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Stromata

“...a vehicle for scholarly expression,”

Edited for the Student Body of
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by

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Contents

Articles

The *Prophezei* and the *Lectorium*:

The Zurich Academy Under the Leadership of Zwingli and Bullinger

Reita Yazawa..... 1

Getting Atonement Theory to Work:

An Application of Robert Sherman's Trinitarian Theology of Atonement to Christian Spiritual Formation

Darrin Compagner..... 13

Exposition of Lord's Days 20-22, Q&A's #53-58

Jason De Vreis..... 21

Elements of Biblical Exegesis in the Commentary of Peter Martyr Vermigli on the Book of Judges with an Emphasis on Allegory

Kristin E. K. Palacios 43

Fear, Female Sexuality, and the Church:

A Pastoral Challenge

Amanda C. Bakale..... 54

Sermons

God's Church: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

John Lee..... 62

Scraping off Our Scales: Lev 14:1-20; Matt 8:1-4; Heb 7:23-28

Chelsey L. Harmon..... 72

What does Orlando have to do with Babel? Gen 11:1-9

Mark Hofman..... 79

A Comprehensive Gospel: Acts 17:16-34

Craig Hoekema..... 86

Christ Resists for Us: Matt 4:1-11

Steve De Ruiter..... 92

Editoria..... 98

The *Prophezei* and the *Lectorium*:
The Zurich Academy under the Leadership
of Zwingli and Bullinger¹

Reita Yazawa

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Zurich academy shows that the training of pastors in sixteenth-century Reformed Zurich was significantly affected both in positive and negative ways by the character of the relationship which Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) had with the government. While the academy's bond with the city council grew stronger in 1530s and 1540s, it expanded its educational activities. Yet at the same time, the increase in interactions with the government sometimes meant difficulties or restrictions for the Reformers' original vision.

Zurich is a well-known city which accepted the cause of the Reformation early in the 16th century and functioned as one of the major centers propagating it. However, a drastic change from Catholicism to Protestantism could not have occurred without deliberate and constant efforts. One of the most urgent tasks of the Zurich reformers was the training of pastors. Having invalidated Catholic priests' positions, reformers assumed a responsibility in nurturing and providing Protestant ministers.

Zwingli and Bullinger played a significant role in initiating and developing a higher education system in Zurich. Zwingli founded an educational institution called the *Prophezei*, and Bullinger developed it into a higher educational center named the *Lectorium*.² Although

¹ This paper was originally submitted to Dr. Karin Maag on February 13, 2007 as a partial fulfillment of HSTH 387: Seminar in Historical Theology: 16th Century Swiss Reformation.

² Although there are several terms used for an educational institution led by Bullinger, a term *Lectorium* will be used in this paper according to Dr. Maag's suggestion. Karin Maag, *Seminary or University?: The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560-1620*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation

there are several descriptions available of their works in relation to the education of pastors,³ research specifically focused on an examination both of what they said in their writings and what they actually did seems to be scarce. If this field is neglected, it becomes difficult to assess to what extent Zwingli and Bullinger succeeded in their efforts vis-à-vis their original visions. Hence, this topic deserves further research in order to achieve a more accurate understanding of training of pastors in Zurich.

In this paper, first, Zwingli and his work at the *Prophezei* will be examined in relation to his treatises. Then Bullinger and his activity at the *Lectorium* will be analyzed in comparison with his sermons. Their practices will be assessed in terms of their original visions. Through the discussions of the visions and practices of these reformers, one will find out that the government's strong leadership in every aspect of the citizens' lives also casts a shadow on educational affairs in Zurich. Hence, finally, this paper will prove the

History, ed. Andrew Pettegree, Bruce Gordon, and John Guy, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 133.

³ Karin Maag describes the development of the Zurich educational system and its relation to the Genevan Academy. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 129-153. Nabholz and Ernst provide the description of developments in the Zurich education. Hans Nabholz, "Zürichs Höhere Schulen von der Reformation bis zur Gründung der Universität 1525-1833," in *Die Universität Zürich 1833-1933 und ihre Vorläufer*, ed. Ernst Gagliardi, Hans Nabholz, and Jean Strohl, vol. 3, *Festschrift zur Jahrhundertfeier*, ed. Erziehungsrate des Kantons Zürich (Zurich: Verlag der Erziehungsdirektion, 1938), 3-29. Ulrich Ernst, *Geschichte des Zürcherischen Schulwesens bis gegen das Ende des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Winterthur: Bleuler-Hausheer 1879), microfiche. Pamela Biel analyzes how Bullinger's educational vision was reflected in his training of pastors. Pamela Biel, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Office of Minister: The Reformed Clergy in Zürich 1535-1575* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1990). This is originally a Ph. D dissertation submitted by Dr. Biel to Columbia University in 1988. This dissertation was later published in a revised version. Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy 1535-1575*, vol. 15, *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte*, ed. Fritz Büsser (Bern: Verlag Peter Lang AG, 1991). Kurt Jakob Rüetschi depicts Bullinger and his relation to school education. Kurt Jakob Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi, *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 215-229.

strengths and limitations of the close connection between the government and education in Zurich.

2. ZWINGLI AND THE *PROPHEZEI*

Zwingli's image of Protestant clergy is expressed in his treatise "The Shepherd" (1524).⁴ Self-denial and a radical dependence on the Word of God are manifest in his argument. He says that "none is suitable for feeding the sheep unless he has emptied himself and only God dwells in him and speaks out of him."⁵ Accordingly, a pastor "must look up only to what God commands him, doing nothing on his own power or knowledge, but considering the only guide, God, and his word."⁶ For Zwingli, this image of a pastor made a sharp contrast with that of a Catholic priest who, from his perspective, did not preach and mingled human teachings with God's pure words.⁷

In his treatise on the office of a preacher (1525), Zwingli recognized that the first function of the office of a pastor is "like that of the prophets of the Old Testament who fended off evil and implanted good."⁸ In order to carry out this commission, the second function was formulated as "to interpret the meaning of Scripture, foremost the Old Testament, whenever people gather to study Scripture."⁹ He says, "Prophets then must have been well versed in languages, for all other gifts served to the end of attaining to the

⁴ This was originally a sermon delivered during the disputation in 1523. See the introduction of the following. Huldrych Zwingli, "The shepherd: How one can recognize true Christian shepherds and also the false, and also how one should behave in regard to them, written by Huldrych Zwingli in the year 1524," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings: In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral and Eucharistic Writings*, trans. H. Wayne Pipkin, with a foreword by H. Wayne Pipkin and Edward J. Furcha, vol. 13, *Pittsburgh Theological Monographs New Series*, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 79.

⁵ Zwingli, "The Shepherd," 90.

⁶ Zwingli, "The Shepherd," 88.

⁷ Zwingli, "The Shepherd," 91.

⁸ Zwingli, "On the preaching office through which one may learn how self-appointed rabble rousers – not 'apostles' as they wish to be called – act contrary to God's word when they impose themselves upon a faithful guardian or preacher of the gospel when they preach among his flock unnecessarily and without the approval of either the people or the guardian," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, 160.

⁹ Zwingli, "On the Preaching Office," 161.

highest, i.e. to prophecy, which means to interpret.”¹⁰ This basic emphasis on proficiency in languages is consistent with his letter on education of youth (1523):

But a man cannot rightly order his own soul unless he exercises himself day and night in the Word of God. He can do that most readily if he is well versed in such languages as Hebrew and Greek, for a right understanding of the Old Testament is difficult without the one, and a right understanding of the New is equally difficult without the other.”¹¹

For this purpose, according to Zwingli’s advice, the Zurich council established the educational institution named the *Prophezei*. The decree issued on 29 September 1523 declares as follows:

The intention [of the Zurich council] is that learned, skilful and upright men shall lecture on, and expound, the Bible publicly every day devoting one hour daily each to the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts, very necessary for the proper understanding of the divine word. . . .

There shall likewise be secured and set up an honorable, learned and industrious body of clergy to the honour of God and the repute of our city and country and for the salvation of souls. This shall be founded and instituted beside the church of Sts Felix and Regula and be as large as necessary for such right, eloquent and apt men for God’s word and Christian life as can be found who can be made rectors, ministers or preachers to our good subjects in city or country.

In addition a schoolmaster, better paid than previously, shall be provided to be an active teacher and leader to the boys.¹²

This was put into practice beginning on June 19, 1525.¹³ “All the

¹⁰ Zwingli, “On the Preaching Office,” 159.

¹¹ Huldrych Zwingli, “On the Upbringing and Education of Youth in Good Manners and Christian Discipline: An Admonition by Ulrich Zwingli,” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans G. W. Bromiley, with introductions by G. W. Bromiley, vol. 24, *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. van Dusen (London: SCM Press, 1953), 108.

¹² Emil Egli ed., *Aktensammlung zur Geschichte der Züricher Reformation in den Jahren 1519-1533* (Zürich: J. Schabelitz, 1879; reprint, Darmstadt: Nieuwkoop * B. De Graaf, 1973), 169-170 (# 426). The translation comes from the following: G. R. Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli*, Documents of Modern History, ed. A. G. Dickens (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 62.

¹³ The following description of a session in the *Prophezei* comes from this source: Heinrich Bullinger, *Heinrich Bullingers Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 1

clergy, preachers, canons, chaplains and senior scholars”¹⁴ gathered early in the morning at the Grossmünster. After Zwingli’s opening prayer, a student read a scripture lesson from the Old Testament in the Latin Bible. Then Jakob Ceperinus (later Conrad Pellikan) read the same portion in Hebrew, expounding it in Latin. Following that, Zwingli read the same passage this time in Greek taken from the Septuagint, with further explications. At the end, a preacher delivered a sermon in German based on what had been learned that day. This practice was continued throughout the year except for Sundays and Fridays.

When we compare Zwingli’s original vision of the training of pastors with the actual practice carried out in the Grossmünster’s choir stalls, it seems that he succeeded in realizing his idea almost fully. His emphasis on the command of biblical languages was exactly reflected in the way the assembly was carried out. Overall, it seems that Zwingli’s original educational program was successfully realized in terms of its focus on training both active and prospective pastors for doing biblical exegesis.

Nevertheless, some limitations can be pointed out. One is, as Maag indicates, that the flexible structure of the session in which anyone is basically welcomed sometimes seemed to blur the specific focus of training future pastors.¹⁵ Although students at Latin schools who were to be pastors were allowed to attend the session,¹⁶ it also served as “continuing education”¹⁷ for active ministers. The session was characterized as a mutual pursuit of learning with discussion, rather than lectures.¹⁸ For the systematic, more official training

(Frauenfeld: Ch. Beyel, 1838-1840), microfiche, 290. Hereafter abbreviated as *HBRG*. Heinrich Bullinger, “Wie vnd wenn man Züriych angehept die Biblisch Lection in dryen sprachen läsen,” *Die Prophezei: Humanismus und Reformation in Zürich; ausgewählte und Vorträge zu seinem 70. Geburtstag am 12. Februar 1993*, ed. Alfred Schindler, vol. 17. *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte*, ed. Fritz Büsser and Alfred Schindler (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 7-9. The translation comes from the following: Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli*, 64.

¹⁴ Bullinger, *HBRG*, vol. 1, microfiche, 290. The translation comes from the following: Potter, *Huldrych Zwingli*, 64.

¹⁵ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 131.

¹⁶ Nabholz, “Zürichs Höhere Schulen,” 7.

¹⁷ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 131.

¹⁸ Nabholz, “Zürichs Höhere Schulen,” 8.

curriculum for in-coming prospective pastors to emerge, Zurich had to wait for Bullinger's time.

Another limitation was that the *Prophezei* had to face financial and personnel problems in its relation to the government.¹⁹ Its financial source was to come from the benefices of the Grossmünster.²⁰ However, since the magistrates allowed the canons from the old regime to continue to receive that income until their deaths, the development of the *Prophezei* had to be a gradual process.²¹ It did not have a firm financial foundation from the beginning. Also, Ceperinus' early death made it urgent to recruit his successor. The magistrates tried to hire only Zurich citizens for faculty posts²² as it cost a lot of money to maintain internationally prestigious professors.²³ To get an outstanding scholar, Zwingli had to resist the magistrates' policy. From the very beginning of this educational institute, negotiation with the government was always an indispensable element.

3. BULLINGER AND THE *LECTORIUM*

In 1532, Bullinger succeeded Zwingli as the chief minister of the city (*Antistes*) and as the director of education (*Schulherr*).²⁴ This was the time when Zurich's expansion policy faced a debacle in the Kappel War. Accusations were accumulating, saying that the leadership of the Zurich clergy in the Reformation movement brought about this catastrophe.²⁵ Accordingly, the government

¹⁹ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 132.

²⁰ Nabholz, "Zürichs Höhere Schulen," 4.

²¹ Nabholz, "Zürichs Höhere Schulen," 5. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 132.

²² Nabholz, "Zürichs Höhere Schulen," 7. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 132.

²³ Karin Maag, "Financing Education: the Zurich approach, 1550-1620," *Reformations Old and New: Essays on the Socio-Economic Impact of religious Change c. 1470-1630*, ed. Beat A. Kümin, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History, ed. Andrew Pettegree, Bruce Gordon, and John Guy (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1996), 206-207.

²⁴ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 133.

²⁵ Andreas Mühlhng, "Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician," in *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575*, ed. Bruce Gordon

required Bullinger not to interfere in political matters.²⁶ On the one hand, Bullinger accepted that he would be faithful to decisions and orders of the civil magistrates. The pastors' acceptance of the magistrates' leading role is reflected in the oath which pastors were required to swear at a general synod. It runs as follows: "I shall be responsible and obedient to the most high Lords of the Councils, regime and the Senate of the city of Zurich, as they are the legitimate, God-sent magistrates."²⁷ Yet on the other hand, he vindicated the clergy's relative independence from the government in terms of the freedom of their sermons and their prophetic role.²⁸ Bullinger stressed: "The Word of God will and should not be bound to anything."²⁹ This was "a shrewd political maneuver,"³⁰ which kept a delicate equilibrium amidst the tension between the church and the state.

At the same time, this strategy was not only an urgent tactic, but rather Bullinger's consistent conviction. He says:

The politic magistrate is commanded to give ear to the ecclesiastical ruler, and the ecclesiastical minister must obey the politic governer in all things which the law commandeth.³¹

And

and Emidio Campi (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought*, ed. Richard A. Muller, 247.

²⁶ Bullinger, *HBRG*, vol. 3, microfiche, 291-296 (Chapter 501-502). Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 222. J. Wayne Baker, "Church, State, and Dissent: The Crisis of the Swiss Reformation, 1531-1536," *Church History* 57 (June 1988), 136-137.

²⁷ The translation comes from the following: Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 214. See its appendix 2 "Translation of synod oath A)."

²⁸ Bullinger, *HBRG*, vol. 3, microfiche, 293-296. Mühling, "Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician," 247. Bruce Gordon, *Clerical Discipline and the Rural Reformation: The Synod in Zürich, 1532-1580*, vol. 16, *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte*, ed. Fritz Büsler (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), 78-83.

²⁹ Bullinger, *HBRG*, vol. 3, microfiche, 295.

³⁰ Mühling, "Heinrich Bullinger as Church Politician," 247.

³¹ Thomas Harding ed., *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, vol.1, with new introductions by George Ella and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004; reprint of Parker Society ed., Cambridge: University Press at Cambridge, 1849-1852), 329 (The Second Decade; Sermon 7).

The magistrate of duty ought to have a care of religion, either in ruin to restore it, or in soundness to preserve it; and still to see that it proceed according to the rule of the word of God. For to that end was the law of God given into the king's hands by the priests, that he should not be ignorant of God's will touching matters ecclesiastical and political, by which law he had to govern the whole estate of all his realm.³²

Indeed, school affairs including training of pastors were significantly influenced by this framework in which mutual assistance and admonitions characterize the relation between the clergy and the government.

Concerning this framework, the development of training for pastors in Bullinger's time can be summarized in two points. In the first place, he reformulated two Latin schools in Grossmünster and Fraumünster in 1532, establishing four grades for each.³³ It is reported that Bullinger played an important role in preparing the ordinance on this matter.³⁴ He defined what subjects were to be taught, prepared a timetable for each day, chapel service, and so on.³⁵ Later during the 1540s, classes were expanded to five, with an introduction of Hebrew.³⁶ After finishing these five grades, students were permitted to proceed to the *Lectorium* for special theological education.³⁷ Bullinger shared with Zwingli the emphasis on biblical languages. Bullinger says: "First of all, for a student of the divine scriptures skill in the divine languages is necessary."³⁸ Accordingly,

³² Harding ed., *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, 329 (The Second Decade; Sermon 7).

³³ Egli ed., *Aktensammlung*, 821-824 (#1896). Nabholz, "Zürichs Höhere Schulen," 10.

³⁴ Hans Ulrich Bächtold, *Heinrich Bullinger vor dem Rat: Zur Gestaltung und Verwaltung des Zürcher Staatswesens in den Jahren 1531 bis 1575*, vol. 12. *Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationgeschichte*, ed. Fritz Büsser (Bern: Peter Lang, 1982), 193f.

³⁵ Egli ed., *Aktensammlung*, 821-824 (#1896). Ernst presents the summary of this ordinance. Ernst, *Geschichte des Zürcherischen Schulwesens*, microfiche, 88-91.

³⁶ Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 226.

³⁷ Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 226.

³⁸ Peter Stotz ed., *Heinrich Bullinger Studiorum Ratio – Studienanleitung*, vol. 1 (text and translation) (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1987), 69. The translation comes from the following source. Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 172.

Greek and Hebrew were taught along with rhetoric and dialectic.³⁹ He also prepared a *Catechism for Adults*, which was dedicated to teachers at these two Latin schools.⁴⁰ This was used as a textbook in their upper classes.⁴¹ For the training of pastors to function successfully, it was natural to extend the educational arrangement even to Latin schools which were major sources for future pastors.⁴² Indeed, for Bullinger, “Christian schools have the first place, which bring forth a plentiful increase of prophets or ministers of the church.”⁴³

Another point is that he consolidated the financial foundation for schools in Zurich. When the magistrates tried to apply their revenue to the war cost, Bullinger opposed it with an appeal to the urgent need for supplying enough pastors for the entire city: “My lords, for our city and countryside you must have 130 people. After a time, how will we find such people? Or how do you intend to have an obedient, truly God-fearing people without the word of God?”⁴⁴ Convinced by Bullinger’s argument, the council decided not only to maintain the school expenditure, but also even increase scholarships.⁴⁵ Under Bullinger’s leadership, Zurich founded another school named *Alumnat*, specifically designed for scholarship students.⁴⁶ Again he appealed to the council: “sons of rich families do not want to become preachers who earn only a small income; therefore the churches depend upon gifted boys from poor families

³⁹ Ernst, *Geschichte des Zürcherischen Schulwesens*, microfiche, 95-96. Rüetschi, “Bullinger and the Schools,” 226

⁴⁰ Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 184.

⁴¹ Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 184.

⁴² Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 182.

⁴³ Harding ed., *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, 479 (Fifth Decade; sermon 10).

⁴⁴ Bächtold, *Heinrich Bullinger vor dem Rat*, 191. See note 7. Although Bullinger’s reports before the council (*Fürträge*) are rare collections in Zurich, Dr. Bächtold presents excellent summaries and analyses in this book. The translation comes from the following source. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 134-135.

⁴⁵ Bächtold, *Heinrich Bullinger vor dem Rat*, 18-19, 116-121, 189-192. Rüetschi, “Bullinger and the Schools,” 222.

⁴⁶ Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness*, 181. The original document (Staatsarchiv Zürich call number: E/ I /14/1 document #10 page 53) is in Zurich’s archives.

and certainly on gifted sons of the mainly poor parsons of country-parishes for training enough young preachers and teachers.⁴⁷ Consequently, the magistrates and ecclesiastical authorities granted ten to forty florins per year to the most gifted students.⁴⁸ The most promising students were sent to other advanced learning centers abroad with scholarships from the government. Maag reports that between 1559 and 1620, at least 112 students were sent to study abroad with financial aid.⁴⁹ For example, a student named Adrian Frisius received financial assistance from 1573 to 1581 during his study at Heidelberg, Strasbourg, one unknown place, and Vienna.⁵⁰ From these appeals and achievements, it is clear that Bullinger was very keen on securing and increasing scholarship funds to train future pastors. These fruits were accomplished through Bullinger's interaction with the government.

However, Bullinger was not so successful in a certain field in his relation with the government. That was hiring talented faculty regardless of their nationalities. For instance, he had difficulty in convincing the magistrates to appoint Peter Martyr Vermigli as a successor for the deceased Pelikan in 1556.⁵¹ Although Vermigli was an internationally renowned scholar, the magistrates were reluctant to hire him as a professor of the *Lectorium* since he was an Italian, not from Zurich. When Vermigli died, Bullinger failed to secure the appointment of Girolamo Zanchi. Instead, Josias Simler, a scholar from Zurich was promoted from lecturer on the New Testament to Vermigli's position as a professor of the Old Testament.⁵² Finally, by 1562, the magistrates took a decisive initiative by passing legislation

⁴⁷ The translation comes from the following source. Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 225. See also Bächtold, *Heinrich Bullinger vor dem Rat*, 215-228, especially 217.

⁴⁸ Bächtold, *Heinrich Bullinger vor dem Rat*, 215. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 137.

⁴⁹ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 139.

⁵⁰ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 139.

⁵¹ Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 226. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 136.

⁵² Emil Egli ed., *Heinrich Bullinger Diarium (Annales vitae) der Jahre 1504-1574* (Basel: Basler Buch- und Antiquariatshandlung, 1904, reprint, Zürich: Theologische Buchhandlung, 1985), 68, 27-28. Rüetschi, "Bullinger and the Schools," 226.

to the effect that only Zurich citizens could be hired for positions at the *Lectorium*.⁵³ The Zurich magistrates considered their educational institutions not as those providing “the be-all and end-all of training in Zurich alone” but as “a springboard” for excellent students to study further abroad.⁵⁴ This “two-tiered training policy”⁵⁵ was, on the one hand, a strength of Zurich education in the sense that it “provided the best possible ecclesiastical or professional training at minimal cost to the city.”⁵⁶ Yet on the other hand, from Bullinger’s viewpoint, this strategy was what limited the development of the *Lectorium* since prohibiting the employment of foreign prominent scholars meant that this institution would remain a “local and regional instituteon.”⁵⁷ The localization of the *Lectorium* was a point in which Bullinger was forced to compromise in his relations with the government. In this way, the same agency, the magistrates, functioned as both strengths and limitations in the development of the *Lectorium*.

4. CONCLUSION

The development of the Zurich Academy was realized through the cooperation of the government with the ministers. Zwingli advised the government to establish an educational institution for training pastors. Bullinger expanded it into a higher educational institution through government ordinances. He also secured and increased scholarships for students through his negotiations with the government. At the same time, however, we also acknowledged that both of these leaders had difficulties in terms of financial and personnel matters since their visions and the policy of the magistrates did not exactly correspond with each other. Both of them had to struggle with the government’s proclivity to employ only Zurich citizens as teaching staff. In this way, the same relation with the government sometimes produced strengths, and other times limitations. Although schools were also founded in Berne, Lausanne,

⁵³ Nabholz, “Zürichs Höhere Schulen,” 28. Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 136.

⁵⁴ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 139.

⁵⁵ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 138.

⁵⁶ Maag, “Financing Education: the Zurich approach, 1550-1620,” 206.

⁵⁷ Maag, *Seminary or University?*, 138.

and Geneva around this time,⁵⁸ interactions between the government and the Reformed leaders (Zwingli and Bullinger) in Zurich were unique in the sense that the “greater critical distance of the church from the magistrates”⁵⁹ was created and that the leaders’ visions sometimes crashed against the economic policy of the Zurich government. One cannot talk about the training of pastors in Zurich without dealing with its interactions with the government. In this political framework, the ecclesiastical leaders experienced both achievements and compromises.

⁵⁸ Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, New Frontiers History, ed. Mark Greengrass and John Stevenson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 236-239.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, 255.

Getting Atonement Theory to Work:
An Application of Robert Sherman's Trinitarian Theology of
Atonement to Christian Spiritual Formation

Darrin Compagner

Q: Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed?"

A: Because he has been ordained by God the Father
and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be
our chief prophet and teacher...
our only high priest...
and our eternal king...

Q: But why are you called a Christian?

A: Because by faith I am a member of Christ
and so I share in his anointing...
-- Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12

I. Introduction

What does it mean to be a Christian? Of the many possible ways of answering such a question, the Heidelberg Catechism points us to the word "Christian" itself. To be a Christian is to be a member of Christ, meaning the "anointed one." To be a member of Christ, then, means sharing in this anointing. Just as Christ is anointed as prophet, priest, and king, so too the Christian shares in this anointing by faith. Yet what if we push further and ask by what means this becomes a reality for the Christian? What of the Christian who seems to experience so little of the power of this anointing? How do the offices of Christ become transformative in the living experience of the Christian?

In his book *King, Priest, and Prophet*, Robert Sherman provides a creative, biblical framework for understanding what he calls a "trinitarian theology of atonement." Sherman's model seeks to integrate competing models of the atonement with the three offices of Christ and correlate these with the three persons of the Trinity. Sherman provides some examples of where these connections shed light on the life of the church, but he also makes it his goal that readers be "prompted towards some new theological connections of

their own for their pastoral work.”¹ To this end, this paper will suggest that, following Sherman’s model, a trinitarian theology of atonement may be fruitfully applied to matters of Christian spiritual formation. By doing so, the church may find theological resources for negotiating the waters of contemporary interest in spirituality, and find faithful ways of getting the atoning work of Christ to work in the lives of believers.

II. The Three Offices of Christ and Christian Spiritual Formation

Sherman sees broad potential for the multi-faceted view of atonement in the three offices of Christ:

Through preaching and spiritual reflection, through counseling and catechism, through hymns and liturgy, the recognition of Christ’s work as king, priest, and prophet can also grow over time in our memory and outlook such that each office in its connection to the Trinity gains an ever greater depth and resonance for Christian believers.²

In sum, the threefold offices of Christ may have an “archetypal function”³ in the Christian life. How, then, might this archetype look if laid alongside the classic spiritual disciplines?

Richard Foster and Dallas Willard have both written and taught extensively on spiritual disciplines and the need for authentic, Christ-centered spiritual formation. In their most central works on the spiritual disciplines,⁴ they each make the connection of the disciplines to Christ explicit and central. Yet perhaps, following the

¹ Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), x.

² Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 268.

³ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 30, citing Geoffrey Wainwright.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I will be using Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), and Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper & row, 1988) as the foundational texts for defining the disciplines in comparison with Sherman’s theological model. Foster divides the disciplines according to the categories of inward, outward, and corporate disciplines, but he acknowledges that these divisions are somewhat artificial. Willard more helpfully suggests a distinction between disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement (176).

Heidelberg Catechism, and the theological connections of Sherman, the connection could be strengthened, deepened, and broadened to include the three-fold nature of Christ, and the three-fold office of the believer in Christ.⁵

A. Christ as King and Christian Spiritual Formation

The Bible vividly and compellingly makes the claim that Christ is Lord and king, the one anointed by the Father to achieve victory over the kingdom of darkness, reclaiming the creation on behalf of the Father. Christ fulfilled and redefined Old Testament notions of kingship, and demonstrates his rule in both word and deed. Christians, knowing that Christ has accomplished a decisive (if not final) victory over the powers of darkness, are armed and empowered to “active participation” in this work themselves.⁶ Sherman acknowledges that this is more than just a new knowledge for the Christian, but an “effect of our new being;” Christians become a new creation, and “are then called to serve Christ’s continuing work ourselves, carefully following the example he set.”⁷

Though Sherman does not say so, this is precisely the point at which the classic spiritual disciplines can serve so well. Many Christians find it painstakingly difficult to find the rule and reign of Christ made evident in their own hearts and lives. It seems that Christ’s victory, even if celebrated in hymns and confessed on bumper stickers, is slow to be appropriated to our own struggles against powers of sin and temptation. Willard argues that “full participation in the life of God’s Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit.”⁸ Foster says that “the Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us.” What types of disciplines, then, might help Christians to place themselves before God, that they might be transformed more fully to reign with Christ and live out this new identity?

Foster begins his chapter on the discipline of submission with

⁵ See Appendix A for this comparison in chart form.

⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 161.

⁷ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 161.

⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 26.

a fitting quote from Martin Luther: “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”⁹ Luther highlights the importance of recognizing right lordship in the Christian life, and the paradoxical ruling power for those who follow the way of Christ. Submission, Foster goes on to explain, means abstaining from the need to get our own way, refusing to allow our own will or way to be our lord.¹⁰ The accompanying discipline of service engages us in the Christ-like pattern of his kingship, as one who “did not come to be served but to serve” (Mt. 20:28). Other relevant disciplines include worship, a fundamental recognition of the sovereignty of God in Christ, or celebration, a discipline delighting in the freedom Christ has won from the powers of darkness. Other disciplines apply to specific sins and temptations that oppress and hold captive the emotions, imagination, desires, or actions of the Christian (such as fasting, chastity, or frugality). Together, the practice of these disciplines may aid the believer in coming to experientially know and be transformed by the saving work of Christ’s kingly victory.

B. Christ as Priest and Christian Spiritual Formation

Christ’s fulfillment of the kingly office is rich and evocative for the life of the believer. But the human condition is not only that of being subject to oppressive powers, but of being guilty before a holy God, corrupt in heart and mind, and alienated from the Creator. In his role as the great High Priest and Lamb of God, Christ in his priestly office brings atonement and reconciliation. The vicarious atonement of Christ here finds its fulfillment, as does his mediatorial role as intercessor.

Sherman traces out implications of this work of Christ for Christian self-perception, ethics, liturgy, and sacraments.¹¹ He adds, that “pastoral applications of this model of the atonement could be multiplied indefinitely.”¹² In fact, this model provides a basis and guiding principle for all the disciplines, namely that they are all

⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 96.

¹⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 96-98.

¹¹ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 213-218.

¹² Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 218.

rooted in God's gracious work in Christ, done on our behalf. Yet we may also highlight the role of a few of the disciplines that may especially help believers to appropriate Christ's priestly atoning work.

One discipline which is evidently appropriate to Christ's priestly office and the believers corresponding call is the discipline of sacrifice. Willard says that sacrifice is the abstention from "the possession or enjoyment of what is necessary for our living" where we "forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands."¹³ This discipline draws us into an abandonment of our efforts to provide for or save ourselves, opening us to the reality of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice on our behalf. Second, the discipline of prayer engages us with "Christ's continuing role as priestly mediator and intercessor [which] undergirds and enables every Christian prayer."¹⁴ Third, the discipline of confession enables us to experience more wholly and completely the reality of Christ's reconciling work, to know more vividly the forgiveness of God in Christ. Together, these disciplines may aid the believer in appropriating the priestly, atoning work of Christ.

C. *Christ as Prophet and Christian Spiritual Formation*

The person and work of Christ would not be complete, however, if we did not also consider how he redeems via his prophetic office. In this office Christ mediates the truth and commands of God, revealing God to a blind, ignorant, and weak humanity. The human need for meaning and truth finds its fulfillment in Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6). Sherman ties this work especially to the work of the Holy Spirit. Empowered by the Spirit, disciples can truly understand who Jesus was and what he taught, can spread the news of Christ, and can live as children of God.¹⁵

The pervasive work of the Spirit, guiding us into the full truth of Christ and transforming lives, has implications for all areas of Christian living. Any and all righteousness and holiness that is

¹³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 174-75.

¹⁴ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 218.

¹⁵ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 251.

achieved in the life of the believer is necessarily a work of God's grace, not something earned.¹⁶ This provides a crucial guide to the spiritual disciplines which can never be rites which magically, on their own, produce righteousness, nor become a new legalism. Foster calls this "the way of death."¹⁷ Any and all growth in being formed in the likeness of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit.

So what disciplines are most appropriate to the Christian life in light of Christ's prophetic office? What types of spiritual practices might aid the believer who struggles to experience the truth of Christ, or struggles to find a sense of meaning in life? Certainly the discipline of study, where one consciously devotes time and energy to forming one's thoughts in the pattern of Scripture or the wisdom of other believers central to this effort. Additionally, we may note the discipline of guidance, practiced both individually and corporately, in which Christ through the Holy Spirit leads and guides his people. Through Scripture, circumstances, the promptings of the Spirit, and the corporate discernment of the church, Christ grants freedom from ignorance, weakness, and meaninglessness.¹⁸ These are practices through which God's grace transforms us by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1), and through which believers may recognize and appropriate more fully the prophetic work of Christ.

II. Benefits and Use of this Connection

The above examples have been necessarily brief and suggestive rather than comprehensive. I'd like to further suggest some of the benefits of the above connections for our understanding of the spiritual disciplines as well as the task of pastoral work.

First, these connections between Sherman's model and the spiritual disciplines provides a Christocentric and trinitarian shape to the task of Christian spiritual formation. It properly roots spiritual formation in the person and work of the Triune God, and in the redeeming work of Christ. This Christocentric and trinitarian rootedness keeps the spiritual disciplines rooted in the gracious work

¹⁶ Willard helpfully notes that "grace is God acting in our lives to do things we can't do on our own. Grace is not opposed to effort; its opposed to earning." In an interview, "The Apprentices," *Leadership* (July 2005).

¹⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 8

¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 151.

of God, without minimizing the active role of the believer. Also, in an age where relativistic interest in spirituality is on the increase, and there is pressure for some churches to accommodate any and all practices deemed “spiritual,” this model provides an evaluative framework for any spiritual practice: how will this practice aid us in appropriating the work of Christ as king, priest, or prophet? How will this practice help us to be growing in our new identity as a member of Christ?

Second, these connections provide an explicitly Reformed link to the work of the spiritual disciplines. While some might deem a book like Foster’s “too Catholic,” these connections help us to see that the practice of the spiritual disciplines can be directly and explicitly connected to a distinctively Reformed theological emphasis: the *munus triplex* of Christ and the corresponding *munus triplex* of the believer. Furthermore, the disciplines can provide this Reformed emphasis with some traction in the here-and-now for believers, keeping us from positing the benefits of Christ’s work merely in the future.¹⁹

Third, this model might provide a prescriptive tool for pastoral work. If, for example, a parishioner speaks of feeling a lot of guilt or shame, the pastor might point this person especially to the reconciling and forgiving work of Christ on the cross, and might correspondingly encourage the spiritual discipline of confession to experience this reality. Or, if a person is experiencing a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness, the pastor might point to the work of Christ as Prophet and Teacher, and the corresponding disciplines of study and guidance. Examples might be multiplied tenfold.

III. Conclusion

Sherman’s theological model gives us a full and multi-faceted

¹⁹ As an example of positing the work of Christ in the future in the Reformed tradition, Herman Hoeksema in his exposition of Q&A 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1970), lays the heaviest emphasis on the “not yet” of the Christian’s anointing to the threefold office, seeing it largely as a future eschatological reality. The catechism, interestingly, is more balanced, positing much of this reality in the here-and-now, and only at the end mentioning what comes “after.”

perspective on the saving work of Christ. As he suggests, this theological framework can be applied to a variety of needs. This paper has suggested that Sherman's model provides a particularly fruitful framework for the classic spiritual disciplines, and that correspondingly, the disciplines get the work of Christ to work in the lives of believers. This wedding of Christ's person and the life of the Christian is an elaboration on the basic theme of the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 12), providing a rich rootedness in Reformed theology, and a beneficial tool for pastoral work.

Exposition of the Lord's Days 20-22, Q&A's #53-58

Jason De Vreis

The Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven once stated that for “425 years [the Heidelberg Catechism] has taught people how to live in the comfort and joy of the Christian gospel.”¹ When Zacharias Ursinus, Casper Olevianus, and many of their peers in the village of Heidelberg, Germany met throughout the year of 1562 to develop their now-famous catechism,² they certainly had no idea just how well received their document would become. Although their project had been commissioned by the Elector Frederick III for the purpose of providing the “pastors and schoolmasters... with a fixed form and model, by which to regulate the instruction of youth”³ it was intended only for use within the Palatinate.⁴ Here in North America, nearly 450 years after the fact, the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) still holds a prominent place in our churches, worship services, educational institutions, and the like.

When the authors of this wonderful document met together to debate, decide – and in some cases – divide over what they considered to be the essentials of the “Christian religion,” they did manage to agree on one thing: a central theme. That theme weaves its way in and out and around the HC’s teachings. At times, the theme is obvious; but at other times, it seems as if it has become so encrypted that it has been dropped altogether. That theme is *comfort*.⁵ LORD’S DAY 1 makes that abundantly clear when it asks, “What is your only *comfort* in life and in death?”

¹ Andrew Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 11.

² Lyle Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 49.

³ From Elector Frederick III’s 1563 dedicatory preface to the Heidelberg Catechism as found in Lyle Bierma, *Documents for “The Heidelberg Catechism,”* 6.

⁴ Bierma, *Documents for “The Heidelberg Catechism,”* 148.

⁵ Fred Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, CRC Publications, 2001), 25.

“Heidelberg One” has become such a beloved statement of faith that we often think of this Q&A as the central Q&A of the entire Catechism. Without a doubt, the first question is certainly a great one. However, in line 13 of A 1, we are introduced to something that is potentially just as important as the Heidelberg’s “comfort theme.” Whereas “comfort” may be the central theme that runs throughout the entire Catechism, how we acquire that comfort is not as clear. The “what” and “why” questions are answered in Q&A 1; the “how” question is not made explicit until Q&A 53.

LORD’S DAY 20 – otherwise known as Q&A 53 – is the beginning of the Catechism’s exposition on the third part of the Apostle’s Creed (AC). Q&A 22 asks: “What then must a Christian believe?” The answer follows: “Everything God promises us in the Gospel. That gospel is summarized for us in the articles of our Christian faith – a creed beyond doubt, and confessed throughout the world.” The creed is stated in Q&A 23, and followed by Q&A 24 which asks, “How are these articles divided?” “Into three parts: God the Father and our creation; God the Son and our deliverance; God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.” LORD’S DAYS 20-22 are entitled “*God the Holy Spirit.*” Q&A’s 53-58 specifically deal with the final “paragraph” – or final six lines – of the AC. A few comments should be made regarding the structure of this section of the creed.

First, it is important to recognize that these six lines are focused entirely on the Holy Spirit (HS). Structurally, the first section is focused on God the Father – “I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” The second, and longest, paragraph discusses God the Son – “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord.” The third section, our text, deals with God the HS – “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” It’s important to point this out because the five lines that follow appear to have nothing to do with the HS. Ursinus wrote:

There are six articles included in this part of the Creed. The first of these treats of the Holy Ghost; the next of the church, which the Holy Ghost gathers, confirms and preserves; whilst the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting include the benefits of Christ,

which the Holy Ghost confers upon the church.⁶

Q&A 53: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The “old” version of the HC begins its answer to Q 53 like this: “First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son.” In comparison, the current version (1988) reads much easier: “First, he, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God.” The Trinitarian doctrine is clear and unmistakable. Beginning an answer with this wording – whether the “old” or “new” – seems to act as a review of the entire structure of the AC – highlighting its major points.

Olevianus observes that this point – despite its location in the Creed – is not by any means the least important. “However, so that the love of God the Father and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be shed abroad in our hearts, the Father through the Son gives us the Holy Spirit, who makes us participants in the mercy of the Father and the grace of Jesus Christ.”⁷ The entire Godhead is actively involved in our salvation: the Spirit is sent by the Father at the request of the Son⁸ in order that we will benefit from the actions of the Son’s death and resurrection⁹ and be adopted into the family of God.¹⁰ The three persons of the Godhead are so closely intertwined that we cannot separate one from the other; if we believe in the Father, we *must* believe in the HS.

As we look at Q&A 53, we can identify two parts to the answer. The first part states that we believe that the HS is equal with the Father and the Son. To ensure that his point would be clearly communicated, Ursinus in his commentary added the terms “co-equal” and “consubstantial.”¹¹ The latter term shows that the HS is not merely equal to the Father and Son – as if referring to a rank or

⁶ Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Williard (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1852), 270.

⁷ Caspar Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. by Lyle Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 90.

⁸ John 14:16

⁹ John 3:16

¹⁰ Rom 8:15, 23, 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5

¹¹ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 271; *Shorter Catechism*, Q&A 39.

status – but one and the same substance. Kuyvenhoven complements Ursinus’ comments stating, “The highest good in the present life is the knowledge of God. He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The only way to the Father is by the Son. And we come to the Son by the Spirit.”¹²

Fred Klooster entitles his exposition of the second part of A 53 “The Holy Spirit and the Believer.”¹³ This title is a bit more appropriate than Kuyvenhoven’s “What He Does.”¹⁴ “What He Does” fails to take into account the fact that the next five lines of the AC do in fact describe what the HS does. The HS’s actions are not limited nor fully described in this answer. However, the focus on how the HS interacts with the believer consists of a relational aspect found in Klooster’s commentary.

The phrase “he has been given to me personally” immediately conjures up images of an intimate relationship. The HS as God is not an impersonal member of the Godhead; the HS dwells within our hearts¹⁵ and enters into a personal relationship with those to whom He has been sent.¹⁶ Ursinus identifies two primary ways in which the HS is given/received by the believer.¹⁷

Ursinus notes that “The ordinary way in which the Holy Ghost is given is through the ministry of the word...”¹⁸ Olevianus affirms this assessment when he states:

God uses the very preaching of Peter to bestow His Holy Spirit upon the elect who heard the Word. This he does still today and will continue to do through the preaching of the Holy Gospel until the end of the world.¹⁹

And what is perhaps the most important piece of evidence for this

¹² Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 133.

¹³ Fred Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Vol. 1*. (Grand Rapids, CRC Publications, 2001), 666.

¹⁴ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 133.

¹⁵ Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 6:19

¹⁶ Acts 16:6, 20:23

¹⁷ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 282.

¹⁸ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 282.

¹⁹ Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, 93.

relationship between hearing the Gospel and receiving the HS, Paul, inspired by the HS, writes, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”²⁰

But Ursinus also notes that the HS is received by means of the sacraments.²¹ There are a few things regarding his statements here that are confusing at best. Ursinus was a student of the Reformers²² and was fully committed to the Protestant cause. With such strong personal convictions, I find it highly unlikely that he would have endorsed a doctrine of the sacraments that would have so much in common with the official Roman Catholic understanding. Unfortunately, there are no apparent correlations between what he says in his *Commentary* and what he included in his *Shorter* and *Larger Catechisms*. Likewise, he includes virtually no explanation of this point in his *Commentary* to assist the reader.

On this point, it is worth drawing attention to HC Q&A 65:

Q. It is by faith alone that we share in Christ and all his blessings: where then does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through our use of the holy sacraments.

Ursinus again appears to contradict himself here. Even when taking into account the reality that the HC is primarily the product of a committee, Ursinus’ involvement and influence was substantial. The important distinction made in Q&A 65 is the use of the word “confirms” rather than “received.” These two words have significantly different meanings. What exactly Ursinus’ beliefs

²⁰ Rom 10:17. Q&A 21 asks, “What is true faith?” Contained within the answer is the message that “true faith is...created in me by the HS through the gospel.”

²¹ The complete quote from the previous paragraph is as follows: “The ordinary way in which the Holy Ghost is given us through the ministry of the word, and the use of the sacraments.” Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 282.

²² Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, 68, 70.

regarding the role of sacraments in the reception of the HS is, is hard to determine based on these two resources.

The next phrase of the answer should actually be read as a parenthetical statement. “He has been given to me personally, so that, by true faith...” The “so that” can be read and understood much like the Greek *ἵνα* meaning “in order that” or “for the purpose of.” This causes the “by true faith” to act much like a qualifying statement; what follows is a result of “true faith” making itself evident in the life of the believer.

Ursinus identifies “true faith” as itself a gift of the HS, re-emphasizing the mystery of the HS as the initiator of “true faith” as well as “true faith” being necessary in order to receive the HS.²³ Olevianus also affirms the relationship between faith and the statements that follow.²⁴ Scripture itself affirms faith as the foundational element of the Christian life.²⁵

The next two points appear to be only one point: “he makes me share in Christ and all his blessings.” To be “in Christ” essentially means to be members of His body, to be part of the invisible Church. The catechetical authors are beginning to develop a clear connection between believing in the HS and the final five lines of the AC. Calvin describes “the Holy Spirit as the bond that unites us to Christ.”²⁶ Kuyvenhoven re-emphasizes Calvin’s ascertains when he writes, “We cannot have the benefits of Jesus without having Jesus.”²⁷ The HS works to graft us into the Body of Christ;²⁸ and only when we have been grafted in, can we begin to receive the benefits of being a part of such a great and wonderful organism.

Kuyvenhoven goes on to weld together Calvin’s and Ursinus’ own words to create a complete idea:

²³ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 285; *Shorter Catechism*, Q&A 39; *Larger Catechism*, Q&A 112.

²⁴ Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 129, 131.

²⁵ 2 Chr 20:20; Hab 2:4; Matt 15:20; Mark 5:34; Acts 26:18; Rom 4:16; Eph 2:8-10.

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 537.

²⁷ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 134.

²⁸ Rom 11:15-24

The rich benefits in which we share when the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ are not described in this answer of the catechism. Some of the blessings follow in succeeding Lord's Days: our membership in the one holy catholic church, our part in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and everlasting life.²⁹

Answer 53 is the catechetical and theological basis of the questions that follow. Although the HC never presents a complete theology of the HS, the last several lines of the AC do help in our understanding of what those "blessings" are.

What I find bothersome, is that sanctification is never mentioned. This would not be such a problem if it was not for the fact that Q&A 24 specifically states that this portion of the AC deals with "*God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.*" Furthermore, Ursinus, in his two catechisms – which we can be almost certain were used as source documents for the HC³⁰ – does refer to the sanctification aspect of the AC.³¹

"Second, he... comforts me." Without a doubt, the authors of the catechism were intentionally reminding catechumens of the comfort theme of the entire HC. But invoking the theme at this point in the HC seems to have a higher purpose: the comfort of Q&A 1 is based on the work of the HS in the life of the believer; belonging to Christ is our comfort – we get there via the HS. Olevianus keenly points out in Q&A 131 of his commentary, that "we know that we have the Holy Spirit... from His effects."³² One "effect" of the HS is the comfort and knowledge we possess of belonging to Christ. Klooster, in tying up all loose ends, reminds us that all this is conditional based on the presence of "true faith."³³

The final statement of Q&A 53 is that the HS "remains with me forever." This phrase seems to act as a link between this answer

²⁹ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 134.

³⁰ Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, 75

³¹ Ursinus, *Shorter Catechism*, Q&A 39; *Larger Catechism*, 109-110, 112.

³² Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, 94.

³³ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 670.

and Q&A 54. The last statement of Q&A 54 states, “And of this community I am and always will be a living member.” The link that is being developed here is connecting the phrase “all his blessings” to the rest of this section of the HC. As I pointed out earlier, each HC question dealing with the final six lines of the AC are inseparably tied to Q&A 53. The similarity of the final lines of A 53 and A 54 begin to “flesh out” that relationship.

In the Scriptures, Christ assures us that we will never be left alone. John 14:16-17 seems to be the standard proof-text for this Q&A. With regards to the final line, the authors of the catechism added 1 Pet 4:14.³⁴ But I might also add Matt 28:20 in which “And surely I am with you always” should be read in light of Jesus’ promises in John 14.

Q&A 54: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE CONCERNING “THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH”?

LORD’S DAY 20 left us with only a hint of the reliance of Q&A’s 54-58 on Q&A 53. Before we get too far, we should recognize three ways Q&A 54 is related to the larger topic of “God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.”³⁵

I have already invoked Ursinus’ words regarding this relationship; but they are worth repeating: “the next of the church, which the Holy Ghost gathers, confirms and preserves.”³⁶ Although the focus has changed in Q&A 54 to the “holy catholic church,” we cannot forget or ignore the role of the HS in making the church a reality; this gathering by the HS is the church. Which leads to my next point: the church is a product of the HS. Without the presence and in-dwelling of the HS in the heart of every believer, there would be no church. The church is completely dependent on the HS for its existence. We are speaking of course of the *invisible* church – the worldwide, universal body of believers – the elect.³⁷

³⁴ “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

³⁵ Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 24.

³⁶ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 270.

³⁷ For a good discussion regarding the differences and characteristics of the *visible* and *invisible* church see Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 286-288.

Thirdly, Ursinus concludes that the church should also be seen as a means of salvation. He sets his readers up by asking the question, “Is there any salvation out of the Church?”³⁸ He answers with a resounding “No one can be saved out of the Church.”³⁹ This point deserves a more in-depth explanation.

We must keep in mind this distinction between a *visible* and *invisible* church. In short, the *visible* church is the “institutional church;” this is our local congregation with our church councils, charters, by-laws, and committees. The *visible* church is essentially a functional entity providing a setting for the *invisible* church to gather and worship our Lord. Not everyone who is a part of the *visible* church holds membership in the *invisible* church.⁴⁰

It is with the *invisible* church that salvation exists. Since “*invisible*” in this context is simply another term for the “*elect*,” it logically follows that one cannot be outside of the church in this sense and be saved. Within this discussion, “*invisible church*” and “*elect*” are interchangeable. Therefore, if one is a member of the elect (which will be signified by the coming to “true faith”), one is simultaneously a member of the *invisible* church.⁴¹

Q&A 54 introduces a few terms to the catechumen that should be defined in order to understand fully the question being asked.

Q&A 54 describes a “holy...church.” Ursinus provides a two-part explanation: “It is called *holy*, because it is sanctified of God by the blood and Spirit of Christ that it may be conformable to him...by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, or obedience; and...[it] is also called holy, because it is consecrated to a holy and divine use...”⁴² Olevianus, by comparison, also offers a two-part description; however, his seems to focus on the first part of Ursinus’ explanation: “It is rather for two reasons that the church is called holy: First, because God has begun to sanctify her and renew her unto a godly life...Second, although there are still many sins and frailties in

³⁸ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 292.

³⁹ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, See also Kuyvenhoven, 137.

⁴⁰ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 287.

⁴¹ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 287.

⁴² Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 189.

her, they are nevertheless totally covered with the perfect obedience of Christ.”⁴³

The church is also called “catholic.” Referring to the church as “catholic” undoubtedly caused significant confusion in 16th century Palatinate. Klooster observes that Luther and other reformers sought to avoid confusion by substituting the term “Christian” for “catholic” in their versions of the AC.⁴⁴ Even today, many fail to recognize the distinction between “catholic” and “Catholic.” Klooster makes the ascertain that “catholic” contains two primary and significant meanings for the discussion at hand. He defines “catholic” with the terms “universal” and “orthodox.”⁴⁵ “Universal” in the sense that as the catechism says, “out of the entire human race.”⁴⁶ “Orthodox” in the sense of being distinct from “Arianism, Donatism and other heresies [that] were rife and were propagating rival churches.”⁴⁷ In this sense, “catholic” is not all too different from Ursinus’ second use of “holy.”

The formatting of our current edition of the HC gives us clue to the basic thrust of A 54:

I believe that the Son of God
through his Spirit and Word,
out of the entire human race,
from the beginning of the world to the end,
gathers, protects, and preserves for himself
a community chosen for eternal life
and united in true faith.

The structure of A 54 assists us in finding the point: “I believe that the Son of God...gathers, protects, and preserves for himself...” In this answer we learn that “the holy catholic church” is the result of the work of Christ (“Son of God”) through the person of the HS. And through the Spirit, *Christ* gathers, *Christ* protects, and *Christ* preserves *for himself*. There has been significant debate over the

⁴³ Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, 97, Q&A 134. Olevianus cites Rom 8 and Eph 5 as supporting texts.

⁴⁴ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 693.

⁴⁵ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 694-697.

⁴⁶ HC Answer 54.

⁴⁷ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 696.

years regarding the theological slant of the HC.⁴⁸ Q&A 54 leaves very little room for any sort of “free-will” theology. In every aspect, Christ – through the Spirit – is the initiator, bringing us into fellowship with him.

However, I feel that A 54 does more to describe how the church came to be than it does to explain what “the holy catholic church” *is*. But a definition of sorts can be pulled out of the wording. I would propose this definition: “*The holy catholic church*” is “*a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith.*”

The former edition of the HC used the word “church” where the word “community” is now found. In our current day and age, “community” is much more understandable – nor nearly as redundant. We live in a global *community* in which our social networks are spread throughout the entire world. With the emphasis of this Q&A on the broad scope of the church, “community” helps to reinforce that wider idea.

This community is qualified by the term “chosen.” In other words, one cannot be a member of this community without being chosen by “the Son of God... out of the entire human race.” The community that makes up “the holy catholic church” is an exclusive group. Klooster correctly points out that “one must recognize that this confession involves the doctrine of sovereign and gracious predestination.”⁴⁹ The only way into the community of believers is via God’s predestination of the elect. Although predestination is never explicitly taught in the HC, we know that at least one of the HC writers held this belief: Dr. Zacharias Ursinus dedicated an additional ten pages to an explanation of predestination.⁵⁰

Just as the final line of Q&A 53 creates a link to Q&A 54, the emphasis on “community” found in Q&A 54 creates a link to Q&A 55 – which deals with “the communion of saints.” Q&A 54 adds a personal touch in its final line: “And of this community *I* am and always will be a living member.” This creates a perfect transition into the next question.

⁴⁸ Bierma, *Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, 76.

⁴⁹ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 699.

⁵⁰ This explanation can be found in Ursinus’ *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 293-303.

Q&A 55: WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY “THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS?”

From the start, it is important to recognize that Q&A 55 cannot be considered apart from Q&A 54. Klooster addresses the relationship when he writes,

Further, these items are all interrelated, and it’s important to understand that the reference to “the communion of saints” is intimately tied to the reference to “the holy catholic church.” In fact, ‘the communion of saints’ serves as a further explanation of the “the holy catholic church.”⁵¹

Earlier editions of the AC and HC reflected this relationship between the two Q&A’s. For example, the edition of the AC adopted by Synod, 1975 formatted these lines like this:

I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic church, the communion of saints;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.⁵²

The 1975 formatting gave the reader a clearer picture of the relationship between the two. The only question then is whether or not one should consider these statements as one rather than two separate thoughts.

Evidence for this close-knit relationship can also be found in the formatting Olevianus chose for *A Firm Foundation*. Question 136 of his work asks, “What do you understand by ‘the communion of saints’?” The answer is strikingly similar to that found in the HC. In the spirit of consistency one would expect to find a number of additional Q&A’s providing a fuller explanation of Q 136. Instead, what we find is an abrupt change of focus to the “remaining Articles of Faith.” Questions 137 and 138 serve a transitional function before Q 139 asks, “Explain to me, then, the forgiveness of sins...” By choosing to make such a definite break at this point, Olevianus is communicating to his readers that there is some special relationship

⁵¹ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 703.

⁵² Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 688; footnote on p 703.

between Q&A 132-135 (which deal with “the holy catholic church”) and Q&A 136. He is forcing us to understand the remaining three lines of the AC to possess a somewhat looser relationship.

Like many of the Q&A’s of the HC, A 55 contains a two-part answer. The first part plainly states that we believe “the communion of saints” refers to the community of Christ – that is, the Body of Christ. The wording here is similar to that found in A 53.

Kuyvenhoven draws attention to the primacy of community by saying, “The first result of the work of the Savior is the communion of saints. There is no private Christianity. When we are saved by the Lord, we are given to each other.”⁵³

The second point of A 55 is worth spending more time on. “Secondly, [we understand by ‘the communion of saints’] that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and cheerfully...” “These gifts” refers to the use of “gifts” in line 4 of this answer. The Scripture references indicate that the gifts in mind are the spiritual gifts that Paul frequently refers to in his writings.⁵⁴

Furthermore, according to the HC, we have a duty to use these gifts. Kuyvenhoven is dead-on again: “God entrusts us with these gifts for the enrichment of other members. Each *must* help the other within the communion of saints.”⁵⁵ The old version of the HC says it this way: “every one must know himself *bound* to employ his gifts...” The terminology is almost legalistic; this version seems to recognize the bestowing of these gifts as a type of contract in which the believer is bound by law to use what has been given to him or her.

The catechism goes on to say that these gifts have been given to us with the expectation that we will use them “for the service and enrichment of the other members.” The old version says “for the advantage and salvation of other members.” Either way, the message is essentially the same: these gifts are not to be kept to ourselves but publicly practiced and affirmed for the benefit and blessing of the entire community.⁵⁶ The Apostle Paul affirmed this when he wrote to the Ephesian churches saying:

⁵³ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 142.

⁵⁴ Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 6:17, 12-13; 1 John 1:3.

⁵⁵ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 142.

⁵⁶ Remember that Q&A 55 is focused on *communion* and *community*.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.⁵⁷

In thinking about the consequences of some communities refusing to use certain gifts, Klooster wonders, "It may be that some gifts overlap and that several believers have the same gifts; but it may also be that only one person has a particular gift in a given community. How tragic the consequences if no one exercises that one gift in that communion!"⁵⁸

The use of one's gifts within "the communion of saints" is not a choice that believers are allowed to make. Through the HS we are brought to faith and made righteous – making us members of the Body of Christ. And through the HS we receive certain gifts for the purpose of building up the Body. In a way, it is through the practice of those gifts that we prove our faith –that we provide evidence that we possess confidence in the next three Q&A's.

Q&A 56: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE CONCERNING "THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS?"

I mentioned earlier that Olevianus places a definite break between the content of Q&A 55 and Q&A 56. As we begin to look more closely at Q&A 56, we should revisit that break.

Olevianus asks in Q 138: *What do the remaining articles of faith contain?* In summary, his answer says, "They explain to us in detail the benefits that Christ bestows upon His Church, that is, all believers, through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹ The progression from Q&A 53 through Q&A 58 is such that the information becomes progressively more detailed as the list goes on. Naturally, this is also the case within the AC itself: we believe in the HS who has created

⁵⁷ Eph 4:11-13

⁵⁸ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 709.

⁵⁹ Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, 98.

“the holy catholic church” which is made up of “the communion of saints” who has received “forgiveness of sins” in order that they might experience “the resurrection of the body” and “life everlasting.” The “forgiveness of sins” is a key defining characteristic of “the communion of saints.”

Klooster seems to take a cue from Kuyvenhoven in preferring to look at the relationship of these statements in reverse. Klooster writes, “The ‘*holy catholic church*’ is ‘the communion of saints’ only because there is ‘the forgiveness of sins.’”⁶⁰ Looking at the HC “in reverse” makes it easier to see how Q&A 53-58 are so beautifully interrelated; each point seems to be mysteriously dependent on the others in order to create a complete whole. And they are all ultimately subject to Q&A 53: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The answer to Q&A 56 states: I believe that God, *because of Christ’s atonement*... (emphasis added). The former edition says, “for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction.” The newer wording is much more appealing to our modern ears; it is also more theologically correct based on our understanding of the relevant terms (i.e. “satisfaction” vs. “atonement”). By our current definitions, “satisfaction” suggests that “forgiveness of sins” is the result of the Father’s desire to appease the Son. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Second Cor 5:18-19 – one of the “proof texts” for A 56 – reads:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself *through Christ* and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself *in Christ*, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

I bring attention to this passage because it clearly demonstrates the source of our forgiveness and the reason for which we are forgiven. I have added italics to help make my point. The phrases “through Christ” and “in Christ” are references to His crucifixion. It was the

⁶⁰ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 711. See also Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 142.

crucifixion event where Christ made atonement for our sins.⁶¹ All this combines to ensure that forgiveness is solely the work of the Godhead: the Father forgives through the work of the Son, communicated to the elect via the HS.⁶²

Although not stated directly, the comfort theme can be sensed in Q&A 56. “I believe that God... will never hold against me any of my sins.” When one considers the insecurity of many today – both within and outside of the Church – the comfort of such a phrase is almost overwhelming! God truly does forgive *and* forget. Psalm 103 demonstrates this well: “The LORD is compassionate and gracious/slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse/nor will he harbor his anger forever...”⁶³ Also Micah 7:

Who is a God like you,
 who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
 of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever
 but delight to show mercy.
You will again have compassion on us;
 you will tread our sins underfoot
 and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.⁶⁴

Once your sins are forgiven, they are forgiven; God will never change his mind and consider you guilty of iniquity ever again. In *that* we take comfort.

This assurance of “forgiveness of sins” should not be seen as a “get-out-of-jail-free” card however. Many will make the mistake of thinking that since they are elect and therefore forgiven, they then have license to go on sinning just as if nothing ever changed. This demonstrates the need for consistent and biblical discipleship. This issue is not unique to our modern culture – Paul dealt with this very issue in his letter to the Roman church:

⁶¹ “Satisfaction” can and is a reasonable term when understood to mean that Christ satisfied God’s requirements for sin. However, that use of “satisfaction” is seldom used in our contemporary context. Hence the reason “atonement” is preferred.

⁶² Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*; See also Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation*, Q&A 145.

⁶³ Ps 103:8-9.

⁶⁴ Mic 7:18-19.

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?⁶⁵

There is the sense that to consider yourself forgiven and yet to go on sinning just as you had before, you would be committing a heinous act of hypocrisy. To this end we can read in James 2:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?...You see that [Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.⁶⁶

Q&A 57: HOW DOES “THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY” COMFORT YOU?

The central theme of the HC is comfort. I recently asked a group of middle school students what they thought the Catechism meant by the term “comfort.” As expected, the answers I received revolved around the idea of warmth, big blankets, good food, and puppies. But one bright student gave a particularly interesting answer: “feeling safe.”

I found his answer interesting because most Americans do not think of comfort in that way. Most of the American evangelical theology being preached today views God – primarily in the form of the Son – as something to make all your problems go away. It is no wonder that so many new believers are quickly discouraged when the bills continue to pile, the boss becomes more demanding, and long-time relationships rapidly deteriorate before their eyes. What is happening is a misunderstanding of the term “comfort” and how that comfort plays out in modern day life.

The authors of the HC had a different meaning in mind when they used the German word “*tröstet*” to describe the feeling “true

⁶⁵ Rom 5:20-6:2.

⁶⁶ Jas 2:14, 22, 26.

faith” creates within a believer’s heart. Despite being the central theme, “*tröset*” is only found six times throughout the Heidelberg’s 129 Q&A’s – 1, 2, 52, 53, 57, and 58.⁶⁷ Notice that four of those occurrences fall within the HC’s exposition of the AC, and three of those within the smaller section dealing with the person and work of the HS. Its use here – Q&A 57 – seems a bit odd considering the topic of this question, but including it in Q 57 dramatically changes the tone of the question.

“How does ‘the resurrection of the body’ *comfort* you?” The question presupposes death; one cannot experience “the resurrection of the body” without the disembodiment of the soul from the physical body – i.e. death. Ursinus launches into a discourse on the immortality of the soul by these words, “The question of the immortality of the soul belongs properly to this Article; for the resurrection presupposes death.”⁶⁸ Although the discussion into the details of “the immortality of the soul” may be useful to a complete understanding of this point, it is not necessary for our goal. Nevertheless, resurrection cannot be experienced without the passage from this life into the next and few look upon death with such optimism.

In focusing our thoughts, Klooster observes that “[the] second part of answer 57 provides the specific response to question 57... Yet the first part of the answer indicates the believer’s immediate ‘comfort’ when death occurs.”⁶⁹

The first part of A 57 professes two things: (1) our souls “*will be taken... after this life to Christ;*” and (2) our souls “*will be taken immediately after this life to Christ.*”

David wrote in Psalm 49 that “God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”⁷⁰ And also in Psalm 73: “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory... My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”⁷¹ Our bodies may rot in the grave in

⁶⁷ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 720.

⁶⁸ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 309.

⁶⁹ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 722.

⁷⁰ Ps 49:15.

⁷¹ Ps 73:23-24, 26.

the years following our death, but our life goes on; our spirit is taken from our body and brought into glory – into the very presence of God.

Jesus' encounter with the thief on the cross demonstrates that our souls will be taken into glory *immediately*. "Jesus answered [the thief], 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'"⁷² Kuyvenhoven speaks adequately to the continuation of life when he says:

We maintain, however, with our confession, that we will be with Christ as soon as life leaves our bodies... The argument finally comes down to an understanding of the *faithfulness of God himself*... Once God has covenanted with Abraham (or John or Dick or Mary), he never lets go of such a covenant or of his covenant partner. Once God has established communion with us, it is necessarily an eternal communion... God's faithful covenant is not interrupted. Death cannot break up a union forged by the love of God (see Rom 8:39).⁷³

I think it worthwhile to address the possible historical influences upon the wording of A 57. The inclusion of the word "immediately" is significant here. Within the Protestant community, such an addition is virtually unnecessary; Protestants have generally always assumed and professed that the soul is immediately ushered into glory – into the presence of God himself.

But in 16th century Europe this was not the case. The Roman Catholic Church still maintained a firm grip on the people of its "holy empire." Within Catholic theology, purgatory played prominently in the experience of the afterlife. Purgatory prohibits the believer from "immediately" entering the presence of God. I would suggest that "immediately" was inserted for the explicit purpose of distinguishing between Roman Catholic and Reformation theology.

While this first part of A 57 is reason enough for the believer to experience the overwhelming assurance of comfort resulting from the knowledge that life does in fact continue following death – death is nothing more than a "gateway" to a better existence⁷⁴ - it is the second half of A 57 that actually answers the question on the table.

⁷² Luke 23:43.

⁷³ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 147-148.

⁷⁴ Phil 1:21-23.

What exactly is our comfort in the “resurrection of the body”? That “even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul...” This reunification is reason enough for “comfort;” but “comfort” is only made better when we realize that this is entirely the work of the Godhead.⁷⁵ The separation that occurs at death is the result of “God’s punishment of sin...genuine comfort springs from the fact that the abnormal separation of what was united in creation is united again.”⁷⁶ All things are again made whole and reconciled to God as a new creation. The Apostle Paul writes:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.⁷⁷

Q&A 58: HOW DOES THE ARTICLE CONCERNING “LIFE EVERLASTING” COMFORT YOU?

Like Q&A 57, Q&A 58 also has its roots in the reality of physical death. Whereas the “resurrection of the body” provides us with comfort in the knowledge that all things will be made new, it is the “life everlasting” – or eternal life – that we are ultimately striving for. The AC and HC may be Christocentric in form, but it is this final line of the AC that acts as the climax for all that came before. It is the reception of “life everlasting” that motivates us and propels us into action; out of thankfulness and indebtedness we “live out” our faith, offering up our *gratitude*⁷⁸ for the blessings we “share in Christ.”⁷⁹

Ursinus observes, “This Article stands at the end of the Creed; 1. Because its perfect fulfillment comes after the rest. 2. Because it is the effect of all the other articles...This article is, therefore, the crowning point of our entire salvation and life.”⁸⁰ Klooster describes it saying, “Truly answer 58 is doxological; in the light of Scripture it is the only way can really talk about the ‘comfort’ of ‘life

⁷⁵ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 729.

⁷⁶ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*,

⁷⁷ 1 Cor 15:20-22.

⁷⁸ This is the title of Part III of the HC (LORD’S DAYS 23-52).

⁷⁹ Refer back to Q&A 53.

⁸⁰ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 318.

everlasting.”⁸¹

The relationship between Q&A 58 especially and Q&A 1 is certainly remarkable. “That I am not my own, but belong...to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” And “Because I belong to him, Christ, *by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life...*”⁸² Even HC 1 treats this article as the climatic result of the work of Christ through the person of the HS.

The question is asked, “How does ‘life everlasting’ *comfort* you?” This is the last time the German “*tröstet*” is used in the HC. But it is by no means the final time the comfort theme is suggested.

What exactly is “life everlasting”? If one must define the concept, how might it be done? Ursinus offers his take on what this is: “everlasting life is the perfect restoration of the image of God, with eternal joy and delight in God, heavenly glory, and the full fruition of all those good things which are necessary to a state of perfect happiness.”⁸³ Much like Ursinus, Kuyvenhoven prefers to focus on quality rather than quantity: “The emphasis should be on the quality of eternal life as life that comes to us from God through the Holy Spirit when we believe in Christ.”⁸⁴ The catechism itself offers its own suggestion – although A 58 admits that it is beyond our imagination⁸⁵ – when it states that eternal life is “a blessedness in which to praise God eternally.” In any case, “life everlasting” is beyond all human comprehension, unable to be explained or described, superseding our wildest dreams.

“Life everlasting” is not something that we have to look forward; “life everlasting” is something that believers enjoy already in this life. The catechism says, “Even as I *already now* experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy...” Klooster refers to this as the “already now – not yet” mystery of eternal life.⁸⁶ In explanation he observes that “This comfort is our ‘already now’ as well as being ‘not

⁸¹ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 731.

⁸² Summary of A 1.

⁸³ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 319.

⁸⁴ Kuyvenhoven, *Comfort & Joy*, 150.

⁸⁵ “Perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined...”

⁸⁶ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 730.

yet' fully realized, not until after the resurrection."⁸⁷ Ursinus also holds to this view as is evident when he states, "The beginning of everlasting life is given already in this world; but the consummation of it, is reserved for the life to come."⁸⁸

The elect begin to experience the "eternal joy" of everlasting life already in this life. However, it is an incomplete joy that will not come to completion until the soul is reunited with the body in the resurrection. Jesus, in his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, gave us an idea of where our eternal life begins: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."⁸⁹ Here Christ identifies knowledge/belief in the Father and the Son as the beginning of our eternal life. However Paul encourages us in his letter to the Philippians when he directs our attention to the completion of our "eternal joy" when he writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."⁹⁰

All this is dependent on our confession: "I believe in the Holy Spirit."⁹¹ When we profess personal belief – when we possess "true faith"⁹² – in the person of the HS, we equally confess God's sovereignty over all areas of our life. This faith is in God's grace, revealed through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, and bestowed upon us by the work of the HS. The HS in turn brings believers world-wide together to form the "holy catholic church," the Body of Christ. It is that Body that experiences and receives "forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body," and ultimately "life everlasting," praising God eternally for the great mercies He has bestowed upon us, His people.

⁸⁷ Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 730.

⁸⁸ Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 323.

⁸⁹ John 17:3.

⁹⁰ Phil. 3:20.

⁹¹ Q&A 53.

⁹² Q&A 21.

Elements of Biblical Exegesis in the Commentary of Peter Martyr Vermigli on the Book of Judges with an Emphasis on Allegory

Kristin E. K. Palacios

Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) was born Piero Mariano in Florence, Italy in 1499. Upon joining the Order of Augustinian Canons in 1514, he took the name Peter Martyr after Peter Martyr of Verona (13th c.), an inquisitor who died at the hands of heretics attempting to reform the thirteenth-century church. By 1518, Vermigli had completed his monastic training and moved to Padua to preach and teach. It was during this time that he learned Hebrew under the tutelage of a Jewish physician. By 1537, Vermigli had become a prior in the Order of Augustinian Canons and was serving the order in Naples. In 1537, he was first exposed to the writings of Reformers such as Zwingli, Bucer, and Melanchthon. As a result, Vermigli began a moral and educational reform within the Augustinian Canons; however, he was soon banned by the viceroy from preaching. An appeal to the pope allowed him to continue his work, but it soon became evident that his Reformed ideas were no longer welcome in the traditional church in Italy. In 1542 he fled from Italy to Zurich. From 1542-56, he served as a professor of theology first in Strasbourg and then in Cambridge, and in 1556 he became a professor of Hebrew at Zurich. He lived there until his death in 1562.¹ As for his works, Vermigli was mostly a biblical exegete, though he also wrote a handful of other works (notable are his treatises on the controversial topics of the eucharist and clerical celibacy along with a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*). He knew Hebrew (both biblical and medieval), Greek, Latin, and Aramaic and was familiar with classical, patristic, and medieval literature. He was particularly interested in Aquinas and Aristotle.²

¹ David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106-8, 112-3.

² John L. Thompson, "The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation in Peter Martyr Vermigli's Old Testament Exegesis," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era*

Vermigli's *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]* was first published in Latin in 1561. This work (along with his commentary on the book of Genesis) are Vermigli's quintessential commentaries,³ demonstrating his roots in a variety of thought traditions, including both scholasticism and humanism, as well as traditional and Hebraic exegetical methods. Although it has been argued that the allegorical method of traditional exegesis died along with the rise of humanism and the Reformation and that it was replaced with the method of modern literalism,⁴ a reading of Vermigli's work on Judges clearly reveals otherwise. Instead, this commentary reveals that traditional exegetical methods were still at work long after the Reformation had taken root through the work of Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Calvin (1509-1564). Through an analysis of the exegetical methods employed by Vermigli in his commentary on Judges, particularly his commentary on the story of the Levite's wife as found in Chapter 19, it will be shown that allegorical exegesis along with scholastic, humanistic, and Hebraic methods were all at work in the life of the third-generation Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli. Before this analysis is undertaken, let us first consider the main characteristics of allegorical exegesis.

First, medieval exegesis was largely centered on a method of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. Allegory focuses not only on the literal (or historical) meaning of a text, but also emphasizes the spiritual sense of Scripture. The four elements of allegorical exegesis are the literal, allegorical (believing), tropological (doing), and anagogic senses (hoping). The literal sense focuses on the original meaning of the text as found in its historical context. The allegorical sense has to do with what the text leads Christians to believe and includes interpretation of the Old Testament in light of Christ. The tropological sense interprets the moral sense of the text and instructs Christians what to do. And the anagogic sense is the interpretation of

of the Reformation, eds. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

³Thompson, "The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation in Peter Martyr," 257.

⁴R. E. McNally, "Exegesis, Medieval," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, 712.

the text in light of eschatology and the final hope that Christians have in a fully redeemed world. Together, these four senses form the *quadriga*. As stated by Augustine of Dacia (d. 1282), the *quadriga* is as follows:

*Littera gesta docet,
quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas,
quo tendas anagogia.*^{5, 6}

This fourfold method originated with Augustine in his book *De doctrina Christiana*. The method was passed on from Augustine through Gregory the Great into the Middle Ages.⁷ Gregory describes the *quadriga* this way: “The words of Holy Scripture are square stones, for they can stand on all sides, because on no side are there rough spots. For in every past event that they narrate, in every future event that they foretell, in every moral saying that they speak, and in every spiritual sense they stand, as it were, on a different side, because they have no roughness.”⁸

Second, scholasticism was a movement that began around the time of Anselm (d. 1109) and was influential even through the era of the Reformation. It was a scholarly movement (thus, “scholasticism”) that found its home in the medieval cathedral schools which in the thirteenth century would give rise to universities. The resurgence of interest in Aristotelian philosophy led to an interest in the dialectic method. At the same time, scholastics worked diligently at codifying the patristic fathers’ orthodoxy into organized systems. Peter Lombard (d. 1160) wrote his *Liber sententiarum* which gathered the main theological topics from the *glossa* and *schola* of biblical commentaries, most of which relied heavily on the patristic fathers. Other works representing the codifications of the Christian faith include the *Gloss ordinaria* of Anselm and the *Expositio continua*

⁵ “The letter teaches what has happened, allegory what one believes, the moral meaning what one does, and anagoge where one is going.”

⁶ McNally, “Exegesis, Medieval,” 708-9.

⁷ Richard A. Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, eds. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

⁸ Gregory the Great, *Hom.* 9, n. 8, in McNally, “Exegesis, Medieval,” 708.

and *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).⁹

Third, humanism was the academic phenomenon that began around the fourteenth century and lasted until the Enlightenment era. It was characterized by a renewed interest in going *ad fontes* (back to the sources) of the Greek and Latin classics, in textual scholarship, and in education in the humanities.¹⁰

Finally, an offshoot of humanism, Hebraism grew from the humanist interest in going *ad fontes* (back to the sources). Christian scholars were now interested in learning the original languages in the biblical text. If scholars learned medieval Hebrew in addition to biblical Hebrew, it enabled them to read the medieval rabbinic commentators.¹¹

Now that the conceptual and historical groundwork has been laid, it is time to begin the analysis of Vermigli's commentary on Judges in order to demonstrate that the above systems of thought (allegory, scholasticism, humanism, and Hebraism), are evident in Vermigli's work, in particular the allegorical element. This will be accomplished by exploring various portions of his commentary on the story of the Levite's wife found in Judges 19.

Vermigli introduces his commentary on Judges 19 with a paraphrase of the story. He writes:

A certaine man being a Levite, had a wyfe, who committed adultery, and fearing the sharpenes of her housband, fled to her Parentes. Not long time after, her husbände went to seeke her, fyndeth her, and is reconciled unto her. The woman as shee returned hom together wyth her husband, was with most fylthy whoredome defiled of the Gabaonites, whereby she miserably perished, and so suffred punishment for her first aduoutry. For God punisheth synnes by synnes. Neither suffered he adultery being not punished by the Magistrates, to go unpunished.¹²

Having paraphrased this portion of the biblical text,

⁹ McNally, "Exegesis, Medieval," 710-1.

¹⁰ W. J. Ong, "Humanism" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 215-6.

¹¹ M. J. DaHood, "Hebrew Studies (in the Christian Church)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6.

¹² Pietro Martire Vermigli. *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges] ...with a very profitable tract of the matter and places* (London: John Day, 1564), fol. 248^v.

Vermigli's first move is to explore the historical situation in which this story of the Levite's wife takes place. The Levite had been living as a stranger in Ephraim, and Vermigli points out that it is not at all unusual that the Levite would be residing in a place other than his hometown; instead, he explains that it was the occupation of Levites to serve as priests for the eleven other tribes and therefore not uncommon that this story finds him living away from home.¹³ In this portion of his commentary, Vermigli has concerned himself with the literal sense of allegorical exegesis.

Vermigli's next move is to broach the philological concern regarding the Levite's current residence on the side of Mount Ephraim. He comments, "This man dwelt as a straunger on the syde of mount Ephraim. The Hebrew word signifieth a side, a hyp or thigh. And by translacion it signifieth a region or coast. And this is a very elegant Metaphore, when there is mencion made of a mountain. He dwelled therefore on the side of mount Ephraim."¹⁴ It is quite clear that humanist philology as well as Hebraism have greatly influenced Vermigli. He is filled with praise for the beauty of the Hebrew language and the possibilities for its translation.

Next, Vermigli delves into the problem of the woman's adultery. He quickly departs from his historical analysis of the text and moves into the tropological sense of the text; drawing on the sin of the Levite's wife, he points out that the wives of ministers in his day ought also to be held to a higher moral standard. He says,

And thoughe in all persons aduoutry is a greivous wicked act, yet in the wyfe of a Leuite or Priest it is farre more grievous, for as much as the holye ministerye ought to bee well spoken of. Wherefore if the daughter of a Priest had played the harlot in her Fathers house, she was not stoned as other were, but burnt with fyre, as it is expressedly wrytten in Deuteromy. But why this adulteresse was not slaine, the cause ... was, for that there was no Magistrate in Israel.¹⁵

¹³ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 248^v.

¹⁴ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 248^v.

¹⁵ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 248^v.

A marginal note confirms that his judgments are applicable to Vermigli's contemporary situation. He writes, "The wyfe of a Minister if she be an adu'tres synneth more grievously then other."¹⁶

Continuing his close reading of the Hebrew text, Vermigli notes the phrase "speake to her harte." He addresses this philological concern by explaining that, in the original Hebrew, this phrase communicates the Levite's desire to offer his estranged wife a chance to repent and be reconciled to himself.¹⁷

Vermigli now departs from the immediate concerns of the biblical text in order to set forth one of his commentary's *loci communes*. The topic here concerns the tropological issue, "Of the reconciliation of the husband and the wife after that adultery hath ben committed." He points out that current civil law prohibits reconciliation after adultery has been committed. He goes on to outline the specific civil laws surrounding adultery, including the policy that a man who retains his wayward wife may himself be condemned as an adulterer. Vermigli therefore sees that the sum of all contemporary law regarding adultery is clearly against the reconciliation of a husband to his sinful wife. However, Vermigli argues that provision should be made for a repentant adulteress to reconcile to her husband, and he calls for the current civil laws to be amended. He concludes, "As touching the civill lawes they are to be corrected by the word of God."¹⁸

In addition, Vermigli now comments on several of the patristic fathers and their view of adultery. Jerome, Chrisostome, and the Council of Orleans judge without exception that the adulteress is unworthy to be reconciled to her husband. On the other hand, Vermigli cites Justinian and Augustine as providing an opportunity for repentance and reconciliation of the adulteress; while calling for severe punishment, both Justinian and Augustine encourage

¹⁶ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 248^v.

¹⁷ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 249^r.

¹⁸ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 250^r.

reconciliation.¹⁹ In this portion of his commentary, the scholastic interest in documenting the patristic fathers' theological views on important topics is evident in Vermigli.

The strongest argument Vermigli makes concerning this case of the adulteress is one which relates this particular Israelite story to the church as found in the New Testament. He comments, "God himself which is onely good, would be the husbände of this church, and that not onely in our time, but also in the times of the fathers. But the church, especially the old church, oftentimes turned aside to idolatry, and comitted whoredome with the Gods of the Gentiles...."²⁰ Similarly, Vermigli mentions the prophets Jeremiah and Hosea, both of whom called the "old church" (Vermigli's term for "Israel") back to God. He concludes, "And if god be redy to receave his wife beyng an adulteresse, man ought also to returne into favor agayne with his wife, especially if she repent, and beginne a new life. For as many as are christian men, professe the imitation of God."²¹ In his connection of a story in Israel with the story of the New Testament church, Vermigli is engaging the allegorical sense of the *quadriga*.

Finished with his *loci communes* on reconciling the adulteress, Vermigli moves on to a commentary on the wise advice given by the Levite's servant, though the Levite does not accept it. For the issue, he cites Aristotle's discussion of the proper relationships of masters and servants. He says:

Aristotle in his Politikes saith, they which excel in mind and counsel ought to beare rule and they which are strong of body must obey. But that cometh not alwayes to passe ... Farther we must not deny, but the prudence and counsels whiche are the giftes of God are not bounde unto the conditions or estates of Lordshyp and servitude ... God geveth them, to them whom he thinketh good, and that most freely, sometymes to servauntes, and sometymes to Lordes, sometymes to poore men, and

¹⁹ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 249^v.

²⁰ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 249^v.

²¹ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 249^v.

sometymes to riche men.²²

This citation of Aristotle is additional evidence of the influence of scholasticism on Vermigli's thinking.

Vermigli then turns to a discussion on the hospitality of the old man in the town of Gibeah. He begins by referencing Hebrews 13:16 and uses it to commend the man's hospitality as an excellent virtue and a "pleasing sacrifice to God." He does not end his exegesis on this topic of proper virtue; instead, he goes on to interpret this old man's hospitality in an eschatological sense. This is the anagogue of allegory. He says: "The sense therefore [of the word "hospitality"] is this, that god doth rejoyse in such sacrifices, and doth accept them with a glad mynde, yea and Christ himselfe also shall say in the last judgement: I was a stranger and ye lodged me, for he that receaveth a straunger, receaveth Christ in him."²³

Yet another example of Vermigli's use of the allegorical sense of interpretation lies in his point that, just as the old man in Gibeah himself was a stranger in the land – as his forefathers had been strangers in Egypt – and the man had compassion on the Levite and his company, so too Christ experienced the difficulties and sufferings as a man, and so is able to have compassion on us when we ourselves suffer.²⁴

A final example of allegorical exegesis in Vermigli is found in his commentary on whether or not it was wrong for the old man in Gibeah to offer the two women to the townspeople. It is not insignificant to point out that, when Scripture is silent in the face of apparent immoral or atrocious behavior of the people of God, the Reformers typically rejected the traditional allegorical interpretations of these difficult passages in favor of more typological arguments. They stated that such and such an atrocity was committed in compliance with God's will so that the particular situation would provide a typological image of the future work of Christ. For example,

²² Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 250^v – 251^r.

²³ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 251^v.

²⁴ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned co[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 252^r.

Augustine provides for Abraham's polygamy by casting him in the typological light of Galatians 4, where Hagar and Sarah represent two covenants, the law and the Spirit respectively.²⁵

In situations which were not to provide typologies, Reformers simply chalk the misdemeanors and atrocities up to natural reactions of human people who have good intentions but are caught in extenuating circumstances. In this method of interpretation, the Reformers are seeking to lessen the culpability of the perpetrator. Since the story of the Levite's wife is not a typology of Christ's future work, most Reformed commentators, in keeping with Augustine, follow the latter route and state that the old man's actions in giving up his daughter and the wife of his guest was the lesser of two evils, for rape between two men was a greater sin than a man's raping of a woman.²⁶

Vermigli, however, departs from his fellow Reformed commentators Pellican, Brenz, and Bucer – each of whom relied on Augustine's interpretation – and argues vehemently that a man's ownership of his wives and daughters in no way allows him to put her in unsafe situations. He says that the host in Gibeah had “no right to prostitute his daughter or his guest's wife. For a father does not have his daughter so in his power that he may expose her to the lusts of others. Nor is the daughter herself obliged to obey in anything that is sin, even if her father ... commands it.”²⁷ What can be deduced in Vermigli's departure from his contemporary commentators on this text is that, unlike most Reformers, Vermigli's categories are not so limited as to force him to decide between typology or an excuse. Instead, Vermigli retains his ability to wrestle with this Old Testament text as the problematic situation that it is. Although Vermigli does not attempt to pinpoint the hand of God in this troublesome story, he does come to a worthwhile conclusion that the rape and murder of this woman was wrong. Because of his versatility, Vermigli's exegetical tendencies put him at an advantage over his fellow Reformers in this situation.²⁸

²⁵ Thompson, “The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation...,” 260.

²⁶ Thompson, “The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation,” 260-1.

²⁷ Vermigli, *Most fruitfull [and] learned cof[m]mentaries [on Judges]*, fol. 253^r.

²⁸ John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible with the Dead* (Grand Rapids, MI:

In summary, Vermigli's commentary on Judges 19 has revealed several systems of thought which influenced his commentary. First, he demonstrated his concern for the literal sense of Scripture with a commentary on the historical reason that the Levite lived as a stranger in Ephraim. Second, the allegorical sense is provided when he says that, just as Christ reconciles the adulteress church to himself, so we should allow repentant adulteresses to be reconciled to their husbands. Another illustration of the allegorical sense is Vermigli's commentary that, as the old man showed compassion on the travelers because he himself was suffering estrangement, so too Christ suffered through a human life so that he could show us compassion. Third, the tropological sense is found in Vermigli's commentary on several occasions, including that the minister's wife is more guilty if convicted of adultery than a woman not married to the minister; that an adulteress should be reconciled to her husband; and that the lesser sin should not be committed, even if it is in order to avoid a greater sin. Fourth, Vermigli interprets the hospitality of the old man in as anagoge. He says that hospitality we show to strangers today will be judged on the last day. Fifth, the influence of humanism on Vermigli's exegesis is evident in the philological concerns he raises concerning the translation of "on the hip of Mount Ephraim" and "speak to her heart." Finally, scholasticism has left its mark on Vermigli's commentary in his cataloging of patristic theology on the issue of reconciling adulteresses and in his quotation of Aristotle regarding the relationship of masters and servants.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that allegorical exegesis is still clearly visible in the work of Vermigli's commentary on Judges 19. There is additional humanist and scholastic influence. Vermigli's varied influences lead to the conclusion that he serves as a representative of biblical exegesis in the transitional period between the traditional, pre-critical exegesis of the patristic fathers and medieval doctors and the modern, higher critical methods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond. In addition, when

Eerdmans, 2007), 197. John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209.

the allegorical exegesis of Vermigli's work is made clear, it provides decisive evidence that the arrival of the Reformation did not bring allegory to an instant demise. Today's Reformed exegetes might do well to consider the fact that one of their own Reformers did not dispose of allegory, but relished the ability to interpret a text with a variety of meanings. David Steinmetz makes a fervent argument that modern biblical exegesis, especially with regard to the Old Testament, has indeed lost something in its rejection of allegory. He says:

Only by confessing the multiple sense of Scripture is it possible for the church to make use of the Hebrew Bible at all or to recapture the various levels of significance in the unfolding story of creation and redemption. The notion that Scripture has only one meaning is a fantastic idea and is certainly not advocated by the biblical writers themselves.²⁹

That said, it would do well for biblical exegetes of the Reformed persuasion to take a greater interest in the commentaries of Peter Martyr Vermigli.

²⁹ David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *Theology Today*, vol. 37 (1980).

Fear, Female Sexuality, and the Church: A Pastoral Challenge

Amanda C. Bakale

The way we think about and feel about ourselves as bodies will always find expression in the way we think and feel about the world and about God. We experience the world only through our body selves.¹

Introduction

Women's bodies have been denigrated, abused, reduced, used, cast aside, and sexualized. It is no small wonder then that women have a difficult time relating to their own bodies. To what are they to relate? Rarely is the female body allowed to be exactly what it is: the body of a particular woman. Rather it is portrayed through images and films, books and history, as the object of the male gaze, the reason for lust, the cause of men's stumbling. It is either virginized or overly-sexualized - the image of either the Madonna or the whore. In order for women to relate to their own bodies they must struggle against the myriad of images that history and religion, culture and science, has placed on the female body. The prevalence of eating disorders in young women and sexual "dysfunction" in older women provide insight into the difficulty of such a task. Reclaiming one's own body from the lies and myths that surround the female figure is the daunting work of each individual woman.

If the above quote is true, which I think it is, and how we think and feel about our own bodies bears directly on how we view others and God, then the disconnection between women and their bodies presents a profound pastoral challenge, not only for women but also for the church. If the church perpetuates this degradation of the female body then we should consider the negative effects on the church's understanding of God. While it is outside the scope of this current paper to address this later concern, I will explore, albeit in a cursory fashion, the fear that surrounds female sexuality, especially

¹ Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 20.

in the church. Acknowledging the complexity and broad nature of such a topic, this paper focuses on female masturbation as an access point or litmus test for the issues at hand. Female masturbation simultaneously exemplifies the stigma around female sexuality and offers a way of bridging the disconnect between women and their own bodies.

Masturbation

Percentages for men and women who masturbate vary from study to study and across the decades since the Kinsey Report. The statistics most typically cited put the numbers around 90 percent of men and between 43 and 95 percent of women.² The numbers for men tend to stay within the 90s, but for women, percentages present a wider gap from study to study. In college age women, the average frequency of masturbation in a month is between one and six times.³

The statistics show that the majority of both women and men masturbate on a fairly regular basis, though men are shown to masturbate on average more than women. Considering this fact, it is perplexing why female masturbation is seen as taboo in comparison to male masturbation. Female self-stimulation is untouched or not mentioned at all. Masturbation is often seen as a “male problem.” In our contemporary cultural context, masturbation as a “male problem” is easily dismissed and accepted, often times, with humor. (One merely has to consider the multitude of slang terms for male masturbation in order to demonstrate this.)

The portrayal of masturbation as a “male problem” rests on two faulty assumptions: 1) The assumption that only men masturbate, and 2) The assumption that it is a problem. We can dispense with the first assumption easily enough by directing our attention back to the statistics provided in the previous paragraphs. The second assumption is not so easily set aside. The arguments go back and forth on either side. The most effective argument against masturbation is the role of fantasy which can accompany the act. Fantasy can be dangerous, but is not necessarily an essential element of masturbation, though it should be taken into account in any ethic of

² Keith Sanford, “Toward a Masturbation Ethic,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 22.1 (1994), 23.

³ Sanford, “Toward a Masturbation Ethic,” 23.

masturbation, however that is not my intent now. Contrasted with the church's teaching against and cultural embarrassment regarding masturbation, more recent research shows it as a natural impulse for both men and women. Parents report children as young as two years old exploring their own bodies through self-stimulation. In her book, *Liberating Masturbation*, Betty Dobson writes:

Masturbation, of course, is our first natural sexual activity. It's the way we discover our eroticism, the way we learn to respond sexually, the way we learn to love ourselves and build self-esteem.⁴

Self-stimulation as self-discovery and knowledge lies at the heart of a positive masturbation ethic.

If masturbation is a natural sexual activity practiced by the majority of men and women, then why does the stigma remain? More specifically, why do we as a culture (and a church) accept it as normal for men to masturbate, but balk at the idea of women doing so? Why do women, perhaps especially women, consider such an idea dirty or disgusting? The easy answer would be to appeal to the remaining vestiges of Victorian sexual repression. However, I would like to propose that the culprit lies in centuries of misrepresentation of female sexuality - either demonizing or suppressing female sexual desire.

Women and Sexual Desire

Shame surrounding masturbation for women includes not only the stigma of the act itself, shared by both men and women, but also the guilt connected to the sense of having a sex drive, of admitting to having a *desire* for sexual pleasure. Men are expected to be so driven, but women, especially Christian women, are not. The reasons for this are multi-layered and complex, but I would like to highlight some themes from church tradition, history, and cultural context.

Women and sexual desire have been seen as a dangerous pair throughout the centuries. Within church tradition, this is an even

⁴ As quoted by Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, "Chapter Nine: Sexual Behavior," in *Our Sexuality*, (9th ed; Redwood City, CA: Benjamin Cummings, 2005).

more definite reality. From the early Christian writers of the second and third centuries right up through to today, female sexual desire has been demonized or suppressed but never acknowledged as good.

Beginning with the church tradition, women have born the burden of both Eve and Mary. As daughters of Eve, women were seen as the temptress and wanton who led Adam into sin. Historian, Georges Duby, chronicles the perception of women in the 12th century through the writings of that time. He quotes directly from one such treatise on the fall, which stands as representative of the literature as a whole:

For her [Eve], the punishment was threefold...because the quantity of the sin is three times more in the woman than in the man: she had let herself be seduced, *she had sought pleasure* and she had made Adam share it.⁵

For Eve, it was sexual pleasure that brought about her descent into sin. Such was the portrayal of the Fall that the clergy of the time saw all women culpable of sexual sin as inherent in their make up as women: “All women...with the exception of the Mother of God, conceived and conceive ‘in iniquity,’ in filth and in sin, not only original sin but that incited by their own desire for sexual pleasure.”⁶ Women were at root uncontrollable sexual creatures. This interpretation of the Fall narrative, which found its inception in the early Christian writers, led to centuries of demonization of female sexuality in Christian thought and practice.

Fast forward to the 1800s in Western culture and the Victorian sensibility was that women were to be like the Virgin Mary, pure and spotless. There are many examples of this attitude in Victorian medical literature. For instance, the initial prohibition against women riding bicycles was based on the fact that “By leaning forward a bit, women could beget or foster the habit of masturbation...no habit is more tyrannical than the dominion of unrestrained sexual drive.”⁷ A male physician of the time wrote that

⁵ Georges Duby, *Women in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 41 (emphasis mine).

⁶ Duby, *Women in the Twelfth Century*, 42 (emphasis mine).

⁷ Helen Sterk, “Whatever Happened to the Fig Leaf?” in *After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 326.

“The majority of women are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind.”⁸

This line of thinking dominated the Victorian understanding of women and their place in society - the cohort of man, but lacking any sexual desire in their own bodies. A study conducted by a woman of the time, Celia Mosher, revealed that the reality was exactly the opposite. Interviewing married women across a span of 30 years, she found that the majority of women did indeed experience sexual desire.⁹ Despite the cultural repression of female sexual desire, the voices of real women show that no such denial of female sexual desire could make it go away.

Since the beginnings of the feminist movement and the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the gender stereotypes and harmful narratives of female sexual desire sketched out (briefly and over generalized) here have begun to break down, but we still live with the detrimental effects of several centuries of female sexual desire as either sinful or invisible. The tension between actual sexual desire and the cultural and religious pressure endures. Lynn M. Phillips, a professor of gender studies, interviewed thirty young women in their late teens/early twenties about how they grew up in relation to their sexuality and how they now give expression to it as young women. The stories she relates are telling of the tensions that women encounter surrounding their own bodies and sexuality. After an analysis of what she terms “pleasing woman discourse,” Phillips writes:

These messages [depictions of ‘traditional femininity’] conveyed the notion that women’s bodies are not the sites of active desire, but rather objects to be admired and kept under control.¹⁰

Phillips’s interviews with young women of today provide evidence that the weight of such narratives perpetuated by church and society still bear on women’s relationship to their own bodies. As Phillips

⁸ As quoted in Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 10.

⁹ Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 11.

¹⁰ Lynn M. Phillips, *Flirting With Danger: Young Women’s Reflections on Sexuality and Domination* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 40.

observes of the participants in her study:

The silence surrounding female pleasure and desire, juxtaposed with the presumption of male sexual desire, suggests that young women's active sexualities are inconsistent with 'normal' womanhood...suggested to [the participants] that female sexuality must be kept hidden, and that their own desires were somehow trivial, dangerous, or abnormal.¹¹

The Pastoral Challenge

How, then, do we speak to women? How do we speak into the fear surrounding female sexuality held not only by men, but also by women? How do we help in bridging the disconnect between women and their bodies?

Having grown up in a traditional, bordering on fundamentalist, Christian home, I was raised in the framework of the typical gender stereotypes - not only culturally conditioned, but baptized by my church's teaching that such roles are as things were created to be. I know the psychological and spiritual damage that such a view of female and male sexuality can have on a person. Outside of the urgency of my personal context, one can look to the global level and see that the urgency of addressing this issue is stressed by the fact of female genital mutilation on a large scale. Little girls and young women undergo even the removal of the clitoris. Such an act is fueled by the fear of and denigration of sexual desire in women.

A right understanding of sexuality will go far in correcting this erroneous view and counteracting the harmful narratives surrounding female sexuality. Recognizing that the capacity for sexual pleasure is inherent in humans - both male and female. Sexual desire on the part of both sexes is natural and right. Wrestling out the remaining vestiges of a body/soul dualism, it is our responsibility as church leaders and pastoral counselors to voice a positive view of the body. For women, this means being encouraged and allowed to understand our own bodies. In order to bridge the disconnect between body and self, women need to embrace the fact of their own sexual desire and not feel dirty or sinful in doing so.

Health care professionals have gone far beyond pastors in this

¹¹ Phillips, *Flirting with Danger*, 46.

area. In my interview with Nancy VerMerris, a nurse-practitioner who ran Calvin College's health care center for many years, it became apparent how much pastors and counselors have to learn from the doctors and nurses who treat women specifically. Years of working with young women who came into the health care center drove home for Nancy the need for a right articulation of female sexuality. Along with a gynecologist I interviewed, Nancy encouraged the use of self-stimulation for women. Viewing masturbation as a natural impulse and one practiced by the majority of men and women, these health care practitioners counseled their female patients to listen to and embrace their bodies.

Self-stimulation is an avenue for women to get to know their own particular bodies apart from the sexualized media culture telling them what their bodies should be like and apart from the church tradition saying that their feelings of pleasure and desire are sinful. The real sin in sexuality is alienation and estrangement from one's embodied reality. According to the quote we began with: "The way we think and feel about ourselves as bodies will always find expression in the way we think and feel about the world and about God." When we are disconnected from our bodies, it follows that we are disconnected from each other and God. To address this chasm between self and body is a pastoral challenge that the church has yet to fully answer.

Conclusion: A Female Voice of Desire

O that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

These passionate words are the voice of a woman. The Song of Songs, named so as to distinguish it as the greatest of songs, presents the female voice as one of desire.¹² Without qualification or hesitation, the poetic song allows the woman to speak unabashedly of her desire for her lover. Contrary to the allegorical readings of this text which have masked the human side of this story for the sake of obscuring the good of the body through over-spiritualization, the text

¹² Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 144-145.

offers a strong example of pure embodiment and sexuality.

Reclaiming the poetic voice of desire found in the Song of Songs provides a way of counteracting the negative narratives espoused in the church for so long regarding female sexuality. In contrast to the images of the temptress Eve and the spotless Mary, the voice of the young woman in the Song of Songs needs to be included in the images that we attach to female sexuality. Here we have a poem from our own Scriptures that presents a female voice of desire with acceptance and rightly ordered understanding.

Against the misconception of women as the passive recipients of male sexual desire, this poem presents a young woman as the main actor in her own story of fully-embodied desire. She seeks him, brings him, beckons to him, and welcomes him. Women today need to hear the voice of one who is not ashamed of her body, who claims control of her own self, and appreciates the full sexual reality of being made embodied creatures.

To encourage women to know themselves, to see their natural sexual desires as good and to be rightly ordered, is the task of pastoral ministry to women – for the sake of our mothers, our sisters, our friends, and our daughters.

God's Church I Corinthians 3:1-9

John Lee

Nothing like a good thing to bring out the worst in us.

Nothing like a good thing to bring out the worst in us. That's one of the painful paradoxes of human life this side of Eden. The very best situations in life often bring out the very nastiest in our characters.

Take the simple act of getting your family here this morning. Family is a good thing. Church is a good thing. You'd think putting two good things together should add up to one great thing, right? In that case it must have been just wonderful getting ready. You and your spouse probably shared tender moments together, using your abundant free time and the pervading sense of peace to do devotions and pray together. The kids probably woke up early and were all smiles. They shared the bathroom politely. Everyone was excited about coming – even begging: “Mom, can we go early? Please.”

Judging by your snickers, I'm guessing that's not the way it went this morning. Many of us know that some of the most hectic times of our week together occur while getting ready for church in the morning. As we arrive at the church's doorstep, we are often at each other's throats. Before our children experience the gracious love of God in our service, they have often experienced the ungracious impatience of their parents trying to get them there on time.

Even once we get our family to church, things don't improve much. Worship should be one of the greatest delights of our Christian life together, but across denominations, say the two words “worship unity” and you'll get blank stares. Blinking eyes. Say the two words “worship wars” and you'll get a flood of battle stories. Frustrated by a different style of honoring God's name, we call each other names. Upset by the presence of a new drum set, the only clashing we hear is of personalities. Seeking to bring heaven to earth, we often let in a little too much hell.

Indeed, even with things as simple and profound as church

and worship, sometimes there is nothing like a good thing to bring out the worst in us.

TROUBLE IN THE TEXT: The Corinthian Church was worldly

You don't have to tell the Apostle Paul that. He knows. Big time. On his second missionary journey he spent a year and a half planting a church in the bustling Greek city of Corinth. It was a smashing success. A great advance of the gospel. A glorying example of a church. Well, sort of.

You see, now Paul holds in his hand a letter from the church in Corinth. It's not good. They are not getting along. At all. Seems they've divided up into different parties. Rival camps. The letter they wrote Paul is a laundry list of petty infighting. On top of that, someone from Chloe's household has fresh news of shocking schisms and sex. People who should be worshipping together, aren't. People who shouldn't be sleeping together are. It's a mess.

As Tom Long tells it, the little flock at Corinth was huddled in vicious little cliques that were at each other's throats. There was, for example, the Holy Spirit camp – more devotional and spiritual than everyone else. As Martin Luther said about another group, they were convinced that they had swallowed the Holy Spirit “feathers and all.”

Contending with these “holier than thou” were the social action group – the “more ethical than thou.” They were, as Paul said later in the letter, willing to have themselves disposed of everything they had and even have their bodies burned for justice.

Then there was also the wisdom group – those “smarter than thou” – who just knew more than everyone else.

And on top of the spiritual superheroes, spiritual do-gooders, and spiritual know-it-alls, the poor church at Corinth was fighting about issues – fighting about the Lord's Supper, fighting about Baptism, fighting about leadership, fighting about speaking in tongues, fighting about spiritual gifts... There was sexual immorality that would make Paris Hilton blush. And to top it all off, a good many of the Corinthians did not even believe in the resurrection.

Other than that, the congregation seemed to be doing fine.¹

So with that letter from Corinth in his hand and the Chloe family report in his ear, Paul sits down to write a letter back that zeros in on that problem. He names the symptom in 3:3: “jealousies and quarreling.” And he gives the diagnosis: there are two types of churches, spiritual and worldly. The Corinthian church is worldly. Decidedly. Thinking they have it all together, they have torn themselves apart. Thinking they are spiritual, they have proven themselves worldly. Thinking they’ve got the right teachers, they have lost sight of the right teachings.

The amazing thing is that in the midst of all that ruckus, the Corinthians thought they were doing pretty good. Paul’s ironic language picks up some of their boastful slogans. Apparently they had taken to calling themselves the “spiritual people” (πνευματικοί). Not content with that lofty moniker, they had also taken to name dropping. “Well, that’s very nice for you, but I follow Paul.” “Oh really, well, I just happen to be a close personal friend of Apollos.” “Oh yeah? Well Peter and I go way back...”

What makes all this schism and strife especially sad is that the Church in Corinth was just beginning. It should be in its honeymoon stage, not divorce court. And it’s not like it had 1000’s of people. According to commentator Charles Talbot, the church was comprised of probably no more than 50 people. 50 people! And yet they managed to be broken up into enough rival pieces to make a jig-saw puzzle.

Founded by the Apostle Paul himself, filled with the Holy Spirit, zealous for social justice...the great Corinthian church is... a royal mess.

Sometimes nothing brings out the worst in us like something good. Even in church.

TROUBLE IN THE WORLD: We are worldly

Maybe especially in church?

This past spring I was in the Holy Land (Israel), in the Holy

¹ Above description adapted from notes taken on "Saints" A Sermon from 1 Corinthians 1 by Thomas G. Long at CTS – heard in Advanced Preaching, September 5, 2007.

City (Jerusalem), for Holy Week (Easter).

Near the old city center stands the “Church of the Holy Sepulcher” – a massive cathedral supposedly containing both Golgotha and the Garden Tomb under one epic roof. Surely with that much religious real-estate in one place, it’s certain to be holy. Except that, as we’ve seen in Corinth, sometimes nothing brings out the worst in us like something good.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is divided up between various Christian groups – the Catholics control a part, the Greek Orthodox another, Armenians still another, Coptics another, Ethiopian and Syriac Orthodox have some cubby-holes too. Things are not good among them. At all. They can’t even agree who can open the doors, so since 1192, twice-a-day, two Muslim families share the task of opening and closing the church with the only key. Not because the Muslims took control, but because the Christian factions were out-of-control.

But during Easter Week the Christians try to come together. Especially around a miracle. According to tradition, every year on Holy Saturday – the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, God blesses His church with “Holy Fire.” Tens-of-thousands of Christian pilgrims from churches of every stripe, all over the world, pack the church. They pack the front courtyard. They pack the streets for blocks all around. Chattering and silent, young and old, well-dressed and poor, they all hold unlit candles. At around 1:00pm the Greek Orthodox Patriarch enters the incense-clouded recesses of the monument over Christ’s tomb. He prays and waits, and every year, according to tradition, God sends miraculous fire to light his candle. He in turn lights the Armenian Patriarch’s candle who entered with him. The Armenian priest then exits and lights others, and so the holy fire spreads through the city and is taken by pilgrims back in lanterns all over the world. It is a most holy moment, in the most holy space of the most holy building, in the most holy city, during the most holy week.

Several friends and I were there. This is what happened, as the Armenian Patriarch retold it to my friend that night. “After lighting my candle, the Greek Patriarch tried to push me against the wall of the narrow passage so he could exit with the flame first. So I grabbed him by the neck and started beating him against the wall.”

Unfortunately in the tussle, the Armenian's flame blew out, and the pinned-in Greek Patriarch refused to relight it. With a satisfied smile, the Patriarch went on: "So I grabbed my 'holy lighter' from my pocket, lit it, beat him out, and still lit everyone else's candles."

And so went the story of this year's "Holy Fire" – still burning this very moment in churches around the world. A flame that is wholly, wholly, wholly unholy. Sometimes nothing brings out the worst in us like something good.

And its not just believers on the other side of the world.

In his book on the church titled, *The Body*, Charles Colson tells of a police break-up at Emmanuel Baptist Church of a congregational brawl in front of the communion table. Instigated by a fist-fight between the pastor, Donald Waite, and an elder, soon the whole body of believers was at each other's throats. All the while, the church organist tried to keep calm by playing "Blest be the Ties that Bind."

And it's not just the Baptists.

Even *our* church.

We've got different names, but the Corinthian's party cliquishness is still in vogue. I follow John Calvin (Calvinist). I follow John Wesley (Armenian). I follow Jim Wallis (Christian Left). I follow Jim Dobson (Christian Right). Some of us follow Rob Bell while others want to ring his bell.² We feast on schism over a bowl of alphabet soup: RCA, CRC, PRC, URC, NRC... And that's just our immediate siblings.

According to the World Christian Database assembled by Gordon Conwell, there are 9000+ Christian denominational groups: from the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church. Adding in all the independent churches, the World Christian Encyclopedia lists 33,830 Christian (and marginal) denominations in the world. That's all a far cry from Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17 that we may be one.

At the heart of such divisions, like in Corinth, are our jealousies and quarrels. Our pride and elitism. Sure such pride can take many different forms. Some of us boast in spiritual gifts, some in

² Closer to home: I follow Gijsbert Haan (CRC). I follow Albertus van Raalte (RCA).²

scholarly knowledge, some in doctrinal correctness or moral uprightness or proper political concerns. Some of us, swearing off any such pride, boast then in our humility. But we all boast.

So reading the Corinthian's mail this morning smarts. Perhaps Paul's volley at the Corinthians lands a bit too squarely on our own laps. We too are worldly – not because we play cards, watch movies, and dance. We are worldly because we gamble away God's gift of unity, watch for each other's weaknesses, and step on each other's toes.

We do so, at heart, Paul tells us, because we think this whole enterprise is ours. That it is our church. Our building. Our holy flame.

And when the church is ours, we fight with might and main to keep it that way. To keep it the way it's always been. Or to keep it moving to where we think it should be. To keep out who doesn't belong. Or to keep in who shouldn't leave. Sometimes, in the midst of it all, you wonder if it's worth it. One in five Presbyterian ministers does just that – and flees ministry within five years of starting it. The conflicts, the controversies, the jealousies, the quarrels – the best things in life bringing out the worst – it just all gets to be too much. Sometimes you just want to cut and run.

GRACE IN THE TEXT: God says the earthy Corinthian Church is Heavenly

You might think Paul felt the same. That he would want to cut and run. That with the Corinthian's letter of division and derision in hand, Paul would pen a "dear john" letter, tell them off, and cut them loose. But God doesn't let him. Not at all. In the same breath the Spirit-led Paul calls the Corinthians "infants," he locates their crib in God's nursery. They are "infants *in Christ*." In the same lines where he calls their present behavior "worldly" he recognizes their true status as "heavenly." For all their imperfections, for all their divisions, for all their arrogance and petty jealousy, the Spirit nonetheless enables Paul to say that they are "God's field. God's building." Amazing.

Let's unpack those images.

First, Paul takes his squabbling spiritual toddlers, sets them on his lap, and gives them a time out. They are babies. But they are God's babies. They are infants "in Christ." And Paul is their

wet-nurse (Verse 1). That's what the Greek word for "milk" (γάλα) suggests.

The Corinthian church is not ready for steak, but they are ready for nourishment, and Paul pictures himself lovingly bending over them and nursing them in the milk of the gospel.

Second, Paul pictures the church as a farm. The Church at Corinth is "God's ranch."

They are an overgrown field. But they are God's field (Verse 9). And Paul is God's farm hand, tilling up the hard soil of their hearts, picking up the rocks of pride and doubt, fertilizing it with the love of God, and nestling the seed of the gospel in that cultivated earth of humbled human hearts.

Such images of their supercharged church being a nursery, not a steakhouse; of their super-charged spiritual lives being an unkempt field, not a garden, must have been hard medicine to the prideful Corinthians. But it was God's medicine. It was freeing.

To a church taken with name dropping, the Spirit of God points them to the name above every name.

To a church prideful that they had it all, the Spirit of God reminds us that it is God who really has it all. The church was not theirs. Not theirs to screw up or to save. The church didn't even belong to their great leaders. "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (Verse 7).

Only God, who makes things grow.

Only God.

Only God.

The self-mature Corinthians are but children. God is the true parent. Apollos and Paul are but field hands. God is the true owner. The factious religious camps are but bricks. God is the true architect and builder.

The Church is God's!

GRACE IN THE WORLD: God says our earthy Church is Heavenly

That same amazing truth is God's word of grace for us this morning!

Sometimes there is nothing like a good thing to bring out the worst in us. But the good news of the gospel is that there is nothing

like God to bring out the best in us, even in the midst of our worst.

In the midst of all our quibbles and squabbles, God says that we are his church. In the midst of all our infighting and backbiting, God says that we are his people.

In spite of all our pride and pomp, God calls us his field.

In spite of all of our jealousy and rivalry, God calls us his building.

We seem worldly, God sees us as heavenly.

We seem divided, God sees us as united.

We see the church as ours, God sees it as His.

His responsibility

His joy.

His Body.

His Bride.

Our church is God's!

That is freeing news. Great news. Amazing news. The church isn't our headache, our heartache, or our ego trip. The church isn't ours at all. It's God's! Only God's.

You teach Sunday school, not to keep this love boat afloat, but because the God who owns not only this churchly vessel, but the sea it floats in – calls you to.

We evangelize, not to fill our pews or meet our church budget, but because the God who has made all in His image, loves this world so much that He uses broken people like us to spread the Good News.

We dig into Scripture and seek doctrinal purity, not because we're locking ourselves up in a defensive fortress to keep hold of the truth, but because God's truth holds us and sets us free to share it.

And the implications of this truth reach beyond our walls. Since the church is God's, then He can bring it in us, through us, outside of us, even in-spite of us. Since the church is God's, no human hands can overcome it. Since the church is God's, no human walls can contain it. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church, not because we are so prayerful, but because God is so powerful. God's church prevails because God presides. It is His church.

Let's try bringing that heavenly concept down to earth.

Earlier we looked at how we messed up a most holy moment in a most holy place, at a most holy time. Maybe it would help us catch Paul's good word to us if we can see God's redemptive work through the church in even a very unholy place at a very unholy time.

While serving as a missionary in Nicaragua, I once coordinated a work team from Bethel CRC in Edmonton, Canada. We were to work in a dusty coastal city named *El Corinto*, helping a Nazarene congregation build a small Christian school next to their church. Following a recommendation from the local pastor, I booked an entire hotel a few blocks away, hidden away off a rutted, dirt street.

The team arrived and we worked hard, clearing away the field next to the church, putting up the blocks of the building. At night we returned to the hotel – and I began noticing things. I noticed that the bedroom doors had slots on them – for sliding money in or out discreetly. Interesting. I then noticed that the carports had curtain rods, where one could pull a curtain across to hide one's car. Strange. Last, I noticed that the doors had stickers for “Body Guard” – and it dawned on me in alarm three nights in, that they were advertisements not for an antiperspirant, but male contraceptives. It all finally clicked. Here I was with a North American *church* work group staying in an “Auto-Hotel,” a place that normally rents rooms by the hour. Not for cat-naps either. I was horrified.

The next day I spoke with the owners and the pastor who had connected me with them. The story came out. It had been an Auto-Hotel, but because of the ministry of the local church, the owners had just recently come to know Christ. Under the discipleship of God's people, the Holy Spirit was now enabling them to use their business for the Kingdom of Light instead of the kingdom of darkness. This church work group was their first customer.

Now the old stickers for “Body Guard” condoms hang below the newly placed verses from Psalms. A place that had once been used for sexual immorality was now helping different denominations work together. And I knew the transformation was real when on a following evening, we returned from service with the Nazarene church and the green parrot in the courtyard was singing a new song. “*Alabare, Alabare...Alabare a mi Señor.*” “Alleluia, Alleluia... Alleluia to my Lord.” That is the Church of God at work!

Bringing transformation. Resulting in praise to God. Reflecting His great glory in the midst of great brokenness.

Sometimes God chooses the very worst things in life to bring out His best.

That, people of God, is God at work through His Church. Planting the seeds of the gospel through imperfect people. Watering those seeds through still other cracked pots. Giving surprising growth through His own Spirit. The Church is God's!

Reformed clergy and Roman Catholic cardinals.

Pious Presbyterians and partying Pentecostals.

Laughing Lutherans and weeping Wesleyans,

In steepled churches and domed cathedrals,

In small house fellowships, and renovated shopping malls ...

The Church is God's.

He owns it.

He loves it.

He draws us into it.

He grows us up through it.

The Church is God's....

In Christ, we are His.

Amen!

Scraping Off Our Scales: Lev 14:1-20; Matt 8:1-4; Heb 7:23-28¹

Chelsey L. Harmon

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.” He was a boss and a bully and didn’t really have any friends. But one day he went on the adventure of a lifetime following his four cousins through a picture in the guest bedroom into the world of C.S. Lewis’ Narnia.

Eustace spends most of the time on their trip pouting and not helping out with any of the chores. Then one night, while the rest of the group is setting up camp, Eustace sneaks away to take a nap. He falls upon a little lake and cave down in a ravine. Inside the cave is a dying dragon sitting on a huge treasure. The dragon comes out of the cave, weakly walks over to the lake to get a drink, it dies when it reaches the water, blood dripping from the corner of its mouth.

It’s begun to rain, so Eustace decides to go into the dragon’s cave. When he finds all of the treasure, he schemes about what to do with his riches. Then he falls fast asleep. “Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts, he turned into a dragon himself.”

After first Eustace thinks about his newfound power and likes the ability to terrorize others even more. But then, he realizes that he doesn’t want those things, he wants to be friends, not a dragon, “a monster cut off from the whole human race.” And he cries big, heavy dragon tears in the moonlight.

Without realizing it, Eustace eats the dead dragon lying by the water and then he flies back to where his friends are camped. But they can’t help him, no matter how much Eustace wants them to. For days, Eustace is trapped as a dragon.

But he doesn’t stay a dragon forever. One night, Aslan the lion comes to him and leads him to a garden on top of a hill with a huge well. Water bubbles up from the bottom of the well, and Eustace senses immediately that being in it would ease his pain and suffering

¹ First preached at Akron CRC, January 2008.

as a dragon. But Aslan says that he must undress first—and being a dragon, the only clothes he’s wearing are his scales.

So Eustace begins to tear off his scales and peels off his whole dragon skin. It’s all at once the most hideous and beautiful thing he’s ever seen. But as he is about to step into the water, he sees that there’s another layer of scales. And after he takes off this layer, there’s another. Eustace realizes that it’s no use—he can’t get the scales off by himself.

Then Aslan, the huge lion says that Eustace must let him do it.

“The very first tear he made was so deep,” Eustace recalls, “that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. . . Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off—just as I though I’d done it myself the other three times, only they hadn’t hurt—and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly-looking than the others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me. . . and threw me into the water. And I realized that I’d been turned into a boy again.”

This story from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* tells about Aslan, the God character of Lewis’ works, restoring Eustace back to full life. Leviticus 14 tells us how God restores a person in need of being cleansed back to full life.

The one to be cleansed in Leviticus 14 has lost his place in the community. Standing on the outside of the camp, he is forced to observe the everyday lives of his friends and family from a distance. Like Eustace, the one to be cleansed is not able to remedy his own situation. He is as good as dead. Because he is outside of the camp, the one to be cleansed is in the dangerous, chaotic world—the place outside of the presence of God; the place outside the comfort of life.

Unlike Eustace, however, the one to be cleansed didn’t do anything to deserve his banishment from the camp. His skin disease wasn’t caused by greed (as it was in Eustace’s case) or any other sin for that matter. It was simply the result of living in a fallen, broken world. Nonetheless, according to the Torah, the Law the Israelite’s followed, the one to be cleansed had to be removed from the presence

of God and his community until he was healed. It's important to know that this man did not have what we think of as leprosy today; he probably had a rash or some other type of infection—something that was not permanent but marked a contamination of what was once whole, healthy, skin. This is why most modern translations use the phrase “the one to be cleansed” instead of “leper” (it's also a better translation of the original Hebrew). People whose entire skins were covered by disease were still part of the community because it was constantly present and was therefore considered part of their whole person.

So the one to be cleansed is sent out for a week. It is a week where he is essentially living in the land of the dead, beyond the safety of the camp, the tent where God's presence is, and away from friends and family. It is a week that takes great faith and prayerful trust that God will restore health. It is a week of contemplation and a time to be devoted to God in worship. And when the week is up, the priest comes out to check on him. The priest, the one who represents God to the community, the mediator between God and the people, leaves the confines of the camp and comes to the one to be cleansed in the land of the dead.

And this is when the mysterious working of God begins. If the priest finds no more remnants of the infection he gives the one to be cleansed some pretty strange orders: he is to supply two living birds, some red wood, some red yarn and a clay bowl with fresh, living water. The priest kills one of the birds and pours its red blood into the bowl; then he puts the red wood and red yarn into the red blood and dips the living bird into the blood before releasing it into the wild. The living bird carries away the disease and any sin of the one to be cleansed, taking with it the symbolic death he carried because of his rash.

Then the one to be cleansed has to cut off *all* of his hair and bathe himself in fresh, living, water. He can get back into the community, but he can't live with his family for another week—he's got to sleep outside his own house, still somewhat estranged. Not the person he once was, not the dead person he was outside the camp, but not the person he is to be after being healed and cleaned.

This change happens with the next two sacrifices. The lambs are offered outside the tent of meeting- God's dwelling place- and

their red blood is sprinkled on the extremities of the one to be cleansed—his earlobe, his thumb, his toe. And after sprinkling oil in the tent, the priest pours the oil on the one to be cleansed's head. By these actions, the priest has declared that the one to be cleansed belongs completely to God—his ears to hear God's word, his hands to do God's work, and his feet to follow God's path. The anointing physically shows the one to be cleansed that he has been chosen and healed and forgiven by God.

The one to be cleansed is alive again. He is clean. Like Eustace, he has been scraped clean and made a better person than he was before.

In our New Testament readings, we learn that Jesus, as *our* priest, scrapes us clean and makes us better people than we were before by his life-giving sacrifice on the cross. Following the example of the priests of the Old Testament, Jesus came down to earth; he came down to the land of the dead to save and heal and cleanse all of those he has chosen.

And it doesn't matter if we're like Eustace or if we're like the one in our text, because each of us are both of them. Eustace was greedy, and that's why he turned into a dragon. But Aslan forgave him of his sins and washed him clean. We sit upon our own piles of treasure and plan and scheme how to use it for ourselves and we don't care about anyone else. Or sometimes we play favorites and we only care for certain people—the people we know will help us sometime in the future. We cheat, we lie, we hurt with our words and deeds. We do these things to others, we do them to God, and we do them to ourselves. We live in a culture that values and praises all of the things that God tells us to give up.

In September of 2005, Troy Reinstra, a member of the Christian Reformed Church and a convicted felon behind bars, wrote an article for the *Banner*. I'd like to share some of his story with you:

My life as a teenager revolved around drugs, crime, and broken relationships. I was married and divorced, became the father of three children, and served five years in prison—all by the time I turned 23. When things couldn't seem to get any worse, they did. In 1995 I committed armed robbery and was sentenced to serve a life term in the Michigan prison system.

Then, on the evening of Dec. 12, 2002, I had a conversation with a fellow prisoner who spoke to me about the love of God, the realities of heaven and hell, and the availability of salvation through Jesus Christ. I returned to my cell with the realization that I was guilty of a wasted life and rebellion against God. Sin had been my burden, and its weight was on the verge of breaking me. With nowhere left to run, I wept quietly in the dark while confessing my sin and guilt before God's throne of grace.

Sin marks us. Like the dragon scales, it sticks to us. And no matter how hard we try, we can't remove the scales and gunk of sin on our own. But how hard we try! We go to see counselors to help with our addictions. We try to be nicer to people by writing nice notes. We pray hard; really hard. Like Troy, we weep over sins and loneliness. We do all of the things that we should do as Christians, but somehow, every thing we do to pull off the scales of sin fail, and we're left with a new skin that looks and feels just like the old one.

Like the one to be cleansed, we live in a fallen world. Things happen to us that we have no control over. A loved one dies. We struggle to find a job that will pay the bills. We are born with genetic defects and people die from tsunamis. Our world seems to be always on the brink of chaos. Everyday in the news we hear and read stories of mass murder and widespread poverty. These are things that are just too big for us to take on by ourselves. Later in his article, Troy writes about the brokenness of prison life-- not just for inmates but also for their families:

According to the Christian Reformed Church's Committee to Study Restorative Justice, more than 35,000 people are currently incarcerated in Canada and more than 2.1 million in the United States, many of whom maintain family ties with the 7 million North American children who have at least one incarcerated parent. Almost 90 percent of the prison population will return to society; more than 600,000 prisoners are released annually. Two of every three prisoners released will re-offend within three years. What can be done about these startling statistics?

Only a priest can declare us clean. But only God can transform the world and everything in it. Our situation is so dire that we need more than a priest. We need a Savior. Our God is our priest and Savior. Our God came to this earth to free us not just from our sins, but from all of the pain caused by living in a world full of sin.

Leviticus 14 uses the word “atonement” to describe this work of God. As the one to be cleansed moves from the outside of the camp back into the community, the broken nature of this world is atoned for and he is made clean from his disease. As he moves from outside his own tent to outside the tent of meeting, the place where God’s presence is, the one to be cleansed’s sin is atoned for and he is forgiven. And as he enters God’s presence inside the tent of meeting, the one to be cleansed is united with God once again: to hear God’s word, to do God’s work and to follow God’s path.

After his conversion in prison, Troy joined “the Church behind bars” and has been an active member ever since. He is trying to live by hearing God's word, doing God's work and following God's path:

I believe the Holy Spirit is leading the body of Christ in our generation to a point of transition. The church behind bars has been gifted to fulfill a significant purpose, and the church as a whole is called to respond. To do this, the church is given a mandate, a clue, and a reminder. The mandate: 'Go into all the world and preach the good news' (Mark 16:15). The clue: 'I was in prison and you came to visit me' (Matt 25:36). The reminder: 'Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners' (Heb 13:3).

As a prodigal son of the Christian Reformed Church, I humbly return home with a multitude of redeemed brothers and sisters in tow. We are the ones who have accumulated the greater debt. We have sinned against God, committing great offenses against his people, and we are unworthy of any forgiveness. Yet as Paul wrote, 'Christ came into the world to save sinners—of whom [we are] the worst. But for that very reason [we were] shown mercy so that in [us], the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life' (1 Tim 1:15-16).

This is God's message for us too. God is still atoning for his anointed, chosen people. The Holy Spirit marks us with Jesus’ red blood through the fresh, living water of baptism. We too are to hear God’s word with our ears, to do God’s work with our hands, and to follow God’s path with our feet. Jesus, as priest and Savior, sets us free and forgives! What once was dead is now alive! What once was lost is now brought back! God’s still listening. God still knows what in our world and in ourselves needs to be set right. God still comes to us; the Holy Spirit still works in our hearts and in our lives. And the

Holy Spirit is still empowering us to work with the church worldwide-- even behind bars. Praise be to God, because without God, we'd all be stuck in our scales.

What does Orlando have to do with Babel? Gen 11:1-9

Mark Hofman

First of all I want to say what a privilege it is to be here this morning. Like most of you I've spent many years listening to great men like my grandpa Medendorp preach in pulpits around the country. But I never thought when I was a little tyke in Michigan that I would be asked to come and preach at *his* church someday! I'm grateful for the opportunity and even more excited that it's down here in sunny Florida. Not a bad location if I might say so myself. Yeah, when I found out that *Grandma* Medendorp was hounding Pastor Doug to get her seminary grandson in the pulpit I wasn't too hesitant to accept the offer. So on Thursday I hopped into a minivan for the marathon down I-75 and I'm very glad that I don't have to be in a car for at least five more days. My traveling companions included two young cadets from my church back home and it's their first time down here in the sunshine state. My dad, who happened to grow up in Los Angeles, plans on taking the boys to Disney World this Tuesday to make sure they don't miss out on an important slice of his childhood development. On our drive down it was interesting to see how many billboards lined the highways, pointing to hotels with special "Magic Kingdom" rates or cheap Disney tickets that always come with a catch. For those of you who live here year round, I'm sure the constant advertising makes the Wonderful World of Disney look pretty small. I remember going to Orlando for the first time when I was a kid. For some reason I traveled down to Florida with Grandpa and Grandma while my parents and siblings took the plane. Sleeping the whole way down in my new Detroit Tiger PJ's, I vividly remember seeing a neon Mickey Mouse at the entrance and ducking my head down for the whole ride on Space Mountain. I don't remember myself, but I guess that when we all rode in the "It's a Small World" boat, I waived to every single little dancing mechanical doll.

Well it just so happens that this ride, along with a few others, was the inspiration behind the East-Coast Disneyland in the first place. Actually, the park was originally called EPCOT, which

inspired but was not intended to be the same as the Epcot theme park that is there now. EPCOT was originally an acronym that stood for the **Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow**. If you visit a website for the amusement park, it will direct you to the original artistic rendering of what the city-of-the-future was going to look like. Right in the middle of the picture, surrounded by multiple buildings and parkways, stands a gigantic skyscraper. A hundred times larger than all of the buildings around it, the cosmopolitan hotel and convention center looms as a bright tower over the flowing landscape. There, visitors would be welcomed by Disney hosts and hostesses able to speak in the guests' own languages. Walt Disney was quoted as saying: "EPCOT will take its cue from the new ideas and new technologies that are emerging from the forefront of American industry. It will be a community of tomorrow that will never be completed. It will always be showcasing and testing and demonstrating new materials and new systems."

When I first heard this quote and saw the design for EPCOT I was blown away by the similarities that Walt Disney's vision had with the city in our text this morning. What I must say before I make any comparisons between Babel and Orlando is that I do not intend to cast the theme park in an overly-critical light. I am simply using the history of EPCOT to provide us with an interesting comparison between Genesis 11 and the images familiar to a 21st century citizen. It is helpful for us to try and picture what something like the tower on the plain in Shinar looked like and what it represented for the people who laid its bricks and feared its consequences. In fact, what most experts say about the tower of Babel story in Genesis is that although there are different interpretations of its history and overall meaning for Israel and the Church, what remains important is how this story functioned in the lives of those who first heard it and those who retell it today.

The story of Babel was part of the earliest set of stories that the people of Israel told to each other and their children. In fact the story was written in such a way that would make it easier for the people to remember or memorize. That way, they didn't need to carry around large and expensive scrolls, the most widely used type of literature in Jewish culture. The story forms what my professors at seminary call a *chiasm*, which is a fancy word for a pattern or outline.

This pattern is like a tower, which is really helpful in the case of the story of Babel. The tower starts on one side, goes up to a point or climax, and comes down on the other side in just about the same fashion, but sometimes with surprising differences. In this way our story begins and ends with the same characters, the same setting, and the same words, or the same vocabulary. But at each step or “brick” of the story something new develops. The beginning of our story has the whole world, settling in Shinar with one language and one set of words. The people have come together for a reason – they want to build a city. They talk to each other not only using words that the brick-builder next to them can understand, but it seems clear that there is a sense of common purpose. The next brick in the story reveals their purpose. They want to build a tower reaching to the heavens so that they can make a name for themselves *and* so they can avoid being scattered over the face of the earth. After this third brick is laid the story reaches its climactic middle. The LORD comes down to see the city. When we read this 9-verse anecdote, it can be easy to simply read right through this unbelievable verse. The LORD came down! How often does that happen?! Enoch was taken up to heaven, Angels would come down to Sodom and Gomorrah, but this hadn’t happened since God had come down to walk in the Garden of Eden. The details are scant, but what we are told is that the LORD wasn’t exactly pleased with the fact that this city and larger tower were being constructed. We know this from reading the “rest of the story,” just as Paul Harvey calls it. And the rest of the story contains what happens after God makes up his will. Just like the brick-makers, God uses the third-person plural to communicate his intention; in fact he down right copies them almost word for word. Come, let’s go down and confuse their language. What is really neat is that the author of this story is using a lot of puns and wordplay to demonstrate the irony of the story. J. P. Fokkeman, a theologian made famous for his work on this story, points out that the word in Hebrew for confuse is almost that same word for making bricks, except flipped backwards. The letters are the same but rearranged to form a totally new word. This is so fascinating because it is art imitating life; the people didn’t forget how to speak or have their memories jogged. It was simply that their words had been rearranged so that they couldn’t understand each other. The story doesn’t have to give all the details about exactly how

this happened, but the final bricks of the story show what happened to the tower *in* the story. It was never finished. The fear of the people came true. They were scattered over the whole earth. The story ends with a new name that is given: Babel – what that exactly means we aren't certain. Some have concluded that this name is short for Babylon and give evidence for the tower being a religious temple that opened as a gate for the gods. Others talk about how Babel sounds like the Hebrew word mentioned before in verse 7 that was rearranged. This word means “to confuse” so therefore the name is a reminder of how the languages were confused. Ultimately, what is beautiful about this final story in the first half of Genesis is that it explained how the nations were spread over the whole earth.

So now that we've rehearsed the story from beginning to end, or should I say top to bottom, let's look at something that not everyone takes notice of when reading Genesis as a whole. If you still have your Bibles open you'll notice that the very last verse of chapter 10, the verse right before the beginning of our story, reads: “These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these, the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.” Now you all-star seventh grade reading students will pick up on something faster than the rest of us might. What do you notice about the last line of chapter 10? It sounds like the nations were spread out over the earth already. So what does that mean for the story of Babel? Did the author mix up the order of the stories? Was there a coming together and then another scattering? What we will come to appreciate, when reading Genesis as a whole, is that many times the author uses certain smaller stories to break up the larger story; sometimes its for an explanation, sometimes its to add contrast. If we fail to see how these sub-stories fit into the larger book, we might confuse these sides with how they fit into the whole. So for the Babel story, we are told about how the nations were scattered after reading the lists of Noah son's and their descendents. We know this is true by reading the verse that immediately follows the story. Chapter 11:10 begins: “This is the account of Shem...” So the larger story picks back up where it left off.

Okay, now that we've looked at some details about the inside and outside of this tower-story, those of you more practical brothers and sisters might be asking, “so why is it important to know these

things? Isn't the meaning of this story clear?" What I hope to convince you of, and the rest of us here this morning is this: even though this is a story contained in God's Word to teach us about him, ourselves and the history of his work in the world, many times we have misunderstood its meaning and purpose because of our own conceptions of what it says. We think it is simply a judgment of human pride, God's reaction to a repeat of the Garden of Eden. Humanity's *hubris* reached up too far and God's justice had to bring us back down to earth. And for those of you who have been taught this understanding of the story, I am here this morning to say: you're right. There is plenty of evidence to support this reading of the story. I've heard people compare this story with countless examples of human effort going wrong. Most recently someone compared this story with the space race of the last century. If you drove down to Cape Canaveral you might hear one of the scientists talk about how they're seeing heaven through the Hubble telescope. This story might just as easily have been written today. Many people think that it was also written to be a warning to the Babylonians or any other people group that might try and build a tower like this one, or the Canaanite one in Deuteronomy. The people were trying to be "like God" – in fact they were trying to shove God over in his heavenly throne room to make space for them. These are all valid conclusions about the motive of the people in Babel.

But there are other ways to read the motives of the people. A medieval commentator once wrote about how the phrase "reaches to the heavens" only meant that the tower was going to be very tall. Its purpose was not to invade the heavens themselves, but to be seen from distances far away. The real command that the people were breaking was the command from Genesis 1:28 which was recapitulated to Noah and his sons after the flood: Be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it. Because they were afraid and resisted being dispersed over the earth, the people valued their unity more than they trusted God's conditions for blessing. Because they wanted to make a name for themselves that everyone could use and keep a language that everyone could use, they decided to construct a defiant city that disobeyed God's plan for the descendents Noah's family. Hopefully we can agree that both of these interpretations are helpful in clarifying the importance of the

story's context, but unfortunately they have not solved the problem of how we see this text in light of God's Word as a whole.

I remember learning this story as a Sunday school student and wondering why God seemed so quick to come down and seemingly punish the people. Weren't they trying to get along with each other? We learn at a young age that because everyone is an image-bearer of God, therefore you should do your best to live in harmony with one another. Unity is an expensive virtue for Christians, hard to attain but well worth it. We might wonder about the people of Babel and their quest for a name and place of significance. Princeton professor Bernhard Anderson wrote: "There is something very human, then, in this portrayal of people who, with mixed pride and anxiety, attempted to preserve unity. However, their intention to hold on to the simplicity of the primeval past collided with the purpose of God, who acted to disperse them from their chosen center." The people of Babel get a really bad rap for something that we can relate to. We strongly warn each other of their dangerous ambition, but deep down we worry about our own internal attempts at achieving harmony they way God wants it. It seems like a harsh punishment for a forgivable sin.

But here John Calvin might illuminate our hearts by his interpretation of verse 8. "Men had already been spread abroad; and this ought not to be regarded as a punishment, seeing it rather flowed from the benediction and grace of God. But those whom the Lord had before distributed with honor in various abodes, he now ignominiously scatters, driving them hither and thither like the members of a lacerated body." Calvin takes the approach that says God is simply following through on this plan that was in place all along. The diversity of nations and languages is not the result of a punished sin. The Babel account simply gives explanation as to how the sons of Shem were scattered and what human elements contributed to its less-than-perfect process. The pride of the "Babel-ians" was present but it never predated God's original plan.

This is good news people! Now we can look at our brothers and sisters from all nations with confidence, knowing that we didn't arrive together from a place of judgment, but rather that we were beautiful byproducts of the Babel plan B. We may speak different languages, but we are all sons of Noah that bear the image of God.

We can see how God's plan for unity in diversity flows from Babel through Pentecost all the way to the New Jerusalem. When Luke reports of Jesus sending out the 70 or 72 disciples, what he is recalling are the lists of nations in Genesis 10. The 70 disciples represent every nation in the world, and every language that was confused at Babel. Jesus sends them out to "Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the whole earth." We celebrate the fact that at Pentecost people of every nation understood the wonderful works of God in their own language. Who knows maybe Peter included the story of Babel in some of his alter calls?

For those of you who have been to the Epcot center in the last twenty years, you might recall that there is a large pond around which 11 different nations are represented in the World Showcase. These pavilions contain foods and souvenirs from the different countries and provide visitors with a panoramic view of what the world would look like if we all lived a bit closer to each other. It is interesting that Walt Disney's original dream for a city with a large tower never became an actuality. But what is more interesting is that the World Showcase is the final result of what his imaginers dreamed up instead. God's vision is so much more grand and beautiful than any plan for unity and diversity that we can come up with. And yet, we get glimpses of this vision both in our reading of his Word this morning and through the ways the Holy Spirit makes us more and more like Christ through his church. We get to see glimpses of the Kingdom showcase every time we gather together in the Lord's name. May the Lord bless you this morning with his grace through this Word until the next time he comes down again. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

A Comprehensive Gospel: Acts 17:16-34

Craig Hoekema

The professor stood front and center on the first day of class. His glasses were gently resting on the very tip of his nose, the knot on his tie was loosened but nicely centered, his pants were neatly pressed, and he was looking very professorial. He peered over the top of his glasses at his impressionable students, and as he raised a book in his right hand, he asked, “How many of you believe that this Bible is the Word of God?” Things are always a bit awkward on the first day of class. The students don’t know the professor; they don’t know each other; so it’s not surprising that only a couple students had the guts to slowly lift their hands partway off their desks. “Do you know what I think of this book?” the professor asked, as if he were really giving students the option of hearing his opinion. “This is what I think of this book,” he’d say as he hurled it out the open window and into the bushes below.

Maybe you’ve heard that story before, or some story like it. I’m not entirely certain that it’s a true story, although I’ve read it a few different places. However, even if this particular story is entirely made-up, it’s certainly true that many Christians face this kind of open hostility and intimidation in University Class rooms. Christians are pressured to believe that intelligent people don’t buy into myths like creation and resurrection. It’s this reality that has led one University professor to write a book entitled, “How to stay Christian in College.”

It shouldn’t be surprising that the world of academia doesn’t have a lot of tolerance for ideas like miracles, and infallible Bibles and supernatural beings. It’s highly intimidating to disagree with a professor... by definition they’re supposed to be smarter than the students. It can feel threatening to be surrounded by people who disagree with you... especially if those people are highly educated, and openly hostile.

That’s the situation Paul found himself in on the streets of Athens. But the apostle Paul was about as gutsy as anybody when it

came to these kinds of situations...situations where powerful and intelligent people start mocking with your worldview. Athens was no blue collar working-man's town...no sir. Athens had a reputation for being the intellectual metropolis of the Roman Empire. Athens was the city of super-star intellectuals; people like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In fact, the text tells us in verse 21 that Athenians spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. Athens was a city of rich and rampant philosophical tradition. Open your mouth in Athens and you were looking for a debate.

But philosophy wasn't the only thing that was popular in Athens. The architecture was incredible. Still today, you can visit the acropolis and get some kind of picture of how majestically those buildings rose from the top of the hill...massive stone columns standing side by side by side. And then there was the art. Athenians were great lovers of art in all different forms; pottery, jewelry, sculptures of gold, silver, ivory and marble. Anyone with a taste for the fine things of cultured civilization would find Athens to be a wonderful vacation destination.

And Paul certainly could have used a little vacation. He was on his second missionary journey, and he had only come to Athens because his life was in danger. Some Jews from Thessalonica had threatened his life and had even followed him to the city of Berea. Evidently, Paul's traveling companions, Silas and Timothy, had unfinished business in Berea. So while Paul fled for his life to Athens, Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea. Paul was only in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. He didn't know how long it would be, but at this point, all he really had to do was stay alive. It would have been the perfect opportunity for Paul to just catch his breath, rejuvenate a little bit, and take in some of the cultural delights that Athens had to offer.

But there was one more thing that Athens was known for, other than its art and its architecture, and its philosophy. Athens was also known for its idols. In fact, one ancient historian said that in Athens, it was easier to find a god than a man. All the big name deities were represented there—Zeus, Athena, Hermes Apollo, Poseidon, Dionysus Artemis, Asclepius—all of them beautifully sculpted by Athens' finest. To top it all off, these Athenians, wanted to be sure that when it came to religion, they didn't miss anybody.

And so they even had an altar to an unknown god. It would have been hard not to be impressed by the beauty of the statues and the magnificence of the temples and the devotion of the worshippers.

But Paul wasn't impressed; in fact, just the opposite. The word that Luke uses in verse 16 is the same word the Septuagint uses to describe how God feels about idols...distressed, provoked, roused to anger. While most tourists would have marveled at it all, Paul was sick to his stomach. A city filled with people, beauty and wisdom around every corner, and yet so many deceived by idol worship.

But what could Paul say? This city was home to some of the greatest minds that ever walked on the planet. This city was bustling with people who did nothing more than dispute ideas. Paul may have had a fine Jewish education, but he was no Aristotle or Plato or Socrates. Was he really going to open his mouth in Athens? He was just there for a little while to wait for Silas and Timothy. What was he going to do, start telling them about Jesus? "Um, excuse me philosophers, but I'd like to tell you about a God who was actually a human being. And, ah, he died on a cross, and then three days later, he came back to life, all on his own, with his own body. Oh, and ah, one more thing; he's the only way to true God." Get real; Paul would just be laughed out of the city. Better to be like one of those students who doesn't raise his hand. That way, when the professor throws the Bible out of the window, you don't have to feel stupid.

I'm sure all of us have had opportunity to feel this way. I'm sure all of us have been in situations where we realize that, it'd probably be best to just keep our Christianity to ourselves. If we were to say something about God or Jesus or a crucifixion or a resurrection, boy would we feel stupid. Maybe for some of us, it *was* in a University classroom where we were told that faith is just a nice word for ignorance. Maybe it was a conversation we were having with our neighbor when she happened to tell us that church wasn't really her thing. Maybe it was at work when those guys started in *again* about their sexual escapades over the weekend. Maybe it was that time in the restaurant, where you could just tell that the atmosphere wasn't right to bow your head and pray. These kinds of opportunities are all around us. We live in a culture that wants to push God as far away as possible. We all have opportunities to feel insecure about our faith; to feel shy about letting anyone know that we actually think God

inhabited the womb of a virgin. We've all been in situations where we knew that idolatry was winning, but we were way too intimidated to open our mouths.

In many ways, it wouldn't be surprising if Paul would have kept his cards a little bit closer to his chest...like a student too shy to raise his hand and admit that he believes in the Bible. But Paul is about as gutsy as they get in those kinds of situations. Paul looked at the idols; and he didn't feel intimidated; he didn't feel shy; he didn't feel like just blending in and taking it easy until his friends arrived. Luke tells us that he felt distressed; he felt irritated; he felt provoked. You see, Paul believed in a God who made the world and everything in it. Paul believed in a God who was Lord of heaven and earth. Paul believed in a God who gives all people life and breath and everything else. He believed in a God who created us to seek him and him alone. He believed in a God in whom we live and move and have our being. Paul believed in a God who had absolute claim over every idol, over every philosophy and over every soul in Athens. Paul looked at a culture that had turned its back on God and he didn't feel intimidated; he felt provoked. Paul didn't just see the beauty of Athens; Paul saw a God who wasn't getting what he deserved.

And that's why Paul didn't take a vacation to catch his breath and wait for his buddies. Paul took his gospel to the streets. And not surprisingly, the philosophers thought he was a babbler, others thought he was advocating foreign Gods. But Paul didn't care how his message sounded, because he knew that it was true. And of course, Paul ends up in front of the Areopagus. The Areopagus was sort of like a church council; except they weren't just overseers of a single congregation. It was their job to oversee the religion, morals, and education of the entire city. There stands Paul, in the midst of a bunch of intellectual giants whose job it was to silence stupidity...and Paul starts preaching.

And what's striking about Paul's sermon that afternoon is how big it is, not in terms of its length, but in terms of its content. Paul doesn't just give your basic evangelical gospel presentation. He doesn't give some cutesy illustration of how the cross forms a bridge between man and God. No, Paul has so much more in view than just getting saved. Paul offers a comprehensive gospel. Paul speaks to them of a God in whom we live and move and have our being. Paul

knew that every square inch of this earth was God's jurisdiction, even the intimidating chambers of the Areopagus. Paul knew that *all* truth is *God's* truth, and anything that these philosophers could ever discover that was *true*—came from God.

And that's why Paul isn't afraid to make connections to their culture in his sermon. Paul wasn't afraid to point to bits and pieces of truth within Athenian society. Paul isn't afraid to borrow little morsels of truth from their poets. Paul isn't even afraid to launch his entire sermon from a pagan altar he had seen one afternoon while walking around. Paul didn't have to be intimidated, because his gospel was comprehensive. He preached a God who was all in all, a God who created Athenian society, a God who inspired the wisdom of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, a God whose spirit was filling the Areopagus every time they deliberated. Paul didn't have to back down from an intimidating cultured society, because Paul preached a God who was Lord over every square inch of that society.

And Paul knew that he would be laughed at. He knew that he would be mocked, especially when he mentioned the resurrection. But Paul didn't care; he just gave testimony to that which was true. He simply told them about the reality of God's claim in their life and he let the cards fall where they may. Paul was provoked by a city lost in the darkness of idolatry...so he gave bold testimony to the light of the world. Luke tells us that a couple of these intellectuals were persuaded by Paul's preaching, even as most of them scoffed. But no matter how hard those intellectuals laughed, no matter how ridiculous it all sounded to pagan ears, no matter how violently that professor threw that Bible out of that window...none of it, makes Paul's gospel any less true.

And you and I are equipped with that same comprehensive gospel. We're equipped with that same message of a God who has jurisdiction of every square inch of this world; even the most pagan and remote corners of this planet; even the most pagan and remote corners of Sarnia. We don't have to worry about being broken mouthpieces; we don't have to be intimidated by clever pagan reasoning; we don't have to be cautious about offending others with the truth of God's claim on their life. Because this is our Father's *world*.

Our task is to bear witness to that reality, and let the cards fall

where they may. Will most of the world like what we have to say? No, Jesus was pretty clear about that. But should that inspire fear or uncertainty...absolutely not. Our God isn't made with human hands, our God can't fit in a temple...we don't have to make excuses for God, we just testify. "Professor, you can hurl Bibles out that window all day long, but you cannot change the fact that 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'" No matter where we utter those simple words, we're always within the jurisdiction of our Creator. No matter how ridiculous it might sound to pagan ears, that pagan still has his life, his movement, and his being in God almighty. It's with than knowledge and that confidence that we can stand before the most intellectual bible-throwing bullies that this world has to offer...and we can testify to our Savior. AMEN.

Our Father in Heaven,

Opportunities to testify are all around us, and yet we confess how intimidated we often are to open our mouths. God, renew us this morning with the knowledge of your Sovereignty and the knowledge of your Lordship. Remind us by your Holy Spirit that you are all in all; that all people live and move and have their being in you. Encourage us with this assurance to give bold testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ, wherever that might be.

This we pray in Jesus' name,
AMEN.

PsH #523: 1,2,5 Lord, You Give the Great Commission

Christ Resists for Us: Matthew 4:1-11

Steve De Ruiter

Do a quick internet search for “Jesus being tempted by Satan” and you will find paintings, sermons, Youtube clips, you name it. Especially when it comes to visual interpretations of this scene, it becomes obvious that everyone has a slightly different idea about what exactly this desert showdown between The Light of the world and the inventor of evil must have looked like

Regardless of the visual details, one thing we do know is that Jesus was famished. This state of Jesus strikes us with stark contrast to the scene just previous to this foodless desert. Jesus had bid John the Baptist to baptize him to fulfill prophesy, to usher Jesus into his ministry as Messiah. And at his baptism, the Spirit of God came down to the tune of a voice announcing Jesus as Beloved, as one in whom God takes pleasure, as one who embodies the Light of the Living God.

It would seem quite fitting, wouldn't it, to skip this temptation bit and go straight to Matthew 4:12 and following where Jesus begins his ministry of calling and sending disciples, giving sermons on mountainsides, healing the blind and the bed-ridden. But the Holy Spirit had other plans. He leads Jesus out and away from everyone and everything. And Matthew says he led Jesus out *to be tempted by the devil*.

We're told that Jesus was forty days without food. Forty Days! This wasn't your run-of-the-mill spiritual practice. This is a fast that not even Moses thought necessary to attempt. This fast was long and hard. It was a fast that made the body weak and ripe for the picking when the Tempter came hunting.

The devil first opts for the obvious target of Jesus' gut. “Let's see if you are really God... fill your belly in a way that no mere mortal can... See these rocks here?” We're not told if the stones glowed like fresh-baked loaves in the window of some quaint country home or if the air filled with the aroma of a little Italian bakery on a quiet spring morning. Chances are, the simple reminder to that Jesus could

command food to appear out of nothing was temptation enough. But Jesus frustrates the devil's attempt.

The devil tries again...taking Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem. Looking down the length of a fall that would kill any jumper the devil taunts Jesus: "Aren't you tired of this lonely desert? Don't you want those angels that worshiped you in heaven to come cool you down and feed you? Or are you just an imposter? If you really are God's Son, take a leap...no self-respecting angel would let the Son of God plummet to his death..." Jesus doesn't cave.

So far Satan works to peck at Jesus' physical discomfort. The devil's conniving to convince Jesus that no Son of God should be without the creature comforts was the easy bet...or so the devil thought.

And in true devilish fashion, Satan had a more potent trick up his sleeve. He takes Jesus up a high mountain and shows Jesus all the kingdoms of all the world. The wealth, the landscapes, the Holy Places and Spaces...And the people. The people Jesus came to love, to Heal, to Forgive, to save. With one bend of the knee, says Satan, you can have it all. With one bend of the knee, you can start your reign as King now. You can forego the formality of the cross, the bitter cup you know is coming. Plant your face in the mud before me and you can be the Savior of the world right now.

Now, we're kidding ourselves if we think Jesus didn't really want to tear into a loaf of bread. The groans of his stomach must have howled as loudly as the night wind of the desert. And we're kidding ourselves if we think Jesus couldn't have gone for some much needed rest in the comforting arms of the angels. But in this third temptation...with the whole world placed before Jesus, the stakes are raised as high as the mountain he's standing on.

You see, the devil isn't appealing to some greedy side of Jesus. He's not enticing him to wear fancy crowns and dine on the finest caviar. He's getting at something bigger. Didn't Jesus' baptism single him out as the Beloved Son of God, who would save the human race from the exact hunger and loneliness Jesus was currently enduring? Here Jesus is smacked in the face with the reason he came to earth in the first place. One Commentary puts it this way: "The one thing with which Jesus' heart burns most ardently is the deep desire to...save the world." Saving the world would fulfill the deepest

longings of Jesus' heart. And the devil puts forth everything that is coming to Jesus anyway...and says that maybe Jesus doesn't really have to wait to claim it. Just bend the knee. Take it now. What's it matter if you make this compromise? You know you want it...

It's easy to make compromises to save us a little pain. When temptation comes knocking...in any of its forms...it sure is enticing to fast track ourselves to what we think will satisfy us. Maybe some fudged numbers in a business deal lead to a bulkier college fund for a son or daughter. They need you to provide *however* you can. They are you first priority. Perhaps an opportunity arises to put forth someone else's work as your own at your job. The time saved in the process affords you more time with a spouse... A spouse who deserves more of your time, more of your attention; why make her a victim of the unreasonable expectations of your boss? Has the buzz of the computer sung to you like a siren of Lorelei? Offering escape, beckoning you to awaken her with a brush of the mouse and see the delights ready made for your deepest desires? Or maybe you simply find yourself embellishing details of your life in order to make a deeper impact those around you. To make you look better, wiser, keener, than you really are. People need someone to admire; why shouldn't it be you? And if it means you have better standing in the community, what's the harm? Besides, isn't everything permissible...and some cases even beneficial? And at the end of the day, if it *is* sinful, doesn't the Bible say that if you claim you're without sin you're a liar? So, if I'm going to sin, can't I tweak my sin to benefit myself and even others?

Awhile back, a popular Christian comedian came under serious scrutiny. His popularity in the 1980's was staggering and he packed concert halls around the country with his stand-up routine that mixed comedic everyday situations with appeals to the Gospel message. His back-story was fascinating. Before becoming a Christian, he was a satanic high priest and led upwards of fifteen hundred followers in the dark ways of Satanism. His testimony of being delivered from Satanism was compelling and effective. Just imagine it, someone from the darkest of dark-sides is set aglow by the Bright Light of Christ...he can't but renounce the devil and come gloriously into the Kingdom. And if statistics can be trusted, his conversion story brought thousands to Christ. His albums flew off the

shelves. His books sold just as fast.

It came about through the investigation of a Christian journalist that the comedian had fabricated his story. People who were close to the man during his supposed satanic years said he was in no way involved in what he said he was. It became apparent that this man was a fraud. His ministry was built on a lie. It threw his fans and supporters into a tailspin of doubt and anger.

But what about those souls that had been saved through this ministry? Could it be argued that lie or no lie, the Kingdom of God had in fact advanced because of story? What did it matter that he compromised the truth. You know we want people saved...

Jesus wants people to be saved. And Jesus knows that no false proposition by a smooth talking snake will get him any closer to doing that.

For each mangled use of Scripture the devil throws his way, Jesus appeals to the *abiding truth* of Scripture. There is no food that nourishes a person better than the Word of God. And in the face of temptation, Jesus relies on the hope and promises that God has written into the story of his children. So when the devil tells Jesus to jump off the temple and prove his faith, Jesus puts his faith in God's *Word*, pulls out some Deuteronomy and says "We don't test God 'round here." Satan tries to convince Jesus he is alone; but God is present in his Word and Jesus clings to that presence in the face of a lie that poses itself as sweet relief.

You see we don't read that Jesus had the gumption or the chutzpah to stand down the devil in the darkest deluge of his desires. What we *do* read is that Jesus came into the desert armed with the sheer promises of God. The promises of God that Jesus had let seep into his very being. The promises of the Word of God that Jesus kept close to him at home and while walking the shores of the Jordan. The Word of God that was wrapped around his heart, held in his hands, and stuck in his head.

Friends, we can't skip this desert scene because Jesus was setting about to be something on our behalf. Jesus embodies the perfection that God's children in the desert days of Israel did not and could not embody. Jesus resists temptation so that we will no longer be slaves to that Pharaoh called sin and Jesus keeps God's statutes so that he can keep *us* alive! Here Jesus steps into full obedience and

keeps Gods commandments so that God will maintain his covenant loyalty with humanity. With one last showing of the perfect arsenal of Scripture, Jesus tells Satan to GO! He won't be worshiping anyone but the Lord his God! Because no devil can give him the kingdoms of the world. And after all that, after all the hungry days and nights, after sand had been caked onto his hands and face and feet by the howling wind, the angels come...and wait upon Jesus.

Well that's just fine. Of course Jesus resists the devil. He's Jesus. Hungry or not, Jesus wasn't going to give into the devil, right? And to place the onus on us as individuals to resist just like Jesus did seems unaccommodating to our human predicament. Besides, I can't remember the last time I was visited by a flock of heavenly hosts armed with palm branches to cool me down after I've successfully passed on an invitation to gamble, gawk at a girl, or guzzle more grog than is good for me. What are we supposed to do in the darker moments when we try and try and try, but we just can't shake the temptation to cave to our vices? What happens when the devil comes lurking and the words of Scripture seem to allude us?

It's time to breathe and look around. God doesn't simply let us stand there on the mountaintop alone with the devil. And He doesn't only work in invisible abstract ways.

I met a man last year. We'll call him Ian. Ian told me the story of his battle with Internet pornography. He wrestled with this addiction for years. He found himself in a dark closet of secrecy that was slowly gnawing away his spirit and his sanity. His addiction consumed his thoughts. The secrecy plagued his dreams. He felt like a fraud. His heart ached. But he just wasn't strong enough to kick this habit. This addiction. This disease.

One day, Ian took his friend Brian out to lunch. Brian was one of those friends you knew you could trust. And Ian had finally resolved to outing himself as a porn addict to Brian. He spilled all his secrets. The late nights when his wife was asleep. The secret file folder on his computer. The pain in his gut from feeding on filth. The hole in his heart from putting God aside night after night after night. To Ian's surprise, Brian said he could totally relate. He too had struggled with the very same problem. Brian said his liberation came through a computer program that emailed a couple of his Christian friends if ever he looked at porn a porn site. Brian said he never

thought the Holy Spirit would make himself known through a computer that he had once used to dance with the devil. Brian installed the software for Ian. He prayed with Ian every week. He read the Bible with Ian to build up his arsenal, that same arsenal Jesus used. He never judged Ian when he fell, but he never let him off the hook either. Today, Ian boasts in God's grace for deliverance from Internet pornography.

You see, we are all goners if the moral of this story is "Jesus is perfect and so can you!" But we are in the hands of a God who knows this. Jesus faced the devil and felt the weight of the gamblers addiction. His skin crawled with the spiders of lust. His mouth was thirsty for the potion that comes in 100 proof bottles. He felt all that. This is the stuff that Hebrews talks about when it says we have a High Priest who knows our every weakness. He knows the desires as if they are his own. And he looks the devil in the eye and says "I make the rules." And the rules state that God bursts into the darkness with a glorious light, through a brother or sister in our church... Through the work of some computer geek with a heart for helping sinners. Jesus resists not because he wanted to set some great example for us, Jesus resisted because it was time the serpent got his head crushed. And each step Jesus took after that desert scene was a step towards the cross. And a step towards the resurrection that frees us from bondage to our sins. The man who said that we do not live on bread alone but by the very Word, if God is, in fact, himself that very Word of God.

Christ is our food...that strengthens us to abide with God in temptation. Christ is our nourishment...that heals us from a week of being beaten down by our desires. Christ is our sustainer...who keeps us close on the road; a road we don't have to walk alone.

In the darkest night of your temptations, know that Christ has felt every ounce of weakness that you feel. Look around. That's why he enables the community of believers to help each other. Jesus loosened the devil's grip and now whispers to you: "I Am the one who frees you..."

Abide in *Me*

Find strength in *Me*

Come to *My* Table

I will fill you.

Editorial

On the Ides of March, 1956, Calvin Seminary's 80th year, the student committee for *Dies Natalis* commemoration began publishing the *Stromata* "as an experiment." Due to the felt need for a journal published by and for students, the Praetor for the Seminary Corps, Hugh Koops, expressed his desire for seminary students to share ideas, book reviews, anecdotes from seminary life and other miscellanies in a published forum. He wrote, "SROMATA can be a valuable aid in preparing us for the ministry, not only by presenting thoughts, but by formulating thoughts."¹ The first two years of the publication read like a résumé for the CRCNA's future leadership. Names like Nederhood, Kuyvenhoven, and Greenway would become household during the following decades, establishing this student journal as the literary training ground for "rising stars." Interestingly, the very first copy of *Stromata* was handed out at *Dies Natalis*, but at the end of the refreshment table. Students were asked to pay 50¢ and thought it was for the food. But when they found out it was for the *Stromata*, they didn't exactly start singing its praises. In fact, the *Chimes* (the College's paper) even criticized the *Stromata*'s conception! Nonetheless, a year later the new President of the Seminary wrote a supportive, title page word of greeting and the *Stromata* was here to stay.

The *Stromata* continued to flourish through its first decade. Alan Verhey became the editor of the *Stromata* in '67, which coincidentally was the same year that "Kalvin's Kerux" began. The Kerux was first labeled as "A Seminary Non-Theological Information Weekly." The *student-news* of its day, the Kerux was meant to serve a more "secular" need of the community by publishing information, announcements, gripes and letters. But by March 16, 1970 the Kerux had changed its subtitle to include that it was also an "opinion weekly." In '63 the *Stromata* had the tagline "A Journal of

¹ Hugh Koops, "Praetor Ipse Dicit," *Stromata* 1.1, 3.

Seminary Student Opinion” added to its cover, which may have inspired the Kerux editors to create a competing forum for student glossing. No matter what their intentions, something happened in the early 70s which caused the *Stromata* to shift in purpose and at times even struggle for existence. In '72 the *Stromata*'s staff altered the format and focus of the “anthology” and incorporated the “literary and artistic efforts” of the student body, which included poems and pictures around the newer Knollcrest campus. A disclaimer that, “the *Stromata* may or may not represent the opinion or lack of opinion of the student body” helped to further clarify the periodical's new trajectory. Some of our own professors' work graced the pages of this new artsy *Stromata*,² which lasted for two strong years. However, for some undocumented reason, the *Stromata* was not published during the school years of 1974 or 1975. The current editor of the *Banner*, Bob DeMoor happened to be the Kreuz editor during 1974 and made no comments as to why there was a period of only one student “forum.” Yet, in '76 the *Stromata* made a comeback, complete with a riveting editorial by Daniel Boerman. He reiterated the importance of having common guidelines and goals so as to “move in the same direction.”³ He also suggested that these guidelines would create a Christian, critical and constructive *Stromata*. After this, the *Stromata* enjoyed another period of stability until the 80s.

The Regan years were very productive for Calvin Seminary's *Stromata*. Editors Feenstra, Culbertson, De Vos, Roeda, and Kok all made significant contributions to the journal's academic quality. Another change in format during the 1984-85 school year may have increased student interest, but by '87 Harry Zantingh was comparing the request for articles to “getting a pig onto a loading ramp in a hurry; you have to pull and push and prod and practically carry the animal there.”⁴ Tom van Milligen was inspired to write an interesting history of *Stromata*'s origin in May of 1989 that suggested *Stromata* was born out of a tension in the student body over the Church/World dichotomy. He describes the first editors' desire to publish: “there is

² An especially well written letter by Prof. Nydam is in the May 1973 issue (*Stromata* 18.2, 14).

³ Daniel Boerman, “Editorial,” *Stromata*, 20.1, 4.

⁴ Harry Zantingh, “Editors Note,” *Stromata*, 31.2.

an almost adolescent imitation of faculty occurring in these first issues; the euphoria of publication exists in the thought of becoming like the professors, as Eve hoped to become like God.”⁵ Although, Milligen’s reading of the *Stromata*’s from the 50s and 60s might be slightly “skewed,” he does insightfully portray the ever-in-flux nature of the *Stromata* through its first thirty years.

By the early 90s *Stromata* had continued to purge the student body of its thoughts and words and publish them for an unknown circulation (I suspect not even many of the students were gracing the pages). For some reason there was another hiatus in the *Stromata*’s publication from ’91-’92. Jeff Brower and Jim Weidenaar took up the torch in the spring of ’93, but it would fizzle out again in the fall of ’95. In the spring of ’96 the techno-savvy Steven Baarda restarted the *Stromata* for the third time in its history. By the winter of ’97, inspired by Professor Neal Plantinga’s own web journal “Myodicy,” Baarda had decided to put the *Stromata* online. His article⁶ captures the forward-looking vision of what would be the “e-mergence” of electronic Calvin Seminary periodicals. Unfortunately the techno-hype didn’t last because, for the third time that decade, the *Stromata* was forgotten in the winds of history in ’98. Was it a fear of the impending Y2K or simply another lull in student interest?

The *Stromata* was saved again and went back to hard copy in ’99. For a few years, it was hard to distinguish the *Stromata* from the Kerux because of its artistic and informational character, but in 2004 it rediscovered its Alexandrian roots and took on the form it has today. Under the leadership of Jordan Ballor and Jeff Snapper the *Stromata* has become a mirror of what Editor Nederhood may have envisioned back in ’56. The first year of our editorship marked the 50th year anniversary of the *Stromata*, and to confess, we didn’t even realize it! Next year, Lord willing, the *Stromata* will celebrate its 50th volume of publication.

Thanks to all who made this year’s 49th volume great – and to all those who wish to keep this “vehicle of scholarly expression”

⁵ Tom van Milligen, “The Origin of the *Stromata*,” *Stromata*, 33.1, 6.

⁶ Steven Baarda, “Briggs-Meyers, Peters, Ellul, Ong, and the Computerized Society: A Provisional Assessment of the Changing Humanity,” *Stromata*, 39 (Winter 1997).

going: let's honor our past and future by remembering the timely words of Praetor Koops, "Seminarrians, you need **SROMATA**. And **STROMATA** needs you."

-Mark Hofman
Grand Rapids, MI
May, 2008