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***Grapho* cover art:**

Embroidered Satin, Cloth For a Splendid Garment

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25–27)

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Letter from the Chairman

Letter from the Chairman: Why We Are Not our Own

Cody MacMillin

In his book, *You Are Not Your Own*, author and professor Alan Noble argues that the fundamental lie of modernity is the one which says we belong to ourselves.[1] He is concerned with our society's increased emphasis on individualism, and he asserts that it requires serious and intentional effort to remember how we belong to Christ. This truth, Noble says, is not just a doctrine to which we must subscribe but a reality which touches every part of our lives.[2] It runs contrary to the narratives of self-discovery and self-ownership that we are surrounded by today, and it is the means by which the Church asserts herself as a community which is set apart from the rest of the world.

In light of Noble's argument, the question for us becomes the following: what does it mean to belong to Christ? How is it that our lives are touched by the reality of the Gospel, and how do we live out our Christian identity so that others can see Jesus more clearly? Most immediately, I believe there are three ways that we can see Noble's argument come to bear, each of which have their roots in the Scriptures as well as the ancient creeds of the Church. We are not our own and we belong to Christ because Christ is our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier, and these truths bear significance for how we see ourselves today.

Christ our Creator

Jesus Christ is our Creator because He is the Maker of all things. He was the Word in the beginning which spoke the universe into existence. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:3) Christ is also the Sustainer of all things, the One in whom all things hold together and continue to have their being. (Col 1:16–17) When we combine these two realities, we realize that Christ as the Maker and Sustainer of all things is also the Owner of the things He makes and sustains. "The sea is his, for He made it," declares the Psalmist. "And the heights of the mountains are his also." (Ps 95:5–6) Jesus is in complete and total possession of the things He creates. All of Creation is contingent upon his Word, and as his creatures, humanity is utterly dependent on Him for every breath we take.

Christ our Redeemer

Jesus Christ is our Redeemer because He reclaims us from our sinful condition. Jesus goes to the Cross to seek and to save the lost, (Luke 19:10) and in so doing He marks his territory against sin, death, and the devil. Jesus delivers us from the devil's dark dominion and into his kingdom through the forgiveness of our sins. (Col 1:13–14)

He is the one mediator between God and man who gave Himself as a ransom for all. (1 Tim 2:5–6) Because Christ is our Redeemer, we know that we have been bought with a price and are therefore valuable in his eyes. (1 Cor 6:19–20) We have been justified by Jesus and brought into right standing with the Father through this redeeming work. We receive the gift of this work in faith, (Rom 3:25) and we are grateful for how Christ has shown us the Father's grace.

Christ our Sanctifier

Jesus Christ did not save us for our own sake but for the sake of the whole world. He has adopted us into his family through Baptism, (Rom 8:15–17) and He has given us the gift of his Spirit, in whom we are constantly being formed into his own image and likeness. We are now imitators of Christ, so that our entire way of life belongs to Him. With the help of his Spirit, we walk as Christ walked, we talk as Christ talked, and we love as Christ loved. As Spirit-filled members of his Church, we also recognize that we imitate Christ among the whole communion of saints. We belong to the Body of Christ as members of it, (1 Cor 12:27) and as the Body of Christ we belong to Christ as his Bride. (Eph 5:22–24) As Christ's Bride, we submit to Christ in every way, loving and serving one another while proclaiming the Good News of his reign and rule. We do so eagerly waiting for the day when all of creation will be restored.

We belong to Christ because He has made us, saved us, and now walks with us in every step we take. There is no way to run from his presence, nor is there a way to outrun his grace. We live our lives in humble submission to Christ because He is the basis for our identities. We are not our own. We are not made by our own hard work and determination. We are not saved by our own moral scruples and sense of superiority. We do not find our own paths but rather follow the path that He has laid before us. It is a path to the Cross, one which reminds us of our utter dependency on Him.

In the articles and materials that follow, this year's edition of Grapho provides further reflection on these truths for the good of the Church. On behalf of the entire publication team, we thank you for your time spent reading and considering how God is speaking through them. We pray that these words would encourage, challenge, and inspire you in your ministry. You are not your own, you were bought with a price, and you too belong to Christ. Amen.

Cody MacMillin
Student Publications Chairman
Spring 2024

1 Noble, Alan. *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World*. Intervarsity Press. 2021. p.4
2 Ibid, p.6

Essays

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The Holy Spirit as the Undiminished Giver in the Early Church[1]

Kyle Weeks

At one time or another, virtually every churchgoing Christian is bound to hear the moniker of "Sanctifier" applied to the Holy Spirit. In this role, the Spirit is often described as dwelling within believers to make them holy, so that they might produce the "fruit of the spirit" as they lead good and godly lives.[2] To that end, the Spirit is said to effect a complete "regeneration and renewal" of the individual, empowering them with the strength, grace, virtues, and other "spiritual gifts" requisite for Christian life.[3] In denominations such as Lutheranism, faith itself is proclaimed to be impossible without the Spirit, and it is not uncommon to hear the pastor tell those about to be baptized to "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."[4]

But while the Spirit's sanctifying work is widely acknowledged, the church tends to be much less clear on what it means for believers to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How is it possible, after all, for the infinite, indivisible Deity to indwell finite human beings without being divided or diminished in His person or essence? Moreover, precisely how does the Spirit go about the work of making a Christian holy? Do believers draw on the Spirit as some sort of force or reservoir of power for holy living, or is something else being imparted? For that matter, what are the virtues and holiness the Spirit is instilling? Some suggest they represent a change in nature, others a skill taught, and still others a spiritual substance of some sort. The lack of clarity has caused many Christians to wonder what is actually received in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Where, in other words, does the Giver end and the gift begin? Considering the scope of the Spirit's activity in the life of the believer, this is no inconsequential query. Fortunately, it is far from a new question for historic Christianity. For although studies of the early church often focus on Christological controversies, the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the church also generated significant discussion.[5] In part, this was because many of the same objections to Jesus' divinity were eventually raised against the Spirit. This is not to say the earliest Christians did not proclaim the divinity of the Spirit, however, as the "divinity of the Spirit [is] implicit in their benedictions, baptisms, hymnody, and prayers."[6] But

just as the Incarnation of the Logos had challenged early theologians to "maintain the unity of God while insisting on the deity of one who was distinct from God the Father,"[7] so also did the church find itself compelled to defend the deity of the Spirit while confessing the indivisibility of the Godhead.

These theological conflicts prompted the church not only to articulate the Spirit's place within the Trinity more clearly, but also to devote considerable attention to the Spirit's indwelling among Christians. Yet most contemporary assessments of early pneumatology omit one of the most important and widespread arguments adduced for the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the early church, namely, the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver, wherein the Spirit is posited to be both the Giver and the Gift in His indwelling of believers. A rediscovery of the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver offers ample opportunities to grow in our appreciation of our Christian identity and its fruits.

Obstacles to the Spirit's Divinity in Jewish and Greek Thought

First, it must be noted that, given Israel's monotheistic understanding of God, the Trinitarian disputes were perhaps inevitable. As it is expressed in the *Shema*, the people of God were encouraged to, "Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."[8] From this and other Old Testament texts, the Jewish people had derived a strict monotheism that understood Yahweh as utterly singular in His Being.[9] As a result, the Jewish people observed "a binary distinction between God and all other reality" that precluded any gradient view of divinity such as existed in the polytheistic pagan world.[10] In other words, God displays a "transcendent uniqueness" that necessitates "sharp ontological distinctions" between God and all other created reality.[11] In this way, Israel grasped implicitly that to include Yahweh among a pantheon of other gods—even if He were the greatest—would be to place Him within a category of beings. Inadvertently, to even entertain the existence of other deities would be to "subject [God] to the categories of finitude," in which case even "superlatives would become diminutives" when applied to God.[12] To assent to the belief that Yahweh is the most preeminent deity among many is to deny Him the status of being the *only* deity.

Additionally, the early church had to contend with the influence of Greek philosophical thought regarding the nature of the Deity. In the 6th century B.C., the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (ca. 580-500 B.C.) began using the term Monad (derived from μόνος, which means "only," "alone," or something standing "as the only entity in a class") in reference to the "One," or the Supreme Being.[13] Just as all numbers are built on the number one, so was the Monad held to be the immutable, irreducible source and principle of all things[14] In the same way that one is the simplest, foundational number and is neither complex nor divisible, so also is the Monad utterly simple and devoid of any composite parts. If the Monad *were* to have

constituent components, it would be contingent upon some characteristic or attribute outside of itself, and thus being mutable, would show itself as something other than the Monad.[15] Consequently, the Monad must be static or immutable, as any addition or subtraction would imply a composite nature. Naturally then, the singular nature of the Monad as a unity implied a basic duality between the Monad and the rest of creation, the latter of which was said to emanate from the unity of the Monad.[16] In order to maintain the immutability of the Monad, it was always held in sharp distinction from the rest of reality.

Given that Christianity was itself grounded upon the monotheism expressed in the Old Testament, many Christian thinkers found themselves sympathetic to the Greek concept of the Divine as utterly simple, static, and unchanging. As such, the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit initially appeared inconsistent with this emphasis on the oneness of God. For if multiple persons were present within the Godhead, this would seemingly imply divisibility and a composite nature, thereby diminishing God and destroying monotheism.[17]

While the church's response cannot be fully enumerated here, its basic reply was to confess in accord with Scripture that "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [were] of one and the same substance," such that there is one God in three persons, all of whom are *homoousios* with one another.[18] For instance, Augustine and others were able to affirm that each of the three persons possesses the divine essence substantially and in full (as opposed to accidentally), so that the divine essence of the three together is not greater than the essence of any one of the three.[19] Whereas the Greek concept of the Monad mandated oneness in both personhood and essence, the church realized Scripture's attestation of God's singularity applied to His essence, but not to His personhood.[20] In this way, Christians were able to maintain the eternal, ontological oneness of the Godhead, while also confessing that economically God is not static but dynamic in time as He graciously conveys His gifts to creation.[21]

Yet the Spirit's divinity presented particular challenges not posed by the Son. For one thing, unlike the Logos, the Spirit did not have the advantage of a familial appellation such as "Son" analogous to everyday life to suggest a shared essence. As a result, many found it easier to follow Arianism and "regard the Spirit as some kind of an elevated creature with its own unique dignity and power, or as some kind of intermediate being who was neither God nor creature."[22] Perhaps even more problematic, however, was the matter of the Holy Spirit's presence within believers. For while it was at least conceivable that there could be multiple persons within the Godhead in light of the Incarnation, for those steeped in Greek thought the dispensation of the Spirit to countless individuals seemed to be an inexcusable parceling out of the Monad. As such, the indwelling of Christians demanded an explicit response, lest the Spirit be blasphemed and the impression given that believ-

ers were sanctified by and baptized in the name of a mere creature.[23]

The Development of the Doctrine of the Undiminished Giver

To address the concerns elicited by the Spirit's lodging within believers, the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver was frequently employed to explain the work of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, Christian thinkers sought to protect the divinity and immutability of the Spirit, as well as to foster appreciation for the Spirit's particular role in the economy of salvation. By referring to the Holy Spirit as the Undiminished Giver, these writers intended to say that what the Spirit gives is inherent to His nature, so that the Spirit actually *is* what He gives, and that He furthermore gives without being reduced or lessened in any way. It is important to note that this is *not* to say that God is a mere exemplification of our virtues, but rather that He graciously gives immeasurably more of Himself than we might otherwise have thought.[24]

As for the origin of the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver, its first undisputed appearance was in the writings of Philo, a first century Alexandrian Hellenistic Jewish philosopher (ca. 20 B.C.- A.D. 45).[25] Philo writes that "God decided that it was fitting to [gift] with unlimited and abundant favors a nature which, without the divine gift, was unable of itself to obtain any good thing; but he [gifts] it, not [with the fullness] of his own graces, for they are illimitable and eternal, but according to the power of that which…[receives] his graces."[26] In other words, Philo asserts that because "good things" are not intrinsic to man's being, mankind can only receive them from the One to whom they are innate. Also implied is the inference that because these attributes exist within God in an infinite capacity, they cannot be diminished. Rather, God's distribution of the gifts demonstrates His own simplicity by way of juxtaposition with finite creatures.

Philo also applies the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver in his *De gigantibus* when treating the 70 elders in Numbers 11:17, illustrating that its usage was a mainstay in his thinking and not merely an anomaly. Philo's application of the doctrine in this passage is quite well-developed, and so deserves to be quoted at length:

> For it is said, 'I will take of my spirit which is upon thee, and I will pour it upon the seventy Elders'. But do not think that this taking away could be by means of cutting off or separation; but it is here, as is the case in an operation effected by fire, which can light ten thousand torches, without itself being diminished the least atom, or ceasing to remain as it was before. Something like this is also the nature of knowledge…it is in no degree diminished [for its being shared]…the spirit which…is everywhere diffused, so as to fill the universe, which, while it benefits others, is not injured by having a share in it given to another."[27]

Philo's analysis of the passage is remarkable in at least two respects. First, it is worth recalling that Philo is writing as a Hellenistic Jew, but as a Jew nonetheless. As such, his application of the doctrine to the Pentateuch demonstrates a belief that it was compatible with Old Testament monotheism, even not having recognized the Trinity. Second, Philo provides the analogies of knowledge and a torch's flame as everyday examples of things which can be shared without being diminished. The implication of this is that as the infinite, immutable God who shares Himself, the deity or essence of the Spirit of God likewise is not somehow changed or reduced by way of said sharing.

In addition to these observations, Lewis Ayres adduces three corollaries of the Undiminished Giver from the above excerpts which are present in the writings of subsequent Christian thinkers. First, Ayres states, "there can only be one undiminished giver," as the attributes of the first principle must remain a singularity.[28] Second, the possession of any quality gifted by the Undiminished Giver is in in some sense a participation in the Undiminished Giver.[29] This point is necessitated by the fact that the attribute being shared is inherent in the Giver, and so interaction with that gift cannot occur apart from a simultaneous participation in the Giver. And finally, to be undiminished, the Giver cannot be spatially or temporally limited, and so must be omnipresent.[30] Any entity which fits these criteria must by necessity be God, as only He is noncontingent and transcendentally unique; only He is utterly simple; and only God is omnipresent.

After Philo, the doctrine is frequently utilized by Platonists such as Plotinus, Numenius, and Proclus till at least late antiquity.[31] Thus, there can be little doubt that Christian theologians of the period familiar with Greek philosophy were aware of the concept of the Undiminished Giver. Indeed, Christian thinkers began explicitly appropriating the doctrine as early as the second century to better defend and explicate the Trinitarian relationship.

While both Justin Martyr and Irenaeus occasionally hint at the doctrine, the first of the church fathers to apply it to the Trinity seems to have been Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 A.D.), who uses it in reference to the Son. In his *Stromateis*, Clement writes that the Son, in accord with the Father's will, "holds the helm of the universe…with unwearied and tireless power, working all things in which it operates…not being divided, not severed, not passing from place to place; being always everywhere, and being contained nowhere; complete mind, the complete paternal light."[32] While this passage lacks the precise trinitarian language of later formulations, it is noteworthy in that Clement clearly recognizes the inexhaustibility, indivisibility, and omnipresence of the Son. In doing so, Clement is arguing that multiple persons within the Godhead are capable of functioning as the Undiminished Giver, thereby making a decidedly Christian contribution to the doctrine.

Following Clement, Origen (ca. 185-254 A.D.) leverages the doctrine over

and against Celsus' criticisms of the *imago dei*.[33] In the process, Origen establishes an important clarification which Philo hinted at but which will be especially helpful to later thinkers. Namely, Origen states that God, "is participated in rather than participates; and he is participated in by those who possess the Spirit of God. Our Savior also does not participate in righteousness, but being righteous, he is participated in by the righteous."[34] In other words, while created beings can participate in the righteousness of God and other such attributes, God can never participate in some external attribute. Indeed, this must be so, because if the gifts of God—such as goodness or holiness—were external to Him, God would no longer be simple and immutable. Instead, God would be contingent upon an external force or standard, and necessarily diminished in the giving of gifts He Himself did not inherently possess. Likewise, God is not simply the greatest exemplar of said virtues, as this again implies that God is subject to measurement by an independent standard, and that His virtue only differs from ours as a matter of degree. Rather, the gifts of God can *only* be conveyed through direct communion with Him. Notably, Origen also looks to be thinking in terms of "one fount of deity, the Father, and one unified operation by which the Father works through Son and Spirit."[35] Thus, his tendency toward subordinationism notwithstanding, Origen laid the groundwork for the Undiminished Giver's application to the Spirit by seemingly conceiving of participation in the Spirit as participation in the Father.

The appropriation of the Undiminished Giver by Christians makes its next developmental leap thanks to Athanasius, who recognizes the inextricable link between the Spirit's creative and sanctifying work. Specifically, Athanasius notes that the New Testament consistently attributes holiness, sanctification, and renewal to the Holy Spirit, who is the gift partaken of according to Hebrews 6:4.[36] In addi-

tion, Athanasius observes that in Psalm 103:30 and elsewhere Scripture attests to the Spirit Himself as being responsible for creation.[37] Taking this into account, Athanasius asks:

> So [the Spirit] who is not sanctified by another, nor participates in sanctification, but is himself the one who is participated in, the one in whom all creatures are sanctified: how can he be one of the *all things* [Jn 1.3]…? For those who claim this would also have to say that the Son, through whom *all things* came to be, is one of the *all things*… But [the Spirit] who does not participate in life, but is himself participated in and gives life to creatures: what sort of affinity does he have with things which have come into existence? In sum, how is the Spirit one of the creatures to whom the Word gives life through him?[38]

Following Athanasius' logic, only created realities require sanctification, life, and renewal be granted to them from without, because God is immutable and such qualities inhere in His very being. This is illustrated by the mutability of humanity and the fallen angels, who in their fallenness demonstrate that they do not possess holiness, righteousness, and the like as unchangeable aspects of their natures.[39] Conversely, Athanasius concludes that because holiness and life are granted to creatures via participation in the Spirit, He must possess them eternally as God. As a result, Athanasius concludes that all creatures—angels included—have always been intended to be indwelt by the sanctifying Spirit from creation, and are utterly dependent on the Spirit in this way.[40] Significantly then, Athanasius has for the first time employed the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver in relation to the Holy Spirit, thereby establishing the precedent of its pro–Nicene usage.[41] Notably, Athanasius does not assert multiple sources of gifts given to creatures but rather one unified source located in the divine nature which is common to all three persons of the Trinity. Finally, the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver is perhaps given its clearest and most sophisticated exposition by Didymus the Blind (ca. A.D. 313-398), in his *De spiritu*.[42] As Ayres says regarding Didymus' treatise, his whole argument is unified by the premise that "the Spirit is the boundless source of all sanctification, and thus *a priori* cannot be a created reality that participates in goodness."[43] Thus Didymus identifies the Spirit's very essence with the act of sanctification, asserting that, "this substance we are now discussing produces wisdom and sanctification," and that conversely "everything which is capable of participating in the good of another is separated by this substance….[and] are creatures."[44] Accordingly, if the Holy Spirit does not possess holiness inherently but is "actually holy through participation in another's sanctity, then he should be classified with the rest of creatures."[45] However, when it comes to the Holy Spirit it is not possible to find in Him

> any strength which he receives from some external act of sanctification and virtue, for a nature such as this would have to be mutable. Rather, the Holy Spirit…is the immutable sanctifier, the bestower of divine knowledge and goods…it is apparent that the Holy Spirit is the fullness of the gifts of God and the goods bestowed by God are nothing other than the subsistent Holy Spirit.[46]

It is evident, Didymus concludes, that the Spirit's person is the gift, precisely because He is Goodness, Sanctification, and Holiness, and accordingly, He must exist in a state of ontological co-equality with the Father and the Son.

Didymus then begins to parse out what this means for the Spirit's indwelling of believers. As Didymus reasons, "because He is good, God is the source and principle of all goods. Therefore, He makes good those to whom He imparts Himself; He is not made good by another, but is good."[47]And indeed, making creatures good is *precisely* what the Spirit does when He empowers new obedience or holy living. The Spirit does not have to impart any foreign substance or serve as a conduit to some external power, because He Himself sanctifies and renews. Neither is the Holy Spirit merely "an activity and not the substance of God."[48] In this way the Spirit does not suffer loss in His dispensation of gifts, because He simply gives of Himself; this of course poses no problem because the Spirit who searches even the depths of God "does not have a circumscribed substance."[49]

Again, the inescapable conclusion of Didymus' logic is made clear just a little later when he emphatically declares "[the Holy Spirit] *is goodness itself* because his nature sanctifies and fills the universe with good things."[50] For if the Spirit differed in His essence from these two, and yet still imparted the good gifts of the Father and the Son, then the goodness of the Spirit would necessarily differ from theirs. In turn, this would mean either the Father and the Son were not inherently good, or that their goodness was somehow incomplete, both of which would imply mutability and inferiority to the Spirit. Yet the Father and the Son are not inferior, so the Spirit must be God.

Lastly, Didymus proceeds to demonstrate how this fundamental tri-unity can be seen in any number of gifts given by the Spirit. For instance, Didymus notes that God is the Only-Wise, Christ the Power and Wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Wisdom; necessarily then, the Spirit gives the Son, who is Himself the Father's Wisdom.[51] This is also seen in the believer's reception of grace, for "it is not the case that the Father gives one grace and the Savior another," but that there is a single grace bestowed by "the Spirit of Grace."[52] Hence, for Didymus the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver "seems to signify the existence of each Person with the same essence and the existence of the Persons in each other." Indeed,

every virtue imparted by the Holy Spirit belongs to the essence of all three persons, so that the indwelling of the Spirit is in fact "a single reception of the Trinity," even as each subsists as their own distinct person.[53] Thus the Christian's reception of grace, forgiveness, life, holiness—and indeed every good thing—is inextricably bound up in our participation in the Spirit, who unites us with Christ so that we may be reconciled to the Father and conformed to the image of His Son.

Christian Identity and the Undiminished Giver Today

After Didymus, the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver continued to enjoy widespread usage not only among Alexandrian theologians, but also by the Cappadocian Fathers and the church at large.[54] Thus, Christian thinkers found a means of affirming the divinity of the Spirit while maintaining the oneness of the Trinity, all while proclaiming a lively and vibrant depiction of God's gracious economy of salvation.

While there have been many theological books written, it is a sad reality that in many ways the Holy Spirit remains "the last unexplored theological frontier" of Christianity.[55] Yet in an age when the problems confronting the church seem to multiply annually, a rehabilitation of the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver could greatly benefit the faith, life, and witness of God's people, especially within the LCMS. Accordingly, while a comprehensive exploration of the ways the doctrine might be applied within the church today must surely be an ongoing and collaborative project, a few brief suggestions can be offered here.

First and foremost, the doctrine of the Undiminished Giver provides significant clarity as to what exactly is received in the gift of the Holy Spirit: the Gift of the Divine Giver Himself. Rather than speculating wildly concerning the Spirit's

role or focusing on showier gifts such as speaking in tongues, the teaching of the Undiminished Giver sets Scriptural boundaries for the Spirit's work by grounding His activity in God's economy of salvation. Moreover, by centering the work of the Spirit in the act of putting us back into a relationship with Christ so that we can be reconciled to the Father and receive the fruits of Christ's victory for us, this tenet may help to reinvigorate and reenchant the church's proclamation of the Gospel as it basks in the wonder of the Triune God's good gifts.

Expanding upon this theme, the doctrine facilitates dialogue about the Spirit in a way that encompasses the deeply relational nature of His work. Too often the church instrumentalizes the Spirit as an impersonal force whose functions overshadow His personhood. The Spirit is not *only* a guarantor of scriptural infallibility. The Spirit's role in disseminating God's gifts is highly intimate, and it can be a profound source of encouragement for disciples of Jesus. In a time when Christians struggle not to feel as though God is distant and aloof, the Undiminished Giver teaches that God's transcendent uniqueness, coupled with His determination to be God with us, is the very source of our salvation and hope. Indeed, all of creation was fashioned to enjoy the presence of the Spirit. In this way, we see that the trajectory of the Christian life is not movement from dependence to independence, but rather that we were created for dependent life in the Spirit from the beginning. In fact, because God is Good, rebellion from God is nothing less than rebellion against all that is Good.[56] In other words, if we are Godless, then we are also "goodless."[57] As Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?"[58] Thus, all that you have —righteousness before God, faith, sanctification, and any other good—is not your own, just as you are not your own.[59]

An obvious corollary of this truth is that the Undiminished Giver helps us lay out a Scriptural anthropology. In contrast to decision theology and other such distorted anthropologies today, we are reminded that if the Holy Spirit is truly a gift, then we cannot wrest that gift from God by our own reason or strength. As Luther says, it is up to "the Holy Spirit to call us through the Gospel and enlighten us with his gifts so that we may be made holy and kept in the truth faith."[60] One application of this would be to emphasize more regularly the points in the Divine Service such as the salutation and the epiclesis at communions where the church asks for the Spirit to be present so that the church people may receive God's gift. Indeed, the church *depends* on the Spirit to come and indwell us, to bring us back into communion with the Triune God so that we can be holy once more. Likewise, Christians can be encouraged to lead lives of repentance and to heed the Spirit via new obedience, as the gifts of God depend on the gift of the Spirit's ongoing presence.

All in all, the Gift of the Giver presents the church with inestimable riches for its life, proclamation, and witness. There is simply no reception of God's gifts absent the Giver Himself. Yet, God is indeed Good, and He showers His goodness

upon us in innumerable ways, including by stooping down to make a temple of the Holy Spirit out of every baptized child of God and claiming us as His own. This should move us to humility, awe, and praise, as we realize that every day of discipleship is an ongoing participation in the Spirit, who also indwells countless others and yet is undiminished in His person or gifts. Indeed, although the gifts we have received are not our own, we are infinitely and eternally better off for them. Thus, may we and all believers pray continually with repentant joy: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."[61]

Endnotes

1 This essay has been adapted from an earlier version prepared for Professor Joel Elowsky's HIS913: Pneumatology in the Early Church, taught at Concordia Seminary in fall 2019.
2 Galatians 5:22 ESV. Hereafter all Scriptural citations will be taken from the ESV unless otherwise stated.
3 Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.
4 Acts 2:38. Even if they do not conceive of faith itself as a gift, nearly every expression of Christianity recognizes the Spirit indwells believers from the beginning of their faith journey to aid them in their sanctification.
5 For a wide-reaching survey of some of the early church fathers who write about the Holy Spirit, see Joel, Elowsky ed., *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Ancient Christian Doctrine Series, Vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
6 Elowsky, *We Believe*, xxii.
7 Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils* (325-787): *Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press: 1983), 33.
8 Deuteronomy 6:4. This is of course not to say that individual Israelites did not engage in polytheistic practices at times, merely that the language concerning God in the Old Testament and the traditional Jewish understanding of God is patently monotheistic. Stephen, Bullivant, *The Trinity: How Not to Be a Heretic* (New York: Paulist, 2015), 21.
9 For example, see Isaiah 44:6-8.
10 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2008),109.
11 Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 109.
12 William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: John Nox Press, 1996), 10.
13 Thomas Rankin, "Pythagoras" Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia, 2019. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=88258864&ite=eds-live. William F. Arndt et al., A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 3441.
14 Christoph Riedweg. *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching, and Influence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 23.
15 Riedweg, *Pythagoras*, 23.
16 Joel Elowsky, "Introduction to the Holy Spirit in the Early Church," Lecture in HIS913 Pneumatology in the Early Church, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, September 5, 2019.
17 The Incarnation was seen as particularly problematic, as it represented the crossing of the ontological divide between God and creation, which was thought to be impassable. In reaction, many concluded "that God's essence could in no way be shared by another," and so heterodox solutions such as Sabellianism, Docetism, and Arianism were proposed to preserve the oneness of the Godhead. Elowsky, We Believe in the Holy Spirit, xxiii.
18 Edmund Hill, trans. *Augustine: The Trinity*, The Works of Saint Augustine, Part 1. Vol. 5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 171. For an even earlier example, see Tertullian's writings on the Spirit in Burgess, The Holy Spirit, 63.
19 Hill, *Augustine: The Trinity*, 239.
20 By personhood, I mean the quality of being distinguishable from other individuals, not a disunity between will or essence.
21 This is not to say God is dynamic in a Monarchian sense, but rather that He crosses the ontological barrier to redeem and restore His creation, yet without diminishing Himself.
22 Elowsky, *We Believe*, xxiv.
23 A. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed*, Woodbrooke Studies, Vol. 5, (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1933), 111.
24 Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 10.
25 Lewis Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver'" in *The Holy Spirit in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Seventh International Patristic Conference, Maynooth 2008*, D. Vincent Twomey SVD and Janet E. Rutherford, ed., (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 59; Daniel C. Scavone, "Philo of Alexandria," *Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia*, 2019. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=88258837&site=eds-live.
26 Philo of Alexandria, *De opificio mundi* 6.23, as cited in Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 59.
27 Philo of Alexandria, *De gigantibus* 24-8, as cited in Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 60.
28 Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 60.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 61. Proclus especially seems to rely on the doctrine in propositions 8, 25, and 26 of his *Elements of Theology*. E.R. Dodds, trans. *Proclus: The Elements of Theology, 2 nd ed.* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 9-11; 29-31.
32 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.2.5, as cited in Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,' 62-63.
33 Glenn W. Olsen, "Origen." *Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia*, 2019. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=88258825&site=eds-live.
34 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Henry Chadwick trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 379.
35 Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 62. For instance, see also *De principiis* 1.3.8.
36 Athanasius, "Letters to Serapion," 88. For instance, see Romans 1:4, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:4-7, and 1 Peter 1:2.
37 Ibid.
38 Athanasius, "Letters to Serapion," 88-89.
39 Athanasius, "Letters to Serapion," 93-94.
40 Athanasius, "Letters to Serapion,"95.
41 Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 63.
42 DelCogliano, *Works on the Spirit*, 31.
43 Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 58.
44 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit",146; 148.
45 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 149.
46 *Didymus,* "On the Holy Spirit", 146-147.
47 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 148.
48 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 174.
49 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 150. Cf. Psalm 139:7-12; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.
50 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 153. Emphasis added.
51 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 172.
52 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 172-173. Cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 1:7; Hebrews 10:29.
53 *Didymus*, "On the Holy Spirit", 172.
54 For instance, see Stephen, Hildebrand, trans., *St Basil the Great: On the Holy Spirit*, Popular Patristics Series 42, (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 52-53; Cyril, David R. Maxwell, and Joel C. Elowsky. *Commentary on John Volumes 1-2*, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 97-98 V.1; 259 V.2. Likewise, Ayres notes the doctrine's usage can be observed in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* 1.274 & 291 and his *Adversus Macedonianos* 1.108, as well as Gregory of Nazianzus' Oration 41.9 & 41.11. Ayres, "The Holy Spirit as the 'Undiminished Giver,'" 68-69.
55 Nicholas Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality* (London: G. Bles. 1946), 22, as quoted in Elowsky, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, xv.
56 Psalm 119:68.
57 Psalm 16:2.
58 1 Corinthians 4:7.
59 James 1:17.
60 SC "The Third Article: On Being Made Holy," Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J. Wengert *eds. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000,) 355.
61 Psalm 51:10-12.

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Bitterness and Anger in Ephesians, Archetypes, & The BI-Hemispheric Structure of the Brain: Comparing Paul, Jordan Peterson, and Iain McGilchrist

Joshua Armstrong

Many people eager to confront falsehood and pursue justice or truth do so *nourishing* a vindictive, bitter, or resentful attitude. Nourishing anger, particularly resentment, is akin to stoking up the archetypal "Luciferian spirit," according to clinical psychologist and author Jordan Peterson.[1] This spirit presumes: "what I do is all there is to do, what I know is all there is to know."[2] It is symptomatic of attending to the world in a way overly reliant on a "left-hemisphere" approach, which leads to entrapment in a "self-reflexive virtual world" disconnected from real "other" things, and only really knowing *itself*, according to psychologist and neuroscience researcher Iain McGilchrist.[3] Both suggest that sustained resentment signals: "I have a problem." Moreover, they explain how this problem is exacerbated by scientific materialism which distorts our perceptions of ourselves and the world.[4] Their observations have led them, each in their own way, to issue a rallying cry that says we must *revise* our presumption that we see more than our ancestors and admit that we just see differently—and in many ways *less*. McGilchrist goes so far as to say, "time is running out" and we need "to see the world with new eyes."[5]

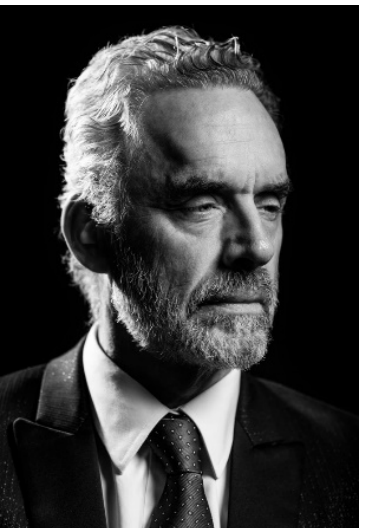
The crisis of mental health, the hunger for self-understanding, and the standing our culture assigns to psychometrics, science, and self-improvement books today make these authors worth hearing. Besides Peterson's 7.7 million YouTube followers, he is a best-selling author, a former professor at the University of Toronto and Havard, and a scientific researcher who has developed a "Big 5 Aspects Scale" Personality course. In my former military career, I took his course to better understand the insights of Operational Psychologists while directing a *Recruiting, Assessment, Selection, and Development* team at a special mission unit—I benefited from it. McGilchrist lectures around the world and is a former Oxford Fellow and Research Fellow in neuroimaging at Johns Hopkins. His focus on the implications

of the specialization of each hemisphere of the brain for science and culture complements the perspectives of Peterson. Both psychologists use spiritual language in their exploration of the mind gripped by or trapped in resentment and anger. In this essay, I use bitterness, resentment, and anger as synonyms referring to states of animosity toward others, God, or life.[6] The opportunity and issues I see are that (1) these influential scientists identify resentment as a problem according to their lens of expertise, (2) they reveal how our culture contributes to this problem and (3) they propose spiritual solutions and increased vigilance which, (4) are inadequate and incomplete when compared to Ephesians. Emotions remind religious and irreligious persons alike that we are less self-commanding than we think.[7] Since resentment and our increased vitriol is a problem widely recognized today, and because these thinkers wade into spiritual matters to address it, it is worth comparing their proposals to Paul, who in Ephesians 4:31-32 addresses bitterness, writing:

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the authoritative voice I use to theologically discern Peterson and McGilchrist's diagnosis of the problem and proposed solution.[8] In Ephesians, Paul describes human life as a *walk* always lived within a spiritual playing field never isolated from the Triune God, sin, spiritual forces of evil, and other people. The sort of relationship we have with the unavoidable company of God, sin, spiritual forces of evil, and others shapes our perceptions, desires, and behaviors. Whether we think we're *absolutely* right or wrong, just at work or *just* at home: Paul reminds us that we're on the spiritual playing field. Simultaneous to addressing resentment, each author also encourages *vigilance*.[9] There is a vigilance that springs from fear, which perhaps sees and battles resentment within, but remains without hope. Or there is a vigilance described by Paul that springs from the grace of God, which creates faith, hope, and love and leads to thanksgiving.[10] Paul is not a Stoic merely advising greater composure or immovability; he wants the Ephesians to be moved and strengthened by the Spirit working through his letter, to thanksgiving and love for Jesus Christ because of how Christ loves them—*knowing* Christ is with them always.[11] In their daily walk, Christians are to see they are blessed now by God in Jesus their Lord, yet not beyond the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil.[12]

I use resentment as a window to compare the systems of two psychologists and the Apostle Paul.[13] **Part I** explores resentment within the context and system of (A) Peterson's book *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* and (B) McGilchrist's book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western*



World. **Part II** focuses on bitterness and anger within the context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians using 4:31-32 as a keyhole to see his larger argument and purpose.[14] Paul's letter primes us to see possible points of contact and confrontation as we hear and learn from these contemporary thinkers.[15]

Part I: A. Jordan Peterson
The Problem According to Peterson

In his book *Maps of Meaning*, Peterson discuses resentment from a mythological "archetypal" perspective because myths, he says, reveal wisdom about how to act—something science cannot give us.[16] Science asks about a thing's verifiable properties whereas myth asks what a thing means for action. Science sees the world as a bunch of things whereas myth sees it as a place of meaning. He writes:

> We lack a process of verification, in the moral domain, that is as powerful or as universally acceptable as the experimental (empirical) method in the realm of description. We have technological power to do anything we want (certainly anything destructive; potentially anything creative); commingled with that power, however, is an equally profound existential uncertainty, shallowness, and confusion…the individual cannot live without belief—without action and valuation—and science cannot provide that belief.[17]

Peterson wants us to see the wisdom codified in ancient writings, to learn from them, and not to repeat the recent atrocities of the twentieth century. Vladimir Lenin's assertion that "people are not people but carries of ideas" and the expedient revolutionary court system he created to sift the wheat from the chaff, on *his* terms and *his* timeline, epitomize the dehumanizing consequences of scientific materialism.[18]

For Peterson, resentment springs from the archetype of the "eternal adversary," forever set against the "mythological hero" who faces the unknown courageously, regenerates society and brings "peace to a warring world."[19] To understand Peterson properly, you should hear "adversary" as the "spirit" (source for a pattern of behavior)[20] animating bitterness, anger, and resentment in each individual's *personality*. The *adversary* is "horrified by his limited apprehension of the conditions of existence, shrinks from contact with everything he does not understand," retreats from fear, is "rigid and authoritarian," and, ultimately, his weakness and "neurotic suffering" engenders resentment and "hatred for existence itself."[21]

The "adversary" manifests in two types, Peterson says, the "fascist" who

seeks refuge in a group and "crushes everything different than him," or the "decadent," who withdraws from society and "clings too rigidly to his own ideas—too undisciplined to serve as an apprentice."[22] The apprentice is a precursor to the hero and willingly submits themselves to strict systems or a hierarchy of values for sustained periods that culminate in mastery, an ability to adapt past wisdom to present needs (i.e., voluntarily confronting the unknown), and freedom.

Unlike Carl Jung, whom Stanton Jones and Richard Butman suggest was ambivalent about evil, Peterson criticizes our contemporary low view of evil.[23] He writes:

> Evil is a living complex. Its nature can be most clearly comprehended through examination of the 'personality' it has 'adopted' in mythology, literature, and fantasy…those 'meta'-attributes of evil that have remained stable over time despite dramatic shifts in the particulars of human existence and morality.
>
> Evil, like good, is not something static: it does not merely mean breaking the rules… and is not simply anger… Evil is rejection of and sworn opposition to the process of creative exploration… proud repudiation of the unknown, and willful failure to understand… the desire to disseminate darkness, for the love of darkness, where there could be light. The spirit of evil underlies all actions that speed along the decrepitude of the world…[24]

Evil, for Peterson, is the embodiment of the *process* in the individual and society which fails to confront the "unknown" and grow, preferring to lie, crush, scoff, and remain blind.[25] Fo him, the New Testament might best be rendered a "process"—we'll address this later.[26] He writes that the (Biblical) devil's "implicit or explicit imitation leads to disaster; the stories that portray his central features exist as *object lessons* in the consequences of resentment, hatred, totalitarian arrogance or jealousy."[27]

The Solution According to Peterson

Peterson says to "never forget" the Holocaust means to "know thyself:" "to recognize and understand that evil twin, the mortal enemy, is part and parcel of every individual."[28] Peterson calls his reader to growth through the pursuit of meaning.[29] Growth means becoming an integrated, self-aware, authentic, and honest person—not yielding to the lie, raging like a "fascist," or retreating like a "decadent."

Growth occurs through the pursuit of an *interest* that "renders the world bearable, enables you to risk security," face the unknown, and act.[30] Accordingly, his final chapter is on the "divinity of interest," because an interest unique to you is what enables forward movement into the unknown, despite inevitable suffering. In context, he notes how hope, curiosity, and interest draw us *forward* in goal-oriented

travel (enabling us to act), whereas fear, apprehension, and anxiety cause us to halt and reassess the validity of our metaphorical map.[31]

For Peterson, our aim should be to courageously face the unknown by following the archetypal hero—who cannot emerge without also attending to the internal adversary. "The heroic attitude is predicated on the belief that something new and valuable still exists… faith that the individual spirit will respond to challenge and flourish."[32] He calls for faith and belief. One consequence of "seeing" faith's inevitability, a primary aim in his book, will be the accompanied desire to see wisdom in the "treasure trove of archetypical forms" found in myths.[33] We all act trusting ("in faith") that our strategy for action in the face of the unknown is our *best* option. Resentment is associated with fear of the unknown, a lack of faith, and indicative of a "bad strategy" for action.

It is necessary to engage Peterson's work charitably and critically. If I were to translate Peterson's work into theological terms, he suggests myths carry elements of natural law, the sort of stuff shaping the "accusing" or "excusing" gentile's conscience (Rom 2:15).[34] Myths and literature function as "natural law" because they invite readers to imagine how they would respond to the same situations of the characters. This offers them a new perspective that holds up an ideal image of how to act which, as a result, stands over them accusing or excusing their past choices while guiding future ones. As Lutherans, we might affirm Peterson as much as Melancthon praises Aristotle's writings when his work is properly distinguished from theology.[35] The works of Peterson and Aristotle might be helpful in horizontal relationships with other people, like in politics and organizational health, but not helpful once we veer into conversations about our "vertical" relationship with God. What is "good" and "righteous" *before* God can only be determined by God's self-revelation.[36]

Peterson, however, has gaps. While Peterson holds a higher form of evil than most, one must ask, how do we reconcile competing images of "the hero" and "villain" across myths that contradict one another? Moreover, if the dividing line between good and evil cuts through my heart, as he often says, can I really step away from it and understand it on my own, then "integrate it" into my personality—or must someone stronger step in and overcome it (Luke 11:22). Are sin and evil simply housecats we should live with or dragons to be killed? How will I know if I am regressing or maturing, moving toward "good" or toward "evil" if I judge such movement by my terms or my preferred interpretation of what a myth means for me?

Finally, unlike Aristotle, Peterson has a New Testament, and his interpretations reject the fundamental assertions of the authors and disregard the implied reader.[37] Can we ignore the claims of the Biblical authors without misunderstanding them and, consequently, the meaning of good and evil we seek to extrapolate from them and apply to today? As we seek to understand Peterson charitably, we must also be ready to defend and request a charitable reading of the Biblical authors.[38] Hold these questions for Paul.

Now we turn to a less overtly religious discussion on anger by looking at it through the lens of the structure of the brain and consciousness.

Part I: B. Iain McGilchrist
The Problem According to McGilchrist

Iain McGilchrist's thesis in his book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brian and the Making of the Western World* is that all human beings experience the world in two different modes[39] which arise from the specializations of two different hemispheres of the brain. These two hemispheres need to cooperate but are actually involved in a power struggle.[40] After aggregating some "5,000 independent pieces of research" he seeks to bring awareness to how the structure of the brain is related to the nature and structure of consciousness.[41] Though there is overlap in hemispheric functions, the hemispheres have distinguishable roles, especially related to our modes of knowing, attending, and experiencing the world.[42] He associates the vitriol we see today to our hemispheric imbalances, noting that we increasingly prioritize "knowing" through an abstract, atomizing, analytical "left hemisphere interpreter" and, therefore, perceive and act like persons with right hemisphere deficits. The left hemisphere is a "wonderful servant and horrible master" because "in the most down-to-earth empirically verifiable way" it is less reliable than the right hemisphere "in matters of attention, perception, judgement, emotional understanding, and indeed intelligence as it is conventionally understood."[43] For our purposes, we will look at how the power struggle between hemispheres manifests in perception and emotions—particularly anger and resentment.[44]

Anger is unique among emotions because it, unlike the others, is processed in the left hemisphere, the same hemisphere most involved with language, analytical and impersonal thinking, and abstraction (i.e., attending to a re-presented category and not an individual entity).[45] Moreover, a left hemisphere interpreter, McGilchrist says, needs certainty, and may, in the case of split-brain patients, be "unreasonably, even stubbornly, convinced of its own correctness" opting to "confabulate" (lie), rather than admit ignorance.[46] Throughout the book, he anthropomorphizes the left hemisphere calling it arrogant. In contrast to the left hemisphere, the right hemisphere "sees nothing in the abstract but always appreciates them in their context, it is interested in the personal" and it "is constantly on the lookout for what it does *not* know."[47]

The reverberating refrain of his book is: "beware!" Our hemisphere imbal-

ance is a problem. One takeaway from the contrast of hemisphere functions is to notice how anger springs from a way of attending to the world that presupposes certainty about my construal of a situation and filters out the possibility of *my* ignorance.[48] Imagine a leg cursing an arm for never carrying the heavy weight it does all day.

The dominance of the left hemisphere is evident in fundamentalism of all sorts, but McGilchrist is most troubled by the mechanistic views of humanity reinforced by scientific materialism.[49] The dysfunctional aspects of left hemisphere dominance are epitomized by schizophrenics who "routinely see themselves as machines (computers, robots, or cameras)" believing, at least according to one patient, that "body and soul don't belong together."[50] Repeatedly, he rejects the metaphor of "man as machine" and calls it harmful. While McGilchrist does not discuss evil, he does note that "attention is a moral act: it creates, bringing aspects of things into being, but in doing so makes others recede."[51] He wants us to see how "the type of attention you bring to bear dictates what you discover" as do the tools, which, in philosophy, he notes, are primarily left hemisphere created and, therefore, inherently limited (hear: beware).[52] Moreover, the left hemisphere thinks of things in terms of utilization and manipulation, even in the domain of religion, which he amusingly observes in trending ten-minute meditation apps to make you a better broker.[53]

He wants us to see how we engage with the world differently. The left-brain interpreter ignores individualities and prefers dealing with its categories and classification of things.[54] This way of attending to things might be useful in pedagogy, but its pedagogical limits can be quickly forgotten. Whereas it is with the right hemisphere, he says, that we "distinguish individuals of all kinds, places as well as faces."[55] It is nuanced and is responsible for maintaining a "coherent and continuous and unified sense of self."[56]

For instance, a left hemisphere stroke patient (with a functioning right hemisphere) can still differentiate things, like their house from other houses or one person from another. Whereas right hemisphere stroke patients might lose the capacity to differentiate things and people, even confusing friends for strangers ("Fregoli syndrome") and be convinced that their hometown is an "imposter" city[57]—like in *The Truman Show*. Moreover, a person with only a functioning left hemisphere, upon being asked to draw an elephant, may only draw a part (e.g., the tail) while someone with only the right hemisphere, sketches the whole thing.[58] This tendency is indicative of the left hemisphere's atomization of things into parts rather than seeing the whole.

If people were dominated by left-brain interpretation, McGilchrist muses:

> …individuals would be ironed out and identification would be by categories: socioeconomic groups, races, sexes, and so on, which would also

> feel themselves to be implicitly or explicitly in competition with, resentful of, one another. Paranoia and lack of trust would come to be the pervading stance within society both between individuals, and between such groups…[59]

We can think of many more categories: Republican, Democrat, academic, practitioner, victim, oppressor, Pietist, Confessional, etc. His logic invites us to see how categories, a good pedagogical tool, can very quickly be misused or weaponized because classification and manipulation occur in the same hemisphere. McGilchrist says we are (in the West) collectively and individually out of balance: trapped in the self-reflective world of our left hemisphere, and the former escape hatch of religion and art is neglected.[60] Even there, the church has been "undermining itself" by joining "the chorus of voices attributing material answers to *spiritual* problems."[61] He says "When we do not worship divinity, we do not stop worshipping, we merely find something else less worthy to worship."[62] He wants us to see that we inevitably revert to mythical ways of seeing and worshiping and that "the spiritual Other" gives us something more than material values to live by.[63] Our current values are dehumanizing and one consequence of this is increased classification, suspicion, and resentment.[64]

Solutions According to McGilchrist:

The metaphor in the book's title points to McGilchrist's solution: the *redemption* of the rebellious left-hemisphere emissary.[65] The problem is that the "*emissary*" (left hemisphere) sent out by the wise, "spiritual," and "selfless *Master*" (right hemisphere) has convinced itself it is the master.[66] Redemption means reintegration of the left hemisphere back to the right hemisphere—the emissary needs to report back to the Master because it is "crucially, *unaware of what it is missing*."[67] This may occur by exploiting the left hemisphere's "points of weakness."[68] These weaknesses are aspects of existence, beyond rationalism, that involves the whole person: "body and soul coming together" which occurs, he says, in religion and art.[69] By engaging the world beyond the left hemisphere's "mode" for knowing or experiencing the world, it seems we interrupt the habit of preferentially knowing or attending to the world through a left hemisphere interpreter.[70]

In his book, redemption specifically applies to the left hemisphere, which must be redeemed or justified for arrogantly, narrowly, and impersonally attending to the world for utilitarian purposes rather than attending to the whole and real "Other" (whatever that may be at the time). He suggests that Johann Goethe's *Faust* and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* illustrate how redemption occurs. Faust sells his soul to the Devil but because he uses his abilities to serve others, but he has his soul taken by God instead. In *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* an old master sorcerer returns home to

find his foolish apprentice trying his hand at magic and rather than grow angry with the younger man, bids him understand that he alone can do such work. McGilchrist says "the left hemisphere acts like a sorcerer's apprentice that is blithely unaware that he is about to drown, a Faust that has no insight into his errors and the destruction they have brought about."[71] The Master and his emissary must work in concert, he says, "redeemed and redeeming."[72]

About Christianity, McGilchrist writes:

> I have tried to convey in this book that we need metaphors or mythos in order to understand the world…We are not given the option to not choose one, and the myth we choose is important: in the absence of anything better, we revert to the metaphor or myth of the machine… Christianity, provides, whether one believes it or not, an exceptionally rich mythos… It conceives a divine Other that is not indifferent or alien…but… engaged, vulnerable because of that engagement, and like the right hemisphere rather than the left, not resentful (like the Old Testament Yahweh often seemed) about the Faustian fallings away of its creation but suffering alongside it. At the center of this mythos are the images of incarnation, the coming together of matter and spirit, and of resurrection, the redemption, of that relationship, as well as of a God that submits to suffer for that process.[73]

Though McGilchrist references many myths, he gives high praise to the "exceptionally rich" Christian "mythos." Notice his reluctant admiration alongside a revulsion to what he calls the "resentful" God of the Old Testament. If I understand his theory correctly, I wonder if the intrigue and negative emotion he experiences indicate a lack of understanding according to the left hemisphere's rational terms? According to the entire Biblical testimony, only God harbors righteous anger, and that same God was incarnate in Jesus Christ.[74]

McGilchrist's theory is helpful and has gaps. It is helpful because it orients the reader to the inherent limitations of their attention and perceptions. It does so not merely because of an "unconscious" idiosyncratic bias but a bias of how we process and understand *all* "information" (i.e., the world) in "two modes." Anger might be symptomatic of a single, *inadequate* mode of "knowing" the other.

McGilchrist, too, has his gaps. Ultimately, the "right hemisphere" is Other oriented. He repeatedly says we can only know in context and we only know via metaphor, writing:

> This fact, that knowledge comes from distinctions, implies that we can come to an understanding of the nature of any one thing, whatever it may be, only by comparison with something else we already know, and

> by observing the similarities, and difference. However, just as everything changes its nature, however slightly, when it changes its context, what we choose to compare a thing with determines which aspects of it will stand forward and which will recede.[75]

Besides rejecting "man as machine" what metaphors or myths shall we use to know ourselves and all others in their appropriate context? Are his metaphorical interpretations of *Faust*, the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, or Christianity compatible—if not, which is "best" or to be prioritized? One of the New Age rallying cries is for more "right hemisphere interpretation" along with claims that all is one, all is God, all religions are one, and a rejection of left brain thinking.[76] We are trending in that direction and, once we're there, on what grounds do we judge another as "arrogant" or "wrong" when "all are one?" The antidote to excessive rationalism cannot be New Age relativism. While McGilchrist is *not* anti-reason,[77] his system may lead some that direction.[78] Could it be that God, the ultimate "Other" reveals himself while also keeping much hidden and that this is a divine means of reminding His creatures of their limitations—limiting rationalism's excess? What if the Christ McGilchrist admires appointed men to be His witnesses to the world and speak with *His* authority? Paul claimed to be this sort of witness. Let's turn to him now.

Part II: Ephesians 4:31-32

Argument: Bitterness is (1) spiritually dangerous and (2) addressed within Paul's larger theme of encouraging Christian maturation into their God-given identity as Christ's.

Bitterness is dangerous. In Ephesians 4:31-32, Paul addresses the danger of bitterness, within a cluster of maladies, springing from the internal influence of sin and external influences of spiritual forces of evil, from whom the Ephesians have been delivered in Christ Jesus, with the goal that his hearers mature in Christ (4:13). They have been baptized, and, in his letter to he Ephesians, Paul continues to teach them.[79] In Ephesians such teaching includes how to discern and walk as God's children, i.e., differentiating between their old, alienated self (2:12) and new self in Christ (4:20, 22-23), until their inheritance (1:11) is fully possessed (1:13). Bitterness is addressed within Paul's larger theme of maturation into their God-given

identity. Paul, as Thomas Winger notes, prays God would give them eyes that "have been [and remain] enlightened" by the Spirit (1:18).[80] First, this seeing involves recognition of their hope in the Gospel and their inheritance (1:18). Then the theme of opened or "enlightened eyes" continues and is expressed in Paul's encouragement and exhortations for them to "walk in a manner worthy" of their calling (4:1), to grow up (4:15), "discern" (5:10), and "be wise" (5:15).[81] These new ways of seeing and living extend across the relationships in which they "walk:" with God, fellow humans, sin, and spiritual forces of evil. In contrast to modern presuppositions about man, in Ephesians there is no "isolated" existence apart from these fundamental relationships.

The Problem According to Paul:
In Ephesians, bitterness is a problem because: (1) It is an attitude that leads to slander and evil actions in Christ's community; (2) they live in a non-trivial spiritual playing field; (3) It is contrary to their God-given identity; (4) it does not proceed from the Holy Spirit but another; (5) it is contrary to Paul's prayers for them to be strengthened and built up.

Paul describes bitterness within a progressive list that grows from emotional expression (bitterness) to evil speech (slander) and wicked intent (malice).[82]
Commentators note a few definitions of bitterness: (1) "resentful attitude;" (2) "resentment from which anger springs;" or (3) "hard heartedness that harbors resentment about the past and sustains animosity."[83] Given Paul's dominating metaphor of life as a "walk," bitterness signals one is heading in the wrong direction.[84] Imagining Paul as a mentor, we might hear him cautiously advising, "step away from whatever is nourishing it—that won't do you any good." Bitterness is *inherently* relational or "directional." A bitter attitude might be directed "up" between a person and God, someone knowing only wrath and "being without hope" (2:12), or "horizontally" between other human beings and groups of human beings. Paul does not want their eyes and attitudes to be guided by sin and spiritual forces of evil, and he describes new and better ways of seeing and living based on their new life in Christ –through whom they know the love of God.

The Ephesians walk in a non-trivial heavenly playing field.[85]
The Apostle opens the letter with a phrase that sets the stage for everything after it: "blessed be the God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed you with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*" (1:3). The phrase "heavenly places" signals the reader to their present life in the heavenly or spiritual playing field: either under the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3) or the reign of spiritual forces of evil (2:2). The phrase is used five times: in the first three instances it refers to their place with

Christ and thereafter, it refers to a location of spiritual forces of evil.[86] Thus, we see the spiritual playing field woven into Paul's dominant metaphor of life as a "walk:" One walk is in love, as Christ loved us (5:2), and the other is alienated from God, in darkness, and under evil (4:8).[87]

For emphasis, Paul bookends the letter with references to the spiritual forces of evil (2:1- 3 & 6:10-20). Doing so draws the reader's attention to spiritual dangers (4:26), their vulnerabilities (4:14, 6:11-12), armor and weapons (6:10-20), vocation as the church to be witnesses to God's wisdom and Christ's authority (2:20, 3:9-10), and, therefore, their need for strength, alertness, perseverance, courage, and prayer (6:10, 18-20).

The metaphor of life as a walk connects the battle (6:12) and blessings (1:3) in the heavenly places with daily life in which the battle plays out (4:26) and God's wisdom (5:7,15) is embodied and made known.[88] Bitterness is not an isolated emotion because we are not creatures who can live in isolation, but always live with (1) "the *one* God and Father of all" (inChrist), (2) fellow human beings, and (3) the spiritual forces of evil/darkness and sin. You are Christ's, Paul says, do not offer your mind, words, or body to sin and the forces of evil.

Bitterness is contrary to their God-given identity and indicative of the old self.
Bitterness is associated with a "darkened" understanding (4:18) and is appropriately seen as a means to callousness (4:18). Bitterness is akin to the old self (4:22), dead and walking in sin (2:1-3), aligned with spiritual forces of darkness (2:2).[89] In Ephesians, spiritual forces of evil are personified as "working" or "operative" in those who oppose God (2:2).[90] Those who oppose God (2:2; 5:6) also deceive by "empty words" (5:6), and promote diverse evils (5:1- 21) at odds with the Christian's (1:13; 4:4) status as citizens and members of God's household in Christ (2:19). The Devil and evil spirits are depicted as awaiting an "opportunity" (4:27) and "scheming" to knock down those in the faith (6:12).[91] They are correctly perceived as the true "wrestling" opponent of humanity (6:12) rather than other human beings. They attack (6:16) with weapons only defended against by the armor of "faith," "truth," "the gospel of peace," "righteousness," and "salvation" (6:14-17) and are only combatted by the Gospel (6:15) and Word of God (6:17). Ahead of treating bitterness, Paul reminds them of their former way of life "corrupt through deceitful desires" (4:22). Corrupted thoughts might include construing a world (i.e., the *un*renewed "spirit of your mind" 4:23) where bitterness is nourished and eclipses the gratitude generated by God's blessings like those stated in in the opening doxology and woven throughout the letter (1:3-14; 2:8-9; 5:20).

Bitterness does not proceed from the Holy Spirit.
Bitterness in anyone should signal the operation of something other than the Holy

Spirit.[92] We see the activity of two sorts of spirits in Ephesians: The Holy Spirit and all other, evil ones. The Holy Spirit is the one who sealed the Ephesians when they heard the Gospel and believed (1:13), the one whom Paul prays would strengthen them in their inner being (3:16), and the one who is grieved by sin (4:30) which includes corrupt talk (4:29) and the source of such talk, i.e., sin manifest in bitterness of heart. When nourished, bitterness is like offering one's body to evil forces for ungodly purposes (e.g., just like theft [4:28], slander [4:31], or failing to speak the truth [4:15, 4:25], cf. Rom 6:17-19). Sensing it in ourselves, through Paul's teaching and the activity of the *Holy* Spirit, should prompt us to discern (5:10) its' source (evil) and end (death).

Bitterness leads to spiritual weakness whereas the Holy Spirit gives spiritual strength.
Paul wants the Ephesians to see the current, blessed state of affairs (1:3-14) declared throughout this letter as *the* authoritative word about the cosmic power struggle they see unfolding within and around them. Bitterness is contrary to Paul's prayer and purposes for them to have the eyes of their heart *enlightened* (1:18), according to the Spirit of Wisdom (1:17), to *comprehend* the love of Christ (3:18-19), to walk in love, forgiving one another as Christ forgave them (4:32). Bitterness is a state of being inattentive to, at best, or rejecting, at worst, the opening doxology (hymn of praise) to God (1:3-14). The Christian's sword against the cosmic forces of darkness, Paul says, is the Holy Spirit's sword. This sword is "the word of God" (6:24), especially the "word of truth, the gospel of their salvation" (1:13). This epistle is meant to be embraced as a weapon against all other spirits who exert influence through words (5:6) justifying indiscriminate indulgence of natural passions and desires—even resentment (2:3; 4:27, 31).

The Solution according to Paul
Paul's "solution" to bitterness is (1) The Gospel; (2) Christ's gift of baptism; (3) instruction about new ways of seeing and living in Christ; (4) instruction regarding relationships.

To treat bitterness Paul repeatedly proclaims the Gospel. God does not merely help them create new ideas; He creates new persons.
Peterson's gap is that he only discusses insightful perceptions, yet Paul speaks of a God who loves and creates *real* new creatures (2:10, 22; 4:24) who are brought near to Him by Christ's *real* blood (1:7, 2:13). As a result of Christ's spilled blood, not humanity's heroics, former "strangers and aliens" characterized as "dead" are made alive "citizens," "children," and "members of God's household" (2:19). The same power by which God rose Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand, Paul says, is "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (1:19-

20). Paul says much about what Christ has done for them.[93]

The Gospel is powerfully proclaimed in the opening thanksgiving to God (1:3-14) and reiterated throughout the letter (2:8-9, 13; 4:32; 5:2b)—*the people never outgrow it*.[94] God does not act capriciously, but Paul says, out of "rich mercy" and "great love" (1:5, 2:4). This Gospel, the fact that Christ has forgiven them, is the motivation for them to forego nourishing resentment and to "forgive others" (4:32).

Focusing on Christ as the hero, and not humanity, does not lead Paul to apathy. Rather, in Christ, Paul gives thanks and praise to God (1:3-10) and encourages the Ephesians to give thanks in all things (5:20), to be strong (6:10), keep alert (6:19), and to ask for their prayers for his own boldness (3:18; 6:18-20). Christ—and the Holy Spirit strengthening them in faith and leading them to thanksgiving—fills the space that resentment and other spirits might otherwise inhabit.[95] We can discern a relationship between attention and health: "when your eye is healthy [looking at the light who is Christ], your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness."[96] Despite difficulties, being in Christ means the Ephesians can look to Christ, at all times, and thereby give thanks to God, at all times—a habit Paul describes as "wise" (5:15, 20).[97]

Baptism

Christ sent His Apostles to baptize *and* teach. Considering McGilchrist's critiques about our excessively rational culture which looks down on the body and physical life, we should note that Christ instituted baptism as a gift and Paul teaches the Ephesians about it (Acts 19:1-6). Paul does not promote an abstract, atomizing, rationality that looks down on the physicality of creatures but proclaims "one Baptism" (4:5) and describes a "washing of water with the word" (5:26) which creates new people (4:24) who live out their God-given identity in concrete relationships (5:15-6:9).[98] It is God's gift (4:5, 8) which Christians receive through faith (2:9, 4:5).[99]

Luther describes Baptism this way, "Because the water and the Word together constitute one baptism, both body and soul shall be saved and life forever: the soul through the Word which it believes, the body because it is united with soul and apprehends baptism in the only way it can."[100] Interestingly, McGilchrist characterizes Luther's reformation impulse as movement "toward authenticity" and "coming from the right hemisphere" which were quickly "annexed by a left hemisphere agenda" in later movements.[101] It is better to see Luther as guided by the convictions he clearly articulated elsewhere, writing, "Whoever wishes without danger to philosophize using Aristotle must beforehand become thoroughly foolish in Christ."[102] When it came to salvation, Luther's conscience was captive to Christ the True Master. To be "foolish in Christ," is to trust in His work alone and call a thing

what God calls it. This robs humanity—both hemispheres included—of boasting before God (2:9). Accordingly, the Ephesians are not given license to justify animosity toward others but called to walk in humility and gentleness (4:2).

New Ways of Seeing and Living in Christ

As a new people *in* Christ, "having the eyes of their heart be enlightened," Paul orients the Ephesians to new ways of seeing and walking: maturing, not being tossed about like children, building others up, not corrupting them, being discerning about fruitful and unfruitful endeavors, not stumbling about in the darkness, being wise not unwise, etc. (4:13-14, 16, 29; 5:10, 15).

Paul encourages self-awareness. Speaking to the Ephesian elders in Acts, Paul says, "pay careful attention to yourselves" and be alert for wolves and twisted speech.[103] Again, in his epistle he says "keep alert" (6:18) and "look carefully how you walk, *not* as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil" (5:15-16). Self-examination and attention to one's way of acting are *good*, but not the end. Paul calls attention to resentment and the "renewal of the spirit of their mind" because of whose they are, Christ's, and whose they are *not*, the devil's. Importantly, their maturation is not to earn "salvation" but for growth (3:18; 4:13) into the identity that is theirs, already, in Christ.

In their daily walk, the Ephesians are to see they are blessed *now* by God in Christ their Lord, yet not beyond the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil. Context shapes how we understand ourselves and others. The context of how much a debtor owes affects the degree of gratitude and love they feel to the moneylender who cancels debts: "gee thanks" is different than the silent weeping of realized freedom.[104] Likewise, an Afghani liberated from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan might put his body armor and weapons behind a decorative glass case once he exits his country, whereas, the person with a Green Card, yet still in enemy territory, hangs his armor and weapons in a position to be donned at a moment's notice. The Ephesians are like the latter case: citizens in God's kingdom, and yet, awaiting full realization of their inheritance (1:14). To that end, Paul encourages alertness, perseverance, prayer, and immersion in God's Word (6:10, 18-19)—they live in a spiritual playing field never in isolation. I suspect Paul wants the Ephesians to see bitterness as a flaming arrow (6:16), that, he prays would only hit their armor and fall extinguished rather than be fanned into flame and consume them or be buried into their heart.

Paul directs the Ephesians to Christ their Lord and not to an inward journey. Christ saves them from sin and spiritual forces of evil which might otherwise entrap them in a world "without hope" where resentment and bitterness flourish. Christ is the only one to defeat sin, death, and the devil. He is *the* dragon-slaying victor and *the* light.[105] So, we each would repeat the error of Goethe's "foolish

apprentice," as it were, to imagine we might do the work that Christ, the True Master, alone can do. Like the foolish apprentice or McGilchrist's arrogant "left brain interpreter," we might think we can combat or integrate sin and evil into our personality—but this is *foolish*. It's treating a dragon like a housecat. Sin and evil are not so tame, thinking so fuels complacency and a willingness to let our armor and weapons collect dust neatly on a shelf behind decorative glass.

Paul's description of Christ's authority is at odds with Peterson and McGilchrist. As long as the individual is free to cherry-pick mythical heroes of their choosing, whom they understand according to their interpretation, it seems that they undermine the comprehensive discipline necessary for true apprenticeship which Peterson notes is necessary for "true freedom."[106] For Paul, freedom—or deliverance—only comes through the deliverer (1:7) or light giver (5:8), Christ, and Christ, alone, can continue to lead humanity out of the darkness (5:2, 8). Unlike fragmented apprenticeships of jobs, school, or parenting seasons, the Christian's apprenticeship begins at birth, in baptism, and extends unto death alongside fellow members of Christ's body and under one Head, Christ (1:22; 2:20).[107]

God strengthens and preserves them through their company.

In Ephesians, Christ is described as descending to earth to give His life-giving gifts to His people through the ministry (4:8-13) while also embedding His people in a community (2:18-22) who live differently *together* (4:22). The ministry offices Paul describes exist so that humanity would not be ignorant (4:18) of God's loving purposes and will (1:3-4; 3:9), alienated and strangers (2:13-14, 17), nor dead in sin under the spiritual forces of evil (2:1-3). The entire church, together, proclaims God's wisdom: the Gospel, humanity reconciled with God, and reconciled with one another (3:8-10; 6:12).

In short, Paul reminds the Ephesians they are not alone in an aimless earthly (or heavenly) sea to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine (4:14), *emotion, or spirit*. Instead, they mature in the faith (4:13) through the means of ministry established by Christ (4:12) and by speaking the truth in love *together* (4:15). Distrust and resentment are normal for sinful human beings, Paul prompts them to speak the truth in love and put away falsehoods to prevent discord from flourishing.

Paul's opening doxology (1:3-10) and repeated encouragement to give thanks in *everything* (5:4, 20) paints a picture of a life no longer controlled or gripped by anger and resentment. For Paul, it is not presumptuous to see reasons for "thanks" because the Ephesians need not guess at God's will toward them. Instead, because of Christ, they know that God the Creator and sustainer of all things loves them and is for them as a father is for his child. The Ephesians are not left to wander about in myths or look to fair weather to understand God's will. Paul makes clear that the "one God," descended to earth, dwelt with humanity, died, rose again,

and commissioned witnesses to teach and baptize on His behalf that they might become His people, His temple, and live under His present reign.

The recipients of His letter are to see they have the best company in the cosmos: Christ their Lord, the Holy Spirit, and fellow Christians. They are never alone, in Christ, and this is a good thing. He gives them strength and comfort. Together, they stand firm against the cosmic powers of evil (6:13) and build one another up (4:16) according to God's purposes. One function of our text is the reader matures by discerning "from *whom* or *what* is that *idea, desire or emotion* coming from—the Holy Spirit or some other?"[108] The Ephesians are not slaves to bitterness nor the spirit which nourishes it, they are Christ's.

Conclusion

The problem I addressed in this essay is the spiritual nature of anger and resentment. The opportunity I see is that this problem is widely recognized, as depicted by Peterson and McGilchrist who (1) diagnose the problem according to their areas of expertise, (2) reveal how our culture contributes to this problem, and (3) propose their own versions of spiritual solutions to the problem along with a call to vigilance that are (4) inadequate and incomplete when compared to Paul's treatment of bitterness in his letter to the Ephesians. In McGilchrist's words—and Peterson would echo him—we must revise "the superior assumption that we understand the world better than our ancestors," and more realistically "acknowledge we may be seeing less than they did."[109]

McGilchrist points out that resentment may be the result of a dominant left hemisphere mode of "knowing" in which we are trapped in a self-reflexive virtual world unwilling to see our ignorance or things in context. To correct this problem, he advocates for "escape" from left hemisphere domination via art and religion because they involve "the body and soul" coming together—a point of weakness for the left hemisphere's mode of knowing. Peterson suggests persistent resentment may be evidence that we are following the archetypal pattern of "the adversary" depicted in mythological villains across cultures and times manifest in "the fascist" or the "the decadent." Rather than tremble and evade the unknown, he calls his reader to follow the pattern of "the hero" who faces the unknown courageously and brings order out of chaos. Paul confirms resentment is a problem and spiritually dangerous but addresses it by reminding the Ephesians of whose they are and whose they are not.

In Ephesians, Paul describes human life as a *walk* always lived within a spiritual playing field never isolated from the Triune God, spiritual forces of evil, sin, and other people. The Ephesians do not live under the lordship of evil, but Christ, Lord over all authorities. Our relationships with the unavoidable company of God, evil forces, sin, and others shape our perceptions, desires, and behaviors. Paul wants them to see the connections between these relationships and their daily walk and he encourages vigilance so that they see the blessings that Christ has won for them are

theirs now, yet the battle with sin and spiritual forces of evil is not over.

The spirituality in Ephesians is the corrective to today's problem of resentment and it is a much different solution than the one presented by the secular authors we explored. In Ephesians, spirituality is based on God's actions *in* Jesus Christ to save (1:7, 2:8-9). Christ is the one *in* whom the mystery of God is revealed (3:6), *in* whom they are made new creatures (4:24), *in* whom they live, walk (2:10, 5:2), "see" (1:18), and mature (4:12-13). Paul illustrates what enlightened "eyes"[110] by the Holy Spirit might see and "new selves" *do* in his encouragement and exhortations[111] for them to "walk in a manner worthy" of their calling (4:1), "to grow up" (4:15), "discern" (5:10), and "be wise" (5:15) across their relationships with God, one another, and with sin and evil. In Christ, they are delivered from sin and spiritual forces of evil which might nourish bitterness, and, instead, made Christ's own, forgiving one another as Christ forgave them. Rather than surrender to resentment, Paul, from prison, sends this letter which proclaims, teaches, and invites the reader to give thanks with him, saying: "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places…" (1:3).

Endnotes

1 Dr. Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist popularized by his lectures on the Bible, media interviews, and his "Jordan B. Peterson" podcast. I interact most with his academic magnum opus, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (1999) whose ideas reoccur throughout his works.

2 Peterson, *Maps,* 333.

3 McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 93. Dr. Iain McGilchrist is a psychiatrist, neuroscience researcher, philosopher, and literary scholar. His 587-page book has two parts: Part I describes the divided brain and Part II traces his theory through the history of ideas, i.e., "how the brain shaped our world."

4 Ibid., xxiii & 7. In his book, scientific materialism (or scientism) refers to an excess and misplaced rationalism contradictory to the "patient and detailed attention to the world," McGilchrist says, that is science. The left hemisphere prizes simple answers, and consistency above all else, is reductionistic and enthusiastic for technological solutions to complex human problems. In the face of "apparent irreconcilables," like matter and consciousness, he says, it acts as if one element or the other does not exist.

5 Ibid, xxvi. In his 2022 forward, McGilchrist says: "time is running out, and the way we think, which got us into this mess, will not be enough to get us out of it… we need, I believe, to see the world with new eyes…"

6 I define bitterness according to Paul in Ephesians below, too. I am not suggesting we understand "Paul" better by adopting contemporary definitions, I am merely trying to avoid confusion as I use these words interchangeably.

7 Ibid, 184 & 186. McGilchrist says affect [e.g., emotional response] comes first, thinking later. He says: "emotion and body are the irreducible core of experience: they are not there merely to help out with cognition. Feeling is not just an add-on, a flavored coating for thought: it is at the heart of our being, and reason emanates from that central core of the emotions, in an attempt to limit and direct them, rather than the other way about." Later he describes how the body responds to commands before cognition occurs, noting, "the brain seemed to know in advance that its' 'owner' was going to make a decision to carry out an action."

8 Seifrid, *Beyond Law and Gospel?*, 31-34. In many ways, this essay is inspired by Acts 17. Pauline expert Mark Seifrid observes how "Luke presents Paul [in Acts 17] as speaking to his [Athenian] audience about God in their own terms in a way that is nearly scandalous to us. His discourse is so thoroughly informed by Hellenistic and especially Stoic conceptions that, if it were removed from context, we would not recognize it as the voice of Paul." While not at Athens, I seek to engage these thinkers following Paul's example of finding points of contact and confrontation with thought leaders of our day.

9 McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 178-179. He describes the "primacy role" of the right brain because of its' grounding role via vigilant attention (over narrowly focused attention), primacy of wholeness (before atomization), and the primacy of experience (presence over "representation" of a thing conceptually).

10 Eph 6:18. Paul ends explicitly saying "be alert," yet, against the backdrop of their former (1) hostility with God and others, (2) being in darkness, and (3) following spiritual forces of evil the theme of vigilance can be discerned throughout the letter (4:18-10).

11 Ibid, 178. Unlike Plato who thought philosophy began with wonder and awe, Democritus "starts to praise… a refusal to be moved or amazed by anything: 'the stoic sages regard it as their highest aim not to lose their composure…to be astonished by nothing." While Paul might be as self-disciplined as the greatest of stoics (1 Cor 9:27), his doxology, prayer for the Ephesian's comprehension of love, awe at the mystery of the Gospel, and frequent call for thanksgiving reveals he has a far different motivation and end-state in mind.

12 Seifrid, *Footprints in the Sand*, 95. "We are not yet beyond the battle between unbelief and faith, between the worship of the idols and the worship of the one, true God. We remain simultaneously sinners and saints, and therefore do not yet possess a whole and unified identity but await it in hope. It is the Scripture that interprets us, tells us who we are in our present state, as in the apostle's penetrating narrative of the human encounter with the Law and recognition of the Gospel in Romans 7. So long as we remain in this body and life, we find ourselves in that wretched person, who cries out for deliverance and finds it in Jesus Christ."

13 Wilson, *Academic Writing*, 13. This is a *comparative* two-part essay. This is *not* a "lens essay" whereby modern psychotherapies are used to better understand Paul.

14 I borrow the keyhole metaphor from Seifrid.

15 Seifrid, *Beyond Law and Gospel?*, 34. Commenting on Paul's address to the Areopagus in Acts 17, he writes "'Confrontation in contact' continues throughout the speech…"

16 Questions about "how to act" in the face of the unknown appear even in mundane situations, like: should we risk honesty not knowing how someone will receive our words…withdraw from such conversations…or lie? Why?

17 Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, 10-11.

18 Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag*, 308. Excerpt from commentary on criminal courts: "People are not people but 'carriers of specific ideas.' No matter what the individual qualities (of the defendant), only one method of evaluating him is to be applied: evaluation from the point of view of class expediency."

19 Peterson, *Maps*, 309. "The… hero… voluntarily faces the dragon of the unknown, cuts it up, and creates the world from its pieces… overcomes the too-long-senescent tyrant and frees the virgin mother from his grasp."

20 Peterson's use of the word 'spirit' is not Paul's. Peterson discusses spirit as an idea and pattern of behavior that you follow.

21 Ibid, 307.

22 Ibid, 307-308.

23 Jones & Butman, *Psychotherapies*, 136-137. Two risks with Jung: evil is minimized or maximized. (1) evil is minimized when it is psychologized as the archetypal "shadow" of a historical epoch we are taught to "suppress" but told we should and *can* "integrate" into our personality, or (2) evil is maximized when it becomes "coequal in humanity and God" who are depicted with equal parts of good and bad. For Jung, it seems there is "no clearly articulated external force," that overcomes evil, nor a resurrection where sin is ultimately destroyed.

24 Ibid, 310 & 313. Bold italics added.

25 Ibid, 311.

26 Ibid, 369.

27 Ibid, 300.

28 Ibid, 311.

29 Ibid, 468. "The human purpose…is to pursue meaning –to extend the domain of light, of consciousness—despite limitation. A meaningful event exists on the boundary between order and chaos… The great religious myths state that continued pursuit of meaning,… will lead the individual to *discover his identity with God.* This 'revealed identity' will make him capable of withstanding the tragedy of life. Abandonment of meaning, by contrast, reduced man to his mortal weaknesses" (my italics).

30 Ibid, 447.

31 Ibid, 2. We may change our goal, approach to the goal, or entire value system that led to the creation of a goal.

32 Ibid, 333.

33 Ibid, xx.

34 Cf. Trudeau, *True Myth and Jungian Criticism*, 865. George Trudeau says something like this in his essay putting fantasy writers like Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who famously called the incarnation "Perfect (true) myth and Perfect Fact," in conversation with Peterson and other Jungians. "When Peterson's humanism is deconstructed, it is clear…[he] is dialoguing with the moral law woven throughout creation…[his] strength is his appeal to objective, natural theology told through imaginative myths."

35 Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 122 & 124. "…we will give this righteousness of reason the praises it deserves… " Kolb & Arand, *Genius of Luther's Theology*, 29. "Christians need both kinds of righteousness. 'We must be righteous before God and man.'" Luther affirms and distinguishes "two dimensions of human existence:" one before God and one before fellow creatures. We have a different kind of righteousness in each relationship: one active before men and once received from God by faith.

36 Ibid, 21, 29-30. Arand and Kolb open their book *The Genius of Luther's Theology* with a quote from Luther's lecture on Galatians, writing "both [kinds of righteousness] are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits." Before God, Arand and Kolb note, "we leave all works behind on earth and seek nothing but the righteousness of Christ," received by faith ("divine righteousness"). In thesis 29 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther says it this way: "whoever wishes without danger to philosophize using Aristotle must beforehand become thoroughly foolish in Christ."

37 Voelz, *What Does This Mean*, 365. "Implied Reader: the reader the author has in mind as he writes a text, a construct to be distinguished from

any real-world readers, i.e., the actual person who has knowledge, abilities, and competency to 'actualize' the text."

38 Ibid, 456. "The central ideas of Christianity," he says, "are rooted in Gnostic philosophy, which, in accordance with psychological laws, simply had to grow up at a time when the classical religions had become obsolete." "Yet it could, and it can, and it will happen to everyone in whom the Christian dominant has decayed. For this reason there have always been people who, not satisfied with the dominants of conscious life, set forth –under the cover and by devious paths, to their destruction or salvation –to seek direct experience of the eternal roots and, following the lure of the restless unconscious psyche, find themselves in the wilderness where, like Jesus, they come up against the son of darkness… "; Jones & Butman, *Psychotherapies*, 129 & 135; Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*, 2. While Peterson is not Jung, Vitz quotation form Jung bears on this essay. Jung said "patients force the psychotherapist into the role of priest… we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which strictly speaking belong to the Theologian."

39 McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 462. E.g., "alienation versus engagement, abstraction versus incarnation, the categorical versus the unique…"

40 Ibid, 3.

41 Ibid, xv, 11, 13. McGilchrist uniquely draws on insights from neuroscience, philosophy, social sciences, *and* medical research on split-brain patients (people permanently with one functioning hemisphere), healthy patients with temporary deactivation of one hemisphere, and those with mental disorders. His focus is on the average human, however, and what is true for 95 percent of us. While most of us have not suffered a stroke leaving us with a single functioning hemisphere, he notes, "to the extent that a process goes on usefully in one hemisphere, it reinforces the sending of information preferentially to that hemisphere in the future" which might "compound during development, ultimately producing a wide range of functional asymmetries, via a snowball' mechanism."

42 Ibid, xvi.

43 Ibid, xxvi.

44 Ibid, xxii. He believes his theory offers four things: (1) a coherent picture of previously unconnected observations about hemisphere differences, (2) a paradigm for addressing shortcomings that would otherwise be addressed by ineffective piecemeal strategies (3) individual ability to "reappraise [the] left hemisphere's world view", (4) a means to evaluate our thinking from a "descriptive, phenomenological model, anchored in the science of the brain." Ten years after the original publication, he observes we are even "more like individuals with right hemisphere deficits."

45 Ibid, 61. "The right frontal lobe is of critical importance for emotional expression of virtually every kind through the face and body posture. The one exception to the right hemisphere superiority for the expression of emotion is anger. Anger is robustly connected with the left frontal lobe."

46 Ibid, 81-82. After a "right-sided lesion, the brain loses the contextual information that would help it make sense of experience; the left hemisphere… makes up a story… appears completely convinced by it… even in the absence of amnesia, the left hemisphere exhibits a strong tendency to confabulate…[and it] appears predisposed to repress negative emotions."

47 Ibid, 44, 46-47.

48 Anger often signals a lack of *vigilant* or *alert* attention to what we do not know because it is *focused* attention predicated on a presupposed certainty about a thing.

49 Ibid, xxiii & 7.

50 Ibid, 439.

51 Ibid, 133.

52 Ibid, 135.

53 Ibid, 441.

54 Ibid, 52 & 447. "Cognition in the right hemisphere is not a process of something coming into being through adding piece to piece in a sequence, but of something that is out of focus coming into focus, in its context as a whole."

55 Ibid, 51.

56 Ibid, 88.

57 Ibid, 54.

58 Ibid, 48.

59 Ibid, 341.

60 Ibid, 6.

61 Ibid, 441. italics added.

62 Ibid, 441. He quotes and echoes Nietzsche in this paragraph.

63 Ibid, 442.

64 Ibid, 6. McGilchrist suggests that our contemporary society's "relentless growth of self-consciousness, conflict, and instability" marked by "alternations between extreme positions" evidences our inability to break out of the left-hemisphere "self-reflexive virtual world."

65 Ibid, 452. He also refers to something like a renaissance of art, and music, along with a look to the East which has a "healthy skepticism" to language and is less prone to rationalism, he says.

66 Ibid, 14. This is metaphor he modifies from Nietzsche.

67 Ibid, xxiv.

68 Ibid, 438.

69 Ibid, 438, 440, 442, 460.

70 Ibid, xv, 11, 13.

71 Ibid, 234.

72 Ibid, 234.

73 Ibid, 442.

74 Gibbs, *Myth of Righteous Anger*.

75 Ibid, 97.

76 Vitz, *Psychology as Religion*, 113-114. Vitz added a chapter called "Psychology of New Age Spirituality" to the 1994 edition of his book. He lists its' tenets: All is one, all is God, humanity is God, a change in consciousness is needed, all religions are one, cosmic evolutionary optimism, and, a final important characteristic is frequent "rejection of reason as 'left-brain' thinking…in contrast to New Age emphasis on 'right-brain' mental life, such as mysticism."

77 McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 7. "… this book has nothing to offer those who would undermine reason, which, along with imagination, is the most precious thing we owe to the working together of the two hemispheres. My quarrel is only with an excessive and misplaced rationalism which has never been subjugated to the judgement of reason and is in conflict with it."

78 Ibid, 85 &131. He distinguishes between rationality and reason.

79 Eph 5:26; Matt 28:19-20; Acts 18:24-20:38.

80 Winger, *Ephesians*, 240, 263-165. Winger notes eyes are the object of "give," and "Paul's prayer is 'that God would give to you…eyes that have [and remain] enlightened.'" Without the gifts of Spirit and Enlightenment, there is "no possibility of spiritual knowledge."

81 Ibid, 263-264. "a most remarkable image [i.e., opened or enlightened eyes of your heart] . . .hints at the origin of a Christian's spiritual knowledge and introduce a theme that will play quietly throughout the epistle;" William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 765. παρέδωκαν: urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.

82 Winger, *Ephesians*, 530. Best, *Ephesians*, 461.

83 Winger, *Ephesians*, 530; Best, *Ephesians*, 460-461; DeSilva, *Ephesians*, 241-242; Best, *Ephesians* 461. Best cites Lincoln (308), too.

84 Winger, *Ephesians*, 520. "'Anger/wrath' and in the present context is an entirely negative emotion that should not characterize relations between Christians." Paul uses the metaphor of life as a walk seven times (2:1, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15).

85 Cf. Winger, *Ephesians*, 185. "The worldview of the Ephesians suggests it refers to heaven as multilayered (Eph 4:10), a diverse playing field for good and evil spirits (6:12, cf. 2:2);" Cohick, Ephesians, 1.

86 Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.

87 Paul uses the metaphor of life as a walk seven times (2:1, 2:10, 4:1, 4:17, 5:2, 5:8, 5:15).

88 This is evidenced by Paul's encouragement for them to build one another up in the church (cf. 4:1, 11-12, 15) and across marriages, families,

and work (5:22-33, 6:1-9). Bitterness corrupts such relationships.

89 This does not deny personal responsibility. In 4:19, Paul writes "they have become callous and have given themselves up…" In 4:19 Paul writes: ἑαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν. The verb (παρέδωκαν) is active third person plural. In other words, "they" (the Gentiles) are the subject or the ones doing the handing over. Who are they handing over? "ἑαυτοὺς" –themselves. Cf. Winger, *Ephesians,* 509.

90 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 99.

91 as if on the prowl, cf. 1 Pet 5:8.

92 Paul does not suggest "bitterness" means someone has lost the Holy Spirit or salvation. He does aim to cultivate vigilance and does not want the Ephesians to be naïve to the schemes of the Devil and tossed about aimlessly. My audience for this article is not "the grieving" –I recommend those grieving and battling with bitterness see a pastor or counselor.

93 Paul teaches: Christ is Lord, Christ has blessed them with every spiritual blessing, Christ has delivered them, Christ's shed blood has forgiven their sins, Christ reveals the mysteries of God, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ reigns over all things, Christ is head of his body the church, Christ makes them alive, Christ raised them up with him and seated them in the heavenly places with him, in Christ they are made new creatures, Christ makes different people into one new people, Christ is the realization of God's eternal purposes, Christ is the cornerstone of God's household, Christ dwells in their hearts through faith, Christ loves them, Christ descended to earth and gave them offices of ministry, Christ's Apostle is Paul, Christ forgives, Christ's self-sacrifice was a pleasing aroma to God, Christ is their master and they are his bondservants, Christ's lordship has implications for all of their relationships.

94 Ibid, 524. "The reference to the devil is an appropriate further reminder of Eden. Paul's meaning is 'let not be Eden be played out again in your life.'"

95 "in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (2:22); "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (3:19).

96 Luke 11:33-36.

97 The Ephesians face difficulties and decisions which they discern as those in Christ. Their difficulties range from learning to live with formerly hostile ethnic groups (2:11-3:13), speaking the truth with one another (4:15), worrying about Paul's imprisonment (3:13), discerning wise actions in an unhelpful cultural context (4:17-19), living as husband and wife (5:22-33), being a parent or a child (6:1-4), being a leader or subordinate (6:5-9), and suffering spiritual assault (6:16). It takes no effort to imagine how anger and bitterness might spring up in any of these relationships and when it does, Paul might whisper: "Christ the Lord is with you –keep alert." Life exists in unavoidable relationships with spiritual forces of evil, sin, God, and other people.

98 I use McGilchrist's terms following an Acts 17-esque pattern, not because I think they are exegetically most correct.

99 See also, Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 457 & 460. Luther observes in his Large Catechism how, already in the 16th century, some preachers arose "who scream that baptism is an external thing and that external things are of no use" not seeing that **"faith must have something to believe –something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus, faith clings to the water which believes it to be baptism…yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brough into the heart, just as the entire gospel is an external, oral proclamation…without faith baptism is of no use,** although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure. So this single expression, 'the one who believes,' [Mark 16:16] is so powerful that it excludes and drives out all works that we may do with the intention of graining and meriting salvation through them."; **McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 315**. McGilchrist discusses these sorts of reformation-age preachers and suggests that Luther critiqued a divorce of the inner and outer world, whereas those who came after him (whom he leaves unnamed) errored and "took it to mean that the outer world was in itself empty, and that therefore the only authenticity lay in the inner world alone."

100 Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 462. "Luther writes 'this is the reason why these two things are done in baptism: the body has water poured over it, because all it can receive is the water, and in addition, the Word is spoken so that the soul may receive it.'"

101 McGilchrist, *Master and Emissary*, 315.

102 Wengert, *Annotated Luther I*, 85.

103 Acts 20:28-31

104 Luke 7:40-43.

105 Cf. Revelation 12:7-17.

106 Peterson, *Maps*, 220. Quoting Nietzsche: "What is essential 'in heaven and on earth'; seems to be…that there should be obedience over a long period of time and in a single direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality –something transfiguring, subtle, mad, divine… the long spiritual will to interpret all events under a Christian schema and to rediscover and justify the Christian god in every accident –all this, however forced, capricious, hard, gruesome, and antirational, has shown itself to be the means through which the European spirit has been trained to strength, ruthless curiosity, and subtle mobility…"

107 For Paul there is only "one Lord" (4:5) and he was raised by God and presently reigns over every rule, power, authority, and dominion (1:20). Elsewhere, in 2 Timothy, Paul, on at least ten occasions expounds the Word of Truth, the gospel, or "testimony about our Lord" which he sets in contrast to "itching ears" accumulating teachers to suit their own passions and "wandering off into myths."

108 Cf. Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 494. An illustration of FC, Article II, paragraph 17.

109 Ibid, 461. Peterson, *Maps*, 8-9.

110 Ibid, 263-264. "a most remarkable image [i.e., opened or enlightened eyes of your heart]… hints at the origin of a Christian's spiritual knowledge and introduce a theme that will play quietly throughout the epistle."

111 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 765. Παρακαλῶ: urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.

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Not My Church: Confessional Living in an All-Consuming World

Cody MacMillin

What I hope to offer in the following pages is a vision for the Church that is not our own in a world that is increasingly foreign to us. In a discussion of the Scriptures and the Sacraments, I would like to present three ways in which this Church is distinctly alien in nature. She presents alien standards, alien sentiment, and alien strength to which we are called to subscribe, submit, and surrender. In presenting the alien nature of this church, I offer points of contrast and comparison with the culture to which we are tempted to succumb. These comparisons will develop what I call an alien way of being—a humble, steadfast, and sacrificial kind of life that is not lived for our own sake or by our own strength. In this paper, I will ultimately seek to show how the Church, properly understood, is about confession rather than consumption, and how we as Christians receive consolation from that reality. Before we get into the argument, however, I would like to provide a brief illustration as to why this paper is necessary for the Church today.

Fewer places today encapsulate the crisis of Christianity better than college campuses. This is because universities are a microcosm of our society at large. As such, they reflect the myriad of stories and opinions we are all forced to encounter. The college experience is also branded as one of self-discovery. It is four years of unparalleled freedom, a unique season in which young people get to choose everything they want to do, from the classes they take to the friends that they keep. However, with so many choices available, there can often be more wandering than choosing when it comes down to it.

I remember being a freshman at Texas A&M and going to an open house the week after classes started. I walked through the doors of the Memorial Student Center, and there were two floors filled to the brim with students, tables, and fliers from different campus organizations. Everybody was looking to make their pitch, sell their club, or recruit new pledges. As for me, I was just looking for a church to call my home.

I didn't know what to look for in a church, but I was a confirmed Lutheran

and figured I should at least give their student ministry a chance. I went up to their table and met two student leaders, Sarah and Ann, who invited me to dinner at their church off campus. They were strangers offering me a free meal which, on a college budget, felt like I was getting a ticket into the Promised Land.

When I got to dinner that night, I immediately knew that the Lutheran student ministry was not going to be my church home. There were not many people there, and those who showed up were not the people I wanted to hang out with anyway. They were not cool. They were not contemporary, and it was not the church I was hoping for.

Determined to find a better fit, I started church shopping around campus until I could find one that was more my speed. I tried one of the larger Baptist churches only to get lost in the crowd. I tried one of the smaller Methodist churches only to realize I was not a Methodist. I even tried a Pentecostal church where I had my salvation questioned because I was baptized as an infant. I grew frustrated by this, and to my shame, I was still going to the Lutheran student ministry to get a free meal when I could. I eventually felt guilty for abusing their generosity, so I showed up one Sunday morning just to ease my conscience. Then something incredible happened, something I certainly did not expect.

We started the service with a time of confession, reciting words from the Divine Service, and immediately I felt like I was back home with my parents standing next to me. I heard these strangers, awkward as they were, saying the same words with which I had grown up. We went into a time of prayer where the words "Lord, in your mercy," never sounded so sweet. We had communion, and the Words of Institution were the same as I remembered them! There was such familiarity in such a strange place, a touch of home in the sea of college life. The church was not what I was hoping for, but it was still mine whether I liked it or not.

What the Church is Not

I do not share this story chiefly to give an apology for our liturgy, but rather to demonstrate a theological point. The Church is not our own. It does not belong to us but rather belongs to Christ. In other words, the Church is not a set of programs designed to meet our needs or a place to be entertained. It is a people who come

together to learn an alien language until it becomes their own. This idea of the Church goes against the grain of Western individualism, refusing to turn the Gospel into a buffet of best practices and a smorgasbord of target audiences. We are concerned about proclaiming the Gospel "for you," rather than making the Gospel for us and our fancies. We are not scared of losing relevance because we live in a culture that isincreasingly secular. Rather, we continue to treat our sacred story as such and offer ourselves to the world as something more than what they can find elsewhere.

In the same way that a college freshman walks through an open house filled with tables and fliers, Christians are daily bombarded with options for idols to worship. Influencers, pundits, and advertisers all clamor for our attention, offering us thousands of paths to choose. More importantly, we are told that the only way to navigate this terrain is by choosing the path that is best for us, all the while figuring out who we are in the first place. The tragedy here is that choice is advertised as a freedom but lived as a burden. When we look to make our lives our own, much less our Church, we embark on a tireless quest whose end is nowhere in sight. We become wanderers more than we become choosers. We become products of our changing desires as well as our changing times, and it is hard to tell which of these two realities is more concerning.

Subscription to Alien Standards

One of the things that has recently driven Western culture away from the Church is the fact that she still subscribes to alien standards. The Church has always believed that the standards she holds to, expressed in God's Law, have come from a place distinctively outside herself. Far from being common sense, God's Law was given to his people because of their explicit lack of understanding. The Law was not given to be a reminder of what we already know or as a helpful articulation of what was written on our hearts. It is a distinctly alien proclamation which comes from the outside in and shakes God's people to their very core. It is a foreign set of values which ultimately condemns God's people because of our sinful rebellion. This is why the apostle Paul can testify to his own personal experience with the Law as troublesome and traumatic.

> What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died (Romans 7:7-9 ESV).

Paul talks about the Law as a distinctively alien and intrusive force. It is a foreign standard of righteousness which breaks into his heart and convicts him of his sin. This conviction has powerful and damning effects on Paul and all those who hear it. If we were to read only these words from Paul, we might think that the alien standard of the Law is just as awful as sin itself. While it comes from God, the Law seems only to bring judgment, shame, and death to his creation. Paul goes on to commend the Law, however, sharpening the distinction between the effects of the alien standard from the standard itself.

> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Romans 7:10-13 ESV).

This is a remarkable rhetorical move by the apostle. On the one hand, the Law appears to be his adversary, yet he concedes that the commandment itself is holy, righteous, and good. It was not the alien standard of the Law which brought death to him but his own alienation from the standard because of his sinful rebellion. The importance of this distinction cannot be overstated. The Law is not bad because it is alien to us. We are bad because we are alien to the Law. Our separation from God was not caused by the Law but realized through it. We are now all the more responsible for our alienation, and such responsibility is an impossible burden to bear.

What Paul reveals at the end of this chapter is also telling. He testifies not only to the goodness of God's Law, but also explains the competing standard of sin that we place upon ourselves.

> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin (Romans 7:21-25).

Here the apostle reminds us that God's Law is not the only standard that confronts us. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we are also confronted with the standard or

the "law" of sin. The conflict between these two standards boils down to a conflict between God's will and our own. Sin is our own standard of living which promises us a better quality of life so long as we do life our way. It convinces us that our best life can be lived now if only we chase after it. It tells us that our dreams can be realized, that we can be good people, and that the world can be a better place if only we would follow our hearts.

In this way, it is important to recognize that sin is not simply an absence of standards but rather an imposition of our own. By going our own way, doing our own thing, and living our own truths, we are telling the world that the only standard which exists is the one we make for ourselves. This becomes an insidious idea when we realize the world is selling thousands of ready-made tools to help us reach whatever standards we set. Does your standard call you to financial success? Here are a dozen catalogs, courses, and conferences that can get you there. Does your standard call you to relentless self-expression? Here is how what can pay to be heard on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Does your standard call you to a towering and masculine persona? Here are the supplements you need to take, the weights you need to lift, and the clothes you need to wear to make sure that no woman ever ignores you again. The irony here is that the more we try to become our own person and live by our own standards, the more we allow others to set those standards for us. We work hard to be individuals, but we become slavish consumers at best. We see this trend continue in the Church when she misunderstands her mission. When congregations spend more time trying to create self-actualized citizens than they do obedient disciples, there is little room for God's standard to come through as the top priority. When this happens, it does not mean that churches no longer preach and teach the Bible. It just means that the Bible becomes a means rather than an end. Parts and pieces of God's standard become just another set of tools for Christians seeking their own version of the good life. Dogmatics are pushed to the side so pragmatics can take center stage. The standards which preachers put before God's people are not alien but intentionally familiar, resonating with the values they have created for themselves.

What is needed now, and what the Church is when she gets her job right, is a relentless proclamation of the alien word which confronts the standards we set for ourselves. It takes pastors recognizing the idols of their congregation and not being afraid to call them out. It takes preaching the Law as holy, righteous, and good and our own sinful nature as completely and undeniably bad. In this way, the Church proves herself to be a confessional body rather than a consuming or commercial one. We speak the truth which has been revealed to us, including what it says about us, that we are poor and miserable sinners in need of the grace of God. We do not make the Law our own by bringing it down to our own level and speed. Rather, we make the Law our own by conforming our lives humbly and totally to what it calls us to be.

Submission to Alien Sentiments

One of the ominous heralds of the past generation has been the near universal push towards self-love. Already conceding that we fall short of the standards we set, this oft-quoted call for self-love has convinced us that it is okay not to be okay. This contradiction might play out well as a song lyric, but it is utterly void of any lasting consolation. If these words are true, we might ask, then why try to be okay to begin with? If we refuse to call a bad thing bad, then what is the point of trying to feel good (or do good) in the first place? These questions are both natural and logical for anyone tasked with loving themselves, but it is through these questions that the premise of self-love ironically leads many to existential dread and despair. We are told to love ourselves, but first we must convince ourselves that we are actually worthy of our own affections.

We need a standard to ground our sentiments toward ourselves, but given the reality of our imperfections, the question becomes how we can ever set a standard low enough to reach! If self-love means our constant self-affirmation, then it eventually requires the complete destruction or delusion of our conscience. We must be able to say to ourselves at some point or another, "What you did was good enough, even if it was not truly good." We have to lie to ourselves to love ourselves, and we must dress these lies under the guise of positivity rather than confess them rightly as moral atrocities, as crimes against ourselves first and foremost. This self-deception might be easy if you are a complete narcissist, but for the rest of us it is a restless struggle. For mere mortals with a shred of self-awareness, self-love can only be described as a cruel game whose finish line is bitterness and resentment, and the etchings of any trophies we receive from playing all but testify to the magnitude of our ignorance.

As human beings, we are destined to fall short of our own standards, and the sentiments we have towards ourselves are bound to be less than loving. We need a different kind of love to sustain us. We need an affection that both validates our existence and acknowledges our brokenness. In short, we need to be fully known in order to be fully loved. How can such love exist, we might ask? What kind of affection attaches itself to something that is unworthy of it? This is the mystery of the Gospel; it is an alien sentiment that announces God's gracious disposition towards his fallen creation and restores it from the outside in. It describes God's eternal favoritism for his people that is neither earned, nor deserved, nor subject to change. Rather, it is a sentiment which has been fought and won by Jesus Christ. This is not the kind of sentiment we are used to receiving as people. It is something utterly and totally different from anything we have ever known.

One of the ways the Gospel's alien sentiment is seen most clearly is in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Specifically, the image of adoption in Baptism articulates how we are brought from the darkness of our sin into the light of an entirely

new world, an alien world called the Church. We are children of the Church, learning and growing in the disciplines that accompany this strange sort of place. We have new responsibilities and relationships that are initially foreign and appropriately burdensome. Much like our biological family, the Church is not a place or a group of people we would choose for ourselves. It is given to us as a gift (a very human and messy gift) and there is no receipt that comes with the package. We could not return it or exchange it for another one even if we tried. While on the one hand Baptism brings us into an alien home, it also unites us with Christ in a death and resurrection that is not our own. There is much to say on this point, but I would like to point out a crucial detail that typically gets lost. Luther's Small Catechism discusses Baptism by answering four main questions: 1) what it is, 2) what it gives, 3) how it works, and 4) it's significance. In answering the fourth question, the Small Catechism discusses the importance of being buried and resurrected with Christ with Romans 6:4 as a supporting text. What is not mentioned, however, is any specific word of the Cross and how we have been crucified with Christ in our baptism (Rom 6:6). In my assessment, we miss a profound opportunity with this omission, in effect short-selling Baptism through our ignorance. This is because the Cross is the means by which the Gospel's alien sentiment was fully demonstrated, and it is only by our participation in the Cross of Christ (through Baptism) that we can say our sins have been forgiven. There are two events here, both of which have historical and soteriological realities. We must not neglect one as we talk of the other, and we must always connect the two if we are to teach either in their fullness.

In a world that has turned inwards in search of love, the alien sentiment of the Gospel invites us to turn outwards and receive an affection that is not our own. We are not saved by our own self-love, but instead by the self-giving love of Christ. We are not redeemed by our own delusions of conscience, but by his death on the Cross. It becomes imperative for the Church to keep these things straight. While we are tempted to turn the Gospel into just another form of self-love, we cannot do so without losing the essence of the Gospel itself. We are never told anywhere in the Scriptures to love ourselves, but rather to love our neighbors as ourselves. This requires our proclamation of the alien sentiment given to us in Christ, extending to the world an other-worldly and alien invitation to die and rise with Him who has called us to be his own.

Surrender to Alien Strength

Those who pride themselves on their own reason and strength will typically place a high value on rationality. These people exist both inside and outside the Church, but in both cases they base their decisions chiefly on what makes sense to them. If something does not make sense to them, they will simply not be persuaded or be able to change their minds. They struggle with ambiguity in particular and with a

lack of control more generally. They are not really looking for truth but certainty. They want a forcefield for their ego, regardless of what they might otherwise say, but you can typically spot their true motives when that forcefield starts to crack. You fight their logic, and they get defensive. You push their buttons, and they buckle down. They are here to fight the good fight, and they are willing to fight dirty if they have to.

While it would be difficult to speak more on what this person looks like in specific circumstances, Martin Luther developed a theological category which captures the root issue of their struggle. Luther called this logic-obsessed soldier a Theologian of Glory, someone who tries to uncover the hidden God and examine his depths completely. This may sound like an innocent quest at first, but Luther makes clear that a Theologian of Glory is far more interested in proving God than in proclaiming Him. They want to have all the facts about God straight so that having faith in God becomes a much easier task. They turn faith into primarily an intellectual ascent and treat God as a mental mountain to climb by their own reason and strength.

The problem with the Theology of Glory is twofold. First, and perhaps most obviously, it grossly overestimates the human capacity to understand a supernatural God. It does not take into account the utter blindness of our sinful condition, and as a consequence it exposes us to the vulnerabilities of our own poor judgement. More importantly, however, the Theology of Glory is problematic because it takes God and turns Him into a product to be bought and sold in an ideological marketplace. He is something to be bought into and believed in chiefly because He is rational and makes sense. The sales pitch goes something like this: God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving, so you would be a fool not to follow Him. How do we know God is all these things? Because we can prove it. We can find the right textual evidence, dismantle opposing views, and ultimately think our way to the truth. All we have to do is lay out the facts and pray that people are not dumb enough to walk away from them. Our faith is strong because our evidence is strong, and there is no way that our God cannot make sense.

Ironically, the toughest truth for the Theologian of Glory to swallow is not the hidden God but the One that has already been revealed. Christ intentionally called his Church to a way of living and being that would confuse people around them. His body was meant to be so mind-bogglingly different that its sheer uniqueness and mystery would be its chief attraction. The early Church came about any way but rationally. Against all odds and opposition, early Christians convinced rich and poor people alike to give up their worldly possessions. They commanded feuding people groups like Jews and Gentiles to humble themselves and be reconciled. Perhaps most shockingly, the early Church willingly endured suffering, persecution, and death for the sake of their beliefs. Surely these people were not in the business

of being understood. To the contrary, they were in the business of turning the logic of the world absolutely on its head as they announced the inbreaking rule and reign of the Kingdom of God. Theirs was a Theology of the Cross rather than a Theology of Glory, a theology which allowed them to surrender their reason and strength to an alien strength provided by the Gospel.

One of the practical ways the early Church surrendered to this alien strength was by participating in the Lord's Supper. This ritual was instituted by Christ Himself and was meant to be a means of providing tangible assurance to the people of God that His promises remained intact. This meal was not chiefly a doctrine to be understood but a gift to be received. It was a proclamation rather than a proof, because it had to be taken in faith rather than reason. It was a metanoia meal in the truest sense, one which demanded repentance rather than intellectual ascendance for participation. Christians were meant to have their hearts and minds challenged and changed at this table. They were meant to feast on the mysteries of God rather than conquer them.

Whether it is in the first or the twenty-first century, faithful Christianity requires a surrender of our reason and strength that simply does not make sense to our contemporaries. In a time when we are surrounded by religious options and ideologies, it might make better sense for us to choose a belief system that makes life easier and not more complicated. It might make better sense for us to share a story that avoids nonsense altogether and just helps us know what we need to know. It seems horribly irrational to consent to anything else, especially when doing so appears backwards, outdated, and strange. Why would we go against the grain of a postmodern age by confessing a comprehensive and objective truth? Why would we throw ourselves to the lions of science by proclaiming things like miracles, the resurrection, and a six-day creation? Why would we hand ourselves over to the perils of pragmatism by insisting that we and others turn the other cheek? We do so because it is faithful rather than rational. Our chief hope is not that we would make sense but that we would make space for the Gospel to be made known to those around us.

Living Faithfully in the Open House

Perhaps the reason why Christianity is such a tough sell is because it was never meant to be sold, but seen. As I think back to my first time visiting the Lutheran student ministry, one of the things that has become clear to me is that I simply was not looking for a church. I did not know exactly what I was looking for, and for that reason I treated every place I went as if I was just looking. It was the theological equivalent of window shopping, and it was unbelievably stressful. I spent months agonizing over what church was right for me without once considering that the church was not about me in the first place. I always had plenty of excuses for leaving a church but very few reasons to stay.

Perhaps what grew on me most about the Lutherans was their overwhelming hospitality and grace. While I spent all my time freeloading off their donated meals, they always had a way of making me feel wanted. They followed up with me throughout the week. They encouraged me as I adjusted to the stresses of college life. They opened their house to me and did their best to make it feel like home. It was something different than what I had seen elsewhere, not just a different style or a different program but a different way of being. It was awkward and it was weird, but I grew to love it and to love them as they had first loved me.

Whether we like it or not, the Church today finds herself enmeshed in an ever-growing open house of worldviews which are competing for people's attention. Such a competitive environment, like any other marketplace, forces people to emphasize their differences. The question for the Church therefore becomes not only how to be different but how to embrace our differences faithfully. How do we subscribe to the alien standard of God's Law, submit to the alien sentiment of the Gospel, and surrender to the alien strength of the Cross in a world that is immersed in its own definitions of success, love, and logic? The answer is simple but not easy: we must open our house as well as our hearts to others with the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

We must confess our imperfections, connect with one another as imperfect people, and ultimately consent to the only story that has the power to redeem our imperfections and bring us into everlasting life. We are not our own, yet we can take ownership of the Good News that has been given us. In so doing, we declare to the whole world that we belong to Christ.

University Lutheran Chapel, Class Photo, Spring 2017

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The Beginnings of Jewish Missions in the LCMS

Jaron Melin

Mission is the theological account of the relationship between the church and the world. Where are the Jews in this relationship? If the church and the Jews had a relationship status on Facebook, then it might say, "It's complicated." This may be true of any kind of missions, but this shows itself to be especially true in Lutheran history and in particular LCMS-history. I look at the histories as recorded by Meyer, Lieske, Cohen, Parviz, and others on the early history of Jewish Missions in the LCMS, and I reflect on the context and theology behind them using missiologists like Bosch, Newbigin, Bediako, Walther, and others. I consider how the LCMS formulates or operates with the relationship between the church and the world with respect to the Jewish people. In this snapshot, we see the Missouri Synod operating in the midst of paradigm-shifts in mission as it deals with medieval, Protestant, and early modern paradigms all coming to a head as they reach out to Jews with the gospel of Christ, who came for Jews and Greeks as well as Germans and English alike.

Jewish Missions before the LCMS

Before I begin where Jewish missions in the LCMS starts, I look into some of the context going into it. In fact, we consider some of the context before the beginning of the LCMS. Luther's concern for the Jews is of course mixed and highly controvertible. We have every positive attitude toward the Jews and the desire for their conversion from *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (LW 45:199–299) as well as every negative attitude toward the Jews from *On the Jews and Their Lies* (LW 47:123–306). In his last sermon, Luther spoke these words three days before he died:

> We want to act in a Christian way toward them and offer them first of all the Christian faith, that they might accept the Messiah, who, after all, is their kinsman and born of their flesh and blood and is the real seed of Abraham of which they boast... We still want to treat them with Christian

> love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord.[1]

Therefore, Luther did have some concern for the well-being of the Jews even close to the end of his life, seeing them as ethnically related to Jesus Christ through Abraham but also as a people in need of saving faith in Him. The church is rooted in the promises to Abraham, to whom Jews are biologically related, but the Jews are in the world by unbelief.

Although there were some Jews who converted during the Reformation and some of Luther's contemporaries like Melanchthon, Osiander, and Sebastian Muenster defended or reached out to the Jews, Jewish missions in Lutheranism were very scarce in the 1600s and 1700s.[2] The major shift in Jewish missions takes place in the 1700s with the rise of Pietism. Philip Spener himself replants Lutheran interest in the Jews in the Pia Desideria, showing how impious living has been a terrible witness to the Jews:

> They cannot believe it possible that we hold that Christ is true God because we do not obey His commands, or they conclude that Jesus must have been a wicked man when they judge him and his teachings by our lives. We cannot deny the offense which we have given these poor people has been a major cause of the past hardheadedness of the Jews and a major impediment to their conversion.[3]

From the 20th century, missiologist Lesslie Newbigin elaborates on the roles of word and deed together in the church's witness to the world.[4] Mission happens in both word and deed, in speaking and doing, and both are done with faith in God's promises through Christ by the Holy Spirit. Jesus demonstrates His lordship and openly shows His kingdom at work through the church. In short, Newbigin says, "The words explain the deeds, and the deeds validate the words."[5] Speaking God's Word and living it out need to be in alignment in missions, and Spener was pointing out how this had not been the case for the church in relation to the Jews. In other words, it is not the case that God has rejected the Jews so that there is no need to witness to them anymore as some might claim. Christians have contributed to the hardheartedness of Jews. We have been a stumbling block to the them by our impious living. Our conduct has been a bad witness for Christ.

Nevertheless, even through the church, which is full of people who are saints and sinners at the same time, God is the primary Actor in mission. Newbigin suggests that we view mission as *missio Dei*—God's action of sending His Son into the world and of sending His Holy Spirit to dwell in the church. *Missio Dei* views God's action as central to mission and views the human efforts of missions as

derivative.[6] Viewing God's mission as central to human missions helps to avoid two ditches: (1) viewing missions strictly in terms of evangelism—that it is all about winning souls to conversion, focusing on numerical growth, and not caring about their earthly well-being; (2) viewing missions as only doing God's will on earth—that it is all about fixing worldly problems, seeking only justice and peace, and not caring about their spiritual well-being. Bosch points out how the theology of Luther and the Reformers had a theocentric and Christocentric emphasis for mission:

> The starting point of the Reformers' theology was not what people could or should do for the salvation of the world, but what God has already done in Christ. He visits the peoples of the earth with his light; he furthers his word so that it may "run" and "increase" till the last day dawns. The church was created by the *verbum externum* (God's word from outside humanity) and to the church this word has been entrusted. One might even say that it is the gospel itself which "missionizes" and in this process enlists human beings.[7]

The emphasis on mission then is not being dependent on human efforts: "No preacher, no missionary, should ever dare to attribute to his or her own zeal what is, in fact, God's own work."[8] At the same time, Luther promoted neither passivity nor quietism but rather a faith which was living and active. If a person were to find himself in a place without Christians, "he would be under obligation to preach and teach the gospel to the erring pagans or non-Christians because of the duty of brotherly love, even if no human being had called him to do this."[9] In doing Jewish missions, then, we should be aware of God's work as primary and our work as secondary. Therefore, we should proclaim the gospel to the Jews, show that we care for them, and trust in God to do His work through the gospel.

Another note about Spener's theology which will surface later in LCMS history is how he interprets Romans 11.25–26: "So if not all, at least a perceptibly large number of Jews, who have hitherto hardened their hearts will be converted to the Lord."[10] How to consider the implications of "And in this way all Israel will be saved" is hairy and complicated, but we first see here some of the beginnings of reaching out to the Jews for the sake of fulfilling this passage before Christ's Second Coming. It seems that Spener was unwilling to take "all" literally and showed some reservation, but later interpreters would not show such reservation. For the time being, Spener's call to action was this: "It is incumbent on all of us to see to it that as much as possible is done, on the one hand, to convert the Jews and weaken the spiritual power of the papacy and, on the other hand, to reform our church."[11] In this way, we see at least a taste of viewing the church's mission as having a particular concern for converting Jews and not just the world in general.

One reason for mentioning Spener and Pietism within the history of the

LCMS is to mark that a great paradigm-shift in how Christians viewed mission had happened before the LCMS was even born. Consider first what came before Pietism. In characterizing the Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm of mission, Bosch shows how the church as a legitimate institution must do the sending, which in the Middle Ages meant extending the authority of the pope to new realms by establishing new bishops even before there were believers in the area. Even as monks and mendicant friars carried out missions to foreign lands by roaming the countryside and preaching, they had to work underneath the institutional authority of the bishop. Even the monks and friars had to be sent by proper ecclesiastical permission. Since the church is institutional, then its mission must work through legitimate institutional channels.

Bosch also characterizes this model with Luke 14.23: "and compel them to come in."[12] In other words, coercion and force were more common in medieval times than in modern times. Bosch bases this argument on a few points: (1) Augustine argued that the Donatists should be forced back into the Catholic fold; (2) throughout the Middle Ages, many pagans and Jews were forced into conversion or at least into being baptized; (3) the mentality existed as late as the 1500s, where opponents of Las Casas challenged his gentle and non-coercive missionary approach, which explained that "compel" meant persuasion, not coercion; (4) in the 1500s and beyond, missions often took the form of European colonization of the non- Western world.[13] If there was no salvation outside the formal membership of the Roman Catholic Church, then it was eternally advantageous for outsiders to be made to join the Church. It is not necessarily the case that the whole church in the Middle Ages used coercive methods in missions (e.g. mendicant friars, Las Casas, etc.), but Bosch notes that this coercive aspect developed and grew prominent during the course of the Middle Ages just as Christendom and Constantinianism solidified. To characterize all of the Middle Ages as coercive in missions would be unfair, but it would be fair to say that coercion grew more prominent during this time-period. Between the Early Church before Constantine and the Middle Ages, a profound change did occur as the institutional church gained power in the civil realm and wanted to bring others into its jurisdiction. The point of Bosch's use of paradigms is to note when fundamental shifts in approaches to mission were occurring, not necessarily to put a blanket characterization on the whole church in a certain time period. In the Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, coercion was a significant development in the church's approach to mission.

In the paradigm of the Protestant Reformation, a new shift occurred where the legitimacy of the papacy was questioned and overruled, yet the sense of needing a legitimate channel for doing missions was still there. Bosch points out, "The Reformers, on the other hand, could not conceive of a missionary outreach into countries in which there was no Protestant (Lutheran, Reformed, etc)

government."[14] The importance of jurisdiction was still at play, but it rested rather on the shoulders of political government. The king has the authority to organize the church and work toward evangelizing. Instead of the universal authority and jurisdiction of the pope for missions, authority and jurisdiction became limited and localized to secular Christian rulers.

The next paradigm shift comes with Pietism in modern times. Bosch characterizes the efforts of Spener and his followers as the "Pietist Breakthrough".[15] For the Pietists, mission was the work of genuinely converted Christians to bring about the conversion of others. This model of mission was bounded neither by institution nor by geography. The "inner church" was bounded by its personal experience of God. This core group was responsible for praying and working for the conversion of the unconverted, including their immediate surroundings of the community or even their own congregations, but this also extended in efforts toward unconverted people everywhere. This challenged the institutional aspect of the Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm as well as the localized aspect of the Protestant paradigm. Pietists believed that they did not need permission from institutional authorities in order to evangelize. Every Christian has the authority and the duty to share the gospel with non-Christians. Also, they believed that they were not limited by local government or jurisdiction. Any Christian could evangelize anywhere without permission from the church or the government. Christians could evangelize even in areas which were not ruled by Christian governments. They did not need colonization for evangelization.

Pietism also challenged the coercive aspect which developed in the Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm by emphasizing the principle of "voluntarism" in mission.[16] Jakob Jocz points out this feature as well in connection to Jewish missions: "But the great pioneer in this direction was Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), who was the first to work out a detailed missionary plan of the Christian approach to the Jews. Its main significance was the renunciation of all forms of coercion."[17] Pietists focused their efforts on helping others genuinely choose to become believers in Christ. Any genuine Christian could evangelize any non-Christian by means of prayer and persuasion. Spener exhibited this mindset also with respect to the Jews. Any genuine Christian had the obligation to seek the conversion of the Jews but could not force them to come to faith, for the Jew had to make a personally free decision to become a believer in Christ.

One more thing to note about the influence of Pietism is that it led to Jewish missions before the LCMS had even arrived on the scene or seriously considered Jewish missions on a synodical level. Francke set up the Institutum

Judaicum at Halle in 1728, and the first organized mission to the Jews in Europe was the Berlin Israel mission, established in 1822.[18] Franz Delitzsch gathered several Jewish missions into the *Evangelisch Lutherische Zentralverein fuer Mission unter Israel* in Leipzig in the year 1869, which became a seminary and training center for Jewish missionaries. The zeal for Jewish missions spread to Scandinavia as well. The Norwegian Jewish Mission was organized in 1844, which supported English and German missionary societies until 1890 then switched locations and worked until 1948–1949. Swedish, Danish, and Finnish mission-societies cropped up as well throughout the 1800s specifically to reach out to Jews. Other Jewish mission societies developed in England and Scotland as well. For example, Alexander Duff, who had been the first missionary commissioned by the Church of Scotland, later in 1866 urged the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland to create a new chair of "evangelistic theology" at New College.[19] Duff wanted the institute to address questions which arose from Christian encounters with other cultures. Among the various concerns of study was the Jewish community. In the United States, Norwegian Lutherans in Wisconsin helped to organize the Zion Society for Israel in 1878, which was intentionally inter-Lutheran. Many Christians in Europe and in America were caring about the conversion of Jews before the LCMS.

The creation of many mission societies happened during the era of the Enlightenment. This has at least two implications for our investigation. First, the belief in progress filled the West with an intractable confidence for the future.[20] They were convinced that they could and indeed would remake the world in their own image. Second, the individual was emancipated and autonomous. Bosch shows the contrast between the Enlightenment and the Middle Ages concerning the individual:

> In the Middle Ages community took priority over the individual, although, as I have argued earlier, the emphasis on the individual was discernible in Western theology at least since the time of Augustine. In Augustine and Luther the individual was, however, never emancipated and autonomous but was regarded, first and foremost, as standing in a relationship to God and the church. Now individuals became important and interesting in and to themselves.[21]

Each individual was allowed to think and act as he saw fit. These two implications had their effects on Christians as well. Instead of having the orientation of looking into the past for guidance like the Renaissance and Protestant orthodoxy did, the orientation of the Enlightenment looked forward, and this influenced churches to view God as their benevolent Creator, humans as capable of moral improvement, and the kingdom of God as the crown of Christianity's steady progression.[22] The

idea of progress began in the 1600s and reached its peak in the 1800s. In short, Bosch says, "Protestant missions could not escape its optimism and its orientation toward the future."[23] In fact, Protestant circles had grown enthusiastic about the prospect of the decline of the papacy and the large-scale conversion of Jews. Such views of the future would later become debates on eschatology and what role the Jews would have in the midst of that. With respect to the autonomous individual, church and mission became two separate things. Mission societies did the sending rather than official offices of the church. They were self-organized, self-initiated, and voluntary. They had only as much connection to official church structures as its members wanted to have. Mission societies functioned as organizations rather than churches. This completely bypassed the limitations of church structure and even those of the state. Missionaries were agents of the mission societies, not the churches. As such, they often cared less about having a confessional stance, emphasizing individual conversion over doctrinal agreement. As mission societies began to dominate in the 1800s, mission dropped off as a feature of the church. Missions were outsourced to voluntary mission societies. Doing mission was no longer integral to being church. The church was an institution, and mission was its own institution separate from the church which functioned differently.

Even before the LCMS was formed, major paradigm shifts had occurred in the Christian world. When the LCMS was formed, influences from Pietism and the Enlightenment were already in the missional mindset of the Western church. Even German Lutherans had been affected by these to some extent. However, they were holding onto other paradigms as well. The missional paradigms which Bosch explains do not have to be restricted to their timeframes but could exist at any point in history. In fact, multiple paradigms could exist within a single church or even a single individual. What we see in the early history of Jewish missions in the LCMS is a clash of paradigms. We see some clashing of paradigms as Walther and the LCMS deal with the Chiliastic Controversy and as the LCMS takes on its first Jewish Missionary.

The Chiliastic Controversy in the LCMS

In 1847, the LCMS began as the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States.[24] In the face of the Definite Platform in 1855, Walther sought even more to promote Lutheran confessionalism, which led to a call to have free conferences between Lutheran church bodies which subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession for the purposes of being united.[25] Beginning in 1855, Walther jumpstarted *Lehre und Wehre* as an editorial for pastors, complementing *Der Lutheraner* which was intended for the broader audience of the laity. The editorial staff of *Lehre und Wehre* regarded doctrinal agreement with the basic confession of the Lutheran church as a necessary condition as it published the call for the free

conferences. Four of these free conferences convened between 1856 and 1859. A fifth one was planned for 1860, but it did not happen.

Although no singular cause can be determined for the end of these free conferences, one possible tension which probably contributed to this was the Chiliastic Controversy of the late 1850s and early 1860s.[26] Chiliasm, known today as millenialism and more specifically as post-millenialism, promoted at this time that based on Revelation 20 and Romans 11.26–29, the world would successively become better and better, and that its triumphal success would include the conversion of all the Jews.[27] One figure in particular who promoted this was Georg Schieferdecker.[28] Schieferdecker was a pastor in the Missouri Synod who initially kept his chiliasm to himself but later publicly proclaimed it. Walther opposed this because he considered it to be church-dividing, and the Missouri Synod agreed. As a result, the Missouri Synod at convention in 1857 unanimously confirmed the resolution which condemns chiliasm in every form as well as anyone who openly teaches and propagates such teaching.[29] So then, Schieferdecker left the Missouri Synod and joined the Iowa Synod instead, which strained relations between the Missouri Synod and the Iowa Synod as well as relations with Wilhelm Löhe, who had hoped that the Iowa Synod would be a mediator between the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod. Löhe believed that chiliasm was not church-dividing and that its opponents could not satisfactorily offer exegetical proof against it.[30] Ehlers also chided the Missouri Synod, believing that neither the Scriptures, the Creeds, nor the Confessions speak clearly against chiliasm. Neither Ehlers nor Löhe believe that chiliasm comes into conflict with any "genuine" article of faith.

Walther responded to this theological debate among the wider audience of the *Lehre und Wehre* in 1859 and 1860.[31] Walther makes an exegetically extensive argument that Revelation 20 and Romans 11.25–27 do not point toward the way in which Christ's future kingdom shall come, and he makes a confessional argument that chiliasm does indeed go against a fundamental article of faith, namely AC XVII concerning the return of Christ for judgment. He further argues that the Lutheran church throughout its history has dealt with chiliasm appropriately in this way. Walther thoroughly opposed chiliasm as trying to turn Christ's kingdom into an earthly kingdom. He also thoroughly opposed the rampant optimism of the age which was due to the Enlightenment. Although he opposed chiliasm, Walther was not opposed to preaching to Jews. In fact, he had a compelling urgency to see his church begin mission work among the "children of Abraham according to the flesh."[32] However, he wanted to do so on the basis of true doctrine, not on chiliasm, as well as for the genuine concern and spiritual wellbeing of the Jews, not for the sake of making Christ's kingdom come by our own efforts.

Jewish Missions of the LCMS in the Late 1800s

In 1881, the Central Illinois District of the Missouri petitioned the Missouri Synod "to con-sider its responsibility for establishing a synodical means for enlisting and coordinating the interest and obligation of every Christian to bear witness to his Jewish fellowmen."[33] The Synod delegated the responsibility for Jewish missions to the Districts and gave its blessing to "all efforts of interested individuals to [make use of] any synodical means to publicize the matter."[34] In the same year of 1881, *Der Lutheraner* published the appeal in six installments. The central motive given was the confessional nature of the Lutheran church: "We have this heritage of our fathers in our Confessions. The Lord has entrusted this talent to us in order that we might enrich and serve others."[35] Other reasons were given as well: the example of Jesus and the apostles, the presence of 230,000 Jews in the USA in major eastern cities, the predominant use of the German language among American Jews, how many Jews were converting, the receptivity of Reformed Jews as opposed to Orthodox Jews, the shaky position of chiliasm which other Protestant Jewish mission societies adopted, the availability of Hebrew New Testaments, and the suitability of Luther's writings for tracts on Jewish missions.[36]

So then, the debates on chiliasm in 1859–1860 did in fact raise awareness for Jewish missions eventually. Not to be overlooked is the fact of immigration. From 1881 to 1910, over 1.5 million Jews entered the USA.[37] More than two-thirds were Russians, and between one-fifth and one-sixth were from Austria-Hungary. From 1818 to 1914, Jewish population in America grew from 300,000 to 3,000,000. The Russian Jews were fleeing from persecution, and the German Jews were seeking work, and the era of Reconstruction gave them that opportunity.[38] Seeing that most Jewish immigrants were Russian, it is interesting to note that the

Missouri Synod made particular attention to the German Jews. In this way, cultural and confessional concerns overlapped.[39]

The role of identity comes into play in Jewish missions. From the African context, Bediako gives some insight into the role of identity and culture with theology.[40] Theology develops from discerning what it means to be Christian, from discerning Christian identity, which also deals with culture. Ethnocentrism often came along with Western missionary efforts to Africans, which still bears the devastating effects of colonialism today. We cannot be culturally impartial in passing down the Christian faith. In short, Bediako contended that there is continuity of African identity before and after Christian conversion. Similarly, Pastor Kevin Parviz, executive director of Lutheran in Jewish Evangelism, says, "Though Jewish believers in the Messiah are Christians, they do not cease to be Jews."[41] The same could be said for the German Jews of the 1800s. On one hand, the Missouri Synod did not adopt the medieval paradigm of coercion but rather followed the example of Spener and the Pietists, seeking to convince rather than coerce. On the other hand, the Missouri Synod still reasoned its theology in German. Their Lutheran Confessions were still in German, and it was difficult to separate their theology from their German identity. Reaching out to non-Germans had its challenges, but reaching out to German Jewish immigrants had some familiarity to it. Although these immigrants were not Lutheran, they were still German, and the Missouri Synod could relate with them on that level. Many of the Jews tended to drop their old customs and to lose their connection with the synagogue.[42] This may be due to the fact that humanism had heavily influenced Germany, leaving German Jews to find their German roots to be more central to their identity than their Jewish roots.[43] Although the Missouri Synod did not make Jews renounce their Jewishness like the Roman Catholics did in the Spanish Inquisition, they appealed more to their German identity than their Jewish identity. It is only in more recent decades that the question of inculturation has become more prominent in Messianic Judaism and even in the LCMS in reaching out to Jews. Also, the rise in Zionism and the establishment of the modern state of Israel has brought about a renewal of interest in claiming Jewish identity. Parviz makes the distinction between Rabbinic Jews and Biblical Jews in helping Jews to reorient their identity with respect to the biblical story.[44] Whether it is German identity or Jewish identity, it must be placed within the context of God's story to be renewed in Christian identity. So then, cultural identity was not obliterated but rather found new meaning in the Christian story in the early Jewish missions of the LCMS.

In 1884, the Missouri Synod established the Commission for Jewish Mission.[45] This was made possible with the arrival of Daniel Landsmann. Landsmann was born an Orthodox Jew in Russia. While residing in Jerusalem in 1863, Landsmann became a Christian. He then worked as a Protestant missionary

to the Jews in Constantinople for the Scottish Society for Jewish Missions. Walther's son-in-law Samuel Keyl was an emigrant missionary in New York, and he had correspondence with Swedish Pastor Sward in Constantinople.[46] As the word went out in 1881 that the Missouri Synod needed a Jewish missionary, Landsmann came to America that same year, expecting to find an assignment waiting for him.[47] However, Landsmann was sent to Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois for further theological training in orthodox Lutheranism.[48] Even though he went through two years of seminary, he was anxious to begin work.[49] Landsmann was in his mid-40s and already had 17 or 18 years of missionary experience. He was not young, and he had a lot of experience in Jewish missions already. He did not want to wait much longer to go back into the mission field. In 1883, the pastoral conference in New York City resolved to take him as an "evangelist," and three pastors and their congregations pledged their support to Landsmann's missionary work among the Jews in New York. Since he was never ordained as a pastor in the Missouri Synod, he had to direct new converts to local pastors so that the converts would be integrated into German-Lutheran congregations.[50] Landsmann could not plant new churches. Landsmann worked to evangelize Jews in New York for 13 years, and a total of 37 Jews came to faith in Christ and were baptized in the Lutheran church. One notable example was Rabbi Nathaniel Friedmann. He used to be an anti-missionary[51] until he himself converted through Landsmann's missionary work.[52] Friedmann then served as a pastor for 45 years and even translated the Small Catechism into Yiddish. The example of Landsmann showed that a paradigm clash had occurred. Landsmann fully expected to have an assignment in America, but he had to jump through some unexpected hoops. Initially, he was expected to become a pastor, and even when they allowed him to work without being ordained, he had to work in close connection to pastors and congregations. In his previous work, he was under the auspices of a mission society. The paradigm of a mission society as we have seen was independent of a church institution. In coming to the Missouri Synod, he saw that church and mission were not as separable as mission societies had made them out to be. Walther had given a strong response to mission societies in 1876:

> But, beloved, the mission societies that had arisen as a sign of the newly awakened Christian life, were also a sign that the whole church was not what it should be. For where things are as they should be, there is no need for small mission societies to be organized within the church, for the whole church must itself be a great mission society…The Christian church itself is the proper mission society founded by God Himself.[53]

Although the Missouri Synod did not have the medieval paradigm of coercion in the sense of relinquishing Jewish identity, it still exhibited the need to work

through legitimate channels within the church. Landsmann could not be a lone missionary doing his own thing. He needed to have some legitimate connection with the church. Landsmann either needed to become a pastor or be in close connection to pastors and congregations. In the paradigm of the mission society, the individual preceded the church, but for the Missouri Synod, the church preceded the individual. However, the Missouri Synod's emphasis for the church was more on the local congregation than it was for the overarching institution. The overarching institution of the synod would only hold together if the pastors and congregations shared the same confession of faith by subscribing to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Conclusions

Objectifying Jews in Jewish Missions

Just as debates raged in the Chiliastic Controversy over the role of Jews in the coming of Christ's kingdom, parallel debates exist today among Evangelicals whether we should evangelize the Jews in order to convert all of the Israel so that Christ's kingdom may come on earth. Parviz points out how this is seen by Jews as self-serving.[54] Andrew Root makes a parallel argument in relation to youth ministry.[55] One pervasive problem within youth ministry is that we often engage with youth for the sake of influencing them into a relationship with Jesus. This is a problem because having an ulterior motive for our relationships with youth actually subverts the very relationship which we are trying to form. It is as if to say we care about having a relationship with them only if it might lead them to Jesus. If the youth shows no interest in Jesus, then the friendship is in jeopardy, which calls into question whether the friendship was actually genuine in the first place. Root poignantly says, "Christ calls me into self-giving, suffering for the adolescent, with no pretense or agenda."[56] Root offers a reflective question which could be helpful in our missional practices: "Is the practice constructed more from this theological confession or from our conflicts within culture?" Good doctrine curbs us from serving ourselves. The same is true for Jewish missions. We cannot approach Jews with our own agenda. It has to be God's agenda. Mission is theocentric, and the church is responsible for the world. Bosch points out how mission cannot be defined only in terms of the church even though the church is missional by its very nature:

> Mission goes beyond the church. […] It is missio Dei. It is trinitarian. […] So mission concerns the world also beyond the boundaries of the church. It is the world God loves and for the sake of which the Christian community is called to be salt and light.[57]

He goes on to show how theology must have a missional character:

> The crucial question, then, is not simply or only or largely what church is or what mission is; it is also what theology is and is about. We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the missio Dei. So mission should be "the theme of all theology." […] For theology it is a matter of life and death that it should be in direct contact with mission and the missionary enterprise.[58]

Hauerwas stresses again and again how "narratives are necessary to our understanding of those aspects of our existence which admit of no further explanation—i.e., God, the world, and the self."[59] Theology is not an abstract system; it is telling and applying the Christian story of everything.[60] Theology is reflecting God's story for the world today. Therefore, Walther's confessional stance against chiliasm is not doing theology for its own sake. Lutheran theologian Michael Newman makes the case that the biblical paradigm of confessing the faith is integral to God's mission of reaching His beloved yet straying people and that the confessing church is engaged in gathering more people as it confesses its faith.[61] Being confessional helps us to be missional. Walther was trying to gather the Lutheran churches around true doctrine, around God's true story of how all things will end, so that they could be a better witness to the world. Doctrine is not for doctrine's own sake. Instead of reaching out to the Jews in order to make Christ's kingdom come on earth for our sake, we can reach out to the Jews for their own welfare before God. Missiology helps theology to not be self-focused but rather to be centered on God and focused on the world, those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Being confessional helps us to have proper concern for the Jew.

The Roles of Clergy and Laity in Jewish Missions

Should a missionary be a pastor or not? With the rise of mission societies, anyone could be a missionary to anyone without any consideration to ordained ministry. Some church bodies in the world have been started by Pietistic laity in fact. Bosch points out that the general movement "away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men to ministry as the responsibility of the whole people of God, ordained as well as non-ordained, is one of the most dramatic shifts taking place in the church today."[62] Although he commends Luther for promoting the "priesthood of all believers," he also believes that Luther "reverted to the inherited paradigm" in response to Anabaptists and Catholics when they assaulted the Lutherans concerning church and theology: "In the end, he still had the clergyman at the center of his church, endowed with considerable authority."[63] Bosch promotes mission as ministry

by the whole people of God:

> Some form of ordained ministry is indeed essential and constitutive, not as guarantor of the validity of the church's claim to be the dispenser of God's grace, but, at most, as guardian, to help keep the community faithful to the teaching and practice of apostolic Christianity. The clergy do not do this alone and off their own bat, so to speak, but together with the whole people of God, for all have received the Holy Spirit, who guides the church in all truth. The priesthood of the ordained ministry is to enable, not to remove, the priesthood of the whole church. The clergy are not prior to or independent of or over against the church; rather, with the rest of God's people, they are the church, sent into the world. In order to flesh out this vision, then, we need a more organized, less sacral ecclesiology of the whole people of God.[64]

Bosch's comments bring out a tension between clericalism and congregationalism. He is trying to balance the roles of pastors and congregations, the ordained priests and the priesthood of all believers, yet he criticizes Luther for favoring pastors with authority. Cohen in his description of Jewish missions in the LCMS also has a heavier bent toward the "priesthood of all believers" than Lieske does.[65] Lutherans might argue that it is not the person of the pastor who is central but the office of the ministry of the Word. The Word is central to the church, and the Word works through means. In the office of the ministry, pastors are the means by which the Word is proclaimed just as water is the medium for Baptism. The church is a creature of the Word, and God makes sure that the church keeps hearing the Word by providing pastors. Pastors are not merely guardians, and they are not guarantors either. Only the Word validates the church as the location of where God's grace is given. Pastors are the means of grace for the proclamation of the Word just as much as bread and wine are for Holy Communion.

Walther also addressed this tension in many places, most notably in Church and Ministry. In Walther's view, the congregation has the keys immediately from God, and the pastor has the authority from God mediately, having the call from Christ through the congregation.[66] God Himself has established the pastoral office. The office is not merely there for human, pragmatic reasons. Believers need to hear the voice of their Shepherd through the pastoral ministry.

In commenting on the Small Catechism, Norman Nagel points to the fact that both church and ministry come from Christ.[67] The pastor is there to deliver the goods of Absolution. Furthermore, AC V shows the delivery and locatedness of AC IV. The congregation has the command to choose a pastor, and the pastor has the command from Christ to preach and deliver the goods. These are complementary

and should not be pitted against each other. Forgiveness only happens in the church, and the pastor makes it happen. Nagel shows the progression from Christ to church, to disciples, to pastors, and to Holy Absolution.[68] The locatedness helps us to not doubt our forgiveness in Christ. No part of the church may be excised or isolated as dominant; all are from the Lord.[69] Disciples do not make themselves disciples, and pastors do not make themselves pastors. Even with the royal priesthood, we cherish the gift of pastors. Church and ministry are two nostrils, and we need them both. Therefore, clergy and laity are both necessary and complementary for mission. Even if a layperson witnesses to others of Christ, he is not without a pastor to care for his soul, and new converts need shepherds to care for their souls as well. The example of Landsmann shows that no Christian works alone in missions. The church, comprised of clergy and laity, participates in God's mission together. Even Registered Service Organizations today like Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism and Apple of His Eye Mission Society operate as church, clergy and laity. They are anchored in the life of local congregations in the proclamation of the gospel and bound together by a common confession of faith. The church works together to participate in God's mission. God seeks to save the lost among the Jews, the Greeks, the Germans, and the rest of the world.

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Virtual Reality in and For Creation

Jaron Melin

1 Framing the Issue

Within the last few years, there has been growing excitement and concern in the rise of what is called the metaverse. How do various enthusiasts and observers characterize the metaverse? Bobrowsky on the *Wall Street Journal* reports the metaverse as "an extensive online world transcending individual tech platforms, where people exist in immersive, shared virtual spaces. Through avatars, people are able to try on items available in stores or attend concerts with friends, just as they would offline."[1] TechXplore reports, "Imagine a world where you could sit on the same couch as a friend who lives thousands of miles away, or conjure up a virtual version of your workplace while at the beach."[2] Rabindra Ratan, an associate professor of media and information at Michigan State University who specializes in the interaction between people and technology, says, "The Meta-verse is a network of interconnected virtual worlds in the same way the World Wide Web is a network of interconnected websites. […] I can jump into a web browser and cruise from one website to another. In the future, you will jump in the Metaverse browser from one virtual world to another to another."[3] According to Mathew Ball, one of the most prominent thought-leaders on the metaverse, "The internet era was defined by the computer being in the living room and the connection to the internet being occasional. […] The shift to mobile computing meant moving the computer from the living room to the office and into your pocket, and changing access to the internet from occasional to continuous and persistent. Metaverse is the idea of computing everywhere, ubiquitous, ambient. In a simplified sense, think about the Meta- verse as a series of interconnected and persistent simulations."[4] Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook who changed the name of his company to Meta, says, "It's a virtual environment where you can be present with people in digital spaces. You can kind of think about this as an embodied internet that you're inside of rather than just looking at. We believe that this is going to be the successor to the mobile internet."[5] Zuckerberg also says, "A lot of people think that the metaverse is about a place, but one definition of this is it's about a time when basically immersive

digital worlds become the primary way that we live our lives and spend our time."[6] Proponents of the metaverse believe that it is the next technological innovation. Opponents believe that it is creating an alternative reality, essentially denying the physical reality in which we naturally live. Many Christians have focused discussions of it within the realm of worship. Is it actually worship if it occurs in the metaverse? Can sacraments be administered in the metaverse? In general, should we embrace the metaverse as a solution to our problems, or should we avoid it as a dystopia?

The fundamental technology behind the metaverse is Virtual Reality (VR), which has been in development for a few decades. Jaron Lanier was considered to be one of the founders of VR when he and Thomas Zimmerman left Atari in 1985 and founded VPL Research, which became the first company to sell VR-goggles and wired gloves. He is considered to be not only a computer-scientist but also a computer-philosopher. He will be helpful in thinking about the relationship between VR and reality. Before jumping into Lanier's philosophy, consider a few questions. First of all, what is VR? Are interactions in VR real? What relationship does VR have with humans and reality? In order to get a grasp on these questions, we should consider the definitions and relationships between reality, humanity, technology, and VR.

1.1 Creation Defines Reality and Humanity

Robert Jenson offers some basic theology which helps to put humans and reality in the proper frame.[7] The first reality is God, and the other reality is the creation. There is no other reality. Although God is the source of all reality, the creation is nonetheless distinct from God. Creation is bounded and limited, having a beginning and an end. The creation cannot go beyond itself nor beyond its relationship with the Creator. The creation was declared "good" by the Creator. Humans are creatures who are made in the image of God, having dominion over the other creatures. Although humans are of the reality of creation, God addresses them by His Word. Although there are many ways to interpret the "image of God," we can at least go with the interpretation that humans are to be God's representatives to other creatures and that God relates with humans by speaking to them. Although humans are limited creatures, they have access to the unlimited Creator in a relationship which He has established, and they have the task of caring for the creation.

1.2 Technology as an Extension of Creation

There are different approaches to what technology is. Technology can be defined as a product, a methodology, or a branch of knowledge.[8] From Greek, technology just means the study of a skill. Today, technology is thought of as a means for doing something more efficiently, achieved artificially rather than naturally, often by the application of scientific knowledge. The meaning of the word "technology" then has shifted from a practiced activity to a product involved in specialized activity.

For example, in hunting, we can either think about the tools (e.g. bows and arrows or guns) or about the art or skill (e.g. archery or riflery), which may indeed use tools but focuses more on the human activity rather than the products themselves. According to Lanier, technologies are extensions of ourselves.[9] For example, we can have remote eyes and ears through webcams and mobile phones as well as expanded memory through the internet.[10] This might tempt us into thinking that technology places us above nature, but Lanier suggests that we adopt Gregory Bateson's approach: people should not think of themselves as being placed above nature but rather embedded within a larger system.[11] In other words, technology does not take us beyond reality but rather embeds us in reality in new ways. Technology is not something outside of creation but rather a part of it. Technology is not an escape from creation but rather something which helps us to live in creation better. Technology is in and for the creation.

1.3 Definitions of VR

If technology is an extension of reality, then VR must also be an extension of reality. There- fore, VR must and should act in ways which embed us in creation for its benefit rather than escaping from it. One expert in the field of VR who makes this case is Jaron Lanier.

Jaron Lanier is often considered to be the man to have coined the term "virtual reality," but he will argue that the ideas of VR came before him. In fact during the 1980s, there were various debates for the terminology to be used such as synthetic reality, artificial presence, virtual environments, artificial reality, telepresence, tele-existence, consensus reality, etc.[12] In any case, he has been one of the forefront pioneers into this field. *In Dawn of the New Everything*, Lanier offers fifty-two different definitions for VR. These definitions are meant to be reflections on his experiences and on the various findings and expressions of VR. No one definition completely unpacks what VR is, so he gives many definitions in order to emphasize various aspects. For our purposes here, I focus on only a few of his definitions. What kind of technology is VR? In Definition 6, VR is an "ever growing set of gadgets that work together and match up with human sensory or motor organs."[13] This leans toward VR as consisting of the devices which simulate reality according to the human senses. In this sense, VR is a tool. However, VR may also be viewed as the study of a certain skill. Consider the following handful of definitions:

> 9. VR is the investigation of the sensorimotor loop that connects people with their world;[14]
> 12. VR is the technology of noticing experience itself;[15]
> 29. VR is a cultural movement in which hackers manipulate gadgets to change the rules of causality and perception in demos;[16]

> 43. VR is a new art form that must escape the clutches of gaming, cinema, traditional software, New Economy power structures, and even the ideas of its pioneers.[17]

In these examples, Lanier views VR as an investigation, a skill of studying experience, a cultural movement, and even an art-form (e.g. like improvisation in jazz). These definitions suggest that VR is an activity rather than a mere product. VR is the activity of modeling physical reality.

How is VR related to reality? In Definition 40, VR is a generalized tool for cognitive enhancement.[18] Lanier gives an example of how VR can help veterans with suffered memory impairments. In this way, VR is extending people with disabilities so that they may become better embedded in reality, overcoming the brokenness of creation. Lanier shows that the narrative arc of someone in VR is not within a virtual world but rather the real world.[19] Reality is the basis for VR. VR cannot go beyond reality, but it helps us to engage with reality in a new way.

2 How VR is Real

Now having a grasp on reality and on VR, how is VR real? How is VR part of creation? I am not claiming that VR is real in every sense, for we should maintain the distinction between physical reality and simulated reality. The model is not the same as the thing which it represents. However, the non-reality of VR is more often posed than its reality. People have often framed VR as an alternative reality. I contend that it is part of reality, part of the creation. If God is the first reality and creation is the second reality, then VR cannot be some third reality. It must be in the creation or else be God, which would be idolatry. If we promote more realities than God and the world, then we'll soon lose sight of what reality really is at all and start creating our own realities, becoming our own gods. Viewing VR as an alternative reality leads down this idolatrous path.

2.1 The Embodiment of the Human Creature

One way to investigate the reality of VR is to explore the reality of humans. Both creational theology and neuroscience shed light on humans as embodied creatures.

2.1.1 Creational Theology

At the most basic level, humans have physical and non-physical components in what we might call "body and soul".[20] The body is good and should not be neglected. Both body and soul are created and exist within the reality of creation. Both are

intertwined in human identity. The body is real, and so is the soul even though it is intangible.[21]

Jaworski supports a holistic view of the human being in order to solve the mind-body problem.[22] The information, organization, or structuring of the body is always irreducibly intertwined with matter in a synthesis of ongoing activity. The soul is not located in only one part of the body but throughout the whole body. No part of the body is lacking in the soul, and the soul is not subdivided by the body.

As humans engage in VR, they are always embodied souls. They cannot leave their bodies in order to be in the virtual world but rather are continuously interacting with their bodies. Their senses of sight, touch, and hearing are engaged. Our sensory organs are always engaged in the realm of VR. If they weren't, then we would cease to be in VR. Our orientation for navigating creation comes from our senses, and it is precisely these same senses which give us our orientation in VR. The means of orientation are the same because we do not leave our bodies as we engage VR; we remain in the creation because we are embodied creatures even in VR.

Even if VR were non-physical in a certain sense, humans already engage in spiritual and non-physical ways and still remain in the reality of creation. Even as we use our senses to read the Bible or hear a sermon, the Holy Spirit works through the Word to strengthen us in faith. We hear the message, and we believe in Jesus. The spiritual reality of the Word does not pluck us out of creation but rather restores us to our relationship with the Creator and guides us in our relationships with other creatures. Similarly, whatever is non-physical about VR need not take us away from creation but can guide us to better serve others. As humans live spiritually, they are still bodily creatures. As humans interact virtually, they are still bodily creatures.

2.1.2 Neuroscience

Neuroscience is often stereotyped into reducing the human identity into only the brain or a bunch of neurons. Modern neuroscience actually proposes a more holistic view of human identity in the realm of embodied cognition. The brain is one part of the whole organism. The brain's role is to integrate sensory experience, working together with other organs and senses. It helps us to become aware of our actions within our environment. It connects receptors and effectors. The brain cannot work by itself. It needs the whole body in order to explore the space around us. The brain needs the body, and the body needs the brain.

Lanier recognizes the holistic view of the human person: "The nervous system is holistic, so it chooses one external world at a time to believe in."[23] In Definition 10, Lanier states, "Reality, from a cognitive point of view, is the brain's expectation of the next moment. In virtual reality, the brain has been persuaded to expect virtual stuff instead of real stuff for a while."[24] For Lanier, physical reality is real because of cognitive expectations as explored in our bodies. Although VR chang-

es those expectations, it is nonetheless providing an environment for exploration. Virtual experience is not the same as physical experience, but it is nonetheless real as it is perceived through an embodied cognition.

From both creational theology and modern neuroscience, there is an uncanny parallel in promoting the holistic nature of the human creature. Neither discipline seeks to be reductionistic. So then, there is overlap between them, and they can pursue some questions together. Seybold speaks on the relationship between our brains and reality:

> We interact with reality by having that reality represented in our brains in the form of neural activity. While there is room for subjectivity in our interpretation of that reality, our 'neural story' nevertheless is considered by most scientists, and nonscientists as well, to be an accurate representation of the real world.[25]

There is also a neural story as we perceive VR. When we perceive VR, our neural activity makes representations of it. Those representations are true to the virtual world although they are different from the physical world. Since our bodies are grounded in the reality of creation and the reality of creation is the basis of VR, we are able to bridge the neural story between the physical and virtual worlds and to determine how experiences are different in both. Even though experiences may be different in the virtual world, our frame of reference is the creation, and we are able to translate the differences.

2.2 Haptics: The Physical Side of VR

Just as Word and Sacrament act as the means of grace, haptics act as the means of physicality for VR. Haptics are physical, and without them, VR is nothing. Lanier talks about haptics as the devices of VR which push back at the user.[26] Examples would be goggles, data-gloves, data-suits, treadmills, and the like. Each device is meant to stimulate a particular sense in order to simulate a particular sensation. A treadmill could give the sensation of motion. If a data-suit has the means of heating or cooling, then the user could be given the sensation of being outside in the winter-cold or in the summer-heat. Each of these devices is physical in some way, and they act as the medium for interacting with VR. Lanier says, "People think differently when they express themselves physically."[27] Haptics give a physical way of interacting in VR so that users can express themselves in new ways. These technological gadgets help users to engage in VR as the activity of simulating reality. They extend reality for the users and embed them in new ways within the virtual world. VR is only as good as its haptics, which are physically based in the reality of creation.

Lanier also emphasizes the importance of interactivity between VR and

physical reality. As VR tries to approximate physical reality more and more, the brain will be trained to detect forgeries better and better, and Lanier says "The key to perception is interactivity."[28] Furthermore, he says, "Through VR, we learn to sense what makes physical reality real."[29] In other words, VR has the remarkable ability to help us understand the physicality of creation all the more. It sharpens our senses and perceptions to distinguish better and better the physical from the virtual. We are able to make a model and test it against the thing which it models. So then, there is a proper distinction between the models of VR and the things of physical reality, but VR is also able to help us to engage in learning about reality all the more. For example, geometric shapes in mathematics may be modeled in idealistic forms. These abstractions may not be physically real, but they help us to engage in our physical reality. These geometric shapes are not unreal but rather exist in an idealistic form. VR is still part of reality even in its approximation of physical reality.

Technology is an extension of reality, but Hefner takes the further step of proposing a nondualistic view of technology: technology is a form of nature, and it is grounded in the same matrix as humans and their culture.[30] This matrix is in fact the reality of creation. So then, technology is part of the creation, and it is the skill of humans to navigate this creation. According to creational theology, humans who are made in the image of God are to have dominion over the creation. Since technology is part of creation, then they should have dominion over technology as well. Since VR is technology, then humans are to have dominion even in the virtual world.

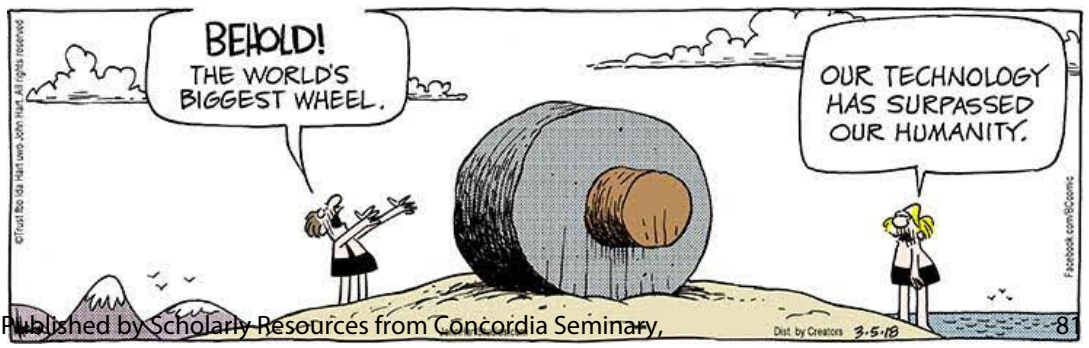
We have dominion, but we are nevertheless accountable. Being made in the image of God also means that humans have a relationship with God the Creator. This means that they are responsible and accountable to Him for their dominion. Since VR as technology is part of the creation, then humans are accountable to the Creator for their activities within the virtual world as well. Even in VR, we cannot escape God the Creator. Humans as creatures are limited within the creation and cannot go beyond it nor beyond their dependency on God. They are always depen-

dent on Him even in VR.

2.3 Information

At the foundation of computer-science, one must deal with the concept of information. Paul Davies suggests that instead of viewing laws of nature as the most basic level of description for physical reality, we should use information instead.[31] So then, the explanatory scheme of physical reality should have the hierarchy of information, then laws of nature, then matter. Thus, the material world is based on mass, energy, and information.[32] Furthermore, Keith Ward argues that God is the supreme informational principle of the universe.[33] If God is the source of all reality, then He is also the source of all information. In this way, creation is not merely material but also informational. Even if VR were not real in the material sense, it can be real in the informational sense. Therefore, there is a distinction between physical reality and informational reality. VR relies on physical reality for its existence, but it delves into informational reality in its explorations. In this sense, the term "virtual reality" may be misleading to a certain extent as it tends to have us think that something is not real to begin with. Perhaps "digital worlds" captures the sense of exploring new environments which are governed more by coding and information.

If information is part of creation, then VR or any kind of digital world is also part of creation. So then, VR is indeed part of creation and God rules over creation. Therefore, God also rules over VR and every kind of digital world we might model or construct. God orders and rules over creation with His law, so God's law is relevant even in the digital worlds. Commands like "Thou shalt not murder" should still apply even in our interactions in VR. If VR is viewed as an alternative reality, then it is tempting to rewrite the rules. In physical reality, we can't fly, but in VR, we can act like birds or angels or whatever flying creature we want. In the digital worlds, we can extend our abilities. What becomes problematic is that we want to also rewrite morality. Murder is wrong in physical reality, but in VR, why not? What's so bad about shooting up a bunch of people in VR? However, if VR is viewed as an extension of reality as opposed to an alternative, then no matter what digital world we inhabit, we are still accountable to God, who is the Creator. We cannot rewrite God's law even in VR. In all our interactions in VR, we should continually ask ourselves, "Is this act in VR in line with God's will?" There is no escaping God's will. God is the Creator, and VR is within the creation. We remain accountable to Him there.



3 Care of Creation

Many Christians have been concerned about VR or the metaverse when it comes to worship.[34] That debate is still ongoing. However, what relevance does VR have for the care of creation? If we know how humans are embedded into creation, then we can know how humans are to act responsibly for creation. If VR is part of creation, then it can be part of humanity's task for the caring of creation.

One long-running question in creational theology is this: How are humans related to nature? Are they separated or connected to nature? There is a theological framework which helps to know the various answers to these questions. Consider the following possibilities.[35]

1. Humankind Set Apart from Nature
(a) Humankind above Nature
(b) Humankind over Nature
(c) Humankind against Nature

2. Humankind as Part of Nature
(a) Humankind with Nature
(b) Humankind into Nature
(c) Humankind within Nature

Being apart from nature implies a certain kind of dichotomy or dualism, and being part of nature implies some kind of integration. The first is mechanistic and atomistic, and the second is holistic and organic. The first approach tends to be utilitarian while the second approach tends to hold nature to have its own intrinsic value.

Where does VR fit in all this? Do we apply terms of dualism or of integration when it comes to VR? Why do we use VR in the first place? Zuckerberg demonstrated how AI could be part of VR, saying, "You'll be able to create worlds with just your voice."[36] So then, he envisions using VR to modify and reshape creation to our will with godlike creativity, exemplifying the model of Humankind over Nature. Marc Andreessen, internet-mogul and board-member of Zuckerberg's company, says the following in response to doubts against the metaverse:

> The Reality Privileged, of course, call this conclusion dystopian, and demand that we prioritize improvements in reality over improvements in virtuality. To which I say: reality has had 5,000 years to get good, and is clearly still woefully lacking for most people; I don't think we should wait another 5,000 years to see if it eventually closes the gap. We should build—and we are building—online worlds that make life and work and love won-

> derful for everyone, no matter what level of reality deprivation they find themselves in.[37]

In other words, the physical world has deprived us of certain realities, so we need to carve out and cultivate our own realities, creating our own paradise perhaps like in the model of Humans against Nature. These views of VR show themselves opposed to nature rather than being with or for nature. Instead of actually helping people to deal with their struggling realities, Zuckerberg and Andreessen are proposing to make alternative realities to distract people away from their problems. VR as alternative reality ends up denying reality itself by escaping this world and rewriting the rules so that the problems which we face are rewritten to not be problems at all. The real problem with this is that it is impossible to write off our problems. The attempt to escape from reality is a failed attempt. Our problems are still our problems whether we like it or not, and VR cannot change the rules of reality, which have been established by God the Creator. We cannot escape the Creator. Just as Adam and Eve tried to hide from their problems and kept passing the blame against their fellow creatures, VR as alternative reality is trying to hide from God and not care about the problems of others. If VR is above or against nature, then we will act in ways which are above and against our neighbor as well.

Need this necessarily be the case? No, it does not. If we have a self-interest in VR, then we will be against nature. If we forget our creaturely connections while in VR, then we forget who we are as human creatures, forget nature as creation, and forget God as Creator, which will end up in turning ourselves into gods and reshaping the digital worlds to our own whims. However, if we have creaturely humility, then we can use VR as a tool or skill for the sake of caring for nature. This is part of what Andy Crouch calls putting technology in its proper place.[38] Crouch believes that technology is in its proper place when it helps us to bond with real people whom we are given to love, to start great conversations, to take care of our fragile bodies, to acquire skill, to cultivate wonder and responsibility for God's creation, to engage in the world around us with all our senses, and to use it with intention and care.[39] VR can engage all our senses, and it can be used as a skill for modeling the world around us. According to Lanier, VR can model the world, we can sense the difference, we can have VR model the world better, we can sense the new and finer difference, and we can keep fine-tuning with the loop. We can actually study and model nature with VR in order to learn it better for what it really is. Hence, Lanier is contending that humans with VR are actually embedded within a larger system of nature, thus promoting a model like Humankind within Nature.

Furthermore, the models of VR themselves might be helpful in taking care of nature. How? Imagine this possibility. World-renowned biologist Edward Wilson (1929–2021) made a plea to Christians to join forces with science in order to save

biodiversity on earth despite disagreements on evolution.[40] Wilson believed that our best chance of preserving biodiversity is by preserving the environments corresponding to the different life forms. Toward this endeavor, he founded the Encyclopedia of Life, which is a database for cataloging every species and every environment on earth for the goal of predicting and handling our impact on them.[41] Perhaps, VR could be used to model ecosystems, being able to interact with the model in order to better understand the effects of our interactions with other creatures and their environments. If we had to make decisions about what to do with a particular environment or species, we could model it, simulate the interaction or intervention which we would place, and then see what the possible outcomes might be before we actually apply such interventions upon these ecosystems. This would not be an act of VR to escape from nature and create some kind of alternative world but rather an attempt to model the creation which we already have for the sake of taking care of it. The interactions within this kind of VR would be driving us back into the creation for its betterment. VR has been used in other scenarios such as training for military, training for surgery, rehabilitation for people with various disabilities, and more. The suggestion posed here is to show an example that VR could be a tool or skill which humans can use as part of their task of caring for creation.

4 Conclusion

VR is in and for the creation. VR is a form of technology, which makes it an extension and part of creation. It is a tool which extends our abilities in creation. It is a skill which helps us to learn more about the creation, giving us the potential to act for the benefit of creation. The rising popularity surrounding VR tends to lean toward VR as the sort of alternative reality that Zuckerberg and Andreessen promote. This ends up denying reality and going against creation, assisting people to fulfill their own desires rather than caring about their real situations. We must never forget that God is Creator and that we are creatures. Viewing VR as alternative reality eliminates God as Creator and leads us into creating our own realities like selfish little gods. Viewing VR as technology, as a tool or skill like Lanier and others promote, better grounds us as creatures and allows God to be in His proper place as Creator. We have dominion in VR just as much as the rest of creation, and we are just as accountable to God there as anywhere else. Once we care about God in VR, then we can more properly care about other creatures as well. We can use VR to model situations and scenarios for learning about the creation and for training to become better able to care for creation. VR can be used for the glory of God the Creator and for the benefit of our neighbor in creation.

Endnotes

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Devotional Materials

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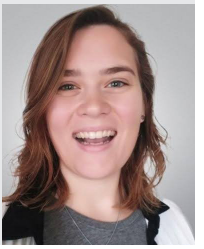

The Psalms and The Good Life of God's People

Rachel McCloskey

We belong to Christ who speaks his word to us. As a creedal church body, we recognize that God's word is not only a word to be received, but a word to be confessed back to him. As the Spirit works through the word, he forms and shapes us as God's confessing people. It has a transformative effect. We belong to Christ and his word does not leave us unchanged.

The Psalms are a particular example of words God puts in our mouth to shape us. They run the gamut of human experience. From the highest high to the lowest low, the Psalms articulate what it feels like to be God's treasured possession in the midst of a fallen and sinful world. The psalmists rage in burning anger, calling out to God for justice. In exuberant joy, they praise Him for his unending love. They cry in desperate fear, begging the Lord for salvation from their distress. They agonize in sorrow and even accuse Yahweh of abandoning them. Nothing is untouched or off-limits in the Psalms' expression of life as God's people.

Renowned scholar James K.A. Smith asserts that humans are, at our core, affective creatures.[1] This means that the Psalms speak to us in a different way than a systematized creed can. As we make them our own, speaking them back to God, they form us on our most basic level. Smith labels habits such as praying the Psalms, which so acutely influence our affections, as liturgies. He argues that liturgies shape our desires and implant in us a picture of what he calls the good life of human flourishing.[2] As sinful creatures, our instinctual vision of the good life often revolves around the gods we make for ourselves. We fashion idols out of full bellies and fuller wallets.

But the good life that the Psalms ignite our desire for is not the health, wealth, and prosperity that would usurp God's rightful place in our hearts. Rather, the good life presented in the Psalms is one rooted in Yahweh's faithfulness to us even as we experience intense anger, sadness, joy, and fear.

This vision of the good life is put forward in the very first Psalm. The upright man who meditates day and night on Yahweh's law flourishes like a sturdy tree planted by streams. The second Psalm firmly asserts what the good life is not. That is, it is not belonging to the rebellious people who seek to disentangle themselves from the true King's reign. Rather, the one who is blessed is the person who takes refuge in the Son's rule.

Reading on in the book of Psalms, one encounters a vision of the good life viewed from every angle and posture of human emotion. Upon seeing the ranks of his enemies in Psalm 3, the psalmist cries to God in fear and anguish. But then he imagines Yahweh as a protective shield around him. "I will not fear," says the psalmist, "though tens of thousands assail me on every side" (3:6). Enraged, the psalmist in 7 calls on God to administer justice, crying, "vindicate me, Lord!" (7:8). The psalmist knows that the good life—and God—cannot tolerate evil. "Bring to an end the violence of the wicked, and make the righteous secure," the psalmist pleads. Bubbling over with uncontainable joy the psalmist shouts of Yahweh's steadfast faithfulness to his people in Psalm 98. "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God!" (98:3b). Being a recipient of God's promises is the definition of human flourishing.

It is not always easy to recognize the vision of the good life presented in a psalm at first glance. Most of us would not characterize wasting away in sorrow (Psalm 6) or having all of one's bones out of joint (Psalm 22) as particularly representative pictures of human flourishing. But the psalms are a special way God forms us into creatures that envision the good life in terms of hope. The Psalms do not sweep pain, heartache, and other unpleasant emotions under the rug. But they give us a voice to remind God and ourselves about the things He will do—either today or in eternity.

In this way, the Psalms are a transformative experience. The psalmists pour out their fear, sadness, anger, and joy before the Lord. Often, by the end of a psalm, however, the tone shifts. The psalmist may still be experiencing distress but something else has entered the scene. The one praying now perceives his or her situation in terms of the Lord's vows. Even the Psalms that do not find an immediate, peaceful resolution, like Psalm 88, still provide words for us to speak to our Father in every circumstance—even if we are not yet ready for comfort or resolution. Instead, the Psalms call us to recognize that we do not have an indifferent or an absent God. The act of prayer itself is a confession of this fact.

The result is that the Psalms reassert our identity as God's beloved children

in a way that speaks to our circumstances. When we pray the Psalms, we walk away changed. Our problems may not instantly be solved (although God certainly has the power to do so and promises to hear our requests). But we have been given a glimpse of the good life—one in which we are heirs of God's promises of justice, restoration, rescue, and salvation. We are not—as it may seem in life's darkest moments—abandoned, forsaken, and alone. We belong to God. And here and now, the Psalms assert, the good life means trusting in Yahweh's word. Through the Psalms, we can rub God's ears with his own promises and remind ourselves of the same. One day, we look forward to the fulfillment of the good life in eternal fellowship with God.

Because we belong to God, we can pour out our grief, anger, sorrow, and joy and be reminded of God's promises and presence. As we participate in the Psalms, we are imprinted with the vision of the good life. God shows Himself in the Psalms to be our shield, as well as our righteous defender, and our comforter in every circumstance. Our imagination is captured by what it means to be God's dear child. We are changed. We are His.

Endnotes

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Christian Narrative Service
God's Story of Everything in Worship

WE BEGIN — *Matthew 28:19b*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

THE BEGINNING — *Genesis 1:1–2:3, 3:1–24*
John 1:1–14
Acts 17:16–34
Revelation 21:1–14, 21–27

BAPTISM — *Genesis 6:5–22, 8:1–12, 9:1–19*
Matthew 3:1–17, John 3:1–22
Acts 2:1–41, Revelation 7:9–17

TEN COMMANDMENTS — *Dt. 5:1–6:25 or Ex. 19:1–20:21*
Mark 12:28–34, Luke 10:25–37
Acts 15:1–33
Revelation 14:1–13

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

CONFESSION OF SIN — *Nehemiah 9:1–38,*
Jonah 3:1–4:11 Luke 18:9–14
Acts 19:11–20, Revelation 3:1–6

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot- tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? Consider your place in life according to the Ten

Commandments. *A moment of silence for reflection and personal confession.* Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins. I am sorry for all of this, and I ask for grace. I want to do better. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

1 Kings 8:22–53
Mt. 1:18–25, Mt. 9:1–8,
Lk. 23:33–47, and Jn. 20:19–23
Psalm 19 or 51

As a called minister of Christ and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Fa- ther and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Jesus Christ has given us new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven us all our sins. The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us with His grace to everlasting life. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Nehemiah 8:1–12
Luke 24:33–48
Acts 13:13–43

CONFESSION OF FAITH

Genesis 15:1–6, Exodus 18:1–12
Matthew 8:5–13, John 20:24–31
Acts 4:1–22, Hebrews 11:1–12:2

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER

Genesis 4:1–16, 25–26;
Jonah 1:1–2:10
Luke 11:1–13 or Matthew 6:5-15
Acts 4:23–31, Psalm 86:1–17

LORD'S PRAYER *Matthew 6:9–13*

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

OFFERING

Genesis 22:1–18
Exodus 35:4–36:7
Matthew 2:1–12
Matthew 5:21–26
Mark 12:38–44
Acts 4:32–37

If there is no Communion, then the service continues with the BLESSING.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Exodus 12:1–14, 24:3–11
Mark 14:12–26, John 6:22–69
Acts 2:42–47
Revelation 19:4–10

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."
Mt. 26:26–28, Mk. 14:22–24, Lk. 22:19–20, 1 Cor. 11:23–25

ASKING A BLESSING *Luther's Small Catechism*

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Your gifts which we receive from Your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DISTRIBUTION

RETURNING THANKS *Luther's Small Catechism*

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

Genesis 12:1–9
2 Samuel 7:1–11 (12–29)
Numbers 6:23–27
Matthew 28:18–20 or
Luke 24:50–53
Acts 3:1–26

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. **Amen.**

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up His counte- nance upon us and give us peace. **Amen.**
Numbers 6:24–26

THE END

Isaiah 25:6–9, Daniel 12:1–4
Matthew 24:1–14 (15–28)
29–31; 25:31–46
Revelation 1:1–20, 5:8–14,
20:1–15, 22:1–21

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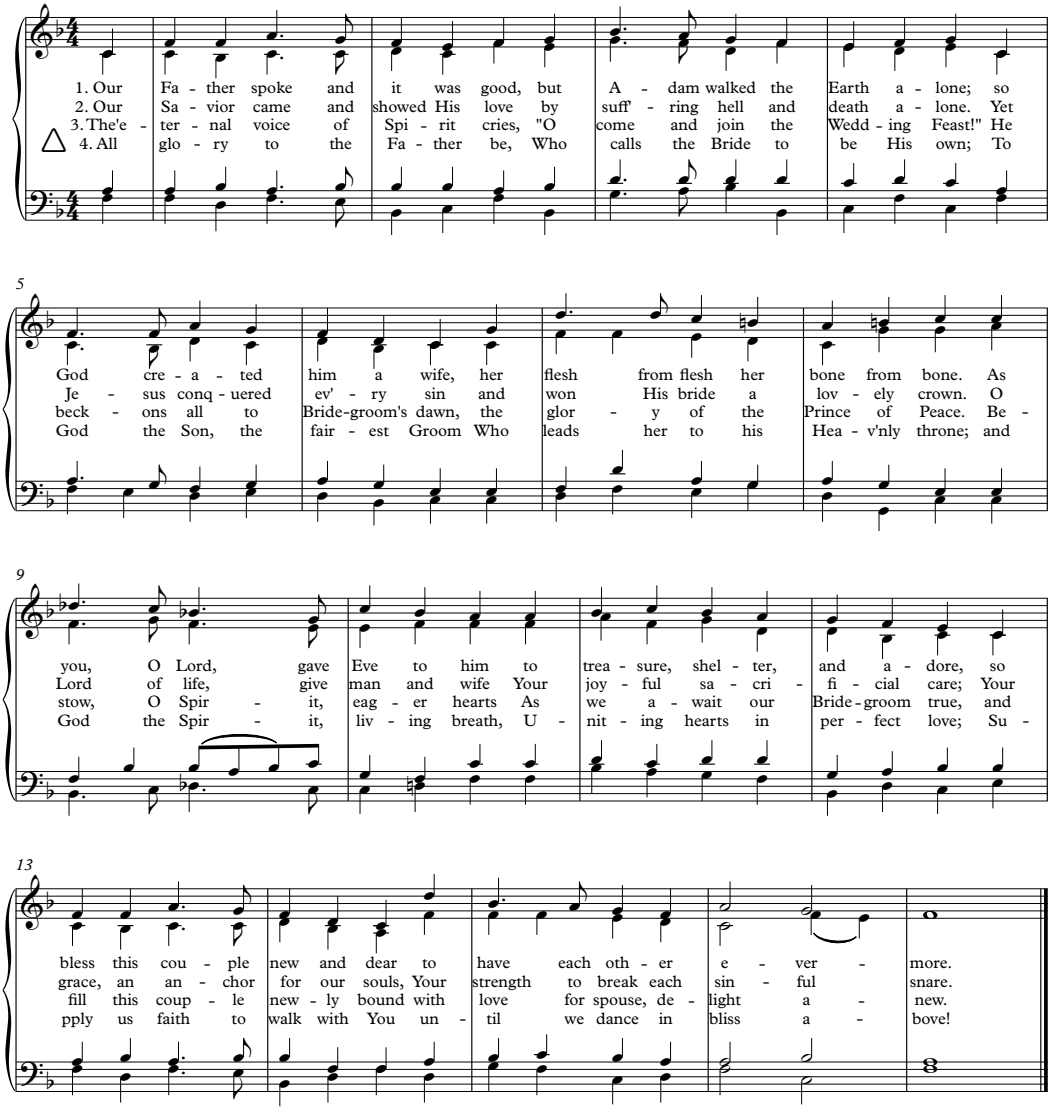
Hymnody

Our Father Spoke, and It Was Good

A Wedding Hymn

Jason Kohm

Richard Tritten

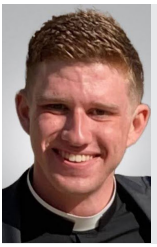


1. Our Father spoke, and it was good,
but Adam walked the earth alone
so God created him a wife,
her flesh from flesh, her bone from bone.
As You, O Lord, gave Eve to him
to treasure, shelter, and adore,
so bless this couple new and dear
to have each other evermore.

2. Our Savior came and showed His love
by suff'ring hell and death alone
yet Jesus conquered ev'ry sin
and won His bride a lovely crown.
O Lord of life, give man and wife
Your joyful, sacrificial care;
Your grace, an anchor for our souls,
Your strength to break each sinful snare.

3. The'eternal voice of Spirit cries,
"O come and join the wedding feast!"
He beckons all to Bridegroom's dawn,
the glory of the Prince of Peace.
Bestow, O Spirit, eager hearts
as we await our Bridegroom true
and fill this couple, newly bound
with love for spouse, delight anew.

4. All glory to the Father be,
who calls the Bride to be His own
through God the Son, the fairest Groom
Who leads her to His heav'nly throne;
and God the Spirit, living breath,
uniting hearts in perfect love;
supply us faith to walk with You
until we dance in bliss above!



Originally from St. Louis, Jason Kohm is a fourth-year student at Concordia Seminary. He earned a BA in English from Concordia Chicago in 2020. While he enjoys many hobbies (his favorite being sailing), he treasures spending time with his friends most of all.

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