Emerging Insights

Word in the World
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NOTE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The purpose of this Journal is to engage theology in the issues and realities of contemporary religious life in a secular, pluralistic society undergoing fundamental institutional change. In doing this, we solicit papers not only from graduate students in theology but also from faculty members who wish to participate in our endeavours. Relevant work from other disciplines will be considered. Although our primary call is for papers, we also solicit personal reflections, stories, artwork, poetry, and any other material operative within the different modes of the theological project. Former graduates of the Theological Studies program are especially encouraged to submit material for consideration. Submissions should be made to: Word in the World, Annex D, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve West, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3Q 1M8. We require two hard copies as well as an electronic copy of the paper. Please do not send originals. If you have an idea for a paper and wish to talk to one of our editorial staff, please visit us at www.wordintheworld.ca or email us at: witw@alcor.concordia.ca . We reserve the right to determine the suitability of each paper for the Journal. Editorial modifications may be made for language, space considerations, or for thematic unity, although we are always careful to maintain the integrity of the author's work.

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Note to Readers

Dr. Matthew Anderson, our faculty liaison for creative writing, was so taken by one of the poems in our previous issue "Theology Unbound" that he put it to music, recorded it being performed by a choir and put the video on the internet. Here is a reflection by the author of the poem:

Reflection on '*Open, Lord*' Performance

Mary Gedeon Harvan

Open, *Lord* began as a prayer in a time when I anticipated change yet could not grasp its direction. It is, in effect, my surrender to the Lord's will and I pray it daily.

This surrender has brought me abiding new friendships with peers and elders in a prayer group I joined soon after I wrote the prayer; then came soul-enriching encounters with children in the Faith First Program; and currently I enjoy energizing and inspiring relationships with my professors and co-students in the Theology Department at Concordia University.

For the moment, only the Lord knows where this particular work of his hands will end up. Yet, my heart beats with enthusiasm and great hope!

The video can be viewed at:
http://www.youtube.com/user/masson5536?blend=23&ob=5#p/u/11/5oouwtG3FNs

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Creative Writing

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Poetry

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Bright Flower *Martha Elias Downey*

Word from the Chair

Calogero A. Miceli

Our latest issue of Word in the World: *'Emerging Insights' Volume 4 (2011)* is finally here and it is my pleasure to present it to you.

This publication is a great accomplishment and is a living testament to the hours of hard work and dedication this entire committee and its associates have been through over the last year. This issue is special not only because it is the fruit of all this labour, but also because it marks a turning point in the history of Word in the World.

Over the past two years we have assembled what is, no doubt, one of the best and most efficient teams I have ever had the pleasure of being a part of. The committee which I have chaired during my time with Word in the World has been nothing short of exemplary and superb. We have achieved the goal we set out for ourselves which was to produce one volume each year. Not only did we accomplish our objective, we did so with added results. Over the past two years this committee has advanced Word in the World with the quality of its articles, the thoroughness of its peer-review process, its affiliations with other academic bodies, and its new online presence. Each of our issues has been – in my mind – better than the last and we hope to see this progression continue in the years and volumes to come.

While this committee has been one of great ability and even greater accomplishment, sadly it will come to an end. As it is with most student journals/associations, turnover is quite high. Students inevitably complete their degrees and fulfill their duties, which force them to move on to the next step of their personal and academic careers. As a result of time slowly moving us forward, the next committee will in all likelihood be very different from the one that worked on this issue; however, the end of one thing means the beginning of something new and it is with great anticipation that I wait to see what new improvements come from the next committee taking the reigns. A fresh mind and a fresh perspective are often the right ingredients for positive change and amelioration. I have no doubt the next committee will be ready and willing to take on Word in the World and bring it to the next step.

I would like to thank the entire Word in the World Executive Committee: Matte Downey, Lily-Catherine Johnston, Elisa Pistilli, and Robert Smith for all of their dedication and hard work. Also, a thank you to our faculty liaisons: Drs. Marie-France Dion and Matthew Anderson, for their contributions and guidance as well as the entire faculty of Theological Studies at Concordia University for their help. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Jean Daou and Sara Terreault. Jean's advice to continue the legacy of Word in the World was a constant reminder and a driving force of every decision we made as we tried to improve Word in the World each year. Sara's help and support

throughout the years have also been an invaluable tool for the entire committee. The support and contributions of everyone involved have been paramount to the successes we have witnessed with Word in the World.

On behalf of the entire Word in the World Committee, I would also like to extend a special word of appreciation to all those who have contributed to this journal and made this issue possible. A special thank you to the following for their generous financial support: *Concordia Council on Student Life* (CCSL), *Concordia University Alumni Association* (CUAA), *Concordia University Graduate Students' Association* (GSA), *Department of Theological Studies*, *Theological Studies Graduate and Undergraduate Student Associations* (TSGSA & TSUSA), and the *Concordia University Small Grants Program*.

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Editorial

Elisa Pistilli

Following in the tradition we began with our previous issue, we have once again drawn our inspiration from the Theological Studies Graduate Student Association (TSGSA)'s February 2010 conference "The Bible as You Don't Know It." The conference was conceived as a way for students to showcase their work in biblical studies and hermeneutics as well as to relate with the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Biblical Studies Conference held in Montreal in 2010.

The Word in the World (WITW) team was so excited and inspired by the flood of submissions for the conference, that we decided to theme this issue in concordance. We also extended our multi-discipline call to Universities across North America with rich rewards. The variety of responses we received is evident by the table of contents of this issue –the expansion of our reflection and creative writing sections as well as the introduction of a book review section; I must say I am rather proud of our team as well as the contributions. We decided on the title *Emerging Insights* to describe the optimism and innovation in the contributors' approach to biblical studies and hermeneutics.

This issue begins with a home-grown talent whose conference contribution was published in-part in our last issue; **Martha Elias Downey** explains the role of prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the creator/creature relationship in Genesis 2. In the first French language article in WITW's history, **Lydwine Olivier** uses two examples from Genesis 2 to stress the importance of attention to syntax when translating Hebrew. Next **Robert Smith** offers a reinterpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans based on a contemporary dialectic. Finally **Jennifer Tacci** shows how understanding different worldviews affects one's interpretation of texts, as well as their classification into specific genres.

In a new book review section, **Kathryn Sawyer** offers an insightful review of Alan Ford's book *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England.* Next **Janice Poltrick Donato** offers two reflective contributions that transport the reader to a world of colour and language as she describes what inspired her to paint two unparalleled paintings. **Calogero A. Miceli** offers a contemporary twist on the Gospel genre; and **Ivan Van Heyst** tells the story of one man's journey to quench his thirst for the truth which leads him to a note worthy, life altering experience.

The last three entries are poems inspired by scripture. **Dr. Matthew R. Anderson** & **Martha Elias Downey** presented their poems inspired by Genesis 32, at a student organized event in the fall. Both are exciting and original interpretations that offer a glimpse into the

world of a Concordia Theological Studies student, and professor. Meanwhile **Mary Gedeon Harvan** offers a poem that is the perfect ending to this multi-faceted volume.

Finally I would like to address the artwork interspersed throughout the issue. We were fortunate to have received a wide variety of quite impressive art work. The contributors' backgrounds are as diverse as the work they submitted. The bulk of the visual masterpieces are offerings of the hidden talents of our Theological Studies students at Concordia: **J.E Raddatz** and **Martha Elias Downey**, but we are truly honoured to introduce our first-ever international submission: a beautiful full-page painting sent to us by **Wilfred Osuri Alero**, a Theological Studies student in Kenya, Africa. It was difficult to decide which image should be used on the cover; after much deliberation we chose the one that we feel best reflects the sentiment behind *"Emerging Insights."*

On behalf of the entire WITW team, I hope that these "*Emerging Insights"* enlighten your reading and outlook on Theological Studies.

Winter Path *Martha Elias Downey*

The Original Choice: The Prohibition of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Martha Elias Downey

Abstract: *This paper addresses the significance of the prohibition in Genesis 2 regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Multiple explanations for the nature of the tree are offered as well as possible reasons for its exclusion from sanctioned activities in the garden of Eden. The role of the prohibition in the Creator/creature relationship is also explored, and some thoughts are offered on the repercussions of the choice made to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It becomes apparent that what is at stake in this story of beginnings is not the destiny of humanity, but the reliability and faithfulness of the Creator.*

Augustine was one of the first theologians to use the narrative in Genesis chapter three to defend the concept of original sin and to explain the entrance of evil into our world.[1] Since that time, the implications of Adam and Eve's actions have become a mainstay of theology and folklore alike. However, before any act that could be labelled as *sin* occurred in this story, the element of a definite and significant choice had to be present. In order to more clearly define what that choice was, it is important to explore the main object of temptation: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It should be noted that a detailed analysis of the origins of the biblical text in question is beyond the scope of this study; I will be dealing with the first few chapters of Genesis in the form in which we find them today within their canonical context. Furthermore, the questions being addressed here are theological ones and not ones relating to textual criticism. With that in mind, the story of beginnings[2] will be explored primarily as it relates to the dual description of the tree in question. In addition, an explanation will be offered regarding the nature of and reason for the prohibition as well as the underlying significance of this prohibition for the relationship between the Creator and his creation. Finally, the repercussions of the choice will be outlined and a few thoughts provided on the implications this original choice has for the concept of sin. It is my conclusion that what is at stake in this story is not the destiny of humanity, but the reliability and faithfulness of the Creator.

[1] See Augustine's *The City of God*, Book XV, Chapter 1.

[2] Scholars today generally agree that there are two creation stories present in Genesis: the first is found in Genesis 1-2:4a and the second one in 2:4b-25. This distinction, while important, is not vital to this study and therefore will not be addressed in any depth.

The Context of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

> And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. … The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die (NRSV Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17).

The stage set in the second chapter of Genesis is a world created by God into which he inserts a creature formed from dust. This man is then placed in a garden called Eden where he is given vocation and freedom to eat freely from any tree except one. The consequence of defying this directive is dire: death. In order to ascertain why this particular tree was associated with such severe a punishment, it is necessary to examine the nature of this tree and what it represents.

The tree is placed within the context of a garden named Eden, which means "delight," a place associated with fertility and beauty.[3] Other references to Eden point to the garden as a place where God dwells, referring to it as the "garden of God."[4] The symbol of a sacred tree or plant is a familiar one in Biblical and comparative Ancient Near Eastern literature. The epic story of Gilgamesh, of Mesopotamian origin, tells of a plant by which the hero regains his "life's breath," but it is stolen from him by a serpent. Other stories also refer to the "plant of life" and the "food of life."[5] The common thread behind these texts is the concept of a tree with power to confer supernatural qualities, often immortality, when it is ingested.[6] What is unique about these two named trees in Eden in contrast to the life-generating plants in other comparative literature is their naturalization, that is, they do not possess any inherently magical properties. As Sarna puts it, "their mysterious powers do not exist apart from the will of God."[7] The garden then, is the realm of God where everything comes from him, is related to him, and is sustained by him. This point is imperative to an informed understanding of the tree in question.

The Meaning behind the Knowledge of Good and Evil

The Hebrew word translated "knowledge" here carries with it a sense of life experience and relationship rather than merely intellectual understanding.[8] E. A. Speiser sees it as referring to both the mode by which knowledge is acquired as well as the resulting awareness.[9] Partaking of the tree that symbolises this knowledge, then, would result in relational, experiential, and intellectual change.

There are several different interpretations of the phrase "the knowledge of good and evil" which can be grouped into four common schools of thought.[10]

[3] R.N. Whybray, "Genesis," The Oxford Bible Commentary, eds. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 44.
[4] Genesis 3:8, Ezekiel 28:13, Ezekiel 31:9.
[5] Howard N. Wallace, "Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life," vol. 6, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 658.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: MacGraw-Hill, 1966), 25.
[8] Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 12.
[9] E. A. Speiser, "Genesis", vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 26.
[10] These four schools of thought are a distillation of selected ideas found in Wallace; Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987); Jeffery Howard Tigay and Bernard J. Bamberger, "Paradise," vol. 15, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2d ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007); and my own observations on the text.

1. Moral Discernment. The parameters of good and evil are seen to represent moral choice. Speiser translates this knowledge as the ability to distinguish between the two.[11] The insight to be acquired by eating of the tree is an enlightenment which enables a person to make the correct decision when faced with both good and evil options. Some have called this legal responsibility.[12] While a cursory reading of this phrase does seem to imply a certain moral factor, the resulting dilemma of being faced with a moral choice (whether to adhere to or disregard the prohibition) before being equipped to discern between right and wrong is troublesome. This dilemma throws doubt upon the creator's forethought, responsibility, and just intention toward his creation. "Critics of this view note that the very prohibition presumes that man knows the rightness of obedience and the wrongness of disobedience, and ask how the biblical God can be conceived as wishing to withhold moral discernment from man."[13] One cannot study the narrative without noting that a certain morality is implied to be already present in mankind by the nature of the responsibility and vocation given to him and by the permission and prohibition placed before him. Therefore, the only possible reading of this phrase as meaning moral discernment would be in the sense of expanding humanity's pre-existing basic moral knowledge through actual experience. However, the problem with this interpretation of knowledge as broader experience is that after Adam and Eve eat of the fruit, moral and legal responsibility are two qualities notably absent. They are quick to shift blame and they attempt to avoid the creator of the prohibition or law.

2. Sexual Knowledge. This interpretation of "the knowledge of good and evil" is linked with other references regarding the verb "to know" which refer to sexual intimacy.[14] As well, there are instances in which a similar phrase designates the young who are said not to possess this knowledge yet (Deut. 1:39) and the old who have lost it (2 Sam. 19:35).[15] The sexual implications of the knowledge of good and evil within the context of the Genesis narrative are taken from observing that immediately after eating of the fruit of this tree, the man and woman become aware of their nakedness. In addition, the first act mentioned after their dismissal from the garden is sexual intimacy (Genesis 4:1).[16]

However, several details in the story reveal the sexual emphasis of this particular knowledge to be a weak interpretation. First, man was given the prohibition before the creation of the woman. Secondly, the sexuality of the humans seemed to be established before the serpent appeared (Genesis 2:23-25).[17] Thirdly, it would be incongruous for God to deny sexual awareness and thereby procreation to mankind, especially considering the command to multiply given in Genesis 1:28. While it may be argued that the mandate to procreate belongs to a different creation account, the implications should not be entirely dismissed. In light of these indications, any inference that sexual knowledge was wrong for mankind or reserved only for God seems inconceivable.[18] The interpretation of the knowledge of good and evil as implying sexual contact, though having little textual support, might be somewhat tenable if seen as part of a larger prohibition which was temporary - a delay until mankind reached some level of maturity. This is the main argument put forth in the next viewpoint.

3. Maturity and Wisdom. Some scholars believe Adam and Eve to have been like children in this story, innocent and

[11] Speiser, 12.
[12] Wallace, 659.
[13] Tigay and Bamberger, 624.
[14] Genesis 4:1, 17, 25 to name but a few.
[15] Tigay and Bamberger, 624.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Wallace, 657.
[18] Wallace, 657; Tigay and Bamberger, 624.

unlearned.[19] George Buchanan argues that as a result of eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve had to shoulder the responsibilities and concerns common to adults.[20] However, it is not quite certain why God would forbid his children to obtain wisdom, for there is no mention of the prohibition being lifted at some point in the future when they were better equipped to receive this knowledge, and if this was to be the case, it certainly would have been vital to the story. In addition, wisdom is consistently touted as desirable and useful for life in other biblical texts, notably Proverbs, and described as an attribute to be highly sought after, not something to be delayed.[21]

Another aspect of the maturity interpretation is to see the knowledge of good and evil as referring to additional, though inappropriate, faculties for humans. The most compelling of the suggested unbefitting abilities is self-determination.[22] However, the theory offered by Wenham that the gaining of knowledge or wisdom would lead to human autonomy which would run counter to the purpose of God has little support from other biblical texts referring to wisdom. As mentioned earlier, it would isolate this story from the continuity of scripture.[23] A resulting self-determination does offer some explanation for the reference that partaking of the fruit of this tree would render mankind similar to God in some aspect (Genesis 3:22). The obvious question then is whether any of these qualities were apparent in human beings after their choice to eat from the tree. There is little evidence to support any gain in wisdom for Adam and Eve, unless one can count the presence of guilt, shame, and fear as elements of that virtue or as steps towards maturity. It should also be noted that self-determination was undeniably present not only in the aftermath of the choice to eat the fruit, but in the events leading up to it. This renders it somewhat ambiguous as a definitive effect that came into play exclusively after the choice was made.

4. Universal Knowledge. The term "good and evil" can also be read as a merism, which is a figure of speech that names both extremes in order to indicate the inclusion of the full spectrum of the subject.[24] Therefore, this knowledge would encompass a certain totality of what is to be known. An example of this exact phrase and its subsequent explanation can be found in 2 Samuel 14:17-20 where David is referred to as "discerning good and evil" and a few sentences later cited as one who knows "all things that are on the earth." This knowledge might be said to refer to special wisdom that belonged to God's realm alone, the acquisition of which was beyond mankind's comprehension. The importance of avoiding this "divine knowledge" is more understandable in light of the greater purpose of preserving the relationship between creator and creation by protecting the limited and perhaps fragile human creatures from a weighty burden too great for them to bear responsibly. Again, it is unclear whether mankind's spectrum of knowledge was increased to a great extent with the breaking of the prohibition. Certainly, there was a new awareness of their nakedness and vulnerability as well as their changed situation in relation to their creator, but the humans also seemed more confused and uncertain than before the incident with the tree.

Each of the interpretations mentioned above breaks down at some point when inserted into the story and extrapolated in light of the surrounding events. It is interesting to note that the writer of Genesis never offers a clear description or

[19] Speiser, 25.
[20] George Wesley Buchanan, "The Old Testament Meaning of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75, no. 2 (June 1956): 119.
[21] Wenham, 63.
[22] Wallace, 657.
[23] Wenham, 87.
[24] Wallace, 657; Clifford, 12.

explanation of this tree. It is mentioned only twice in the story, with the first appearance somewhat awkwardly inserted in the text which has led some scholars to suggest that it might be a later addition.[25] If that were the case, it would only serve to further obscure the nature of the tree. In the end, it is most likely a moot point, because either the writer assumes that the reference is common enough to be self-explanatory, or the story itself is seen to carry adequate explanation for what the author is trying to convey. Because the purpose of the prohibition cannot be found, at least with sufficient clarity, within the name given to the forbidden tree, the answer must be found elsewhere within the story.

The Tree of Life

It is not possible to fully grasp the meaning of the prohibition of the tree of knowledge of good and evil without mentioning its apparent counterpart, the tree of life, and what it represents. It should be noted that in the Old Testament the word "life" is used to refer to a wide range of meanings, including "immortality" and "good health."[26] The tree of life also appears in Revelation, whereas the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is absent, which leads one to conclude that the first had enduring qualities while the second carried with it a limited and temporal purpose.[27] The lasting nature of the tree of life seems to be directly related to the eternal presence of God. In fact, in some texts it is synonymous with being in the presence of God (Rev. 2:7, 22:14, 19).[28] This tree is also a source of healing in Revelation 22:2, pointing to the notion of good health mentioned previously. In Genesis, both named trees are referred to as being situated in the middle of the garden of Eden which could denote a somewhat competitive aspect, a vying for centrality in the story. However, there is insufficient evidence within the text itself to pit one tree equally against the other or to conclusively make the first choice one between either life or knowledge.

It appears that the pair did not eat from the tree of life even though it was available to them. The question as to why they did not partake of a tree with such special status and obvious benefits is unclear. John Skinner suggests that the tree of life, situated in the middle of the garden, was perhaps another forbidden tree or even *the* forbidden tree itself, since no identifier other than location is given to the prohibited tree in Genesis 3:22.[29] However, R.N. Whybray denies this idea that the two trees were one and the same, synonymous in a way, and defends the more widely accepted position of two distinct trees.[30] Traditionally, the rabbis explained this conundrum of the shared location of the two middle trees by placing the tree of life at the very centre, but inferring that the tree of knowledge was placed around it as a sort of hedge. Therefore, any access to true life must be through true knowledge.[31] While interesting, this concept fails to explain why any prohibition would have been made on these trees since both are seen to lead mankind closer to the purpose of God in this scenario.

Knowledge, then, cannot be said to be in direct conflict with life in this story, but neither can it be said to lead to life. It does seem clear from the text that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a lesser tree than the tree of life, having limited effect and power, occupying no lasting place in the purpose of God.

The Nature of the Prohibition

When God speaks the prohibition to Adam, he does not expand on it in any

[25] Wenham, 62.
[26] Wallace, 658.
[27] 1 Corinthians 13:8.
[28] See also Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 45.
[29] John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 88.
[30] Whybray, 44.
[31] Julian Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 57.

way, aside from citing the result of partaking of the tree, which is death. It is the crafty serpent, questionable as a reliable source, who expounds on the nature of the forbidden tree, refutes the claim that they will die and instead, insists that they will become like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4-5). The serpent implies that the prohibition was put in place not for their own protection, but in God's self-interest and for his security. The fact that they did not die immediately after ingesting the fruit can be taken to be a confirmation of at least part of the serpent's statement.

Scholars have sought to explain this apparent non-fulfillment or at the very least, delayed implementation of God's words to Adam. Wenham makes a valid point regarding the narrative of the first few chapters of Genesis: "...at best, all language about God is analogical. Words used to describe him and his acts must inevitably be human words, but they do not have quite the same meaning when applied to him as when they refer to men."[32] While the fact that the humans did not die on the day that they ate of the fruit seems to contradict God's earlier warning, one must look at the overall use of the word, "day," in the creation narratives. In Genesis 1:5 God separates the darkness from the light, and the first day is declared, even though the sun has not yet been created. Clearly, the use of the term, "day," in this story is far from straightforward. Therefore, one must be careful not to impose an implicit timeframe in one instance (Genesis 2:15) that one is not willing to consider regarding other occurrences of the word in a similar context (Genesis 1).

The term "you shall die" can also be read not as referring to physical death, but "to be cut off, excluded from community with God."[33] Ezekiel 18 is an example of this reading, being a chapter on the implications of righteous living (they shall live) as opposed to turning away from righteousness (they shall die).

It should be observed that there is no strong indication that God did not follow through regarding the announced consequence for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death took up root and grew ever more prevalent in the story of humanity, as is evidenced by the murderous story of Cain and Abel that follows in Genesis 4:1-16 and subsequent disturbing narratives. Moreover, Moberly believes that what is at risk in the prohibition is not merely physical life for the first man and woman, but something much more profound: God's trustworthiness.[34] The choice made by Adam and Eve to test the bounds of the prohibition indicate that they were indeed questioning the veracity of their creator's words, and they would not be the last humans to do so. The implication of this, a fearless creator putting his reliability and credibility on the line to be affirmed by his creation, is that human beings find themselves in a constant position of choice. The narratives found in the remainder of the Old Testament would seem to expand and verify this.

The Reason for the Prohibition

In order to explore the reason why the creator might give his favoured creatures a prohibition, putting not only mankind but conceivably his own reputation at risk, one must revisit the story within its larger setting. Hermann Gunkel observes that unlike later narratives, the early chapters of Genesis depict a God who is decidedly intimate and recognisably present with mankind.

> In the latter [legends of the patriarchs] the divinity appears always enveloped in mystery, unrecognised or speaking out of Heaven or perhaps only in a dream. In the earlier legends, on the contrary, God walks intimately among men and no one marvels at it: in the legend of Paradise

[32] Wenham, 40.
[33] See Clifford, 12.
[34] Moberly, 31.

> men dwell in God's house; it is assumed that he is in the habit of visiting them every evening...Furthermore, in the legends of the patriarchs the real actors are always men; if the divinity appears, it is regarded as an exception. But in the primitive legends the divinity is the leading actor...[35]

Taking the point of view that God, the creator, is the primary actor in the story shifts the focus away from mankind and his fate. Genesis three is not then, as James Barr proposes, an account of how the opportunity for mankind's immortality was squandered.[36] In fact, immortality is not mentioned until the end of the third chapter (3:22). The story does not begin with human beings - it begins with God. Once this paradigm is established, the details of the narrative take on a slightly different perspective.

As articulated earlier, Eden is the place where the creator is present by his works, words, and proximity, though he is not defined by its locale nor restricted to its elements. Within this context, the purpose of the garden is not primarily as a habitation for creation, but as an expression of the creator; it is a point of contact between the two. The perspective of God as the main character changes the question regarding the purpose of the prohibition. It is no longer, "Why was mankind refused access to a certain tree and its implied knowledge?" but "How does this prohibition further the purpose of the intimately relational creator whom we see present in the early chapters of Genesis?"

Placing the focus of the story on the fall of humanity and the entrance of evil and death into the world causes one to miss the larger picture being painted by the writer, and fails to take into consideration the introductory chapters which set the tone for what follows. Brueggemann warns against this tendency to misinterpret the first chapters of Genesis: "Like the people in this narrative, our concern is not finally the danger of sex, the origin of evil, the appearance of death, or the power of the fall. It is, rather, the summons of this calling God for us to be his creatures, to live in his world on his terms."[37] These chapters cannot be read through the simple formulaic lens of sin and punishment. God's purposes are much grander than justice; his design is on creating life.

The prohibition given by a relational God would then be to guard and protect the best interests of the communion that God initiated between himself and humanity. The only bad choice would be one which would cause a rift in this relationship. A careful reading finds that the knowledge of good and evil is not portrayed as an evil and alluring object in this scenario; only the suggestions of the crafty serpent allude to such a concept. In other biblical passages, knowledge and wisdom are clearly desirable traits. Proverbs 1:7 says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." Not only is there is a correlation between gaining knowledge and revering God, but the method and order of acquiring knowledge are deemed important. As one can see from the Genesis narrative, when knowledge is sought to be procured outside of the parameters set up by the creator, there are drastic consequences. The prohibition therefore, could be interpreted to be more about the means of gaining knowledge than about acquiring the knowledge itself.

The Effects of Defying the Prohibition

It has been established that the prohibition was given to protect and promote trusting interaction between the creator and the creature. According to Wenham, the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree

[35] Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 13-14.
[36] James Barr, "Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2-3) - and Related Matters," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (2006): 4.
[37] Brueggemann, 44.

would lead to "human autonomy and an independence of the creator incompatible with the trustful relationship between man and his maker which the story presupposes."[38] This is, in fact, exactly what transpires. Mankind was driven from the garden of God and became an outsider to the close fellowship that was present before. The humans were deceived into believing that their action was a search for further knowledge. Ultimately, their decision was not one for greater knowledge, but to acquire knowledge apart from its source. According to Proverbs, the path to knowledge starts with reverential respect and acknowledgement of one's dependence on God; it does not start by eating the fruit of a tree.

Perhaps one of the most devastating effects of this choice to become autonomous was that the source of life was cut off. What had earlier been readily available to humans, not as fruit from a tree, but as sustainability from the one who breathed life into them, now became a temptation as well, and they were banned from it.[39] It can be speculated that Adam and Eve did not eat of the tree of life earlier because the fruit of the tree paled in comparison to their every day encounter with "the real thing," the author of life. If there was no desire to eat from the tree of life because they had life, then the only way they could be tempted by the tree of knowledge was to believe that they lacked something, and that their creator was not dealing fairly with them nor providing adequately for their needs. The secondary tree was never about gaining forbidden knowledge; it was placed there as a symbol of trust. Once that trust was eroded, aided by the clever innuendos of the serpent, the result was inevitable.

The Concept of Sin

The three most common Hebrew words for sin in the scriptures incorporate the ideas of failure, breach, and crookedness.[40] Thus, sin in its most basic definition denotes a break in a relationship or covenant, a failure of mutual obligations in the realm of relations. Though the word *sin* does not occur until Genesis 4:7, the break in the relationship is evident much earlier in the story. Was mankind totally responsible for this schism, or can any blame be placed on the clever serpent?[41] Tigay and Bamberger see the source of evil as neither divine nor demonic, but having roots in the actions and attitudes of the creatures of God.[42] This is an uncomfortable conclusion to draw, for it lays the responsibility for the choice and its subsequent repercussions squarely on humanity's shoulders. Every time human beings place blame on the serpent for how this story turned out, they are replaying the immediate fallout of the first decision to break faith: a desire to escape responsibility. The shameful attempt of the humans to assuage their guilt by hiding from the truth did nothing to repair the broken relationship. It happened then, and it continues to happen today.[43] The persistent search for an explanation as to why evil is present in the world invariably leads to theories that include every other factor than our own lack of trust. It is another sign of how deeply human fidelity has been wounded.

However, the issue of blame is only a symptom of the real tragedy: the disruption of the first community which saw the divine being, humanity, and the earthly elements all in harmony with each other. Clothing became an attempt to deal with the shame and the uncomfortable exposure that had never been present within the covenant of God. Both Lipinski and Armstrong believe that sin, the breaking of the covenantal

[38] Wenham, 87.
[39] Clifford, 12.
[40] Edward Lipinski and Louis Jacobs, "Sin," vol. 18, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2d. ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 621-622.
[41] Karen Armstrong sees little difference between the two scenarios. See *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 28.
[42] Tigay and Bamberger, 626.
[43] Whybray, 43.

relationship, is the catalytic component that dissolves community and positions itself as the enemy of completeness, honesty, and honour.[44] The banning of the man and the woman from the garden of God was a solidification and confirmation of their breach of trust with the Creator. It was not the cruel and disproportionate backlash that it appeared to be. It was God's concrete recognition that they had excluded him from their community, not by desiring knowledge, but by directing their wills towards a purpose in direct opposition to a trusting, communal attitude.[45]

The uniqueness of this story among other legends of origin is that the God represented here is one God, a single deity as opposed to the multiple gods of other traditions.[46] This is the story of one creator and his creation. The monotheism which stands out in stark contrast to other myths of origin testifies to the central importance of an exclusive and intimate component in the creator/creature interaction. The distinguishing characteristic which makes this unique partnership possible is the peculiar identity of the creature who carries the breath and likeness of the creator. "The most striking statement of the primeval story, over and above God being the creator, preserver and sustainer of creation, is that God created human beings in his image. The sentence means that God created humanity to be his counterpart so that something can happen between God and the individual."[47]

What began as a world of integrated relations meant to establish wholeness in place of chaos soon tumbled into disarray when the first cracks of distrust crept into the community. Where this inclination towards destroying unity came from is not the important question, at least according to the story of beginnings that we find in Genesis. The emphasis is always on the Creator, inviting his creation to live in harmony with his mandate in order to benefit from his goodness.

The original choice, then, was not a decision to gain moral discernment, sexual knowledge, a broader range of experience and maturity, nor to acquire some degree of omniscience and so become more like God. Neither was it strictly a choice to obey or disobey an arbitrary directive given by the creator. The prohibition was put in place to protect the community created by God wherein all things come from him, exist in him, and are sustained by him. This intimate community was built on trust, and in order for it to remain authentic, the choice was given to human beings either to continue as willing participants in trusting communion with their creator or to venture out on their own. Unfortunately, God's confidence in humanity as a faithful partner proved to be greater than mankind's confidence in the creator and ultimately, in themselves. Fortunately, this is only the story of beginnings and not the end. What follows in the biblical narrative and beyond is the continued account of God presenting humanity with opportunity after opportunity to re-establish community so that he can show himself to be trustworthy.

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[44] Lipinski, 622; Armstrong, 30.
[45] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 96.
[46] Whybray, 40.
[47] Westermann, 111.

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Eli Eli Lema Sabachthani *J.E. Raddatz*

Apports de la Grammaire Hébraïque et de l'analyse syntaxique à la Traduction et à la lecture Processuelle: Exemples tirés de Genèse 2

Lydwine Olivier

Résumé: *Le propos de cet article est de rappeler à travers deux exemples pris dans le chapitre 2 de la Genèse l'importance de prendre en compte la syntaxe hébraïque, en montrant les incidences que celle-ci peut avoir sur la traduction et une interprétation processuelle du texte biblique. Dans le premier exemple, prendre en compte une forme verbale particulière (le H/Hiphil) permet de relever une avancée substantielle dans le récit, capable de nourrir une lecture processuelle. L'autre exemple a pour objectif de monter que l'analyse syntaxique du texte hébreu peut conduire à proposer une nouvelle traduction, et d'en analyser ensuite les incidences herméneutiques.*

Le propos de cet article est de montrer comment les nouvelles avancées en syntaxe hébraïque, qui concernent aussi les formes verbales[1], apportent des nuances intéressantes de traduction et d'interprétation capables de nourrir une théologie processuelle. Nous illustrerons ce propos par deux exemples précis de Genèse 2. Pour situer ce texte, rappelons que Genèse 1 concerne la façon dont Dieu, pour créer le monde, opère un travail de séparation, alors que ce qu'on appelle communément le second récit de création est davantage centré sur la création de ce qui va vivre sur cette terre. Plus précisément, la première partie du chapitre 2 de la Genèse porte sur la création de l'humain et des conditions nécessaires à sa survie, alors que la seconde partie se concentre sur la création de l'altérité comme condition tout aussi nécessaire. Dans cet article nous prendrons deux exemples dans ce second récit de la création.

Dans le premier cas, au verset 15, l'analyse verbale montre comment un changement dans la forme verbale hébraïque fait passer ce qui semble une banale répétition au rang d'une action révélatrice de la participation de l'humain dans la progression du récit. Dans le deuxième cas, au verset 23, on verra que l'analyse macro-syntaxique du texte permet d'attribuer la phrase « Celle-là sera appelée femme parce que de l'homme celle-là a été prise » au narrateur plutôt qu'à l'humain. Si cette proposition de traduction[2] permet de résoudre un certain

[1] Le système verbal hébraïque se compose de 7 constructions (appelées *binianim*) : Qal, Niphal, Piel, Pual, Hiphil, Hophal et Hitpael. Mais les grammaires récentes, qui tiennent compte de certaines difficultés liées à ces appellations traditionnelles, ont renommé ces constructions verbales respectivement : G, N, D, Dp, H, Hp, HtD. Les deux appellations sont utilisées de façon conjointe dans cet article.

[2] Les passages bibliques cités ici sont issus de notre propre traduction du texte hébreu.

nombre de difficultés textuelles, elle conduira aussi à réfléchir aux incidences de cette traduction, notamment processuelles.

L'intérêt de prendre en compte les formes verbales hébraïques

Il s'agit ici de montrer l'importance de prendre en compte les formes verbales hébraïques dans un texte biblique, même s'il peut s'avérer difficile, quand vient le temps de la traduction, de faire ressortir la nuance que cette forme verbale offre. L'exemple des versets 8 et 15 est à ce sujet significatif. Prenons le temps de prendre connaissance de la section qui nous intéresse, en rappelant qu'à la fin du verset 5, il n'y avait pas d'humain pour servir la terre.

> V. 8 : Le Seigneur Dieu plante un jardin en Eden, vers l'est. Il place là l'humain qu'il a modelé.
> V. 9 : Puis le Seigneur Dieu fait en sorte que surgisse de la terre tout arbre désirable à la vue et bon comme nourriture, et l'arbre de la vie au milieu du jardin, et l'arbre de la connaissance du bon et du mauvais.

Les versets 10 à 14 relatent qu'un fleuve sort de ce lieu pour abreuver le jardin et le reste du monde. Puis, au verset 15 :
V. 15 : le Seigneur Dieu prend l'humain, il fait en sorte qu'il s'installe dans le jardin d'Éden pour le servir et le garder.

Habituellement, Genèse 2 est lu comme un texte dans lequel Dieu est le sujet de la plupart des actions, et ses créatures des objets passifs, ce que la forme du verbe utilisé au verset 8 confirme : dans ce verset, Dieu « place » l'humain. Le verbe est au G/Qal, forme verbale qui implique une action simple : « placer », un sujet : « Dieu », et un objet : « l'humain ». Au verset 15 en revanche, le verbe utilisé est un synonyme : « installer ». Mais sa forme verbale est cette fois au H/Hiphil, ce qui, dans des perspectives récentes concernant le système verbal hébraïque[3], implique toujours une action, mais cette fois avec deux sujets actifs. Dieu (sujet n°1) n'agit plus sur un objet, mais stimule le sujet n°2 (l'humain) à agir. Pour marquer ce double sujet, nous avons traduit cette phrase par : « le Seigneur Dieu fit en sorte que l'humain s'installe dans le jardin. ». Cette précision est importante, car elle montre qu'il ne s'agit plus d'une simple répétition. L'humain, qui était au verset 8 un objet qu'on place, se comporte au verset 15 en sujet qui s'installe, grâce à Dieu. Ceci vient par conséquent contredire un certain nombre de commentaires qui parlent de ces deux actions, « placer » et « installer », comme une répétition[4], un résumé de ce qui vient de se passer entre le verset 8 et le verset 15[5], ou encore un marqueur de fin de digression.[6]

Choisir d'utiliser une forme verbale impliquant deux sujets dans le verbe « installer », quand le verbe existe dans sa forme la plus simple, donc au G/Qal, fait ressortir la vocation de Dieu de donner une place importante à l'humain comme sujet, comme acteur. En changeant de forme verbale, le narrateur veut nous signaler un changement tant dans le statut de l'humain que dans la raison de ce changement : il manquait à l'humain quelque chose pour qu'il soit autre chose qu'un objet. Ce manque vient nourrir une lecture processuelle. Il manque à l'humain ce qu'il faut à tout humain pour vivre : des arbres désirables à voir et bons à manger, un arbre de la vie, un arbre de la connaissance du bon et du mauvais. Ce n'est qu'une fois que tout cela a poussé, et que l'eau vivante a surgi, c'est-à-dire à la fin du verset 14, que Dieu peut faire en

[3] Waltke, Bruce K., O'Connor, Michael P. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 351s.
[4] Vogels, Walter. *Nos origines : Genèse 1-11* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1992), 94 ; Von Rad, Gerhard. *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 80.
[5] Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11: a Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 211.
[6] Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 67.

sorte que l'humain s'installe. Ayant de quoi vivre, l'humain, au verset 15, peut enfin devenir, agir, ce qu'il commence à faire en s'installant. Le verbe est d'ailleurs en lien avec la précision de sa vocation, qui était au verset 5 de servir la terre, et qui devient, au verset 15, de servir le jardin et le garder. En s'installant, l'humain est mis face à une responsabilité supplémentaire. À cet instant, une nouvelle proposition apparaît, celle de « garder » le jardin.

Le passage entre les deux formes verbales montre de façon subtile la sollicitude et le réalisme de Dieu qui s'occupe des besoins de l'humain avant toute chose, ce que la pensée processuelle appelle le pôle conséquent de Dieu : cette capacité qu'a Dieu de tenir compte des entités, en partant toujours de là où elles en sont[7]. Le verbe au H/hiphil montre aussi que Dieu, loin de contraindre, a plutôt comme penchant premier d'inciter, de stimuler pour donner envie aux entités d'aller vers ses propositions. Cela vient aussi éclairer à l'avance la réaction de Dieu au verset 18 quand il dit : « il n'est pas bon que l'humain soit seul ». Le lecteur, à cet endroit, est informé que la proposition de Dieu n'a pas été entièrement *préhendée*[8] selon le mot processuel adéquat. L'absence de réaction implicite de l'humain signale qu'il manque encore quelque chose à l'humain une fois installé pour qu'il serve et garde le jardin, ce que la remarque de Dieu met en relief : « Il faut que je lui fasse une aide devant lui ». À cet instant, on apprend qu'être vivant, tout comme désirer et manger, ne suffit pas à l'humain. Il a besoin de l'altérité pour vivre. Dieu, là encore, va tenir compte de cette absence de réaction de l'humain qui n'adhère pas encore à la proposition de servir et garder le jardin.

Ayant montré que les formes verbales hébraïques apportent des nuances qui ouvrent à de nouvelles perspectives théologiques, la partie qui suit va s'intéresser à l'apport de l'analyse syntaxique dans la traduction, et ses incidences théologiques.

L'analyse syntaxique comme support pour ouvrir à une autre hypothèse de traduction.

Avant d'aller plus loin, il faut se rappeler qu'un récit comporte trois formes de narration : la narration effective, qui raconte une suite d'actions ; le discours, qui introduit un texte au « je » et au « tu » ; enfin, ce qu'on appelle le commentaire narratif, une forme de parenthèse dans l'avancée de l'action faite par le narrateur.

Reprenons le texte à partir du verset 22 :

22a Le Seigneur Dieu construit le côté
b qu'il avait pris de l'humain,
c en une femme.
d Il fait en sorte qu'elle vienne vers l'humain.

Regardons maintenant ce qui suit :

23a L'humain dit : (way)
b « celle-là, cette fois, os de mes os et chair de ma chair ». (PNS)

c. Celle-là sera appelée femme (x-yiqtol)
d parce que de l'homme celle-là a été prise. (x-qatal)
24a C'est pour cela qu'un homme quittera son père et sa mère (x-yiqtol)
b et s'attachera à sa femme; (we-qatal)
c Ils deviendront une seule chair. (we-qatal)

25a. Ils sont tous les deux nus, l'humain et sa femme, (way)

[7] Sur le pôle primordial et le pôle conséquent de Dieu, voir Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality, an Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harner, 1960). Pour une définition plus abordable de ces concepts, voir John B. Cobb, *Whitehead Word Book. A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Claremont, P&F Press, 2008), p. 69s.

[8] Le mot *préhender* est un néologisme inventé par Alfred N. Whitehead pour parler de l'action des entités qui adhèrent, « prennent » la proposition qui leur est offerte. Whitehead, Alfred N. *Process and Reality, an Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Harner, 1960), et John B. Cobb, *Whitehead Word Book. A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality*. (Claremont, P&F Press, 2008), p. 31s.

b ils n'ont pas honte l'un envers l'autre. (we-x-yiqtol)

Si le v. 22 fait suite à une série d'actions qui font avance le récit, le verset 23 apporte un changement. Le verset débute par un wayyiqtol, forme verbale utilisée pour la narration : « l'humain dit ». La suite est une phrase nominale : « celle-là cette fois, os de mes os, chair de ma chair », sans verbe, avec deux possessifs à la première personne du singulier, « mes », « ma ». Jusque-là, c'est bien l'humain qui parle. On est dans le discursif.

Le deuxième ensemble, du v. 23c au v. 24c, est composé de deux x-yiqtol. Le premier est suivi d'un x-qatal, et le second de deux we-qatal. Syntaxiquement, un bloc qui commence par un x-yiqtol coupe le récit et introduit quelque chose de nouveau : ici, cela correspond au commentaire narratif. D'habitude, ce qui précède un yiqtol, ce qu'on nomme le « x », est une conjonction. Ici, c'est un démonstratif, « celle-là ». Il est donc logique syntaxiquement, de couper le texte quand le premier x-yiqtol apparaît, soit, non pas au v. 24a, ce que tout le monde fait, mais au v. 23d, en se servant du premier x-yictol comme indice syntaxique, et de regrouper dans un même ensemble les deux x-yictol. L'analyse des formes verbales montrent que le premier x-yiqtol est suivi d'un x-qatal, qui introduit une antériorité de narration sans incidence sur le x-yiqtol lui-même, et on peut noter que les deux verbes sont à la voix passives, ce qui contribue à les rapprocher. Le second x-yiqtol est suivi de deux weqatal, qui marquent, en grammaire hébraïque, une continuité d'avec ce qui précède. Même en mettant de côté le x-qatal, qui peut être lu comme une commentaire dans le commentaire, tout concours ainsi à permet un regroupement des deux x-yictol dans un ensemble cohérent. Dans cette hypothèse, le commentaire narratif ne commence plus au v. 24, mais bien au v. 23d :

23c Celle-là sera appelée femme
d parce que de l'homme celle-là a été prise.
24a C'est pour cela qu'un homme quittera son père et sa mère
b et s'attachera à sa femme ;
c Ils deviendront une seule chair.

Pour conforter ce choix, il est intéressant de remarquer que, contrairement à l'ensemble précédent, celui-ci ne comporte que des verbes conjugués, et aucun possessif ou pronom à la première personne du singulier. Le fait que le sujet de cet ensemble, l'homme (*ish*) ajoute un indice supplémentaire en faveur de cette hypothèse. Nous verrons en effet que dans le troisième ensemble, il est à nouveau question de l'humain (*adam*), et non plus de l'homme.
Il faut cependant bien rappeler que cette proposition est en rupture avec toutes les traductions : de tout temps il a été admis que la phrase « Celle-là sera appelée femme parce que de l'homme celle-là a été prise », est dite par l'humain. Ceci est soutenu par le fait que le v. 23 fait apparaître trois fois le démonstratif « celle-là », qui joue le rôle de fil conducteur de la parole de l'humain. Enfin il est traditionnellement admis que le verset est construit sur un rythme qui lui donne une unité. C'est sur cette structure poétique que les commentaires se fondent tous pour attribuer à l'humain l'ensemble de la phrase (v.23b-d), que Westermann appelle *the jubilant welcome*[9].

Parlons maintenant du troisième ensemble. Pour bien montrer que la parenthèse narrative est terminée, le v. 25 repart avec un nouveau wayyiqtol, forme habituelle de la narration. Le sujet en revanche a changé. C'est à nouveau l'humain (*adam*), qui était le sujet du discours, et non plus l'homme (*ish*) comme on pourrait s'y attendre, et qui était le sujet du commentaire narratif : « Ils sont tous les deux nus, l'humain et sa femme ». Faire cette distinction dans la traduction n'est pas neutre. Pourtant, elle

[9] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: a Commentary*, 191.

est très souvent gommée par les traducteurs[10].

Revenons sur le commentaire narratif, soit les vv. 23c-24c : « Celle-là sera appelée femme parce que de l'homme celle-là a été prise. C'est pour cela qu'un homme quittera son père et sa mère et s'attachera à sa femme ; ils deviendront une seule chair ». Bien qu'en rupture avec la tradition, cette nouvelle hypothèse résout un certain nombre d'énigmes. La première, c'est qu'il n'est plus nécessaire de se demander pourquoi l'humain parle à la troisième personne[11], ni pourquoi il parle de façon aussi impersonnelle de la femme. Et pour cause, dans cette hypothèse, ce n'est pas lui qui parle. Cela, c'est pour ce qui concerne l'humain.

En ce qui concerne le commentaire narratif, quelles sont les conséquences de le faire commencer à la fin du v. 23 ? Car, si syntaxiquement l'hypothèse tient, il faut se demander quelles sont les incidences d'un tel commentaire. En effet, ce commentaire annonce trois événements à venir, qui vont émerger de la situation issue de ce *jubilant welcome* de l'humain.
Reprenons. Le narrateur nous prévient donc que : 1/ « celle-là » sera appelée femme (*issha*), car d'un homme (*ish*) elle a été prise ; 2/ l'homme abandonnera père et mère pour sa femme, et qu'il s'attachera à elle ; 3/ ils deviendront une seule chair. Revenons sur la première annonce :

23c Celle-là sera appelée femme (*issha*),
d parce que de l'homme (*ish*) celle-là a été prise.
Ce que dit le narrateur semble faux, puisqu'au vv. 21-22 il est dit :

21a Yhwh Dieu fait en sorte qu'un profond sommeil tombe sur l'humain.
b Il s'endort.
c Il prend un de ses côtés
d et ferme la chair à sa place.
22a Yhwh Dieu construit le côté
b qu'il a pris de l'humain,
c en une femme.
d Il fait en sorte qu'elle vienne vers l'humain.

On voit bien que la femme a été prise du côté de l'humain (*adam*), et non de l'homme (*ish*). Quel est donc le but de ce commentaire ? Que s'est-il passé entre le verset 22 et le verset 23 pour que l'humain passe au statut d'homme ? Une analyse processuelle du début du verset 23 nous éclaire. Le « jubilant welcome » de l'humain est le signe de l'intégration que l'humain fait de la proposition de Dieu. L'humain *préhende* la nouvelle donnée que représente l'altérité reconnue comme celle qui lui fait face. En adhérant à cette nouvelle proposition, l'humain évolue vers autre chose, ce que le procès appelle une avancée créatrice[12] : l'humain n'est plus seul. Il accueille l'altérité, et de cette altérité émerge la sexuation. En acceptant cette proposition, l'humain s'introduit, de facto pourrait-on dire, à sa propre sexuation, différenciée de la femme, ce qui est signifié par les mots *ish* et *issha*.

En opérant ce glissement de l'humain vers la femme, le commentaire narratif nous apprend que l'humain ne peut devenir « homme » qu'une fois qu'il a reconnu l'autre devant lui comme os de ses os et chair de sa chair. C'est dans le manque et dans sa reconnaissance que l'humain devient un homme, différencié par sa sexuation. Tant que cette étape n'est pas franchie, la femme reste celle-là, un démonstratif. Car elle aussi n'accède au statut de femme comme être sexué que dans la reconnaissance par cet autre qu'est l'humain en train de devenir homme.

Cela nous apprend aussi qu'il ne peut être celui qui se reconnaît ainsi. Cette nouvelle

[10] Voir notamment la TOB, (traduction Œcuménique de la Bible), La BJ (Bible de Jérusalem), ou encore la Bible Segond, mais la liste est beaucoup plus longue.
[11] Wénin, André. *D'Adam à Abraham, ou les errances de l'humain: lecture de Genèse, 1:1-12:4* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 76.

[12] Ce vers quoi tend toute *concrescence* (voir note suivante).

concrescence[13] de l'humanité ne peut être reconnue ni par l'humain dans sa parole, ni par Dieu, mais par l'autre. Cet autre, ici, c'est le narrateur, qui tire la conséquence implicite mais immédiate du cri de l'humain. La femme s'est avancée, l'humain l'a reconnue, et de ces deux nouvelles propositions d'accueil faites l'un à l'autre, est advenu autre chose : l'émergence du sujet-homme et du sujet-femme sexués. À partir de l'altérité proposée par Dieu apparaît une nouvelle différentiation, une nouvelle séparation qui vient renforcer la notion d'altérité, dont l'homme et la femme en constituent l'irréductibilité. Ici, ce n'est donc plus Dieu qui propose, c'est l'accueil de l'altérité qui, en se proposant à l'autre, engendre une nouvelle distinction. Ici, c'est l'humanité qui vient prolonger la création de Dieu. Dieu fait son travail de création primordial, offert désormais au monde et à ses entités. Avec cette nouvelle concrescence, sous forme d'une humanité séparée, différenciée en homme et en femme, le récit nous entraîne, d'une façon extraordinairement concise – en 1 verset et demi –, vers l'essence de la vie humaine.

La sexuation conduit au couple, à la famille, et à une autre séparation nécessaire, une autre différenciation essentielle : abandonner ses parents pour à son tour devenir couple, et implicitement, parent. Autant de nouvelles propositions que l'humain, qu'il soit homme ou femme aura à accueillir ou non. L'ensemble 23d-24 devient un véritable traité sur les conséquences de la sexuation, sur la vie humaine, la vie à deux, les notions d'enfants et de parents, et sur les relations qui en découlent.

Mais cette émergence de la sexuation contient en son sein un risque de confusion existentielle contenu en germe dans l'altérité, et que Dieu ne voudra pas : gare à l'annulation de celle-ci, la Tour de Babel nous le rappellera encore. Dieu propose et s'engage à l'altérité, ce que signifie l'expression « une aide devant lui », c'est-à-dire en hébreu quelqu'un capable de secourir, mais aussi d'affronter. Si, comme la tradition l'affirme, c'est l'humain qui énonce que la femme a été prise de l'homme, et qu'ensuite on apprend qu'ils ne formeront qu'une seule chair, certains auteurs tels Balmary[14], Basset[15] et Wénin[16] ont raison de relever l'annonce d'un risque de fusion dans ce « une seule chair », et encore plus l'annonce d'une confusion qui se nouera en Genèse 3, quand manger de l'arbre de la connaissance du bon et du mauvais conduira l'humanité hors du Jardin. Car qu'est-ce que la fusion, sinon une façon de « manger » l'autre ? On se retrouve alors effectivement dans l'annulation de cette nécessaire et fructueuse séparation entre homme et femme.

En revanche, si la phrase appartient au commentaire narratif, il est alors question de la vocation de l'humanité de conserver une saine et sainte distanciation, symbolisée par la sexuation comme différence irréductible, capable de combler sans jamais l'atteindre le manque constitutif de l'homme et de la femme. Une saine altérité qui seule peut conduire à une communion qui ne détruit pas l'autre, mais au contraire lui permet de s'épanouir, si l'on reprend l'idée de Marc François Lacan[17].

[13] *concrescence*: néologisme inventé par Whitehead à partir du latin *con-crescere* (grandir avec), pour signifier cette évolution de l'entité vers un nouveau stage d'évolution. L'entité, enrichie de sa préhension d'une nouvelle donnée qui se présente à elle, entre en concrescence. Pour une définition plus complète du concept, voir John B. Cobb, *Whitehead Word Book. A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Claremont, P&F Press, 2008), p. 59s.

[14] Balmary, Marie. *La divine origine. Dieu n'a pas créé l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), 90.

[15] Basset, Lytta. *Sainte colère. Jacob, Job, Jésus* (Genève/Paris: Labor et Fides/Bayard, 2002), 78.

[16] Wénin, André. *D'Adam à Abraham, ou les errances de l'humain: lecture de Genèse, 1:1-12:4*, 69.

[17] Lacan, Marc-François. « Une présence dont je puis jouir », *Lumière & Vie* 198: 63-80. Cet article s'appuie sur le texte d'une conférence inédite, donnée à la Faculté

Alors qu'il s'était arrêté à l'exclamation de l'humain, le récit reprend au verset 25 sous la forme d'un épilogue. L'humain – et non l'homme comme on pourrait s'y attendre – et sa femme sont nus. S'il est question ici de l'humain et non de l'homme, on peut valablement émettre l'hypothèse que humain et homme ne font plus qu'un en raison même de cette sexuation, source de différenciation et d'identité, comme la femme est une altérité devenue sexuée elle aussi. Ils représentent ainsi tous les deux ce qu'ils vont effectivement devenir : opposés et complémentaires l'un pour l'autre, l'un en face de l'autre, l'un contre l'autre aussi. L'humain est devenu cet homme sexué, l'humain dont on peut penser qu'il deviendra bientôt un nom propre (Adam), une fois son identité acquise. La sexuation, et donc par là même son identité, ne serait-elle pas ce manque qui l'empêchait de devenir pleinement acteur de sa vie ? L'humain devient un homme, et la femme, une femme. Il deviendra Adam quand il nommera sa femme Ève, même si, pour cela, il faudra attendre le chapitre suivant[18].

* *
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Les deux exemples qui ont été proposés ici montrent la nécessité de prendre en compte la syntaxe et les formes verbales hébraïques. Dans le premier cas, prendre en compte une H/Hiphil permet de relever une avancée substantielle dans le récit, qui infirme ce que les commentaires ont l'habitude de voir comme une répétition sans intérêt. L'autre exemple aura montré que l'analyse macro-syntaxique du texte permet de proposer une autre façon de traduire un texte. Or, proposer un changement dans la traduction d'un texte aussi connu que Genèse 2 conduit à avancer une autre herméneutique de ce texte, ce qui est aussi le but de toute analyse processuelle : se laisser déstabiliser par le texte – hébreu – pour oser de nouvelles avenues.

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de théologie catholique de Strasbourg, le 9 avril 1987. Consulté le 30 avril 2009. http://www.psychanalyse.lu/articles/MarcLacan.htm.

[18] Le mot perd son article en Genèse 3,17, et 3, 21.

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Revisiting Homosexuality and Paul's Letter to the Romans: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Considerations of 1:18-32

Robert Smith

Abstract: *Romans 1:18-32 is arguably one of the most cited biblical arguments against homosexuality. This article seeks to give a context from which to better understand Paul's admonition, by reexamining some of the exegetical and hermeneutical considerations, and their use in contemporary dialectic. After reviewing various perspectives and interpretations of Romans 1:18-32, a concluding segment argues that the dialectic should be reconsidered within an appropriate ethical framework.*

***Romans* 1:18-32**‡

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; [21] for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools; [23] and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, [27] and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. [28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. [29] They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy,

‡ Biblical references in this article are from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).
* Instead of the ptc. epigontes, MSS D*, G, and Latin versions read instead ouk enoesan, "they did not know," which changes the meaning of the verse considerably.

murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, [30] slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] They know God's decree,* that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

Romans 1:18-32: God's Judgment on the Ungodly

The letter to the *Romans* is one of many attributed to Paul in the New Testament canon, which were written to different Christian congregations circa 50 CE. In it, he addresses particular concerns of the congregation in Rome. The portion of the text concerned with here, Romans 1:18-32, comes immediately after Paul's self-affirmation of his apostleship, his salutation to the Christian congregation in Rome, and a brief proclamation of salvation to all those who have faith in the gospel. The text in question is primarily delineated by a transition in subjects that focuses on characteristics of the "wicked" and "ungodly," which includes idolatry and homosexual practices, and a long list of other vices. In contrast, the preceding text deals with the righteousness of God as revealed by faith in the gospel, and the proceeding text warns against condemning one's self by passing judgment on others. Specifically, Romans 1:18-32 discusses the wrath of God from heaven on the ungodly and wicked who suppress the truth, as well as some descriptive characteristics of who the wicked and unrighteous are, what they do, how God has "given them up" to their degrading minds and passions, and that they deserve to die.

To give a brief context, the remaining text of *Romans* discusses various concerns including: the righteous judgment of God, the Jews and the law, and that no one is righteous (2:1-3:20); the righteousness of faith, the example of Abraham, and God's promise and the justification of faith (3:21-5:11); the relationship of Adam and Christ, dying and rising with Christ, and being slaves of righteousness (5:12-6:23); the law and sin, the inner conflict, life in the spirit, the future glory, and God's love through Jesus Christ (7:1-8:39); God's election of Israel, God's wrath and mercy, and Israel's unbelief (9:1-10:4); that salvation is for all, that Israel's rejection is not final, and that all Israel will be saved—including the salvation of the gentiles (10:5-11:36); the new life in Christ, and that the marks of the true Christian include being subject to authorities and loving one another (12:1-13:10); that the time is nigh, not to judge another and make another stumble, and that one should please others and not one's self (13:11–15:13); and some concluding instructions, personal salutations, and intentions on visiting the congregation (15:14-16:27).

Upon inspection, specific words are used throughout Romans 1:18-32 that connote an action in space such as *up* (4x) and *in* (4x); a directional relation between things, such as *from* (1x); states of being such as *invisible* (1x), *same* (1x), *filled* (1x), and also *full* (1x); and places are also referred to such as *heaven* (1x) and *creation* (1x). Most spatial references are metaphorical, and the references to heaven and creation underscore how Paul understood these concepts by drawing from Jewish traditions. Regarding tenses, the verses flow back and forth between the present and the past, with a noticeable emphasis on the past in verses 22-26, and a

concluding emphasis on the present for verses 30-32.

Given the heavy use of the words *God,* and the pronouns *their* and *they*, the primary actors in the text are God and the wicked. Although distant and supernatural, God is an active creator character, and heaven is also characterized in action as revealing the "wrath of God" (v. 18). God gives up the wicked to their "degrading passions," "debase minds" and to "things that should not be done" (v. 24, 26, 28). Although the characters are flattened, the wicked and ungodly are the most highly developed actors in the text. They are described as "suppressing the truth" and "without excuse" (v. 18, 20); not honoring or giving thanks to God, "futile," "senseless," "and darkened" (v. 21); claiming to be wise, but really fools (v. 22); "exchanging the glory of God for images" (v. 23); lustful, impure, and degrading (v. 24); exchanging the truth about God for a lie, and worshiping and serving creatures rather than God (v. 25); exchanging natural intercourse for unnatural (v. 26-27); shameless, erroneous, and not acknowledging God (v. 27-28); filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit and craftiness (v. 29); gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents (v. 29-30); foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless (v. 31); knowing that they deserve to die and yet applauding the practice of wickedness by others (v. 32). The text emphasizes characteristics that evoke charged images such as the wrath of God from heaven and the wicked suppressing truth (v. 18); the creation of the world and God's eternal power, divine nature, glory and immortality (v. 20); images and idols resembling humans, birds, four-footed animals or reptiles (v. 23); and God "giving up" the wicked to their vices (v. 24, 26, 28).

While the main structure of the writing is in letter format, the complicated polemics make the text more of a homily. The author does not attempt to convince or convict, but rather reaffirms what the intended audience already perceives about the wicked and ungodly. There is also a connection to the past by drawing from Jewish traditions, which highlight the creation of the world and God's power, as well as an apocalyptic sense of the wrath of God against the wicked (v. 18-20). In particular, one finds the use of polemical allusions, which characterize the wicked by alluding to Israelite stories revolving around idolatry and the cyclical pattern of turning from God, as well as the Deutero-canonical laws in Leviticus. It is likely that the intended audience is aware of Jewish traditions and it seems to be further implied that the wicked are too (v. 21, 32). However, the Hellenic perspective of the author also emerges in verses 22-23 when they suggest that they know who is wise and who is a fool, which points to the widespread cultural conception of *gnosis* in the ancient Mediterranean.[1]

The author uses a poetic repetition of the key phrase "giving up" *in* verses 24, 26, 27, and 28. Additionally, the word "exchanged" is rhythmically repeated three times in verses 23, 25, and 26. There is also a marked connection between idolatry, physical impurity and wickedness. Furthermore, Paul does not distinguish exactly who the wicked are by giving specific and overt references; rather, the wicked are distinguished by

[1] *Gnosis* is defined here as a special salvific knowledge held by an elite group.

their actions. While the wicked are the most developed characters in the text, they remain generalized, one-dimensional and flattened. In the narrative dialogue, it is implied that the wicked are external "others," separate from the righteous community to whom the text is intended.

Historical and Exegetical Criticisms of Romans

Scholarly investigation dates *Romans* to circa 56-58 CE; however, form and genre criticism show that the letter was current in several textual forms as early as the second century. The most significant variation lies with the text as a whole. Disregarding minor variations, there are three primary versions of the text. Each version is distinguishable by length—one consists of fourteen chapters, one of fifteen chapters, and one in sixteen chapters. It is argued that the Roman form of the letter must be preserved in the fifteen and sixteen chapter versions, since all explicit reference to Rome is absent from the fourteen chapter version through the omission of the specific address (1:7; 1:15) and of chapter fifteen.[2]

According to Harry Gamble, the only viable option on the question of integrity is between the fifteen and sixteen-chapter forms, the fundamental problem being whether chapter sixteen belonged with Paul's letter to Rome.[3] There are features of the content of chapter sixteen that suggest an incongruity with the Roman address. Gample argues that the letter was originally addressed to another community, likely in Ephesus. He explains that:

> The major internal argument against the Roman address is derived from the greetings of 16:3-16 and relates (a) generally to the extent of the greetings, and (b) more particularly to the persons greeted and the ways in which they are characterized […] That Paul, who had never visited Rome, could have known so many Roman Christians must appear highly unlikely, if not altogether impossible, and requires some explanation. It would be much more natural to locate so many acquaintances in a community well known to Paul.[4]

Notable in the greetings are Prisca and Aquila (16:3-4), whom Paul first encountered in Corinth (Acts 18:2), and with whom he had worked closely with before moving together to Ephesus. They were still in Ephesus at the writing of 1 Corinthians (16:19), in which Paul refers to a church in their house, which suggests a permanent residence. Finally, in 2 Timothy, purportedly directed to an Ephesus location *and* attributed to Paul sometime after the writing of *Romans*, greetings are sent to Prisca and Aquila.[5] Although no geographical notices are linked to other names, the personalized nuances suggest that Paul is personally acquainted with those greeted (16:5b-15). Gamble admits that the fact that Paul had not visited the Roman community in no way excludes the possibility that he had acquaintances in the congregation. Furthermore, that Paul possessed some knowledge about the Roman community is hard to dispute, and it would be strange that along with the notices he received he gained no information of individuals in the community.[6]

[2] Harry Gamble, Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism*, Studies and Documents 42 (ed. Irving Alan Parks; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1977), 127.
[3] Ibid., 36.
[4] Ibid., 37-38.
[5] Ibid., 38. See also Vincent P. Branick, *Understanding Paul and His Letters* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 335-36, 354-355.
[6] Ibid., 47-48.

Gamble points out that the second major argument in what has come to be know as the "Ephesian Hypothesis" is drawn from the admonition against schismatics (16:17-20), which is thought to be unsuitable for Rome in terms of its tone and content.[7] He continues:

> Throughout Rom 1-15 Paul maintains an irenic and solicitous posture, not stressing the apostolic authority which he invokes against problems of false teaching in letters to churches of his own founding. By comparison with the rest of the letter the tone of 16:17-20 appears to be unduly sharp and authoritarian […] Conversely, both the tone and content of 16:17-20 can be regarded as appropriate to Ephesus. The existence there of false teaching is sometimes inferred from 1 and 2 Timothy, which mount a sustained defense against a schismatic tendency with affinities to that characterized in Rom 16, and also from the speech to the Ephesian elders in Miletus which Acts attributes to Paul (20:18-35).[8]

There are variations in the actual formulations of the Ephesian Hypothesis, the primary of which is that the correspondence is preserved in its entirety in Romans 16, and that its attachment to *Romans* was Paul's own work. It has been proposed that the letter sent to Rome is comprised of Romans 1-15, but at the same time a copy of the letter sent to Ephesus with the addition of chapter sixteen.[9]

The epistolary structure of *Romans* is hard to miss. According to Hans-Josef Klauck, the letter begins with one of the longest prescripts in antiquity, in which Paul addresses "all the Gentiles" (1:5-6) and "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints" (1:7).[10] The letter continues with a proem (1:8-15) consisting of a thanksgiving and a self-recommendation, and a thesis statement of God's righteousness (1:16-17) against the wickedness of the world's sinfulness (1:8-4:25). The letter continues with discussions on the life of faith (5:1-8:39) and the destiny of God's people (9:1-11:36), followed by general (12:1-13:14) and special (14:1-15:13) exhortations, and a recapitulation of important catchwords (15:7-13) that serves as the closing of the body. The letter closing is elaborate, and consists of travel plans (15:14-29), a prayer and peace wish (15:30-33), a recommendation (16:1-2), fifteen greetings (16:3-15), a request for the recipients to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (16:1a), and an ecumenical greeting. The flow is interrupted in 16:17-19 (where some scholars suspect an interpolation) that warns against agitators, which is followed by a promise of deliverance by the God of peace and concluding grace benedictions (16:20).

It is impossible to detect a single type of genre that sufficiently covers all the intentions of the text. Luke Johnson argues five aspects that work to shape the genres and rhetoric in *Romans.*[11] The first is that *Romans* is a real letter. It is not simply an essay, but rather it is addressed to real people with a real purpose. Second, *Romans* is a scholastic diatribe. As such it offers a vivid, dialogical form of discourse, which addresses specific issues and presents rhetorical questions. *Romans* presents Paul more as a teacher than a

[7] Ibid., 39.
[8] Ibid., 40.
[9] Ibid., 41.

[10] Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Content and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 301-302.
[11] Luke Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2001), 6.

preacher, and the use of the diatribe form also points to his Hellenic heritage. Johnson argues that recognizing the aspects of diatribe, particularly in the presentation of theses (as with 1:16-17) and antitheses (as with the text in question), is probably one of the most important keys in understanding the arguments in *Romans*. Third, *Romans* is a form of midrash. Paul's way of citing Jewish Scripture reveals his background in the interpretation of sacred texts within Judaism. For Paul and other Jewish-Christians, it is Jesus as the crucified and raised messiah that provides the key to interpreting Jewish Scripture. Fourth, *Romans* is a Christian writing. Paul shares with his readers not only understandings of the *Torah*, but also the "specific structures and symbols of the messianic movement."[12] Finally, *Romans* is a Pauline writing. There is overwhelming consensus that Paul authored this letter in terms of generating its vision and directing its arguments.

In addition to Johnson's list, the form of *Romans* also exhibits other genres. While Johnson argues in favor of a diatribe of moral instruction aimed not at theological preaching, but rather on shaping a certain moral and communal ethos,[13] there are undoubtedly theological arguments that are integral to Paul's letter. As such, *Romans* can be seen to contain a homily. Moreover, as a self-introduction to a community that he has not met, in preparation for his impending visit, it could also be argued that *Romans* is a brief manifesto, an apologetic self-defense of Paul's theology and preaching style. Indeed, Johnson concurs that *Romans* is "the most powerful argument concerning God in the New Testament."[14] As an introduction, the text also exhibits elements of a diplomatic ambassadorial letter, most notably in the opening (1:1-15) and in the concluding recommendation and greetings (16:1-15).

In closer examination of 1:18-32, the form exhibits several characteristics that suggest that Paul is speaking in general terms about the state of humanity without the gospel. Verse 18 presents his topic sentence, and verse 32 his summary judgment. Joseph Fitzmyer points out that in verses 18-32 Paul speaks only of human beings, and never specifies Greeks or Gentiles; however, it is evident that he is talking about the totality of the pagan world of his day.[15] Furthermore, Paul uses heavy allusions to the creation narrative and incidents in Israel's history, and applies the ideas to the pagan world. However, it should be noted that the overall effect is to characterize human unrighteousness from a Jewish perspective. James Dunn points out a "threefold repetition" in verses 23, 25, and 26, which are matched by a second threefold repetition in 24, 26, 28; and further quotes a threefold development that appears in 19-23 (sin against the truth of God), 24-27 (sin against nature), and 28-32 (sin against others).[16]

Regarding the text in question, the most distinctive genres of verses 18-32 is as the antithesis of Paul's primary thesis in 1:16-17, and as a rhetorical trap, which is sprung in chapter 2. Vincent Branick echoes contemporary scholarship by stating that the whole message of *Romans* is contained in the summary of 1:16-17, in

[12] Ibid., 16.
[13] Ibid., 9.
[14] Ibid., 17.
[15] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 270.
[16] James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 53.

which Paul announces the themes of salvation and justice.[17] With this opening, Paul refutes Jewish claims to exclusivity, as well as any Gentile sense of superiority over the Jews. Jews and Gentiles alike are the beneficiaries of "the good news." Justice is linked to salvation through faith. The next passage, which is the primary concern here, is described by Johnson as the antithesis in a diatribal argument, which is used to "demonstrate the thesis by its contrary."[18] In this case, the antithesis shows the opposite of the power of God for salvation, and the dark contrast of sin serves to make the light of the good news even brighter.

Alain Gignac notes that the theology and anthropology of 1:18-32 is nuanced and corrected by the proceeding text in chapter 2 and elsewhere in the letter.[19] He further states that, for a letter that espouses a universal greeting for all humanity, the text in question exhibits marked hierarchical dichotomies, that stem from a patriarchal logic—genres which appear only twice in all of *Romans* (also in 7:1-4). Beginning with a tribunal theme, the dichotomies include: heaven/[earth] (v. 18); God/humans (v. 18); Creator/ creature (v. 25); incorruptible/corruptible (v. 23); truth (v. 18, 25)/lie (v. 25); wise (v. 20)/fool (v. 22); understood, knew, thinking (v. 20, 21, 23)/senseless, darkened (v. 21); natural/unnatural (v. 26); glory (v. 23)/shame (v. 24, 26, 27, 28); just (v. 32)/injustice (v. 18).[20]

It is widely regarded that the fourteen-chapter form of the text cannot be Paul's original letter; and it is further posited that the shorter fourteen-chapter version was a later attempt at catholicizing the letter, in order to make it relevant to others than the first recipients. Although the fourteen-chapter form of the text exerted a broad influence on the tradition, the need to present concluding elements later resulted in variant endings and differing placements of the doxology and benedictions; and because of the abruptness of ending *Romans* with a list of greetings, rather than grace benedictions, two alternative endings are attested in the manuscripts.[21]

Although no version of *Romans* exists without chapters 15 and 16, there is evidence in the textual tradition for a 14-chapter version.[22] In his commentary, Origen notes that Marcion drops the doxology and all that followed 14:23. Ancient *précis* also argue for a form of *Romans* having 1:1-14:23 + 16:25-27. Similar *capitula* from the sixth-century presuppose a text of *Romans* having 1:1-14:23 without the doxology. Furthermore, the *concordia epistularum paulinarum* found in some manuscripts of the Vulgate lists subject headings only from 1:1 to 14:23 and the doxology.[23] In addition, some Latin manuscripts designate the place from which the letter was sent as Athens, a reference that would not fit 16:1 if it were present.

A long-standing problem in the interpretation of *Romans* is the difficulty of stating with certainty its occasion and purpose. Unlike Paul's other letters, it is not all that clear in *Romans* that Paul is

[17] Branick, *Understanding Paul and His Letters*, 247-248.
[18] Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 31.
[19] Alain Gignac, "Résister au texte pour repenser les ‹‹genres››? Expérimentation herméneutique à partir de Romains 1,18-32," *Lectio Difficilior* 2 (2002): 6-8, http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/02_2/gignac.pdf (accessed April, 17 2010).
[20] Ibid., 22.
[21] Gamble, *The Textual History*, 36, 128-30.
[22] Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 49.
[23] Gamble, *The Textual History*, 18-19.

responding to the situation of the intended readers.[24] In speaking of the literary form of *Romans*, Dunn states that it is generally recognized that the introduction and conclusion are essentially variations on the familiar pattern of letter writing in the ancient world, which supports the impression that *Romans* was intended as a letter to a specific community.[25] However, he notes that the body of the letter is highly distinctive in content and character, resembling a treatise or literary dialogue. This tension has yet to be resolved, which underscores the uniqueness of the form Paul created. Dunn claims further that drawing parallels to other letters chiefly show how others wrote, which provides little prescription by which to assess Paul. In comparison, Klauck notes that typical letter components and expressions occur within the body of the text, which includes direct addresses and disclosure formulas, and question-and-answer exchanges reminiscent of the style of diatribe.[26] Furthermore, all three of the traditional Aristotelian rhetorical genres are found in *Romans*, including judicial speech (which uses prosecuting or defensive language to convince; deliberative speech (which offers advice about an upcoming decision, favoring a particular opinion or warning against it); and demonstrative speech that entertains or praises.[27]

It is also remarkable how much Romans 1:18-32 resembles the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Written around 30 CE in Egypt, the *Wisdom of Solomon* represents the conflicting tensions between Jewish inhabitants and their Gentile neighbors. Everett Kalin notes that "[s]ome of the key themes and specific turns of phrase in *Wisdom* 13-14 are so close to what Paul says in Romans 1:18-32 that we might even imagine him having that text before him (mentally if not physically) as he wrote."[28] He observes that the reference to the idolatry of Gentiles and its consequences are commonplaces for both texts and their Jewish readers. Furthermore, both texts make a similar argument followed by a point they are trying to make. Both *Wisdom* and *Romans* state that the Gentiles fail to acknowledge God, worshipping instead false gods, and this idolatry is the source of their unrighteous behavior. However, there is a radical difference between the points they lead up to. For *Romans*, Jews and Gentiles are considered equal under God, but in *Wisdom* there is a marked distinction between God's treatment of Jews and Gentiles. The similarity in arguments, but marked contrast in the points they make, underscores Paul's struggle in establishing equitable relations between Jews and Gentiles within the Christian movement—which was particularly difficult with the Jews, given their circumstances, and whose covenant gave them a certain pride of place in the sight of God.[29]

It is widely recognized that Paul draws from a Hellenic-Jewish heritage. Dunn points out that Paul was a converted Pharisee who still carried many of his earlier concerns, and contends further that the suggestion that Paul abandoned his former identity for a new religiosity cuts off a proper exegesis of *Romans* and condemns interpretation to confusion and contradiction.[30] Paul did not see himself

[24] Ibid., 132-33.
[25] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, lix.
[26] Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 303.
[27] Ibid., 212-213, 303.
[28] Everett Kalin, "Romans 1:26-27 and Homosexuality," *CTM* 30.6 (2003): 426.
[29] Ibid., 426-429.
[30] Dunn, *Romans 1-8,* xli.

as moving from one religion to another, but rather as having "found the final expression and intent of the Jewish tradition."[31] Furthermore, Paul's missionary work aroused opposition from fellow Jews and Jewish-Christians alike. Dunn explains that Paul's work can be divided into two phases concerning the relationship with Jerusalem. In the first phase, Paul looks to the mother church in Jerusalem as a source of authority for his missionary work, but later as the relationship became strained, he became a more independent missionary. Yet he still tried to maintain a positive relationship with Jerusalem, and in the period before the writing of *Romans* it was Paul's priority to make a collection from the churches he had founded and to take it to Jerusalem as a mark of Gentile solidarity.[32] Dunn continues stating that

> [a]n appreciation of this background is essential for an understanding of Paul's letter to Rome. The letter comes at what Paul clearly regards as the end of a major phase of his work (15:19,23), a phase greatly marked and marred by that hostility between Paul and an important strand of Jewish Christianity stemming from Jerusalem. The trip to Jerusalem to deliver the collection would be for Paul the fruit and seal of his success both in winning so many Gentiles to faith, but also in maintaining the unity of the whole Christian movement. Paul's hopes and fears on the matter are lucidly portrayed in the language of chapter 15: that his ministry in winning so many Gentiles would be acceptable to God (v16) and that their token of fellowship would be acceptable to the saints in Jerusalem (v31); but evidently he is more fearful regarding the latter than the former. It is in this spirit of hope and fear that Paul writes his letter to Rome.[33]

It is evident that Paul had not been to Rome and did not know the community firsthand, and that his intent to visit is incidental to his mission in Spain—Paul intends on visiting Rome in passing (15, 23-24). Johnson argues that Paul is not writing to resolve an internal crisis in Rome, and it is for this reason that many scholars posit that Paul's composition of *Romans* was motivated more from his own personal plans and circumstances than from a crisis within the congregation.[34] The basic premise is that Paul's purpose in writing was to announce his impending visit to the congregation in Rome, to give the readers an understanding of his preaching, and to establish a rapport, thus securing support for his mission to Spain. Johnson concurs with Gamble who argues for the authenticity of the sixteen-chapter form of the text, which makes sense if the primary purpose of the letter is to prepare the congregation in backing Paul's expedition, by essentially naming a network of people who can attest to Paul's worthiness.[35] Another widely advocated opinion considers Paul's anticipated visit to Jerusalem (15, 25), which argues that *Romans* contains major elements of the apologetic speech that Paul was planning to give in Jerusalem. While this view explains the nature and content of the letter, it is problematic why it was sent to Rome. An alternative perspective insists that Paul was acquainted with the circumstances of the Roman church and that he addresses those concerns directly, which would put *Romans* in line with the rest of his letters.[36] However, Johnson

[31] W. D. Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," *NTS* 24 (1977-78): 20. Quoted in Dunn, *Romans 1-8,* xli-xlii.
[32] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlii-xliii.
[33] Ibid., xliii.
[34] Johnson, *Reading Romans,* 6.
[35] Ibid., 8.
[36] Gamble, *The Textual History*, 134-35.

admits that the data are mixed, and need not be exclusive to one side or the other—meaning that it is quite possible that Paul was concerned with both his own plans and circumstances, *and* the general needs of the community in Rome.

Gamble points out that it is commonly concluded that *Romans* has little to no direct bearing on the Roman community because (1) Paul did not establish this church and had never visited it, and it is therefore assumed that he had no knowledge of the actual circumstances; (2) *Romans* lacks the explicit directness to the conditions of the community found in Paul's other letters; and (3) there are textual forms in the tradition that do not refer to Rome at all, which is taken to show that Paul may have sent, or was intending to send, the letter to other communities as well. Such a generic letter could not be concerned with unique circumstances. Yet each of these premises is problematic.[37] If chapter sixteen was an integral part of the letter, then Paul may very well have had specific knowledge of the community. The reasons why the letter seems to be vague may lie in the fact that Paul had not visited the church in Rome, and that he had not previously exerted his authority there. Furthermore, the generalized forms of the text do not necessarily indicate with certainty that the letter was ever intended to have a general applicability.

The task of reconstructing the correlation between the content of the letter and the circumstances of the recipients is presently beyond any firm conclusion. The strongest evidence may lie in the effects of the edict of Claudius (circa 49 CE), which purportedly involved a large-scale expulsion of Jews from Rome. Gamble argues that if Roman Jewish-Christians fell under this ban, then the concerns of the Roman letter would be relevant to the situation of the congregation—after the proscription was rescinded and the Jewish-Christian constituency attempted to reestablish itself in Rome. However, Gamble continues that it is still necessary to keep Paul's preoccupations with Jerusalem in view in order to grasp the epistolary situation as a whole, and further suggests a convergence with the issues confronting the Roman Community.[38] Fitzmeyer concludes that Paul wrote *Romans* for *ad hoc* purposes—to introduce himself and to seek support for his mission to Spain—as well as to address some of the concrete problems of the Roman community. First he writes to expound his missionary reflections on the gospel, in particular his gospel of justification without the deeds of the law, but also to deal with divisions in the community between the "strong" and the "weak."[39]

A Gnostic Reading of Romans 1:18-32

In commenting on *Romans*, Elaine Pagels examines patterns that seem to be consistent and fundamental to Valentinan exegesis.[40] She notes that scholarship tends to portray Paul as an opponent of Gnostic heresy, and that he writes his letters to attack Gnosticism and to refute the claims of Gnostic Christians to secret wisdom. However, instead of repudiating Paul as an opponent, Gnostic writers claim his letters as a primary source of Gnostic theology. Furthermore, texts from the Nag Hammadi discovery offer new evidence for a Gnostic Pauline tradition.

[37] Ibid., 136.

[38] Ibid., 136-137.
[39] Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 79-80.
[40] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 1, 16-17.

In alluding to verses 19-20, Valentinus explains that those who see "in faith" perceive in the visible cosmos an image of the invisible God. From a Jewish perspective the text warns against pagan idolatry, but from a Gnostic perspective it warns against worship of the demiurge, by exchanging the truth of God for a lie. According to Pagels, the distorted relationship with God results in unnatural human relationships, but that pneumatic readers do not concern themselves with conventional morality. Instead, the reference to homosexuality is understood as a metaphor for the hidden mystery and separation of Adam and Eve, who typify the pneumatic (elect) from the psychics (non-elect). Thus, the initiated reader learns from *Romans* that psychics and pneumatics hear the message of Christ and experience redemption in qualitatively different ways.[41]

A Gendered Reading of Romans 1:18-32

In his chapter on *Romans* in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, Thomas Hanks outlines some of the major criticisms from a Gender Studies perspective.[42] Notably he highlights the boundaries of the text in question as beginning with 1:18 and ending with 2:16. Taken as a whole, it is argued that the "wickedness" Paul outlines in 1:18-32 is a rhetorical trap, which he then deconstructs in 2:1-16 by warning the reader against judging others. He also notes that there are two rhetorical traps with proceeding deconstructions, the first with 1:18-32 and 2:1-16, which is set up for Jews, and the second in 9:1-29 and 9:30-11:36, which is meant for Gentiles. Throughout *Romans,* Paul calls into question and deconstructs the legalistic use of the Hebrew Bible and the excessive Jewish concern with purity, in favor of the "end of the Law" in Christ so that there may be "liberating justice resulting in a new status for everyone believing (10:4)." In contrast to the perceived emphasis on homosexual condemnation, the focus of *Romans* is largely against ethical absolutism and instead on the love of neighbor that avoids harm, oppression, violence and injustice toward others.[43]

It is also posited that the majority of the names that Paul includes in his list are names that were common to slaves in the Roman world. Slaves were not permitted to wed, whereas only three people that Paul mentions are married, which is significant in that the majority of the constituents of the congregation were likely political and sexual minorities, and as such, *Romans* must be viewed with imperial oppression and abuse of power in mind. Thus read, 1:18-32 is aimed at the excessive pagan practices and injustices of the oppressive ruling class, which often involved sexual abuse of slaves.[44]

Additionally, there is a notable distinction between the unnatural sexual activity of women and men. It is unclear in verse 26 whether Paul is speaking specifically about lesbianism, or if he is speaking in more generalized terms of acts "contrary to nature." It is plausible that, like today, there are degrees of discrimination in Paul's conception between female and male sexual practices. It is argued that the lack of emphasis on lesbianism is likely because in Paul's patriarchal society, any

[41] Ibid., 17-18.
[42] Thomas Hanks, "Romans," in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (ed. Deryn Guest et al.; London: SCM Press, 2006), 582-605. Rather than quoting each criticism individually, this brief survey will be limited to a selection of Hanks' observations of the work of others.
[43] Ibid., 585-587.
[44] Ibid., 583-584. For more information on Christianity and the Roman Empire see Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006).

sexual act for women that was not for the intended purposes of procreation was considered unnatural.[45] To add to this point, Fitzmeyer quotes John Chrysostom who stated that women "ought to have more shame than men."[46] Furthermore, according to James Miller, most modern readers merely assume that both female and male homosexuality is being condemned in parity. However, he argues that the Classical world lacked a common category such as homosexual for both gays and lesbians. Thus, he makes a case to understand the description in verse 26 as referring to unnatural heterosexual intercourse.[47]

A case has also been made for interpreting Romans 1:26-27 as referring specifically to cultic sexual practices. It is argued that when God has "handed over" the wicked to their passions, the punishment is not forthcoming, but rather has already been received as a way of degraded being. Taken as such, homosexual acts are treated as a consequence of a prior sin (namely idolatry).[48] Although speculative, the received penalty could include venereal diseases, castration, transvestitism, and unclean sexual acts found in cultic practices.[49]

In contrast to pro-homosexual readings of Romans 1, Robert Gagnon takes an anti-homosexual stance in Scriptural interpretation. In his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, he systematically addresses exegetical and hermeneutical issues regarding Paul and Romans 1.[50] The table of contents is a helpful place to start in identifying some of the major arguments around homosexuality and the text in question. While he admits that Jesus did not speak directly on the issue, he claims that his silence and support of the authority of the Old Testament is witness against same-sex intercourse. From this premise, it was then left up to Paul to articulate clear instructions for the church, then and now, on same-sex intercourse. Furthermore, he claims that Christians "must" base their moral doctrine regarding homosexuality on Romans 1:24-27 in particular because, among other things, it speaks most decidedly about the issue and it is "one of the most difficult texts for proponents of homosexual behavior to overturn."[51]

Gagnon reads the main message of *Romans* to be that all have sinned and are culpable before God. In regards to the intentions of the letter, he makes the claim that Paul wanted to put an end to divisiveness over minor matters (homosexuality not being a minor matter). According to Gagnon, when Paul speaks of not judging other Christians, it would be a mistake to think he meant that believers should stop judging homosexual Christians.[52] Thus the rejection of homosexual practice, as well as other sins in verses 24-31, is not just a trap for self-righteous people who judge others, but a prelude to the moral claims of the gospel about right conduct.

Gagnon continues stating that in Romans 1:18-32 Paul employs a Hellenic-Jewish critique of gentile sin in which God does not judge them for ignorance, but rather for acting contrary to the knowledge they already have about right and wrong. He

[45] Ibid., 591-593.
[46] Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 287. See also John Chrysostom, *In ep. ad Romanos* Hom 4:1 (PG 60.417).
[47] James E. Miller, "The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?" *NT* 37.1 (1995): 1.
[48] Hanks, "Romans," 588-589.
[49] Ibid., 594.
[50] Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).
[51] Ibid., 229-231.
[52] Ibid., 277-284.

notes that in verses 24, 26, and 28 that God "gives them over" three times, each time followed by a reference to conscious human "exchange"—exchanging the glory of God for idols, exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and exchanging natural for unnatural sex. Notably, Gagnon makes the claim that in verse 26 Paul is speaking specifically about lesbianism.[53] He counters the observation that Paul does not speak specifically about female-female sexual relations by stating that the parallel wording in verse 27 infers it, and the use of the word "likewise" suggests that the actions must be the same.[54]

He continues further to state that when Paul speaks of sexual practices contrary to nature, it was for him just a matter of commonsense observation of human anatomy, male-female complementarity and procreative function, which even pagans had no excuse for not knowing.[55] In contrast to pro-homosexual views, Gagnon maintains that Paul was adamantly against homosexuality as a sin deserving of no less than death. He also argues that Paul is not condemning those who condemn homosexual practice in the material immediately following 1:18-32, but rather that Christians must not live like the sinful people described.[56]

A Note on the Expression "Physis"

The word *physis* or "nature" occurs fourteen times as a noun and three times as an adjective in the New Testament. James DeYoung claims that part of the "new" approach to *Romans* "tries to give approval to homosexual nature or behavior" by focusing on "new ways" of understanding Paul's use of "nature" or *physis* in verses 26-27.[57] For example, Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 11:14 in speaking against men who grow their hair long as being contrary to nature, which in this context is largely viewed as a social convention. In his article, he attempts to counter claims that Paul is speaking more specifically about Greek pederasty and that there is no way of knowing whether Paul would oppose a caring adult relationship of mutuality. DeYoung argues that the use of *physis* in *Romans* should be taken to mean part of the natural created order, since it is used in relative context to the word "Creator," in comparison to the use of *physis* in 1 Corinthians 11:14 where there is no reference to a divine Creator or creation in the text.

He further argues that Paul writes from a more biblical or Hebraic reference than Hellenist, particularly in his Scriptural understanding of creation and homosexuality in *Leviticus* and *Genesis* respectively. Thus, based on the Jewish models, DeYoung argues that Paul is decidedly against all forms of sexual expression between same sexes in *Romans*. Fitzmeyer concurs with DeYoung that "nature," in the context of Romans 1, expresses for Paul the intended order of the Creator, or more specifically in the order seen in the function of the sexual organs themselves. He further dismisses the use of the term *physis* as a social convention in 1 Corinthians 11:14 as having little theological significance and relevance for the context in *Romans*.[58]

[53] Ibid., 231, 251.
[54] Ibid., 297-299.
[55] Ibid., 255-556.
[56] Ibid., 277-279.

[57] James B. DeYoung, "The Meaning of 'Nature' in Romans 1 and its Implications for Biblical Proscriptions of Homosexual Behavior," *JETS* 31.4 (Dec 1988): 421; 437-41.
[58] Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 286-287.

Final Considerations

While there are some variations in the textual tradition of *Romans*, it is generally concluded that the fifteen and sixteen-chapter form represent the most likely version of the text. Furthermore, it has been convincingly argued by Gamble that the sixteen-chapter version, which on the surface exhibits some incongruities, makes sense in light of Paul's anticipated visit and the need to establish a network of support for his travel plans to Spain. However, some scholars postulate that the body of *Romans* may have been produced in a more generic form that excluded a specific introduction and conclusion, which could later be added and addressed to different communities. Whichever the case, the textual evidence shows that the letter was at some point intended specifically for the Jewish-Christian community in Rome.

Although *Romans* exhibits a unique form that encompasses many genres, it is undoubtedly a letter generated by Paul that he addressed to real people with a real purpose. Paul writes from a Hellenic-Jewish perspective, citing Jewish Scripture and drawing from the Jewish Wisdom Tradition, while also utilizing the prevalent modes of Hellenic discourse. The diatribe in *Romans* is arguably one of the most important features to understand in reading the text, in which Paul presents theses and antitheses, and uses rhetorical devices, in offering a dialogical homily that focuses on his theological insights, moral proscriptions and communal ethics. It is likely that the writing of *Romans* was generated from a complex combination of concerns, which include Paul's anticipated meeting with the Jewish-Christian congregation in Jerusalem, his missionary plans in Spain, and the Jewish-Gentile divisions in Rome and elsewhere.

Criticism of Romans 1:18-32 highlights the text as an antithetical and rhetorical trap for Jewish-Christians, whose Jewish heritage was fraught with tension and legalistic separatist ideologies that ultimately led to judgmental attitudes toward Gentiles—and vice versa. Paul struggles to establish unity and solidarity between Jewish and Gentile Christians, by arguing against ethical absolutism and emphasizing the point of not judging others. The heavy allusion to Jewish Scripture strongly indicates that the intended audience is the Jewish-Christians of the congregation in Rome (and perhaps more generally across the board). Given the larger context of *Romans* is one of unity, the fact that Paul alludes to Scripture and that he is essentially contradicting himself by being judgmental suggests that the emphasis is not so much on a new condemnation. Rather he is reiterating a list of vices from the common Jewish understanding. In a paraphrased version, Paul is essentially saying, "Yes, we already know these things are wrong, but it is also wrong and not Christianly to go around judging others. Instead, we should join together in solidarity in Christ, which is manifest in loving, nonjudgmental relationships between Jews and Gentiles alike."

The question remains: How should contemporary readers understand Romans 1:18-32? Evidence from Early Gnostic-Christian exegesis shows that the interpretive tradition of the text has been qualitatively diverse from early on, and contemporary religious-political debates serve to highlight the continued polarity. Much of the current criticism at the polarized ends of the spectrum focuses on

Paul's intended meaning and level of discrimination against homosexuality. Arguments vary, but it appears semantically evident that Paul views homosexuality as the result of sin; however, as Kalin points out:

> Contemporary discussions of homosexuality seem to take it for granted that in these verses we have Paul's firm conviction that homosexual acts are sinful. Though Paul surely understands what he describes in vv. 26-27 to be reprehensible, the context shows that these acts are not the "sins" to which he is directing our attention. These verses are part of a demonstration by Paul that the Gentiles […] are sinful beyond measure. The sin of the Gentiles that evokes God's wrath is their failure to worship God [...] The Gentiles' impurity and degrading of their bodies (evidenced in vv. 26-27) and their debased mind and their doing of the things that ought not be done (evidenced in vv. 29-31) are the *result of* their idolatry.[59]

Paul is restating the legal codes against vices (i.e., Leviticus) and the general mindset of Judaism, which had long since identified idolatry as a major source of contention, and his reference to homosexuality is incidental. Kuhn adds to this saying:

> Within the broader argument of Rom 1:18-32, Paul presents same-gender sexual practice as one among many manifestations and consequences of humanity straying from God's intentions for humanity, including also idolatry, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossiping, conniving, backbiting, and disobedience to parents. To be sure, Paul's main concern in this section of Romans is not homosexuality *per se* but the depravity of *all* humankind (not simply Gentiles, in my view), hence the expansive list of depraved activities. Nor do his comments on homoerotic activity present a view distinct from first-century Judaism. Thus, to argue that homosexuality was of special concern for Paul or seen by him as an especially egregious violation of the created order grossly overstates the evidence. Nevertheless, Paul's assessment of same-gender sexual activity is clear: It is not what God intended for human sexuality—it is unnatural—and it represents a breakdown in the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity with one another.[60]

The emphasis on the "naturalness" of homosexuality lies at the heart of the debate. While there is good argument that Paul's use of *physis* in the context of Romans 1 refers to homosexuality as against the created order, it does little to disprove his understanding of what is "natural" as a social convention (such as with 1 Corinthians 11:14). The fact that Paul had a learned Jewish background and uses heavy allusion to Jewish Scripture, and the fact that Hellenist Pagans viewed homosexuality otherwise, serves to confirm the social construction. Furthermore, as David Daube notes, the stories of Genesis 1–3 are often quoted as the model of God's created order for proper sexual relations; however, the stories that celebrate the creation of male and female, and the blessings of procreation and becoming "one flesh," are not commands.[61] It is argued that to use these texts to limit the creativity of the Creator in shaping and forming a diverse creation runs the risk of transforming a wonderful blessing into a command that excludes and condemns a part of the diversity that perhaps is God's design for creation. From this perspective, it seems ironic that the whole discussion hinges on

[59] Kalin, "Romans," 430.

[60] Kuhn, "Natural and Unnatural Relations," 318-319.

[61] David Daube, *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1977), 1–6. Quoted in Gwen A. Sayler, "Beyond the Biblical Impasse: Homosexuality Through the Lens of Theological Anthropology," *DJT* 44.1 (2005): 86.

the authority of Paul's constructed understanding. However, following Paul's lead, there is a tendency to appeal to an intuitive conception of what ought to be in the world designed by God in distinguishing "natural" from "unnatural" intercourse.

In examining this topic, Gwen Sayler asks the question why Paul and other ancient writers define certain sexual distinctions as "unnatural," and answers by stating that

> writing as a man of his time and culture, [Paul] does share with them (Philo and Josephus) and with Greco-Roman authors certain assumptions about proper gender-role configurations. That Paul condemns same-sex sexual intercourse as "unnatural" is clear. Why he condemns it also is clear. He does so based on a hierarchical theological anthropology that defines men as active penetrating agents and women as passive penetrated recipients. At stake is what we call proper gender role distinction.[62]

Similarly, Gignac notes the hierarchical construction of genres presented in Romans 1:18-32, and raises the question to the modern reader whether it is possible to construct a theological and anthropological discussion of the text not in patriarchal vertical terms of order, dualism and hierarchy, but rather in horizontal terms of harmony, complexity and reciprocity.[63] He suggests that the confusion arises from the fact that the Bible and the text in question represent each of these themes, and that to pick one over the other distorts the reading. Gignac claims not to take a theological or anthropological position on the relevance of the text—rather he points out, from a feminist perspective, the danger of a non-critical acceptance of the hierarchical rhetoric that exists in the text. Thus, his observations assist the modern reader—not to argue a side—but to acknowledge both.

In discussing how to approach Romans 1, Kuhn argues that many readers try to understand *the text* in a way that both honors Scripture and also allows for the possibility that homosexual relationships may not be contrary to the will of God; however, this says something that Paul likely did not mean.[64] Instead of trying to find ways around Paul's intended meaning, Kuhn calls for a contextual, canonical reading that examines the passage in relation to the whole biblical tradition, which provides the text with possibilities of meaning it would not possess if read in isolation. Similarly, James Zabniser and Craig Boyd call for elevating compassion for the person above articulating a judgment on the issue of homosexuality. They claim further that an "overemphasis on judgments and opinions can actually interfere with the practice of Christian compassion," and that, "[e]stablishing an opinion does not necessarily lead to the practice of Christian virtues in relationship to people."[65]

Many critiques of Romans 1 put emphasis on the literal veracity of Paul's intended meaning, and for some, to state otherwise would mean changing the Bible and not taking it seriously. For example, DeYoung concludes his article by stating that "[i]f it has been at least reasonably demonstrated that Paul opposes all forms of sexual expression between the same sex in Romans 1, then his judgments are […]

[62] Sayler, "Beyond the Biblical Impasse," 85.
[63] Alain Gignac, "Résister au texte pour repenser les ‹‹genres››?" 16, 19.
[64] Kuhn, "Natural and Unnatural Relations," 319-320.
[65] James H. Zabniser and Craig A. Boyd, "The Work of Love, the Practice of Compassion and the Homosexual Neighbor," *JPC* 27.3 (2008): 216.

'eternally valid.' Revisionist interpretations would do well to come under the authority of Scripture."[66] DeYoung's remark highlights that there is a definitive etymological link between authorship and authority. The authority of *Romans* lies in Paul's authorship, and Paul was, after all, a fallible human being. However, it would be an error to suggest that in saying this one takes the Bible less seriously. It is an ethical fallacy to state that if one questions the literal, face-value interpretation of Scripture that they are somehow less understanding or devaluing God's will. Furthermore, there are many instances in the Bible that challenge contemporary perspectives. For instance, it is commonly quoted that if every proscription were followed *verbatim*, everyone wearing clothing made from a blend of two or more fabrics would be sinning, and it would be within a parent's right to stone their child for being disobedient. This is hardly appropriate for conventional norms.

There is, of course, a gross difference in most people's minds between clothing and homosexuality; however, the point is sufficiently made that it is not a question whether the intended meaning of biblical texts such as Romans 1 should or should not be contradicted because of a changed circumstances in modern times—many texts already are. However, this also does not give license for wanton disregard of the moral teachings found in the Bible, but rather that some of the rhetoric should be reconsidered within an appropriate ethical framework. This means considering the possibility that the texts often cited as "proof" that the Bible condemns homosexuality reflect a theological anthropology that is challenged within Scripture itself. Additionally, unless further evidence surfaces, humanity will never know with certainty the full implications of Paul's intended meaning, and if he would think differently in light of contemporary circumstances.

The question of how Scripture ministers to people today becomes particularly acute with the lack of consensus and compromise on the meaning and relevancy of the texts. However, given the fact that these issues have remained unresolved for thousands of years, it seems sufficient to say that the value and unity of Scripture is not found in either consensus or compromise. Rather they are discovered in the vulnerability of the human life and the struggles with diversity in a community, which can lead to an enriched way of being that is manifested in appropriate choices and balances—and above all love of God and love of neighbor. To impose a staunch literalism of the letter or to insist on conversion to one side or the other is simply missing the point.

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[66] DeYoung, "The Meaning of Nature," 440-441.

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Sunflower *Martha Elias Downey*

The Pesharim and the Gospel of Mark: Unbinding True Meanings of Current Realities

Jennifer Tacci

Abstract: *This article discusses the importance of understanding a worldview in order to uncover the essence of writings that may or may not conform to a particular genre. It shows how an understanding of the world can break the bounds of genre and find its way into a variety of documents. The Gospel of Mark takes center stage as it is compared to the pesharim of Qumran and other second temple documents to show how it reflects a pattern of thought and a conceptual framework that mirrors that of apocalypses. The Gospel of Mark is the product of a particular culture. Its author assimilates Jesus into an already established tradition that is both literary and oral. This is not a matter of Jewish materials being taken over by Christians, but another example of a culturally conceived world continuously evolving both in literary form and in the minds of followers.*

In an article entitled "Scripture and Apocalypticism: Breaking the Bounds of Definitions and Taxonomies", I discussed how a predominant ideology of a culture might reveal itself in its literary documents.[1] The *pesharim* a unique type of biblical interpretation found in the caves of Qumran are an example of how this can occur. Although the *pesharim* are not formal apocalypses, they may be categorized as a broader category of material that more accurately indicates the prevalence of apocalypticism in a given culture. In this paper, I present this in connection to the *Gospel of Mark* which, like the *pesharim*, was also influenced by an apocalyptic ideology. Similar to the *pesharim*, *Mark* is an interpretation of authoritative scripture in light of an apocalyptic understanding of time, space and God. As in the case of the *pesharim*, the author of *Mark*, a specially endowed interpreter, added his perception of reality to his assessment of present occurrences revealing the divine plan of God and the salvation of his chosen elect. At Qumran, the *peshairm* served as a mirror of the Community's identity, showing how they understood their own history and spirituality. The same is true for *Mark*. By explaining Jesus' life through his apocalyptic worldview, the writer of *Mark* extracted from authoritative texts what he believed was their "true" meaning, revealing God's divine plan and the destiny of his elite.

[1] Jennifer Tacci, "Scripture and Apocalypticism: Breaking the Bounds of Definitions and Taxonomies" *Scriptura* forthcoming.

What Exactly are the Pesharim?

The *pesharim*, found among the scrolls of Qumran, are a type of biblical interpretation. The word *pesher* can refer to either the use of the technique or the genre. A *pesher* is a detailed exposition of a selected biblical text, intended for Qumran sectarians, these texts applied present history to authoritative texts. For example, in the Commentary on Habakkuk, the coded prophetic messages of the book are deciphered by the author of the commentary explaining its true meaning for the sect in connection to their current situation. The composition of *pesharim* could only be done by those whom the Community considered to be specially endowed. The basic structure of a *pesher* is simple, it is broken in to sections, the *lemma* is a direct citation from an authoritative text followed by the *pesher* which is the application the author's contemporary reality to the original text. Essentially the *pesharim* contemporize biblical verses, identifying their referents in history through "inspired" application.

The Pesharim at Qumran

In a world where prophecy was exceedingly common, the community that safeguarded their precious literary documents in the dark caves of the Judean Wilderness sometime prior to the fall of the Second Temple, felt the need to ground themselves in past prophecies. Returning to the trusted prophets of scripture they studied them afresh. Searching for guidance and answers, specially gifted interpreters guided by a specific worldview added to these written texts their own perception of reality and their assessment of present occurrences. By doing this they were able to reveal the divine plan of God and the salvation of his chosen elect, in this case, the community that once inhabited the ruins of Qumran.

The Community believed they were living in a world that was on the brink of an irreversible turning point. Their worldview was permeated with the same ideology that stood behind the compositions of texts such as *Enoch* and *Daniel*. For them, scripture not only held the answers to how to live the right way of life, but also spoke of the fate of those living in the present world. However, these meanings were not obvious; they had to be extracted from the texts being revealed in pieces to those who had the ability to comprehend their essence and hidden truths. When we look at texts that contain scriptural interpretation, we must try to see how these interpretations functioned within the community for which they were meant, and how these interpretations helped shape self-understanding, identity and place in life.[2] No piece of literature is produced in a vacuum. Every text has a social context and a function. As a mirror of the Community's identity portraying its history and spirituality, the *pesharim* also serve as an insight into the ideology that fueled the existence and purpose of the Community. Through applying an apocalyptic worldview to non-eschatological texts, the Community believed that they had extracted from these authoritative texts their "true" meaning, revealing God's divine plan and the destiny of his elite, the Community of Qumran. As representatives of the Community's apocalyptic worldview, the *pesharim* should be categorized as a sort of apocalyptic writing.

As way of introduction into the world of the *pesharim*, scholars have identified five different types of biblical commentaries at Qumran. Some of these commentaries served to augment or rearrange traditional texts. Others set out to make biblical stories more comprehensible and some

[2] J. Jokiranta, "Pesharim: A Mirror of Self-Understanding" in *Reading the Present in the Qumran Library: The Perception of the Contemporary by Means of Scriptural Interpretations*. eds. Kristin De Troyer and Armin Lange. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 24.

went so far as to create new stories relying on one or more passages from authoritative texts. However, the type of biblical commentary that is most characteristic and distinctive to the Community is a form of exegesis that reinterprets prophetic texts in order to apply them to the past, present and future of the sect. The authors of these texts achieve their goal by expounding verses from prophetic texts relating them to the history of the sect. The *pesharim*, unique to Qumran, are where prophetic texts are updated and actualized for the Community with regard to their specific life and theology.[3] The *pesharim* give the modern reader a glimpse into the ancient interpreter's perception of reality and the reality that was created by their scriptural interpretation, providing us with the religious point of view of the Community that is primarily apocalyptic. While the *pesharim* cannot be defined as apocalypses, they share a number of affinities with the genre and should be associated with it. John J Collins defines the genre of apocalypse as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisions eschatological salvation, and spatial as it involves another supernatural world"[4]. The structure of the *pesher* does not follow this outline and cannot be defined as an apocalypse; however, it is still best understood as a form of apocalyptic literature.

The *pesharim* share the same conceptual framework that is found in apocalypses. The root of the Hebrew term *pesher* means "to unbind" or "release" and came to specifically denote the unbinding of dreams. The Community perceived biblical prophecy in itself as revelation, the mystery of which might only be revealed by a specifically endowed individual. Daniel has visions and dreams but is only able to decipher them with the help of an angel for example Daniel 8 verses 15 and 16 "When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai calling, 'Gabriel, help this man understand the vision'". Similarly the coded prophetic messages of biblical texts could only be understood by the author of the *pesher* with the help of a spiritual aid.[5] An example found at Qumran is in the *Pesher on Habakkuk*, the pesherist interprets the biblical prophetic book of *Habakkuk* as:

> …concerning those who will be faithful at the end of days. They, the men of violence and the breakers of the Covenant, will not believe when they hear all that [is to happen to] the final generation from the Priest [in whose heart] God set [understanding] that he might interpret all the words of His servants the Prophets, through whom He foretold all that would happen to His people and His [land].[6]

There are a number of important elements that should be drawn out here. The commentary concerns "those who will be faithful at the end of days". The revelation in this work is the writings of a past prophet, in this case *Habakkuk*. Its interpretation has been given to the Priest by God who set it in his heart, endowed with the ability to provide the interpretation and give it to his community. The interpretation itself consists of knowledge of what is to occur at the end of days. While the Priest does not have direct access to God, he does have a special ability that enables him to unlock the secrets of the text before him.

[3] J. Jokiranta, "Pesharim: A Mirror of Self-Understanding", 24.
[4] J. J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse the Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14; Missoula) 1979, 5.
[5] S. L. Berrin, "Pesharim" in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, in L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam *et al.,* (vol.1) (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), 644.
[6] Commentary on Habakkuk- II, 5-9 as found in G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, (Penguin Classics, London, 2004), 510.

The meaning has been hidden in the scriptures and only the Priest can reveal their intended meaning of which directly concerns the Community of Qumran. The Priest plays a role that is comparable to the one played by Daniel in the book that bears his name as the recipient of knowledge that can only be understood with the aid of an otherworldly being. There is nothing to suggest that the writer of *Habakkuk* held an apocalyptic worldview. However, the interpretation of the author of the *pesher* ascribes themes familiar to apocalypses to it, transforming its meaning and implications. The key message of *Habakkuk* is "wait and be faithful".[7] The *pesher* expounds this message and transforms it to explain *what* is being waited for and the *purpose* for being faithful: the end times are near and salvation is at stake. Interestingly, while the author of a *pesher* updated scriptural passages to reveal the "true meaning" of the text, they did so in veiled terms.

Since the author uses code words, it is often difficult to recognize the historical realities that are being reflected in the text. The primary purpose of the *pesher* genre was not to record history, but rather to relate the *values* by which to understand history so that readers of the *pesharim* could understand their current reality correctly.[8] The *pesharim* use scriptural compositions as their starting point and interpret them to convey eschatological fulfillment. These texts contemporized authoritative biblical verses and reinterpreted history through 'inspired' application.[9] The *pesher* uses allegory, textual variants and paraphrase to imply eschatological hopes to the original prophetic text. *Pesher Nahum* is a refined example of the *pesher* genre. The manuscript that dates to the first century bce transforming Nahum into a text about impending judgment against all enemies of God and the Community.[10] The commentary breaks down the original prophetic text to unveil its "true" eschatological significance. The 'original' Nahum's description of God's powerful effects on nature is interpreted by the writer of the *pesher* as a symbol for God's coming intervention against political entities, presenting rivers for example as governing powers.[11] However, the eschatological implications of the commentary are the same as those found in the apocalypses. Apocalyptic eschatology asserts that the present age has reached the end of its given existence and anticipates God's decisive action that will bring about its finality, but promises retribution for individuals beyond the limitations of human history and corporeal death.

The affinities between the *pesher* and apocalyptic literature reveals how the apocalyptic worldview can find its way into a wide variety of genres and is not limited to those texts that fit neatly into the genre of apocalypse. An important aspect of the *pesher* that reveals an apocalyptically oriented mindset is the role of the author of the commentary. The pesherist is a specially endowed person who has access to hidden knowledge that enables him to interpret scriptural texts accurately. The *pesher* states that the Teacher's words come 'from the mouth of God' however; an additional elite individual is needed to unveil coded predictions.[12] Like Daniel or John of Patmos, the *pesherist* is chosen by God to reveal the destiny of a particular group. In a world where God is removed from the daily lives of people, the only way to access him is through channeling through angels or the Holy Spirit. Since God no longer manifests himself in an anthropomorphic way to his people, he interacts with his chosen ones in a new way through the agency of human being he selects himself. The audience of a

[7] See Habakkuk 3:17-19.
[8] See J. Jokiranta, "Pesharim: A Mirror of Self-Understanding", 34.
[9] See S. L. Berrin, "Pesharim", 645.
[10] S. L. Berrin, "Pesharim", 653.
[11] S. L. Berrin, "Pesharim", 653.
[12] S. L. Berrin, "Qumran Pesharim", 124-125.

pesher understands that not just anyone could author such a text. It is not by human qualities that the *pesherist* is able to reveal the meanings of the literary prophets, but through spiritual gifts granted to him by God.

The *Gospel of Mark* and its Affinities with the *Pesharim*

When we look at the *Gospel of Mark* with all this in mind many new insights come to light. The *Gospel of Mark* is a unique Gospel. It begins with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer. There is no mention of his genealogy as in the other two synoptic Gospels, and it does not start like the Gospel of John with an intertextual reference to Genesis 1:1 recalling pre-creation. *Mark* instead begins with a reconfiguration of prophetic discourse swiftly recalling the prophet Isaiah, giving an account of Jesus' adult life and death as the continuation of a redemptive story that began in the time of the prophets. *Mark* is a narrative that tells its story through an apocalyptic lens. The *Gospel of Mark* tells the story of how the advent of Jesus of Nazareth would impact the conflict between good and evil in the world and the *Gospel* also introduces a slightly altered version of the worldview shared by so many. The *pesharim* and the *Gospel of Mark* share common social and cultural values. Together these literary pieces build a mosaic of commonplaces, conventions, traditions and culture growing out of one another to form branches of a common root.

Many of us still have a tendency to assume that a work should not be classified as "history" unless it represents events accurately and reliably. Neither *Mark* nor the *pesharim* should be considered objective history; however, they should not be dismissed as mythology either. They represent communal history. For Qumran the fact that the Community existed meant something important for history, as does the existence and death of Jesus for the *Gospel of Mark*. Jesus' identity is important to the author of *Mark*, not in the interest of establishing character or example, but as a means to write a particular kind of history based on a specific worldview. The *Gospel of Mark* gives a symbolic account of history that reflects the apocalyptic understanding of time, space and God. Like the Qumranites, *Mark's* audience believed prophecy was being fulfilled in their own time in their community. By using scripture and familiar themes the author of *Mark* explains how Jesus affected the goal of history:

> Mark's notion of an eschatological fulfillment, of course, has its origin in the prophetic books of the Old Testament or Jewish Bible. His overall conception of history, however with its notion of fixed divine plan (8:31, 13:7, 20; 14:36, 49) and its incipient periodization is due to the influence of apocalyptic tradition and literature…From the point of view of its Jewish heritage, Mark may be seen as an eschatological and apocalyptic counterpoint to the biblical foundational histories. It continues Israelite and Jewish ethnic sacred history and illustrates the fulfillment of the universalist tendency in Israelite and Jewish literature through the extension of the revitalization movement begun by John and Jesus to the Gentiles.[13]

In the second verse of the first chapter, *Mark* identifies John the Baptist as the prophet predicted in Isaiah 40:3. *Mark* validates both John and his own work by referring to a prophetic work of the past that has already an established authority among his audience since it is a recognizable reference to scripture. In addition, the writer of the second gospel makes a distinction between John and Jesus; John is a prophet but Jesus is the interpreter blessed not only through the waters of the Jordan, but with the Holy Spirit, (*Mark* 1:8). The juxtaposition between John and Jesus marks an important distinction, John is the

[13] Collins, A. Yarbro. *Mark*. Hermeneia. Ed.. Harold W. Attridge,, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2007), 43.

continuation of the past into the present: Jesus is the turning point of the beginning of the end of time. The author of the Gospel gives no explanation as to why Jesus is the one to be blessed with the Holy Spirit; he just is. Through the reference to Isaiah 40:3 the audience is made aware that the task of Jesus is to prepare the people for the full manifestation of the end of time. The anointing of Jesus is quite significant. Jesus, like the authors of the *pesharim*, becomes a specially endowed person. It is through the guidance and power of the Spirit that Jesus will exercise his ministry and teach secrets that no one else can understand (*Mark* 4:11). Jesus is a man like any other until he is given the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The function of the Holy Spirit here is the same as it is for the Teacher of Righteousness and for the authors of the *pesharim*. It is what gives these human agents access to higher knowledge and God's plan. The emphasis of the *Gospel of Mark* is on the present being the fulfillment of past prophecy and as being the final age, as Jesus himself asserts: "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (*Mark* 9:1).

The strong sense that the end is near typical of the Jesus-tradition is a clear influence of Jewish apocalyptic ideas. This apocalyptic promise provides the audience with a powerful incentive to faithful discipleship. It also, as in the *pesharim*, functions as an important reward for those who withstand persecution and wait for eternal salvation beyond this world. The readers of *Mark* form an inner circle, like that of the Qumran Community (*Mark* 4:11). They see themselves as the inheritors of God's kingdom at the end of time. There is in *Mark* a conviction that the biblical text held contemporary relevance for his immediate readers' beliefs and experiences. The Markan Jesus is the subject of Old Testament prophecies. This connection goes beyond validating his ministry; it presents Jesus as the final interpreter and the first man to be resurrected (*Mark* 8:31, 9:31, 10:32-34). If Jesus has been raised, then it will not be long before the living would see the rest of what is expected for the end of time.

While the whole of *Mark* reflects an apocalyptic worldview, scholars interested in apocalypticism often focus on the thirteenth chapter since it has come to be known as the Markan Apocalypse. It is in this chapter that Jesus looks into the future in order to predict what is in store for his followers. The structure of *Mark* 13 does not imitate the apocalyptic genre. There are too many elements missing for it to be described as an apocalypse. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this section of *Mark* is apocalyptic in nature. It is difficult to decipher how much of this section was compiled by *Mark* from other traditions, how much of it is original to the Gospel and how much originates to the historical Jesus. However, for our purposes what is interesting here is how this particular chapter does reflect a pattern of thought and a conceptual framework that mirrors that of apocalypses. The *Gospel of Mark* is the product of a particular culture. Its author assimilates Jesus into an already established tradition that is both literary and oral. This is not a matter of Jewish materials being taken over by Christians, but another example of a culturally conceived world continuously evolving both in literary form and in the minds of followers. Jesus was not the first to predict the fall of the Temple. In chapter 13 verse 14 the author of *Mark* refers to "the desolating sacrilege" and quickly reminds his audience "let the reader understand" that what is being referred to is the Book of Daniel: "the aside is a literary device to indicate that the preceding allusion to the 'desolation sacrilege' or 'abomination of desolation' is a cryptic saying that requires interpretation. This literary device belongs to the ancient practical apocalyptic hermeneutics".[14] Apocalyptic visions of

[14] Collins, A. Yarbro. *Mark*. Hermeneia. 596.

the world were widespread in the time of Jesus and during the Second Temple Period. It is a worldview that implies a sectarian context seeking to maintain conviction in its own authority against the confusion of real historical events. Believers adapted the apocalyptic worldview into their daily reality and lived by this understating of the world. The advent and threat of Hellenism affected the thinking of Jews and produced a new kind of literature which reveals a change in values and a shift in spirituality. This shift set the stage for the literature produced after the fall of the Second Temple.

Conclusion

There are qualities that belong to *Mark* that are not shared by other texts and vice versa. To focus on topics such as the "son of man", "messiah" or "kingdom of God" is necessary, but it also runs the risk of missing the bigger picture. All these texts are as much alike as they are different from one another. *Mark* is not an apocalypse, neither is it a *pesher*, however, the Gospel does share attributes with apocalypses and *pesharim* and it should be categorized as a type of apocalyptic literature. The strong influence of apocalyptic Judaism can be felt throughout all these literary documents. Apocalypticism is a worldview that has the ability to adapt and change with the needs of the communities who use it, it is not a static worldview; it is one that has been able to stand the test of time.

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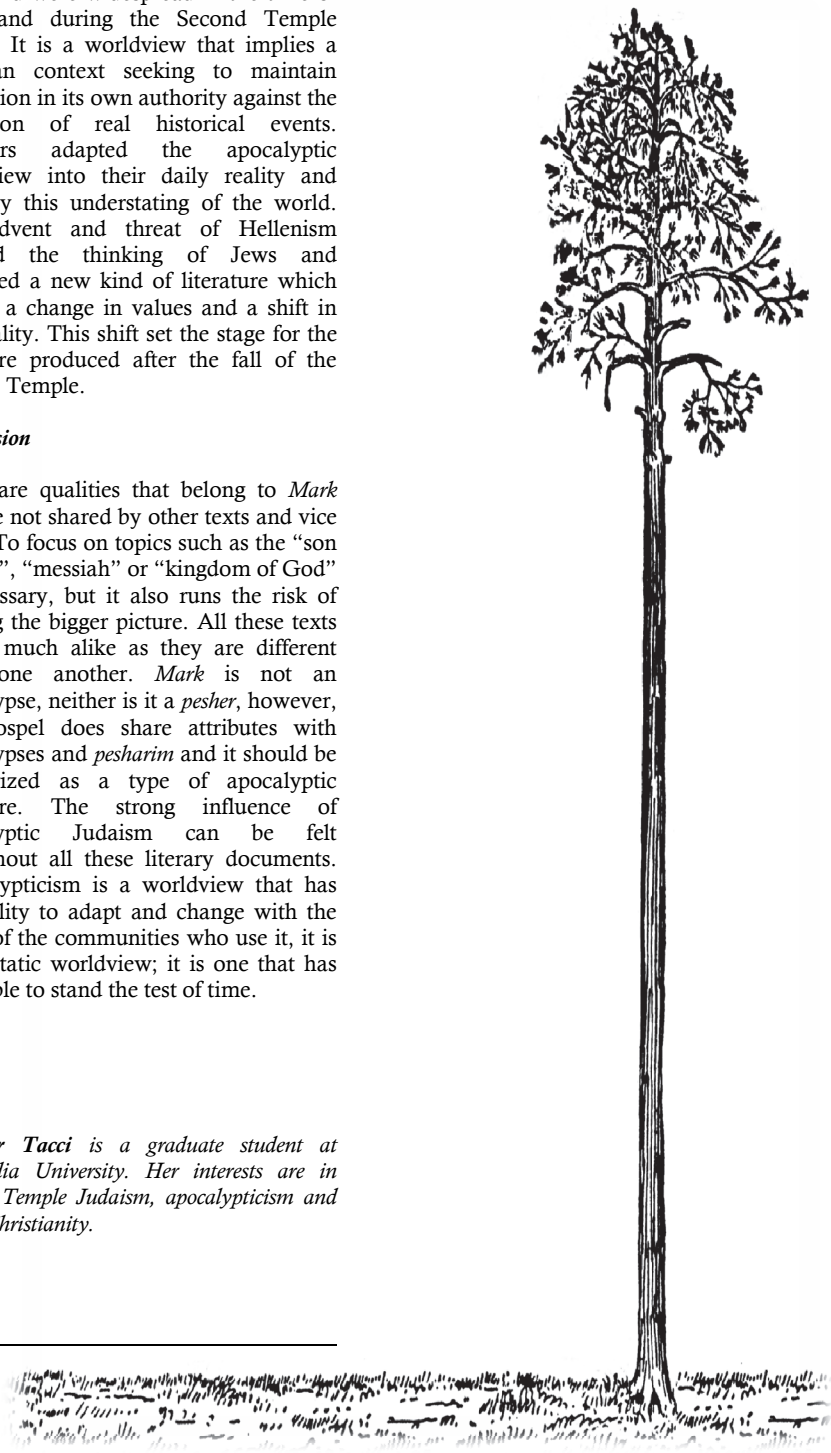

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Luo Christmas *Wilfred Osuri Alero*

Wilfred Osuri Alero *is in his final semester at Bishop Okulu College of Theology at Great Lakes University, Kisumu, Kenya. He will begin graduate studies in theology in 2012. Wilfred assisted the widows of St. Peter's, Bwaja to create an altarpiece for their small rural church on Lake Victoria, Kenya.*

Book Review:

James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England by Alan Ford xi, + 315 pp. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kathryn Sawyer

In *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England*, Alan Ford writes a book that brings to light the various religious and political contexts that shaped the life and work of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of the Church of Ireland. The book is divided into two sections, the first (and much larger) dealing with Ussher's life in Ireland, and the second covering his time in exile in England during the last years of his life. Right from the introduction, Ford stresses Ussher's personal characteristics of gentleness, caution, diplomacy, and sensitivity to conflicting opinions as they are revealed in Ussher's own writings. As well, he highlights the observations of people around Ussher, as Ussher navigated the tumultuous waters of religion and politics in two countries over several decades. However, it is easy to lose sight of the subject of Ussher as the book develops, as Ford at times concentrates more on the political and historical contexts of Ireland and England rather than focusing squarely on James Ussher himself.

The book starts off by giving a general history of the tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland during the second half of the sixteenth century. It sets the stage for the entrance of James Ussher into the public eye with his participation in a formal debate with the Jesuit Henry Fitzsimon in the year 1600. Ford takes care to contrast the strength and self-confidence of the Catholics in Ireland at this time against the small and unsupported Protestant minority, from among which this student not yet twenty years old was the only Protestant willing to take up Fitzsimon's challenge of a public debate. By the end of the section on Ireland some two hundred pages later, Ford has traced the development of the Protestant minority in Ireland from a period of timidity and uncertain doctrine to a

strong, solidly Calvinist, and self-reliant Protestant Church of Ireland supported by the faculty and graduates of Trinity College in Dublin.

Ford stresses three aspects that define Irish Protestantism: it was strongly Calvinist, it was an imported reform of the existing church, and it was very late in developing in comparison to other European reformations (p. 57). He also demonstrates how being a minority within a hostile Catholic majority caused the Protestant community to approach issues of reform with a much greater sense of urgency than their English counterparts. Throughout this section, Ford illustrates this sense of urgency by bringing to light an interesting contrast in Ussher's thought: while Ford repeatedly refers to Ussher's gentleness and sensitivity, as well as his willingness to practice tolerance towards non-conformist Protestant clergy, by the end of the book Ford has also demonstrated Ussher's apocalyptic mentality and his conviction that the Pope was the Antichrist, along with "Ussher's role in developing a strongly sectarian protestant mindset" (p. 273). Ford does an excellent job of balancing these two seemingly opposite developments in Ussher's thought and approach, showing how this unique mix in a man so thoroughly involved in the religious and political leadership of the day affected the development of Catholic-Protestant and English-Irish relations in the first half of the seventeenth century.

That the Reformation was imported to Ireland from England also strongly affected Ussher, a native-born Irishman of Anglo-Norman descent who spent a considerable effort in maintaining that the earliest Irish Christianity was "Protestant" in its beliefs and structure. He was also insistent that the Church of Ireland was more of a sister to the Church of England than a daughter, and should therefore retain a certain measure of independence from England with regard to specific theological points and its internal governance. The issue of internal governance came to the forefront in the 1620s and 1630s, when Ussher, as Primate of the Church of Ireland, battled the twin threats of English Arminianism and Scottish Presbyterianism, while at the same time retaining the Irish Church's pragmatic policy of tolerance towards the more "non-conformist" clergy in Ireland. Ultimately, his mission to keep the Irish Church distinct from the English collapsed during the wars and rebellions in the 1640s in both countries.

Ford organizes much of the section on Ussher in Ireland into different theological topics, such as the Irish Articles of 1615 and the defense of Calvinism in the Irish Church against pressure from England for the Church to conform to a more English standard of belief and liturgy. While this has the advantage of separating

sixty years of Ussher's life into topically digestible parts, it also has the unfortunate drawback of letting the focus slip from Ussher himself to surrounding historical events and concerns. Throughout the section on Ireland, I found myself having to search for Ussher's role in whatever fascinating and thoroughly well-researched topic Ford was covering at the moment. While his work is certainly informative, Ford could have taken more care to focus more closely on James Ussher, rather than writing a general history of the rise of Protestantism in Ireland in which a character named Ussher makes cameo appearances alongside multiple other key players.

The second, and much shorter, section on Ussher's time in England from 1640 until his death there in 1656 does a better job of keeping the focus on Ussher while describing to some extent how the historical and political events of that period affected his life and actions. Indeed, it seems as though Ford goes from one extreme of assuming that his readers know nothing about the Irish context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to assuming that his readers are intimately acquainted with the history of England during that time. Where his initial fault is in giving far too much background, his later approach is wanting because it doesn't give enough background information for Ussher's actions and interactions during his time in England.

Ford has produced a very interesting piece of work that sheds light on a key player in the development of a unique Irish-Protestant identity at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The footnotes and bibliography provide an excellent resource for any student covering the social, political, or religious history of this time period. However, Ford the historian does tend to get carried away with the context surrounding James Ussher, rather than letting the history shine through the events and actions in Ussher's own life. Despite this one rather distracting element, which is admittedly much less apparent in the English section of the book, this work accomplishes the great task of offering a multidimensional look at the history and politics of two different kingdoms during a tumultuous time in political and religious history.

Kathryn Sawyer *is currently completing her M.A. in Theological Studies at Concordia University. Her thesis is on the theological development of the protestant church in early modern Ireland. She hopes to pursue a PhD with a focus on dissident religious groups in the early modern English-speaking world.*

"Reflection"
(Oil on Panel, 2007)

Janice Poltrick Donato

The last three theology classes that I have taken have all made reference to Bernard Lonergan's Structure of Intentional Consciousness. It is only recently that I had the realization that I have cycled through the levels that he describes in relation to faith issues, and that I have intuitively sought to express this journey through my artistic practice. Understanding his consciousness template has helped me put my experience into perspective as well as deepening it and making it more meaningful, while validating a process that seemed to me at the time to be a questionable and dangerous

venture.

I was converted to a fundamentalist faith at the age of fourteen, and have participated in various conservative church circles since then. In my experience, for the most part questions were not encouraged and were labeled 'doubt', and a refusal to acknowledge any data, subjective or objective, which did not correlate with accepted doctrine was labeled 'faith'. Even in more progressive circles, questions were encouraged but the assumption was that an honest search would end up with the expected and acceptable answers.

After a couple of decades of rather valiantly trying to hold onto this narrow 'faith', I finally had to acknowledge my cognitive dissonance (Be attentive - to subjective data and experience). I started asking questions (Be intelligent) and doing my own research into contemporary biblical scholarship and historical Jesus studies (Be attentive - to objective and empirical data). My commitment was to the 'truth' (Be rational), whatever that might turn out to be and at whatever cost that might have for my faith as I vowed I would not limit my quest to finding the expected answers (Critical reflection). I recognize now that the answers are not obvious, and that even the scholars run the gamut of belief through to unbelief and that I still have to take responsibility for my own interpretation of the data, subjective and objective, and make a decision about what I personally believe (Be responsible).

At a time when I was struggling with these issues, I painted my personal manifesto, a declaration of my right to acknowledge my authentic experience, ask questions, reflect honestly and critically, and make my own responsible judgments. I find it telling that I titled this painting “Reflections” (2005) before I was even aware of Lonergan's Structure of Intentional Consciousness.

"Trinity"
(Oil on Canvas, 2007)

Janice Poltrick Donato

In this painting of the Trinity, I unknowingly (and heretically) fell prey to a form of modalism, in which I represented the Trinity not as three distinct 'persons', but as three modes of one essence; water, air and ice as modes of H2O.

Janice Poltrick Donato *is a professional artist/illustrator/mural painter who is studying Studio Arts at Concordia. She has recently discovered the wonder of Theology, and is enjoying the challenge of combining these two most excellent disciplines.*

The Story According to the Academic

Calogero A. Miceli

CHAPTER I

The Proclamation

1 This is the beginning of the good account of the man of the institution, who walked along the halls and taught those of us who were unaware of such things. [2]Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of these tales, [3]I have investigated their claims and have compiled for you, my most excellent reader, a perfected account of only those things which truly did take place. For many, wishing to spoil the reputation of the man out of jealously and hatred have polluted the stories and his words with utterly shameless lies. [4]With this, I am happy to report that the flower is blossomed and it can be adorned for I have cut the thorns from its stem. This is the testimony I give on his account.

The Parable of the Academic Seeds

[5]As he walked along the hallways he heard and saw a young man crying. He stopped and asked, "Why do you cry?" [6]The youth wiped his tears and spoke, "I cry because I cannot succeed in this world. I write and I read and I think and I deduce and I create and nothing comes out of it. I have been to all my classes and I have met with all of my professors and still I cannot succeed." [7]The man, looking at him, laughed. He said to him, "Do not be discouraged for all those who are now above you walked along the same road you tread. [8]For the work of a scholar is like a sower; [9]it is as if someone would scatter seed into the good soil. If one does not tend to the seed by watering it and caring for it, then nothing will grow and it will wither away. [10]If one tends to it every hour and every minute and every second and expects fruit, surely I tell you that fruit will not come. For the fruit will be seen after long toil and hardship, after long periods of time. [11]The one who waters his seed and cares for his plant and is patient to wait not a few days, but until spring has passed into summer and the leaves begin to change their colors, truly that man will see his ripened fruit and he will rejoice because of it. [12]Then the harvest will have come." [13]The young

man was silent for he heard what had been spoken to him. He got up and smiled and he thanked the man for his wisdom proclaiming to everyone that he now had the truth for academic success.

The Lesson of Plagiarism

[14]As he continued to walk he saw a brother and sister who were angry and shouting. [15]He asked them, "Which of you has copied the other?" And they were amazed saying, "How did you know that one copied the other?" [16]Smiling he said to them, "It is not that two fig trees cannot grow side-by-side, but that these will never be blessed with the same fruit of the same size, of the same quality, of the same position, and of the same taste. For if such an occurrence took place it could be only through miracle, but looking at your work and that of your sibling I say there is no miracle here. [17]One of you has breathed into the work of another so as to imitate it." [18]The brother and sister were silent [for they knew] one had plagiarized. He said to them, "Throw away both documents and cast them into the fire; for what is tainted can never be pure. [19]It is better to have no fruit than to eat that fruit which has been spoiled and filled with worms and other creatures." [20]Immediately, they tossed their papers away and were rejoiced because of it. [21]He said to them before leaving, "Tell no one about this or you will surely be judged, but preach to others that you have seen me and that my wisdom was sound." [22]As he walked away the brother and sister also parted ways from each other in order to commence anew their own work.

The Question about Fees

[23]Soon after, he was approached by many scholars. They hated his teachings and wished to trick him so that he might stumble. [24]They (those most wise and elderly amongst them) asked him, "O Great Teacher, teach us the way to the truth so that we may be more like you and less like ourselves. [25]The schools continue to demand that we pay our wages and they demand much allowances. These are increasing with every year and with every day. Should we pay these, or not?" [26]The crowd listened attentively. He knew their cunningness and the evil in their hearts for he heard it from this. And he asked for their documents and the one beside him handed it to him. He took it and said, "What name do you see here?" [27]They responded, "The name of our institution." [28]He said to them, "Then give to your institution the things which belong to your institution and to your education the things which belong to your education." [29]At this they were amazed and silent.

Worldly Possessions

As he continued along the halls they asked one another, [30]"Who then is this, that he can claim such things?" [31]One of them spoke up, "I have heard it said that he does not study in order to receive praise nor yearn for a seat on the high council. [32]He does not criticize others with his knowledge or demand to be given fine clothes and jewels. He does not ask for such things nor does he accept them. [33]Though he has earned that prestigious entitlement (which we all bear) he does not place it before his own name or sign with it." [34]In amazement they asked, "Why would someone refuse such privileges?" He continued, "He refuses all of these possessions which he deems worldly and often speaks of these as distractions. [35]It is said that he seeks and speaks only the truth." At this the crowd was stunned. [36]One by one they threw down the jewels they had been adorned with and walked away leaving their expensive sandals behind them.

The Man Caught in Breaking an Academic Regulation

[37]A group of scholars came near him. As they approached, he noticed that one among them was not like the rest; [38]he was in tears and his eyes faced the ground. [39]This one was made to stand before them all and they said to him, "Teacher, this man was caught in the very act of breaking an academic regulation. [40]He has no academic integrity and must be punished for his offence. The academic code of proper conduct is clear that any that breaks its laws will have their records smeared and are subject to banishment. [41]Now what do you say?" They said this to trick him, so that they might have some charge to bring up against him. [42]He sat down and on the blackboard beside him, began to write with his chalk. [43]When they kept on questioning him he got up and said to them, [44]"Let anyone among you who has never erred be the first to dismiss him." One by one they went away. He was left alone with the one who was still in tears. [45]He said to him, "Do not do this again from now on.

Why he Studied to be a Scholar

[…]

[…]

[46][And] they were angry and replied, "Then why have you studied to become a scholar? You wish to be [like] us and yet you […] at every chance, demeaning our work [and existence]. [47]Why would you [study to

be a scholar] if this is what you are criticizing? How can you [criticize that which] you are?" He replied to them, [48]"I am […] am. We are not [the same] for you choose to […]. Nothing is further […] this is like that […]" […] angry with him. For […]

[49][…] evening had […]

[…]

[50][…] They threw off […] when […]

Love for Opponents

[…]

[51][…] "But remember now what I say to you concerning these people. These are your opponents but they are also your colleagues. [52]Do not hate them for testing you and for commenting on you and for challenging your ideas and for ridiculing you. If anyone challenges your arguments, offer them others and for anyone who opposes your paper, give to them all that you have written (so that they may oppose them all). [53]Do not have hate in your heart for those challenging you because you also have challenged those who were before you." [54]He said this so that all can realize that anyone who is willing to challenge knowledge is free to do so and should always be commended because of it. All that is and has been written is open for challenge and everyone must surely embrace such challenges so that together they might come to knowledge. [55]Those who were with him were rejoiced and departed so that they might find their opponents and make those into allies.

The Quarrel with the Teacher

[56]As he walked he heard noises and went closer. As he arrived he noticed a Teacher with several students. One of the students raised his hand and questioned the teaching (which was not sound) and at this the Teacher rebuked him. He became angry and said to the Teacher, [57]"Why do you rebuke the wisdom of this student?" The Teacher replied, "This is a non-initiate and he is not worthy of speaking or questioning that which is spoken by me. [58]Only those who have completed the steps and who have been initiated may converse. Do you not remember your own initiation, o wise one?" [59]At this he said, "Certainly I recall my rite of passage and it would seem that you have forgotten yours. [60]All of these students are worthy to receive your teaching and because of this they are also worthy of

questioning its validity. [61]For how can one be certain that salt is salt if one has not tasted its saltiness? [62]Indeed, one who has passed the initiation is above the under-initiates but that one is not above knowledge. For knowledge is neither secret nor perfect. [63]For if it was secret what then would be its purpose? Who would know of such things if they were hidden?" But the Teacher's heart was hardened and he did not wish to listen to what was spoken. [64]He left the room throwing his books to the ground. The students were upset because the lesson had been cancelled but he said to them, "Continue to question and continue to challenge even though you have not been labeled as initiated ones. All those who are now initiates were human before this and even now are still human. [65]For this reason, they should not make themselves out to be more than what they are." One of the students asked, "Then what good is the process of initiation?" [66]At this he smiled and replied, "The one who can answer this is truly the wisest of all."

Foretells his Betrayal and Denial

[67]Many were around listening to him. [68]Among these were the newly appointed scholars and several students. One of the students, his name was Jude Trapse, had been following him for quite some time and had been fond of his teachings. [69]Then he looked around and said to Jude, "You will betray me to the high council and you will deny my teachings as I have spoken them." [70]To this Jude replied, "Great educator, why do you say such things? Surely, I would never deny you, nor would I betray you to anyone. [71]You are the one I admire most and the one with whom I am closest." He said to him, "This is what will take place and it has already happened."

Calogero A. Miceli *is a student at Concordia completing his M.A. in Theological studies. This piece was inspired by the idea of the gospels taking place in a contemporary setting.*

Pure In Heart

Ivan Van Heyst

You are redeemed, the voice sounded in my head above the jeering throng. The look below the bloodied brow assured me it was not just my imagination. The burden of a lifetime in my heart and soul seemed to lighten, even as the weight on my shoulder mounted and the wood ripped my flesh.

Fair-skinned he was, of those northern tribes, himself. Perhaps thirty, maybe forty. Even now, I am uncertain, as his ordeal stole time from him. He wore but a loincloth, though it was hard to tell. Dust and blood covered him, as did human and animal excrement, enrichments of the raving and violent mob. Even through the crusting filth, I saw the sea of torn flesh on his back and limbs, angry ridges everywhere. His matted hair beneath the rude crown of thorned branches was long and layered in slick blood and slime, which trickled down his face and neck in lines of human suffering and violation.

At the remembrance of his face, my pen falters, for I do not trust my memory. It was such a long time ago.

Agonized, his flesh cried for release in every line and pore. Begged for mercy.

Just a Jew, my mind wept its sorrow and disappointment then. **Just like me, after all.** I nearly fell myself in that instant of despair. **Not Him, at all.** The weight of darkness crushed me.

You see, despite what some have written, it was much more than coincidence that I was there that day. I was not just passing by.

This is my testament.

I turned eighty-one last month, and will not see another winter. For thirty-five years these words, these truths, have been sealed in me. I am compelled, now, to step forward, not for myself, for I am still as naught, but for His glory, everlasting.

Simon of Cyrene, then, let me be called, as they would have me be. One name is as good as another. And I once did live there. And these current cave walls and stone floor care not, and do not remember me, though I have lived here over twenty years.

By my early forties, I had grown great in the eyes of men, with land, livestock and slaves. Many wives and children. I lived in the law and prospered by His grace. My life would have passed easily thus, in peaceful reverence to God, but for a hair's breadth incident that so often turns our lives against their tides.

I passed the kitchen doorway one winter morning, and heard the fervour in my servants' voices as they spoke of the latest prophet to arise in Galilee. I tarried but briefly, and dismissed their idle talk, like dust from my sandals. Yet, something in that story, in their voices, kept coming back to me. I could not leave it alone. It came to obsess me. It haunted my dreams and waking hours.

In time, leaving Alexander and Rufus, the two eldest, in charge of my estates, I traveled north and east. Even now, I cannot say exactly why I left everything I knew to hazard months on the road among strangers, to find a ghost in the desert.

Even before reaching Idumea, the stories of his miracles were repeated everywhere we went. Many believed, and many did not. My servants, of which I still had a dozen with me, no longer wished to return home, but wanted to go on their own pilgrimages to find this Messiah. Within a few weeks, I would release them all from their bonds of service to find their own paths.

Thus it was when I met the desert lion at the River Jordan I was alone. I heard his crying in the wilderness. So fiercely did he proclaim repentance and baptism that, trembling, I fell to the ground on the shore in supplication of His mercy. In a few rags of camel skin, this gaunt pillar of flesh flashed like a single taper in the night, burned fiercely to those of us who awaited and hoped for the dawn.

"Arise," the hoarse command, not unkindly, spoke to the group of latest arrivals, kneeling like myself. "Arise, children of God." His hands rose high toward the sky, as if he could draw us all up like puppets. "Forsake the past. Live in Him." He motioned them forward into the water, coaxing like a parent to hesitant children. "Come to me. And I will baptize you in His name, and His blessed mark shall be upon you all the days of your life." His long hair swung a gentle arc flashing light, like a rainbow, as he turned back to the river.

I heard the others rise and follow him, but I could not. Such a weight held me down. Instead of rising, I was pressed closer to the earth. On my knees, face hard to the ground, I began to count the grains of sand in my view.

These are the sins of my life, I thought. **In action. In inaction. In thought.** I was thought tzaddik or righteous in my clan, even within the city. But I, just like us all,

was plagued by thoughts not divine, by evil inclinations or yetzer hara. Peace in my heart would not abide, and I could not find His dwelling place.

I counted the grains slowly, and recited the ignominies of my weak soul and flesh. Hours I may have been entranced, sand clinging to my whispering lips and face.

"Arise, my brother," the voice sounded just above a whisper across the water where he stood knee-deep, alone and pensive, flashing in the moonlit water, "Come here."

At his command, I rose, let slip my robe, and walked into the river. I remember not its touch then.

I fell to my knees again in the water at his feet, looking upward into the star-smattered sky, my upturned face blank with sorrow and shame.

"Unworthy am I . . ." I mumbled.

But he set a finger to my lips. He paused. His gaze suddenly lit with a smile at the touch, as if he suddenly saw me, or as if he felt something pass between us. He stared a moment at my face, as if he saw something written there.

"Blessed art thou," John the Baptist intoned as he raised a handful of water to my face, and gently let it wash the grains of sand from me. He brushed a few lingering particles, gently, as a mother would a child. I was cleansed and lightened by those cool waters and soft touch.

"You are the Christ," I whispered, less a question, than a hope.

"No," he answered slowly, "I am not whom you seek." The smile still clung to the haggard, bearded face. "*He* is the light. I, like you, Simon, bear witness to that light. With grace and truth shall he gift us." He paused, as if in reverie.

"I baptize with water alone." His hand reached downward and trailed the surface of the river. "But he shall mark us all with the Holy Spirit." His arms reached skyward once again. "He is the light of the World, though in *this* world, he shall dwell for a little time only."

A flash of sadness overtook the prophet then, not for his own death at Herod's hands that he foresaw, but for the crimes at Golgotha that would weep stones and cry men forever after.

"Darkness rises in this world," John offered. His hand rested on my forehead, and his fingers spread through my hair as if in blessing, as if in prayer, as if trying to impart some of his will and strength to me. "And its weight crushes us all." A briefest pause suggested his own mortality flashing before him again. "Remember, my brother, when that weight threatens you, remember these cool waters and strong words to fortify

and underpin that moment." His eyes glistened, for joy or sorrow, I am not sure. "Your burden will be great."

He released me, as if from a spell, and walked away, barely a splash or ripple in his wake. As I remember yesterday, he could foresee all future days, not just for himself, but for the Christ, and me, and all the world. I do not know where his vision stopped. A year out? Ten? One hundred? A milennium? In the motion and silence of his parting, I sensed he saw too much, and wished unmade the future's mold, or to be given some understanding of the days to come.

In that growing dark, as in many times since, I heard the echo of the prophet's unspoken prophesy: "We are all sinners . . . . Words break . . . . The world cracks."

I would not see him again.

I left my robe in the sand, as well as everything else I still carried with me, except a loincloth, as if the weight of all else could not be endured.

I ranged the desert, lost and burned by the prophet's touch, eating and drinking what I could find, which was not enough. Some weeks later, at least a full moon, I emerged from the desert like a lost prophet myself, ready to seek the Messiah. I'd like to say I had such profound thoughts and insights in that time among the unwatered stones, but it passed like a dream, forgotten in the instant. I'd like to say the experience made me wise, but I think I was out of my mind most of that time from hunger and thirst.

I feared less, then, not finding Jesus, for I knew, somehow, our paths would cross: that knowledge at least endured in me from the days of wandering.

I did find him eventually in Galilee, preaching from a mountainside to a great multitude. It would come to be called the Sermon on the Mount, when the great Beatitudes were professed.

By one line, in particular, was I haunted and riven. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." By these words, I felt condemned to an eternity of exile from Him, for I knew my own failings, perhaps most of all.

He seemed so ordinary then, less mekubal than John the Baptist, almost normal. But his voice caught you like a net. It was only later when I got close enough that I would witness and feel the power of his gaze. He seemed to look right into you in a flash. A kindness rose in him, like a balm for each and all, as if he understood each one's secret anguish, as if he could take into himself that brokenness and leave only wholeness in return.

I was not pure in heart. I did not see him clearly then. I held to the fringes of his camp. I listened to him speak and, like the rest, often struggled with his parables.

I was not pure in heart. Even now, so many years later, I cannot understand the miracles he performed, from casting out demons, to curing illnesses and deformities, to raising the dead. I heard these rumors then, but I had no direct experience. I was not witness to them.

I wonder still, sometimes, where the reason lies, but always come to rue my own blindness and close-mindedness of that time. Of a thousand miracles, I saw not one. I wanted to, but perhaps too much. Others were blessed with easy proof of the Messiah, and grew stronger in their faith day by day. Mine own soul's calibration worked in reverse: from the absolute certainty of the day in the River Jordan, each day that passed thereafter, I lost a little of my belief. The more I wanted it, the less it stayed with me. I wanted to believe more, better.

I finally decided to go home. Disillusioned, I would forsake my dream. I would wait for Passover to finish, then I would wend a poor man's long road back to my estates in Africa.

His entry into Jerusalem on an ass to the accompanying and waiting throngs harbinged the crisis to come. Of what kingdom was he king? His popularity and following threatened his earthly counterparts to dire and decisive actions, once started in motion, virtually impossible to stop or deflect.

I could still not get close, as the crowds had only grown larger. A part of me, as I have come to realize in subsequent years, kept myself away from him - - afraid of the truth, fearing that he was not the Messiah, or maybe that he was.

It is hard for me to bear witness against myself, even these many years later.

I lost myself in the city, then. Hope had eluded me. I despaired. I stole a purse for drink, passing out in the gutter, a pattern repeated for three days and nights. I was befouled within and without.

To my eternal shame, I was in the mob before Pilate when they determined the fate of Jesus. I had been asleep at the back of the square, when the shouts awakened me from a Lethean wash of dreams, soul-wrenched.

When I stumbled upright and finally focused, I saw the silent figure of blame beside Pilate. **Bastard of my pain**, my mind decried. **I wanted to believe!** I did not see - - and fresh tears wash these pages - - the suffering, broken flesh of a man, and the rising spirit of our Savior. My hatred was blind. I hear forever in my mind, whether waking or dreaming, echoing condemnation on me and all my children and their generations of children yet to come, my sentence upon the Christ - - "Crucify him. Crucify him!"

I weep.

Perhaps I shouted longer, perhaps louder. Perhaps it was something in my voice. Regardless, the sad visage of Jesus turned upon me. Never will I forget the flash of power and certainty and sorrow in those eyes. They carried a world of pain, but also a knowledge superior to it all. I felt like a child who disappoints a parent. Why could I not have been better?

Open your eyes, the voice sounded in my mind, like strange and subtle music, reaching every last dark corner of my heart. At his command, like a miracle, I was suddenly transformed. I was blasted clean of all the accretive waste and hate and despair within me. I wept then. Tears ran tracks through the filth on my face. The words died on my lips as he was taken away to be crucified. Condemned by me, yet still forgiving me.

I stood as stone for a long time in that square, long after the crowd had left to line the route to Golgotha. I had left home to find the dwelling place of God, and I had found it, but managed to defile it utterly - - shitting and pissing in every corner.

Crucify *me*! I shouted in my mind at the absent host.

I fainted suddenly, as if struck down.

When I awoke, face in the dirt, the dust burned me like fire all over my body. I smelled and understood the worst of all the world: the unkindness, violence, hate, and despair, like vile puss and gore it streams endlessly from our ulcerative hearts. Sodom and Gomorrah arisen, unioned and multiplied.

My God, what have we done? We have forsaken you.

For *this*, He would ransom himself? For *us*? The questions sprang in my mind, wholly incredulous. I wanted to tell him He was wrong, for He *was* wrong. **Destroy us! Fire and flood destroy us!**

He would hang upon the cross that day, and through all future generations, ever mocked, reviled, ignored, and forgotten. And all the violence and blood, murder and destruction, hetacomb and holocaust, would only increase in time. Maybe that is what the Baptist saw.

He could unmake that chain of events, but I knew He would not, for He believed in us, even if we did not in Him. My heart broke at that moment: His enduring love against our unchanging hate and indifference.

I wept again. For Him. For all of us.

A moment passed before I rose, as if suddenly restored to life, not knowing what I could do, just certain that He need not be alone.

I ran toward the great din of shouts and laughter. It had already started. The victim was to carry his own cross up the long road to Golgotha. The crowd was nightmarish, as if there was not a single human soul among them, only the demonic, as if all the spirits He had cast out were allowed their return in victory upon Him. They reveled in His pain, darkly laughing at the humorless spectacle.

Shame and sorrow rose in me. I brushed my cheeks, for I wept still.

I stationed myself ahead of Him on the Via Delarosa. The roaring mounted deafeningly as He neared. He advanced so slowly, with such pain, I imagined Him taking a lifetime to reach the end. I saw in Him then more than just the tortured flesh of His body, as I felt and perceived the light emanating from Him still.

"Don't you see it?" I wanted to shout. "He is the Son of God." But no one would hear me.

As He drew near, the din was truly inconceivable, as everyone shouted as if possessed, such profanities and curses unheard before or since, such was the stream of hate poured upon Him. And the trash and excrement were appalling. And surreptitious stones and bricks struck Him occasionally, death to the caster if caught, for the right to kill the accused was reserved for the state.

As He was about to pass by me, not four feet away, His ever downward gaze turned slightly toward me. And there is no doubt in my mind that it was for me that He turned, and gave to me the blessings of that day.

He locked my eyes. The pain of His flesh threatened Him, but He surged in that moment. I felt Him shudder.

A stone flew past my right ear. I cried out in warning, already too late. I stepped instinctively forward. The rock struck Jesus on His brow between His eyes, and He stumbled almost flat to the stones. The cross shuddered one end to the pavement, swinging slowly flat at my feet with a clatter unheard above the frenzied crowd.

Let it be said, as it has been recorded, that the Romans conscripted me to carry that cross. Let it be said, as many thought, that I hurled the stone that brought Him down. For *He* knows the truth. It was Him, not the Romans, who invited me to rise above myself. It was Him, not myself, who forgave me. I did not throw ***that*** stone, but had ever barraged Him and others with enough stones of the heart to bring Him low.

I leapt over the vile wood to reach His side, but spears and drawn swords greeted me. None could touch the prisoner. They drove me back a little. Two Romans whipped the fallen figure mercilessly, desperately. They had to move the procession forward or risk a riot. The whips cut Him fiercely. He rose slowly, as if from a grave,

Himself a Lazarus. They prodded Him forward. He was no longer burdened with the cross, as they knew He could no longer bear it.

I do not remember picking up those befouled timbers, slippery with human waste, weighted with viciousness and hate. It burned to the touch as if covered in acid. It weighed more than I could ever have imagined.

Within two steps, however, I was at His side. It was then I heard those blessed words, "You are redeemed." It was then also that I saw His ravaged face, holding no longer anything of the divine, and doubted again that He was the Messiah at all.

Despair and darkness ambushed me momentarily. I faltered with the cross, as if I needed His stature of Messiah to warrant my attention, to justify my actions.

A childhood memory rose in me. I was lost in the woods and fell into a ravine. Wolves and the dark threatened me. Fearful and hurt, I whimpered my pain and anguish. But, suddenly, my father was there, and took me in his arms.

And in that instant the message from His teachings and parables came home to me, as they never had before. As if I had been given a key to another language or realm, I was changed, forever.

No longer the Messiah, he was just a man and, as just a man, he had my love and devotion, and my sacrifice. I would carry his cross for him without regret or worry, the peril to my health and life were as naught. In fact, the impulse rose in me to take this man's place, accept his punishment as my own.

The ground shuddered, probably just from the thousands of stamping and milling feet.

But, when I looked into His face, He was Himself transformed, a light seemed present again.

Redeemed. The word resonated in me and beyond.

And I saw once again, and ever more, my Redeemer.

Although I was soon as befouled as Him, the Waters of Life, like the River Jordan with the Baptist, washed over us, and we were made clean in spirit.

The road grew steeper and my strength waned. My spirit, despite His presence, faltered.

And then His right hand rested on my shoulder. To all the world it looked like *He* needed *my* support, but I will tell you that it was His hand that lightened my burden and spirit, and lifted me.

Forgotten was everything around us, immediate and far. Time collapsed, or seemed on hold. In that touch He harbored me. Gone were the viscious faces and

cluttered streets. Gone was the cross. On solitary strands and verdant fields, we laughed lifetimes.

No longer cries demonic and depraved, but angelic refrains surrounded us. No longer did the fetor and decay assault us. I remember still the sweet smell that rose then, the redolence of baking when I was six or seven coming home from lessons to my mother dancing bread in the oven.

In that march, His eyes flashed the fires of heaven, like a burning sun. He slid his right hand up once to the side of my face. With his thumb, with the swiftness of a spirit, he made a sign upon my flesh, a mark to set me apart for all time.

He always ever knew me, but with that touch he gave *me* knowledge. In that instant I understood. He granted me such insight of the world, through all of time, though when the journey was done, it would be sealed within me, as if hidden to protect me, and all of us.

In my dreams still, I remember His toddler's fascination with the curls of wood from the planes, as they sang from the boards in His father's shop, arching like sudden angel wings, curling into secret scrolls of knowledge, that He kept protected as treasures for years to come. I feel still His own carpenter's hands upon His own special selections of wood, and the silent thunderous communion with the unsmoothed grain.

In these years, since that time, have I spent in solitude, trying to find again more of those lost moments of forever, and with but the smallest recovered pieces, I have found such reward.

At my return home, I told my story to my family and all who would listen. I gave my wealth away, and exiled myself to caves such as this one. My family became followers of the new Christian order, with Alexander and Rufus gaining some recognition for their ministries in Rome.

I am now ready, after all these years, to go home again, and see His face anew.

These words may not survive as I have written them, but they will be heard again.

They wrenched the cross and Him from me at the top of the hill. Such was the pain of loss, I cried out, as if a limb or vital organ had been removed. I stood to the rear of the crowd, numb and dumbstruck.

I could not take His place, though some would say I did. This testament should put those doubts to rest. I was overcome by horror and helplessness as they nailed Him to the cross, and thrust it skyward to mock the heavens.

The crowd thinned as time passed, but I did not move. Indeed, in later years, I would strike by accident the physical pose of that day, and my body would cry in memory.

Toward the end, He looked at me less (as He looked at all things of this world less). I watched Him through my tears. But He would not release me until His final breath. In the darkness that had befallen that Place of Skulls, I could still see Him clearly, as if He were illumined. Every breath of His was my own.

I want to say I shared His pain, but I did not. That was His alone. He spared me that, and all of us.

Yet, I remember, always, the rood's innocent hardness on His flesh. The plaintive song from that still pulsing wood rocked and cradled Him. Pledged with commingled sap and blood, they were bound like brothers.

As one voice they cried forgiveness to us all: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

Before He addressed His Father at the end, He looked one last time upon me. He may have tried to smile. I am not sure, the world was so sideways in my tears, helpless as God died.

Blessed are the pure in heart, His voice resounded in my mind, resonating for all my life, His departing words to me, **For they shall see God**.

Hosana.

Ivan Van Heyst *works as a senior manager in the service business. He earned his MA in English from the University of Toronto, and is currently working on an Urban Agriculture Certificate from the University of Guelph. He has had two stories previously published.*

Bridge Pond *Martha Elias Downey*

Note to Readers:

The following two poems *The Bishop Street Wrestler* and *The Waiting Game* were performed as part of an evening dedicated to spoken word, sponsored by the Theological Studies Department of Concordia University in the Fall of 2010. One of the themes poets were asked to write about was the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel as found in Genesis 32:22-31. The two pieces published here stand as a testament to the richness of the biblical text and the delightful creativity of the human spirit.

The Bishop Street Wrestlers

Dr. Matthew R. Anderson

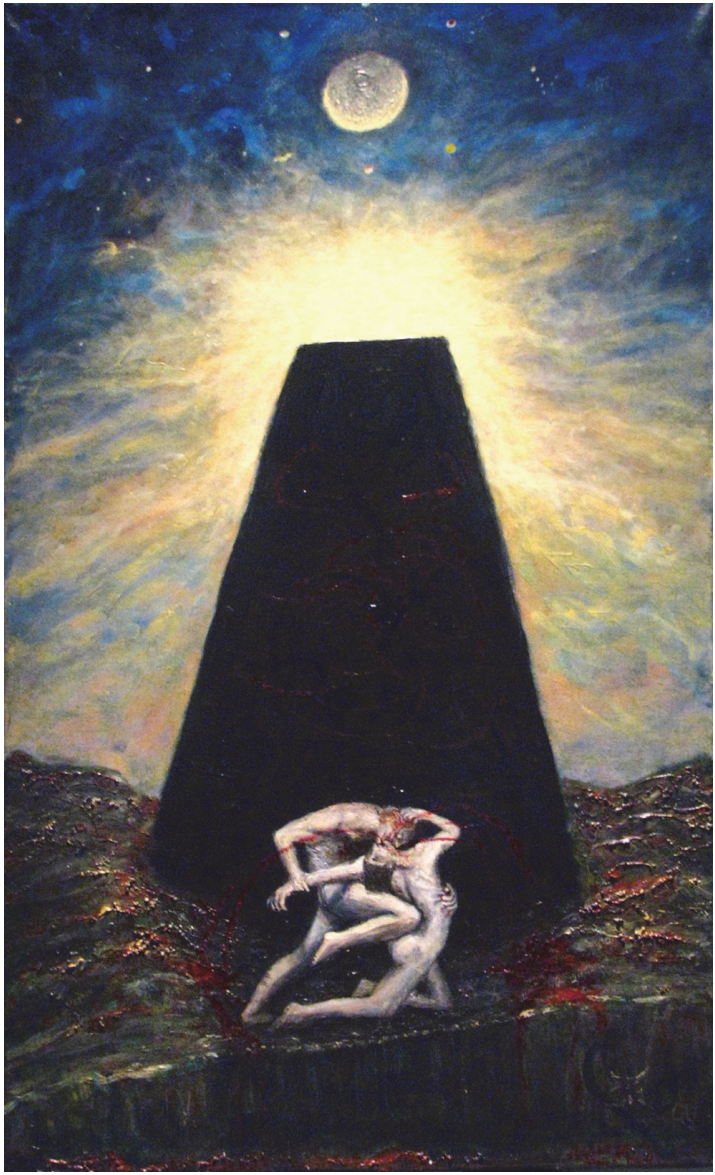
> The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbock. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said: "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob". Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.
> *Genesis 32: 22-31*

That night says the Holy Book, Jacob got up
Troubled by his dreams?
Who knows?
He SHOULD have been, such a small, mean,
Cocky bean of a man. The smallest brother, the crook, the cheat
Who ran off to Uncle rather than take the heat
Of the stolen birthright.
NOT right.
Birth WRONG. Under that sheepskin, lentils still on his breath
Like the benediction stolen just before death's
Final rattle.
Jacob'd been wrong,
But still favoured, featured, even blessed, the underdog,
the twit.
(A pattern it seems, in holy Writ.)
On the way home, sleepless, Jacob, now older, woke up,
Cradled that cup
Of tea, thought hard,
and decided.
And so awoke his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children,
(not bad, for fourteen year's work)
and forded the Jabbock. Sent them under cover of darkness
away
across the stream,

fearful of the years and the black, bad dream
and likewise it says, sent EVERYTHING he had.
End result?
No longer rich. No longer respected.
Just Jacob alone.
Unprotected.
That's what it says.
Just his backpack. Like the kid again. ALONE.
But who was he kidding?
This chisling, quizling, fibbing, grasping, gasping, clambering little man.
realized
Who was coming.
Alone.
Truer words were never spoken.
In the end, at the ford of the stream, we are always, ever, alone,
And a man wrestled with him, it says, until daybreak.
So what?
So what, you ask?
What is this old story to us?
What can WE take from this …
This solitary wrestling?
Just this:
What is this study – YOUR study, dear friends, OUR study - but a wrestling?
A mental exercise that keeps us guessing
No blessing, our books and lectures, our ideas, conjectures, but
A half-turn, full-nelson, pin to the mat
both shoulders down, this and that,
Wounded at the hip,
Out of joint.
But as you may point
out, still, somehow, we learn to:
Publish our thoughts in a journal, see them in print,
If we're lucky and good
the letters behind our names pay the rent
Theological studies makes one poor and bent,
Not broken,
But BENT.
So a meeting like this gives chance to vent
the divine. Perhaps meet the divine,
A little Kaffee Klatch, cinq-a-sept set-up, sit down, set it down, kick it out
Knock-down no-holds-barred with God, this fisted, twisted, fiery, Ancient of Days,
who, as with Jacob, grabs us by the wrist,
and
then, a Bishop-street theophany,
turns terrible, a holy, burning cacophony,
A symbol, metaphor, but more….
a man, it says, like anyone else. HU-man. A stranger….
And isn't God in the flesh always the stranger?
An incarnate unknown, a problem, a source of danger?
There by the Jabbock
Jacob lost his comfortable status quo
Oh, he pretended, this wrestler,
Feinted, dodged, parried, thrusted

But then like the fighter God is, was all over you
While Jacob, poor little runt, a weekend warrior busted
Slip, slid and parried
Surprisingly, for a small fellow, although worn and harried
held his own,
While the stranger, like a dog to a bone,
Bore down, as the Word ALWAYS does,
On our weak spots,
and shoved, and held, and pushed and turned, and bit and wounded,
Until Jacob, weak and worn, tired and sore
It being almost daybreak,
Held this stranger off just long enough,
For light to break.
God's breath on our necks not always sweet comfort -
But sweat, and fear,
Too powerful, too intimate, too God-blessed near,
Tell me your name, the stranger muttered in his ear.
Jacob, said the fighter.
You are no longer that name but another, said the stranger:
Neither your father's nor your brother's, neither your country's nor your mother's,
You are mine now, Israel.
Mine.
And shall always be.
And the point?
As he was, so are we.
As he was, so are we…
Fearful, alone, in the dark, often waiting,
Circling, this guessing, baiting, irate dating game with God,
This study, this elaboration citation of concentration,
On what was, what is, and what is to come,
For what we have witnessed, what we have seen,
Goes far beyond this Mesa 14,
Our books are the very gates of heaven, can we not understand?
And our thoughts the fighter's moves and parries,
Whilst the Unknown, the strange fighter who call us out awaits.
So….
Good dreams to you, good friend, I cannot wait to hear tell,
Of the way you fight your Penuel.
For we too will have our day, will wrestle,
Our hips out of joint,
But we will, though limping survive, though tired, alive,
Like Jacob, our every blessing stolen,
thrive
Our names changed, having more than we deserved
For we too, dear friends, Will have seen God,
and yet
and yet.
And YET….
our lives will be preserved.

Dr. Matthew R. Anderson *is a lecturer in New Testament and Theology in Film at Concordia's Dept of Theological Studies. He has published a number of short stories and has had his work featured on CBC Radio One. He recently returned from Spain, where he was teaching a course on Pilgrimage for the Department with Sara Terreault, and where he learned to say "octopus" in Spanish.*



Born Under a Bad Sign (Am I My Brother's Keeper?) *J.E. Raddatz*

The Waiting Game

Martha Elias Downey

Someone...is waiting for me.

I can sense it when I walk home at night
out there, just out of sight
waiting, watching, debating when to make a move.
I can feel it when the hairs on my arm rise up slowly
and there is a tingle on the back of my neck, only
it doesn't stay there.
That tingle, shivery tingle, finds
the bottom of my spine
and that's how I divine that
someone...is waiting for me.
I imagine and hypothesize and theorize
that the encounter will happen in some dark alley -
the *marked* and the *mark-er* meet and greet and all manner of devastation is heaped on me.
Yes, that is what I fear.
Deep in my belly, that's where I hear the fear talking
so when I am walking
I am praying, hoping, that nothing happens.
It's okay, I'd say, to be praying...for nothing.

But nothing will not happen.
I know that this someone will, eventually, catch up to me.
It might happen in broad daylight, who knows?
Perhaps I am in a park, and someone suddenly appears in a bush- whoa!
(though I think that highly unlikely)
I think about it often, more often than not, about how I'll be caught off guard.
When I open the closet door, the refrigerator door, the shower door, the elevator door
pick a door, any door -
I always feel like
Someone...might be waiting for me.
Sometimes I think I can see the *wait-er* out of the corner of my eye, a glimpse
just out of my peripheral vision
like when you're sitting too close at the theatre during a Bruce Willis movie and a fight breaks out in a restaurant - as you know it has to - and there are those two guys in the background that never really come into focus and they hope you won't notice that one of them is looking right at you.
Yes, someone...is waiting for me.
I know he is, or she is, or they are, or it is.
No, not *it*. Maybe *he*, maybe *they*,
maybe someone big enough to convey t*hey* even though *they* are one.
Yes, some ONE is waiting for me.

This One is so patient. The patience of God, it would seem.
This One is always present. I cannot shake the feeling, asleep or awake, that I am never alone.
This One is annoyingly hidden. Like the wind. I can see the effects, but these eyes can never truly catch a glimpse of exactly where or what or who One is.
This One watches. I know this and do not know it.
When you feel the gaze of someone upon you, you are drawn in their direction.
You know?
I know!
We know!
Some One is watching!
Some One... is waiting for me.

But I am waiting, too.
I am waiting for the day when I will have the advantage.
When I turn around a corner just a second before the One expects me to
or I open that closet door and catch the One on the floor, asleep
or I peek behind that bush in the park and the One is relieving himself -
Hah! I will definitely have the upper hand then.
And when that *then* happens
when opportunity presents itself to me like a stairway to heaven
I will get right up in the elusive One's face
(you would think we were going to embrace but I will have quite another purpose in mind)
and I will ask,
"What do you think you are doing? Following me around all these years and never showing yourself?"
I will call the One a coward, or a control freak, or whatever accusations come out of my mouth at that moment to give voice to the years of fear and anxiety and doubt that I have suffered under those invisible eyes.
If he has a lethal weapon, I suppose I will die before I get to say the next bit,
but if he is a doddering old fool, and some days I suspect that he is, I will tell him that this isn't funny.
Not amusing in the slightest degree.
Can't he tell that people get freaked out by someone they can't see?
"Who are you?" I will ask. "I need to know who you are!
Are you the long lost brother that I never knew I had?
or the old man I pissed off years ago, who has been getting angrier and angrier by the day watching and waiting until the time is right to make me pay?"
And that's as far as I get in my fantasy
because I can't see his face and
it seems kind of pointless.

More pointless than I know
because one day, the One just appears.
He is not here
and then he is here.
(I don't do boxing, but I have often thought it would be a good sport for me.
I am fast and can think on my feet.
But fast feet only get you so far.
You've got to be able to land a punch, and do it convincingly.
But look at these arms. Are you convinced? Me neither.)
Anyway, the One appears.

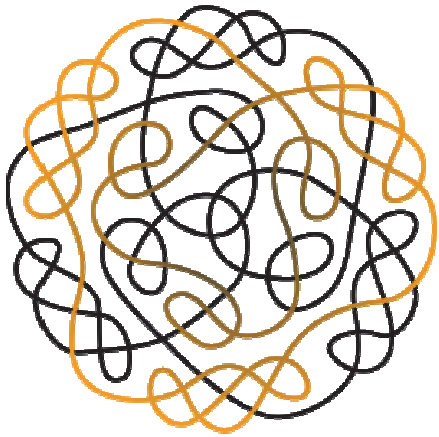
No time for fear.
The One is here. I am here. Game on!
You know, I thought he would use his invisibility to take advantage of me.
I thought he would catch me off guard and hit me hard.
I thought he would play on my fears, drive me to tears, for sure.
But this One...
This One is not what I thought.
I don't even know how I know it is him when I see him, but I know
and being fast on my feet, I make the first move:
Power blow to the chest! I expect him to crumple to the ground, stunned
but he grabs me and we both go down, tumbling.
(I suppose wrestling would have been a more useful sport to fantasize about than boxing)
My arms are my weakness and I have no hope of getting a good hold on the One.
Not a full nelson, not a cobra clutch, not the chin lock. Nothing sticks.
I needn't worry about using any wrestling tricks, though
because *he* is holding onto *me*
in a giant bear hug.
The kind a big black bear might use, a grip that says you are mine because I'm hungry and it's going to be a long winter.
But I am fast and small and I wiggle and wriggle and struggle and wangle my way out of his grip.
I leap back on my feet.
"You can't have me," I say!
The One, he stands up and waits.
I don't know what he is thinking, but the longer I look at him, the more I am sure I don't like it.
So I make another move. I call it the "All-In" maneuver!
This time, I will have him!
All four limbs are in the air as I execute a flying tackle
but I feel only the bounce of my body off a solid surface.
He is no longer a bear. Now he is a rock!
I grab at the slippery smooth wall of some familiar yet foreign substance and find no handhold.
And I am afraid again. The elusiveness is back.
I thought I had him, but I have nothing...

I will not be left with nothing!
Not after all this! Not now!
I grasp for something, anything that will keep the One from disappearing.
The edge of his shirt finds its way into my hand and I hold on tight.
"I will not let go," I say to myself.
"You will not let go," I tell my hand.
"I will not let you go," I say to him.
"Not until you give me what I want!" I demand, as if beggars and losers get to make demands.
I think of all the *why's* I want answered and all the fears I want to be assuaged.
But that is not what comes out of my mouth.
The One is waiting (by now I know he does this very well)
and I decide that this is the advantage that I have been waiting for. It is mine for the taking.
"I want what you have," I cry!
"That confidence, that strength, that lack of uncertainty, that ability to wait and wait and wait and never get discouraged."

The One speaks: "What's your name?"
What? He's been following me around all these years and he doesn't know who I am?
But then I realise, surely he is saying this because he is about to pull out his chequebook and make me rich here and now! He just wants to get the name right! Of course!
I reply: "I am *Trying To Get Ahead in Life*. With one 'i.'"
The One smirks, at least that's what his face appears to be doing. Odd.
But before I can finish the second "d" in that thought, I am on the ground.
He has me pinned, flattened, crushed.
I count to ten in my head but it doesn't matter.
It could be one or a thousand, it would be all the same.
I cannot move. I can barely breathe. I think I might be paralyzed or maybe dead.
Ouch does not begin to articulate what my bones are feeling.
Something is definitely out of place.
I feel woozy and would fall down if I was not already...down.
Suddenly the pressure lifts and I am alone.
I look around and see no One.
Only me and the ground and a small piece of paper near my left hip.
It IS a cheque, and it is made out to "Good Wrestler." Or maybe there is only one "o." I can't quite tell.
I get up off the ground, bruised but a whole lot braver.

Strange. How is it that I can lose the fight, yet feel like I gained the whole world?
Something is definitely out of place here.
(smile)

This poem is loosely based on Genesis 32 and a few other bits of the Bible.



A Self-Conscious Gesture

Mary Gedeon Harvan

I met him at a party
a slender well dressed man
not quite handsome
yet he had a certain
quality - a certain air of
sadness I could not resist

I introduced myself
his response was curt
unsmiling - a self-conscious
gesture reminded me of
someone I once knew

I began to tell him about
the Ragman who used
to trudge up our back lane and
about the Ragman's son

I stooped to fix my shoe strap
when I straightened up
he was gone

Mary Gedeon Harvan *is currently completing an M.A. in Theological Studies at Concordia University on the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of John. She holds a B.A. English Literature from Sir George Williams University and currently tutors Koine Greek, writes music as well as freelance articles for the local newspaper.*

Untitled *Robert Smith*

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