound up in the biblical canon, we can draw two applications for Caribbean renewal. First, Christians cannot afford to downplay the reality of human sin. The Bible views sin as a pervasive and persistent reality. It sets in place the idea that sin has led to dissonance in every aspect of human life. All of human life (no matter how good things appear) is tragically adrift from God's creation purposes and lies under a curse because of human sin.

Nevertheless, sin's curse can be lifted. The atoning work of Christ provides for our personal salvation. That Jesus died in *my* place, bearing the guilt of *my* sin is the most liberating 'good news' of the Bible. That I should desire for others to know this truth and be forgiven of their sins is the most energizing motive for evangelism.<sup>16</sup> Any hope of human (or Caribbean) renewal for that matter must begin with the reversal of the effects of sin—through the salvation of the cross—God's symbol of defeat for all cosmic evil. The Caribbean church must maintain with total commitment and conviction its call of individuals into a redemptive lifestyle and to appropriate ways of being, loving, believing, following,

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, 314.

worshiping, and enacting of the ethical transformations that accompany the forgiveness of sins.

Second, the church in the Caribbean must recognize that the cross goes beyond individual salvation. A biblical understanding of sin must acknowledge its social and organizational impact. A quest for Caribbean renewal has to admit that sin is not only an internal or private reality. Human societies have and continue to add to the catalog of sins: online pornography and affairs, online thuggery, same-sex marriages, transgender evolution, and the list can go on.

Institutional social sins such as discrimination against the poor, divisions that alienate persons by race, white-collar crimes for profits, sex-slavery of children, abortion on demand, gun murders, and environmental abuse are rampant twenty-first-century realities. Regrettably, Christians are sometimes perpetrators of some of those transgressions (which is not entirely surprising to me). To point out those problems is, however, a matter of bringing them in the light of God's redemptive mission. A cross-centered and mission driven church cannot afford to water down the gospel to individual salvation alone or engage in evangelism without social action.

Within the biblical canonical, the cross affects the whole creation. The gospel message communicates that through Christ "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). The social, political, and economic dimensions of God's redeeming work are vital for Caribbean renewal.

It means the church must insert itself into our social context and offer prophetic clarity about God's intentions for our social and community life. It has to publicly denounce social sin in all forms. The church must challenge the abuse of institutional power and social injustice. It needs to consider the poor, heal the infirmities of the sick, look after orphans and widows, and protect foreigners (James 1:27) as expressions of biblical faith.

The church must open its doors and offer ministries of forgiveness and restoration of penitent sinners, as well as to those afflicted by the effects of sin. Believers ought to use their God-given skills to work constructively in politics, finance, and cultural development projects for the peace and prosperity of society. The church as a whole must model for society, through responsible family lifestyles and practices, what God's plan for creation looks like in culture.



We have noticed that the relationship between human sin, salvation, and human renewal lies at the deepest core of the biblical canon. The realities of sin and salvation flow through the biblical canon. Caribbean renewal demands that the church interprets and contextualizes its message about sin in a way that is faithful to the text and to context. The case above shows that addressing the issue of human sin can be a starting point toward Caribbean renewal.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

What makes the canonical interpretation of the Bible essential is the notion that theological issues that are crucial to the Christian faith spread throughout the Bible. That idea assumes the inner coherence of the Bible and aims at developing applications that are congruent with both text and context. Ordinary Christians, theology students, pastors, and Bible teachers need to read the Bible with a mindfulness of its overarching narrative while being sensitive to contextual realities.

Good Bible interpretation must link us intimately to the canonical message, in light of its teachings about creation, fall, redemption, and God's plan of restoration. Every point deserves a theological discourse of its own. It must also connect the canonical message, in words and deeds, to the broad (multiple) realities of our human context.

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## LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY

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### Introduction

“Who am I?” is a question that we all ask consciously or subconsciously. Everyone has an identity, but not everyone has a sense of that identity or a sense of the worth of that identity. Caribbean people have their own unique challenges with acknowledging and accepting who they are. This, of course, inhibits any movement towards self-actualization, for this presupposes self-knowledge. And so, any attempt at redressing economic and social imbalances must include, as a matter of course and a matter of priority, the ‘renewing of the mind’. Why has it been so difficult for the Caribbean person to seek, as Bernard puts it, “an actualized self within an affirming and liberating environment”?<sup>1</sup> The story is told of Monkey and Fish:

It seems Monkey and Fish got caught in a flood. As the waters rose higher and higher, Monkey found a tree and climbed to safety. As he got above the water level, he looked down and saw his friend, Fish still in the water. So, out of concern for his friend, he reached down, rescued Fish, and held him tight to his chest as he climbed higher in the tree.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> April Bernard, “Emancipating Spirit: Decolonizing the Caribbean Religious Experience”. *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diasporas* 11 (2) (Spring/Summer 2008): 49.

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 32.

Caribbean people can identify with Fish in as much as, for most, their ancestors were wrested from the place of their identity, and, over time, there have been attempts to shape a new identity for them. At the outset, they were ascribed the new identity of slaves, regardless of their status prior to arriving in the Caribbean, and later of subjects of the Crown, a Crown whose interest was not in their development, but in the development of the Colonising Power it represented. So, there is a clear point of divergence between the Story and their History. It lay in the motive ascribed to the 'Rescuer', for theirs had no noble and honourable intent. For, as Kortright Davis declares: "Europeans conquered these lands for their own mercantilist expansion"<sup>3</sup>, and it was in order to achieve that end that they "[procured] African bodies and [suppressed] African souls."<sup>4</sup>

The slave and subject, though he did not accept slavery and subjugation, and, therefore, fought for and eventually gained Emancipation and Independence, found it a tremendous challenge to overcome the emasculation of his selfhood. So, the fight for Emancipation, the fight for Independence still continues. This is a fight against mental slavery. It was easy to identify the injustice of physical enslavement. It has been easy to identify the injustice of economic exploitation. It has been easy to identify the injustice of social stratification and political victimization. But, it has not been so easy for the oppressed to be conscious of the bonds of 'identity indoctrination' and its relationship to the other forms of bondage.

Alexander the Great understood this relationship. He recognized that to truly conquer the world, he had to Hellenize it. And, Greek culture did become the world's culture. An important element in his battle on the cultural front was the philosophers, whose weapons were words – potent weapons indeed, as language is "a medium for projecting social identities".<sup>5</sup> Like Alexander the Great, our former 'rescuers', the imperialists and colonialists of old, did not under-estimate the impact language could have. It was the major means by which they engaged in the identity indoctrination of the Caribbean people. They, therefore, used words to belittle and degrade and suppress the colonized; and they made distinctions between *their* languages and those of their 'subjects' which reinforced that sense of deficiency. Language was used as a tool of exploitation.

### **Language: A Tool of Exploitation**

Language was an immediately obvious distinguishing mark between the European masters and the African slaves. With "some ten million Africans captured and deported to

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<sup>3</sup>Kortright Davis, *Emancipation Still Comin': Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 50

<sup>5</sup>Hubert Devonish and Karen Carpenter, "Towards Full Bilingualism in Education: The Jamaican Bilingual Primary Education Project." *Social and Economic Studies* 56 (1/2) (Mar/Jun 2007): 285.

the Americas”<sup>6</sup>, there existed a considerable language barrier. It is a barrier that was bridged by the whip and other forceful methods. But, the time did come when that barrier was also bridged by the development of Creole languages.

### *Imperialist Propaganda*

With Creole narrowing the language gap, the imperative that the message of the colonialists be clearly understood led some to give instructions in it. Hubert Devonish points out that in the Danish Virgin Islands, the desire to communicate was so great that a writing system for Dutch Creole was created. The result was an unusually high literacy rate. Then, in Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, Papiamentu became the medium of religious instruction to the extent that there were translations of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark into that Spanish/Portuguese based Creole. And, in St. Domingue, now Haiti, French Creole was used to issue proclamations.<sup>7</sup> For example, says Devonish, a “proclamation written in Creole and dated 1801,<sup>8</sup> was sent by the First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, to the rebellious blacks of St. Domingue, demanding their loyalty to the French Republic.”<sup>9</sup> The latter scenario is most obviously a use of Creole to reinforce the socio-economic order that had been established by the plantocracy. But, institutions such as the Church and the School were not disinterested parties whose sole purpose was to ‘enlighten’ through the gospel and through personal development those who had been dislocated through the enterprise of slavery. According to Devonish, they were instruments used by the State to produce “ideological acceptance of the status quo among the black population of the Caribbean”.<sup>10</sup> For both Church and School, the Bible was a sourcebook for this indoctrination.

The Church’s and School’s, as well as the Consul’s use of Creole was a demonstration of the ‘language policy’ in operation in the Caribbean. Creole was used to issue edicts to the so-called emancipated slaves. It was used to instil moral and ethical values that would benefit the plantation system. But, it was *not* used in the writing of laws or for any other official purpose of communication. And, “in those colonies where English emerged as the dominant European language alongside an English-influenced Creole, the use of the Creole language in even as restricted an area as religious instruction was ignored. This was the experience of countries such as Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, and Norval Smith, eds., *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1995), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Hubert Devonish, *Language and Liberation: Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean* (Guernsey: Karia Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>It is interesting that just three years later, Haitians declared their independence from France.

<sup>9</sup>Devonish, *Language and Liberation*, 48.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 46

<sup>11</sup>Devonish, *Language and Liberation.*, 51

There was an underlying message about the value of that which belonged to the colonialists in relation to that which belonged to the subjects. One *may* graciously condescend to communicate in the language of the people if one deems it beneficial, but certainly Creole is not to be ascribed equal or even comparable worth to the languages of Europe. And so, even when the north state of independent Haiti, after the assassination of Dessalines, wanted to make a statement that they were distancing themselves from their colonial masters, and so affirmed<sup>12</sup>: “Next to the change of religion, a change of language is the most powerful method of altering the character and manner of a nation”<sup>13</sup>, they did not accept Haitian Creole as their official language. Instead, “it was resolved in council ... that instruction should be given in the English tongue, and after the English method.”<sup>14</sup> This definitely indicated a reality that consumed all plantation societies:

Habits of thought that had emerged out of the particular social relations of slavery continued to influence society well after slavery had been abolished, for hegemony during the slave period had involved not only the legal ownership of slaves but also a whole belief system that entrenched the white oligarchy as the economic, political and cultural leaders of colonial society.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, even when people have been able to appreciate all other areas of cultural expression, and repudiate any suggestion of their inferiority, the legitimacy of their own language for use beyond everyday conversation and story telling has been hard to accept.

### *Language and the Question of Development*

There are many arguments against making the Creole of a given state its national language. These arguments are often founded in pragmatism. Why promote a localized, parochial mode of communication in this age of globalisation? It must be a retrograde step. Why lessen the people’s chance for progress, for development just to make a nationalistic statement? Haiti has moved beyond its reticence to accept Creole, and so has made such a statement. Has it, therefore, blighted its prospects for economic recovery? For some, this is a rhetorical question. The argument for the use of Creole seems to them to be an argument for self-denigration and ‘self-oppression’.

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<sup>12</sup>This statement was made by De Vastey who was an official in the administration of Christophe who ruled Haiti’s northern state after the assassination of Dessalines in 1806.

<sup>13</sup>P. De Vastey, *An Essay on the Causes of the Revolution and Civil Wars of Hayti* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1828 (1969), 214. Quoted in Hubert Devonish, *Language and Liberation: Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean* (Guernsey: Karia Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2000), ix-x

Selden Rodman posits that “unquestionably, Creole has played a part in keeping the peasant isolated on his acre”.<sup>16</sup> His acre is all he knows of the world. One reason is that he is being ‘educated’ in what Rodman calls “a half-foreign language”<sup>17</sup> instead of in Creole; therefore, he can hardly master the concepts he is supposedly being taught – concepts which will help him understand and gain access to the world beyond his acre. So, although it can be made to appear that Creole itself is at fault, the problem is really systemic. And, it is a system created and sustained by elitism, both from without and from within.

The peasant is isolated because the powers of this world isolated Haiti politically and economically. This isolation was a deliberate attempt to punish her for her “audacity of hope”<sup>18</sup>; it was retribution for the Revolution. She dared to think that she could govern herself at a time when white hegemony had thought itself well established. There was no way she would be allowed to succeed. She was to be “an example of black incapacity for self-government.”<sup>19</sup> And, Haiti’s own, those who took charge after the Revolution, were not as concerned for the betterment of the masses as they were for personal status and prestige. This, they, in part, achieved through becoming more proficient in French.

The continued official use of French in revolutionary St. Domingue and the spread of its use among the new elite, perfectly served the interests of this emergent ruling class. It served to ensure, as a French speaking elite, their access to and control of the various sections of the state apparatus. Simultaneously, it served to help dissipate any illusions among the Creole-speaking masses that they (the masses) were the true inheritors of the state and its economic base.<sup>20</sup>

Haiti’s new leaders had become what their masters were. Haiti, therefore, experienced oligarchic rule for much of its history, both pre- and post-independence.

But the issue raised by Rodman concerning the Haitian’s isolation goes beyond responsibility. If the continued use of Creole by the masses helps maintain a distinction between them and the ruling class, and leaves them unprepared for leadership, it is reasonable to say that the solution is to be found in making the people literate in French. Then, it will no longer be a “half-foreign language”. But, Rodman, almost in rebuttal, points to a question asked by “advocates of a Creole education”: “Is it more important to turn the peasant into a Frenchman with a consciousness of the problems of the outside

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<sup>16</sup> Selden Rodman, *Haiti: The Black Republic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Old Greenwich: The Devin-Adair Company, 1973), 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> An expression made popular by the forty-fourth president of the United States of America, Barack Obama.

<sup>19</sup> Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, ix

<sup>20</sup> Devonish, *Language and Liberation*, 46.

world or to equip him to cope with the problems of his own environment by his own means?"<sup>21</sup> Although this question could be answered in terms of preference, there is no need to do so since the options are not mutually exclusive. To establish a place of credibility for any Creole is not to undermine the significance of knowing other languages or other cultures. It is just to acknowledge people's right to what is legitimately theirs, to what identifies them as distinct, but not inferior. Caribbean people cannot afford to accept the identity created for them by anyone else, but God. Additionally, establishing this place of credibility is to defy a system that makes isolation and discrimination a reality for the masses of not only Haiti, but of the Caribbean as a whole. By not accepting Creole while accepting European languages, we are ceding ground to that system of discrimination.

This matter of Creole use in the context of a global economy is understandably of great concern. Both proponents and opponents of its use often argue from the standpoint of socio-economic development. But, it is not only at the governmental level that the issue has currency. The Church too has had to contemplate the issue.

### *The Church and the Question of Language*

What would make it difficult for the Church, in particular the Church of the "English-speaking" Caribbean, to use Creole for instruction, and for worship in general? Ashley Smith contends that "the dominance of the culture of the plantation" has been one of "the enduring spiritual and psychological consequences of slavery."<sup>22</sup> Harold Sitahal points out one of these consequences: "In the Caribbean, the churches have been historically involved in the establishment of a white Eurocentric religio/cultural institution."<sup>23</sup> And, this persists, in essence, with some exchanging "American" for "Eurocentric". Churches "seem content to perpetuate the administrative structures and liturgical expressions of European [or American] churches."<sup>24</sup> For, as with the political order, those who replaced the European church leaders were well prepared so to do. And thus, they propounded the "missionary theology" they had learnt. It was a theology of denial. It denied the reality of the Caribbean peoples: it denied the authenticity of their expressions; it denied that the human spirit required a form of worship that was related to the substance of its true identity; it denied the need for religion to be more than personal, that it had to treat with issues of public policy as well. It denied all these and more. According to William Watty:

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<sup>21</sup> Rodman, *Haiti: The Black Republic*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ashley Smith, *Emerging from Innocence* (Jamaica: Eureka Press, 1991), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Sitahal, "Caribbean Theology of the People/for the People". *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 20 (2) (September 1999): 7.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Ucko, Syncretism: A Challenge to an Ecumenical Discussion on Gospel and Culture. *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity* (Trinidad and Tobago: CCC, 1995), 42.



[T]he greatest threat to theology is the threat of unreality...Unreality is the great threat that hangs over any language or category which one might use to talk about God. Unreality is the threat which hangs over any kind of theism and any kind of atheism, over not only what may be branded as heresy but what may be accepted as orthodoxy, over not only attempts at particularizing the theological discourse but equally over whatever may have traditionally been purveyed as universal and catholic. Precisely because theology is discourse about God, who by His very nature can never be exhausted by the categories of human thought, and precisely because it is a discourse conducted by and between human beings who are by their very natures finite beings, and by their very circumstances limited in their understanding, then there is no theology which can ever claim to be entirely satisfactory or above criticism.<sup>25</sup>

European Christian theology was accepted uncritically. The result has been a Christianity that is not as impacting and effective as it could be. Many there are, therefore, who live a life of dualism. Edward Seaga puts it this way:

Faith dwells both in Jehovah as well as in balm yard. Sunday morning is Jehovah's time; Sunday night many of the same observers 'jump revival'. There is no conflict: different spiritual powers are needed to deal with the problems of life and there is more than enough faith in our folk culture to embrace God, the Trinity, archangel and prophets, as well as the spirits of the dead.<sup>26</sup>

Seaga's point is well taken. The description is understood. The rationale has basis. But, it warrants deeper analysis. Why do people engage in activity and practice which they have been taught contradicts the dogma of the "other religion" to which they say they adhere? Should it not be a case of choosing one over the other? Is it that each meets a need that the other does not? John Cole speaks of the dualism of spirituality<sup>27</sup>, but dualism extends beyond the balm yard and the revival table. People, who have accepted the admonition of the clergy and so do not mix "religions", also find great difficulty living an integrated life. Does this mean that Christianity is inadequate? Does it mean that the claims of Christ are not sufficiently relevant to the Caribbean person? Or does it mean that the message of the gospel has been poorly communicated, and, therefore, misunderstood? The latter is a question that goes beyond language. It speaks to attitude and to disposition, to presentation and to application. And yet, the issue of language has to be addressed as part of the bigger equation.

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<sup>25</sup>William Watty, *From Shore to Shore* (Barbados: CEDAR Press, 1981), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Seaga, "Popular Religion: Its Dimension and Types". *Caribbean Quarterly* 43 (1) (March – June, 1997), 88. Quoted in John Cole, "What can the Euro-Christian Churches in the Caribbean Learn from Indigenous Caribbean Religions?" *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 21 (1) (October 2007): 19.

<sup>27</sup> John Cole, "What can the Euro-Christian Churches in the Caribbean Learn from Indigenous Caribbean Religions?" *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 21 (1) (October 2007).

Here are verses of three hymns that are still being sung in some Caribbean churches:

When careless of His rich repast  
 We've sought, alas, to rove  
 He has recalled His faithful guest  
 And raised His banner – Love (Anonymous)<sup>28</sup>

How many persons in the average congregation understand these words: “repast”; “alas”; “rove”?

Thy love we own, Lord Jesus,  
 In service unremitting;  
 Within the veil Thou dost prevail,  
 Each soul for worship fitting:  
 Encompassed here with failure,  
 Each earthly refuge fails us;  
 Without, within, at war with sin,  
 Thy name alone avails us. (W. Yerbury)<sup>29</sup>

Many persons have their understanding impeded not only by the unfamiliar vocabulary in these hymns, but also by their unfamiliar structure. Yet, congregations insist on singing them. To what end? For what purpose? Worship? Worship should come from the heart. How many can sing these songs from the heart? Can people sing from the heart that which they do not understand? Or, is worship so mystical that understanding is unnecessary? Some criticize Muslims for proclaiming the mystical benefits of reading the Koran in Arabic even when they do not understand it, calling it absurd, yet behave in similar fashion, using, in worship of God, language that a great number of the congregation do not understand well.

The higher mysteries of Thy fame,  
 The creature's grasp transcend;  
 The Father only that blest name  
 Of Son can comprehend.  
 The sweetness of that name of love  
 The Father gives us now to prove. (Adapted from J. Conder)<sup>30</sup>

It seems that there are those who want God to remain mysterious. The question is: “Does God want to remain a mystery because of language barriers?” Paradoxically, the God

<sup>28</sup> Hymns taken from *Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Ontario: Believers Bookshelf Inc., 1993)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

whose infinitude will always make Him mysterious wants to be known, and actively seeks to reveal Himself.

Let us consider another worship song:

*Faada Gad, yu ina klaas bai yusef  
And, abov Yu, mi se nobadi els  
Onggl yu aluon kyan mek mi fiil dis wie  
Laad mi fiil yu prezens roun mi die bai die*<sup>31</sup>

Songs like these are sometimes discounted, and, certainly are not the regular repast – let us rephrase that – certainly do not constitute a regular part of the worship experience. Yet, the words are understood,<sup>32</sup> and the structure is familiar.

That which has been identified as a problem in the liturgy of worship in song is also true of preaching and teaching and general interaction around the Word of God. George Mulrain contends: “If all that a worshipper has heard ... in church are incomprehensible technical terms [and] theological jargon, then how can [he or] she be expected to have a longing for worship?”<sup>33</sup>

Many have been robbed of a truly authentic worship experience. And so, language has been a tool of oppression even in the hands of Caribbean church leaders who, by continuing in the tradition of their ‘former’ masters, may have inadvertently used it in that way. The psyche has certainly been affected by centuries of indoctrination.

Another reason it has been so used is ignorance about the nature of Creole and its use in relation to other languages.

### **Language: A Tool of Liberation**

#### ***Constructing a New Reality: A Linguistic Response***

People are often afraid to encourage the use of Creole because they believe it is broken English or French or Spanish or Portuguese or Dutch. But, is this really so? In the Caribbean, “the masses speak a vernacular which differs significantly in grammar and idiom from an official language with which it co-exists; but the vernacular and the official language, nevertheless share the majority of a common vocabulary.”<sup>34</sup> Despite

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Douglas, *Class by Yusef*, Scroll V2: “Under Construction”. Canute “Neil” Ellis (Executive Producer), 2006.

<sup>32</sup> They are very familiar when transmitted orally, but not so familiar when transmitted in written form, for many of us are not as *yet* used to the phonetically determined spelling system

<sup>33</sup> George Mulrain, “The Use of Senses in Worship”. *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 17 (2) (September 1996): 34-35.

<sup>34</sup> Dennis R. Craig, *Teaching Language and Literacy: Policies and Procedures for Vernacular Situations* (Guyana: Education and Development Services Inc. 1999), 1

sharing vocabulary with the official European languages, Caribbean vernaculars or Creoles are to be considered languages in their own right. They were formed in response to the new situation into which the Africans found themselves. Having been brought forcibly from various parts of West Africa, they faced the challenge of being able to communicate neither with the colonizers nor among themselves. Just as they were brought together by force, so did Creole languages develop “as a result of linguistic violence.”<sup>35</sup> This was no “natural transference of a language over generations”<sup>36</sup> but the development of one by a disparate group of Africans in order to meet an immediate and urgent need. These new languages, Devonish explains:

could be learnt comparatively easily by speakers whose native language was a Niger-Congo language. The reason was that the new language variety tended to retain many of the syntactic, phonological and semantic features<sup>37</sup> common to the Niger-Congo languages. [This] helps to make us understand the reason for the strong similarity which all Caribbean Creole languages share, irrespective of whether the main source of their vocabulary is English, French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese.<sup>38</sup>

But, why didn't the slaves simply learn the language of their masters? Not learning the European's language had nothing to do with their level of intelligence. It had, in great measure, to do with their level of exposure to these foreign languages whose grammatical structure was so different from their own. It is difficult enough for an adult to learn a foreign language, but this difficulty is considerably lessened through language immersion. This was not the case for the slave. Even the house slave, though having access to the slave owner, was not sufficiently integrated into the owner's world to properly learn his or her language. Segregation, not integration, was the mantra of the plantation economy.

In any case, if the circumstances had been different, and there had been integration between Africans and Europeans, the result would likely have been an interchange between languages rather than the complete dominance of one language over the other, as will be seen from an examination of the origin and development of Koine<sup>39</sup> Greek, French and English.

George Hadjiantoniou explains the origin of Koine Greek thus: From among the many Greek dialects, Attic emerged as the “literary language of Greece”. When Alexander, the Great put together an army to conquer the world, since his recruits came from all over

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<sup>35</sup>Arends, Muysken, and Smith, eds., *Pidgins and Creoles*, 4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> It should be of interest to note that Chinese resembles many Creole languages in its grammar. See Arends, Muysken and Smith, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 5.

<sup>38</sup>Devonish, *Language and Liberation*, 51.

<sup>39</sup>*Koine* means ‘common’.

Greece, “a dialect gradually formed, which having the Attic as a basis, served as a common means of communication among all men of the army, and later among the merchants who followed the army into the conquered lands.”<sup>40</sup> As the language of imperialism, it was no wonder that it became a universal language. Notably, its universal use outlasted the Greek empire as it gained the acceptance of the subsequent world power, Rome, which meant that there was no real attempt to usurp it as the dominant language. According to Gleason L. Archer, it was “accurate in expression, beautiful in sound, and capable of great rhetorical force”<sup>41</sup>, a perception seemingly shared by many in the world of circa 330 B.C. to 330 A.D.

Like Greek, French, emerged out of modification of the language of invading forces. In this case, that language was called Vulgar Latin because it was the language of the people – the average Roman citizen. Interestingly in France, it was regarded as the language of the educated. Arends, Muysken and Smith trace the development of French. According to them, Modern French developed from Old French which developed from Vulgar Latin and other linguistic influences, and Vulgar Latin developed from Classical Latin which developed from Archaic Latin.<sup>42</sup>

The development of English was also gradual. The Saxons, Angles and Jutes occupied Britain in the fifth century. Their inter-related languages developed into Old English. Then with the invasion of the Normans and, thus, the introduction of Old French, further changes took shape in the language spoken in Britain. This new language has been called Middle English. This was the language of the masses. The elite spoke French. Over time, the language of the masses became the accepted language, but it still was not stable; it was continually changing. With the invention of the printing press came stability and standardization, and Early Modern English. Changes occurred thereafter as is to be expected because language is dynamic, but these changes were not as significant as was formerly the case. A comparison of Chaucer’s works to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible as against the KJV and a more modern translation will reveal very little similarity between Middle English and Early Modern English, and noteworthy similarities between Early Modern English and Late Modern English.

It can be seen from the history recounted above that (1) languages developed from interaction with other language forms; (2) there was a tendency to use language to cement a distinction between the masses and the so-called upper classes of a society; and (3) the speech of the common man eventually became an esteemed language, in some cases even

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<sup>40</sup>George Hadjiantoniou, *Learning the Basics of New Testament Greek* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1998), 3.

<sup>41</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* Vol. 3, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 870.

<sup>42</sup>Arends, Muysken and Smith, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 4.

turning out to be the language of the elite and a distinguishing mark between them and “others.”

Like the languages examined above, Creole languages developed from the interplay of language forms, in this case the interaction of European and African languages, but within the former British colonies, they have not yet become accepted, much less esteemed. Instead, they have been an indicator or mark of low social and economic status. Those who are articulate in English are seen as educated. And, the well-to-do are expected to speak it. May, however, an understanding of the history of Creoles and of other languages lead us to contend with firm resolve that “creole languages are not in the slightest qualitatively distinguishable from other spoken languages”<sup>43</sup> If this is acknowledged, communicating in Creole will not be seen as “talking down” to people. This perception has caused individuals to believe that in speaking Creole they are either (1) doing their listeners a favour for which they should be grateful or (2) belittling them and reinforcing negative stereotypes. Neither is a necessary response. A Creole is as much a language as any other, and there is as much justification for its use in oral and/or written form as for any other.

In some territories, their Creoles are established written languages. In others, like Jamaica, there is a movement to standardize their use.<sup>44</sup> There is great hope among some scholars, especially Caribbean linguists that the translation of the Bible into Jamaican will contribute greatly to this process. Then, instruction in Jamaican will be closer to becoming a reality, a reality which could pave the way for such an initiative in other countries.

The question about development is bound to resurface at this point of the discourse. However, teaching people to read and write and think in their own language, far from impeding national development, may prove to be its catalyst – all other variables considered<sup>45</sup>. People naturally think in the language with which they are most accustomed. Teaching them to read and write first in a foreign language (which these European languages are to most Caribbean people), inhibits their personal growth and development which in turn inhibits national growth and development. Of course, there are many who have achieved success in the current language environment. But, they have done so in spite of, and not because of how language education is done in schools. The exception proves the rule. It is not the rule.

Etienne Gerin, soon after Haiti’s declaration of independence, recommended that Creole should be made the national language:

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 4, 5

<sup>44</sup>Standardization will not make local dialects obsolete.

<sup>45</sup>Other variables include issues of political stability and political will, both national and international

in order to integrate the Creole speaking sectors of the population effectively into the education system ... He proposed that only when the basic skills<sup>46</sup> had been imparted that a transition to French should take place. In order to support his proposal, he wrote a Creole grammar intended for use in the infant classes within the schools.<sup>47</sup>

His proposal was refused. Gerin's proposal is similar to that made by Caribbean linguists such as Hubert Devonish. The particular Creole spoken by the majority should constitute that people's national language. Since no language is innately superior to another, the 'heart language' of a people should drive any conversation about national issues. An appeal to the limitations of Creole is not a legitimate, though understandable excuse for it not to drive such a conversation. All languages have limitations in relation to others. Those limitations are linked to the speakers' limitations. As people are exposed to new experiences and concepts, they create or adopt new words into their oral and written 'lexicon'. The dynamism and adaptability of language must not be under-estimated. Creole will, therefore, adapt to meet the new challenges imposed on it.

Additionally, the point must be reiterated that an endorsement of Creole is not a rejection of other languages. More and more people worldwide are recognizing the advantages of being multi-lingual. And, we must too. We cannot afford to thwart our development goals by being myopic. Therefore, the argument for instruction in Creole is not an argument against instruction in English or any other European language. In fact, linguists believe that a firm foundation in one's own language leads to a better grasp of another's. And so, as the Language Unit of the University of the West Indies engages in its 'Jamaican Bilingual Primary Education Project' in which it seeks to teach both Jamaican and English to primary school students, it

expect[s] that after 4 years, the pupils in this project, relative to their peers outside, would i) show superior self-concept in language and related areas ii) demonstrate superior literacy skills in both languages, and iii) manifest superior control of the material taught in content subjects."<sup>48</sup>

These are all commendable, desirable, and even necessary objectives. But, the primary argument for the use of Creole is an argument for the facilitation of a people's understanding of their reality, and of their reshaping that reality.

### *Constructing a New Reality: A Hermeneutical Task*

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<sup>46</sup>It is best that one learns comprehension and critical thinking skills in the language in which one most naturally thinks.

<sup>47</sup>Devonish, *Language and Liberation*, 48.

<sup>48</sup>Devonish and Carpenter, "Towards Full Bilingualism in Education", 288.

Language is more than a means of communication about reality; it is a tool for constructing reality. Different languages create and express different realities. They categorize experience in different ways. They provide alternative patterns for customizing ways of thinking and perceiving.<sup>49</sup>

Caribbean reality needs reconstruction. It was constructed with language as a tool of oppression. This has led to a loss of identity – a loss of our true identity. It has led us to demean what is uniquely ours while we embrace what is not ours nor can be – the life and identity of our oppressors. This is part of the reality that we need to deconstruct before reconstruction can take place. The Church has a critical role to play in this process.

Emphasis has been placed on the Church as an instrument of an exploitive state. The Bible was used, in large measure, as a sourcebook to validate the condition in which we as Caribbean people had found ourselves. And for this reason, many reject it today. But even in the days of colonialism, there were elements within the Church who brought a liberating message. The Word from God is essentially a Word of liberation. And so, the Church, into whose guardianship it has been placed, needs to present the message that God intended and in the way that He intended.

According to Donald K. Smith, “the Message we have received is for giving, not for keeping. This means that Christian workers must give primary attention to the business of communication.”<sup>50</sup> This will mean bridging the gap between the Word and its recipients. As Anthony C. Thiselton explains:

Understanding takes place when two sets of horizons are brought into relation to each other, namely those of the text and those of the interpreter... On this basis understanding presupposes a shared area of common perspectives, concepts, or even judgments ... understanding as it were presupposes understanding.<sup>51</sup>

“What is the writer saying and how does it relate to me?” is a question the reader is bound to ask. But, though the words of the text convey a message, they in themselves do not convey meaning. That is why Thiselton contends that “traditional approaches to language usually carry with them an inbuilt limitation”.<sup>52</sup> When we “concentrate attention on the language of the ancient text and do not attempt to bring about a fusion of horizons between the world of the text and that of the interpreter”,<sup>53</sup> the result is that the

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<sup>49</sup> James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1979), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding: A Handbook for Christian Communication across Cultural Landscapes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 7.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 103.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.



Word is not made applicable and relevant to its audience. True understanding does not take place. It is important to establish the significance of the words in *our* context because “any given symbol cannot be counted on to represent the same reality in more than one culture.”<sup>54</sup>

For the average Caribbean interpreter, there are multiple barriers to understanding the Biblical text: there is the barrier of the temporal, cultural, historical and geographical distance of the text from his/her own; there is the barrier of the original languages in which the text came to us; and, there is the barrier of the language into which the text was translated. The first will be true for all persons. The second is true for all, but obviously less problematic for those who have studied Biblical Hebrew and Greek. The third is not true for all. Those whose first language is one of the European languages do not have this challenge, for the Scriptures have been translated into these languages. For most of us in the Caribbean, these are supposedly second languages, and some do speak them with a great level of fluency, but many are not at all proficient in them. And so, for these persons, the third impediment is even more of an obstacle.

If communicating meaning is critical, why not bridge the gap as much as possible by translating the Word into the language of the people and by speaking the language best understood by the them? It is in an effort to bridge the gap for the Jamaican people that the Bible Society of the West Indies has undertaken the task of translating the Scriptures into Jamaican. But, there are persons who have expressed reservations about this Project. Some of the arguments relate to issues already discussed. But, there are other lines of reasoning, like the cost/benefit analysis that some proffer. But, to argue that the Bible should not be translated into Jamaican because so few will benefit in relation to the monetary cost to be incurred is to devalue the individual, and to devalue the community for which it is being done. Why does smallness of number matter if the persons have worth? There is rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner that repents because that one sinner is important. Once the goal of effective communication of meaning will be enhanced, the enterprise should be encouraged. It bears repetition: Meaning does not reside in the words themselves. Meaning lies in what the speaker/writer wants to be understood and in what the audience actually understands.

Where the Bible is concerned, there are multiple speakers and writers, and, therefore, different assignments of meaning. Hence, one cannot communicate a message with its original meaning only. Much transference of meaning takes place before it reaches the twenty-first century audience. The original speaker/writer has his own meaning. The original recipient who may in turn become speaker/writer has his; the translator has his; the listener/reader has his, and he, in turn becomes a “translator” for someone else. It is a never-ending saga. It is for this, among other reasons, that there are revisions in translations. As the matrix of understanding changes from one generation to another, or

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<sup>54</sup>Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, 240.

even within a generation, there is need to re-engage the Text so as to engage the new reader. For, as Smith posits:

communication effectiveness is enhanced when we 1. Understand the models held in people's minds. Different groups as well as different individuals will have different mental models. The 'general' model of a people must be learned first and then, through dialogue the specific model of the individual with whom we are communicating. 2. Understand how information is transferred in the specific culture and situations where we seek to minister 3. Transfer sufficient information so that the recipient can reconstruct a meaning closely approximating that which is intended<sup>55</sup>

To speak of reconstructing the meaning of the Biblical text to reach a Caribbean audience is to speak of a radical shift in perception. In fact, Gosnell Yorke argues that Bible translation plays a pivotal role in shaping culture and identity and suggests that it should take place using an Afro-centric approach.<sup>56</sup> Such a suggestion at first glance seems heretical. It is easier to understand the concept of translating the Scriptures into the particular languages that African people groups speak, or in the case of the Caribbean into Creole languages; we can understand the need to apply the Scriptures bearing in mind the African or Caribbean context; we may even understand the creative reading of the Bible through the lens of African or Caribbean reality. But, the approach proposed by Yorke seems to involve a distortion of the Word of God. However, what Yorke is proposing is the redressing of decisions made by past and present translators. Felder, an African-American New Testament scholar, makes the point as follows:

European/Euro-American biblical scholars [and Bible translators?] have asked questions that shaped answers within the framework of the racial, cultural, and gender presuppositions they held in common. This quiet consensus has undermined the self-understanding and place in history of other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>57</sup>

Their intentions may not have been malicious but

presuppositions, preunderstandings (*sic*) and biases, of whatever kind, invariably impose limits on us—limits which no amount of formal education or life-experience seems able to eradicate entirely. It is this fact of life which John Elliott, the white American New Testament scholar, captures in his own creative

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Creating Understanding*, 59

<sup>56</sup> Gosnell Yorke, "Bible Translation in Africa: An Afrocentric Perspective". *The Bible Translator* 50 (1) (January, 2000).

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

way. He says: "All perception is selective and constrained psychologically and socially; *for no mortal enjoys the gift of 'immaculate perception.'*"<sup>58</sup>

Since these limits are not imposed by the text itself, but by the translator, it behoves those who do not have those particular biases to correct them through retranslation. Yorke gives a number of examples. Here is one where the rhetorical question in Jeremiah 13:23 is translated in a way that could suggest that an Ethiopian may want to change the colour of his skin:

In the NIV, the entire verse reads as follows:

Can the Ethiopian change his skin  
or the leopard its spots?  
Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

First of all, Bailey correctly points out that the verb in the Hebrew translated as "can" is not *ykl* as one would have expected. Instead, we find the hé-interrogative with the imperfect form of the verb, that is, *hyhpk*. A better translation, then, is:

*Would* the Ethiopian change his skin  
or the leopard its spots?

The unarticulated response is: of course not. Why would they want to do that? They are quite happy the way they are already! Jeremiah's point is that just as there is no desire on the part of either the Ethiopian or the leopard to change his skin or its spots, so there is no desire on Israel's part to change from her erring ways.<sup>59</sup>

The suggested retranslation of Jeremiah 13:23 projects a positive and affirming image of blackness in contrast to the negative one reinforced by a number of translations in circulation today. Retranslation has the potential of "valorizing [the vulnerable]"<sup>60</sup>.

Yorke's proposal concerning African-centred translations would benefit a Caribbean audience, not only an African one. But, Caribbean people must undertake for themselves their own translations.<sup>61</sup> They must bring their own perspectives to bear on the text – not uncritically, and not without a basis which the text itself gives. And, they must determine to take an approach which, though limited in itself, removes the limits that were placed on them. One advantage that they definitely have as a people is their rich cultural

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Philip L. Wickeri, Janice K. Wickeri, and Damayanthi M.A. Niles, *Plurality, Power and Mission: Intercontextual Theological Explorations on the Role of Religion in the New Millennium* (London: The Counsel for World Mission, 2000), 94.

<sup>61</sup>Some have been translating the Scriptures into Creole.

heritage. They are diverse in ethnicity, and if all contribute to the hermeneutical task, they will limit their limitations. And, they will play their part in the transformation of their societies.

### Conclusion

“You change a society by changing the wind”<sup>62</sup>, not by recognizing the direction in which the wind is blowing. Wind changers are people who change the course of history. If the Church, as a whole, were to accept Creole as a legitimate, appropriate way to communicate the message of the gospel and to develop the mental capacity and skill set of Caribbean people, could it be a wind changer? Could it not impact people’s self-understanding, leading to essential transformation? According to Burchell Taylor, “The Church needs to [discover] and [come] to terms with what the Spirit [is] saying to the churches of the Caribbean context and [respond] to the call to act in obedience for new life and hope for the people of the region.”<sup>63</sup> Analysis is good. Criticism is useful. But, they are not ends in themselves. They are a call to action. It is time for the Caribbean Church to act decisively. It must articulate its own theology and live it out. It must be bold enough to contend with the forces of discrimination in a given society. And, it must be radical enough to use the language of the people to communicate with the people.

As we have seen, there are those who think that “breaking away from the Euro-American tradition is the watering down of Christianity.”<sup>64</sup> They have to be confronted in a way that challenges them to rethink their position. They must be helped to see the faultiness of the presuppositions that undergird their worldview, rooted as they are in the ideology of those whose agenda was to oppress. They need to see that ‘the Noble Savage’ is not free simply because “the Noble Savage has mastered the masters’ language.”<sup>65</sup> He is not truly free until he accepts his own.

Language has been a tool of exploitation. Now it is time to reclaim this gift from God by using it as a tool of liberation. We must, therefore, listen to the arguments of the linguists and acknowledge the worth of Creole languages.<sup>66</sup> And, we must respond to the hermeneutical imperative and seek to construct a new reality. For, if God’s Word is translated into the language of the people, and if it is repositioned through both retranslation and the contextual presentation of that Word to show that God does side

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<sup>62</sup> Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get it* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 22.

<sup>63</sup> Burchell Taylor, “Engendering Theological Relevance”. *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 20 (2) (September 1999): 24.

<sup>64</sup> Lewin Williams, “What, Why and Wherefore of Caribbean Theology”. *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 12 (1) (April 1991): 37.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> It is not good enough to communicate in Creole. The colonialists were willing to do so for practical reasons, but still did not acknowledge its inherent value, even as they did not acknowledge the value of those whose language it was.

with the oppressed, then the relevance of Christianity and the sufficiency of Christ will be more evident to Caribbean people. As Jean-Bertrand Aristide attests:

We are not looking for a God living off in the distance. God ...has taken the close and immediate form of justice; Jesus was the king of justice ... [F]ighting for justice means following the direction of our faith.<sup>67</sup>

Clive Abdullah concurs: Christ came “to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.”<sup>68</sup> And, these forms of slavery are overcome through liberation of the mind. Liberation of the mind makes liberation beyond the mind that much more possible. And, in any case, it certainly frees us from the most oppressive hold any human being can have over another.

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<sup>67</sup> Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Jean-Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 165.

<sup>68</sup> Clive Abdullah, “Any Word from the Lord” in *Troubling of the Waters*, ed. Idris Hamid (Trinidad: Rahaman, 1973), 16.

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THE MEANING OF FOREKNOWLEDGE  
IN ROMANS 8:29

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### Introduction

Scripture must be the highest court of appeal in all matters of controversy between Christians. Of course it is good to consult what other Christians believe, but ultimately every thought, belief, and theological system must be judged by the criterion of God's Word. If that thought, belief, or theological system fails to be faithful to God's Word, then it must be rejected regardless of the sentiment or tradition that might be attached to it. Yet, while all born-again believers look to the Scriptures as their final rule of authority, differences of interpretation still exist. So perhaps it should be emphasized—especially at the onset of this particular chapter—that the existence of disagreement does not call into question the reliability of the Bible. Instead, it points to the existence of another reality: that there are incorrect interpretations of Scripture. Therefore, every Christian who wants to know divine truth must labor hard in the pages of the Bible, embracing certain biblical claims while at the same time rejecting others.

This article will present five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29. These five arguments, when taken cumulatively, show that foreknowledge cannot be understood as foreseen faith. The five arguments are as follows: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω (*ginōskō*), from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This argument goes beyond the text of Romans 8:29-30. Nevertheless, it is implied in the logical sequence of divine activities and therefore appropriate for discussion.



### Foreknowledge in the Calvinistic Sense: Five Arguments

*Argument 1: Defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture.* In order to define foreknowledge as foresight of faith, a self-determining will that can freely believe in Christ must be either “natural” to human nature or “restored” to human nature. Because of the overwhelming biblical evidence that testifies to mankind’s spiritual deadness, the majority of Arminians have embraced man’s inability to come to faith of his own volition. Robert Reymond, in responding to the classical Arminian view of predestination in *Perspectives on Election*, presents the case for total depravity very succinctly. He argues that men

by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ’s word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* accept the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7), by nature *cannot* discern the truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44-45, 65). In order to do any of these things, they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra* [from without]. So there simply is no such thing among men as free will that can always choose the right if it wants to.<sup>2</sup>

It is nearly impossible (without utterly dismissing the avalanche of scriptural witness) to reach any other conclusion than that man is spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins, enslaved to sin and to Satan, and completely unable and unwilling to come to Christ for salvation. Even Arminius spoke like a Calvinist when it came to the issue of the seriousness of sin and its debilitating effects upon mankind.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the unbreakable link between total depravity and unconditional election was proven breakable with the notion of prevenient grace. It is not an overstatement, then, to say that prevenient grace is the citadel of Arminianism. Indeed, it is the very fortress that protects the logic of Arminian soteriology and makes it possible for foreknowledge to be defined as foreseen faith. But does the notion of prevenient grace withstand the rigor of exegetical scrutiny?

The judicial argument for prevenient grace maintains that such enablement is primarily a result of God’s justice. It would be unjust of God to sentence people to an eternal punishment when they are not able to decide against that punishment and for a

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<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Reymond, “Responses to Jack W. Cottrell,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 136-37.

<sup>3</sup>James Arminius, *Public Disputations of James Arminius*, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:526. Disputation 11 is titled “On the Free Will of Man and Its Powers.”

loving Savior. Prevenient grace, as an act of fairness on God's part, restores man's free will so that he is able to come to Christ if he so chooses. Olson states that this "is necessary to protect God's reputation."<sup>4</sup> Arguing from the vantage point of God's justice, however, fails on the grounds that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. Scripture teaches that although believers know God's eternal power and his divine nature through the creation that they enjoy, they willingly live lives that neither honor God nor give thanks to him (Rom 1:19-20). In fact, they live the entirety of their existence following the course of this evil age, reveling in the passions of their flesh, and carrying out the desires of their body and mind, and, as a result, God's wrath naturally rests upon them (Eph 2:1-3). By sentencing sinners to eschatological punishment, God is not treating them unfairly. He is (1) giving them what we want, which is a life without him, and (2) giving them what they deserve, an eternity separated from his loving presence.

Furthermore, God does not need his creatures to protect his reputation: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25) And whatever punishment God brings is right and just: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One" (Rev 16:5). "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Rev 16:7). Whatever God's actions may be and whatever God's punishment may be, his ethic of fairness, rightness, and justice cannot be called into doubt. Suppose for a moment that God has not granted universal enabling grace, and suppose for a moment that he does set his electing love upon some while passing over others. That scenario does not entail injustice being performed. It is often assumed that the opposite of justice is mercy, but it is not. The opposite of justice is non-justice. Thus, there is justice and there is non-justice, but within the category of non-justice resides both mercy and injustice. If God sets his saving love upon David (who does not deserve it) but not upon John (who likewise does not deserve it), David has received "mercy" while John has received "justice," but neither has received "injustice."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the judicial argument for prevenient grace, while logically and emotionally attractive, must be rejected on the basis that it fails to agree with what the Scriptures say about God's holy and righteous character: in all matters God is fair and just.

A second argument for prevenient grace is fundamentally Christological. Appeal is made to grace given in the atonement and Christ's death for all as an indication of prevenient grace. Pinnock, for example, when discussing his theological pilgrimage from Augustinianism to Arminianism, explains, "Christ's death on behalf of the [human] race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship

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<sup>4</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 98.

<sup>5</sup>This illustration was adapted from R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 26.

with God, but made it possible for people to enter into such a relationship by faith.”<sup>6</sup> Later in the same volume, Miethe argues in similar fashion. He asks:

What is the nature of God and the nature of man as created in God’s image? Does the Bible teach that Jesus died for the sins of mankind? Does the Bible teach that man, created in God’s image, can [i.e., is free to] and must respond to God’s free gracious offer of salvation? I answer that the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus died for the sins of all people, and man can and must respond to the free offer of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

John 12:32 is cited frequently to support the universal power of the atonement: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” Of course Jesus is referring to his approaching death, resurrection, and ascension, when he will be lifted up on a cross, then lifted up from the grave, and finally lifted up to heaven. Further, Jesus tells us that his “lifting up” will result in all people being drawn to him. This drawing, Arminians suggest, does not ensure that all people will come to Jesus for salvation but does enable them to do so. Whether they come fully and finally for forgiveness of sins and eternal life is entirely their choice.

This is not the first usage of the verb ἐλκυο (*helkuō*, “to draw”), however, in the Gospel of John. In the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).<sup>8</sup> Jesus is teaching that no one has the ability to believe in him for salvation unless, first, the Father draws him—and this drawing is inextricably linked to his Father giving certain individuals to him. “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus proclaims, “and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” So God “giving” certain persons to Jesus results in them being “drawn” to him, which is equivalent to coming to faith in him.

That this is an inevitable drawing is seen both in verses 37 and 44: “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus asserts; and again, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” Don Carson rightly comments, “The combination of v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it should be noted that there is not one example in the

<sup>6</sup>Clark Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 23.

<sup>7</sup>Miethe, “The Universal Power of the Atonement,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 84.

<sup>8</sup>That “to come” to Jesus means “to believe” in Jesus is clear from v. 35: “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” Thus, the phrase “comes to me” is synonymous with “believes in me.”

New Testament of the use of ἑλκμο (*helkmo*) where resistance is successful. Always the drawing power is triumphant. “Ultimately, therefore, salvation depends not on human believing, but on the ‘drawing’ action of the Father (presumably by the Holy Spirit) by which God moves a person to faith in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

If one allows Scripture to interpret Scripture, the “drawing” of John 12:32 cannot be taken to mean, as Carson points out, a universal enablement that attracts all persons to Jesus; and since universalism is not taught in the Bible, there must be another meaning in view. The arrival of some Greeks triggers for Jesus the awareness of his “hour,” a word that typically in the Gospel of John refers to his arrest, crucifixion, and death (cf. John 2:4; 7:30). It is only through this “hour” of suffering and eventual glory (his resurrection) that all ethnic groups, even Gentiles, will be able to approach Jesus for salvation, as his words suggest: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The drawing of all people in John 12:32, then, does not refer to an enablement that draws all people without “exception”; instead, it refers to an effectual work of the Father that successfully draws all people without “distinction,” meaning both Jews and Gentiles.

Other texts are also cited to prove that Christ’s work on the cross brought with it a universal and enabling grace. These passages state that Jesus died for “all” and for the sins of “the whole world” (2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 John 2:2). But regardless of how “all” and “the whole world” are defined in these verses—whether as “all without *distinction*” or “all without *exception*,” as in the preceding paragraph—the notion of prevenient grace is still absent. Nowhere do these passages teach that the atonement resulted in a restored will to all people. The same is true of Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” “The grace of God that brings salvation” is a roundabout way of referring to the contents of the gospel message. It highlights Christ’s incarnation and accomplishment. Certainly Jesus Christ is God’s gracious gift to humanity that brought salvation to all people, but again, there is no hint in this verse of prevenient grace or a restored will. Paul simply states the fact of the historical gospel and what it means: that through Christ’s coming salvation is now offered to all (every person and all people groups).<sup>11</sup>

Arguably the most common scriptural support for prevenient grace comes from John 1:9, which I have termed the “incarnational” argument. Schreiner notes that the

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<sup>9</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 293.

<sup>10</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 213.

<sup>11</sup>It is likely that Paul refers in Titus 2:11 to all people without distinction. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Problematic Texts for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 386-87.

crucial phrase in this verse is “enlightens every person”, which Wesleyans understand to refer to prevenient grace.<sup>12</sup> Jesus’ coming into the world brought enough revelation to all people so that they are now able to reject or accept the message of the gospel. The primary lexical meaning of *enlighten* is “to shed light upon,” “to make visible,” “to bring to light,” and only secondarily “to illuminate (inwardly).”<sup>13</sup> The context suggests that the primary meaning, to shed light upon, is the correct meaning:

Some are shown to be evil because they did not know or receive Jesus (John 1:10-11), while others are revealed to be righteous because they have received Jesus and have been born of God (John 1:12-13). John 3:19-21 confirms this interpretation. Those who are evil shrink from coming to the light because they do not want their works to be exposed (v. 20). But those who practice the truth gladly come to the light so that it might be manifest that their works are wrought in God (v. 21).<sup>14</sup>

That all persons are enlightened does not necessitate the bestowment of grace. Rather, the light exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one’s heart.<sup>15</sup> As Köstenberger states, it is an external illumination of objective revelation that requires a response.<sup>16</sup> Or as Carson more bluntly describes: “It [the light] shines on every man, and divides the race: those who hate the light [that is, those who hate Jesus] respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21).”<sup>17</sup> Thus Jesus, the true and genuine light, enlightens everyone in the sense that one’s response to him reveals where one stands in relation to him. It is how one responds to Jesus and his message, as the context makes clear, that in a very real, tangible, and public way exposes one’s true nature.

A fourth defense of prevenient grace, the causal argument, appeals to the warnings, invitations, and commands in Scripture which imply that they are able to be freely carried out by every person. After all, why would God give commands unless people were given some ability to obey them? Does this not imply that people have the

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<sup>12</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 239.

<sup>13</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 123-24.

<sup>14</sup>Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 240.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Kostenberger, *John*, 35-36.

<sup>17</sup>Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 124. This is fundamentally the same argument that Schreiner makes.

ability to repent if they would only choose to do so? It should be acknowledged that Arminian logic is coherent here, and one can see why they would deduce human ability from the giving of commands. Nonetheless, even though their reasoning is commendable, it does not necessarily follow that their conclusion is true. An argument may be logically coherent and not fit with the state of affairs in the world because the answer given is incomplete. More specifically, the causal argument for prevenient grace is not in accord with the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

Romans 2:4 is an example: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” Of course it is true that God’s kindness “should” lead people to repentance, but the depravity of our sinful and hard hearts makes that an impossibility unless enabled by God’s grace (2 Tim 2:25-26). Hence, it must again be stressed what this text does not say: nowhere in this verse is prevenient grace taught, implied, or even insinuated by Paul. While the lavishness of God’s kindness, forbearance, and patience should certainly lead sinners to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus, the reality of life as it is portrayed in the Bible paints a different picture, as Romans 2:5 shows: “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Forlines’s “influence-and-response” model, although unique in its approach, also fails to agree with the reality of life as portrayed in the Scriptures. He argues that because man is created in God’s image, God deals with him solely on the basis that he thinks, feels, and acts:

To do otherwise undercuts the personhood of man. God will not do this—not because something is imposed on God to which He must submit, but because God designed the relationship to be a relationship between *personal beings*. Human beings are personal beings by God’s design and were made for a *personal relationship* with a personal God. God will not violate His own plan. The nature of the case does not demand that God work in a cause and effect relationship with human beings.<sup>19</sup>

Forlines’s argument is fraught with red flags. I shall mention only two. First, it is filled with highly emotive language that threatens his readers’ sense of freedom. For example, he speaks of anything other than a self-determined will as “undercutting the personhood of man,” something that God would never do because it would “violate His own plan.” Language like this inevitably stirs the emotions and elicits a strong reaction against any who oppose such a view of man’s liberty. Second, and more importantly, Forlines’s

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<sup>18</sup>Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?,” 242-43.

<sup>19</sup>F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans*, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 49.

“influence-and-response” logic is refuted by the testimony of Scripture. The Bible abounds with verses that teach a “cause-and-effect” relationship between God and man. Proverbs alone states, “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD” (Prov 16:1). “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Prov 16:9). “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” This does not sound like God is influencing us and waiting to see how we respond. Moreover, specific instances can be cited throughout Scripture that illustrate God’s absolute control over our lives, even over our response to his commands.<sup>20</sup> In no way does this undermine man’s accountability, for the Bible teaches both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. But to claim that God only interacts with men and women in an “influence-and-response” relationship is simply untrue.

Perhaps the biggest challenge unconditional election faces comes in the form of the ontological argument, which puts forth the love of God as the ground of prevenient grace. Admittedly, it is hard to understand how a God who loves the world and desires all to be saved can at the same time choose only some to be saved. What one is dealing with entering into this discussion is the interplay between God’s universal love and his electing love (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:8; Matt 22:14; John 6:37, 44, 65; 8:47; 10:26-29; Rom 8:29-30; 9:6-23; 11:5-10; 1 Cor 1:26-30; Eph 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 2:5); that is, how these two seemingly contradictory wills of God are harmonized. It is emotionally tempting at this point to let those texts which speak of God’s universal love snuff out those texts which speak of God’s electing love. However, one must allow the whole counsel of God to speak, reconciling what can be reconciled and leaving to mystery what belongs to mystery.

We shall first examine John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse is commonly used as the first line of attack against unconditional election.<sup>21</sup> It is argued, “Jesus says whoever believes in him will be saved—whoever. Therefore unconditional election cannot be true. God loves the world and would never limit his love in that way.” A few comments will suffice as to why this verse does not refute Calvinism’s doctrine of election. (1) The term *κοσμος* (*kosmos*, “the world”) in the Gospel of John does not emphasize the “individuals” in the world but rather the “badness” of the world. According to John, the world is the mass of fallen humanity that is in rebellion against its Creator (e.g., John 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14).<sup>22</sup> What makes God’s love so amazing, then, is not that the world is

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<sup>20</sup>One of the clearest examples of this is 2 Chron 30:1-12, which will be examined in Argument 5.

<sup>21</sup>Personally, John 3:16 has been quoted to me more than any other verse to refute that God unconditionally chooses whom he will save.

<sup>22</sup>Overwhelmingly, the world stands in stark opposition to Jesus and his disciples.

so big but that the wicked do not deserve it. (2) Calvinists wholeheartedly agree that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. That is not, nor has it historically been, an issue of disagreement. (3) This verse does not say anything about man's "ability" to believe in Jesus. It merely promises that whoever does believe in him will be saved. To use this verse as a rebuttal against unconditional election, therefore, does not work. It implies that man has the ability to come to Jesus of his own free will, which is explicitly denied in Scripture and even by Jesus himself (John 6:44).

God's universal love is also expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is possible that careful exegesis of this verse would lead us to believe that God's desire for all people to be saved does not refer to every individual person in the world but rather to all "sorts" of people, since "all people" in verse 1 may well mean groups such as "kings and all who are in high positions" (v. 2).<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this interpretation has been unconvincing to Arminians and likely will continue to be.<sup>24</sup> Besides, it is possible that "all people" means "all individual persons," so further inquiry is needed into this passage and those like it.<sup>25</sup> What is undisputed is this: although God truly desires all people to be saved, in reality that does not come to pass. But what are we to think of a desire of God's that goes unfulfilled? There are two possibilities:

One possibility is that there is a power in the universe greater than God's, which is frustrating him by overruling what he desires. Neither the Reformed nor the Arminians affirm this. The other possibility is that God wills not to save all, even though he "desires" that all be saved, because there is something else he wills or desires more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>This interpretation is popular among some Reformed theologians because it shifts God's love from an "individual" emphasis to a "class," or group, emphasis: God desires all *kinds* of people to be saved, and that includes kings (v. 2) and those in high positions. This is seen as necessary in order to avoid the collision between God's electing love and his general desire for all people (all individuals) to be saved.

<sup>24</sup>I. Howard Marshall, for example, writes, "This interpretation means that vv. 3f. provide justification for praying for the government authorities in 2:2. This interpretation (like the previous one) is followed by scholars who find a doctrine of particular election underlying the NT. However, nothing in the context suggests such a limitation. Nor does this interpretation secure the desired result, since in the last analysis divisions between individuals and classes of humankind merge into one another" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastor Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary Series [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999], 427).

<sup>25</sup>For instance, 2 Pet 3:9 states, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, *not wishing that any should perish*, but that all should reach repentance." It is often argued that in context Peter is speaking to professing Christians (but is patient toward you), so that technically speaking God's desire that none should perish refers to those whom Peter is writing, that is, those who are professing Christ. Nonetheless, what was said of 1 Tim 2:4 could likewise be said of this passage: further inquiry needs to be made into the relationship between God's universal love and his electing love.

<sup>26</sup>John Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 39.



Simply put, all of God's desires do not rise to the level of volition. There is a greater commitment, a greater good, which is more valuable to God than saving all people by his sovereign, efficacious grace. Arminians hold that the greater value is free will and the possible resulting love relationship with God that might come about through the right response to the gospel message. Calvinists suggest that the greater value is the full manifestation of God's glory in both his wrath and mercy (Rom 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation (1 Cor 1:29).<sup>27</sup> The controversial 1 Timothy 2:4 does not settle the matter, for it neither tells us what that greater commitment is, nor does it teach that man has the ability to believe in Christ of his own free will. Since I do not find in the Scriptures that human beings possess the power of self-determination, I agree with the Calvinist interpretation that God deems his glory as the higher commitment that restrains him from saving all people.

In attempting to reconcile God's universal love and his electing love (as much as it is humanly possible to do so), it must be acknowledged that the Bible speaks of the love of God in different ways. There is, for example, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father (John 3:35; 14:31). This is a unique relationship that exists only between God the Father and God the Son. It is not only "eternal," in that it has no beginning and no end, but it is also the "purest" relationship that has ever existed, in that it is not (nor can it be) tainted by sin. As well, there is God's providential love for his creation. God created this world and deemed it "good"—indeed, "very good"—and continually provides for all people, believers and unbelievers alike (Matt 5:45).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when scholars distinguish between God's universal love and his electing love, it is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. Instead, it is a biblical attempt to come to grips with the two wills of God as taught in the Bible.

John Piper has given thoughtful consideration to this subject and shared his conclusions in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*.<sup>29</sup> He reasons that God's emotional life is infinitely complex and far beyond our ability to fully comprehend:

For example, who can comprehend that the Lord hears in one moment of time the prayers of ten million Christians around the world, and sympathizes with each one personally and individually like a caring Father (as Hebrews 4:15 says he will), even though among those ten million prayers some are brokenhearted and some are

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Carson is tremendously helpful in thinking through the different aspects of the love of God. See D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000).

<sup>29</sup>John Piper, "Are There Two Will in God?", in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 126-27.

bursting with joy? How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time—in fact are always coming to him with no break at all?

Or who can comprehend that God is angry at the sin of the world every day (Ps. 7:11), and yet every day, every moment, he is rejoicing with tremendous joy because somewhere in the world a sinner is repenting (Luke 15:7, 10, 23)? Who can comprehend that God continually burns with hot anger at the rebellion of the wicked, grieves over the unholy speech of his people (Eph. 4:29-30), yet takes pleasure in them daily (Ps. 149:4), and ceaselessly makes merry over penitent prodigals who come home?<sup>30</sup>

It is this divine emotional complexity that allows God to desire all to be saved and yet only set his saving love upon some. He is able, as Piper describes, to see the world through two lenses: either through a narrow lens or a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or sin for what it is in itself, and he is angered and grieved. But when God sees a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy or sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it: “He sees it in all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic, with all its (good and evil) parts, he does delight in (Ps. 115:3).”<sup>31</sup>

If this seems unfathomable, it is because in part it is. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9). And, as Paul proclaims in Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Of course, these are not easy answers, but they are answers derived from the text of Scripture. God’s people must humbly bow to what they see in Scripture and leave unrevealed matters to him, accepting that the secret things do not belong to us but only to our Lord (Deut 29:29).

I have sought in this argument to establish that prevenient grace cannot be substantiated from Scripture. As best as I am able to discern, I do not see one verse in the entirety of the Bible that teaches that a universal enabling grace has restored man’s will to its pre-Fall “neutral” condition. When people claim otherwise, it appears to be driven more by philosophical presupposition than exegetical conclusion. It is thus fitting to conclude with the words of Arminian Clark Pinnock: “I also knew that the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 126-27.

<sup>31</sup>Piper, *Does God Desire All to be Saved?*, 45.

if it did.”<sup>32</sup>

*Argument 2: Foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29.*

Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom he [God] foreknew [προγινώσκειν] he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” The verb προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*) means “to know beforehand,” and without question God knows beforehand all things and all people. The Bible declares consistently that God’s knowledge is vast, great, and all-encompassing.<sup>33</sup> However, the remainder of verse 29 teaches that those whom God foreknew “he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” Since all people are not predestined to be conformed into the image of Christ, it is only those whom God “foreknew,” and since God knows all people in the sense of cognitive awareness, God’s foreknowledge of all men in general cannot be what Paul has in mind. Rather, he is using the word in a narrower sense, defining a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole.

It is this reality that forces interpreters to clarify further προγινώσκειν. What precisely is it that distinguishes those whom God foreknew and marked out to be conformed to the image of his Son from those whom God did not foreknow and mark out to be conformed to the image of his Son? Simply acknowledging the narrower sense of “foreknew” does not answer all the questions that the term raises. Indeed, that God’s foreknowledge defines a special and distinct group of people separate from all people as a universal whole is agreed upon by both Arminians and Calvinists. It is when the issue is pressed further (as it must be) that disagreement arises; hence, the former interpret foreknowledge as “foreseen faith” and the latter as “covenantal commitment.”

Admittedly, many Calvinists readily grant the appeal and reasonability of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Schreiner confesses, “Such an interpretation is attractive in that it forestalls the impression that God arbitrarily saves some and not others.”<sup>34</sup> Moo concedes that “foreknew,” as its etymology in both Greek and English suggests, usually means “to know ahead of time.” “This being the commonest meaning of the verb, it is not surprising that many interpreters think it must mean this here also.”<sup>35</sup> Murray agrees: “The most common [understanding] is to suppose that what is in view is God’s foresight of faith. God foreknew who would believe; he foreknew them as his *by faith*.”<sup>36</sup> Paul

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<sup>32</sup>Clark Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 22. Pinnock goes on to deny total depravity, appealing to the notion that Scripture implores people *as though they are able* to respond.

<sup>33</sup>The Old Testament, for example, provides abundant evidence for God’s omniscience. See Pss 139:2, 18; 147:5; Prov 16:2; Isa 41:23; 66:18; Ezra 1:1-4.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 452.

<sup>35</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 532.

Jewett, as well, notes that among Protestants the position that bases God's election on his foresight of faith has long had an appeal. One could even argue that it is the most widely held view. He explains why this is so:

It can easily be inferred from a fundamental strand of biblical revelation: the Scriptures plainly teach that a genuine offer of salvation is made to all in the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20), that the gospel itself is the good news that Christ died for all (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and that this death commends the love of a God (Rom. 5:8) who wills the salvation of all men (1 Tim. 2:4). If God is the seeking God, the God who all day long stretches forth his hands to rebellious sinners (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21), the God who solemnly declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), what other position can one take? The fact that some are beneficiaries of his grace must, in the last analysis, be attributed to the free decision of the creature either to accept or to reject the grace freely offered in the gospel. At least so it would seem.<sup>37</sup>

This is what Cottrell means when he says that "Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith."<sup>38</sup> What may seem reasonable, however, is not always scriptural, and in this particular scenario one is forced to ask, "Where is faith mentioned in this verse?" That God foresees a person's faith and bases his election of an individual upon that choice is a notion that is foreign to the text and to the Bible as a whole.<sup>39</sup> To say otherwise is simply smuggling a meaning into foreknowledge that is glaringly absent from the word (and the passage) itself. The "foreknowledge as foreseen faith" view, appealing and reasonable as it may be, "presupposes" that God sees each individual's act of self-wrought faith and consequently predestines him or her unto salvation.

Ironically, this is even acknowledged by a number of Arminian scholars. Cottrell says, "Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to

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<sup>36</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 316.

<sup>37</sup>Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 70.

<sup>38</sup>Jack Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 85, emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup>On the contrary, Acts 13:48 teaches just the opposite: "[A]nd as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." God's divine sovereignty in election results in the belief of the Gentiles, demonstrating that their belief was due to God's grace alone. The clear meaning of the passage is that the ones who believed did so because they were appointed to eternal life, a note that Luke, through the Holy Spirit, saw important enough to include. Moreover, passages such as Eph 2:8-10, Phil 1:29, and 2 Tim 2:25 (as well as others) teach that faith and repentance are gifts of God.

meet these conditions, especially the condition of faith.”<sup>40</sup> Forlines confesses, “It is true that the Bible does not specifically say that foreknown faith was the condition of election in eternity past.”<sup>41</sup> Behind these statements, of course, is the underlying belief in free will. But even Olson admits, “Arminians believe in free will because they see it everywhere assumed in the Bible.”<sup>42</sup> The reason these scholars speak so candidly about faith, free will, and foreknowledge is because they know, exactly as Forlines states, that the Bible “does not specifically say” that God foresees an individual’s faith and elects him or her based upon that prior knowledge. It is an assumption, an inference, a presupposition, and their moral integrity obligates them to be honest in their assessment. Nevertheless, even though (by their own admission) they see no hard scriptural evidence in support of defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith, they continue to hold fast to their position.

Inevitably, all forms of conditional election fall prey to defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith. Forster and Marston try to distance themselves from this fact by suggesting that in Romans 8:29 Paul is not dealing with why some came to be converted and some did not; instead, he is simply writing to Christians about their position, or their status, before the Lord. They then conclude that “the foreknowledge [Paul] has in view implies a complete understanding of them, of their characters, their weaknesses, and their reactions.”<sup>43</sup> I do not see how this definition of foreknowledge varies in any substantial way from the traditional Arminian definition of foreknowledge. Does not God knowing a Christian’s “reactions” include his knowing his “reaction” to the gospel?

That this is what they are actually saying seems even clearer when they sum up their position in the final paragraphs of the chapter: “Our inheritance is obtained and our destiny worked out in Christ, and this destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge of those who would so receive it.”<sup>44</sup> This is not substantially different from Arminianism’s traditional interpretation of foreknowledge. To say that the Christian’s destiny was set out by God in the full light of his knowledge “of those who would so receive it” is fundamentally saying the same thing as the traditional Arminian interpretation: God predestines individuals based upon his foreknowledge of who will and who will not repent and believe in his Son. Let us note that saying the same thing a different way is still saying the same thing, and that does appear to be what these two scholars are doing. While in many ways their treatment of foreknowledge provides an

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<sup>40</sup>Cottrell, “Arminian View,” 85, emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup>Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, 186, emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 98, emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup>Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1973), 205.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 204, emphasis added.

excellent word study,<sup>45</sup> in the end Forster and Marston make precisely the same interpretive error that every scholar who holds to conditional election does: they assume that a person's free-will decision to receive Christ is what God foreknew when he elected them unto glory, which affixes an element to the word that is foreign to the text.

This textual addition has been aptly called a “qualifying adjunct.”<sup>46</sup> To relieve God from the accusation of injustice, and to give mankind complete freedom in determining his eternal destiny, Arminians must add something to προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 that is not inherent in the word, in the verse, or in the surrounding context. Furthermore, as Murray points out, the rejection of this interpretation is not dictated by a predestinarian interest.

Even if it were granted that “foreknew” means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For it is certainly true that God foresees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith God foresees is the faith that he himself creates (*cf.* John 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; II Pet. 1:2). Hence his eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing, and we are thrown back upon the differentiation which proceeds from God's own eternal and sovereign election to faith and its consequents.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, even if foreknowledge is allowed to mean “foreseen faith,” that does not solve the problem of origin. Where does the individual's faith come from?<sup>48</sup> Again, any qualifying adjunct at this point is just that: an addition to the word (and the verse) that is not intrinsic to the word (or the verse). For this reason, the view that foreknowledge refers to the foresight of faith must be rejected. There is simply no exegetical rationale for defining foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 in such a manner.

*Argument 3: The verb γινώσκω (ginōskō), from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship.* Argument one concluded that prevenient grace cannot be corroborated from Scripture. Argument two further concluded that foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29. This alone is enough evidence to reject Arminianism's definition of foreknowledge and consider the possibility of an alternative interpretation. Murray proceeds forward with keen insight:

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 178-208.

<sup>46</sup>This expression is Shedd's.

<sup>47</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316.

<sup>48</sup>See footnote 7 in this chapter. Also, this issue will be addressed more fully in argument 5: since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.

It should be observed that the text says “*whom* he foreknew”; *whom* is the object of the verb and there is not qualifying addition. This, of itself, shows that, unless there is some other compelling reason, the expression “whom he foreknew” contains within itself the differentiation which is presupposed. If the apostle had in mind some “qualifying adjunct” it would have been simple to supply it. Since he adds none we are forced to inquire if the actual terms he uses can express the differentiation required.<sup>49</sup>

Instead of adding something alien to the text, Murray suggests that the word “foreknew” should be investigated to see if it supplies within itself any extra information. Indeed it does:

The usage of Scripture provides an affirmative answer. Although the term ‘foreknew’ is used seldom in the New Testament, it is altogether indefensible to ignore the meaning so frequently given to the word ‘know’ in the usage of Scripture; ‘foreknow’ merely adds the thought of ‘beforehand’ to the word ‘know’. Many times in Scripture ‘know’ has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition. It is used in a sense practically synonymous with ‘love’, to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action.<sup>50</sup>

The texts that support this meaning are abundant. In reference to Adam, Genesis 4:1 says, “Now Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.” Obviously, this is referring to sexual knowledge, but the point is that the word “knew” means something significantly more than that Adam was aware he had a wife named Eve. By contrast this same idea is expressed in Matthew 7:23. False disciples come to Jesus claiming they have prophesied in his name, cast out demons, and performed many mighty works, and he tells them, “I never *knew* you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” This does not mean that Jesus never knew they existed, or that they were doing these works in his name. Jesus is not expressing some sort of cognitive ignorance, as if he is completely unaware of their identities and activities. He is stating that he did not know them in a personal and saving way; otherwise, he would have welcomed them into his kingdom.

Similarly, this is the sense in which Paul uses the word “know” in Galatians 4:9: “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God . . . .” “To know God” implies a genuine relationship with him. In the case of the Galatians, they were tempted to revert back to principles and practices they had previously followed before their union with Christ (v. 9). Paul is astonished, and in essence says to them, “How can that be, now that you know the one and true living God?” From the Galatians perspective, they have just recently and experientially entered into a relationship with

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<sup>49</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 316-17.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 317.

God. But we can know God only because he first knew us (Rom 8:29), just as we choose him because he first chose us (John 6:44; 15:16), and we love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Evident in these texts, then, is that the word “know” can (and does) have the connotation of love, delight, and intimate relationship.

The background of the term is in the Old Testament, where for God “to know” refers to his covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen.<sup>51</sup> Amos 3:2 speaks of this type of knowing. God is warning Israel through his prophet that judgment is coming, and he reminds them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Judah and Israel believed that their special relationship as the chosen people of God would protect them from harm, but it is precisely this fact that makes them even more accountable. God knew all the peoples of the earth and easily could have chosen any of them to set his covenantal love upon. Out of love and his own autonomous decision, however, he chose Israel.<sup>52</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7-8 affirms this interpretation: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.” What is evident in these passages is that the word “know” is used to express God’s unconditional act of loving whom he chooses to love, apart from anything he sees in those he loves.<sup>53</sup>

Thus far I have sought to demonstrate that the word “know,” in both its New Testament usage and Old Testament background, can carry within itself the idea of affection, love, and, often, covenantal commitment.<sup>54</sup> Of course, this does not necessarily

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<sup>51</sup>The Hebrew word *yada* (“to know”) carries a range of meanings, one of which can be described as “God’s special relationship with.” Willem VanGemeren notes, “The vb. is used for God’s relationship to Israel as a people, ‘You only have I known’ (Amos 3:2 NRSV), and with individual leaders

(Abraham, Gen 18:19; Moses, Exod 33:12; Deut 34:10 [‘face to face’]; David, 2 Sam 7:20; Jeremiah, Jer 1:5). This usage does not focus on election in a narrow way, but on the relationship in its fullest sense. To know ‘by name,’ on the part of either God or humans (Exod 33:12; Ps 91:14), refers to closeness, not to a badge of identification” (Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], s.v. “yada,” by Willem A. VanGemeren.

<sup>52</sup>This is the point of Deut 10:14-15: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.” The truth of God’s sovereign ownership of the entire universe, and by extension all the peoples therein, serves as a backdrop to highlight his grace in freely choosing Israel. Simply put, God owns everything and can take any nation he wants for his own special possession.

<sup>53</sup>Many other passages can be cited to support the Hebraic sense of “know” as well. Old Testament texts include Gen 18:19; Exod 33:17; 1 Sam 2:12; Ps 18:43; Prov 9:10; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; as well as further New Testament passages, such as John 10:14, 17:3; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 John 4:7.



entail that we should import the Hebraic sense of “know” into Romans 8:29, but it has proven that there is exegetical grounds to do so (or at the very least consider it to be a legitimate possibility). Often forgotten in this discussion, however, is the fact that Paul uses the word “foreknowledge” just a few chapters later in Romans 11:2: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” This is not an unimportant observation, and should be given serious consideration when determining the meaning of “foreknowledge” in 8:29. Bruce Ware has given this rightful attention in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*:

Now if we applied the Arminian notion of foreknowledge here, this text would mean, “God has not rejected his people *whom He knew in advance would choose Him.*” But clearly this is not the case! God chose Israel, from all the nations of the world, even though she was the smallest and weakest of the lot (Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2)! It is simply not the case that God picked Israel to be his people because he knew in advance that Israel would pick him! Rather, what Romans 11:2 is saying is this: “God has not rejected His people whom He *previously had been disposed to be in relationship with and favor.*” Both the usual lexical meaning of “foreknowledge” and the historical facts about God’s relationship with Israel indicate that this is what Paul means in Romans 11:2.<sup>55</sup>

Schreiner, as well, appeals to Romans 11:2 in arguing for the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge. “The verb προέγνω (*proegnō*) here functions as the antonym to ἀπόσατο (*apōsato*, “he rejected”). In other words, he verse is saying that God has not rejected his people upon whom he set his covenantal love (cf. also Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Similarly, in Rom. 8:29 the point is that God has predestined those upon whom he has set his covenantal affection.”<sup>56</sup> Baugh, too, concludes that Paul refers to the concept of a committed relationship with the phrase “whom he foreknew,” as it is confirmed by the context: “God’s eternal foreknowledge, his devotion to his people before all ages, inspires the apostle to conclude with a virtual restatement of that eternal, divine commitment to us in verse 31: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ What better exhibits this divine determination to have us as his people than the fact that he delivered over his own Son on our behalf (Rom. 8:32)?”<sup>57</sup> Murray is right to conclude that when this import is appreciated there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion, for “whom he foreknew” is seen to contain within itself the differentiating element required. It means

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<sup>54</sup>Usually, context makes it very clear if this is the sense in which the word should be understood.

<sup>55</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 27.

<sup>56</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

<sup>57</sup>S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 194.

“whom he set regard upon” or “whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight,” and it is virtually equivalent to “whom he foreloved.”<sup>58</sup>

Generally speaking, Arminians do not find fault with attaching the connotation of love to γινώσκω (*ginōskō*); they just find fault with doing so in the particular case of Romans 8:29. For instance, Osborne writes, “The verb is connected to the Hebrew *yada* for God’s loving knowledge of his people. . . . Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb.”<sup>59</sup> It is better, he concludes, to link foreknowledge to a faith decision and interpret it as God’s knowledge regarding those who would respond in faith to his call.<sup>60</sup> There is no need to address the numerous problems with Osborne’s assertion (as they have been previously discussed), other than to say that his understanding of “foreknew” is not the most natural understanding of the verb. On the contrary, his interpretation takes προγινώσκω far beyond the bounds of what the text allows.

The most natural understanding of προγινώσκειν in Romans 8:29 carries with it the notion of love, devotion, and personal commitment. It is bound up with covenantal implications, to be sure, because God is a loyal and faithful God to those he chooses to redeem. It is then appropriate to render Romans 8:29-30 in such a way that reflects that love, devotion, and personal commitment: “For those whom [God] set his heart in love he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”<sup>61</sup>

*Argument 4: The terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous.* It is common for Arminians to refute the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge on the grounds that it folds “foreknowledge” and “predestination” together, thus making the two terms basically indistinguishable, which is obviously not what Paul meant. Osborne, for example, writes,

The majority of commentators (Murray 1968; Cranfield 1975; Hendriksen 1981; Morris 1988; Stott 1994; Moo 1996; Schreiner 1998) take “foreknew” as virtually equivalent to “predestined” on several grounds: (1) The relational love inherent in “foreknew” goes further than mere knowledge of choices and means “to determine

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<sup>58</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 317.

<sup>59</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 221. See also Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), 107-10; Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 178-208.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>61</sup>Foreknowledge and predestination in Rom 8:29 are roughly equivalent to what Moses says to Israel in Deut 10:15: “Yet the LORD set his heart in love (foreknowledge) on your fathers and chose (predestination) their offspring after them, you above all people, as you are this day.”

to enter a relationship with,” that is, God’s choice or election (as in Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20); (2) it relates to his preordained plan from verse 28; (3) it is foreknowledge that determines rather than just knows what is to happen; (4) the emphasis is on the second verb *predestined*, and the first verb simply prepares for it; (5) it connotes that God knew his people, not just about what they would decide to do; (6) since it refers to a prior intimate knowledge of believers, it by nature becomes synonymous with God’s choice “before the creation of the world” (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). This is very impressive, even persuasive, for it fits the emphasis on divine sovereignty throughout this passage (leading into chaps. 9-11). Yet one wonders if it is the most natural understanding of the verb. For one thing, none of the other five stages are virtually equivalent (even *predestined* and *called* are different stages); rather, each one prepares for the next. Why should the first two be synonymous?<sup>62</sup>

It is clear that Osborne is familiar with how Calvinists have reached their conclusions, and even finds the arguments persuasive, yet ultimately he rejects the Hebraic sense of foreknowledge, first, on the basis that it is equivalent to predestination. While Arminians do acknowledge that γινώσκω can have the connotation of love, they inevitably assert that Calvinists’ primary definition of γινώσκω is “to choose,” “determine,” or “set apart.”<sup>63</sup> This is apparent in Forster and Marston’s word study of “foreknowledge” in *God’s Strategy in Human History*, as well as Cottrell’s essay in *Perspectives on Election*. For instance, Cottrell writes, “For Calvinists God’s foreknowledge is the act by which he (unconditionally) makes distinctions among people, *choosing* some out of the mass of future mankind to be the sole recipients of his saving grace. Foreknowledge is the same as election.”<sup>64</sup>

It is not entirely accurate, however, to claim that Calvinism’s primary definition of foreknowledge is election. In fact, a brief survey of even a few of the commentators Osborne cites reveals differently. Murray presents a thorough and well-articulated defense of “foreknowledge” as “foreloving.”<sup>65</sup> Stott concludes unambiguously, “Foreknowledge is ‘sovereign, distinguishing love.’”<sup>66</sup> Moo notes that “foreknowledge” likely means “know intimately,” or to “have regard for.”<sup>67</sup> Schreiner

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<sup>62</sup>Osborne, *Romans*, 221.

<sup>63</sup>Godet does clearly distinguish between foreknowledge as “to choose beforehand” and the Hebraic sense of “foreloving,” but rejects both in favor of foreseen faith. See Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 103.

<sup>64</sup>Cottrell, “Arminian View,” 87.

<sup>65</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 315-18.

<sup>66</sup>John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 249.

<sup>67</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 533.

asserts that the point in Romans 8:29 is that God has predestined those whom he set his covenantal affection.<sup>68</sup> While all these commentators see foreknowledge and predestination as in some way related, that is a far cry from saying they are in every way the same. The word προγινώσκω means “to know beforehand,” and προώρισεν (*proōrisen*, predestine) “to destine beforehand.” “The latter term stresses the preordained plan of God that will certainly come to pass (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11) in accordance with his will. The former has a different nuance in that it highlights his covenantal love and affection for those whom he has chosen.”<sup>69</sup>

An analogy may help here. Suppose a guitarist visits his favorite music store and plays a handful of fine acoustic guitars. After several hours of playing he finds himself especially enamored with a particular Gibson J-45, but chooses to leave the store that day without it. On the other hand, suppose another guitarist visits his favorite music store. He too plays all the acoustic guitars and falls in love with a rather dry and spritely Martin D-18. He knows if he walks away from this rare mahogany find he will live to regret it, so he decides to purchase it that very moment and use it to record his next album.

What is the difference between these two scenarios? The primary difference is one of purpose. The first musician, undoubtedly smitten with the J-45, ultimately decides not to take it home, while the second musician, also smitten with the guitar he has discovered, purchases the D-18 with the specific intent of using it on his next project. This, in essence, illustrates the difference between foreknowledge and predestination. Foreknowledge tells us that God set his heart in love upon certain individuals before the foundation of the world, and predestination tells us what he determined to do with them: conform them into the likeness of his Son. Simply put, προγινώσκω emphasizes God’s love, whereas προώρισεν emphasizes God’s “purposive intent” in that love.<sup>70</sup>

When we consider this high destiny defined, “to be conformed to the image of his Son,” there is exhibited not only the dignity of this ordination but also the greatness of the love from which the appointment flows. God’s love is not passive emotion; it is active volition and it moves determinatively to nothing less than the highest goal conceivable for his adopted children, conformity to the image of his only-begotten Son. To allege that the pregnant force of “foreknew” does not leave room for the distinct enunciation of this high destiny is palpably without warrant or reason.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 452.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>70</sup>I am not trying to make a correlation along all points of this illustration, such as why God chooses some for salvation and others he does not. I am simply stressing that there is a clear difference between foreknowledge and predestination, emphasizing, in this analogy, that the “purpose” of predestination makes it distinct from God’s prior act of foreloving (foreknowing).

Arminians would be right to object if in fact Calvinists made no distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, but that allegation is, as Murray states, without warrant or reason, for a clear line of demarcation exists between these two pre-creation acts of God. Whereas προγινώσκω emphasizes God's loving commitment to those individuals he set his affections upon, προώρισεν emphasizes God's destination for these same individuals. In other words, "foreknowledge" and "predestination" are not synonymous terms; they highlight two related-yet-distinct actions performed by God from before the creation of the universe. Therefore, the claim that the Calvinist definition of προγινώσκω obliterates the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination is unjustifiable and should be rejected.

*Argument 5: Since justification is by faith, and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God's calling produces faith.* The plain point of Romans 8:29-30 is that all the foreknown will ultimately be glorified; not one person will be lost, dropped, or left out of God's plan of salvation. Jesus speaks of this same type of inevitability, albeit using different language, when he says,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:37-40)

Furthermore, both Jesus' words and Paul's words imply selectivity. To say that "all" those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified is to say that "only" those God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Since justification is by faith (Rom 5:1), and Paul says that only those who are called are justified, it must be that this calling is an "effectual" calling, a calling that, without fail, accomplishes faith and consequently justification. This type of call is most clearly seen in passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." While a "general" call, a true gospel invitation,<sup>72</sup> goes out to all people, an "inner, effectual" call goes out to the elect. This divine call creates a new heart of willing faith so that the gospel, which was once considered foolish, is now seen as the power and wisdom of God.

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<sup>71</sup>Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 318.

<sup>72</sup>Matthew 22:14 demonstrates this type of call: "For many are called, but few are chosen." Here the word *call* is used in the general sense, as it is juxtaposed with *chosen*. Although many are called in the sense of being invited, only the "chosen" actually partake of the wedding feast.

The Bible illustrates this effectual, or irresistible, call in various ways. Paul, speaking of those who are perishing, says to the Corinthians, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God . . . . For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6). Because men are blinded to the worth of Christ and the beauty of the gospel, a divine work, indeed a miracle, is needed for them to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, “Let there be light.” When spiritually dead people come to see and believe in Jesus, it is in fact a new creation, a new birth that has taken place, which makes God’s creative power seen in Genesis 1 an appropriate parallel.<sup>73</sup>

Arminians balk at Calvinism’s doctrine of effectual calling, or irresistible grace, because they see it as God forcing someone to do something against his or her will. The doctrine of irresistible grace, however, simply means that when God pleases he overcomes all resistance and makes the heart happily willing to believe in his Son rather than remain in a state of rebellion and condemnation. Generally speaking, perhaps the most explicit account of God’s sovereignty over men’s hearts is found in 2 Chronicles 30:1-12. King Hezekiah wrote to the people of Israel commanding them to keep the Passover, as was decreed and pleasing to the Lord: “So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD” (2 Chr 30:10-12).

What is striking in this passage is that all people were given the same decree. They were commanded by the king to return to the Lord, to not be like their fathers and brothers who were faithless, stiff-necked, and brought judgment upon themselves. Instead, Hezekiah pleaded with them to yield to the Lord and serve him only so that God’s fierce anger may be abated and turned away from them. Sadly, some laughed and mocked the couriers and the king. Others, though, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. And then the Spirit records, “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD” (2 Chr 30:12). Verse 12 demonstrates a general principle that is at work not only in this passage but also in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; and Romans 8:29-30:

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<sup>73</sup>Another example of God’s divine work that brings a person to faith in Christ is in Acts 16:14, where Lydia is listening to the preaching of Paul. Luke says, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” This heart-opening is what happens when God “calls” those he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. It is not merely an opportunity for man to choose or reject the gospel, but an infallible work of God that creates new spiritual life, opens blinded eyes, and creates a heart of willing faith. Lydia experienced this in Acts 16:14 and so has every person who has ever come to faith in Jesus.

behind an individual's moving/working is God's moving/working.<sup>74</sup>

This principle is consistent with the Calvinist understanding of “calling” and “justification” in Romans 8:30. We have already noted that the calling in verse 30 is selective: “The call here is given only to those God predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he predestined, *these* he also called.’ And this call leads necessarily to justification, as verse 30 says, ‘Those whom he called, *these* he also justified.’ All the called are justified, not just some of them.”<sup>75</sup> But, again, inherent in this verse is both selectivity and inevitability. Those whom God foreknew and predestined are infallibly called and justified; and because justification is by faith, it naturally follows that the calling produces, or guarantees, faith. The calling in view, then, is a divine act by which God calls faith into being. Just as he creates light out of darkness and moves men's hearts to obey his vice-regent king, he calls spiritually dead people to faith in his Son.

Unquestionably, the Arminian interpretation of Roman 8:29 places faith in between foreknowledge and predestination, for it is those God foresaw by their own free will who would believe in Jesus that he, in turn, predestined. But the “foreseen faith” understanding of foreknowledge is not exegetically or logically plausible. Since only those who are called are justified, it must be that the calling itself creates faith. If God foresees any faith, it is the faith that he begets in the life of the called, and this calling does not come to all but only to those who are predestined. The correct interpretation of this text cannot have faith falling in between “foreknowledge” and “predestination.” Instead, it must fall in between “calling” and “justification,” thus proving the Calvinist understanding of foreknowledge to be the only legitimate interpretation.

### Conclusion

This paper has presented five arguments in favor of the Calvinistic sense of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29: (1) defining foreknowledge as foreseen faith requires that the concept of prevenient grace be true, which is an idea not substantiated from Scripture; (2) foreseen faith is foreign to the text of Romans 8:29; (3) the verb γινώσκω,

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<sup>74</sup>Space does not permit me to look at other passages that reflect the same reality. For instance, Jesus responds to certain Jews' unbelief by saying, “The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, *but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep*” (John 10:25-26, italics

mine). Jesus does not say, “You are not my sheep because you do not believe,” but rather, “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” The reason they do not believe is that they do not belong to him. As well, in Acts 13:48 the gospel is preached to Gentiles and Luke records, “and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” While human responsibility in believing must never be undermined, the emphasis here is that the Gentiles believing was due to God's grace alone: their election *resulted in* them believing, and not the other way around.

<sup>75</sup>John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2000), 141.

from which “foreknew” is derived, often connotes love, affection, and relationship; (4) the terms “foreknowledge” and “predestination” are not synonymous; (5) since justification is by faith and only those who are called are justified, it must be that God’s calling produces faith. Considered separately, any of these five arguments provide compelling evidence against the Arminian definition of foreknowledge and for the Calvinist interpretation. But when taken cumulatively, it is inconceivable to argue that foreknowledge means foreseen faith in Romans 8:29. Rather, it seems exegetically and contextually right to define foreknowledge as God’s purposive love which results in predestination and finally glorification.



**CHIASTIC CONTOURS AND THE BOOK OF ACTS:  
THE MESSIANIC COMMUNITY AND CHRISTIAN MISSION**

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*It is possible to attend so resolutely to context that we miss the integrated theology that holds the Bible's grand narrative together. God conveys the biblical message as a unified story that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. The narrative develops through various plot structures that bring the message into focus. The Bible tells the story of God's boundless love for creation and his plan of redemption, centered in the life of Christ and whereby we are active participants, awaiting a final renewal.*

-Dr Ajilon Ferdinand

### Introduction

In the sequel to Luke, which has come down to us as the book of Acts, the writer appears eager to show that the early followers of the Messiah not only sought to understand their world but engaged it in an effort to introduce other-worldly life transforming values. The conviction here is that the Lucan plot is no mere narrative, but a story which invites us to share its world, the commitment of its leading characters, and its enthusiasm for life.<sup>1</sup> What we find in Luke-Acts, then, are bio-narratives.<sup>2</sup> In the first volume, the dominant figure is the Messiah himself, with others in the background. In the second, Peter takes centre stage in chapters 2-11, while Paul makes his salvific entrance in chapter 9, and maintains his prominence until the end. Of course, for Luke, though the Messianic presence is in the background in Acts, He is still 'large and in charge' of Empire (cf. Rev 1:5b).

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 445.

<sup>2</sup> On the flexibility of genre, see O. Padilla (*The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* [Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2016], 46-52). As I see it, Luke's gospel is, in terms of emphasis, a *Bio-narrative*, and its sequel *Bio-narrative*—both are responsible and reliable history.

Schnabel is certainly correct when he affirms that “[t]he biographical focus of many passages in Acts suggests that Luke intends his readers to emulate the deeds of . . . Peter, Phillip, Barnabas, James and Paul, and women like Lydia and Priscilla . . . [precisely because Acts is] the story of the life and missionary work of the early church.”<sup>3</sup> Although the lives of the aforementioned individuals are definitely paradigmatic (see e.g., 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 4:9), the main focus of Acts is still that of God, his exalted Son, and the Spirit of promise—Ultimate Reality ultimately paradigmatic.<sup>4</sup> This paper proposes that one way to benefit from Luke’s bio-narrative in terms of his central focus outlined above is to appreciate his artistic ring structuring of the scroll/papyrus.

A perusal of the *Art of Rhetoric*<sup>5</sup> reveals no discourse on chiasmus, putatively a part of Luke’s artistic design. Longenecker informs us that Aristotle’s Greco-Roman successors were equally silent on the matter.<sup>6</sup> What Longenecker detected in the arrangement of Luke’s second volume is a chain-link composition. This enables the author to make a significant connection between his content and style. “From that structure emerges a theology intent on bolstering confidence in the God whose power Luke depicts as promoting the inevitable advance of the Christian movement.”<sup>7</sup> Longenecker opts for a four-fold outline:

Acts 1:1-8:3 Early Christianity in Jerusalem

Acts 8:4-12:25 Persecution and Consequent Spread (with the transition beginning at 8:1b)

Acts 13:1-19:41 The Spread of Christianity through the Ministry of Paul (with transition beginning at 11:27)

Acts 20: 1-28:31 The Spread of Christianity through Events that Take Paul from Jerusalem to Rome (with the transition beginning at 19:21).

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<sup>3</sup>Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 109. After all, Luke was writing another bio-narrative (*diēgēsin* (cf. Luke 1:1), with an emphasis on the fact that “[a]s Acts presents it, the Christian Church is a missionary Church.” (E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Trans. R. M. Wilson [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 144); italics original.

<sup>4</sup> See Burchell Taylor, “The Self-Revealing God and the Human Predicament,” in *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological Essays from the Majority World*, ed. Dieumeme Noelliste and Sung Wook Chung (Eugene Oregon: Pickwick, 2015), 48-66.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Bruce W. Longenecker, *Rhetoric at the Boundaries: The Art and Theology of the New Testament Chain-Link Transition* (Waco, Texas, 2005), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Longenecker, *Rhetoric*, 8. Richard Pervo (*Acts: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008], 20) mentions chiasmus without any elaboration; later (p. 75) Peter’s Pentecost speech is shown to contain it, and there is one that encompasses 22:3-21 about which we read: “The ease with which the structure yields to a chiasmic analysis confirms its completeness (p. 560). K. R. Wolfe, “The Chiastic Structure of Luke-Acts and Some Implications for Worship,” *SWJT* 22 (1980): 70, plausibly suggests that the Ascension is the centre of Luke’s two volumes; S. Porter (*The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary* [Sheffield: Phoenix, 2015], 54) denies that there is any macro-structure like this in the NT.

The strength of his chain-link proposal appears to be its explanatory power to solve crucial exegetical problems by showing how Luke makes certain literary transitions smoothly through the employment of a not-so-fairly-well-known rhetorical device. The proposal is also detailed, covering the entire book. A weakness, it seems, is that it has no centre, or perhaps better stated, it ignores what is considered by many the fifteenth chapter by lumping it with his “third macro-text unit”. I hope to demonstrate that by placing a centre in the midst of Longenecker’s outline—better—by making good use of Luke’s employment of chiasmus with its discernible central focus, we may be better able to grasp an important element of the Lukan plot. The author’s chiasmus<sup>8</sup> also may enable the reader to see four ways in which the willing Deity reached out to peoples of the first-century to ensure human flourishing for his own glory. So we are not surprised in hearing that the book:

exhibits careful attention to structure at several levels. . . . Structural organization is apparent also in units of different sizes, such as the cycles of persecution in chap. 3-7, and individual units such as 19:1-7. Ring composition (chiasmus) and inclusion are means of presenting rounded sections. Chapters 13-14, for example, are framed by a complex inclusion. When travel is involved, the pattern follows the time honoured “there and back” formula, as in Jerusalem-Samaria-Jerusalem (8:14-28). This pattern continues with Paul, who repeatedly returns to Jerusalem, but is decisively broken off in chaps. 27-28.<sup>9</sup>

We will now re-examine Luke’s second volume in light of a new (suggested) structure.<sup>10</sup> Our proposal underlines the way in which the gospel is extended to unbelievers and embraced by them and the people of God in an involuntary or voluntary manner. It also enables one to see more clearly the dynamic of human responsibility and divine sovereignty in a different light, by accenting the willingness of God in Lukan soteriology (cf. 2 Peter 3:9; Isa 18:19). Finally, it

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<sup>8</sup>The device may be defined thus: an “inverted sequence or cross-over of parallel words . . . sentence, or larger unit.” (Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 2edn. [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981], 40). On the following page, Soulen describes N. W. Lund’s ground breaking work, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1942), as “over zealous”; yet it has no proposal for the book of Acts. Chiasmus belongs to an author’s surface structure; therefore, as J. P. Louw (*Semantics of New Testament Greek* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982], 77) puts it, “This means that if an author wishes to say something (deep structure), he will choose a specific form (surface structure) in which to say it.”

<sup>9</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, 20; Luke Timothy Johnson (*The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, Revised Edition [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 220) adds the following: “[E]vents in Acts clearly parallel those of the Gospel. . . . The cyclical patterns in Luke-Acts are placed within a story that is essentially and intentionally linear.”

<sup>10</sup>Divine plan ‘A’ and ‘B’: A-chapter 1; B-chapter 8; B'-chapter 16; A'-chapter 28. In these four panels, there are four momentous movements, which sandwich another panel that is of no less missiological moment. The A-B structure straddles the eight Lukan summaries, dividing them in three parts (2:47; 5:14; 6:7/11:21, 24; 12:24/16:5; 19:20). Also each “of the key editorial markers (6:7; 12:24; 19:20) climaxes a section of the narrative recording the resolution of some conflict or the cessation of opposition and persecution” (D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 33). “Another significant point of progression,” says Peterson (p.70), “is the offering of salvation to the Gentiles (1:8; 8:-40; 9:15; 10:34-43; 13:46-48; 22:21; 28:25-29).”

foregrounds the Messianic law as an integral component for theological reflection relative to Christian mission. The proposal is as follows:

**A. Messianic Community<sup>11</sup> Go Willingly<sup>12</sup> (Plan): Acts 1:5-8**

The form of the imperative in verse 8 (“you shall be my witnesses”), I think, should be carefully noted.<sup>13</sup> It is the same form of that found in Deuteronomy 6:5, and there is a possibility that Luke wants Theophilus (and any other ‘lover of God’) to make the link: only the love of God (objectively) can truly motivate the people of God to carry out this mandate. The mission of Luke 10 is definitely a localized one, but the one in Acts 1:8 is global in scope.<sup>14</sup> Any discussion of the purpose of Acts must factor this in. And however we understand the baptism of the Spirit (1:5-8 vis-à-vis Acts 2:1-3, 38; and chapters 10 and 11), what is unmistakable is that the boldness and empowerment for the mission is tied to it. This is ably demonstrated by Luke’s catalogue of power-encounters throughout.<sup>15</sup> If chapter 1 verse 8 mandates witnessing, then the first act of witnessing is to be seen in chapter 2. That took place after the one hundred and twenty

<sup>11</sup> According to C.K. Lehmann (*Biblical Theology, vol. 2: New Testament* [Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald, 1974], 255), “Not until the incident of Ananias and Sapphira did Luke introduce the word church (Acts 5:11).”

<sup>12</sup> This is the intention of the command, i.e., willing obedience, e.g., 9:19-22; 13:1-3.

<sup>13</sup> On this C.F.D. Moule (*An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* [Cambridge: CUP, 1959], 178) notes, “This is a normal Hebrew construction [i.e., commands expressed by the future indicative], and is familiar to readers of the N.T. because of quotations from the LXX such as Luke iv. 8 . . . .”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the following from the Psalms of Solomon: “[God] brought someone from the end of the earth . . . one who attacked in strength; he declared war against Jerusalem, and her land.” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 659, ed. J.H. Charlesworth. Yorke suggests

that the last section of Acts 1:8, to wit, καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, is primarily a reference not to Rome or even Spain way out West but to Africa, the outermost reaches of the Roman Empire and beyond, way down South, and must, therefore, be taken as a geographical cue and clue as to the direction in which the earliest expansion of the Christian faith was being contemplated as well. (“To the Ends of the Earth: An Afro-missiological Take on Acts 1:8”: Paper Presented at the 69<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of SNTS, Szeged, Hungary, Seminar 6 “The Mission and Expansion of Earliest Christianity,” Thursday, August 7, 2014; Presenter: Gosnell L. Yorke).

May be it is best to see, like Padilla (*Acts of the Apostles*, 99), καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς as a proleptic statement pointing to the mission to the Gentiles; Luke’s locating Paul, then, in Rome (the centre of Gentile power) supports this interpretation nicely. But see Yorke’s “To the Ends of the Earth: a Cursory Afro-missiological Take on Acts 1:8”, pp. 1-15, in this vol. of *CJET*.

<sup>15</sup> On some of these, then and now, see Craig Keener (*Miracles: The Credibility of New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011]); on 1:30 he observes, for example: “Luke does not describe miracles in Corinth, [but] Paul reports them as a dramatic and observable part of his ministry there (2 Cor 12:12). Whereas Luke mentions miracles merely in several locations, Paul seems to believe that they occurred virtually whenever he preached (Rom 15:18-19).”

potential leaders of the soon-to-formed Messianic community prayerfully awaited the Spirit for about ten days.

An amazing feature of the story is how quickly the Spirit-filled people of God became aware of a gross misunderstanding (2:13). More significant was the apostles' telling response. The Spirit enabled the apostles to 'short-circuit' their worship in order to defend (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) the divine phenomenon, and to engage in witnessing that brought much clarity to the occasion, including an invitation to be baptized (2:38):<sup>16</sup> "Repent," said Peter, "and each of you become identified<sup>17</sup> with the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift—the Holy Spirit." Those who received Peter's exhortation, according to verses 41-42, were then immersed and devoted themselves to the principles and practices of the newly constituted Messianic community.

One notices as well Luke's overall understanding of witnessing is not limited to evangelism in its strictest sense as in Acts 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch but includes works of righteousness, welfare engagements and worship. This kind of vigorous witnessing resulted in trials and persecutions culminating in the murder of the first Christian martyr. Like Peter at Pentecost, Stephen, faithful witness, knew how to expound and apply Scripture in such a way as to bring conviction to his audience, and like Peter (2:14-15), there was also an apologetic element to his discourse.

As Stephen, fully under the Spirit's control, made his way to the portals of heaven, he "saw the Glory of God, that is, Jesus standing" at God's side.(v. 55).<sup>18</sup> Then he shouts, "Look . . . I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."(NIV). If Boyarin's bold and intriguing thesis is to be accepted that the title Son of God is more associated with the humanity of the Christ and Son of Man His deity, then we can better appreciate Saul's (and that of the executioners) horror in listening to Stephen's final words.<sup>19</sup> If the fledgling Messianic community was tested internally with the challenge of meeting the needs of their own in chapters

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<sup>16</sup>Including the will and willingness (*boulē*) of God (2:23) to surrender his son to effect salvation; "*boulē*, when referring to God's will or counsel, always denote 'irrefragable determination'" (Moisés Silva, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 2nd ed. 5 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014], 1:528).

<sup>17</sup>Figurative use of *baptizō* (J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [New York: UBS, 1989], 539). These two nuances of 'immersed' and 'identified' pretty much sums up the semantic range of this term throughout the NT as Matt 3:11 illustrates. Interestingly, this verse bears both senses in a remarkable pun. At the time of its use, Peter was a disciple of John the Baptizer. Peter, of course, I want to suggest, was impressed with the play on the word. It evidently also impressed Peter's new Master, judging from its use in Acts 1:5 (cf. 11:16).

<sup>18</sup>Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980), 187.

<sup>19</sup>Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012), 30-31. Cf. J.E. Taylor, "The Son of Man," *The Bible Translator* 48 (1997): 101-108. We therefore disagree with Barrett (*Acts* vol. 1, ICC [London: T & T Clark, 1994], 383) that "It would be mistaken to lay too much stress on the Christological significance of . . . [Stephen's] vision".

2-4, the lies of two of their own in chapter 5, the imperative of prioritizing in chapter 6, then the test of chapter 7 is overtly external but no less challenging. Chapter 8 (and following) is Luke's report of how this challenge was met.

***B. The Messianic Community Goes Unwillingly<sup>20</sup> (Persecution): Acts 8:1-4***

To judge from Luke's report it does appear that the early believers did their best in carrying out the Messianic mandate of Luke 24 and Acts 1:8. But a reading of verse 1, with its mention of Jerusalem-Judea-Samaria collocation, seems to suggest that there was still room for improvement. The first time we see these place names together is in chapter one verse eight. The believers are now located in these spaces, courtesy of a severe persecution. We are not sure how long the people of God experienced their phenomenal growth both in numbers and maturity; one thing seems certain: there was no clear evidence of any plans on their part to reach out to the Judeans or Samaritans.

Bruce comments that the "new Ecclesia, like the old, was to have its Diaspora (cf. 1 Pet. I. 1). . . . The persecution led them to carry out further the terms of their Lord's commission in i. 8."<sup>21</sup> The old Ecclesia was definitely scattered on account of their sin; it is debatable whether their new covenant counterpart suffered a similar fate.<sup>22</sup> If we assume that the church at this juncture was guilty of disobedience, we also note a difference. The old covenant people were punished for straying (idolatry) in the land, whereas the post-Pentecostal people were guilty of staying too long (inertia?) in the same piece of real estate, particularly the capital where the success was phenomenal. Did the apostles stick around to consolidate this success to protect the weak (widows, children, infirmed et al.?), or to make themselves available to answer charges on behalf of the fledgling Messianic community? Luke does not tell us. Luke's interest at this point is to show Theophilus how the good news winged its way from Jerusalem to other parts of Palestine (v 4).

The mission to Gentiles started here in chapter 8 with the African, then to the European in chapter 10, and then to other Gentiles in chapter 11.<sup>23</sup> The mission receives a new impetus in

<sup>20</sup> Other examples include the following: 11:19; 13:13.

<sup>21</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1952), 181. He also cites an interesting parallel from 2 Baruch i. 4: "I will scatter this people among the Gentiles, that they may do good to the Gentiles."

<sup>22</sup>Cf. D. von Allman, "The Birth of Theology: Contextualization as the Dynamic Element in the Formation of New Testament Theology," *International Review of Mission* 64 (1975), 39.

<sup>23</sup> Chapter 9 records the conversion of an Asian, the apostle to Gentiles and Jews. For the significance of the Eunuch's salvation for Luke's purpose, see Beverley Roberts Gaventa, "Whatever Happened to Those Prophesying Daughters?" in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marriane Blickenstaff (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 57; and especially Mickeal Parson, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 123-142).

chapter 13 with the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul and, of course, the divine initiative.<sup>24</sup> Both men were already missionaries, and both were given new assignments through the agency of the Spirit and the blessing of their assembly. So Barnabas and Saul:

*. . . sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.<sup>6</sup> They travelled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. . . .<sup>13</sup> From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch.<sup>25</sup> On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.<sup>15</sup> After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.” (13:4-15).<sup>26</sup>*

Above Luke introduced his first transcript of Paul’s gospel proclamation to a group. Ten more are to follow; they are as follows: to Gentiles (14:15-18; 17:22-31), Christians (20:17-38), Jews (22:1-21; 23:1-6), Gentiles (24:10-21; 25:8-11; 26:1-23), Jews (28:17-20; 25-28).<sup>27</sup>

The next section of the chiasmic arrangement takes us to the heart of Luke’s second volume.

***C. The Messianic Covenanters Come together Willingly to Discuss the Cruciality of Canonical Soteriology for the Purpose of Mission(Problem):<sup>28</sup> Acts 15:1-33***

Verse 1 sets the agenda for this crucial pericope: By what ethical code will the new people of God be guided, and on what is their salvation grounded? The Pharisaic faction in the church stoutly maintained the viability of the Mosaic code of ethics as well as its salvific relevance, while Barnabas, Paul, Peter, and James oppose it.

The pericope on a whole:

<sup>24</sup>E.g., see the thought of 13: 48b and the following comment: <sup>24</sup>“The present verse is as unqualified a statement of absolute predestination — ‘the eternal purpose of God’ (Calvin 393) — as is found anywhere in the NT. . . . This can hardly be avoided by saying, with Schmithals (127) that what we have here is not Prädestinationslehre [a doctrine of predestination] but Ebrauungssprache [edification talk]. . . .” (C.K. Barrett, *Acts* vol. 1 [London: T & T Clark, 1994], 658).

<sup>25</sup> “In the heart of present-day Turkey,” according to Paul Ellington, “Acts 13.38,” *The Bible Translator* 45 (April 1994): 242.

<sup>26</sup> Were they familiar with the Jesus tradition which likens evangelism to the catching of fish? Implied in the metaphor is the thought that the best way to catch fish is to go to their natural habitat. The synagogue in those days was the best place to reach Jews, proselytes and god-fearing Gentiles.

<sup>27</sup> Adapted from Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 552.

<sup>28</sup> “It is not by chance that the Apostolic Council occupies the middle of the book” (Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 115). We concur. Fitzmyer (*The Acts of the Apostles* [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 538) supports the centrality of the pericope by pointing out that both the sections that precede and succeed chapter 15 have approximately 1,200 words.

relates . . . how the early church reached a consensus decision regarding the disputed question of whether Gentile Christians should submit to circumcision and to the wholesale obedience to the Mosaic law. The passage states (with Peter) that faith in Jesus and the grace of the Lord are the basis for salvation. It states (Paul and Barnabas) that God has authenticated the Gentile mission in which Gentiles are not told to become Jewish proselytes. And it states (James) that Gentile Christians are members of God's people as Gentiles, worshipping God in the temple . . . which is the messianic community of the last days, and that Gentile Christians need to comply only with some fundamental regulations that the law stipulated for Gentiles living among Jews.<sup>29</sup>

Schnabel continues:

The episode . . . is made up of eight incidents.

1. Luke relates the prehistory of the meeting in Jerusalem . . . (vv. 1-3).
2. The Antioch delegation arrives, with a report of Paul and Barnabas (vv. 4-5).
3. The apostles and elders convene a council meeting . . . (vv. 6-7a).
4. Peter gives a speech . . . (vv. 7b-11).
5. . . . Paul and Barnabas report about their missionary work . . . (v.12).
6. James gives a speech (vv. 13-21) that confirms the theological consensus
7. The decision of the assembly ("the apostolic decree") is recorded in a letter (vv. 22-29).
8. Luke ends the narrative . . . in Antioch . . . (30-33)

There appears to be another chiastic arrangement within this central C-section (1-33):

**A** Antioch (v. 1)

**B** Revelation of the problem by the delegation, apostles and elders (vv2-7a)

**C** Peter's speech (7b-11)

**D** Missionary report featuring the acts of God (v.12)

**C'** James' speech (13-21)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, 621-622.

<sup>30</sup> "Tannehill [too] notes a neat chiasm in v.16, built around four first-person singular future verbs beginning with the Greek prefix *an-*" (Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 431). The construction will look something like this:

**A** I will return after this

and

**B** I rebuild David's fallen tent

and

**B'** and I will restore its ruins

and



**B'** Resolution of the problem by the delegation, the apostles and the elders (vv 22-29)

**A'** Antioch (30-35)

For Luke, then, even when the missionaries are not carrying out their substantive responsibility, the acts of God in terms of miracles among the Gentiles, take centre-stage.

We now return to the question of the two ethical codes (Mosaic and Messianic) that are at the heart of the discussion at the apostolic council. If this issue were not dealt with adequately, then, quite likely, there would have been a very different end to the story—not only for Luke's two volumes but also for subsequent ecclesiology and the missiology that drives it. The question is of paramount importance.<sup>31</sup> We continue with a biblical-theological survey of three crucial codes to cement the point.

Right throughout the canon one senses a strong ethical tendency. In both the Old and New Testaments we see that all of humanity is subject to a ubiquitous ethical imperative, a clear sense of divine ought. Though not explicitly stated, this must have been the basis of the global-flood judgment; the human race at the time was said to be violent and evil. Ample time was given to them for repentance but there was no behaviour modification. There were murder and bigamy before the flood, and the punishment of these sinful acts assumes an ethical frame of reference that was divinely sanctioned. Sin in every era then is the transgression of an ethical standard. What we are positing here is that this standard is part and parcel of the *imago Dei*. It is not surprising therefore to find in Genesis an individual called Melchizedek whose commitment to authentic ethical behaviour pattern qualified him, among other things, to function as priest of the Most High God. It is no surprise either to hear God's word to Isaac that his father "obeyed me and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). And given the pre-Israelite background and chronology (twentieth-century BCE?) of the protagonist, our understanding of Job 23:12 takes on new significance.

Outside of Scripture, we hear a voice like Epictetus echoing Holy Writ with these wise words: "If a man could only subscribe heart and soul, as he ought, to this doctrine, that we are all primarily begotten of God, and that God is the father of all men . . . I think that he will entertain no ignoble or mean thought about himself."<sup>32</sup> Such laws, we further submit, belong to an ethical

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**A'** I will rebuild . . .

<sup>31</sup>M. Dibelius (*The Book of Acts: Form, Style, and Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 134-139) appears to value the literary and theological import of the 'Council' but is extremely sceptical of its historicity.

<sup>32</sup>*Epictetus* I-II LCB (Cambridge, MA, 1925), 25. Of course, one has to admit that the echo is faint, since the writer has in mind Zeus and not YHWH. He also writes about what we have called above the mesographic law: "I cannot transgress any of His commands [*entolōn*]. . . . These are the laws [*nomoi*] that have been sent to you from God, these are His ordinances; it is of these you ought to become an interpreter [*exēgētēn*], to these you ought to subject yourself . . ." Idem II: 313.

system or code that we may call the ‘Mesographic Law’.<sup>33</sup> This Law is given to everyone and is therefore universal in scope (cf. Amos 4:13). Thus an observant atheist can write regarding the Decalogue: “Admonishments of this kind are found in virtually every culture throughout recorded history. . . . It is a scientific fact that moral emotions—like a sense of fair play or an abhorrence to cruelty—precede any exposure to scripture.”<sup>34</sup> We agree. This innate sense of morality is the basis, for example, of the ethical imperative of thanksgiving<sup>35</sup> which in part provides us with a better understanding of humanity’s culpability in Romans 1: 21(they were guilty of ingratitude).<sup>36</sup>It was this ‘mesographic’ revelation that enabled the Greco-Roman philosopher/priest and contemporary of the apostle Paul to have penned the following treatise on deity: “God is . . . timeless. . . . He, being One . . . has with only one ‘Now’ completely filled ‘Forever’. . . . Under these conditions, therefore, we ought, as we pay him reverence, to greet him and to address him with these words, ‘Thou art’; or even, I vow, as did some of the men of old.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, we have the following testimony from Hellenistic Jewry: “[T]hose who dwell on earth shall be tormented, because though they had understanding they committed iniquity, and though they received the commandments they did not keep them, and though they obtained the law they dealt unfaithfully with what they received.”<sup>38</sup>

But before the Hellenistic age another Law was given, the famous Mosaic variety. This Law was limited in scope (Psa 147:19-20) but was of much more significance than that which preceded it, since its stipulations (613 of them?) set apart all who had a special covenant with Yahweh. So

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<sup>33</sup> What Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis (*Integrative Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 1: 95) call ‘the implanted law’. Cf. Alan F. Segal (“Paul’s Jewish Presuppositions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* ed. James Dunn [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 166), who mentions the “seven commandments which the rabbis assumed were given to all humanity before Moses.” This universal variety may be dubbed ‘mesographic’, i.e., written inside (cf. Rom. 2:14). We are therefore not surprised at the solemn declaration of Micah 5:15.

<sup>34</sup>Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 21. See also Simeon McIntosh (*Reading Text & Polity: Hermeneutics and Constitutional Theory* [Kingston: Caribbean Law, 2012], 1): Every “judicial opinion uttered by the judge in the name of the law carries implicitly a claim to moral truth.”

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *Epictetus*, 39, 319: “From everything that happens in the universe it is easy for a man to find occasion to praise providence, if he has within himself these two qualities: the faculty of taking a comprehensive view of what has happened in each . . . individual instance, and the sense of gratitude [Gk. *euchariston*] . . . we should be giving thanks to God for those things for which we ought to give Him thanks.”

<sup>36</sup>May be also ‘the law of God’ in Rom 7:22, according to Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 71.

<sup>37</sup>Plutarch, E Delph. 20, cited in Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. E. Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 218. According to Schnelle, “There were two sources of the knowledge of God: (1) the idea of deity implanted in the human consciousness in view of the majesty of the cosmos [Mesographic revelation?], and (2) the traditional images of God conveyed in the old myths and customs.” This second ‘source’ is condemned in Rom. 1:18-32; it is nothing but an imaginative corruption of the first. The point is conceded even by a First Century pagan (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 2.26-27) who excoriates those “worshiping ghosts and making a god of one who has already ceased to be even a man.” Idem, *Theology of the New Testament*, 226.

<sup>38</sup>2 Esdras 7:72 (RSV) <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=3652195>.

how does this Mosaic variety relate to its Mesographic counterpart? “The moral law in its written form does not contradict or change the will of God. Rather, it makes it explicit and amplifies that will as originally expressed in natural law [Mesographic]. Since the will of God does not change, the law remains virtually the same throughout redemptive history.”<sup>39</sup>

The Old Testament which implicitly and explicitly informs us about the Mesographic and Mosaic codes of ethics also points to another system in Jeremiah 31: 31-37. Like its predecessor, this new system, far superior to the others, is also tied to a covenant (Luke 22:20). Based on Galatians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-21, we are justified in classifying this variety the Messianic Law (MeL). MeL is promulgated, circulated, and has come to be understood as “my commands” (John 14:15), “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1: 25),<sup>40</sup> “that pattern of teaching to [which] you were entrusted” (Rom 6:17 NET), “dominical directive” (1 Cor 14: 37, our translation), “the commands of God” (Rev 14:12), as well as the “but I [*egō*] say on to you” refinements of the Sermon on the Mount. In all of these NT genres, the ethical imperative is evident. MeL was first announced by Jeremiah 31:31-37 (cf. Isa 55:3; Eze 16:60), and even a fragment from the Qumran community (4Q521) appears to anticipate (or reflect) it, “. . . [the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from *the commandments* of the holy ones[*q<sup>e</sup>dôsim*].”<sup>41</sup>

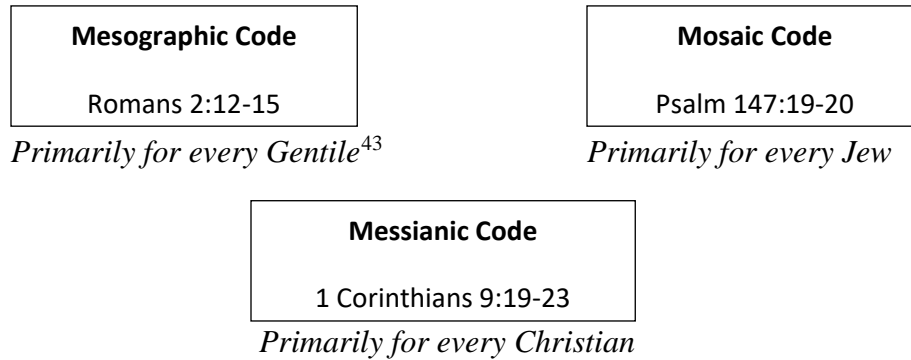
So where in the book of Acts do we find evidence of such a code of ethics? Chapter 1 with its dominical directives to wait (in prayer?) in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, along with the devotedness of the three-thousand strong to the apostolic didache (2:42) all point in that direction. (The Jesus tradition in Acts 20:34-35 qualifies as well.) The resolve of apostles to give themselves to prayer and proclamation in chapter 6 seems to be another example. The Jerusalem Council (JC), with its strategic placement in the narrative should not be overlooked in this regard. The rhetoric of 15:11 (cf. 15:26b) is a timely reminder that there is a new Lord. One wonders as well if the statements concerning the salvific grace of the lord in verse 11, supernatural acts of God in verse 12, and the shared goodness of the Spirit in verse 28 are not theologically pregnant in this regard. Almost any reading of chapter 15, then, leaves the impression that the Messianic lordship and law (seen as a unit) is prominent and preeminent, and the Mosaic law which bears witness to it is to seen as a backdrop—an important backdrop to the

<sup>39</sup> W. A. VanGemen, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*, ed. Greg L. Bahnsen et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 21. We agree with VanGemen although we express some reservation about the virtual immutability of the law.

<sup>40</sup> C. L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James: Exegetical Commentary on New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 91-92. On Lukan chiasm, see also Blomberg, “Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke’s Central Section,” in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography*, Vol. 3, ed. R.T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 217-261. On p. 234 Blomberg reports that C.H. Talbert (*Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* [Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974], 56-58) “finds a chiasmus in Acts 15:1-21:26.”

<sup>41</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 1997), 391-392. Italics added. The “holy ones” in Hebrew could also be construed as singular (the Holy One) as in Prov. 9:10; taken this way the reference is to YHWH and not to the saints. Cf. also the following with its NT fulfilment: “He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent] . . . . For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor.”

drama of redemption nonetheless—but should never be foregrounded in any shape or form.<sup>42</sup>In this way the book of Acts (and the mission it promotes) is in sync with the other documents that make up the literature of the new covenant. In sum, the three codes of ethics that govern the world look like this:



Interestingly, from a historical perspective the first (mesographic) code is tied to creation as a necessary component of the image of God; the last (Messianic) is intimately connected to the new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Both the first and the last are written within (Rom 2:14-15; Jer 31:31-33, respectively). It is the second that is written on stone, possibly suggesting its interim character.

All three codes, it is to be noted, have the same ‘Parent’ and constitute a graphic triplet. This accounts for their strong resemblance. That there are differences among the three ‘sisters’ no one denies. The difficulty is to work out how much continuity or discontinuity there is between the Mosaic that gladly plays the role of a John Baptist in pointing to the Messiah (cf. Luke 24:13-49) and the Messianic which underscores the importance of the former (Matt 5:17-21).

Once the council members were able to have a consensus on the centrality and cruciality of the Messianic categorical, they had no qualms in expressing the sentiments of 15:28-29. With this the mission delineated in 1:8 can resume with clearer lines of integrity and conviction, for the Messianic code (unlike its typological predecessor) not only sends (evangelisation); it is also the main basis of the process of strengthening believers new and old (edification).

With the Council out of the way, Luke returns to the itinerary of first-century Christian missionary engagement. The council, however, reminds the reader that such engagement needs the kind of theological reflection that would encourage humility in the face of divine authority (13:48), engender a proper sense of industry and accountability (14:21-28), and ensure as much as possible spiritual integrity vis-à-vis the missionary context in its proper canonical alignment

<sup>42</sup>Conzelmann’s comment on 15:20 to the effect that “The intention of the [apostolic] decree is not to retain the Law as valid, not even symbolically or ‘in principle’” may be too strong; *Acts*, 118. For a more nuanced approach, see Justin Taylor, “The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15.20,29 and 21.25) and the Incident at Antioch,” 47 (July 2001): 372-380.

<sup>43</sup>Borrowed from *mesographos* “drawn [or written] in the middle [heart?]” (H. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon 1997], 500).

(15:15-41).<sup>44</sup> In the following chapter, Paul is once again on the move, this time with a new colleague. His next challenge (Acts 16:1ff), though not overtly theological as the council, is not without doctrinal import (16:17b: “A way of salvation” or “the way of salvation”?)

***B' Messianic Communicators Welcome the Unwilling<sup>45</sup> (Portent<sup>46</sup>): Acts 16:25-31***

The pericope (16: 25-31) illustrates another way in which people come face to face with the gospel. After the unfortunate split between the two apostles (14:14)<sup>47</sup> following the Jerusalem council, the latter chose Silas and continued the same kind of activity with which he and Barnabas were engaged in terms of edifying the relatively new converts. Following this we have an interesting discourse of Paul's itinerary in relation to the *voluntas Dei*. In verses 6 and 7 the willing witnesses are hindered from serving in the province of Asia and Bythiana but allowed to pass through “the region of Phrygia and Galatia,” (v. 6), having passed by Mysia on their way to Troas (v. 8). One wonders if Paul and Silas entertained any doubt concerning their mission (especially the former whose ‘ungrateful’ behaviour toward Barnabas, the brother who was instrumental in introducing him to the fledgling Messianic community). If they had any misgivings concerning the viability of their missionary enterprise, it was soon removed by a vision that clarified their mission, while at the same helping them to understand the perceived setbacks. The steps (as well as the stops!) of good men are ordered by the Lord.

Having arrived in Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, the team's first converts were Lydia and members of her household. In the case of Lydia, one senses the heart of God in his eagerness to reach the heart of humanity (16:14). If there is success with Lydia, there is trouble ahead with another female. In contrast to Lydia, this one appears willing to help the evangelists announce the way. Both Bruce and more recently Schnabel express doubts concerning this superficial understanding of the girl's assistance. Bruce, for instance, suggests the following translation: “a way of salvation.”<sup>48</sup> Wallace simply labels the construction debatable.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Verses 36-40 demonstrate how Luke bought into what we may call realistic historiography, since: “The holy books of no other religion depict their followers so negatively as the Bible does the Jews and the Christians. scripture describes very graphically the doctrine that Jews and Christians are also sinners and capable of the most dreadful sins, and denounces not only the atrocities carried out by the Gentiles, but also those of the supposed (or true) people of God. This pitiless self-criticism is integral to Judaism and Christianity, in contrast to other religions. no other faith criticizes itself so severely as old testament Judaism or new testament Christianity. scripture exposes the errors of the leaders very clearly, and God often employs outsiders to recall His people to obedience” (Thomas Schirrmacker, *Towards a Theology of Martyrdom: The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All*. [Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008], 43).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Acts 17:16-24.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 2: 19.

<sup>47</sup> We are not quite sure what Childs means by the following: “What is of course striking is that Paul is not described as an apostle by Luke, but rather as the great missionary to the Gentiles.” Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 293.

<sup>48</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 316.

Certainly the evangelistic team was not amused with such promotion; eventually, the team was incarcerated for voicing their concern in the form of an exorcism. Verse 25 is a surprising response on the part of Paul and Silas. The fact that the prisoners heard most likely for the first time a redemption song may explain the jailer's question later in verse 30. He too was a prisoner of sort; the eyes of him and his family were open that night. The final verse of the chapter gives us a picture of the embryonic Messianic community in Macedonia. In chapter 17 the missionary team is in Thessalonica. There, for over two weeks, Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17: 3). The results of Paul's exposition of the Scriptures were encouraging; willing hearts—women and men—responded positively (v 4). Others responded negatively (vv 5-10). The retreat of the missionaries, Paul and Silas, to Berea reminds one of the dominical counsel of Matt 10:23.

The Bereans, Luke informs us, appear to be model disciples from the get go (vv 11-12), but just as it was in Thessalonica, opposition came from some adherents of Judaism. This resulted in a temporary split of the team, with the apostle Paul ending up in Athens. Again Paul's ministry began in the synagogue, but it was not restricted there (v 18). His presence in the Greek capital afforded Paul the opportunity to witness to two of the most prominent philosophical groups of the day: the Epicureans and the Stoics. Keener's comment on this episode is apropos: "If Paul is like a new Socrates . . . then he, rather than the novelty-seeking Athenians (17:21), stands in continuity with the true philosophic tradition."<sup>50</sup> If philosophy is seen (broadly speaking) as a way of life, Paul was completely sold out to the Way, the Truth and the Life and was thoroughly convinced that others should be also (cf. Rom 1:1-3). This conviction takes the apostle to Corinth (18:1-27), to Ephesus (chaps 19-20), back to Jerusalem (chaps 21-26), and finally to Rome itself—all along through much trial and tribulation. In his own words, he has

*. . . been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.<sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.<sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. . . . I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.<sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.<sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Cor 11: 23b-28 NIV).*

Whether Paul is in Jerusalem, Athens or Rome, whether incarcerated or not, like his Master, his major concern is for people, especially the Messianic community and its potential membership. This is also borne out by the final chapter of Luke's synopsis.

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 101.

<sup>50</sup>C. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2625.

*A.' Messianic Communicator Welcomes the Willing (Providence<sup>51</sup>): Acts 28:30-31*

One of the ways in which the Lucan plot is advanced in Acts is by the provision of a variety of progress reports.<sup>52</sup> These reports serve well the trajectory of his narrative, which moves inexorable from the religious capital (Jerusalem) to the imperial capital that was no less religious but much more pluralistic in orientation. A central part of the narrative juxtaposes the conversions of three prominent individuals who appear to be descendants of Ham, Shem and Japheth, the three men given the primary responsibility of re-populating the earth, according to the Genesis record.<sup>53</sup>

After citing a few instances of ‘mass’ conversions, Luke begins his triadic show-piece by telling the story of a Gentile treasurer, who may well have been regarded as among the first-fruits of the promise found in Psalm 68:31 (Acts 8). The third example of an individual coming under the influence of the Messiah (chapter 10) appears to be an adumbration of the final episode of Acts which is located in Rome. The centre-piece within the triad indicates Luke’s main interest in the former Semitic zealot who became the chief agent in carrying the evangel beyond the borders of Palestine into the very centre of the evil Empire. Saul of Tarsus, then, becomes for Luke the best example of a person who has fully committed herself or himself to the redemptive and imposing Messianic Presence whose power is mediated through the Pentecostal Spirit. This fact can be easily borne out by the amount of space (an estimated two-thirds of Luke’s material) dedicated to the apostle. From chapter 13 to the end, then, Paul has been Luke’s hero.<sup>54</sup> Now the hero is in Rome. Why Rome? Kilgallen’s response to this query is worth considering:

One of the teachings to Theophilus in this tumultuous century is, it seems most likely, an explanation as to how it is that he, a pagan, has become a full member of an exclusionary religion that began as thoroughly Jewish. This attention to Theophilus, it is suggested, makes necessary a story that geographically and chronologically arrives and finishes at the place where Theophilus and his community are. . . . This strongly suggests Luke’s satisfaction that he has told a story which finally arrives where Theophilus is. That Luke stops his work at Rome, 61 AD, indicates Theophilus and his church are there. By Luke’s story, Theophilus understands the truth . . . , particularly about his place in God’s plan of salvation.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Seen here as the outworking of God’s plan (26:30-32; cf. 2:23), about which Luke has much to say (e.g., 27:21-25; see also D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, NNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 29-32).

<sup>52</sup> See n. 10 above.

<sup>53</sup> On these, see J. Daniel Hayes, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), 51-65, 157-180.

<sup>54</sup> For an interesting take on this hero, see Brittany E. Wilson, “The Blinding of Paul and the Power of God: Masculinity, Sight, and Self-Control in Acts 9,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 367-387.

<sup>55</sup> John Kilgallen, “Luke Wrote to Rome—a Suggestion,” *Biblica* 88 (2007), 255. For a credible proposal as to why Luke is silent on the outcome of Paul’s trial in Rome, see Daniel Marguerat, “The End of Acts (28:16-31) and the Rhetoric of Silence,” in S.E. Porter and T.H. Olbricht, eds., *Rhetoric and the NT: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (Sheffield: SAP, 1993), 74-89.

There is a sense in which the book of Acts is a tale of two cities: Jerusalem and Rome. The former was one of the largest centres of Jewry; the latter was an urban area of around a million people, roughly half of whom were slaves.<sup>56</sup> Both in Luke's first and last chiasmic frames (A-A')<sup>57</sup> he has the willing-and winning God reaching down and reaching out to "the poor . . . the prisoners . . . the blind . . . [and] the oppressed" and others (Luke 4:18) in the most significant metropolitan areas.<sup>58</sup> It is a sacrificial venture. If the Messiah (Act 2:23) and Stephen (Acts 7: 54-59) die in Jerusalem, Peter and Paul will die in Rome. The deaths of these witnesses did not signal the end of the Way (John 14:6 admits no cul-de-sac). They point to a new beginning. Put another way, Rome makes way for new frontiers (cf. Rom 1: 1-16).<sup>59</sup> So the apostle's willingness to go to Rome was an assault on the capital of Empire, not to take life but to give life through the One whose life was taken by Rome.

In chapter 28:30, Paul's willingness was matched by that of his visitors, and, in a sense, by Rome in allowing him the privilege of proclaiming another king and kingdom (28:31). If Luke's first volume begins with the Anointed One *par excellence* (Luke 4:18), his second ends with another anointed (Acts 13:46; Isa 49:6) who takes his paradigmatic role with the utmost seriousness (e.g., 1 Cor 11:1). So does Luke. And it was after the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul, sent out from Antioch, that Luke reports the first major theological and missiological discussion, involving the two main centres of Christianity at the time. After the apostolic council and the promulgation of the first and foremost of letters of earliest Christianity, Luke began to narrow his focus on the life of one missionary whose training and commissioning made him especially equipped to embody and expound the significance of the Jerusalem-council letter that has so much import for the Messianic community in general and Gentile evangelisation in particular.

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<sup>56</sup>Stanley Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A linguistic and Literary Commentary* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2015), 4.

<sup>57</sup> The other points of the frame, especially B-B', suffuse the book of Acts.

<sup>58</sup> On God's heart for the upper echelon of Roman society, see James Edwards, "'Public Theology' in Luke-Acts: The Witness of the Gospel to Powers and Authorities," *NTS* 62 / Issue 02 (April 2016): 227 – 252. Says Noelliste: "Luke's interest in . . . the salvation [Christ offers embraces] the weak, the vulnerable and the outcast . . . 8:1-3; 13:10-17 (women), 17:11-19(men), 18:15-17 (children), and 23: 39-43 (the dying). Not even the rich escaped his notice (18:18-30; 19:1-10) ("Christ and Liberation," in *Diverse and Creative Voices*, 89).

<sup>59</sup>If Christianity back then was "turning the world upside down," and if in the twentieth century it was the opiate of the people, it remains today an equal opportunity 'fix'; what it did to Rome it will do to other cities. Luke wrote after the dispatch of the book of Romans, knowing fully well that the Gospel did not leave that city untouched. If Luke was familiar with Ephesians, he would have known also that Artemis of Ephesus was unfavourably compared with the people of God in 2:10. In other words, if the temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world, God's 'poem' outlasted them all, and is the only temple that will make it into eternity (Matt 16:18).



### Summary and Conclusion

In this paper I have posited that Luke employed chiasmus<sup>60</sup> to delineate the way in which the gospel reached Rome from Jerusalem. The structure highlights certain divine initiatives<sup>61</sup> (two centrifugal and two centripetal) that engaged the Messianic community in a dominically mandated and motivated mission. A fifth initiative, the centrepiece of the macrostructure, focuses attention on the dire importance of theological discussion for the enterprise of gospel contextualization.

Finally, it true that chiasm (like beauty) is in the eyes of the beholder, and there is arguably nothing more beautiful to behold than the divine plan of cosmic liberation—a “chiasmus *in distance*.”<sup>62</sup> The cosmic character of this emancipation is seen especially in Rom 8:18-23, and from a comparison between the old and the new creation: in the former, the Creator-turned-Liberator started with the material universe before the creation of humanity (Gen 1); in the latter, humanity takes precedence. The comparison also reveals the following chiastic macro-structure: A-Material Universe (Gen 1:1-25), B-Image-bearers (Gen 1:26-31), B'- Image-bearers (2 Cor 5:17), A'- Material Universe (Rev 21-22; cf. 2 Pet 3). Although Luke-Acts began with this larger B'-panel and stops short of A', the writer was well aware of the cosmic character of liberation—from *Adam*—the first image-bearing son (Luke 3:38) to the *Apokatastasis*—the final immaculate salvation (Acts 3:21).

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<sup>60</sup>See Appendix. In commenting on Luke 9:6, Darrell Bock (Luke *1:1-9:50*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 817-818) observes: “By way of conclusion, Luke summarizes the mission briefly by referring to two primary tasks of the twelve: preaching the good news and healing (so also Acts 13:3 with 14:1-18). These are the same two categories with which Luke introduced the passage (Luke 9:1-2), except that he now gives them in reverse order (9:2 also spoke about the kingdom). The summary thus forms an *inclusio* with the introduction (Bovon 1989: 460). Some have pointed out the *inclusio* of Acts 1:6 (‘kingdom’) and 28:31 (‘kingdom’)”; the reverse order relative to the Lukan mission mentioned by Bock appears to parallel the purported macro-structure of Luke’s second volume.

<sup>61</sup>See also Beverly Gaventa, “Initiatives Divine and Human in the Lukan Story World,” in G.N. Stanton et al. eds., *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 79-89. According to J.B. Green (*The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 830), “[T]he story of Luke-Acts is, in large part, the tale of two competing purposes---that of God and that which opposes God.”

<sup>62</sup>A. Dimarco, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutic—on a Rhetorical Pattern: Chiasmus and Circularity,” in Porter and Olbricht, *Rhetoric and the NT*, 484; italics original.

## APPENDIX

*Chiasmus and the Book of Acts*

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**A. Plan: *Messianic Community Go willingly (Acts 1:5-8)***

**B. Persecution: *The Messianic Community Goes unwillingly (Acts 8:1-4)***

**C. Protestation: *The Messianic Covenanters Come together willingly to Discuss the Cruciality of Canonical Soteriology for the Purpose of Mission (Acts 15:1-33)***

**B.' Portent: *Messianic Communicators Welcome the Unwilling (Acts 16:25-31)***

**A.' Providence: *Messianic Communicator Welcomes the Willing (Acts 28:30-31)***

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***Chiasmus that includes the Book of Acts***

(CREATION OLD AND NEW—Luke 3:38; Acts 3:21)

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<b>A-Material Universe</b>	<b>(Gen 1:1-25)</b>
<b>B-Image Bearers</b>	<b>(Gen 1:26-31)</b>
<b>B' - Image Bearers</b>	<b>(Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17)</b>
<b>A' - Material Universe</b>	<b>(Rev 21-22; 2 Pet 3)</b>

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