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Contents

Landas
Vol. 28, No. 1 (2014)

1 *What Are We Doing When We Do Theology?*
Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J.

13 *Beguines: The First Women's Movement in Christianity: A Time for a Return?*
Carmen Valdés

47 *But You Are the God of the Lowly, Helper of the Oppressed: God in the Prayer of Judith (Jdt. 9:1–14)*
Helen R. Graham, M.M.

59 *Luke's Good News to the Poor: Ambiguities and Challenges*
Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M.

91 *Discernment of Spirits in the Bible*
Ramon L. Bautista, S.J.

115 *The Temple Controversy in Mark*
Francis D. Alvarez, S.J.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J. ("What Are We Doing When We Do Theology?") explains the task of theology by grounding it on a commitment of faith and a believing community. Built upon a long history of reflection, theology nevertheless reinterprets and re-appropriates Christian tradition for the contemporary world. Gallagher notes that "theology for nearly a century now has been acutely aware of the challenge of an increasingly secular culture." Today's culture has profoundly shaped our interpretation of life. It is this "social imaginary" (as Charles Taylor puts it) that poses the greatest challenge to faith. It is on the level of imagination, rather than on a narrow kind of rationality, where theology needs a new language. "On this frontier the worlds of imagination—including art, poetry, music, and the new media—are more needed than a communication of theological content," he says. "Theology, faced with these inner contexts of forgotten desire, needs to develop a ministry of disposition and to create languages of attraction and of invitation." He also explains a variety of theologies based on changing contexts of human experience: biblical, anthropological, synthetic (inculturated), practical, transcendental, and counter-cultural. But context alone is not enough. According to Gallagher:

> Although it is vital to listen to the questions of the culture and to discern the emerging sensibilities, that is only a preparatory phase for a delicate and demanding dialogue. If theology stays too focused on contextual questions, it can become a form of religious sociology, advocating worthy cultural positions but without putting them really into contact with the drama and vision of the Gospel.

Dr. Carmen Valdés ("Beguines: The First Women's Movement in Christianity: A Time for a Return?") provides a succinct account of the history of the Beguines, a spiritual revival movement in the 13th–16th centuries, particularly in the Low Countries of Europe, that stressed imitation of Christ's life through contemplative prayer, works of charity, and voluntary poverty. Some of these women lived in quasi-religious communities but without taking vows. Valdés recounts the struggles the Beguines had to face due to the prevailing bias against women in the medieval Church and the witch-hunt launched by the Inquisition against mystics and visionaries. A discussion of the writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete illustrates the new kind of bold mysticism inaugurated by the Beguines. Valdés asks:

> Is it time to bring back to our spiritual life the essence of the Beguine spirituality and movement especially as exemplified by Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Marguerite? … Within this three-dimensional world, what can we gain by giving free expression to bolder ways that are more inclusive of other religious approaches to the development of our inner life? Do we not need an all-encompassing spirituality in the 21st century?

The next two articles in this issue are research essays that were presented at the 2014 Annual Convention of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP) on the theme of poverty in the Bible: "Blessed Are the Poor" (Mt. 5:3). Helen R. Graham, M.M. ("But You Are the God of the Lowly, Helper of the Oppressed: God in the Prayer of Judith—Jdt. 9:1–14") discusses how the deuterocanonical book of Judith presents God as the champion of the poor and the oppressed through the heroine's theology and prayer. Chiding Uzziah and the people of Bethulia for giving God a deadline to save them, after which they would surrender to their enemies, Judith "speaks of the freedom of God to save or not to save." Graham notes: "God is radically free and is not to be threatened or cajoled … Judith's radical monotheism puts all in God's hands … the people are only to call upon God, trust God, and wait for God's deliverance if indeed it is God's good pleasure to deliver." Moreover, God tests and educates his people through suffering. Judith's prayer contains a number of epithets—e.g.,

God of my ancestor, defender of widows, divine warrior, God of the lowly, king of all creation, God of all power and might—which portray in various ways the God of Israel as the one "who executes justice for the orphan and the widow" (Deut. 10:18).

Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M. ("Luke's Good News to the Poor: Ambiguities and Challenges") explains the significance of the programmatic passage found at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Luke's gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor …." (Lk. 4:18–19; cf. Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6). Co investigates first the meaning of the verb εὐαγγελίσασθαι (to bring good news) and then the identity of the πτωχοί (poor). What did Jesus do to bring good news? Co studies all the various occurrences of εὐαγγελίσασθαι in Luke-Acts. "Bringing good news" is a fitting prelude to all of Jesus' subsequent activities: e.g., proclaiming the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, raising the dead, reconciling sinners to God, etc. The "good news" is Jesus himself and the authority manifest in his person. Who are the "poor" that are the recipients of good news? They are not just the needy and the afflicted, but also the sinners whom Jesus cared for and reconciled with God. Moreover, there are also those who have made themselves poor in order to follow Jesus. "What Jesus started in his ministry," Co notes, "is an alternative lifestyle of radical prophetic poverty. It is an alternative lifestyle that manifests radical trust in God, serves as a protest against rich living, and expresses solidarity with the least." This is the kind of poverty that challenges all of us who aspire to be disciples of Jesus.

Ramon L. Bautista, S.J. ("Discernment of Spirits in the Bible") notes that there are only a couple of explicit references to "discernment of spirits" in the Bible: 1 Cor. 12:10 (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων) and 1 Jn. 4:1 (δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα). There is no systematic treatment of the subject in the OT, but the Biblical characters often dealt with the conflict between the good and evil spirits. "Needing careful discretion, like all of us today, these OT individuals," according to Bautista, "had to ask pivotal questions in their own search for greater truth and meaning in their lives." Thus, the practice of distinguishing the various kinds of opposing spirits is already well attested in the

Hebrew Scriptures, even if both good and bad spirits are initially attributed to God as their source and only later on is the evil spirit no longer attributed directly to God. No matter how strong the influence of these spirits, the person always has the freedom of choice. In the NT, the evangelists deal implicitly with discernment in some of the parables and sayings of Jesus (e.g., Mt. 13:24–30; 25:31–46; Mk. 1:23ff; etc.). Jesus even offers one criterion for discernment: "By their fruits you will know them" (Mt. 7:16, 20; Lk. 6:44). John's gospel presents a number of polarities which are matters for discernment, e.g., spirit and flesh (Jn. 3:6), light and darkness (Jn. 3:19), etc. Paul's letters attest to many instances when he needed to make decisions regarding issues he faced in his mission (e.g., imposition of circumcision on gentile converts, observance of dietary laws, etc.). Bautista recapitulates his investigation by formulating a definition of discernment:

> [It] is a process whereby the believer, in *faith*, examines prayerfully his or her affective experiences … operative from within, including especially their direction and end. Doing this enables one to know, understand, and respond more authentically to God's personal unique manner of unconditional loving here and now.

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J. ("The Temple Controversy in Mark") interprets Jesus' actions in Mark 11:15–18 as a prophetic act. But what message is it trying to communicate? Instead of limiting his hermeneutical optic to the Temple scene and the episodes close to it, Alvarez considers the temple episode as part of the larger story, the "good news" that Mark wants to proclaim. Hence, the author begins his "maximal interpretation" with the programmatic passage in Mk. 1:15 ("The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news"). He goes on to explain the characteristics of Jewish eschatology, the various aspects of time in Mark (καιρὸς, ἀρχὴ, εὐθὺς), the present time and the age to come, the battle with cosmic forces seen in Jesus' exorcisms, and the Temple as a synecdoche for Israel. Within this broad canvas of Markan eschatology, the author now interprets Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his first visit to the Temple, the cursing of the fig tree, and finally, the demonstration in the Temple as fulfillments of various Messianic or eschatological

prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures (Zech. 9:9–17; 14:21; Mal. 3:1–7; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11; etc.). In summary, Alvarez writes:

> Mk. 11:17 brings together two quotes from the prophets that interpret Jesus' temple actions in this way: "The time of this temple has ended. There is a future temple in our horizon." … Jesus was passing judgment not just on the temple but on all of Judaism; he was ending not just the time of the temple but everything Israel knew.

Felipe Fruto Ll. Ramirez, S.J.

Note: Due to a miscommunication, Eleanor R. Dionisio's essay entitled "Catholic Partisanship: Good or Bad for Democracy?," published in *Landas* 27:2 (2013): 35–50, was a premature version with incomplete citations and not yet intended for publication. It also included an error of fact (p. 40) which was corrected in a later version: the White Vote Movement endorsed only ten senatorial candidates, not a full slate of twelve; it was El Shaddai, a prominent member of the White Vote Movement, which endorsed twelve candidates, two of whom supported the Reproductive Health Law. The published version also did not include its provenance: the essay was a talk for a forum co-sponsored by the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues (JJCICSI) and by the Ateneo School of Government, entitled "Political Parties and Civil Society in the Philippines," on February 12–13, 2014 at the Social Development Complex Audio Visual Room (SDC-AVR), Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City. It also failed to mention Ms. Dionisio's affiliation with JJCICSI, which she had intended to include in the author credits. *Landas* apologizes for the miscommunication.

Landas 28:1 (2014) 1–12

WHAT ARE WE DOING WHEN WE DO THEOLOGY?

Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J.

It may be useful to begin with a number of distinctions. If we can see what theology is not, we are in a better position to see its identity or what it is called to do. To begin with, theology is not a neutral discipline because, unlike "religious studies," it is grounded in a commitment of faith. Similarly, it is not an individual project only but takes place within an ecclesial community of believers, and hence it is rooted in a rich tradition of reflection. But to insist on these two contexts for theology (faith and a community of faith) should not restrict theology to narrowly religious themes or only to being an ecclesial specialization. Although its focus is on God and revelation, theology also deals with all things in relation to God (as Thomas Aquinas said). Although it is grounded in a long history of thinking, it is asked to reinterpret or mediate that tradition for different audiences today—not just for the Church, but also for a pluralist society and for a pluralist intellectual world (as David Tracy has argued). Although its foundation lies in God's Word, written and handed on, it is rooted also in the transforming experience of God's love (as Bernard Lonergan insists). Although in an older meaning theology claimed to be a science, it differs radically from modern empirical sciences which begin from external data. Theology can never claim that kind of evidence about its object which involves the mystery of God. It begins from revelation

and faith, and aims at a different and relational kind of truth: in other words, as Vatican I put it beautifully, theology seeks obscure, imperfect and yet fruitful understanding of mysteries, and it does so mainly through analogies. This also means that theology cannot be equated with doctrine alone but also with understanding the spiritual depth and cultural significance of doctrinal truths. Therefore, it is not a question of repeating "a monolithic body of doctrine" as abstract theories, as Pope Francis has said, but ultimately of serving the "freshness" of faith for today, and doing so through discerning dialogue with "human experiences" and cultures.[1]

A Secular Frame

If these are some of the general horizons and hopes of theology, obviously it has to operate within specific contexts of history. In this sense theology for nearly a century now has been acutely aware of the challenge of an increasingly secular culture. At the beginning of the first chapter of Charles Taylor's now famous book, *A Secular Age*, he asks two questions: why was it almost impossible not to believe in God 500 years ago? And why has religious unbelief become so widespread in today's Western world? His lengthy volume offers many answers, including the emergence, at more or less the same period, of a "modern" rationality and of a new self-image of the "modern" individual in quest of authenticity or fullness. Outer sociological changes such as urbanization and industrialization are less important in his eyes than the more hidden cultural changes that shape our interpretation of life. For Taylor, the crucial change lies in the inner context of our "social imaginary," in the sense of a shared set of implicit priorities of life (usually not articulated explicitly).[2] It is on this level of imagination rather than of ideas or external situations that the

[1]Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 39–40, 133.

[2]Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.

contemporary context for faith has its greatest challenge—and perhaps also its greatest opportunity for a new language.

From a theological perspective, Taylor is exploring a radically different context for the possibility of faith. What has changed is not really the faith-vision itself but the context where people decide for or against faith, and in fact because of a plural menu of life-options such a personal decision becomes essential. In a similar spirit, Karl Rahner suggested that fundamental theology—that branch of theology that discusses the credibility of revelation—needed to put decision rather than truth at the center of its attention. But is there a sense in which Rahner's thought on this issue is in danger of seeming [to be] culturally dated? And could the same be said of other theologians such as Alfaro or Schillebeeckx? The confidence with which they spoke of the centrality of existential decision presupposed that both the question of meaning and the drama of commitment are strongly felt in people's lives. But Taylor has become more skeptical on this point. Although he defends the "modern" ideal of personal authenticity, increasingly he has voiced worries about its descent into the narcissism of the "buffered self," suffering from "loss of meaning" but protected from much pain over that loss.[3] This form of self-identity implies a closure in indifference, a protection against questioning, a sense of immanence without much desire for anything larger. It is what Taylor also sees as "therapeutic" culture or "soft relativism,"[4] where self-realization becomes the main agenda of life. The question of God can seem to have gone asleep and the drama of decision is lost in a postmodern fragmentation of life-style. If so, an important challenge for theology lies less in the explicitly religious realms of Word, Sacrament, and fundamental option than in the pre-religious realms of self-imagination and potential spirituality. Pastoral priorities change towards initiation to desire, or towards pre-evangelization rather than evangelization. On this frontier the worlds of imagination—including art, poetry, music, and the new media—are more needed than a communication

[3]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 303.

[4]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 618, 484.

of theological content. Theology, faced with these inner contexts of forgotten desire, needs to develop a ministry of disposition and to create languages of attraction and of invitation. It needs to be aware of the distance from explicit faith experienced by many people today, and indeed their allergy to many perceived forms of religion. We need a creative and less austere version of John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord today.

Varieties of Contextual Theology

In one sense, all theology is contextual in that it is born from a specific background and seeks to make sense of faith for a particular audience in the present. But what are called contextual theologies (and the plural is significant) seek to pay particular attention to the constantly changing contexts of human experience, seeing each situation as a *locus theologicus*. Let me draw on a well-known book by Stephen Bevans in which he distinguishes six different models of interaction between context and theology. To begin with, there are two contrasting approaches: first, while seeking to *translate* Biblical revelation into the language of a culture, one gives strong priority to the Biblical vision and prefers a minimum of adaptation to the local context. Here the message of Christianity is seen as transcending cultures and the emphasis is on the protection of Christian identity. Second, a more *anthropological* model starts from listening to the culture itself: what Paul Tillich proposed as "correlation" would fit here. The assumption is that each culture has spiritual treasures calling out for theological recognition and that Christian faith can fulfill the deepest hopes of humanity. But this approach "from below" can be in danger of compromising the identity of faith by adapting the Gospel too easily to the values of the culture. A third approach attempts a *synthesis* or middle ground, involving some two-way dialogue between context and revelation, seeking to preserve both the specific nature of faith and the reality of the surrounding culture. In this spirit, some official Church discourse concerning "inculturation" speaks of a mutual or two-way traffic where theology and culture learn from one another. A fourth model stresses that faith is more *praxis* than doctrine, and

hence the relationship with the context aims at offering an alternative vision and leading to action. What are the practical and social fruits of faith in a given context? Liberation theology could belong to this school of contextual thinking which asks us to go beyond intellectual approaches. A fifth version of theology is called *transcendental*, with an emphasis on the individual experience of self-transcendence as leading towards God and on the fact [that] what is authentic in any culture can open the door towards faith. Here religious reality is seen as mediated by the human construction of meaning and not just by social situations. How are we to find expressions of our cultural and religious identity? But a temptation here is to remain within an excessively personal framework. A sixth and final version (which Bevans added in a revised edition of his book ten years after it was first published) focuses on the need for faith to be *counter-cultural*. This tendency stresses the radical difference between Christian faith and the ambiguity of all human constructs, including culture. A healthy suspicion is needed to face the contradictions and the cost of conversion. Is the impact of culture humanizing or dehumanizing? How is God present in history? Here the Church becomes a more openly prophetic or "contrast community." Obviously there is a danger that this more aggressive approach could jump to a kind of "careless negativity" without having understood the lived sensibilities of our contemporary contexts.[5] However, its basic concern is valid, reminding us that the difference of the faith vision always offers a purifying challenge to all the cultural contexts that surround us.

Theology as More than Contextual

It is too easy to say that these various approaches to theology are complementary and all equally important. There are inevitable tensions between these schools. The Belgian theologian Lieven Boeve warns us against being too innocent about the complexity of the issues here. From his perspective in a highly secularized part of Europe, he stresses

[5]Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. & ex. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 125.

the depth of what he calls "detraditionalization," in other words the loss of roots, of memory, of religious traditions of belonging. In such a situation, if people do not find ways of "constructing their personal identity," they will often drift, with fragmented lives, under the influence of "the media and the economization" of the surrounding culture.[6] Boeve sees religion as "interruption" of this context, and hence as offering a different theological model, one that avoids both mere adaptation, where faith waters itself down in order to be acceptable, and mere opposition to the secular context, where ecclesial tones can be mainly of confrontation, discontinuity, and negativity. Thus he acknowledges "an intrinsic bond between Christian tradition and context" and the call today for a more self-conscious faith, rooted in its own identity but "open to dialogue and challenged by otherness."[7]

In this light, it is significant that Bevans felt the need to add that sixth model of contextual theology. It is indicative of a growing awareness that faith in today's situation is called to be more explicitly counter-cultural; but in what tone? It need not mean a spirit of lamenting or of negative criticism of the idols of the world. Rather, it requires a healthy and discerning critique of the many dehumanizing superficialities that can undermine culture. How are we to embody our differentness? There is a tendency in some Church discourse to moan about the contemporary scene in judgmental or nostalgic mood. Pope Francis has spoken on various occasions of the opposite dangers of a new Pelagian pessimism or a new gnostic superficiality of faith. The Pelagians seem to live a perpetual mourning, see everything with rigidity, and lack the joy and freedom of real faith. But the gnostics float on the surface of religion and make God into a kind of vague spray to cover everything.[8] We need a wiser reading of our contexts.

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[6]Lieven Boeve, "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 99–122, at 105.

[7]Boeve, "Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe," 114.

[8]These images can be found in the Pope's homilies at Santa Marta for April 18, 2013 and June 27, 2013. This contrast was also developed in his speech to CELAM in Brazil on July 28, 2013. It recurs in Paragraph 94 of *Evangelii Gaudium.*

Pope John Paul II often repeated that a faith that does not become culture remains immature. So theology is asked to reflect not just on the differentness of faith in a spirit of defensive intransigence but with cultural creativity and openness: we have a gift to mediate and translate for now.

Genuine theology involves a complex convergence of perspectives and of gifts. Context alone is not enough. Although it is vital to listen to the questions of the culture and to discern the emerging sensibilities, that is only a preparatory phase for a delicate and demanding dialogue. If theology stays too focused on contextual questions, it can become a form of religious sociology, advocating worthy cultural positions but without putting them really into contact with the drama and vision of the Gospel. So theology needs at least two other horizons beyond a sensitive interpretation of context. Let us call them roots and disposition.

To echo the opening of Pope Benedict's first encyclical, theology is not based on a "lofty idea" or on some ethical or existential option of ours: instead, its "new horizon" is grounded in an "encounter with an event, a person."[9] This is what I mean by *roots*—all that we receive in God's Word, in revelation, and in tradition. This is the difference between theology and what many universities call "religious studies." This latter approach, valid in itself as a phenomenology of religious attitudes, does not require faith. But if, as mentioned at the outset, we see theologians as crucially people of faith, then the interaction between faith and culture, essential for theology today, takes on a more personal tone of involvement. Contexts and roots need to encounter one another within the spiritual reflection of believers. In saying this, we are already touching on the question of disposition. The limitation of "religious studies" as distinct from theology is that it usually assumes a stance of academic neutrality or safe objectivity, offering a useful survey of historical developments. But if there is no spiritual *disposition* of prayerful receptivity, can we speak of real theology? To remember the humility of negative theology is another way of expressing this essential characteristic for doing theology. This ancient tradition underlines

[9]Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

the inadequacy of all our languages before the transcendence of God's mystery. Faith involves always both presence and absence. Gregory of Nyssa in his fourth century *Life of Moses* spoke of lack of vision as a "luminous obscurity." In this "negative" tone, theology explicitly acknowledges its permanent limitations and inevitable lack of any mastery of mystery because one of its temptations is to claim to explain too much and too easily. It can become enamored of its genuine doctrinal achievements and forget the strange imperfection of faith that St. Thomas Aquinas always insisted on, claiming that the goal of believing is not found in formulations but in the reality of God.[10] In fact, the young Joseph Ratzinger, commenting favorably on the sections of *Gaudium et Spes* dealing with atheism, voiced his disappointment that there was no element of negative theology there: theology, he argued, can become too affirmative and overlook the always necessary "purification of faith and of the idea of God."[11]

Towards a Unifying Map

An important challenge for anyone doing theology today, whether as teacher or student, is to find some living convergence between its many branches (biblical, systematic, moral, historical, and so on). It is not simply a matter of recognizing an interdisciplinary ideal in theory. It is more a question of finding an existential foundation for the whole enterprise. In one of his Anglican university sermons of 1841, Newman faced this difficulty, asking how we are to find a genuine center for theological studies. He compared the fragmentation into many separate fields to a kind of intellectual tourism, like sailors who visit the world but never integrate their experiences:

> Seafaring men range from one end of the earth to the other; but … they see … the tapestry of human life on the wrong side … Nothing

[10]Actus credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II–II 1.2 ad. 2).

[11]Joseph Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," in H. Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* Vol. 5 (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 155.

> has a meaning, nothing has a history, nothing has relations. [Similarly] undigested reading shows us that knowledge without system is not Philosophy. Students load their minds [rather] than … enlarge them.[12]

That last expression is Newman's hope: to find a way of enlarging one's knowledge of theology so that it discovers connections with life. More than a century later, one of Newman's disciples, the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan, offered a more ambitious and more precise answer. It has become commonplace to claim that theology needs to rebuild bridges to spirituality (and vice versa). But where can this be found in practice? Even in recent decades, many future priests seem to have encountered theology with a focus on doctrinal content, and with little connection with the drama of faith as lived. Against this divorce, Lonergan identified religious experience as literally foundational for theology: "Fundamental to religious living is conversion. It is a topic little studied in traditional theology" but in fact "conversion can supply theology with its foundation."[13] For Lonergan, the transformative experience of recognizing God's love offers us an empirical basis for theology. Indeed, he would insist, without this new horizon of the converted self, we are not really doing theology. Obviously this emphasis can have pastoral implications: seeing a spiritual encounter with God as the basis of a living theology can help overcome a certain sacramental consumerism caused by a distorted theology of sin and grace.

Lonergan's Invitation

This new foundation stone for theology is not "out there" in the Bible and Tradition but "in here" in the conversion of the theologian and indeed of the Church as a Spirit-guided community of wisdom within history. But it is dangerous to say "in here." This could sound subjective in a misleading sense. What happens here is the work of God.

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[12]John H. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between 1826 and 1843* (London: 1890), 288–289.

[13]Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," in Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 65–67.

We are changed. Our meaning becomes love-rooted. The foundation of theology has shifted from texts and authorities to interiority. The old foundations for theology were externalist, logical, a question of conclusions drawn from premises. The lived horizon of the theologian was often forgotten but in fact is central. All this emphasis challenges theologians not to imitate a neutral model of academic work, one that is so naively and universally accepted in university culture today.

In this respect, Lonergan quoted an unusual text where Thomas Aquinas warns us not to reduce theology to excessive clarities, and where he speaks of the damage to students if this model of theology monopolizes the field. In his *Questiones quodlibetales*, Aquinas accepts that where the need is to explain the content of faith or to remove doubts, an appeal to biblical or ecclesial authority is appropriate. But he indicated a deeper task for theology than offering doctrinal elucidation. A more fruitful road to understanding requires "going to the root of the truth." Without this more ambitious wavelength, says Aquinas, students may arrive at clarifying some "certitude" about truths, but if they "acquire no knowledge or understanding, they will go away empty" (*nihil intellectus acquiret et vacuus abscedet*).[14] This existential emptiness can be healed if theology pays attention to the spiritual adventure of theologians and stops being falsely "objective."

In a parallel spirit, on his 2006 visit to the Gregorian University in Rome, Benedict XVI spoke without notes to Jesuit professors, inviting us to "restructure theology." This, he said, would mean avoiding "ecclesial positivism" and facing the "great existential questions of today."[15] One can interpret this in the light of what has been seen from Lonergan: unless theology pays attention to the *existenz* of the theologian, it runs the risk of a self-destructive positivism or Denzinger dogmatism, one which is unfaithful to the very nature of theology as a mediation of reflecting faith. Theology can even become

[14]Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* Vol. 23 (Toronto: 2013), 531.

[15]This speech was neither recorded nor published. These quotations come from my own notes.

"irreligious," especially if "its main emphasis is not conversion, but proof," because these abstract positions can be "maintained out of individual or corporate pride."[16] Therapy for that temptation lies in a theology that keeps in touch with spirituality and with the lived drama of faith, hope, and love. Hence, Lonergan's advice to any theologian would be: pay attention to your operations and to your own adventure of believing, belonging, and of seeking understanding of faith. In this way, theology can avoid conceptualism, a mere debate about words, and discover a more costly and more existential language of reflection on religious experience in Christ.

Conclusion

Of course, there is much more that could be said about doing theology. By way of conclusion, let me at least list some dimensions left undeveloped in these pages. It has been mentioned that theology is called to mediate God's meaning in Christ. That will involve a challenging encounter with the richness of the ecclesial past in order to serve the mission of the Church in the present and the future. In other words, the theologian is a translator, standing at the crossroads of cultures, receiving a vision within a tradition, and re-imagining it so as to incarnate its transformative potential for now. The zones of human freedom and of human imagination are probably the real battlegrounds of faith today, and hence fields where theology needs to be urgently alert and alive. In the drama of human meaning, truth is married to freedom. Theology therefore cannot remain merely cognitive: since it seeks to explore God's meaning for us, it needs to

[16]Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), 350. With his traditional background in dogmatic theology, Lonergan's book on method does not neglect doctrine. It simply puts it in a larger operational map as dealing with theology as truth, which then has to be understood (systematic theology) for today and also inculturated in different worlds. This more complex map cannot be examined in detail here. I have described it briefly in my book *Faith Maps* (London & New York: 2010), 64–77.

develop existential and affective wavelengths. In brief, it is called to reach people's freedom through their imagination.[17]

Theology in its fullest Christian sense is born from a love-event, an encounter with a transforming Word, which then transforms the whole horizon of those who "do theology." And thus their mission is to create worthy expressions of God's revelation within the adventure of changing cultures. In Frederick Crowe's stimulating words, "doing theology" means "responsibility for the formulation of meaning." And, he adds, "we are no longer reading a book written by someone else: we are writing our own. We not only contemplate history, we must change it."[18]

[17]Here I have in mind a powerful sentence of John Henry Newman: "The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination" (*An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* [London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909], 92).

[18]Frederick Crowe, *Developing the Lonergan Legacy*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 28.

Landas 28:1 (2014) 13–46

BEGUINES: THE FIRST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY

A Time for a Return?

Carmen Valdés

The Beguines (pronounced "bay-geens") were women who initiated a radically new way of life for Christian women in the 12th century. Despite having no initiator or major leader, the movement caught fire and grew spontaneously in Low Countries. There was little interest in them, however, until a wave of enthusiasm over mysticism brought them to the forefront in the 1970's.

However, even when the Beguines drew a great deal of attention in medieval Europe, the impact of their contribution did not receive proper credit. Why? Who were they? Why did they flourish and why were they demolished by the Church? Finally, what is their significance for us in the 21st century? Is it time for a return of their spiritual movement? Marygrace Peters, O.P., believes that they indeed have something to offer Christianity in our era. In an article published in the journal *Spirituality Today*, Peters affirmed that "this medieval feminine movement offers a unique spirituality and community life for spirituality today."[1]

[1]Marygrace Peters, O.P., "The Beguines: Feminine Piety Derailed," *Spirituality Today* 43:1 (Spring 1991): 36–52, here at 36.

Christian historians generally agree that the movement emerged between 1170 and 1180 in Liege (what is now Belgium). It rapidly reached its full flowering in the 13th and 14th centuries, having spread to France, Germany, and other Latin countries. It also "exhibited a rich diversity and a complex and heterogeneous flavor."[2] Men soon followed it; taking on this new form that originated with women, they were known as the Beghards.

Certain socio-historical and religious elements led to the burgeoning of the Beguines. The 12th century saw several forces moving head-on into each other, molding what Abby Stoner from the History Journal *Ex Post Facto* at San Francisco State University calls "space," or a creative "space." She says that this "space" ignited something new and refreshing in the medieval European Church. Although this "space" was unstable, it provided the opportunity for innovation and for new roles to take shape. Firstly, the "space" opened up new areas for work due to the decline of feudalism and the migration of rural people to urban communities, especially women who went to the cities to find employment. Secondly, the crusades left many widows in its wake, and young women found no husbands to marry and had no one to provide for them. As a consequence of this depletion of the male population, women stepped forward to fill the gap of laborers in urban society.

The third impetus came from a strong upswing in trade. Increases in commerce fed the materialist desires of those who could afford imported goods, including members of the clergy whose avarice and sexual immorality had deteriorated to the chagrin of the laity. The increase in materialism brought with it a strong backdraft for a life with greater meaning in keeping with Christ's teaching.

The Beguines were thus part of a reactionary force within the Church as an institution which had become much too powerful and far too rich to be a beacon of what Jesus came to preach: "blessed are the poor," "blessed are the meek," "blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice." With an aspiration to live the life of Jesus and the

[2]Peters, "The Beguines: Feminine Piety Derailed," 36.

apostles, the laity in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and especially in the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) had a yearning to go back to the values of the Gospels. This fervor gave birth to the "vita apostolica" (also known as "vita evangelica"). The Beguines fuelled the engine of the "vita apostolica" together with Francis of Assisi and other mendicant orders. With the growth of "vita apostolica" or "vita evangelica" came a surge for the mystical life and a thirst for union with God that made monasticism an ideal.

The majority of Beguines, especially at the outset, came from the nobility and "largely from the new city merchant class."[3] These women were educated, creative, and moneyed, thus their rapid growth and way of life. The field was wide open for these women; therefore, "with their freedom of movement, economic independence and spiritual creativity, the Beguines carved out an unusually expansive—and controversial—niche for female religious expression"[4] not only by incarnating the Gospel in their own way but also in their spirituality and mode of mysticism.

First Women's Movement in the Church

The Beguines "have been called the first women's movement in Christian history."[5] They broke new ground outside the established structures of the Church and of society burgeoning out of their deep desire to put into practice the spirituality of the Gospels and committing to a nuptial relationship with God. Stoner spells out the distinctive elements of their way of life. It is generally agreed by church historians that Beguines were groups of religiously dedicated laywomen who

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[3]Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 83.

[4]Abby Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, San Francisco State University Journal Archive, 26–47. http://userwww.sfsu.edu/epf/journal_archive/volume_IV,_no._2_-_sp._1995/stoner_a.pdf.

[5]Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, 26–47.

- took no permanent vows,
- followed no prescribed rule,
- supported themselves with manual labor (especially embroidering),
- interacted with the "world" (therefore not cloistered),
- and remained celibate or could be married.

Since their celibacy was not permanent, they could marry at any time. Those who married usually continued to live within the Beguinage (the common dwelling or set of dwellings of the Beguines). They had no uniform dress and practiced voluntary poverty. The movement had no "founder," and at first there were no designated leaders. The Beguines were like a powerful wind that raced across Europe, gaining speed as each woman experienced the deepest desire to live the Gospel and not just preach it. The Beguines delved into a mysticism and spirituality of their own. Soon this mysticism became one of their most significant contributions. It was exemplified by Marie of Oignies, Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete who was burned at the stake by a camouflaged political motivation of the Inquisition that overtly accused her of religious heresy. It is speculated that the real reason for the persecution of the Beguines was the desire by the hierarchy to bring the movement to a full stop, which it did for all intents and purposes in 1312.

Bernard McGinn, a proficient historian of the evolution of Western mysticism, distinguishes "four chronological phases":[6] a) The Beguines began as dedicated women who took on a lifestyle somewhat like nuns without taking vows; they continued to live in their own homes, either alone or with their parents. As most of them came from well-to-do families, they could set aside a room for themselves and practice a life of prayer and simplicity, dedicating themselves to the corporal works of mercy while they remained celibate. b) Little by little, these women began to gather together and live in common dwellings in a parish setting. c) Larger groups of cloistered Beguines began to serve hospitals

[6]Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* Vol. III: *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 32.

and do other works of charity. d) Large Beguine communities and their associates developed into independent parishes called *curtes*, some of which have survived to this day in the Belgian *begijnhof*.[7]

McGinn is of the same opinion as Stoner. He believes that "the beguine style of the *vita apostolica* ranks among the most creative innovations of late medieval religion … [in addition to] key aspects of beguine life, especially their existence outside the cloister."[8] An uncloistered nun was simply unheard of at that time. Added to this was how "their independence of established religious rules of life gave them a special character."[9] Since their celibacy was not a life-time commitment and they were willing to have married couples as part of their community, it opened the doors for many more women to join the movement.

This very structure of the Beguine lifestyle made the clerics terribly uneasy. Women confined to the cloister were naturally excluded from "a major part of the vita apostolica: the ministry of evangelizing in the secular world."[10] Yes, they were allowed to prophesy, but "preaching was not: preaching was necessarily public, whereas prophesying could be practiced in private or through letters."[11] But the Beguines, because they were not cloistered, had the facility to preach, and their voices could be heard by the public at large. For the Dominicans and Franciscans, however, "the concept of a non-cloistered, unmarried religious woman, even if chaste, was disturbing; they too shared

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[7]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 32.

[8]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 32.

[9]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 32.

[10]The injunction to protect women from sexual temptation was occasionally taken to extremes. To cite one example, elaborate curtains were erected lest a dying nun see the priest who administered last rites (Rosemary Ruether, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974], 244).

[11]Ruether, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 244.

the prevailing conception of the female gender as dangerous and potentially contaminating."[12] Francis of Assisi had a close relationship with his partner Clare, but he put her in a cloistered convent. Later, he said of Clare and her nuns: "Up to now the disease was in our flesh and there was hope of healing, but now it has penetrated our bones and is incurable."[13]

In the Middle Ages, women had to live under the auspices and control of men, either their father, husband, brother, or another male relative. The only other option was to enter the cloister as a nun or as an anchorite where the woman remained under the rule of a priest and/or bishop. That a woman or a group of women set out on their own raised many religious eyebrows. The Cistercians, for instance, stated in their statutes "that women were to be avoided at all costs, and one specifically stressed that no Cistercian abbot or monk should bless a nun."[14]

Stoner believes that there was a difference between the manner in which men saw women and the attitude women had towards themselves. She quotes Penelope Johnson from *Mulieret Monialis: The Medieval Nun's Self-Image*: "Women with a strong religious calling of any sort were more likely to see themselves as Christians first, and females second."[15] These contrary perceptions, which caused tension "between male attitudes towards women and female conceptions of themselves, constituted a major determinant in the course of the

[12]Ruether, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 244.

[13]Frances Gies & Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978), 88.

[14]Sally Thompson, "The Problem of the Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries," in Derek Baker, ed., *Medieval Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 227.

[15]Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, 28.

Beguine movement,"[16] according to Stoner. To be fair, however, there were priests, theologians, and men among the laity who supported the Beguines and even took inspiration from them.

"Mary or Eve": Medieval Controversy Over the Status of Women

Since the Church recognized only two places for women—cloister or home, it was obvious that the Beguine women would be unwelcomed by the hierarchy. The stronger the Beguine movement became, the more suspicion they drew from the clergy. Notwithstanding the opposition of the institutional Church, the Beguines took their future into their own hands and moved forward. Thus, the attitude of the hierarchy and social norms added to the complexity of the Beguine relationship with the community.

Medieval society's attitude toward women in general was fret with contradictions. Women were perceived as both "Mary" and "Eve": as "Mary," they were the virgin and loving mother who had no sin, but every woman was simultaneously "Eve"—evil personified that led to the fall of Adam, the man. Peters paraphrases Eileen Powers from *The Position of Women*:

> women were looked upon as objects worthy of pedestal worship, since they compared favourably to the virgin mother of Christ, or were seen as sources of temptation who lured others toward a bottomless pit, and, as such, were denigrated as obstacles in the way of those who sought salvation.[17]

On one hand, the troubadours' romantic devotion to Mary elevated women in the eyes of men, while on the other, the Premonstratensian Abbot Conrad of Marchtal stated what many men accepted to be true: "the wickedness of women is greater than all other wickedness of the world … the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less

[16]Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, 28.

[17]Peters, "The Beguines: Feminine Piety Derailed," 36.

dangerous to men than the familiarity of women."[18] This attitude was in keeping with Tertullian, a prominent 2nd and 3rd century clergyman of the Church from Carthage. His influence was still felt in the medieval Church, and on women he wrote:

> You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die. (*de Cult Fem* 1.1)[19]

In 1184, the Office of the Inquisition was established to rid the Church of heretics, and women were particularly persecuted by it, including many Beguines who were brought to trial. The Church did what it could to squelch the Beguine movement, putting them under scrutiny for heresy. Time and again the Inquisition pursued them until the climax of the attacks came on the Beguines accusing them of unauthorized and excessive pursuit of the apostolic life, declared at the ecumenical Council of Vienne (1311–1312) with the decree *Cum de Quibusdam Mulieribus*, issued by Pope Clement V with the approval of the council. It demonstrated the kind of hostility that these women encountered when they ventured into affairs considered beyond their reach:

> We have been told that certain women commonly called Beguines, afflicted by a kind of madness discuss the Holy Trinity and the divine essence, and express opinions on matters of faith and sacraments contrary to the catholic faith, deceiving many simple people. Since these women promise no obedience to anyone and do not renounce their property or profess an approved Rule, they are certainly not "religious" although they wear a habit and are associated with such religious orders as they find congenial …. We have therefore decided and decreed with

[18]Quoted from Caroline Walker Bynum in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 75.

[19]Quoted from Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 167.

> the approval of the Council that their way of life is to be permanently forbidden and altogether excluded from the Church of God.[20]

According to Peters,

> [There was an unspoken] declaration that was at least mildly suggestive of the male fear of female sexuality that was characteristic of the time. The female population greatly outnumbered males, due to the hazardous effects of wars, crusades, feuds, and other mostly male endeavors. Viewed as a surplus commodity, paltry value was placed upon female life and welfare. Women banded together for mutual support, security and protection, and they would not allow themselves to be excluded from expressions of religious opportunity that permeated their society.[21]

The Middle Ages saw the proliferation of women who decided to unite themselves in a way not seen before. The Beguines seemed unafraid to confront both the political and religious authorities of their times. They were dedicated and convinced of their call from God and their mission to pray, work, and serve. Many Beguines felt drawn to the mystical life and they spearheaded a new mysticism. Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), a Benedictine abbess of male and female communities of monks in the twelfth century, and whose popularity rose at the end of the 20th and into the 21st century, "issued the opinion that the decadent society and church of her time were the result of masculine weakness of a kind that must be overcome through the agency of women of integrity. This, she said, 'was the *tempus muliebre*, the era of woman.'"[22] Such was the case specifically in the Low Countries of Europe.

The Inquisition reached its highest level of cruelty toward women with the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, translated as *Hammer of Witches*, a treatise on the prosecution of witches written in 1486 by

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[20]R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1970), 330.

[21]Peters, "The Beguines: Feminine Piety Derailed," 37–38.

[22]Peters, "The Beguines: Feminine Piety Derailed," 38.

two Dominican monks, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. Edo Nyland (*The Witch Burnings: Holocaust Without Equal*) said that the two monks "assembled many fairy tales and magic stories, nightmares, hearsay, confessions and accusations and put this all together as factual information in what became the handbook for the witch hunters, examiners, torturers and executioners"[23] of the Inquisition.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* is arguably one of the most infamous books ever written, due primarily to the position it was given during the Middle Ages. It served as a guidebook for inquisitors and was designed to aid them in the identification, prosecution, and dispatching of witches. The authors of the *Malleus* addressed those voices in no uncertain terms, stating that "Whether the Belief that there are such Beings as Witches is so Essential a Part of the Catholic Faith that Obstinacy to maintain the Opposite Opinion manifestly savors of Heresy." Estimates of the death toll during the Inquisition worldwide range from 600,000 to as high as 9,000,000 (over its 250-year long course); either figure is a chilling number when one realizes that nearly all of the accused were women, and consisted primarily of outcasts and other suspicious persons such as old women, midwives, Jews, poets, and gypsies. Anyone who did not fit as a pious *Christian* within the contemporary view was suspect, and easily branded as a "witch"—usually to devastating effect.[24]

This handbook was the standard against which people (mostly women) were tested to see if they were witches. Based on the *Malleus Maleficarum,* hundreds of women were tortured and burned at the stake for supposedly being witches. The Dominican authors said of women:

> … a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men … since women are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come under the spell of witchcraft. For as regards intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature than men …. But the natural reason is

[23]Edo Nyland, *The Witch Burnings—Holocaust Without Equal* (1997). http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/cienciareal/cienciareal12.htm.

[24]Nyland, *The Witch Burnings—Holocaust Without Equal.*

> that she is more carnal than a man as it is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib from the breast which bent as it were in a contrary direction of man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives … and all this is indicated by the etymology of the word, for Femina comes from Fe [meaning "faith"] and Minus [meaning "less"], since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith. Therefore, a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to adjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft.[25]

They assumed that women were naturally of "less faith," and cited the etymology of the word "femina" (Latin for "female") and said that "fe" meant "faith" and "mina" meant "less."[26] This was a very skewed judgment and it shows plain ignorance. They seemed to be unaware of the fact that "femina" actually comes from the Latin word "fellare," which means "to suckle."

When Pope Clement V, following the recommendation of the Council of Vienna in the early 14th century, declared in no uncertain terms that the Beguines were forbidden to live their way of life, several groups continued to do so. But the horrors of the Inquisition, in its relentless pursuit of witchcraft and in the stamping out of heretics, deterred many women from pursuing the Beguines' lifestyle. This is one of the reasons that led to their decline. Nevertheless, some Beguines continued in defiance of the institutional Church.

It should be stated here that four years after the publication of the "handbook," the Inquisition finally condemned Kramer and Sprenger for their excessive pronouncements on witchcraft and found their conclusions to have very little substance. Unfortunately, the damage had been done and their unfounded, sometimes bizarre, summation on how to discern the elements of witchcraft lingered like a pall over European society up to the 19th century.

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[25]Quoted by Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 170. Taken from J. Sprenger & H. Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London: Pushkin Press, 1948), pt. 1, q. 6.

[26]Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 170.

The New Mysticism of the Beguines

The Beguines opened new pathways in the field of mysticism. The giants of Beguine mysticism were Hadewijch (ca. early to mid-thirteenth century), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1212–1281/1301), and Marguerite Porete (1250–1310). They express something bold and refreshing in the manner of their relationship with the Divinity, specifically concerning the "God" beyond God—that is to say, the "Godhead" that cannot be known beyond the "God" that we can somehow describe and comprehend, albeit in a faltering manner. They brought a new freedom concerning the dynamisms of the body and psyche in their mystical interactions with the Godhead. It is possible that the relative freedom of their lifestyle also gave them the audacity to bring this freedom into their intimacies with the Godhead, and into the way in which they expressed it. Yes, they picked up on the notions of "courtly love" as symbolized by the scriptural *Song of Songs* and which were typical of their era, but they traverse beyond that and break boundaries along the way. Each one expanded the space where they experience the Godhead for brief or protracted moments, although each in different way. Thus, it is worth the effort to dig a little deeper into each one's contribution because they do have something to say to 21st century spirituality.

Hadewijch of Antwerp

The identity of Hadewijch is clouded with uncertainty. Among the 111 pious women on record with the name Hadewijch in the 12th and 13th centuries, medieval scholars are of the opinion that Hadewijch, the mystic author, is a Beguine, Flemish, and from a noble class. Based on her writings, her education was quite extensive for a woman of that era.

> Hadewijch, whose works are considered to be the earliest vernacular prose in the Low Countries, wrote thirty-one letters, forty-five poems in stanzas, fourteen visions, and sixteen poems in couplets. She is familiar with the Latin language, rules of rhetoric, numerology,

> Ptolemaic astronomy, many of the Church fathers, and with most of the canonical twelfth-century writers.[27]

She lived around the area of Antwerp. Her letters, poems, and accounting of her visions indicate a high level in the mystical life and a tremendous ability to express her spiritual experiences in a language that is complex but most eloquent. Hadewijch also appears to be the leader of a Beguine community. Over time, however, her standards and uncompromising attitude toward the Beguines' way of life turned her community against her. There is also the possibility that jealousy played a part in her demise—medieval scholars surmise that some of her sisters were envious of her special mystical gifts. Whatever the circumstances may be, things escalated until members of her community undermined her authority and exiled her. Moreover, they spread terrible rumors about her so that the rest of society refused to take her in. This elimination of Hadewijch from her community is all the more tragic because at that time, a woman alone is *de facto* ostracized from society. It is simply not acceptable and a woman who lived alone led to accusations of witchcraft or an immoral life-style. From her letters and poems, we infer that she probably died taking care of the sick, perhaps lepers, while continuing to write.

With regard to her mysticism, Hadewijch was initiated early. "Since I was ten years old," described Hadewijch,

> I have been so overwhelmed by intense love I should have died during the first two years when I began this, if God had not given me other forms of strength than people ordinarily receive, and if he had not renewed my nature with his own Being.[28]

Stoner believes that "with this sanction—even compulsion—from God Himself," Hadewijch, and later Mechthild of Magdeburg (who was of the same genre of Beguine mysticism), were "able to disregard and

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[27]Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 180.

[28]Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B., ed. Richard J. Payne (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 69 (Letter 11).

transcend the misogynist ideology propounded by male clerics."[29] They acted against all institutional odds, proof enough of how powerful the commitment of these two Beguine leaders was to their understanding of God as "minne"—Love with all its profound and incomprehensible meanings. Paul Mommaers, in the Preface to *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, confirms that, of the two, "Hadewijch … is undoubtedly the most important exponent of love mysticism and one of the loftiest figures in Western mystical tradition."

Mommaers explains that "the most striking hallmark of love mysticism" that sprang forth in the second half of the twelfth century

> is its strongly emotional and ecstatic character. The touch of Love also throws the minds and senses of these persons into commotion, so violent indeed that all sorts of psychosomatic phenomena arise from it. And it seems that the experience of oneness and Love must go hand in hand with a psychological withdrawal from self that usually finds its reaction in visions.[30]

Vision 7 of Hadewijch reads thus:

> On a certain Pentecost Sunday I had a vision at dawn … my heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire and, as often occurred with me, such madness and fear beset my mind that it seems to me that if I did not content my Beloved, and my Beloved did not fulfill my desire, dying I must go mad, and going mad I must die. On that day my mind was beset so fearfully and so painfully by desirous love that all my separate limbs threatened to break, and all my separate veins were in travail.[31]

Despite the authenticity of this ecstasy, both McGinn and Mommaers emphasize that Hadewijch did not see ecstasies as the object of her spiritual life. Mommaers continues: "what she principally wants to make clear is that her attraction for 'fruitive being-one' [a term from Hadewijch] is a sign of non-full-growness, and that in mysticism what

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[29]Stoner, http://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/beguine1.htm.

[30]Paul Mommaers, Preface, in Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, xiii.

[31]Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 280.

matters is so to grow up that one is enabled to live wholly other aspects of the being-one with God."[32] In fact, Hadewijch deems that one can have a deeply mystical life without having such ecstatic experiences, and even more central is her experience of "violent longing" (PS 7, 60) for "being-one" with the God beyond God. As she says in Vision 1, she knows quite well that she has to mature spiritually: "And that desire which I had inwardly was to be one with God in fruition. For this I was still too childish and too little grown-up."[33]

From a historical perspective, perhaps the reason why her works and her name were buried and practically forgotten for about four hundred years was because she was a Beguine and because she was exiled from her Beguine community. As a matter of fact, even in her own era it was only because of John Ruusbroec, the mystic and writer, and his disciples who admired her and her works that she was known in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was not until 1838 that Hadewijch was rediscovered in Brussels by several researchers of medieval figures. Thus, it seems that now is truly the right time to bring forth her richness.

"Minne," translated as "Love," is the central theme and ultimate value of Hadewijch's spirituality and lived experience. The word "love" in English, however, does not capture the meaning of "minne" as she perceived it. Throughout her poems, letters, and visions, she mentions at least seven names or works of "minne"/"Minne" or love/Love. Maturing in "minne," love, means growing toward "being one" with the Godhead beyond God who is the *being* of "Minne." In her *Poems in Couplets* 16, entitled *Love's Seven Names*, she lists "minne's" names or works: "chain," "light," "living coal," "fire," "dew," "living spring," and "hell."

"Love is truly a 'chain,' because she binds and grasps everything in her power. … For Love, midway, withdraws consolation. … I think

[32]Mommaers, Preface, in Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, xiv.

[33]Mommaers, Preface, in Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, xxi.

I shall die of pain" (PC 16, 15–24). The "chain" pulls her in through consolation. She knows, however, that consolation will dissolve, for soon the "light" of "love" shows us the truth in us that is not "love." But "Love" remains a "chain" that binds her to God in spite of this negative dark side. As the poem continues, "Love" is "light" that reveals everything in us that is not "Love," so that "Love principally condemns us" (PC 16, 53–54).

The third and fourth names flow from the first two. "Love" is, then, a "living coal" and "fire." Hadewijch says that "Minne" sets us "aflame" this way:

> It makes the proud man timid …
> It places the pauper in a kingdom …
> until it comes back again to the fire …
> Burns to death, engulfs and consumes …
> … She burns to death
> Good fortune, success and adversity:
> All manner of being are the same to fire.
> Someone we love or someone we hate, refusal or desire,
> Winning or forfeits, convenience or hindrance,
> Gain or loss, honor or shame …
> This Fire makes no distinction. (PC 16:72, 75, 83–85, 87–89, 94–96, 99)

When "fire" consumes, it turns everything into itself and then to ashes. The person usually experiences a sense of loss as though nothing matters anymore. Mystics, whether they are Buddhists, Hindus, Sufis, Christians, or from other religions or philosophies, refer to this as a state of "indifference." Once the individual has let go of everything, all that remains is nothing and from there comes a consciousness that is surrendered to the One Consciousness. The illusions of our small human perceptions are thus dissipated by the sun of an impenetrable Reality that goes by many different names.

Hadewijch used daring and very uncomfortable language. This was often unnerving to the people of her own time, and even to those in the present, when she described the human as "being one" with the Divine mystery. She saw the energy of "minne" in the universe, in human beings, and in "Minne," i.e., Divine Love in the Trinitarian Godhead. For example, she portrayed God's "Love" as an intimate "kiss," or

that which "condemns," or as "hell." Thus, the 5th name of Love is "dew"; it is our "kiss" with God. She expresses it as sensually ecstatic. It is the same "kiss" of the unplumbed forces within the Godhead:

> Love drinks in these kisses and tastes them to the end.
> As soon as Love thus touches the soul,
> She eats its flesh and drinks its blood. …
> To the indivisible kiss—That same kiss which fully unites
> The Three Persons in one sole Being. (PC 16, 115–116, p. 355)

From that "kiss" comes the 6th name of "minne," a "living spring": "This flowing forth and this reflux of one into the other, and this growth in God, surpasses mind and understanding" (PC 16, 129–131). She saw God as eternal movement, flowing in and out of us in an endless flow, like water that rises, turns, returns, and jets into the sky in an artisan well.

"Hell is the seventh name of this Love wherein I suffer" (PC 16, 150). Why is Love "hell" even as it is experienced simultaneously as a "living spring"? The Beguine expounds:

> Forever to be in unrest,
> Forever assault and new persecution;
> To be wholly devoured and engulfed
> In her unfathomable essence,
> …
> In the deep, insurmountable darkness of Love.
> This outdoes the torments of hell. (PC 16:158–165)

Those of us who have not reached this intimacy with the Godhead of "Love" cannot understand what this experience is. But …

> He who knows Love and her comings and goings
> Has experienced and can understand. (PC 16, 165–166)

Her spirituality expands as she says, in Vision 1 (325), "live as Man"—that is to say, live the full humanity just as Jesus did. In Vision 14 (155), she gives the reason why: "in order that I might taste Man and God in one knowledge." Mommaers summarizes what this "one knowledge" is:

> The being-one with God demands of man that he is man; the experience must not, exclusively or by preference, aim at the Godhead; it must also—at the same time—be able to taste everything that belongs to the concrete, disconcerting, human Humanity.[34]

In modern idiom, we must be totally human and totally divine in order to be in "being one" in the Godhead. After all, as Ruusbroec quotes Hadewijch, "we all wish to be god with God."[35]

Besides the seven names of "minne"/"Minne," the most significant spiritual insights of Hadewijch focus around the following:

- Jacob conquers God (L 12: 174)
- Conquer me that I may conquer you,
- In your unconquered power. (PS 19: 53)
- The Rhythm of the Trinity (L 17)
- Unfaith (V 13: 226–234; L 8: 27–71; PC 10: 87–102)
- The Abyss (L 18)

Together these images create a perfect storm where the soul is absolutely engulfed in the Godhead. The novice state is over in the spiritual growth of the soul. After the experience of consolation, it is time for the "battle with God" (Gen. 32: 22–32) as in the story of Jacob wrestling with God, which Hadewijch is prone to refer to. Just as Jacob spends the entire night in combat with God on the day before he goes to battle with Esau over their father's blessing, so does every human consciousness that lives in God's presence do battle with God. In the words of Hadewijch, the battle goes on as "chain," "light," "living coal," "fire," "dew," "living spring," and "hell." But, just as Jacob emerged the next morning, so does the person. Jacob called the place Peniel because he said, "I have seen God face to face and survived." From that day on, his name was changed to "Israel," which means "he that struggled with God." For Hadewijch, each of us must be in mystic conflict with forces both inside and outside ourselves.

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[34]Mommaers, Preface, in Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, xxiii.

[35]Hadewijch of Antwerp, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 16.

Like Jacob, however, we will emerge victorious. Hadewijch thus uses poetry in the language of war. She says, speaking to God, "conquer me that I may conquer you." She dares to say that the human person will conquer God after God has conquered the person.

Hadewijch is very realistic. She knows that while these battles are personal within the self, there are also sufferings inflicted by society from the outside, such as in the way she suffered eviction from her community and from society. Just as Jacob came out of the battle with God with a "limp," so will the individual who struggles with "minne" bear the scars of combat. The "limp" in the scriptural text is a sign that Jacob is wounded by God, and the message is that God wants us as much as we want God. In fact, we cannot escape God. If the soul talks about things within itself, that is God, and if the soul talks of things outside itself, then that is God, too. Hadewijch makes "four paradoxes of the divine nature … based on the Trinitarian hymn 'Alpha et Omega, magne Deus,' ascribed both to Abelard and to Hildebert of Lavardin."[36]

> Above all things, below all things;
> Outside all things, within all things;
> Within all things, but not included;
> Outside all things, but not excluded;
> Above all things, not elevated;
> Below all things, not subjugated.[37]

From Jacob's journey-battle, Hadewijch speaks of the movement into the "rhythm of the Trinity" of the Godhead. Her presentation of the Trinity is the Godhead in constant movement: "He rests in nothing but the tempestuous nature of his profusely overflowing flood which flows back and forth over all" (L 22, 252–255).[38] Here she says that "God's countenance is invisible for 'those who have never tasted human and divine love in one being,' the flowing out and back of all things in

[36]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 212.

[37]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 212.

[38]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 213.

God" (V 14, 102–108).[39] She employs the sensually provocative word "taste." Although God is "invisible," we can "taste" both "human and divine love in one being." It seems almost contradictory that God who is unknowable and invisible can be "tasted."

The eternal movement in God is like a spinning "disk" in a "whirlpool" where Hadewijch is "swallowed up." In Vision 12, she says:

> And in that very instant, I saw myself received in union by the One who sat there in the whirlpool upon the circling disk, and there I became one with him in the certainty of union … In that depth I saw myself swallowed up …. (V 12: 187–192, 206)

This, however, brings the discussion to "one of the most original and difficult aspects of her mystical teaching,"[40] that of "unfaith." McGinn explains that "unfaith" is a "mysterious state" that

> occurs when the soul's frustrated desire passes beyond humility and knowledge to a consciousness in which she ceases to believe in the faithfulness of minne. This indifference to, even hatred of, love's consolation allows her to engage in a far deeper struggle with love and love's own grounds. "Abandoning minne for the sake of minne compels minne to surrender herself to the soul."[41]

Hadewijch writes:

> They called continually for fruition and did not believe in the love of their Beloved; it rather appeared to them that they alone were loving and that love did not help them. Unfaith made them so deep that they wholly engulfed minne and dared to fight her with sweet and bitter. (V 13, 226–234) …
>
> The fruition overcame me as before, and I sank into the fathomless depth and came out of the spirit in that hour—of which one can never speak. (V 13, 319–323)

At this stage, the individual has ventured into the deep forest of the "Cloud of Unknowing." It is the beginning of the "dark night of

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[39]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 210–211.

[40]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 209.

[41]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 209.

the soul." This is the place where all the old consolations and "feeling good" sentiments are gone, and where the individual now falls into the abyss of the Godhead. It is like having no gravity. The soul is floating without any foothold anywhere. Many come to the point where the individual does not care about anything anymore. In modern psychoanalysis, it might seem like clinical depression, but actually it is not. Although, let me be clear, clinical depression is not the "dark night" in mystical terms. Everything in the past that gave meaning and purpose has become dry. The individual must now come face to face with who they really are and where they feel "indifferent" while, at the same time, being totally given to conditional love or "minne." At this point, however, God, as the soul has known "God," breaks out of all our human imagery. In fact, it is the entrance into the "Cloud of Unknowing," as it is called by the anonymous monk of the late 14th century, author of the book of the same title.

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Mechthild of Magdeburg—little is known of her except through her writing. Not much of her personal history has come down to us, although we know that she was probably born in 1208, that her divine revelations began at the early age of 12 years old, and that in her early 20's she fled to Magdeburg to become a Beguine. Like Hadewijch, she played an authoritative position in the community and she wrote in the vernacular, Middle Low German (although the originals have been lost and only translations are extant). Hadewijch seemed to have written for her community while Mechthild addressed both her Beguine community and all "friends of God."[42] Most importantly, Mechthild, as Hadewijch, wrote of "minne" in the realm of "courtly love," and of the power movement in the ineffable Trinitarian Godhead where we should all dwell. Mechthild was also one of the great mystics of the 13th century, and, in the same light as Hadewijch, she saw herself as a messenger of God.

[42]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 222–224.

In the Middle Ages, visions are referred to as "showings." When individuals such as Hadewijch, Angela of Foligno, and Julian of Norwich speak of "showing," they are speaking of visualizations, images or symbols, and words that take over them, and they experience God communicating with them in any or all of these forms. According to McGinn, there are three major images in Mechthild, each with its own content, as found in *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*: ""flowing' (vliessen), 'courting' or 'playing at love' (minnespielen), and 'sinking' (sinken)."[43]

The image of "flowing" is very much in keeping with the Platonic paradigm of the First Principle—that from which all things come forth and then return to. Mechthild writes:

> I shall greet (gruos) the sublimity … and the wondrous oneness of the Holy Trinity. Out of it has flowed forth immaculate all that was, that is, that ever shall be. There I must one day enter again. How shall that happen? I must crawl back, for I am sinful. … I must fly with the feathers of doves. … I must soar in all things above myself. When I am utterly spent, then I shall enter. (FL 7:25 [275, 2–120])

Mechthild believed in the pre-existence of the soul, that it first existed in the Trinity. This belief did not go well with many Church officials. Her image was that we dwell in the Trinity and when the Godhead can no longer hold us back, we burst into reality here on earth: "When God could no longer hold himself within, he created the soul and gave himself to her as her own from the greatest love" (FL 1:22 [18:35–40]).[44] She says later on that the entire person, body and soul, pre-existed in the Creator since eternity (paraphrase of FL 3:9 [87:40–49]).[45]

Mechthild does not use the term "minne" as often as Hadewijch does, but she does take it much further in the sexuality of her images. The second flowing image of Mechthild is the "Playing (and Leaving)

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[43]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 231.

[44]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 233.

[45]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 432 (notes).

the Game of Love." In *Flowing Light*, she says, "Just when the game is at its best, one has to leave it" (1:2). Mechthild personifies "minne" as Lady Love, Lady Knowledge who says to her, "you are an eager bride in your and God's love-bed," and Lady Contemplation. Mechthild often becomes erotic in her book of experiences:

> Him shall I, the least of souls, take in my arms, eat him and drink him and have my way with him. … No matter how high he dwells above me, his Godhead shall never be so distant that I cannot constantly entwine my limbs with him. And so I shall never cool off. (FL 2:22 [55:16–56:22])[46]

And in *Flowing Light* (5:25), God responds in like manner:

> I cannot be completely intimate with her unless she is willing to lay herself in utter repose and nakedness in my divine arms, so that I can play with her. For it was for this that I surrendered myself into her power … and she shall ever more in soul and body soar about and play to her heart's content in my Holy Trinity and drink herself full like a fish in the sea.[47]

Although other mystics, even male ones, use eroticism, it is Mechthild who is premier in this language of sexuality, taking it as far as suggesting sexual intercourse with God. But to stop there would be to underestimate the depth of Mechthild's spirituality. She is clear that as wonderful as it is, insinuating an orgasmic union, it is not the goal, and she knows the "sinking" experience that follows these physical heights. She speaks of the stage of "estrangement" which seems similar to Hadewijch's experience of "unfaith" or to what John of the Cross refers to as "the dark night of the soul." McGinn describes it as such: "But the closest form of union with God in this life, as paradoxical as it may seem, will be through imitating God and Christ in 'flowing down,' or 'sinking' away from ecstasy into pain, humility, and even into estrangement from God." In Mechthild's words, "If you want to

[46]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 433 (notes).

[47]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 236.

have love, you must leave love" (FL 2:23 [58:55–56]).[48] She personifies this loss as Lady Estrangement:

> After this came Constant Estrangement from God and enveloped my soul so completely that the blessed soul said, "Welcome, very blessed Estrangement. Fortunate am I that I was born—that you, Lady, shall now be my chamber-maid, for you bring me unusual joy and incomprehensible marvels and unbearable delight as well. But, Lord, you should take delight from me and let me have Estrangement from you." (FL 4:12 [125:65–69])[49]

This is not the joyful delight of the senses but the feeling of losing intimacy with God, of entering into the great darkness; she knows how close she has become to the Godhead that is totally unknowable and unfathomable.

It is a tragic historical fact but, as Stoner relates,

> all Beghards and Beguines alike were condemned as heretics, excommunicated, and outlawed. Their property was taken to serve for pious purposes, for the support of the inquisitors, or for repairing city walls and roads. Between 1366 and 1378 remorseless persecution raged against them throughout Germany; but even then they found advocates, especially among the secular magistrates, and Gregory XI was finally prevailed upon to repeat the distinction between orthodox and heretical Beguines and Beghards, and to tolerate the former.[50]

While Hadewijch was exiled from her community for her uncompromising ways, Mechthild fell under persecution by Church magistrates, and she was dogged throughout her career by Dominican

[48]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 240.

[49]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 435 (notes).

[50]*The Beguines and Beghards* from Christian Classics Ethereal Library at Calvin College, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc6.iii.xii.vi.html?highlight=beguines#highlight and http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc5.ii.xii.vi.html?highlight=beguines#highlight.

friars who accused her of heresy.[51] But she was not afraid to take them on and denounce immoral clerics and politicians as "goats" and "Pharisees." Like Hadewijch, Mechthild stood firm in her position as God's intended mouthpiece, and appealed to Him directly for protection:

> I was warned about this book and told by many that it should not be preserved, but rather thrown to the flames. Then I did what from childhood I have done when trouble overcame me: I betook myself to prayer. … "Lord, now I am troubled: Must I walk uncomforted for Thy Glory?"[52]

Stoner relates that in "the end, however, Mechthild's resolve buckled; at the age of sixty-two, she fled to the monastery at Helfta, a center of German piety." The two great mystics, Hadewijch and Mechthild,

> with their powerful pens and original minds, appear to have internalized very few constraining attitudes toward their own femaleness, they were not able to withstand the harassment of the male-dominated Church. As the sphere of self-determination for pious laywomen narrowed to the point of imperceptibility, Mechthild's retreat to conventual life was typical of many Beguines' destinies.[53]

Marguerite Porete

Among the three major Benguine mystics, it is the Northern Frenchwoman, Marguerite Porete, who paid the price for her beliefs with her life. McGinn asserts that she challenged her contemporaries and still does so for us even today. He says that she was "bold and uncompromising" in her spirituality which finally led to her execution

[51]Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 237.

[52]Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, 30.

[53]Stoner, *Sisters Between Gender and the Medieval Beguines*, 31.

as a heretic on June 1, 1310.[54] But Marguerite's book, *The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls and Those Who Remain Only in Will and Desire of Love*, came back into the mainstream only in the second half of the 20th century, together with many other forgotten mystics. The return of her book to the discourse on mysticism spurred a debate—are some of her teachings heretical or not?

There is a great deal of mystery and consequent ambiguity about the personal lives of the three major Beguines: Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Marguerite. But it is the French mystic who draws the most disagreement. The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to find certitude, for that is impossible; rather, it is to reveal the nature of her work that brought down the condemnation of the Inquisition upon her. The essential teaching of *The Mirror* is thus the most critical and appropriate to this research. Marguerite, along with Hadewijch and Mechthild, blazed a trail which the institutional Church barred others from following. What was it that made authority figures so discombobulated?

The majority of present knowledge about Marguerite is based on the documents of her trial and studies of her book. What most scholars agree upon is

- that a Frenchwoman, Marguerite Porete, wrote *The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Souls and Those Who Remain Only in Will and Desire of Love* and …
- that she took on the life of a Beguine in some form, either as a traveling mendicant or as a leader in a Beguine community, or perhaps both in sequence;
- that she was supported by some clergy and theologians who came to her defense;
- that her mysticism was apophatic and therefore quite incomprehensible to many;
- that she spoke up against Church officials without fear of reprisal;

[54]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 244.

- that she was brought to trial by the Inquisition and sentenced to death as a heretic;
- that she did not speak during her imprisonment and even to her death;
- and that the high level of her articulation speaks of a very solid education and so she must have belonged to the upper class of society.

In her writing, she says that some Beguines were also attacking her. McGinn is of the opinion that Marguerite was probably referring to Beguines who were "enclosed" (cloistered) and who were very uneasy with her mendicant and wandering style of life.

Marguerite's book was first published in 1290. Her inquisitors condemned the book probably between 1296 and 1306, and she was forced to witness the burning of her book in front of Bishop Guy II of Cambrai. In 1308, however, she was arrested for continuing to distribute the text. The Dominican Inquisitor of Paris, William Hubert, called in twenty-one theologians to study fifteen of her propositions that were said to be heretical. She was brought before the tribunal but she refused to speak. She was accused, among other things, of "quietism," i.e., "indifference to the ecclesiastically mediated means of salvation."[55] Marguerite continued to remain silent and refused to recant. Thus, in 1310, she was burned at the stake and her book with her. But that was not the end, for her influence continued.

Among the mystical texts written in the vernacular in the Middle Ages, *The Mirror* was one of the most disseminated and most controversial texts of its time. In fact, a strong case can be made that it influenced and was used by the apophatic theologian Meister Echkart. *The Mirror* is not a book about Marguerite's visions. Also, she does not apologize or try to make excuses for being a woman—in point of fact, she takes a different approach from her contemporaries. So why the controversy and why did it provoke conflict?

[55]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 245.

The teachings that follow make up the essence of what Marguerite preached. She was caught in the middle of the struggle between the mystical and the institutional elements of Christianity, a tug-of-war that is felt to the present day. On one hand, it is the nature of institutions to set up organizing categories and definitions under which they function. Anything that radically opposes those categories is seen as a threat to the institutions' foundations. On the other hand, mysticism is innately about encounters, dialogues, the expanding of boundaries, and the melding of horizons in order to sift-out the pure essence of humanity's relationship with the Godhead. Mysticism is organic. It dwells in those who live it. Thus, it cannot be confined to dogmatic statements.

The Mirror creates a dialogue between personifications of the "Church," "Reason," "Love," "Truth," etc. God, too, is personified. Its central theme is annihilation, a mysticism that believes, like Mechthild, in pre-creative existence, where the soul must return to its source and "in this transition everything disappears." Marguerite sees this as the sixth and final stage of the soul; in this end of annihilation, everything no longer exists but is "into primordial Oneness with God."[56] In the words of Marguerite:

> Now this soul is in the stage of the first being, which is her being, and she has left behind three and has made of two one. But what is this one? This one is when the soul is placed again in the simple Godhead, who is one simple being of overflowing fruition, in fullness of knowledge, without feeling, above all thought.[57]

In her book, Marguerite pitted "Holy Church the Little" against "Holy Church the Great," as she called them. Here, "Reason" is the opponent of "Love." She confirms that "the ultimate meaning of Love is annihilation."[58] Marguerite thus confronts the institutional Church

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[56]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 251.

[57]Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 118.

[58]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 250.

and its "clergy as 'Reason's' servants, who are representative of those who will never be able to grasp the message that Love teaches the Simple Soul."[59] The book also has harsh yet truthful words for the "Sad Souls" who remain in the land of will and desire. They are not totally annihilated and are therefore not totally in God. They are, in Marguerite's terminology, at the fifth stage of annihilation and have not crossed over to the last stage. However, "Love" insists, through Marguerite, that "even the crass merchant souls who do nothing more than fulfill commandments, as well as the Lost and Sad Souls who have attained higher stages of love without reaching freedom, they will be saved."[60] She probably admits this not to contradict the doctrine of "Holy Church the Little," where "Reason" rules.

Marguerite speaks of "works-salvation" versus "free-salvation" which comes from faith alone. This proposition put her in deep heretical water with the Inquisition. Within her apophatic spirituality, she called God "Far Nigh." God is absently present in his "Far Nearness." Like John of the Cross a century later, "nothingness" is absolutely central to her teachings. The "Soul" says:

> Oh, Love, says this Soul, the meaning of what is said makes me nothing, and the nothingness of this alone has placed me in an abyss, below less than nothing … And the knowledge of my nothingness … has given me the all, and the nothingness of this all … has taken litany and prayer from me, so that I pray nothing.[61]

The Mirror has brought Marguerite to the state of annihilation where she desires to remain in her nothingness as she states:

> The opening of this book has made me see so clearly that it made me give back what is his and receive what is mine—that is, that he is … and I am not, and so it is indeed right that I do not possess myself. And the light of the opening of this book has made me find what is mine and to remain in it. Thus I have only as much being as he is able

[59]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 251.

[60]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 252.

[61]Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*, 108.

> to be of himself in me. Thus, what is right has rightly restored what is mine to me and nakedly shown that I do not exist.[62]

We Can Walk through the Portal in the 21st Century

Perhaps it is time to bring back the mystical images and bold practices of the Beguines. Since the Age of the Enlightenment, Christian spirituality has become too intellectual, rationally defining our beliefs in so many theological frameworks. Perhaps we were shifting away from emotionally-driven devotions to the crucified Christ and the Mater Dolorosa so theologians moved to the intellect. The three Beguine mystics opened a portal which we can now walk through that is neither emotional nor intellectual.

Today we can look to the language of experimental science. Is it time to bring back to our spiritual life the essence of the Beguine spirituality and movement especially as exemplified by Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Marguerite? Maybe we are to explore, to have the audacity to abandon our inner life to chaos? Do we not need expression in movement and play in order to prepare us to fall into the consciousness of being … one that has respect for all living things and an appreciation for all the different cultures of the world? Within this three-dimensional world, what can we gain by giving free expression to bolder ways that are more inclusive of other religious approaches to the development of our inner life? Do we not need an all-encompassing spirituality in the 21st century?

In the onslaught of the digital age, where are people going with their spirituality in terms of how they want to practice their faith, prayer, service, and relationships in marriage? This clearly requires a great deal of research that is culture-based. But while there is a need to get hard data in order to be prescriptive, that is not the objective of this article. Looking at the lives of the three major Beguine mystics,

[62]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 251.

however, what do we see? Here are some markers that they can offer us in the 21st century which might throw some light on three areas: their free personal response, their confrontation with social and religious norms, and their daring in their contemplative life.

First, the Beguines were women who simply went out and did what they needed to do in order to fulfill what they believed was right for them. The three major mystics were among the bravest. The Beguines did not wait for a leader and neither did they join a movement, yet they sprung spontaneously in many different places. There is no solid evidence that the three even read the others' works. No one rallied or called them to action; rather, they listened to their inner forces and acted on them. Yes, there was chaos in the process, but there was also a great deal of innovation and creativity that created a new mysticism for their age, one that could draw from emotion and intellectual theological ideas and then leave both behind to go to the "unknowing," the "unfaith," and the "nothingness."

Second, they were alert to their times but they were not afraid to go against the hierarchy, even if it meant being arrested and condemned to death. Fear did not dominate their actions, drawn as they were from the inner fire which the three mystics felt in the practice of meditation and in their good works. Yes, they were aware of the plight of those around them, and that is why they dedicated much of their energy towards helping the unfortunate. But they were not activists who simply responded to external circumstances, for it seemed that they were driven by their interior life in the face of the Godhead.

Third, they were not afraid of making society feel uncomfortable. They went against social norms and were willing to stand against the institutional Church. They went back to the Gospels and made the norms of Jesus their standard. For women today, the three Beguines opened wide the portal for the institutional Church to change its attitude toward women in general. Perhaps it is time for a new movement, one that is neither organized nor structured, where each woman in her own environment can take a stand no matter what the odds, just as the Beguines did. Whether it is about women being ordained as Catholic priests, or being given a greater role and more

authority in the structure and leadership of the institutional Church—is it time for women to insist?

Fourth, they were not afraid to allow the physical elements of their bodies to enter into their interaction with God. The concept of "minne"/love is an approach that might cause some reservation because there is a fear of delving into affectivity in our highly rational society. Our intellectual approach is just as detrimental as the overly indulgent emotional approach. Mechthild, therefore, talked of "play" and the "game of love" when speaking about her relationship with the Godhead; all three spoke of their interaction with the Godhead/Trinity in sexual and erotic terms, and did so without embarrassment. They seemed to have brought this notion into their contemplation.

Fifth, they were daring in their understanding of the spiritual stages, which included notions such as "unfaith," "estrangement," and "annihilation." Their entrance into the pathway of "nothingness" came before John of the Cross would discuss "nada" (nothing). Of course, there were mystics of the early Church who spoke in the language of their times, but these women were unashamed of the disturbance the use of these words might cause in their milieu. From the eroticism of their passion and love which they saw as an initial stage of interaction with the Godhead, they knew that they would be "sinking," as Mechthild describes it, into the "unfaith" of Hadewijch, into the abyss of "nothingness" where everything, in the terms of Marguerite Porete, is destroyed, where there is no mind, no emotion, no will, and no desire. We "disappear" into the Being of the Godhead.

Such words were provocative in their era. Today, however, with our deeper understanding of later mystics and of the avatars of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism, their language is most appropriate. In this sense, they open the portal of oneness with all religions and beliefs.

In the Middle Ages, the three great Beguine mystics were condemned and their works buried by the Church. Hadewijch was exiled from society, Mechtild bent to the male authorities of the Church and withdrew to a monastery, and Maguerite was executed by fire as a heretic by the Church. It has been a long time coming—800 years, but the winds have shifted. The lifestyle of the Beguines is ripe for

the 21st century. Perhaps the three Beguines might say to us today, using the words of Mechthild in her noted poem on the mystical life and works of love:

> You should love the nothing,
> You should flee the something,
> You should stand alone,
> You should go to no one.
> You should not be too busy
> And you should be free of all things.
> You should unbind the captives
> And compel the free. (FL 1:35)[63]

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[63]McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 243.

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Landas 28:1 (2014) 47–57

BUT YOU ARE THE GOD OF THE LOWLY, HELPER OF THE OPPRESSED

God in the Prayer of Judith (Jdt. 9:1–14)*

Helen R. Graham, M.M.

"What God is There?" (Chapters 1–7)

A Contest Between Gods (1–3)

The early chapters of the Book of Judith record the boast of "Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians … the Great King, the lord of the whole earth" (2:4–5), that he would "accomplish by [his] own hand" (2:12) the destruction and plunder of the lands of those who had refused to join in the war against [the unknown] King Arphaxad "in the great plain that is on the borders of Ragau" (1:5).

It is in the fourth chapter that we first meet the Israelites living in Bethulia who, upon hearing of the exploits of Holofernes (chief general of Nebuchadnezzar's army), were duly impressed and "greatly terrified at his approach" (4:2). They therefore "cried out to [their] God (cf. Exod. 2:23) with great fervor and humbled themselves with

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much fasting" (4:9). The reader is informed by the narrator, in a clear reference to the God of the Exodus, that "the Lord heard their prayers and had regard for their distress" (4:13; cf. Exod. 2:24–25, 37ff).

Ironically, Achior, "the leader of all the Ammonites" (55), issues a warning to Holofernes, expressed in good Deuteronomistic theology, that the history of the Israelite people shows that "their Lord and God will defend them, and [you] shall become the laughing stock of the whole world" (5:20–21; cf. Jdg. 2:11–23).

Displeased with Achior's "prophesy," Holofernes sets the terms of the contest with the question "What god is there except Nebuchadnezzar?" (6:2; cf. Deut. 32:39–40). He had thrown down the gauntlet.

The tension set up in the narrative—between Holofernes' claim that Nebuchadnezzar is to be worshiped as a god (3:8) and the narrator's assurance that Israel's God had heard the prayers of the people and "had regard for their distress" (4:13)—recalls the contest between the Yahwist prophet Elijah and the 450 prophets of the Ba'al in 1 Kings 18:21–40. Both Elijah and Judith pray to the God of Israel before confronting the enemy (1 Kgs. 18:36b–38; Jdt. 9:1–14).

Judith reproaches the elders of Bethulia, accusing them of "putting the Lord Almighty to the test" (Jdt. 8:13) and asserting that God has the freedom to choose to deliver the people "if it pleases him" (8:17).

Abandoned Because of Our Sins (4–7)

The general picture presented in Part I of the book is that of a small and powerless people seemingly abandoned by their god, and facing a great and powerful army whose king was being proposed as the only god before whom there was no other.

- It is a situation similar to that of the proto-Israelites in Egypt (Exod. 1:8–14).
- It also reflects the circumstances first faced by northern Israel while under attack from Assyria in the first quarter of the eighth century BCE (2 Kgs. 17:5–6),

and by Judah in the last quarter of the sixth century as the historical Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army entered the city of Jerusalem, destroyed its temple, and carried off its ruling class into exile in Babylon (2 Kgs. 24:10–16).

- It is also reflective of the situation faced by the Jewish people under the rule of King Antiochus IV during the Maccabean period (see 1 Macc. 1:20–40).

These first seven chapters act as a foil for the second half of the book (chapters 8–16) in which the lowly, weak, and helpless will be saved/vindicated by the God of Israel who will be victorious over the powerful military might of Nebuchadnezzar's army through "the hand of a woman." And it will be seen once again that Israel's God is "the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel" (9:14) in fidelity to the covenant commitment.

The narrator juxtaposes the concluding statement of the first part of the book ("they [the Bethulians] were in great misery" [7:32c; cf. Jdg. 2:15]) and the introduction of the heroine in the beginning of the second part ("now in those days Judith heard about these things" [8:1; cf. Jdg. 2:16]), thus signaling the role Judith is to play in the remainder of the book. As in the Book of Judges, where the phrase "and they were in great distress" (Jdg. 2:15) is immediately followed by the statement that "the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them" (v. 16), so Judith is introduced into the narrative immediately after the reference to their "great misery." Is the author suggesting that Judith is to play the role of "judge" (*shophēt*) or charismatic leader similar to the judges of old (in particular of Deborah)?

The God of Judith (Chapters 8–16)

A God Not to be Coerced (8:11–17)

In the most explicitly theological chapter of the book (chapter 8), Judith sets forth her theology in contrast to that of the leaders and

people of Bethulia. With a directness bordering on boldness, Judith speaks to Uzziah and the elders of Bethulia who had given God a time limit of five days to save them, after which they would surrender in order to save their own skins, even at the price of slavery.[1] Judith chides the people's leaders for putting God to the test (v. 12) and for trying "to bind the purposes of the Lord our God" (v. 16).[2] She says:

> You are putting the Lord Almighty to the test—but you will never know anything! You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, nor find out what a man is thinking; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? (v. 13b–14)

She speaks of the freedom of God to save or not to save as is God's wont. God has power to protect or destroy (see 8:15). God is radically free and is not to be threatened or cajoled.[3] God may send suffering as a test; such is not punishment (see Deut. 8:2–5, 16; Jgs. 2:22–23; Job 5:17–18; Tob. 12:14). Judith's radical monotheism[4] puts all in God's hands, for good or ill. According to Judith, the people are only to call upon God, trust God, and wait for God's deliverance if indeed it is God's good pleasure to deliver. She is confident, however, that God

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[1]Judith finds Uzziah's oath, by which he had promised to surrender the town to the enemy if God did not come to their help within five days (8:11; cf. v. 9), especially reprehensible. It is the time limit put on God rather than the idea of surrendering that provokes Judith's homily on the nature of faith in God (8:12–17).

[2]This is reminiscent of God's answer to Job out of the whirlwind (chapters 38 and 40) but, as J. C. Dancy remarks, Judith is "more explicit than Job in giving up the desire for detailed knowledge of God's plan and in relying instead on God's goodness" (J. C. Dancy, "Judith," in John Dancy, Wesley J. Fuerst, & R. J. Hammer, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: University Press, 1972], 99).

[3]There is a clear reference here to the LXX of Num. 23:19.

[4]I first heard the phrase "radical monotheism" from Prof. James A. Sanders (Union Theological Seminary, New York) in the summer of 1967 in an explanation of Amos 3:6b: "Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?" (RSV).

will work deliverance through her because the people have not fallen into the same sin as their ancestors, namely the worship of gods made with hands; because of this, they have reason to hope (8:20). But Judith's God will also hold them responsible for the desecration of the trust in God (8:21–23). Judith thus envisions a liberation to rank with the Exodus, a liberation that "will go down from generation to generation among the descendants" (8:32) of Israel.[5]

A God Who Scourges Those Who are Close (8:18–27)

Rather than tempt God by surrendering, Judith urges the Bethulians to give thanks to God, who is testing them as their ancestors were tested (cf. Gen. 22; 29). She refers to the testing of Abraham (Gen. 22), Isaac,[6] and Jacob (Gen. 29). She understands their situation not as punishment (since they did not do the thing that merits punishment, viz., idol worship or apostasy) but as discipline, for "the Lord scourges those who are close to him in order to admonish them" (Jdt. 8:27; see Prov. 3:12).

Judith's God is a God who educates through suffering, a God who chastises in order to admonish or test. Suffering is understood as pedagogy, as educative. In contrast to the wavering faith of the people, Judith exudes confidence; she is confident that "the Lord will deliver Israel by [her] hand" (8:33b).

God in the Prayer of Judith (9:1–14)

It is in her prayer, which contains the greatest concentration and variety of epithets for God, that we have access to her deepest

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[5]See Irene Nowell, "Judith," in Dianne Bergant & Robert Karris, eds., *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988), 851.

[6]The reference here is not clear. Cary Moore writes that "Isaac's 'testing' may have been his silent acquiescence to Abraham's intention to offer him as a human sacrifice (Gen. 22:9–15). Then again, as one reads the story of Isaac (Gen. 21–28), one might argue that Isaac's entire life was just one big test" (*Judith*, AB [Garden City: Doubleday, 1985], 183).

understanding of God. Judith, in the privacy of her rooftop tent (see 8:6, 36), "prostrated herself … [and] cried out to the Lord with a loud voice" (9:1). Judith also resorts to prayers of petition at several points in the narrative. Aside from her long prayer of petition in 9:2–14, she prays at each step in the process leading to Holofernes' decapitation (12:8; 13:4–5, 7) in order to petition God's help in what she is about to do. After her glorious victory over the enemy, she offers praise to God in thanksgiving for help given (13:14). Finally, her great Song of Victory (16:1b–17) brings the entire narrative to its conclusion. This sequence of lament/petition and praise punctuating the narrative at strategic points underlines a basic theological conviction of the book: that persistent prayer and unwavering fidelity to God's law is essential for victory.[7]

The prayer of Judith is one among a sizeable number of prayers from the period of early Judaism. Coming together informally or within more structured settings,[8] Jews recited hymns and prayers that became fixed only later in this period.[9] The "institution of fixed communal prayer" was a radical innovation of the Second Temple period, as J. Heinemann has shown. "Fixed prayer, in and of itself constituting the entirety of the divine service, was a startling innovation in the ancient world, which both Christianity and Islam inherited from Judaism."[10]

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[7]Norman Johnson, *Prayer in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series II (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1948), 7.

[8]Such as at the *h'burah* meals, the Synagogue, the *Bet Midrash*, and, in particular, the Temple. See James Charlesworth, "A Prolegomenon to a New Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers of the New Testament," in Geza Vermes & Jacob Neusner, eds., *Essays in Honor of Yigael Yadin* (Allanheld: Totwa, 1983), 265.

[9]Charlesworth, "A Prolegomenon to a New Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers of the New Testament," 265.

[10]Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns*, Studia Judaica, Band IX (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 14–15.

Very little knowledge about Jewish hymns, odes, and prayers that were composed during the period of early Judaism was available until the latter part of the 19th century, when only one Jewish hymnbook, the *Psalms of Solomon*, had as yet been recovered.[11] Several hymnbooks, however, have been either recognized or discovered since that time, such as the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers (in the *Apostolic Constitutions*)[12] and the *Hodayoth* (1QH).[13]

God of My Ancestor

Judith's prayer places her in continuity with tradition as she calls upon God as the God of her ancestor Simeon, "into whose hand you put a sword to take revenge" (9:2a). With this unique designation for God, Judith explicitly evokes the story of Simeon's avenging of the rape of his sister Dinah by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, in Genesis 34:1–31 (Jdt. 9:2–4). Her poetic summary of the biblical episode (vv. 2–4) forms part of the argument that she advances in her prayer.

The Book of Genesis condemns both Simeon and Levi for their trickery against the subsequent slaughter of the Shechemites (Gen. 34:20; cf. 49:5–7). But Judith rehabilitates Simeon in her reappropriation of the Genesis narrative as a metaphor of the present predicament of her people. Her equation of the rape of Dinah with the imminent siege of Bethulia is reinforced by the assonance between the name of the town and the Hebrew word for "virgin," *bethula*. Two other passages dealing with rape are also evoked by Judith's use of the phrase "it shall not be done" (9:2) from Genesis 34:7. The first comes

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[11]James Charlesworth, "Jewish Hymns, Odes, and Prayers (ca 167 BCE to 135 CE)," in George W. E. Nickelsburg & Robert A. Kraft, eds., *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 411.

[12]David Fiensy, "Prayers, Hellenistic Synagogal," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[13]Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus* Vol. 3, ed. & rev. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, & Martin Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 787.

at the end of the story of the unnamed concubine from Bethlehem (Jdg. 19:30). In the second instance, the phrase is spoken by Tamar, daughter of David, to her half-brother Amnon, who has managed to trap her in his bedroom through deception (2 Sam. 13:12).

The repetition of the phrase "it shall not be done" links these rape cases together and interprets them, against the background of the commandments of YHWH, as something that jeopardizes the covenant relationship between God and people.

Defender of Widows

Although the phrase "defender of widows" does not appear in Judith's prayer to describe the deity, the Book of Judith certainly intends to present her as making a special appeal to God under this ancient title: "O God, my God, hear me also—a widow" (9:4; see also 9:9; LXX Ps. 42:4). This appeal is consonant with the Deuteronomic characterization of God as one "who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the stranger, providing them food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18; see also Ps. 68:6 [:5 NRSV]; 146:9; Sir. 35:17).

Divine Warrior (9:7)

Judith evokes the archaic imagery of the Divine Warrior in both her prayer and Victory Song. In a statement reflecting the LXX of Exodus 15:3, she exclaims the following:

> They do not know
> that you are the Lord who crushes wars;
> the Lord is *your* name. (Jdt. 9:7; cf. 16:2; emphasis mine)

The third person *kyrios onoma auto* ("the Lord is his name") of the LXX has been changed to second person in line with the direct address characteristic of the entire prayer.

God of the Lowly (9:11)

Beginning with a chiastically arranged affirmation that God's "strength does not depend on numbers, nor [God's] might on the powerful" (see 1 Sam. 17:45–47; 2 Chr. 16:8–9; Jdg. 7:2), Judith

constructs a litany of ten divine titles that are divided into two by the words *nai*, *nai* (lit. "yes, yes").[14]

> But you are the God of the lowly,
> helper of the oppressed,
> upholder of the weak,
> protector of the forsaken,
> savior of those without hope.
> Please, please, God of my ancestor,
> God of the heritage of Israel,
> Lord of heaven and earth,
> Creator of the waters,
> King of all your creation,
> hear my prayer! (9:11–12)

The first group of five titles speaks variously of the God of the lowly as the one who helps, upholds, protects, and saves the oppressed. The words helper, protector, and savior (*boethos*, *skepastes*, and *soter*) also appear in the same order in LXX Exodus 15:2, demonstrating just how significant the influence of the LXX form of the Exodus passage was for the Book of Judith.

Tapeinoun, which is the frequent LXX translation for *'anah* in the Hebrew Bible, is the very first word we find in the Bible that is used to express oppression (see Gen. 15:13–14). Appropriately enough, *'anah*/*tapeinoun* is also the first word used in the Book of Exodus to describe the oppression suffered by the proto-Israelites, the descendants of Abraham in Exodus 1:11–12.

This exodus experience of oppression and liberation takes on a paradigmatic function in the tradition of Israel, and becomes operative in the ancient collection of laws in Exodus 20:22–23:33 known as the Book of the Covenant, in particular Exodus 22:21–24 (*NRSV* adapted); see also Ps. 94:5–8 (4–7 *NRSV*).[15]

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[14]Toni Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 70 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 91.

[15]Thomas Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Bible, the Reformation and Liberation Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 16.

The central image of God in Judith—the God of the lowly—draws its inspiration from this tradition. Hanks calls attention to three words for oppression in this brief passage from Exodus: *yanah*, *lahats*, and *'anah* (twice). "The relationship between poverty and oppression is made clear by the three common classes of poor and weak persons: immigrants, widows and orphans."[16]

The theme of God's strength in weakness is a motif from the holy war tradition. We find it, for example, in the story of Gideon (Jdg. 7:2) and also in the story of David and Goliath, a story that contains significant parallels with the story of Judith and Holofernes (1 Sam. 17:43–47). A third example from 2 Chronicles provides an apt commentary on the situation described in the Book of Judith (2 Chr. 16:8–9).

King of All Your Creation (9:12)

The second group of petitions directed to God as "God of my ancestor" and "God of the heritage of Israel" moves into creation language, as Judith requests God to hear her prayer as Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, and King of all creation. This creation language is picked up again in the second part of the victory hymn (16:14).

> Let all your creatures serve you,
> for you spoke,
> and they were made.
> You sent forth your spirit,
> and it formed them;
> there is none that can resist your voice.

This litany brings together the images of God as Savior and as Creator, a theological innovation usually accredited to the great theologian of the Exile, Deutero-Isaiah.[17]

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[16]Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World*, 16.

[17]See Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970).

God of All Power and Might (9:14)

Judith concludes her prayer with a reference to God as "the God of all power and might" who alone protects the people of Israel (9:14). This is one of the important ethical doctrines of the First Testament, but it is definitely not unique when compared with conceptions in neighboring cultures. The only real difference is that YHWH is considered to be the only protector of Israel.

Conclusion

Exemplifying the weak and the lowly in her own person, the widow Judith sets out for the camp of the enemy with absolutely no protection, save that of her faith in the God whom the tradition remembers as the one "who executes justice for the orphan and the widow" (Deut. 10:18). The God of Judith is manifest not in military might and power but in the faith and piety of a young (and seemingly) vulnerable widow through whose hand Holofernes and his entire army is effectively routed.

Landas 28:1 (2014) 59–89

LUKE'S GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Ambiguities and Challenges

Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M.

The gospel of Luke has been called a "gospel of the poor." It contains more references to the poor than the other gospels and gives particular importance to concern for the poor. The inaugural preaching of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth in Lk. 4:16–30 introduces the ministry of Jesus as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Lk. 4:18–19; cf. Is. 61:1–2; 58:6). Jesus is the one anointed and sent by God to proclaim good news to the poor (εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς). This characterization of the ministry of Jesus is echoed in Lk. 7:22 (par Mt. 11:5) which gives Jesus' reply to the question of the messengers of John the Baptist: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them (εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς)." These two texts highlight the poor as the recipients of Jesus' proclamation. This article focuses on the phrase εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς and argues that the summary of Jesus' ministry as "good news to the poor" is the key to interpreting Luke's texts on wealth and poverty, possessions, and renunciation of possessions. The first part of this article deals with Luke's use of εὐαγγελίζω and the second part with the meaning of πτωχός and the challenges of Luke's teaching on poverty and wealth.

"Proclaiming the Good News" in Luke-Acts[1]

The noun εὐαγγέλιον (gospel) does not appear in the gospel of Luke but is used twice in Acts (15:7; 20:24).[2] It is the verb εὐαγγελίζω which is characteristic of Luke's vocabulary (Lk. 10; Acts 15). A survey of the use of this word in Luke-Acts helps us to see its significance for Luke.[3]

In Luke's gospel, the verb appears four times as part of the narrative setting or summary (3:18; 8:1; 9:6; 20:1) and six times in direct speech (1:19; 2:10; 4:18, 43; 7:22; 16:16).[4] The verb εὐαγγελίζω is used in the

[1]This article assumes the narrative unity of Luke and Acts. For a recent discussion on this issue, see P. Walters, *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts*, SNTS MS 145 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); M. Bird, "The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion," *JSNT* 29/4 (2007): 424–448; P. Spencer, "The Unity of Luke-Acts: A Four-Bolted Hermeneutical Hinge," *CBR* 5/3 (2007): 341–366.

[2]It is used 4x in Matthew and 8x in Mark (1:1, 14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15). On several occasions, Luke changes the Markan formulation (Mk. 1:14; cf. Lk. 4:14–15; Mk. 10:29; cf. Lk. 18:29) or omits the word (Mk. 8:35; cf. Lk. 9:23) or the verse altogether (Mk. 13:10; cf. Lk. 21:13–14; Mk. 14:9; cf. Lk. 7:47). In Acts, the word εὐαγγέλιον appears on the lips of Peter and Paul. Peter speaks of "the word of the gospel," ὸ λόγος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (15:7), while Paul talks of the "gospel of God's grace," τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ (20:24).

[3]The Two-source hypothesis is assumed in this study. Luke's redaction is clear in Lk. 4:43; 9:6; 20:1 where Luke added the verb into the Markan texts. The same may be said of Lk. 3:18. Lk. 7:22 and 16:16 have parallels in Matthew but the word εὐαγγελίζειν is not used in Mt. 11:12–13. Lk. 1:19; 2:10; 4:18; 8:1 come from Luke.

[4]Viewed in its wider context, the texts where the word occurs are found in each major section of the gospel except in the Passion and Resurrection narratives.

Luke	εὐαγγελίζω
1:1–4	
1:5–2:52	1:19; 2:10
3:1–4:13	3:18

narrative texts to summarize the activity of Jesus (8:1; 20:1), John the Baptist (3:18), and the Twelve (9:6). Based on the immediate context of Lk. 3:18, John the Baptist's proclamation is about the coming of the Messiah (cf. 3:15–17). Lk. 9:6, on the other hand, shows that the Twelve act on the instruction of Jesus (9:2). They proclaim the good news and cure diseases. Jesus is thus the reference of the proclamation both of John the Baptist and the Twelve.

In Acts, the word is used three times in direct speech with Peter (in the address to Cornelius and his household [10:36]), Paul (in the speech in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia [13:32]), and Barnabas (along with Paul, at the speech in Lystra [14:15]) as the speakers. Acts 10:36 speaks of Jesus Christ as the one who proclaims the gospel of peace and states that its origin is God. In Acts 13:32, Paul proclaims the good news of the resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. In Acts 14:15, the good news of Barnabas and Paul is that the people turn to the living God. In these three instances, we find three groups of addressees of the proclamation of the Good News: the Jews, the God-fearers, and the Gentiles. As a summary or part of the narration, the word is used to summarize the activity of Peter and the apostles (5:42), the disciples who were scattered because of persecution (8:4), Philip (8:12, 25, 35, 40), converts from Cyprus and Cyrene (11:20), and Paul (13:32–33; 17:18) with Barnabas (14:7, 15, 21; 15:35) and with Timothy (16:10). The disciples proclaim the words of Jesus (8:25; 15:35) along with the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12; 28:31). Their proclamation includes the good news of Jesus' resurrection as the fulfillment of God's promises.

4:14–9:50	4:18; 4:43; cf. Mk. 1:38; 7:22 par Mt. 11:5; 8:1; 9:6; diff Mk. 6:12
9:51–19:28	16:16
19:29–21:38	20:1
22:1–23:56	
24:1–53	

From this brief survey, we can see that the use of εὐαγγελίζω in specific places of Luke-Acts is deliberate and serves to connect the mission of Jesus and that of his disciples and to convey the origin and progress of Christian proclamation.

"Good News" in Luke

As noted above, there are six instances of εὐαγγελίζω in direct speech in the gospel of Luke. In four of these, Jesus is the speaker who proclaims himself, his mission, and the kingdom of God (4:18, 43; 7:22; 16:16). The other two occurrences are found in the infancy narrative, where the angel is the one who proclaims the good news (1:19; 2:10). A brief examination of these texts reveals something of Luke's understanding of good news.

1. Lk. 4:18–19

Lk. 4:18–19 is part of the dramatic episode (4:16–30) which Luke composed to introduce the ministry of Jesus.[5] In this scene, Jesus reads aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Luke depicts Jesus proclaiming his identity and mission using the words of Isaiah the prophet. Luke thus illustrates how Jesus begins his ministry by announcing the Good News and shows the effective force of this proclamation through Jesus' own commentary: "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). Luke uses the Isaiah text to give the reader an insight into the mission of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." In this quotation from Isaiah 61:1–2, the second part of 61:2 is omitted and a text from Is. 58:6, "to let the

[5]Lk. 4:16–30 appears to be a free composition of Luke based on Mk. 1:14–15, 6:1–6, and Q (Lk. 7:22 par Mt. 11:4–5). See M. A. Co, "Reading the Isaiah Quotation in Luke 4:18–19 Intertextually," in *Announcing a Year of Favor of the Lord*, Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of CBAP (July 28–30, 2000), 33–45.

oppressed go free," is inserted before Is. 61:2a. In Lk. 4:19, the verb κηρύξαι is used instead of καλέσαι.[6] These changes affect the structure of the text.

4:18a	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me	4:18a	Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμε
b	because he has anointed me	b	οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με
c	to bring glad tidings to the poor	c	εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς,
d	He has sent me	d	ἀπέσταλκέν με,
eα	to proclaim liberty to captives	eα	κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν
eβ	and recovery of sight to the blind	eβ	καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,
f	to let the oppressed go free	f	ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,
4:19	and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.	4:19	κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.

The text may be divided into three main statements:

A. 4:18a "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"—introduction and main affirmation

B. 4:18bc "He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor"

C. 4:18d–19 "He has sent me to proclaim liberty … a year acceptable to the Lord"

Lk. 4:18a is the introductory and main idea that governs the whole text. The verse calls to mind the previous texts that mention Jesus' relationship to God and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:35). The Angel Gabriel whom God

[6]See Co, "Reading," 36.

sent to Mary (1:26ff) revealed to her the child's identity and mission (1:30–33, 35). Jesus "will be called the Son of the Most High," "holy," the "Son of God." "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:32b–33). His birth was announced to the shepherds by the angel who also proclaimed his messianic identity: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). Simeon called the child "salvation from God … a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel" (2:30–32). Through the notices of growth (2:39–40, 52) which describe Jesus' progress in strength, wisdom, and grace before God and people, Luke conveys that God has always been with Jesus. In Lk. 2:41–51, Luke illustrates Jesus' wisdom, understanding, and consciousness of the Father (2:46–49). While he is praying after his baptism, Jesus receives the Spirit and the revelation of his identity as God's beloved Son (3:21–22). Luke then describes Jesus returning from the Jordan as "full of the Spirit" and led by the Spirit in the wilderness (4:1). After his experience in the desert, overcoming all temptations, Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee (4:14). Lk. 4:16–30 is a high point in the narrative development of the revelation of Jesus' identity and mission.

The first words of Jesus are addressed to his parents and talk about the Father (2:49). Luke describes Jesus as praying after his baptism but allows the reader to hear only the voice of the Father and not Jesus' words (3:21–22). In the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert, Jesus confronts the devil with words from the Scriptures (Lk. 4:4; cf. Dt. 8:3; 4:8; cf. Dt. 6:13; 4:12; cf. Dt. 6:16). Here again in Lk. 4:18ff, Luke depicts Jesus reading aloud the words of Scripture. It is the declaration of the fulfillment of the Scriptures that comes from Jesus' own utterance (4:21). This is consistent with Luke's characterization of Jesus in the Emmaus story where Jesus interprets "in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (24:27). Jesus is the one who opens the Scriptures to the disciples and explains to them how these are fulfilled in him (24:32, 44–47).

Lk. 4:18b–19 contains a parallelism: 4:18bc and 4:18d–19. Lk. 4:18bc is governed by the main verb ἔχρισέν while 4:18d–19 by

ἀπέσταλκέν. Following the main verb in 4:18b is the infinitive in 4:18c, εὐαγγελίσασθαι. Lk. 4:18d–19 has the same structure. The main verb is followed by three infinitive phrases: κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν (4:18e), ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει (4:18f), and κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν (4:19). Ἔχρισέν με and ἀπέσταλκέν με are parallel. The series of infinitive phrases in 4:18e–19 parallel εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς. With the repetition of κηρύξαι and ἄφεσις, a double inclusion and concentric structure are formed. The first one has the two κηρύξαι phrases framing ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει which is the verse taken from Isa. 58:6 and inserted into this quotation. Highlighted in this structure is the freeing or liberation of the oppressed.

a **κηρύξαι** αἰχμαλώτοις **ἄφεσιν** καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,

b ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν **ἀφέσει**

a' **κηρύξαι** ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν

The second concentric structure consists of the framing of τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν by two phrases with the word ἄφεσις. In this structure, the recovery of sight is given importance. It would appear that κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν is to be seen also as a parallel to εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς and as encapsulating the proclamation in 4:18e–f.

From the parallelism and structure of the text, we can infer the following: a) Lk. 4:18e–19 elaborates the meaning of εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς; b) the anointing (4:18b) and the sending (4:18e) overlap in meaning which is related to Jesus' identity and authority (cf. Lk. 20:1–8); c) Lk. 4:19 incorporates the ideas in 4:18e–f; d) the meaning of "poor" (πτωχοί) is clarified by "captives" (αἰχμάλωτοί), "blind" (τυφλοί), and "oppressed" (τεθραυσμενοί); e) the good news is about release, freedom, liberation, and forgiveness, somehow evocative of the jubilee year.[7]

[7]See S. Ringe, *The Jubilee Proclamation in the Ministry and Teaching of Jesus: A Tradition-Critical Study in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, Ph.D. diss. (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1981), 61–69, quoted in R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* Vol. 1: *The Gospel According to Luke*

2. Lk. 7:22 (par Mt. 11:5)

The Isaiah prophecy is fulfilled in the person and effective proclamation of Jesus (Lk. 4:18–19, 21). The fulfillment of this prophecy in the ministry of Jesus is affirmed in Lk. 7:22. The context of this verse (Lk. 7:18–23) deals with the question of John the Baptist about Jesus' identity. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?" (7:20). In Luke's version of the story (compare Mt. 11:2–6), the question is repeated (7:19–20) and the actions of Jesus are described as happening then and there (7:21). Luke makes John's disciples actual witnesses of Jesus' activity. "At that time he cured many of their diseases, sufferings and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind" (7:21). Jesus tells them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν, χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν, λεπροὶ καθαρίζονται καὶ κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν, νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται, πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται [7:22]). The beginning and end of the enumeration recall τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν (4:18e) and εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς (4:18c).[8]

The enumeration in Lk. 7:22 consists of two parts joined by καὶ, with each part having a series of three: the blind, the lame, and the lepers in the first part and the deaf, the dead, and the poor in the second.[9] The verse echoes Isa. 29:18–19 ("the deaf shall hear … eyes of the blind shall see … the poor rejoice"), 35:5–6 ("the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf be cleared, then will the

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 62–68; C. R. Bruno, "'Jesus our Jubilee' … But How? The OT Background and Lukan Fulfilment of the Ethics of Jubilee," *JETSS* 53/1 (2010): 81–101; E. Sri, "Release from Debt of Sin: Jesus' Jubilee Mission in the Gospel of Luke," *Nova et Vetera* 9/1 (2011): 183–194.

[8]In the parable of the great banquet, the list includes the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame (14:21; cf. 14:13).

[9]Compare with the structure of Mt. 11:5: τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν καὶ χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν, λεπροὶ καθαρίζονται καὶ κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν, καὶ νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται καὶ πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται.

lame leap like a stag"), 26:19 ("your dead shall live"), and 61:1–2 ("glad tidings to the poor … recovery of sight to the blind"). In Isaiah, the common pairing is the blind and the deaf. It appears, based on the structure of the verse, that Luke extended the pair to include the lame, the lepers, the dead, and the poor. Luke's narrative from Lk. 4:14 to 7:21 includes stories of Jesus' ministry to these people. An illustration of Jesus' preaching to the poor within this section is found in Lk. 6:20ff. The last phrase "the poor have the good news preached to them" appears to be not just one of Jesus' activities but the summary of his ministry as well. The people who experienced healing and salvation from him are among the poor who receive and experience Jesus' proclamation of good news.

3. Lk. 4:43 (par Mk. 1:38)

After Lk. 4:16–30, Luke follows Mark's narrative closely in Lk. 4:31–44 (par Mk. 1:21–39)[10] then inserts an episode (5:1–11) before following Mark again in Lk. 5:12–6:11 (par Mk. 1:40–3:6). Lk. 4:43 is Luke's rendering of Mk. 1:38.

Mk. 1:38 Let us go to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.	Lk. 4:43 To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent.
ἄγωμεν ἀλλαχοῦ εἰς τὰς ἐχομένας κωμοπόλεις, ἵνα καὶ ἐκεῖ κηρύξω εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐξῆλθον.	καὶ ταῖς ἑτέραις πόλεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαί με δεῖ τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἀπεστάλην.

[10]Lk. 4:31–32 par Mk. 1:21–22; 4:33–37 par Mk. 1:23–28; 4:38–39 par Mk. 1:29–31; 4:40–41 par Mk. 1:32–34; 4:41–44 par Mk. 1:35–39.

Luke changes Mark's κηρύξω to εὐαγγελίσασθαι here but uses the verb in the following verse (4:44 par Mk. 1:39).[11] Lk. 4:43 clarifies the content, purpose, and origin of Jesus' proclamation. The words εὐαγγελίσασθαι and ἀπεστάλην here echo Jesus' inaugural preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk. 4:18f).

4. Lk. 16:16 (par Mt. 11:12–13)

Lk. 16:16 is part of Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Lk. 16:14–31. The Pharisees are described in 16:14 as lovers of money who scoffed at Jesus. Jesus' reply consists of sayings (16:15–18) and a parable (16:19–31). Following his criticism of the Pharisees in 16:15, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God in Lk. 16:16: "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently" (ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου· ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται). This text is significant because it clearly states that the good news is the kingdom of God. It mentions John who in 3:18 is said to be proclaiming the good news and reminds us of the connection between John and Jesus.

5. Lk. 1:19 and 2:10

Lk. 1:19 and 2:10 are the two instances of εὐαγγελίζω in the Infancy Narrative. Lk. 1:19 is the response of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah's question (1:18). It contains the verbs ἀποστέλλω and εὐαγγελίζω which are also found in Lk. 4:18–19 and 4:43. Common to these texts are the ideas of being sent, proclaiming the Good News, and God as the origin of sending and proclamation.

[11]Luke uses κηρύσσειν 9x in his gospel compared to Mark where it appears 14x. The word is found 9x in Matthew. Luke follows Mark's use in 3:3 par Mk. 1:4 and 8:39 par Mk. 5:20. In Lk. 9:1–6, par Mk. 6:6b–13, Luke changes κηρύσσω (Mk. 6:12) to εὐαγγελίζω in the parallel verse (Lk. 9:6) but uses it in 9:2 (add Mk. 6:7).

Lk. 1:19	I am Gabriel who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news.	ἐγώ εἰμι Γαβριὴλ ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀπεστάλην λαλῆσαι πρὸς σὲ καὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαί σοι ταῦτα

Lk. 2:10 is the introduction of the angel's proclamation to the shepherds (2:10–12) after the birth of Jesus (2:1–7).

Lk. 2:10	Do not be afraid: for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.	μὴ φοβεῖσθε, ἰδοὺ γὰρ εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην ἥτις ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ,

In Lk. 1:19 and 2:10, the angel is the one proclaiming the good news about the birth of a child. Zechariah is the recipient of the good news from the Angel Gabriel in 1:19; in 2:10, the angel addresses the shepherds. In Zechariah's case, the news is given before the event. The angelic proclamation here is a promise and a prophecy. The proclamation to the shepherds, on the other hand, happens after the event. The news of great joy is the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord (2:11). As the angel announces to the shepherds the birth and identity of Jesus as Messiah, so in Lk. 4:18ff Jesus is the one who proclaims his identity and inaugurates his messianic mission.

Besides highlighting the significance of their birth, the texts also function in the interest of comparison and parallelism between John the Baptist and Jesus; also in the interest of Lukan parallelism is the use of the verb εὐαγγελίζειν for the activity of John the Baptist in Lk. 3:18.[12]

[12]The parallelism between Jesus and John the Baptist has been noted by R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977); J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981/1985). The parallelism between Jesus and John the Baptist is found as well in Lk. 7:31–35. Luke also draws a parallelism between Jesus and the disciples

6. Lk. 20:1 (add Mk. 11:27)

The last occurrence of εὐαγγελίζειν is in Lk. 20:1 which describes the activity of Jesus in the temple. It is found in the setting of the episode that deals with the question of his authority (20:1–8, par Mk. 11:27–33). Jesus responds to the question of the chief priests, scribes, and the elders by asking about the origin of John's baptism (20:3–4). They cannot agree on how to answer Jesus, so they tell him they do not know (20:5–7). Jesus then replies, "Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things" (20:8). From the beginning of Luke's gospel, the reader knows that Jesus' authority comes from God.

Lk. 20:1–8 in a way recalls Lk. 7:8–23. Both texts deal with the question of Jesus' activity and identity; both mention John the Baptist. In Lk. 7:8ff, Jesus answers the messengers by positively making John's disciples witness his activities; in Lk. 20:1ff, on the other hand, the chief priests, scribes, and elders are left in the dark. Viewed in the light of Lk. 20:1–8 and 7:8–23, it is clear that Lk. 4:18ff and 2:10–11 convey not only Jesus' identity and mission but also his authority.

The final words of Jesus before his Ascension (24:44–49) announce the fulfillment of His messianic mission (24:46). He has fulfilled what has been written of the Messiah through his suffering, death, and resurrection, and opened the possibility of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He thus entrusts his disciples with the mission to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name (24:47). This implies that part of the mission Jesus had accomplished is the formation of disciples to continue his mission and proclamation to all nations (24:48). But Jesus in this scene talks not only of fulfillment but also of promise. He instructs his disciples to remain in Jerusalem because he is sending the promise of the Father, the power from on high which is the Holy Spirit (24:49). The final words of Jesus in a way summarize his entire ministry. Not only do they refer to his passion, death, and resurrection, they also evoke the beginning of his ministry in Galilee

(see Lk. 5:17–26 [Jesus healing a paralytic], Acts 3:1–10 [Peter and John healing a lame man], Acts 14:8–13 [Paul and Barnabas healing a crippled man]). Lk. 9:6 also indicates that the Twelve act as Jesus does.

(Lk. 4:14ff) where he announced his mission to proclaim release. At the end of the gospel, the release has come to refer to forgiveness of sins. Lk. 24:44–49 also looks back to the beginning of the gospel where the opening scene shows the Angel Gabriel announcing the good news to Zechariah. In his announcement, the angel brings hope and evokes expectation for the fulfillment of a promise. Towards the end of the gospel, after proclaiming the good news of fulfillment, Jesus gives a promise, evoking new hope and expectation for the coming of the Holy Spirit who will empower His disciples to continue proclaiming the good news he himself has begun.

It is in the Acts of the Apostles that the good news of the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled. Acts shows how the disciples carry out the commission of the Risen Lord. Luke also uses the word εὐαγγελίζω in significant points of the narrative of Acts to remind the reader of the continuity of the mission of Jesus in the disciples' proclamation.

The Poor as Recipients of the Good News

Jesus' inaugural proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth highlights his prophetic and evangelizing mission to the poor. Earlier, after looking at the surface level of the text, we inferred from the structure of Lk. 4:18–20 that the good news is about release, freedom, liberation, forgiveness, and that the poor are those mentioned in the same proclamation—the captives, the blind, the oppressed. What do they have in common? Being in need, afflicted, restricted in their movement, subjugated, and judicially disadvantaged—these are the people who are called poor (πτωχοί) in Lk. 4:18.

Πτωχός appears 10 times in Luke (4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 19:8; 21:2, 3) but never in Acts.[13] Πτωχός means "destitute, beggar," one in need and in affliction. It denotes "complete

[13]πτωχός is found 4–5 times in Mark and 4–5 times in Matthew. In Luke, 5 instances of πτωχός are peculiar to him (4:18; 14:13; 16:20, 22; 19:8). The context of Lk. 14:21 is Lk. 14:15–24 (par Mt. 22:1–14) but 14:21 has no parallel in Matthew. The other occurrences of the word in Luke have parallels in the

destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging."[14] The poor to whom the good news is to be proclaimed are the materially poor who are vulnerable, living in the margins of society, and have nothing, including those who are reduced to poverty by unjust means. Considering that this is what Jesus actually did, it is clear that Luke through the Isaiah quotation provides an interpretative summary of Jesus' ministry.

The Poor in Jesus' Ministry

Jesus mingled and had table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. He defended those who were despised by the learned, the scribes, and the Pharisees. He healed the sick and touched lepers and made them whole; he pronounced the poor blessed and fed the hungry. He instructed his disciples to continue his mission. If Jesus actually ministered to the materially poor and disadvantaged, then πτωχοι, in Lk. 4:18, should be interpreted as the materially poor. Material poverty means not only lacking in material sufficiency but poverty in non-material terms as well. Although there could be sympathy for the poor, the destitute and the indigent are often despised and scoffed upon, considered vulnerable to exploitation, defenseless, lawless, and unworthy of trust. Jesus is good news to the poor. He proclaims that they belong to the kingdom of God. Even if people despise and exclude them, they are not excluded by God. In fact, they are the first beneficiaries of the kingdom. This is expressed in Lk. 6:20–23:

> Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for you, for behold your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

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other synoptics: Lk. 18:22 par Mk. 10:21; Mt. 19:21; Lk. 21:3 par Mk. 12:42–43; Lk. 6:20 par Mt. 5:3; Lk. 7:22 par Mt. 11:5. In Lk. 21:2, Luke uses πενιχρά.

[14]"πτωχός" in TDNT, vol. 6, 886.

For the poor, the afflicted, the needy, and the downtrodden who feel that God is far from them or that they are excluded from the kingdom of God, this is certainly good news. Jesus proclaims that God is on their side, that God offers them the kingdom and promises a reversal of their situation.

While Jesus' proclamation in Lk. 4:18–19 and 6:20–23 is a promise of salvation for the poor, he also warns the rich: "Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (6:24–26). This reversal of fortunes is hailed in the Magnificat as God's action on behalf of the lowly: "He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk. 1:51–53).

The reversal is expressed similarly by Abraham in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31): "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish." Nothing is said about Lazarus being worthy, good, or righteous; he is simply poor and has a skin disease. The good news of the parable is that God balances the situation. Nothing is said about the rich man abusing Lazarus. He simply goes about his life, feasting sumptuously every day and being clothed in purple and fine linen. While Lazarus is aware of the rich man's life because he desires to be fed with what falls from the rich man's table, the rich man shows no awareness at all of Lazarus' existence. The dogs that lick Lazarus' sores seem to be better than the rich man for Lazarus exists for them. The startling contrast is that Lazarus in his poor condition is able to give a "feast" to the dogs but the rich man in all his riches offers no help or consolation to Lazarus. Thus, the parable is also a warning to the rich. There is a time of reckoning and the judgment on the rich will be based on their attitude and action toward the poor.

Jesus' good news to the poor is his own life of total trust and confidence in God. He lives the life of the poor and dies the death of a wretched criminal—condemned, tortured, scorned, and despised. Not only his words and deeds but his very life and death manifest his solidarity with the poor. His resurrection, then, is the climax of the good news he proclaims. His resurrection validates his proclamation. To receive the good news is to live as he teaches; to proclaim the good news is to live the new life he offers by his resurrection.

Based, therefore, on the life and ministry of Jesus, the poor in Lk. 4:18 (cf. Is. 61:1) refers to the materially poor who lack not only material sufficiency but other goods as well which are needed to live with human dignity.

Luke's View of the Poor

Luke hands on to us the tradition about Jesus who shows concern for the poor in his life, words, and deeds. There is a gap of several years between the time of Jesus and the time of Luke's writing. The question is whether Luke means something else other than the materially poor in Lk. 4:18 (cf. Is. 61:1). We noted earlier that material poverty entails other forms or dimensions of poverty. The question here focuses on the basic meaning of poor in Lk. 4:18.

1. The Poor in Lk. 4:18 in the Light of Is. 61:1

Πτωχοῖς in Lk. 4:18 is the LXX translation of the Hebrew עֲנָוִים in Is. 61:1. עֲנָוִים is the plural form of עָנָו, a subsidiary form of עָנִי. עָנִי primarily denotes a relation rather than a situation of social distress. It comes from the stem ענה which indicates the situation of answering and readiness for this. Later it came to describe the position of inferiority in the face of the one who demands the answer. עָנִי is concretely the hearer, the dependent; eventually it also came to denote one who is wrongfully impoverished or dispossessed.[15] YHWH is the protector

[15]"πτωχός", 888.

of the עֲנָיִים because they draw to him (Ps. 140:12; 40:17; 86:1; 109:22; 69:29; 74:19; 140:12). The word comes to have a religious significance—"humble," "pious" (Ps. 18:27 [ταπεινός].

Isaiah 61:1–2 belongs to the third part of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 56–66) which was written probably in the late sixth century B.C.E. The message of Third Isaiah is addressed to the people who returned from exile and were worried about their claim on the land. The city was still devastated and the people were unsure of their status as the holy community. The prophet announced the rebuilding of Zion by YHWH and encouraged Israel to commit itself anew to right worship and social justice.[16] It will be God's divine action. God will establish justice for Israel. Thus, Isa. 61:1ff is addressed to Israel as a whole. The characterization of Israel as the poor of YHWH is found in Second Isaiah (49:13; 51:21; 54:11). The proclamation continues in 61:3ff which speaks of the restoration of Israel. The time of favor for Israel's exiles is also an occasion of God's vengeance on their enemies (61:2, 5–6).

The poor in Isa. 61:1 might indeed refer to the whole of Israel; however, the context of Lk. 4:18ff shows that Luke widens the meaning of poor. The omission of the last part of Isa. 61:2, "a day of vindication by our God," and Jesus' references to Elijah and Elisha (Lk. 4:25–27) indicate that the proclamation goes beyond the vision of Jewish nationalism. In Jesus' proclamation, the Gentiles are included. This message is not received well by Jesus' hearers. The people's reaction change from amazement (4:22a) to questioning (4:22b) and then to fury (4:28) and violence (4:29).

It is said that by the time of Second and Third Isaiah עֲנָיִים has a religious significance. Thus, the meaning of poor in Isa. 61:1 is humble, lowly, and pious.[17] The text offers a promise of eschatological jubilee to the humble poor who are called to trust in God and await his actions

[16]R. Clifford & K. Anatolios, "Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 66/4 (2005): 744.

[17]"πτωχός," 892.

of justice and liberation for the poor (Isa. 61:4ff; cf. Isa. 11:4). The good news of release (ἄφεσις) has to do with the release of moral-spiritual debt. This has to do with the forgiveness of sins.[18] The good news is the breaking of "bonds that enslave people to sin in all its various forms."[19] This does not deny that Jesus releases people from various concrete forms of physical, social, and economic oppressions. Forgiveness of sins is indeed a theme that runs through Luke-Acts and is related to the theme of salvation (Lk. 1:77). Towards the end of the gospel of Luke, Jesus is seen entrusting to the disciples the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name (24:47).

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God to his people and majority of his hearers were poor. In the first century Palestine of his day, there were only a few rich—the large landowners, Herod and the royal family and their functionaries, and some merchants. The poor consisted of day laborers, slaves, small landowners, tenants for large landowners, and all those who worked to earn their livelihood. Sometimes they were overburdened with taxes, tithes, rents, and became debtors. There were also poor who lived partially or fully on relief: the beggars, sick, blind, lame, lepers, destitute, the unemployed poor and drifters, the fatherless, widows, and victims of ill fortune who needed social care and received such. Although they would receive some form of help like daily or weekly food, they were treated with contempt by the well-to-do. Their material poverty involved loss of dignity, status, security, and even resulted in uncleanness.[20] Jesus' concern for them astounded them. Jesus offered the poor and the sick knowledge of God and forgiveness even when they could not go to the temple and afford to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was really good news to them. However, not all who heard Jesus and witnessed

[18]Sri, "Release from Debt of Sin," 192.

[19]P. Miller, "An Exposition of Lk. 4:16–21," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 417–421, quoted by Sri, "Release from Debt of Sin," 193.

[20]M. Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16–30)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 172.

his astounding deeds believed in him. Jesus preached to the poor but only the poor who were open to God accepted him.

In light of the above considerations, it can be fairly said that Luke broadened the horizon for understanding the poor. The good news of Jesus is not only for Israel but for the Gentiles as well. This is shown more clearly in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus turned his attention to the materially poor but not all who heard him, poor or rich, were convinced of his preaching. Those who accepted his good news and believed in him were the poor who were humble and open to God. The acceptance of Jesus' message erases the divide between rich and poor.

2. The Poor in Luke's Narrative

By the time of Luke's writings, the Christian movement had progressed through the Mediterranean world of the Roman Empire. He had a broader perspective of Jesus' mission which continued to his own day through the handing on of tradition from the apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus as well as from missionaries. Though he kept a distance between his own time and the narrated world of the gospel, his worldwide perspective and the concerns of the community or communities he was addressing influenced his writing. The teachings on wealth and poverty in the gospel show Luke's concern both for the poor and the rich. The following section presents the characters that are portrayed in Luke's narrative as receiving and experiencing the good news.

The first recipients of the good news in Luke's narrative were Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both were characterized as righteous before God and blameless (1:5). They belonged to the priestly clan. Zechariah was a country priest; he was poor compared to the priestly aristocracy in the temple. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were advanced in age. They were childless. The good news that the angel brought to Zechariah was the birth of a child, and not just any child; he would be John who would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to make a people ready for the Lord (1:13–17). The good news proclaimed to Zechariah was experienced by Elizabeth herself when she conceived

and bore John. She recognized that God looked at her and took away her reproach (1:25).

Mary, a young woman of Nazareth and betrothed to Joseph, accepted the word of the angel and conceived in her womb the Son of God (1:26–38). Luke does not mention Mary's pedigree. She is simply a young woman from Nazareth and a kinswoman of Elizabeth (1:36). Mary in her song of praise (1:46–55) speaks of herself as a lowly servant. God "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ [1:48]). The birth of the Messiah is announced to the shepherds (2:10–11). Although "shepherd" is used as an image of God in the Jewish Scriptures, the shepherds during the time of Jesus were not viewed favorably. They were classed among robbers and cheats because they were suspected of stealing the increase of the flock entrusted to them. With this background of the place of shepherds in Israel's society, the angel's proclamation to them is significant. Here is another instance when God showed favor to the poor and the lowly.[21]

In Lk. 3:18, John is described as proclaiming the Good News. He was proclaiming into all the regions about the Jordan a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (3:3). He was proclaiming the coming judgment and exhorted the people to "bear fruits that befit repentance" (3:8). He preached to the multitudes (3:10), to the tax collectors (3:12), and to the soldiers (3:14). Each of these groups asked him "What then shall we do?" John replied to the multitudes: "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (3:11). To the tax collectors, he said: "Collect no more than is appointed you" (3:12b), and to the soldiers, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages" (3:14b). The concrete acts of repentance John advised were actions of justice, sharing, and kindness toward the poor. John's teaching touched on the social, economic, and political issues of his day but there was no hint of questioning the established system. Luke must have found this teaching relevant for his own time as well. Only he

[21]The story may also be interpreted on a symbolic level. The mention of shepherds evokes connection with David who was a shepherd.

among the evangelists gives us this teaching of John the Baptist. John could have proclaimed this to his contemporaries or Luke interpreted the preaching of John in this way for his community. The text shows Luke's concern for the materially poor and conveys the idea of sharing as a way of addressing the needs of the poor.

After his proclamation in Lk. 4:16–30, Jesus undertook his ministry. Luke gives us stories of people who witnessed Jesus' teaching and experienced his healing presence. They were those who were sick with various diseases and those oppressed by demons (4:40ff; 5:15; 6:17–19; 7:21–22; 4:31ff; 4:38ff). Luke illustrates through stories how Jesus' activities fulfilled the Isaiah prophecy.

- Demoniacs were released from the power of evil spirits (4:31ff; 8:26ff; 9:37ff);
- lepers were cleansed (5:12ff; 17:11ff);
- a paralytic was forgiven and made to walk (5:17ff);
- a sinful woman was forgiven (7:36ff);
- a man with a withered hand (6:6ff), a centurion's slave (7:1ff), a woman with hemorrhage (8:49ff), a bent woman (13:10ff), a man with dropsy (14:1ff), and a blind beggar (18:35ff) were healed;
- the hungry crowd was fed (9:12ff);
- and a daughter (8:40ff) and a son (7:11ff) were raised to life.
- Tax collectors and sinners had table fellowship with him (5:27ff; 15:1–2).
- His own disciples witnessed his saving power (8:22ff).

These were the poor who experienced the joy of the kingdom through Jesus' care, compassion, healing, and forgiveness.

Luke, however, shows us that Jesus did not associate only with the poor. Jesus also accepted invitations to dine in the houses of a Pharisee (7:36ff) and a ruler (14:1ff). The banquet became a means for Jesus to teach about hospitality and liberality to the poor. "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be rapid at the resurrection of the just" (14:13–14). Without doubt, the poor refers to

the materially poor and the rich are encouraged to open themselves to the poor in view of future judgment. In his association with the rich, Jesus calls them to turn toward the poor, to relate to them. His concern for the poor also reveals a concern for the rich, for he teaches them what they need to do in order to be part of the kingdom of God. Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house (19:1ff). Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and rich yet considered a sinner, received Jesus joyfully in his house. Zacchaeus' conversion is shown in his decision to give half of his possessions to the poor and to restore fourfold anyone whom he has defrauded (19:8).

When Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts in the treasury and a poor widow also putting in two copper coins, he was quick to point out the contrast to his disciples (Lk. 21:1–3). He praised the poor widow rather than the rich because the rich gave out of their abundance but the widow "out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:4). This story in Luke is preceded by Jesus' denunciation of the scribes whom he accused as desiring the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at feasts but who devour widows' houses (Lk. 20:47). The point at issue is not only the contrast between rich and poor but the actions of the rich and powerful against the poor, actions of injustice that impoverish the widows and the poor more and more. The theme of justice is also conveyed in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (18:1–8) which is told as a teaching on persistence in prayer. It concludes with the saying, "Will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily" (18:7–8a).[22]

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was accompanied by disciples who left everything and followed him (5:11, 28; 18:28). They shared his life of poverty and proclaimed the Gospel according to his instructions: "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics" (9:3). He gave similar instructions

[22]See J. D. Hays, "'Sell Everything You Have and Give to the Poor': The Old Testament Prophetic Theme of Justice as the Connecting Motif of Luke 18:1–19:10," *JETS* 55/1 (2012): 43–63.

to the seventy(-two) disciples: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandal" (10:4). There were women in their company too. These women and many others provided for Jesus and the Twelve out of their means (8:3). Jesus and his community of disciples lived a poor life and carried out their mission in poverty but they were not destitute. At the Last Supper, Jesus asked his disciples, "when I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?," and they said, "Nothing" (22:35). Their life of poverty was a life of total trust and confidence in God as Jesus was teaching them (6:20ff; 11:1ff; 12:22–34).

From a consideration of the different characters who were addressed by and accepted Jesus' proclamation, we can say that the poor in Luke's narrative encompasses the materially poor, the morally poor, and the religiously poor. This is in line with the theme of universality of salvation in Luke's gospel. Jesus proclaimed to all who cared to listen.

3. Being Poor to Follow Jesus

Luke gives us the stories of the call of Jesus' disciples who left everything to follow him. Peter and his companions "brought their boats to land, left everything and followed him" (5:11). Levi, who was sitting at the tax office when Jesus called him, left everything, "rose and followed him" (5:27–28). After hearing Jesus' saying on the difficulty of a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, Peter remarked, "We have left our homes and followed you" (18:28). Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come" (18:29–30).

The story of the rich ruler (18:18–23) shows that riches can be an obstacle to following Jesus. He asked Jesus what he should do to inherit life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. When he said he had observed them from his youth, Jesus told him: "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor (πάντα ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον καὶ διάδος πτωχοῖς), and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (18:22). Hearing this, he became sad for he was very rich (ἦν γὰρ πλούσιος σφόδρα). Luke's story of the rich ruler appears open-ended. Luke omitted Mark's conclusion: "he went

away sorrowful" (Mk. 10:22). Lk. 18:22 calls to mind Jesus' saying to his disciples in Lk. 12:32–33:

> Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms (πωλήσατε τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ὑμῶν καὶ δότε ἐλεημοσύνην); provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

This saying comes after the teaching on trust in God's providence (12:22–31). The call to sell possessions and give alms is a call to live a life of trust and confidence in the Father's goodness. It is also a call to a renunciation of property that benefits the poor. Jesus challenges the disciples to an attitude that gives priority to spiritual value over material things, to sharing and concern for others over concern for one's possessions and security. The renunciation of possession has meaning in view of the kingdom but it remains a difficult condition of discipleship. A more radical formulation is found in Lk. 14:33: "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής). The demand is unmistakable; it calls for total renunciation of one's possessions. The saying is addressed to the multitudes (14:25). The response to this call will distinguish the true disciples from the crowd.

The teaching on renunciation of possessions is to be considered in relation to one's view of life and death. In the parable of the rich fool (12:16–21), the rich man whose land brought forth plentiful harvest decides to pull down his barns and build larger ones where he can store all his grain and goods. He plans to live a life of security. But God says to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" The parable is Jesus' reply to the one who asked him to help get his share of inheritance from his brother (12:13). Jesus uses this parable to illustrate his saying on covetousness: "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (12:15). Jesus challenges the attitude of the rich to secure oneself and build one's future without consideration of others. No matter how the rich secure themselves with possessions, they do not know the time

of their death which can bring to nought what they have worked for. Death is a moment when one loses everything. Possessions cannot secure any person from death. In the face of death, one learns the relative value of wealth and possessions (cf. Sir. 41:1–2). Luke follows this parable with Jesus' sayings on trust in God (12:22ff). It is the view of the end of one's life that can guide people to make right decisions about their life and possessions (cf. Sir. 7:36). For Luke, the end in view is the eschatological reality of sharing in the kingdom of God. It is this eschatological reality that gives meaning to the renunciation of possessions. It appears that the sayings on the renunciation of possessions are really expressions of the value of the kingdom of God.

What Jesus started in his ministry is an alternative lifestyle of radical prophetic poverty. It is an alternative lifestyle that manifests radical trust in God, serves as a protest against rich living, and expresses solidarity with the least.[23]

The renunciation of possessions may be seen as a manifestation of the self-denial that Jesus calls for: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it" (9:23–24). Possession may be seen as symbolic of the person; thus, to renounce possession is symbolic of renouncing the self. Underlying the hoarding of possessions is the desire to preserve the self.[24] Self-denial may be equated with renunciation of possessions. Thus, the call to deny the self in order to follow Jesus appears as another expression of the demand to renounce possessions or it is the attitude that grounds the possibility of fulfilling the demand to detach from possession. Learning to deny the self begins with learning to detach from what one has. Becoming poor to follow Jesus is not just a matter of ascetic discipline. It is clear from Lk. 6:20ff that the poverty of the disciples is for the sake of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus teaches

[23]H. Welzen, "Spiritualiteit in het Lukasevangelie: Verscheidenheid en Gemeenschap," *Acta Theologica* 32/2 (2012): 326.

[24]L. T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), 150.

his disciples to be rich toward God (12:21), to seek his kingdom, and that "these things will be yours as well" (12:31).

Luke appreciates Jesus' call to renunciation. He highlights what he has received from tradition (Lk. 9:23–27 par Mk. 8:38–9:1; Lk. 18:18–30 par Mk. 10:17–22; Lk. 12:22–31 par Mt. 6:25–45; Lk. 12: 33–34 par Mt. 6:19–21) by repeating the saying on the renunciation of possessions (Lk. 12:33; 14:33; 18:22) and adding stories and parables that challenge people's attitudes toward possessions. This is a challenge that Luke poses to his own contemporaries. The focus is not so much the possessions but the kingdom of God, and the good news of the kingdom of God is what grounds and gives meaning to the renunciation of possession.

4. Sharing of Possessions as a Way of Discipleship

Besides the teaching on renunciation, Luke's gospel contains parables and sayings on having and using possessions. These teachings on possessions seem contradictory. Thus, it was observed that Luke consistently talks about possessions but he does not talk about possessions consistently.[25] Does Luke really contradict himself? Or does he intend to give different views about possessions for his contemporaries?[26] To our mind, all these sayings are governed by the good news of the kingdom.

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[25]Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, 129–130.

[26]See the review of proposals by different scholars in T. E. Philips, "Reading Recent Readings of Wealth and Poverty in Luke and Acts," *CBR* 1.2 (2003): 231–269. Very briefly, we can note how he classifies the different proposals. One group seeks to find the reason for the inconsistency in terms of Luke's readers; another group seeks to prove the consistency of Luke's view. Schmithals considers the situation of a possible persecution of the Lukan community, a situation that gives light to the contradictory views on poverty and wealth; Degenhardt sees two groups being addressed: renunciation for the disciples (ecclesiastical authority) and proper use of possessions for the people (members); Karris sees the Lukan community composed of rich and poor and the gospel is addressed to the rich; Stegemann situates the Lukan community in the city of the Roman empire but not in Palestine and considers the tensions in the

Luke gives examples in the gospel of people who use their possessions to benefit others. The women in Jesus' company provided for their needs out of their resources (8:1–3). Zacchaeus decided to part with his possessions (19:1–9). The Samaritan who attended to the needs of the man who fell among robbers (10:29–35) is an example of using one's possessions to help the needy (10:33–35). The parable of the dishonest steward (16:1–8) illustrates how one deals with possessions to secure his immediate future and conveys that there is a way of dealing with possessions that leads one to inherit the kingdom. A negative example is given in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31). The rich man's neglect of his responsibility toward the poor and his failure to attend to the need of Lazarus who was just there at his door brought him to Hades. This is a serious warning to the rich who only think of this life and themselves. In Luke's view, the members of his community need to learn how to deal with wealth and possessions for these can be obstacles to the kingdom of God as they are a cause of tensions in the community.

Jesus' teachings on poverty, renunciation, and the use of wealth and possessions are related to the kingdom of God. It is the vision of the life beyond this world, the eschatological dimension, that gives meaning to these teachings. Luke shows in the Acts of the Apostles how the early Christian community in Jerusalem fulfilled Jesus' teachings on possessions (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16). Luke describes the community as being together and having all things in common (2:44). They "sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (2:45). They lived their community life in joyful table

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community due to economic differences as the reason for the different views on poverty and wealth. The other group seems to accept that the disciples' poverty is a literary ideal for Luke who gives a critique of the rich. Seccombe thinks the gospel is addressed to the rich about the poor; Koenig relates the texts to hospitality and considers two groups being addressed: residential Christians and itinerant preachers; Kim accepts that Luke's community is composed of wealthy and poor members and relates the texts to slavery; Garret takes the viewpoint of an ascetic reader; Phillips makes a distinction of apostolic (renunciation) and post-apostolic time (use of possessions); Prior takes the stance of a contemporary reader and York that of an eschatological reader.

fellowship, prayer, and holding fast to the teaching of the apostles. Luke is quick to point out that the sharing of goods comes from an inner disposition of each believer. "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common" (4:32). Here Luke gives a compelling picture of complete unanimity and profound unity among the believers. The basis of their unity and harmony is their common faith. The union of heart and soul is further described as ingrained in a basic attitude of unselfishness particularly with regard to material possessions. Not one makes an egoistic claim even to what are rightfully one's own. Their sharing of temporal goods is an external manifestation of the union of heart and soul, an outflow of their interior disposition of openness, detachment from material possessions, and freedom from self-seeking interests. The sale of possessions and distribution to each as any has need results in a situation where "there was not a needy person among them" (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς· [4:34]), an echo of Dt. 15:4. In Acts 2:42ff and 4:32ff, Luke pictures an ideal community inspired by the first group of Jesus' disciples who lived with Jesus and shared his life of poverty. Luke gives an ideal portrait of a Christian community that is permeated by the spirit of self-giving and generosity.

The absence of πτωχός in the narrative of Acts does not mean that Luke has abandoned his concern for the poor. The narrative of Acts focuses on the spread of the Christian message yet there are still some stories that show the concern for the poor (Acts 6:1ff, 11:28ff). In the description of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, Luke has united the demand of renunciation of possessions with the practice of sharing of possessions. This is Luke's vision of an egalitarian community of disciples of the Risen Lord. Luke's good news to the poor is a challenge so that in the community there would be no needy person. The goal of renunciation and sharing of possessions is not to impoverish the community but to enable it to witness to the Resurrection of the Lord.

Good News to the Poor

Luke's understanding of good news enables us to look at the teachings on wealth and poverty in a new light. Our study of the meaning of good news in Luke-Acts led to a clarification of Luke's meaning of poor. Luke includes among the poor not only those who lack material and non-material goods, but also those who are morally, religiously, or spiritually poor. The proclamation of the good news to the poor gives the proper perspective for interpreting the different sayings and parables on wealth and poverty. Both renunciation of possessions and sharing of possessions are geared towards an egalitarian community which manifests the kingdom of God.

The good news that the poor are blessed may be met with different reactions. "Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk. 6:20). Jesus' good news to the poor is that, though they are considered of no account and are despised, they are actually the first beneficiaries of the kingdom. Jesus assures them of their worth and the Father's care for them. Jesus challenges his society's prevailing view on and estimation of the poor.

Today there is a lot of discussion on global poverty. Reducing global poverty has been an issue for several decades. It is startling how, despite so many international and local organizations, agencies, institutions, and groups working for, with, and among the poor, the problem of poverty becomes more pronounced and the gap between rich and poor becomes even wider. A discourse analyst draws our attention to the discourse on poverty and stirs people to think about what they communicate by the way they speak of, about, and to the poor. How can the fight against poverty not become in reality a fight against poor people or the program to eradicate poverty a program to eliminate poor people? Is it still appropriate to speak of "poor" as a category or label for people living in poverty? Sandra Jeppesen has this to say about poverty:

> Poverty is in my bones. The lessons of poverty are that money is not everything, people come first and sharing can cover you. Free things carved a path into my life. Hanging out with punks and anarchists,

> poverty is an intentional way of life, a political anti-consumerist asceticism. If everyone you know lives in poverty, you have a community; it is no big deal … a life of poverty has its good moments too, like any life.[27]

She continues by identifying different situations of poverty.

> Poverty is complex in gendered and racialized lives and as it is experienced by indigenous people, people with disabilities, children, homeless people, squeegee kids, alcoholics, sex workers, people with mental health issues, drug addicts, et cetera. People living in poverty become criminalized, objects of targeted policing, automatic suspects. There is a sense of injustice.[28]

How is it possible to speak of the poor without labeling them and perpetuating the societal and cultural presuppositions about the poor? One challenge for us today is to clarify our notion of poverty and our way of speaking of and about the poor. It is not enough to pronounce a blessing on the poor; there is a need to recognize the poor as a blessing too, and to work with them so that they can enjoy the blessings of God.

Sadly, the many advancements in our society seem to push the poor further into the margins of social life. Our globalized world has produced tremendous wealth "to such an extent that if it would be distributed equally, all poverty would be eradicated."[29] This might seem to be an exaggeration, but even in our local setting, growth in the country's economy is reported but such growth has little or no impact on the poor. Luke's teachings on wealth and possessions can at least disturb those who gain wealth at the cost of the poor. Luke reminds us that an unlimited striving for wealth can engulf persons with a passion that makes them slaves of their possessions.

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[27]S. Jeppessen, "From 'War on Poverty' to 'War on the Poor': Knowledge, Power and Subject Positions in Anti-Poverty Discourses," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34/3 (2009): 488.

[28]Jeppessen, "From 'War on Poverty,'" 488.

[29]Eben Scheffer, "Luke's View on Poverty in its Ancient (Roman) Economic Context: A Challenge for Today," *Scriptura* 106 (2011): 131.

One of Luke's solutions to the problem of poverty and relationship in his community is for the rich to share their possessions. This is not only a matter of benevolence to the poor but a challenge to establish a condition in the community that will enable the poor to live according to their human dignity.

Luke also makes us aware that poverty is interconnected with other forms of human suffering and marginalization, such as "sickness, mental disturbance and social ostracism …. Any association or identifying with the poor for the sake of self-interested political gain which in the end does not benefit the real poor should be exposed."[30] This is a challenge to prophetic witness.

The renunciation of possessions is an ideal that may be difficult to follow. In Luke's gospel, this is not motivated by asceticism but by joy, the good news of the kingdom. The ideal of renunciation may be the narrow door to the kingdom. As the disciples orient themselves to the kingdom of God and follow Jesus in this mission of proclaiming the kingdom, the disciples tread the path towards renunciation that opens themselves to embrace the kingdom wholeheartedly.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI chose the theme "Fighting Poverty to Build Peace" for his Message on the World Day of Peace. In his homily (January 1, 2009), he distinguished between the poverty to be chosen and the poverty to be fought. The poverty to be chosen is the one Jesus chose and proposed for his disciples; the poverty to be combated is a deprivation which God does not desire, "a poverty that prevents people and families from living as befits their dignity, a poverty that offends justice and equality and … threatens peaceful co-existence."[31]

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[30]Scheffer, "Luke's View on Poverty in its Ancient (Roman) Economic Context," 131.

[31]http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090101_world-day-peace_en.html.

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DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS IN THE BIBLE

Ramon L. Bautista, S.J.

1. Can you give a short background on the expression "discernment of spirits?" What is its origin in the first place? Is it found in the Bible?

In English, "to discern" basically means "to detect something that is obscure or concealed." It also means "to perceive or recognize as being different or distinct; distinguish." Hence, in ordinary usage, "discernment" has to do with "keenness of insight and judgment."

The verb "to discern" comes directly from the Latin term *discernere* which means "to sift apart or separate." *Discernere* has the prefix *dis* (meaning "apart") and the root word *cernere* (meaning "to separate").

In the Greek New Testament, we have several terms that can serve as equivalents to the verb "to discern" and the noun "discernment." They are:

1. *anakrino* (verb): to distinguish or separate out so as to investigate (*krino*) by looking throughout (*ana* = intensive) objects or particulars; hence, it signifies to examine, scrutinize, and judge closely;
2. *diakrino* (verb): signifies to examine, separate out, and discriminate;

3. *dokimazo* (verb): signifies to test, to prove, to scrutinize so as to decide;
4. *diakrisis* (noun): a distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging.[1]

The actual expression "discernment of spirits" first explicitly appears in the epistles of the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Jn. 4:1).[2] It does not appear in the Gospels and Old Testament, though the general principle, theory, and practice of sifting different kinds of conflicting "spirits" can already be plainly seen from both these sources.

It is St. Paul, specifically, who brings up this need to discern these "spirits" when he declares that one of the many gifts of the Holy Spirit to the early Church was the "power to distinguish one spirit from another" (*diakriseis pneumaton* [1 Cor. 12:10]). The author of the First Epistle of John also speaks of these same "spirits" when he writes: "Beloved do not trust every spirit, but put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Reading both the Old and New Testaments, we find that a great part of their spirituality and theology deal with this evident conflict between these good and evil "spirits." In the Old Testament, the authors often touch on matters pertaining directly to this conflict; for example, the conflict between God and the serpent (Gen. 3:1ff), between choosing life and choosing death (Dt. 30:11–20), between serving the Lord God and serving strange gods (Jer. 5:19), and between true and false prophets (Dt. 18:21ff; Jer. 23:14). In the New Testament, the writers also deal with this major conflict; specifically, for example, between

- the works of light and the works of darkness (Eph. 5:8–14);

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[1]See John R. Kohlenberger, ed., *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 306–307.

[2]All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *The New American Bible*, The New Catholic Translation (Washington, DC: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1970).

- angels and devils (Rev. 12:1–12);
- the good spirits and the unclean spirits (Mk. 1:27; Mt. 4:11);
- the fruits of the spirit and the fruits of the flesh (Gal. 5:13–26);
- the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception (1 Jn. 4:1–6); and
- the standard of Christ and the standard of Satan (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Tim. 3:7; Mt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13).

It is these "spirits" in conflict which highlight these two basic opposite realities of grace and evil so present in the Bible, and undeniably so real in our present world and personal lives that we need to examine and assess the nature of the spiritual states experienced within ourselves or others when engaged in the art of "discerning the spirits."

2. What does the Old Testament basically say about discernment?

As noted earlier, we do not find the precise expression "discernment of spirits" (or "to discern the spirits") in the Old Testament. Some scholars today offer the Hebrew term "bin" for the English verb "to discern." However, "bin" (and its derivatives) is a non-technical word used often in the OT (e.g., Dt. 32:29; 1 Kgs. 3:9–11; Ps. 19:12), and, in general usage, it simply means "to understand by evaluating." Thus, words like "discern," "distinguish," and "judgment" take on the basic meaning of "bin."[3]

No systematic presentation of discernment of spirits can be found in the OT. This does not mean, however, that the subject matter is brought up rarely by its writers. On the contrary, discernment is often taken up by them, though they do this more implicitly than explicitly. For one, Solomon is presented in the OT as a young king asking distinctly for a wise, understanding heart from the Lord in order "to judge (his) people and to distinguish right from wrong" (1 Kgs. 3:9). Elijah, too, has this episode where he seeks the Lord and is able to find him not in the strong wind, not in the earthquake and fire, but in the

[3]See Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 226.

tiny whispering sound like a gentle breeze (1 Kgs. 19:11–12). What is more, God himself is depicted as having this or that particular will or desire in varying instances, with the Lord even making these known clearly to the different persons he calls and graces (e.g., Gen. 22:12; Ex. 3:4ff; Ez. 37:1–14).

The practice of discriminating judgment, which is vital to the more technical expression "discernment of spirits," is also seen in not a few OT characters. This includes Israel herself as God's chosen one—Moses' exhortation to the entire community "to choose life" and not death is well known to many of us (Dt. 30:11–20). In the same manner, many other OT personalities are described as facing much obscurity and going out of their way to make serious choices in the light of their faith in the Lord. Needing careful discretion, like all of us today, these OT individuals had to ask pivotal questions in their own search for greater truth and meaning in their lives. For example, there was Abraham who had to ask himself, "Should I leave my homeland or not?" (Gen. 12:4). There was Gideon who also had to ask, "Should I lead my people to this (or that) battle or not?" (Judg. 7:9–15). David as king had to consider seriously the query, "Should I build a house for the Lord or not?" (2 Sam. 7:1–29). The young Jeremiah, too, had to wrestle with the question, "Should I respond to God's call as a prophet or not?" (Jer. 1:4–10). Lastly, we mention Ruth, who had to decide, "Should I abandon Naomi or not?" (Ruth 1:14ff). Given these examples (and many more), we can insist that in the minds and hearts of these OT characters there was much awareness of the need for quality discretion when seeking the more truthful choices in their lives.

As we said above in the first question, the overall principle, theory, and practice of distinguishing different kinds of opposing "spirits" can already be seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. Initially, however, *both* good and evil spirits were believed to come from the *same single* source, namely the Lord himself. Though this was the understanding, the persons and even entire communities affected directly by these "spirits" of the Lord were led in divergent and even contradictory directions. Thus, for example, the spirit of the Lord departs from Saul at one point and later he is tormented by an evil spirit sent likewise

by the Lord (1 Sam. 16:14). While the spirit of the Lord transforms certain individuals into outstanding leaders (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 15:14), this same Lord also places a lying spirit in the mouths of some prophets (1 Kgs. 22:23ff). God is even once portrayed as pouring this spirit of confusion into Pharaoh and all of the Egyptians, making them blind and bringing their nation into ruin (Is. 19:14).

In all these cases, what is important to note is that such actions of these good and bad spirits are so overwhelming that it appears impossible for the persons concerned to defy them. Yet at the same time, these same individuals do not lose their core personality and are even held mainly responsible for the choices and actions they take (1 Sam. 18:10ff; 19:9ff; 24:17ff). This obvious tension—on the one hand, "being invaded by a strange power which is not properly (their) own"[4] that it is most difficult to resist its control, while on the other hand, still being held fundamentally responsible for the decisions and actions taken—has made the sifting of these spirits a not so easy theme to discuss in the OT. This becomes apparent precisely because how can one be expected to do any form of serious discreet judging and choosing if there is only one source for all these various spirits, plus the fact that the one choosing possesses no adequate freedom in the first place?

The explanation for this early belief in different spirits, including perverse ones, as coming only from the Lord and him alone could be linked to Israel's own image of God and his total transcendence. There was no problem with affirming the good spirits and their inspirations as always coming directly from the Lord. But then to have attributed the evil spirits and their harmful actions to someone other than God would have suggested a kind of moral dualism, a belief in a conflict between two independent powers.[5]

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[4]Xavier Leon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, English translation (London: Cassell Publishers Ltd., 1996), 570.

[5]See Jacques Guillet, et al., *Discernment of Spirits*, trans. Innocentia Richards (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 20. See also *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 522–523, 570.

It took a while for Israel (until postexilic times, after 586 BC) to modify her theological view on God, the nature of these spirits, and their origins.[6] Undeniably, the Lord is and will always still be completely transcendent, and attributing evil to another powerful being does not at all diminish God's sense of greatness. As a result, the time came when evil spirits and their unholy influences were no longer ascribed directly to God. The belief in an independent spiritual being as the enemy of human nature that tempts people to sin slowly became more and more evident in later Judaism. Genesis speaks of this evil being only as serpent (Gen. 3:1). The Book of Wisdom names this serpent in particular; it is the "devil" (Wis. 2:24). With this later explicit identification of the Evil One, the doctrine and practice of distinguishing different spirits become a bit more refined in the OT. Now, there is *another* voice along with God's voice that needs to be recognized and understood, namely the voice of sin, the voice of the demon,[7] God's opponent (Gen. 4:7). Interestingly, this Evil One tempts and deceives people not only directly and openly but also under the guise of something good (Gen. 3:13).

In the OT, wisdom is not unrelated to the virtues of prudence and discretion. Here wisdom is described in various ways. For example, wisdom is a kindly spirit (Wis. 1:6). Like a counselor, she makes our sense of judgment keen (Wis. 8:11). Like a loving mother, she is a gift from God who leads us to so many other gifts, like understanding, learning, joy, and gladness (Wis. 8:21; Sir. 15:2–6). Or like a teacher, she too schools us in justice, fortitude, moderation, and prudence (Wis. 8:7b). As the Lord's spirit, wisdom knows and understands all things and guides us discreetly in our affairs (Wis. 9:11–17). From such descriptions of wisdom, we can see how it is a much valued virtue, most

[6]See *The New American Bible*, footnote of 1 Chron. 21:1, on this changed theological view of postexilic Israel, when evil was no longer attributed directly to God.

[7]See *The New American Bible*, footnote of 1 Chron. 21:1, for an explanation of the terms "satan" and "devil." See also footnote of Gen. 4:7 for a brief discussion on the term "demon." See also Guillet, et al., *Discernment of Spirits*, 17.

indispensable when making discriminating judgments and seeking the "better" choices in life.

The human heart itself was another matter linked to this practice of religious discrimination in the OT. While the human heart on its own can be "wise" (Prov. 23:15) and "humble" (Ps. 51:19), it can also be "devious" and "arrogant" (Ps. 101:4, 5). Due to this, it can also be a clear source of "wickedness" (Prov. 6:18) which affects people's manner of choosing and relating (Prov. 12:10). Independent from the "spirits" and their effects, the heart of the human person can be "uncircumcised" too (i.e., not purified [Jer. 9:25–26]), and thus it often possesses little or no capacity for comprehending fully the seriousness of one's actions and the consequences that arise from them (Ex. 32:21; 2 Sam. 12:7). It is this quality of ambiguity, very much present and at work in the human heart, that perhaps made Jeremiah declare: "More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9–10).

Our final point here on "discernment" concerns prophetic interpretation.[8] In the OT, one of the most significant applications of discriminating judgment has to do with the clear identification of true and false prophets. With more and more prophets emerging, particularly during the rise of Israel's monarchy (ca. 1020 BC) and with them insisting on conflicting revelations and directives, the need to assess and tell apart the true prophet from the false one became crucial for Israel's leaders and people. Gradually, a set of criteria evolved among the Israelites for ascertaining the authenticity (or lack of it) of prophets and their messages. In time, prophets came to be judged by the following norms: 1) their sense of orthodoxy and faithfulness to Judaism's core faith; 2) the actual fulfillment of their own foretellings,

[8]See Guillet, et al., *Discernment of Spirits*, 21–26. See also Michael Buckley, "Discernment of Spirits," in Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 274–281. See also Martin McNamara, "Discernment Criteria in Israel: True and False Prophets," in Casiano Floristan & Christian Duquoc, eds., *Discernment of the Spirit and of Spirits* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 3–13.

especially those involving misfortunes (since the true prophet usually was bearer of bad news); and 3) the quality of their moral life and virtue, including especially their stress on social justice. Added to these ("external" or "objective") criteria were the more "internal" (or "subjective") ones. By "internal," we mean the prophets' intentions, whether they were actually pure or more self-seeking, plus their very own personal vocation story. These two, especially the second one which involves their individual call experience, confirmed to a high degree that their being prophets of Israel did not come from them but really from God and from him alone.

3. What do the Gospels basically say about discernment?

Not unlike in the OT, "discernment" as a theme is taken up in the Gospels, but apparently (also) only in an implicit manner. As we said above in the first question, the technical expression "discernment of spirits" is never really mentioned by the Evangelists. With these authors focusing mainly on Christ, on his words and deeds, and especially on his divine sonship, they are not that concerned with clearly elaborating a doctrine on this topic. Nevertheless, these Gospel writers do tackle this subject matter of "spirits," bringing up these opposing realities of grace and sin and their evident presence and influence in our lives and in our world.

When we read the Gospels, we immediately see this open conflict between the forces of good and evil. Here, in all these four books, the Evangelists even utilize various images and symbols to underscore these different "spirits" and the need to distinguish them well. To cite some examples, the Gospels insist that we must learn to separate the following:

- the wheat from the weeds (Mt. 13:24–30);
- the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:31–46);
- the true prophets from the false ones who come disguised as sheep but underneath are wolves (Mt. 7:15);
- the useful things from the useless ones caught in the net (Mt. 13:47–48);
- the just from the wicked (Mt. 13:49–50);

- the angels from the devils and unclean spirits (Mt. 13:39–41; Mk. 1:23ff);
- the good tree (or fruit) from the decayed ones (Lk. 6:43);
- the Holy Spirit from Beelzebul (Mk. 3:22–30; Lk. 11:13–15);
- God from money (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13); and
- the standard of Christ from the standard of Satan (Mt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13).

When discussing these "spirits," the Gospels call attention to one very important criterion for their sifting, and it is this: "By their fruits we will know them" (NKJV/Mt. 7:16, 20; Lk. 6:44). This means that it is by examining carefully the effects on us, the direction and the *terminus* of these spirits, that we will be able to tell their real source, whether they come from God or from the Evil One.

Together with these examples of opposing powers in the Gospels are the striking polarities we find in St. John. Some of these polarities in the Fourth Gospel are: spirit and flesh (Jn. 3:6), light and darkness (Jn. 3:19), those who belong to what is above and those who belong to what is below (Jn. 8:23), truth and lies (Jn. 8:44), life and death (Jn. 11:17–26), plus others. All these polarities are only manifestations of this main struggle between God and Satan, and the urgency to distinguish them and their actions in us if we are "to have life and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10b).

In all the Gospels, Jesus is presented as one who personally engages in discernment. In short, he himself is the "discerner."[9] As beloved Son, he has this most profound and personal relationship with God as Father (Mt. 11:25–27). Gospel commentators refer to this intimacy of Jesus with the Father as our Lord's "Abba experience." Full of the Spirit, he constantly goes out of his way to seek, find, and do God's will, but always in the context of this loving affinity with his Abba (Mk. 3:35; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34). Often going out to the mountain or deserted

[9]See Thomas Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1984), 35–53. See also Guillet, et al., *Discernment of Spirits*, 30–39.

places to pray, he takes time to be quiet, to listen and dialogue with the Father. He does this especially prior to making pivotal decisions in his life, like the time when he was about to begin his public ministry (Mk. 1:35ff), or when he was about to choose his twelve disciples (Lk. 6:12–16), or when he was in the Garden about to face his Passion and death (Lk. 22:39ff). Like all of us, he too is tempted by the devil. After forty days in the desert, he realizes that his mission is not to be a political Messiah, dependent on worldly wealth, glory, or power, but to be a humble Messiah, deeply devoted and obedient to the Father and his will (Mt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13).

While our Lord in the Gospels is shown as someone doing serious discernment regarding his own identity and mission, he also at the same time becomes the very object of people's attention and focus. In other words, from being the "discerner," Jesus too becomes the one being "discerned." This often takes place in view of the Messianic expectations in Israel at that time. As John the Baptizer once asked, "Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for another?" (Mt. 11:3; Lk. 7:19).

Due to our Lord's radical way of preaching and behaving (like eating with sinners and outcasts), numerous Jews, not excluding Pharisees and scribes plus his own relatives, became hostile to him. Soon enough, they even openly rejected him as Messiah and prophet (Mk. 3:20–30; Mt. 12:1–45). All the same, even if many renounce him, there are those who choose to know him and believe in him. In some cases, those who accept him do so quite readily and without much resistance. Such were the cases of Simeon and Anna who came into contact with the Christ child for the first time in the temple and, upon encountering him, almost immediately placed their faith in him (Lk. 2:25–38). Others, like the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:4–42), or the centurion at the foot of the cross (Mk. 15:39), or the Emmaus disciples (Lk. 24:13–35), or even Thomas and the other apostles (Jn. 20:19–29) had to go through some process of clarification before they were able to judge and ascertain who Jesus truly was. "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk. 8:29; Mt. 16:15). This was the question of our Lord to Peter

and the other disciples. Beyond doubt, this too had to be the same question (or at least a similar one) raised by all the characters in the Gospels who personally met Christ and who came to believe in him and appreciate his person and mystery.

To be familiar with Christ and his radical ways, we also need to be familiar with his teachings, in particular with his Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5–7). This primary discourse of our Lord is so radical and original in its core demand. More than anything else, it insists on love for God and for all others—yes, including our very enemies and persecutors (Mt. 5:44). With this revolutionary way of loving, a completely new paradigm of caring for and relating with others emerges. Together with this, an entirely new set of criteria for evaluating and discerning our thoughts, feelings, and actions also arises. Now, it is never enough to not just kill or murder for one not to be liable to judgment. Now, one is not even allowed to let his anger or bitterness against anyone remain and grow in his heart (Mt. 5:21–26). Also now, it is never enough just to forgive those who have repeatedly hurt us, even if we choose to forgive them up to three times, the number set down by the rabbis, the teachers of the Law. Now, one is required to also have a gentle and humble heart, ever open to forgiving people "seventy times seven times," which means that we are not to limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times (Mt. 18:22). On top of this, whereas before one chief norm for dealing with individuals who have injured us was the precept "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," this time it is the rule of "turning the other cheek" that has to be followed with such people who have offended us (Mt. 5:38–42). Indeed, with our Lord's coming and with the Kingdom of God already in our midst (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2), what really counts this time are not only our external behaviors and actions. What also really matters this time are our very *intentions* behind our external behaviors and actions. Little wonder why it is the "pure in heart," as stressed in the Beatitudes, who are given new eyes to see and new ears to hear in order to discern well and find God in their daily lives (Mt. 5:1ff; 13:16–17).

On the matter of the Beatitudes, many Gospel commentators today hold that they in fact are a self-portrait of Christ.[10] Not a few contend that when Jesus was giving this instruction, he may have been describing and talking about himself, directly or indirectly. To be sure, it is the Lord, above all else, who is poor in spirit, who is lowly, and who hungers and thirsts for what is right. It is he, outstandingly, who is the merciful one, the one who is pure in heart, the peacemaker, including the one who is sorrowing and persecuted for holiness' sake.

Taking this interpretation of the Beatitudes, some even take a major step further. They affirm that the Lord is not only talking about himself here. Much more than this, he seems to be presenting himself as *the* new and paramount standard for all loving and relating, even over and above the Jewish Law itself. Though he insists that he came not to abolish the Law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Mt. 5:17), the core obligations he now sets forth to his disciples are obviously still much more than what the Torah demands. It is in this context of Jesus presenting himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6) and as *the* new supreme standard for loving that we need to approach and understand his new commandment of love, namely, not only "to love one another" but also to love "just as he has loved us" (Jn. 13:34). In the end, it is this aspect of Christic-loving, so radical and so original, as we hear it in the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount, and as we witness it in Jesus' own public life and Paschal Mystery, that should become the overall foundation and spirit for all our judging, choosing, and discerning as beloved disciples of our Lord.

4. What do the Epistles of St. Paul (and also of St. John) basically say about discernment?

We said earlier (in the first question) that it is in the NT epistles that the actual expression "discernment of spirits" first appears. It is St. Paul who tells us that one of the numerous gifts from the Holy Spirit to the early Church was "the power to distinguish one spirit from another" (*diakriseis pneumaton* [1 Cor. 12:10]). Once more, the

[10]Pope John Paul II also takes this position on the Beatitudes in his Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (#16).

presupposition here is that there are various kinds of "spirits" at work inside and outside of us, and often they can be known in the light of their different polarities. Some of the polarities used by Paul are:

- grace and sin (Rom. 5:20);
- light and darkness (Rom. 13:12–13);
- fruits of the spirit and flesh (Gal. 5:19–26);
- God's wisdom and human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7, 13);
- law of faith and law of works (Rom. 3:27);
- freedom and slavery (Gal. 5:1);
- the cup and table of the Lord and the cup and table of demons (1 Cor. 10:21);
- life and death (Rom. 8:12);
- natural and spiritual persons (1 Cor. 2:14–15);
- true and false gospel (Gal. 1:6–9);
- true and false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13); and
- Christ and Satan (1 Cor. 5:3–5).

To understand Paul and why the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment to the Church was so important to him, we need to look at the context from which he was preaching and writing. As one of the top leaders officially concerned with the guarding of the rich deposit of faith (Gal. 1:6–9) and the building up of Christ's Body, Paul had to deal with many questions and issues that the new Church was facing then. The Council of Jerusalem (ca. 49–50 AD/Acts 15) can give us a glimpse of how complicated the situation was at that time. Being the very first council of the Church, this council had to address questions like: "Should the new Church subject Gentile converts to the Mosaic Law or not?"; "If yes, how far should they be subjected to the Law?"; "Should circumcision be imposed on them or not?"; "Should certain forms of dietary, ritual and marital laws (also) be imposed on them or not?" Though Paul is very clear that we are saved by faith in Christ and never by the works of the Law (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16), still, surely, as a devoted shepherd to many communities, he must have grappled with these kinds of burning queries. His three missionary journeys alone (ca. 48–58 AD/Acts 13–21), including his imprisonments in Caesarea (ca. 58 AD/Acts 24) and in Rome (ca. 61 AD/Acts 28), and of course his very martyrdom (ca. 65–66 AD) can help us imagine the countless

challenges he had to confront together with the difficult decisions and discernment he had to make as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the Book of Acts, we hear Paul warning the Miletus presbyters (ca. 56–57 AD). He exhorts them to "be on guard," for soon, some from their own ranks "will present themselves distorting the truth and leading astray any who follow them" (Acts 20:30–31). This alert Paul repeats in his Second Letter to the Corinthians. In this letter, he writes about "false apostles" who disguise themselves as Christ's workers and ministers of God's justice. In this way, they are just like Satan who masks himself as *an angel of light*. However, in time, their falsehoods are uncovered since their drift and *terminus* correspond always to their works of deceit (2 Cor. 11:13–14). Apparently, this kind of situation, with false prophets and apostles abounding, was not at all isolated in the numerous communities of the early Church. Therefore, there was the urgent need for believers and their true leaders to be extra prudent and wise.

It was this threat of instability faced by many communities then, with various issues arising and with many untruthful religious leaders emerging, that moved Paul to come up with some guidelines for distinguishing the spirits. In fact, early on, in his very first letter, he was already urging the believers in Thessalonica, whom he describes as children of "light" (as opposed to children of "darkness"), to "test everything" (ca. 50–51 AD/1 Th. 5:5, 21; cf. also 1 Cor. 2:15). Speaking in terms of "God's will," he stresses that it is God's desire that they enduringly seek the good of all, always taking time to rejoice, pray, and render thanks to the Lord (1 Th. 5:16–18).

This theme of God's will Paul reiterates in his epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:4). This time, though, he includes the opposition between the "flesh" and the "spirit" as he instructs the Christians there to "live by the spirit" and "follow the spirit's lead" (Gal. 5:25). Similar to what is noted in the Gospels (Mt. 7:16; Lk. 6:44), he suggests that spirits are recognizable eventually by their fruits. From here, Paul then presents his two separate lists of the basic fruits of the "flesh" and of the "spirit" which can be regarded as invaluable guidelines for both personal and communal discernment. From the list of the fruits

of the "flesh," we find the following *vices*: "lewd conduct, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like." In contrast, the list of the fruits of the "spirit" features the following *virtues*: "love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity" (Gal. 5:20–23).[11]

Significantly, we can find other similar lists of vices and virtues in Paul's other epistles (e.g., Rom. 1:29–31; 12:9–21; 1 Cor. 13:1–13; 2 Cor. 6:4–7; Phil. 4:4–9) and in the other NT epistles as well (e.g., 1 Jn. 2:16; Col. 3:5–17; Eph. 4:25–32; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; Titus 1:6–8; James 3:13–18; 1 Pet. 3:8–12). These epistles (Pauline and non-Pauline), with their respective lists, can also be looked upon as excellent guidelines for both individual and communal discernment. Taking these lists, one key rule can be applied, i.e., where these *virtues* (especially *faithfulness* to apostolic witness and *love*)[12] are present and alive, the spirit of Christ (most likely) is also present and alive, and where these *vices* are present and alive, the spirit of Satan (most likely) is also present and alive.

Despite Paul's emphasis on all these virtues and vices as norms for discernment, there is still for him one other standard most primary and even indispensable for the truthful testing of the spirits. This standard has to do with our fundamental attitude in relation to Christ himself. As Paul asserts, "no one can say: 'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11). For this apostle, to confess Jesus' Lordship and divinity can only be the grace and fruit of the Holy Spirit and acknowledging this truth can only bring us closer to God. On this

[11]Some authors refer to these two lists in Gal. 5:20–23 simply as a list of "vices and virtues" (see Gerald F. Hawthorne, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* [Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 962–963). Strictly speaking, however, "joy" and "peace" are not virtues. They refer more to our *interior dispositions*. It seems Paul often includes them since they are great marks of the Spirit's presence inside and outside of us. See Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Phil. 4:4–9.

[12]*Faithfulness* to the apostolic witness and *love* are also key themes of John's epistles. See 1 Jn. 2:24; 4:6, 7–21.

ground, the acknowledgment (or non-acknowledgment) of Jesus as the Christ and as Son of God "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:4/New American Standard Version) becomes the basis of all discernment and can thus be regarded as *the* norm of all other norms when distinguishing the spirits.

Later, the writer of the First Epistle of John (ca. 90 AD) will echo this Pauline teaching on Jesus' Lordship. Like Paul, he will also urge Christians that they cannot just trust every spirit. He will point out the need for all to "put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God" (1 Jn. 4:1). He then gives the reason for this, and it is because "many false prophets have appeared in the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).[13] After giving this warning, the author then highlights this essential criterion for discernment which is very similar to Paul's, which is the confession that Jesus our Lord has "come in the flesh" (1 Jn. 4:2).

Here the formula "come in the flesh" is most important. As a "new" confession of faith, it does not refer simply to the Incarnation, with Jesus the divine Word becoming a human being or the Son of God coming to us "in human form."[14] Much more than just the issue of "the physical reality of Jesus' humanity," the whole point of this formula "come in the flesh" has to do with the actual *salvific significance* of the reality of Jesus, who he was, and what he did "in the flesh." In other words, Jesus' coming in the flesh is not just one aspect of salvation among many other aspects which God utilized in order to redeem us. On the contrary, it is a most indispensable and intrinsic component

[13]"False prophets" here refer to those who have left the Johannine Christian community. These "secessionists" have chosen to join with others in the "world." In John's Gospel, "world" is a "designation for all those who (have) rejected Jesus." See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible Commentary Series, eds. William Albright & David Freedman (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1983), 503.

[14]See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 505. Also here we say "new" confession because it is a "new" (modified) formulation of faith to defy directly the new error of these false prophets who deny the redemptive significance and value of Jesus' "coming in the flesh." "Jesus is the Christ" (1 Jn. 2:22) and "Jesus is the Son of God" (1 Jn. 4:15) are two other (earlier) confessions of faith.

of salvation history without which the whole work of God redeeming us would not have been possible. Hence, there is that essential link between Jesus' being "in the flesh" and our very salvation. As one writer puts it, to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to "acknowledge the plan of God who has willed that the divine Son enter fully into the physical, and thus historical, dimension of humankind and work salvation *within it*."[15] And it is precisely this crucial teaching on Jesus and his incarnation that many "false prophets" were negating at that time, which in the mind of the author of the First Epistle of John was most damaging not only to the Church but particularly to the very person and mystery of Jesus himself. This explains why the term "Antichrist" comes up in the epistle (e.g., 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3), for to go against Jesus and the truths regarding his person and his work of salvation is to foster the work of the devil.[16] Thus, in the long run, for the writer of John's First Epistle, it is this "doctrinal" testing on our faith in Jesus as God's Son "come in the flesh," with its intrinsic salvific significance, that will enable us to tell which spirit belongs to God and which one belongs to the Antichrist, which one comes from the spirit of truth and which one comes from the spirit of deception (1 Jn. 4:3–6; cf. also 1 Jn. 2:22). On this account, the Spirit of God will always acknowledge this truth regarding Jesus while the spirit of the Antichrist will always deny it.[17]

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[15]Francis Martin, "1 John," in William R. Farmer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary* (Claretian Publishers, 2001), 1830.

[16]R. Brown writes that the

> author of 1 John sees his adversaries' refusal to confess "Christ come in the flesh" as annulling or negating the importance of Jesus, and thus accomplishing the work of the Antichrist which is to destroy Christ. … Since by their christology they are annulling or destroying Jesus, the secessionists are diabolically reversing the purpose of the coming of God's Son.

See Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 505.

[17]Aside from this test of right doctrine, there are for the author of the First Epistle of John (not unlike Paul) two other tests to help us discern which spirits

As far as we can tell, Paul (without excluding the other writers of the NT epistles) had no clear intentions of offering a systematic doctrine of discernment. It appears that his real and more urgent concern was to address the more pastoral cares and problems of the various communities then. These pastoral cares and problems ranged from too much legalism to corrupt and false apostles (or prophets) presenting heresies and false gospels, different forms of immorality (including sexual immorality), idolatry, group factions and rivalries, and simple and plain jealousies. In this way, these local communities, including the Church as a whole, were in dire need of some instruction (no matter how elementary it may be) on this gift of discernment so that believers and their leaders could be helped when evaluating their particular circumstances and when making pivotal choices for the genuine building up and edification of the Body of Christ, the Church. This, it seems, was the overall purpose of Paul when he took up this theme of discernment of spirits in his epistles.

5. Can you give one or two good definitions of "discernment of spirits?"

In essence, discernment of spirits is a process whereby the believer, in *faith,* examines prayerfully his or her affective experiences (i.e., feelings and interior movements) operative from within, including especially their direction and end. Doing this enables one to know, understand, and respond more authentically to God's personal unique manner of unconditional loving here and now.

One good definition of discernment of spirits is by Edward Malatesta. He says:

> By discernment of spirits is meant the process by which we examine, in the light of faith and in the connaturality of love, the nature of the spiritual states (what we may call our "consolations" and "desolations") we experience in ourselves and in others. The purpose of such examination is to decide, as far as possible, which of the movements

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are at work. They are the tests of *faithfulness* and *obedience* to the commandments (1 Jn. 2:3–7; 3:22–24) and *love* (1 Jn. 5:2).

> we experience lead to the Lord and to a more perfect service of him and our (neighbor), and which deflect us from this goal.[18]

Another helpful definition of discernment of spirits is provided by Philip Sheldrake. He writes:

> In the Christian tradition … discernment (involves) the wisdom to recognize the difference between courses of action that are life-directing and the [ones] that are potentially destructive because [they are] out of harmony with our true nature and our relationship with God. The wisdom of discernment of spirits is meant to form a spiritual and ethical backdrop to life as a whole and to the way life is orientated, whereby we come to recognize almost instinctively our deepest truth and respond to God's communication in daily existence. As a form of wisdom, discernment invites us to a *critical* reflection on human experience—critical because such experience is fundamentally ambiguous. Faced with choices, whether overtly moral or not, we are subject to contradictory influences from inside or outside ourselves. Some of these influences incline us to what is authentic or morally good (again our "consolations"), others to what is inauthentic or morally flawed (our "desolations"). However, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two.[19]

From our definitions above, we see the most principal elements authors today underscore when spelling out the meaning of discernment of spirits. They include:

1. our inner experiences (in consideration of our present context and situation) which are the raw materials of all discernment, including their direction and end;
2. the art of constant, repeated, prayerful examination and reflection on these inner experiences;
3. a discrimination between various experiences not from the point of view of natural causalities (psychological or otherwise) but from that of personal faith and

[18]Taken from Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat*, 41.

[19]See Philip Sheldrake, "Discernment, Social Wisdom and the Public Realm," *Milltown Studies* 68 (Winter, 2011): 1–20.

connatural knowledge and love in the Lord which changes the whole perspective;

4. an evaluation of these interior experiences from this knowledge, love, and faith-standpoint; and finally,

5. the capacity to receive and obey those movements which are discernibly from God and to reject those which are discernibly not from him (since they move us away from him), leading one to choices that are in accordance with the Spirit's ways.

6. What practical value can we derive from our earlier discussions on discernment in the Old and New Testaments (questions 2–4)?

From our discussions above, we can tell right away that discernment cannot just remain on the level of theory. Sooner or later, we need to go beyond our theoretical knowledge of sifting the spirits and get into its (more) *practical application*. The reason is because discernment (whether it is personal, communal, in the context of daily living, formal spiritual direction, preached, or in guided retreat) is ultimately all about making "good" (or "better") choices that are in harmony with the Spirit's guidance. For that matter, what can be more "practical" (or "useful") than engaging ourselves in this gift and art of "choosing well?" In fact, just like the OT and NT characters we named earlier, we are often confronted with obscure and challenging situations that require a truthful mindset and perspective, including a wise and prudent heart so that more life-enhancing decisions can be made by us. It is this truthful mindset and perspective, together with some of the most key principles of discernment present in the OT and NT, that can provide practical helps to us believers who are serious enough in seeking God and his will in our lives.

In both the OT and NT, we immediately realize that discernment of spirits is not just limited to skills, techniques, or methods of effective decision-making strategies. First and foremost, the overall groundwork of Christian discernment is our *personal faith* and *loving relationship* with God. In the NT, this specifically refers to our very attitude in relation to Christ our Lord. To use Paul's language, he says, "My entire attention

is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me—life on high in Christ Jesus. All of us … must have this attitude" (Phil. 3:14–15; 1 Cor. 12:3). Do away with this attitude towards the Lord, and we simply end up with a formal decision-making process which can be most workable but certainly not consistent with what we find in Scriptures. In addition to this emphasis on our faith and loving relationship with God, both the OT and NT also reveal a God who is most accessible and available, a God who is always near and not at all distant. Ever eager to call and reach out to his beloved ones, particularly in the context of personal vocation, he is a God of the covenant and revelation who does speak and make known his will to us (Gen. 15:1–21; Mt. 11:25–27; Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:1–4).

If God and his grace are so real and alive for the authors of the Bible, so too are the realities of evil and sin so true and operative for them. We have seen this in the varying polarities that we pointed out in the previous questions (from the first to the fourth). The difficulty with evil and sin, as we said, is that they often come under the veil of something good, and even disguise themselves as *angels of light* (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:13–14). This is exactly where our Biblical criteria and guidelines for testing the spirits can come into play and bestow so much practical benefit to those who can utilize them.

To begin with, the excellent criterion "by their fruits we will know them" (NKJV/Mt. 7:16, 20; Lk. 6:44) will always be of tremendous value to all discerners, whether they be beginners or experienced in the art. As St. Paul suggests, sometimes all we need is just some degree of patience when doing discernment because, sooner or later, the deceptions of the Evil One will be uncovered since their *direction* and *end* will always match his deeds (2 Cor. 11:15). Thus, there is a need to "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21) and examine always the entire experience (i.e., its beginning, middle and end) and not just certain aspects of it.

Most complementary to the Gospel rule "by their fruits we will know them" are the lists of virtues and vices offered to us by Paul and the other epistle writers. With the aid of these lists, discernment of spirits, though still a most complex process, becomes significantly simplified. As we said before, the general application of these lists

becomes easy enough by following this plain guideline: *where these virtues are present and at work, the spirit of God is present and at work; and where these vices are present and at work, the spirit of Satan is present and at work* (fourth question above). At the top of these lists are the virtues of fidelity to apostolic tradition (Gal. 1:6–9) and Christian charity (1 Cor. 13:1–13). These two top virtues are compatible with the OT prophetic guidelines of fidelity to Israel's core faith and a prophet's moral sense and virtue. Given these lists of virtues and vices, plus the Spirit's reliable marks of true joy and peace, the discernment indicators of external signs, wonders, mighty works, and the like become only secondary and relative (2 Cor. 12:12).

Paul's accent on the role of the universal Church and her local communities when doing discernment can be another useful detail to all of us present-day discerners. From our apostle, we can learn that discernment is never just totally "personal." It is never just a "me and my God" private affair. Discernment always has to have a communal and social dimension. Such was the case with the OT prophets and Paul himself, who showed special concern not only for the community of believers but also for the poor and the weak, ever sensitive to issues related to compassionate service and social justice (Is. 1:17; Amos 2:6ff; Rom. 12:9ff; Gal. 2:10).

To summarize, the following are the most practical truths that we can gain from our discussions on discernment in both the OT and NT, and taking them up can considerably improve the quality of our testing the spirits:

1. at the center of this gift of discernment should be our loving relationship with the Lord;

2. our God is a God of the covenant and revelation who is always near, and who does speak and make his will known to us, especially in the context of our personal vocation;

3. like God and his grace, the Evil One and sin are also at work in our lives, and they often do tempt us under

the guise of something good and affect our way of loving and choosing;

4. hence, there is a need to "test everything" by examining the start, middle, and end of our experiences (especially the more significant ones), focusing on their *terminus* since by their fruits we will know their source(s);

5. virtues (especially fidelity to official and traditional teaching and Christ-like loving, including joy and peace) and vices can be helpful pointers to the Spirit's presence or absence in us and in others; and finally,

6. doing discernment can never be a "private" affair since it always has to have a social and communal aspect.

7. You described discernment of spirits not just as a "gift" but also as an "art" (questions 1 and 6). What do you mean when you say that discernment is an "art"?

"Art" has to do with a "specific skill in adept performance, conceived as requiring the exercise of intuitive faculties that cannot be learned solely by study."[20] Applying this to discernment, this means that discernment, though first of all a *gift* from the Spirit, can be developed and facilitated not so much by reading or studying about it but by actually doing it. It is in this sense that discernment is an art. Presenting a simple analogy here may help us.

The art of discernment of spirits may be compared to the deftness and virtuosity of a concert pianist.

The skill that the pianist has acquired through the years has been perfected only through sheer constant practice and actual playing. In this regard, learning to discern the spirits is like learning to play the piano. One learns to play the piano not by attending concerts and lectures on piano playing, and not so much even by reading books on how to play the piano. One learns to play the piano by actually getting behind the keyboard and playing the piano.

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[20]Taken from *s.v.* "Art", *The American Heritage Dictionary*, New College Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

Likewise, one learns to truly discern not so much by reading books and attending seminars and talks on discernment, although these can certainly help. One learns to discern truthfully by actually discerning. One learns to pay attention and get in touch with one's feelings and inner motions by actually paying attention and getting in touch with one's feelings and inner motions. One learns to name and describe the diverse experiences and movements operative from within and understand and interpret their meaning by actual practice. One learns to sift and test the "spirits" by actually doing it. Rather than any formal study and serious reading from books and articles, in the end it will be without question more through personal experience, actual practice in sifting these spirits, and long prayerful exposure to God's Word and to the Spirit's radical ways that will enable us to bring forth and deepen this gift and art of discernment.

Landas 28:1 (2014) 115–152

THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN MARK

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J.

> Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. (Mk. 11:15–18)

A Prophetic Act?

Isaiah walked naked and barefoot as a sign that the king of Assyria would lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles,"both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered" (Isa. 20:1–4). Jeremiah shattered a potter's jug in front of the elders and priests of Jerusalem as a sign that God would break the city and its people (Jer. 19:1–13). Ezekiel, using a series of actions that ranged from building a miniature of Jerusalem sieged to burning and scattering his hair, prophesied against the house of Israel (Ezek. 4–5). Can Jesus' actions in Mk. 11:15–17 be read in the same vein as those prophetic acts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel?

Mark uses "Christ" almost like a surname for Jesus (Mk. 1:1). When Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter declared "You are the Messiah," Jesus' response was to order them sternly not to tell anyone (Mk. 1:29–30). Jesus then began to teach them that he "must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31). This was the first time Jesus predicted his passion, death, and resurrection, and this was a most explicit disclosure of what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be. It is clear that "Christ" or "Messiah" is central in Mark's presentation of Jesus. But we must keep this in tension with the other lenses Mark gives us to see Jesus: Son of God, Son of David, and Son of Man, to name a few. The whole matter enters a deeper level not only when we acknowledge how these ways of seeing Jesus overlap but more so when we take into account Jesus' own words: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak … no one puts new wine into old wineskins" (Mk. 2:21–22). The old categories may be helpful as starting points, but we cannot just force Jesus into them. New wine must be poured into new wineskins.

Mark certainly portrays Jesus as more than a prophet, but Jesus is also presented with distinctively prophetic characteristics. During his baptism, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and heard a voice from heaven (Mk. 1:9–11). These events are similar to the prophetic commissioning of Isaiah who experienced a heavenly vision and also heard the voice of the Lord (Isa. 6:1–8). Ezekiel, too, received visions as the heavens were opened before him (Ezek. 1).

The Spirit descending on Jesus in Mk. 1:10 can be read messianically especially in the light of Isa. 11:1–2 ("A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse … the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him …"), but it can also be read prophetically. Adela Yarbro Collins sees in Jesus' endowment with the Spirit a prophetic installation as when Elisha was endowed with Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs. 2:9, 15).[1] Elijah's call of Elisha in

[1]Adela Yarbro Collins & Harold W. Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 46.

1 Kgs. 19:19–21 can also be likened to Jesus' call of his first disciples in Mk. 1:16–20. Both Elijah and Jesus take the initiative: those who are called are in the middle of pursuing their livelihood—plowing a field and casting or mending nets. Elisha left his mother and father behind, and James and John left their father, Zebedee, and Elisha's remark to Elijah, "I will follow you" (1 Kgs. 19:20), is mirrored by the Markan comment "And they followed him" (Mk. 1:20).[2] As Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian (2 Kgs. 5), Jesus cleansed the leper in Mk. 1:40–45. As Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:17–24) and Elisha the son of the Shunammite (2 Kgs. 4:8–37) from the dead, so Jesus restored the daughter of Jairus to life (Mk. 5:22–43). As Elisha multiplied loaves to feed a hundred people (2 Kgs. 4:42–44), Jesus satisfied an even greater number twice (Mk. 6:35–44 and 8:1–10). Elisha cursing the boys who jeered at him in Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:23–25) can also remind us of Jesus cursing a fig tree that had no fruit (Mk. 11:12–14, 20–21).

Jesus may not have used the messenger formula ("Thus says Yahweh" or "Thus says the Lord God") of the classical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,[3] but much of his speech falls under the prophetic categories Rudolf Bultmann classified as "preaching of salvation" (for example, Mk. 8:35 and 10:29–30), "minatory sayings" (Mk. 8:12, 38; 10:23, 25; and 12:38–40), "admonitions" (Mk. 1:15 and 13:33–37), and "apocalyptic predictions" (Mk. 9:1, 12–13; 13:2, 5–31; 14:58; 15:29).[4]

Jesus also foretells his passion, death, and resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–34). He predicts that his disciples will abandon him (Mk. 14:27) and that Peter will deny him (Mk. 14:30). He also displays clairvoyant abilities in instructing his disciples how to prepare for his

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[2]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 48.

[3]See Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 98–128.

[4]See Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 108–125.

entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1–7) and for the Passover (Mk. 14:12–16). Jesus is able to discern the future like the prophets of old.[5]

Jesus' deeds and words are signs to the reader that he can be counted as a prophet. The people of Jesus' time are also reported to have regarded him as a prophet (Mk. 6:15; 8:28). Moreover, in giving an explanation why the people in Nazareth rejected him, Jesus said, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mk. 6:4). Thus, Jesus also saw himself as a prophet. Finally, and most relevant to this study, the Markan Jesus' acts in the temple can be interpreted as prophetic because Jesus uses the words of the prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11) to shed light on what he did.

Possible Interpretations of Jesus' Temple Actions

The temple that Jesus supposedly "cleansed," though existing during what has been designated as the second-temple period, was actually the third temple. Known as the Herodian temple, as it was Herod the Great who rebuilt it on an expanded temple platform beginning in 20–19 BCE, this third temple was truly monumental, containing the sanctuary, courts, gates, approaches, porticoes, subsidiary buildings, and even the fortress Antonia.[6] When the whole project was finally finished in 63 CE, it was one of the largest complexes in the ancient world. It is estimated that the sacred precincts extended to an area of 144,000 square meters.[7]

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[5]The presentation above of Jesus as a prophet is guided by Collins' own treatment of the topic. See Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 44–53.

[6]Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 365.

[7]Meir Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, trans. Ina Friedman (Jerusalem: Harper Collins, 1985), 77.

As Sanders points out, Jesus' action in the temple could not have stopped all buying and selling for this would have required an army.[8] Some scholars propose that Jesus' followers must have also joined his demonstration, but this is not found in the text. Jesus' temple act would not have been substantial enough, therefore, to disrupt the daily routine for an extended period of time, or else he would have been arrested right on the spot.[9] Thus, the significance of Jesus' actions in the temple must be based not on what they were immediately able to accomplish but on what they must have stood for. And what did they symbolize?

Was Jesus making a stand for Gentiles? Interpretations that take this direction focus on the words "house of prayer for all nations" (Mk. 11:17, from Isa. 56:7). To add credence to this reading, scholars situate Jesus' temple act in the Court of the Gentiles, pointing out that the Greek word rendered as "temple" in Mk. 11:15–17 is ἱερόν (temple precincts) and not ναός (the temple building itself or the sanctuary). Did Jesus expel the traders to reclaim the space for the Gentiles and give them a place to pray? But the designation "Court of the Gentiles" did not exist during Jesus' or Mark's time.[10] Josephus' *Antiquities*, his *Jewish Wars*, and the *Mishne Midoth*, all of which have detailed descriptions of the Herodian temple, do not mention the "Court of the Gentiles" or refer to the outer courts as such. Even when the designation is used later on in history, it is not meant positively or to afford the Gentiles a special place. The "Court of the Gentiles" has a negative meaning: it is the area beyond which Gentiles cannot go.

The Markan Jesus does exhibit concern for Gentiles. He healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, albeit after hesitating at first (Mk. 7:24–30). This encounter seems to have opened Jesus to reaching out to the Gentiles. He healed a deaf man in the district of Tyre (Mk. 7:31–37) shortly thereafter. The feeding of the four thousand

[8]E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 70.

[9]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70.

[10]Solomon Zeitlin, "There Was No Court of Gentiles in the Temple Area," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (July 1965): 88.

(Mk. 8:1–10), especially when compared to the earlier feeding of the five thousand (Mk. 6:34–44) and its Jewish-centric details, is read by many commentators as an extension of Jesus' ministry to all nations. But up to this point, the drama and the tension in Mark have been steadily building up. Opposition to Jesus has been increasing and coming closer to him. There are also those three ominous predictions of his passion in "the Way section" (Mk. 8:22–10:52) which serve to warn the reader of impending danger. Jesus' concern for the Gentiles, which as presented is limited to Mk. 7:24–8:10 (just 24 verses), seems out of place at this stage of the story and does not seem to merit such a pivotal position in the narrative.

Was Jesus demonstrating against unfair and opportunistic trade practices? Interpretations of the temple incident that see it thus emphasize the words "den of robbers" (Mk. 11:17, from Jer. 7:11). It is not too difficult to imagine, as some studies suggest, that the sellers and money changers fleeced the pilgrims to the Jerusalem temple and took advantage of them. Those in charge of the temple probably knew this and, beyond tacit approval, also gave it their support—for a cut of the profits, as we can again easily imagine. While this is plausible, the text does not bear witness to it, and the theme of corruption is not such a major concern in Mark that it would be the focus of as critical a pericope as the temple controversy. Moreover, if Jesus were against any overcharging or even swindling that was happening, why would he drive out not only the sellers but the buyers as well?

Was Jesus purifying the temple from the defilement of all trade, whether honest or not? This would explain the evacuation of *both* the buyers and sellers. It would also explain why Jesus stopped the transport of σκεῦος through the temple. σκεῦος is translated as "anything" in Mk. 11:16, but it can also be translated as vessel and what merchants used to hold their money. It can also refer to the money bags of those who used the temple as a bank[11]—as many temples in

[11]John R. Donahue & Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina Vol. 2, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 328.

the ancient world also functioned. But the text does not really focus on commercialism in the temple.

The trade that went on in the temple was actually essential to the cult. Pilgrims, some coming from great distances, could hardly be expected to bring their own animals to be sacrificed. Not only would sheep, oxen, pigeons, turtledoves, and the like be very inconvenient to bring on long trips, there was a great possibility that these would be blemished along the way and be rejected by the priests as not fit for sacrifice. The money changers performed an important service as well because they provided pilgrims with the standard Tyrian coinage acceptable for paying the half-shekel temple tax.[12] Jesus' actions in the temple should therefore be seen as not only against the buyers, sellers, and money changers, but all the daily activities in the temple which the buyers, sellers, and money changers were participating in. But was Jesus against sacrifice and all other temple practices?

This does not seem to be the case because in Mk. 1:44–45, he tells the leper he just healed to go to the temple, show himself to the priests, and offer for his cleansing what Moses prescribed in Lev. 14:2–32. It can be argued, however, that seeing Mk. 1:40–45 in this light is only a shallow reading. Some manuscripts have Jesus in Mk. 1:41 not moved with pity but with anger. The anger could have been at

> the Jerusalem priestly establishment and their institutionalized procedures and prescribed offering for the "leper" to be free of the stigma (clean). Since Jesus already made the man clean, his instructions must be intended either as a demonstrative testimony or "witness" against the priest and the costly offerings required by their code.[13]

A better argument for Jesus not being against temple offerings can be seen in his high regard for the widow in Mk. 12:41–44. Jesus had just denounced the scribes for devouring the houses of widows

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[12]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 64–65.

[13]Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60 (New Testament).

in Mk. 12:40. Joseph Fitzmyer has compiled a list of what this could have meant:

a. Scribes accepted payment for legal aid to widows, even though such payment was forbidden.
b. Scribes cheated widows of what was rightly theirs; as lawyers, they were acting as guardians appointed by a husband's will to care for the widow's estate.
c. Scribes sponged on the hospitality of these women of limited means, like the gluttons and gourmands mentioned in Assumptions of Moses 7:6 ("devourers of the goods of the poor, saying that they do so on the basis of their justice").
d. Scribes mismanaged the property of widows like Anna who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Temple.
e. Scribes took large sums of money from credulous old women as a reward for the prolonged prayer which they professed to make on their behalf.
f. Scribes took the houses as pledges for debts which could not be paid.[14]

As much as Jesus saw the injustice being played right before him, Jesus did not stop the widow from putting her two small coins into the treasury. Instead, Jesus praised her.

One final piece of evidence that Jesus was not against temple sacrifice is that his disciples and himself ate the Passover meal "on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed" (Mk. 14:12–16). Even though a lamb is not mentioned in the Last Supper, the Passover meal would not have been complete without it. And the only place in Jerusalem where the lambs could be slaughtered at this time was the temple.

[14]Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible, Vol. 28A (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1318.

Was Jesus symbolizing the destruction of the temple? This is Sanders' position. He centers on the image of "overturning" tables and seats and links this with Jesus' prophecy about the temple being destroyed in Mk. 13:1ff: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."[15] But as Sanders himself notes, one objection to this is that overturning furniture is not an obvious symbol of destruction. C. F. D. Moule points to the broken pot in Jer. 19:10 as a better possible sign. Also, if the meaning of Jesus' acts can be seen in his prediction of the temple's destruction, why was this prophecy not reported right after the temple event? Why did Mark wait for two chapters before recounting this? It is the conflation of Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11 (in Mk. 11:17) that is put right after Jesus' acts, and so this passage must be used to interpret what the Markan Jesus meant to do.

The possible readings of the temple controversy presented above are not exhaustive of all scholarly positions, but they are representative of what this study calls "minimal" interpretations. They are "minimal" because while they are based on the text, they limit their views to the temple scene and the episodes proximate to it. As a result, they also prove unsatisfactory. What is needed, especially for a difficult text such as the temple controversy, is a "maximal" interpretation, one that considers the thrusts and themes of the whole Gospel and opens up to a more integrated view.

Towards a Maximal Interpretation

A maximal interpretation is one that considers one part of the narrative in the greater context of the whole story. Thus, it is the position of this study that the "cleansing of the temple" is not merely a cleansing and not only about the temple. The temple is not usually listed in commentaries as a major motif in Mark's Gospel. In fact, the first mention of the temple comes only in Mk. 11:11. It does play a prominent part from then on, but to introduce a new theme only in

[15]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70–76.

the last third of a narrative does not speak well of a storyteller's art and skill. The point of the scenes involving the temple must therefore already be found early in the Gospel, perhaps even in the beginning. It must lie in many other parts throughout the Gospel and must also be seen when the Gospel is taken as a whole.

This maximal approach can also be applied analogously to the way this study will treat Mark's allusions to Hebrew Scripture and other texts from the second temple period. This essay will also examine the Jewish texts echoed in Mark in their wider context. Atomistic exegesis, "which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion,"[16] was a rabbinic practice and is part of the Jewish tradition of *midrash*. With Christianity's roots being located in Judaism, it would be logical to assume that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament writers would resemble to some extent those of then contemporary Jewish exegeses.[17] Is it valid then to go back to the larger contexts of Jewish texts when they appear? There are also examples of contextual Jewish exegeses; we should not too hastily conclude that the Jews used texts only in one way. David Instone Brewer demonstrates this with quite a number of examples of contextual Jewish exegeses.[18]

So how do we know whether a particular use of a Jewish text in Mark is an example of contextual or non-contextual exegesis? How do we know whether to go back to an allusion's larger context or not? We take a clue from Donald Juel's approach in *Messiah and the Temple*: if a particular allusion to a Jewish text does not seem to fit well in its new

[16]George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 248.

[17]Richard N. Longenecker, "Who is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament's Use of the Old," *Themelios* (October & November 1987): 7.

[18]See David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

setting, we will examine the original context of the Jewish allusion.[19] If going back to the original context of a Jewish allusion sheds more light on its new setting, how can we just ignore what it gives us to ponder?

As will be shown, Mark's use of Jewish texts will always be better understood when these texts are seen in their original contexts. Following Timothy Gray, we will consider Mark's use of Jewish Scripture as more than just examples of atomistic exegesis but instances of metalepsis, a literary method of evoking the wider meaning of an earlier text by striking a resonance through a brief citation.[20] Thus, while only a phrase is quoted, we will also look into the context of the verse where it originally appears.

The Kingdom of God

We begin our maximal interpretation by going back to what many exegetes have pointed to as the "thesis statement" of Mark's Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (or is at hand); repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk. 1:15).

The words above, which the Markan Jesus spoke at the start of his ministry, situate him squarely in an eschatological context.[21] Eschatology literally means words or concepts about the last or final things, but Jewish eschatology is not about the end of the world. That would make no sense in the Jewish worldview,[22] for how would God's promises be fulfilled then?

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[19]See this approach at work in Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 133.

[20]Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 5.

[21]Donahue & Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 37.

[22]N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 285.

Jewish eschatology is centered on the faithfulness of God to his covenant with Israel. The basis of this covenant is the set of promises given to the patriarchs ("I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" [Gen. 12:2; see also Gen. 15, 17, 22, and so on]). This set of promises was initially fulfilled with the Exodus (Ex. 2:24ff), ratified at Sinai (Ex. 19–24),[23] found blossoming with David and the blessing given to his house (2 Sam. 7), challenged in exile in Babylon, and seemingly restored upon the return of God's people to Jerusalem. But the Jews during Jesus' time would have been in a dilemma: if God had made a covenant with them, why were they in their current state? It had been many years since they were released from Babylon, but though they were back in their land, they were still in an exile of oppression under foreign overlords. Still, Israel held on with hope. Jewish eschatology looks to the future. If there is anything final in Jewish eschatology, it is a final future, the advent of an age that will last and never be supplanted.

A part of N. T. Wright's summary of the Jewish worldview as seen in second-temple literature is as follows:

a. Israel's God was indeed going to fulfill the covenant. The hope is never abandoned (Dan. 9:16; Neh. 9:8; Joel 2:15–32; Ps. Sol. 9; Bar. 5:9; etc.).

b. This will result in re-establishing the divinely intended order in all the world (Isa. 40–55; Dan. 7; Tob. 13–14, etc.).[24]

The kingdom of God is one way of talking about the re-establishment of the divine order that fulfills the covenant. Reflection on eschatology in the New Testament has privileged the image of kingdom of God (or kingdom of Heaven, a circumlocution in the Gospel of Matthew) and validly so because this expression is mentioned 122 times in it, with ninety-nine of those occurrences in the synoptic

[23]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 260–261.

[24]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 271.

Gospels. In Mark alone, there are fourteen references to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God should not be understood as primarily spatial, territorial, or political. Going back to the Greek βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, we note that "βασιλεία" is more active and dynamic than the static "kingdom." βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ refers more to the "reigning" or "living rule" of God as well as the conditions for his reign.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news" is a programmatic statement. It sets Jesus' mission for the rest of the Gospel. As many scholars have said, *everything* that Jesus does and says is a proclamation that the kingdom of God has come near. If this is so, then Jesus' demonstration in the temple must also be read as a prophetic act preaching the kingdom of God.

The prophetic acts mentioned early in this essay all have connections with the message they were trying to convey: walking naked as a sign of being led away as poor and defeated captives; a broken jug symbolizing a city destroyed; hair scattered and burned like a people dispersed and reduced to nothing. How can driving out buyers and sellers, overturning tables and chairs, and preventing the transport of vessels signify the coming of a kingdom?

A Different Image

The kingdom of God is a privileged way of talking about eschatology, but it is only one way of talking about it. In all the many times the kingdom of God is discussed and described in the Gospels, it is never really precisely defined. This may be because the kingdom of God is elusive, or perhaps it is the hope, the promise, and the mystery that the kingdom of God is trying to capture that is even more elusive: eschatology.

To better connect the temple event to eschatology, this study proposes a different focal image. We do not have to look far for this alternative metaphor. Reading Mark's "thesis statement" as an instance

of synonymous parallelism, a common device in poetic Hebrew texts, we already have another way of stating that the kingdom of God is at hand: "The time is fulfilled." How time, season, age, era, or καιρὸς can be a better way of understanding Jesus' temple act will be developed below.

Before anything else, though, it must be emphasized that this study is not proposing to replace "kingdom of God." Rather, it is pushing another image to be considered alongside it. We saw earlier how Mark presents many different images of Jesus, some overlapping with others but with no single image capturing Jesus perfectly. Similarly, we have many different images of eschatology: new creation, covenant fulfillment, blessings given, deliverance, liberation, new exodus, restoration, the day of the Lord, kingdom of God, and so on. All these images approximate but never fully encapsulate what is hoped for in eschatology. This is because eschatology refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed—no one knows exactly when or precisely how—to such an extent that there is an entirely new state of reality about which the only thing certain is that it is new.[25] Proposing a different image will perhaps remind us again that the kingdom of God is not static. Proposing a different image will perhaps allow us to recover some of the dynamism the metaphor of the kingdom of God has lost.

The Aspect of Time in Mark

Is time a valid theme with which to interpret and integrate Mark? καιρὸς is mentioned only in Mk. 1:15, 11:13, and 13:33, but its second occurrence, when Mark comments that it was not the season or καιρὸς for figs, is very relevant in our discussion of the temple controversy (see below).

We are alerted to the importance of the aspect of time from Mk. 1:1: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of

[25]David L. Petersen, "Eschatology," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 575.

God." In this study, we will take the position that "beginning" here does not just refer to the witness of John the Baptist (Mk. 1:2–8) or only to the prologue of Mark (Mk. 1:1–13 or, as some outlines have it, Mk. 1:1–15). We will take "beginning" here in conjunction with understanding good news, gospel, or εὐαγγέλιον in the same way that Paul, the earliest Christian writer in the New Testament, proclaims it in Rom. 1:3–4: "the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." For Paul, more often than not, the content of the good news is the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. As Brendan Byrne explains:

> If, for Paul—and presumably other Christian writers and preachers before Mark—the core content of "the Gospel" was the good news about God's raising of Jesus and the establishment of his messianic reign through the Spirit (Rom. 1:3–4), what Mark could be saying, then [with "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"], at the start of his work is: "You believe the basic good news about Jesus the Crucified One: how God raised him from the dead and revealed him to be the Messiah and Son of God. Now I am going to tell you how Jesus anticipated his postresurrection messianic reign in his teaching and activity up to and including his death on the cross. In other words, I am going to tell you how it all *began*."[26]

The whole of Mark therefore can be seen as a process of inauguration, the establishment of a new period. To this, we can add R. Alan Culpepper's insight on beginnings: "To make a beginning is to divide time, to place a marker that says one era has ended and another one has begun."[27]

"Gospel" or "good news" or "εὐαγγέλιον" also connotes a new age. In the Greek-speaking world of Mark, εὐαγγέλιον (or εὐαγγέλια, the plural form in which it more commonly appears) is used in formal

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[26]Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 24.

[27]R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary Vol. 20 (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2007), 64.

announcements of marriage, anniversaries, and in the proclamation of the accession or birth of rulers and emperors. An inscription from Priene in Asia Minor dating back to 9 B.C.E. states:

> … the birthday of the god (Caesar Augustus) has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel (εὐαγγέλια); concerning him, therefore, let all reckon a new era beginning from the date of his birth.[28]

Seeing Jesus as a prophet also builds up eschatological anticipations and indicates the beginning of a new age. For Israel, prophecy declined and then ceased sometime after the Babylonian exile. But in the second temple period, the notion that prophecy was a thing of the past somehow combined with the expectation that the end of the present tribulation and the coming redemption would be accompanied by the return of prophets.[29]

"Kingdom of God" may outnumber references to καιρὸς by a big margin, but another expression related to time occurs almost three times more frequently than βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in the Gospel according to Mark: εὐθὺς, which appears forty-one times. Translated most of the time as "immediately," εὐθὺς "lends the sense of everything proceeding at breathless haste—the unstoppable unfolding of a divine project."[30] Even βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ has a time aspect: the kingdom of God is *when* God rules. This ties in quite neatly with the concept of good news in Isa. 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" What is good news is when God reigns. Benedict XVI asserts that the kingdom of God is an "event" unfolding in history in a new way beginning with Jesus' proclamation of the good news. Jesus' message is that "God is acting *now* [emphasis added]—this is the hour when

[28]See Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, 6.

[29]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 44.

[30]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 30.

God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the Living God, in a way that goes beyond anything seen before."[31]

Finally, the aspect of time is very much appropriate for discussing the temple controversy because, as will be shown, the Old Testament texts alluded to in connection with Jesus' temple demonstration are about the coming day of the Lord and the day of judgment.

The Old Age and the New

Eschatology includes a duality between the present time and the time to come. The new age signals the end of the old, and this is one way of seeing Jesus' ministry—as a sign that the final future has come.

Jesus' first miracle in Mark is the cure of the demoniac (Mk. 1:21–28). This is significant because with this act, Jesus is showing that the age of captivity to demons has ended. Eschatology involves the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. With his exorcisms (see Mk. 5:1–20; 7:24–30; and 9:14–29, to name a few)—and it is in Mark that Jesus performs the most number of exorcisms, he communicates that God's victory is at hand; the age of fulfillment has come.

It is a similar message that is in the cure of Simon's mother-in-law (Mk. 1:29–31), the many sick in Capernaum (Mk. 1:32–34), the woman with a hemorrhage (5:25–34), and Jairus' daughter: the time of captivity to affliction—and even death—is over; a new time is beginning.

When Jesus heals the paralytic (Mk. 2:1–12) and the man with a withered hand (Mk. 3:1–6), when he opens the ears and removes the speech impediment of the deaf and dumb man (Mk. 7:31–37), when he restores the sight of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22–26) and Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46–52), Jesus is fulfilling the Isaian prophecy of the return of the redeemed and the time of their restoration:

[31]Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 56.

> Strengthen the weak hands,
> and make firm the feeble knees …
> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
> and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
> then the lame shall leap like a deer,
> and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. (Isa. 35:3, 5–6)

When Jesus touches and cleanses the leper (Mk. 1:40–45), eats with sinners and tax collectors (Mk. 2:13–17), and engages in debates about purity laws (Mk. 7:1–23), he signals the end of the old age and the old division between being clean and unclean. When he heals on the Sabbath (Mk. 3:1–6) and teaches that "the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:23–28) and challenges Jewish tradition (Mk. 7:8–13), he is proclaiming the end of a particular way of interpreting the Torah. When he redefines what family means (Mk. 3:31–35), he is marking the beginning of something new. And when he forgives (Mk. 2:1–12), he is saying that the time of slavery to sin is over.

Jesus also ends the old understanding of what the Messiah is in his predictions of his passion (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–34) and shows them, in the verses immediately following, a new way of greatness in the new age of the kingdom (Mk. 8:34–38; 9:33–37; 10:35–45).

The Temple

All the words and deeds listed above bring us to the point of the narrative when Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem and the temple. Are not the events and signs above already sufficient in proclaiming the close of the old age and the opening of the new? What does the incident in the temple add? Eschatological thought believes that God will act *definitively* to end the time of old and begin the prophesied new era. For the Jews, there is no more dramatic place to stage a definitive demonstration than the temple.

The temple was at the heart of every aspect of Jewish life. Its importance cannot be overestimated. Shmuel Safrai writes:

> In the eyes of the people, it constituted primarily the divine dwelling-place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations … the offering of sacrifices and the ritual cleansing involved atoned for the individual transgressions and served as a framework for his spiritual elevation and purification …. The temple, its vessels and even the high priest's vestments were depicted as representing the entire universe and the heavenly hosts …. With the destruction of the temple, the image of the universe was rendered defective.[32]

The temple was at the religious, national, political, and even economic core of Israel. It was a synecdoche for Israel. Thus, it became the focal point of many controversies during the second temple period.[33] And when Jesus held his demonstration in the temple, it must have been considered an attack on the whole of Israel. No wonder then that Israel's leaders conspired to put him to death after the temple incident.[34]

We are now ready to deal with the texts directly connected to the temple controversy.

The Entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1–10)

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem must be part of our treatment of the temple event first because of the temporal proximity of the entry to the temple demonstration. The close relationship between Jerusalem and the temple can also be seen in the text which strings together

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[32]Shmuel Safrai, "The Temple," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Vol. 2, eds. S. Safrai & M. Stern in cooperation with D. Flusser & W. C. van Unnik (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 904–906.

[33]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

[34]The Sabbath can also be considered a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of God. It is noteworthy that after Jesus violated the Sabbath (Mk. 3:1–5), "the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mk. 3:6).

the two: "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple …" (Mk. 11:11); "Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple …" (Mk. 11:15); and "Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple …" (Mk. 11:27).

Wright describes Jerusalem and the temple:

> When we study the city-plan of ancient Jerusalem, the significance of the temple stands out at once, since it occupies a phenomenally large proportion (about 25%) of the entire city. Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it.[35]

Jerusalem is a metonymy for the temple and vice-versa. Psalm 78:68–69 tells of how God chose Mount Zion for his sanctuary, and Zion later came to refer to Jerusalem, the temple-city. Lam. 2:6–8 uses "Fair Zion" and "Jerusalem" interchangeably.[36] The main point of what happens as Jesus enters Jerusalem can be projected to the main point of what happens when Jesus clears the temple precincts.

Part of the oracle in Zech. 9 prophesies:

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
> Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
> Lo, your king comes to you;
> triumphant and victorious is he,
> humble and riding on a donkey,
> on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9)

The allusion to Zech 9:9 is more explicit in Matthew's account of the entry into Jerusalem, but it is also found in Mark's, as seen when Jesus comes riding on a colt (Mk. 11:7) and the people shout aloud (Mk. 11:9).

Zech. 9:9–17 paints the image of the coming ruler of Israel. It is replete with eschatological hope as it looks forward to "that day" (Zech. 9:16) when the Lord *will* save them (again Zech. 9:16), when the

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[35]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

[36]See Jon D. Levenson, "Zion Traditions," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6, 1098. In a further development of the metonymy between the temple and Jerusalem, Zion was later also used to refer to the people of Israel.

Lord *will* appear over them and the Lord God *will* sound the trumpet (Zech. 9:14), when the Lord of hosts *will* protect them (Zech. 9:15). "That day" is a shortened reference to "the day of the Lord." And all of this should remind us of Mark's programmatic statement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

The people shout, "Hosanna," which can be translated as "Save *now*!" The aspect of time is again present as Jesus is praised as ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the one who comes or the one coming in the name of the Lord (Mk. 11:9). Mark has pointed to Jesus before in the same manner. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus and spoke of him as the one more powerful who is coming (Mk. 1:7). In the entry into Jerusalem, the one who is coming is announced as finally come.

The crowds are correct in their proclamation in Mk. 11:9: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (from Ps. 118:26). Jesus is the one who is coming, and he comes in the name of the Lord. But they show their misunderstanding of Jesus in Mk. 11:10: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" Jesus' message is all about the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of David, which has a political and nationalistic ring to it.[37]

The First Visit to the Temple (Mk. 11:11)

The first part of Mal. 3:1, "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me," has already been fulfilled in Mark with John the Baptist's ministry. Jesus' first visit to the temple accomplishes the second part: "… and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." Mal. 3:1–7 is yet another passage that is in the context of eschatology. It is again about the day of coming. But for Malachi, this is not a day of glory. Amos, the first prophet to announce "the day of the Lord," warned that this would not be a day of light but of darkness for Israel (Am. 5:18). Similarly, in Malachi 3, the "day" is a day of judgment: "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who

[37]Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 21.

can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap …. Then I will draw near to you for judgment …" (Mal. 3:2, 5).

What Jesus does when he "suddenly comes to his temple" may seem anti-climactic at first. After the heightening tension in the Way section and the big build-up in the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus enters the temple and just looks around. Some scholars say that Mark puts this pause here so that he can insert the cursing of the fig tree (which is the next scene) and have one of his trademark intercalations. Some guess that Jesus needed to look around the temple precincts so that he can plan his demonstration the next day. Some think that to look around was all Jesus could do because, as the text says, it was already late. Perhaps the merchants and the crowds had already gone home. But consider more deeply Jesus' actions: he looks around at everything—it is what a judge would do. The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. And the judgment will not be all blessing and light. Quite poetically, it is already [too] late (Mk. 11:11).

The Fig Tree Cursed (Mk. 11:12–14)

The judgment glimpsed in Jesus' actions the day before now becomes clearer in the scene with the fig tree. First of all, the fig tree figures in the prophetic books often in passages with an eschatological import. In Micah 4, when the mountain of the Lord's house is established as the highest of mountains in the days to come (v. 1), all shall "sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees" (v. 4). In Zechariah 3, when the Lord brings his servant, the Branch, and removes the guilt of the land (vv. 8–9), the people shall invite each other to come and sit under the vine and fig tree (v. 10). The blossoming of the fig tree and its being found with fruit is depicted when God visits his people with blessing (see Deut. 8:7–8; 1 Kgs. 4:24–25; and 1 Macc. 14:12). But the withering of the fig tree and its lack of fruit is portrayed when God comes in judgment (see Jer. 8:13; Hos. 2:12; and Isa. 34:4). In Am. 8:1–3, the link between the fig tree and God's judgment is presented through a pun: the prophet is shown a basket of

summer fruit (which were dried figs)— קָיִץ (qāyits), which God uses to make Amos say קֵץ (qēts)—the end (of the people Israel).[38]

It has been noted by many exegetes that when Mark intercalates the puzzling incident involving the fig tree and the controversial acts done in the temple, as with his other intercalations (see for example Mk. 5:21–43: the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage; and Mk. 14:53–72: Peter following Jesus to the courtyard, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Peter denying Jesus), the two stories are supposed to be mutually interpretative. The intercalation of the fig tree and the temple scenes is remarkable because we actually have here a "double sandwich"[39]—Jesus visits the temple for the first time (Mk. 11:11); he curses the fig tree (Mk. 11:12–14); Jesus goes to the temple again (Mk. 11:15–19); the fig tree is seen to have withered (Mk. 11:20–25). This makes the relationship between the fig tree and the temple scenes doubly stronger.

In Mk. 11:12–13, Jesus, hungry, goes to a fig tree in leaf but finds nothing on it. In Mic. 7:1, in the context of judgment (see Mic. 6:9–16), God hungers for first-ripe figs and finds none. Just as the fig tree in leaf (Mk. 11:12) shows signs of life but is actually fruitless, so is the temple. It is bustling with life and activity but in truth produces no fruit.[40] Thus, it will be judged. "May no one ever eat of your fruit again," Jesus says to the fig tree (Mk. 11:14). A fruit tree without fruit is as good as dead; a temple that produces no fruit is as good as ended.

The Markan comment, "It was not the season (καιρὸς) for figs" (Mk. 11:13), may make Jesus look foolish—why would he be looking for figs when there really was not supposed to be any? But the irrationality of the act should be a signal for us: "It was not the season for figs" must

[38]William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980), 134–135.

[39]Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, 178.

[40]J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74/3 (July 2012): 509–527.

be read not as an agricultural statement but as a theological one. First, καιρὸς should again remind us of the theme of time that is prominent in Mark's Gospel (explicitly in Mk. 1:15: "This is the καιρὸς …"). Our brief foray into biblical texts concerning figs showed us that a tree ripe for harvest means eschatological glory and a bare tree is a sign of the season of judgment.[41] The Markan comment in v. 13 prepares us for what will happen in the temple.

The Demonstration in the Temple (Mk. 11:15–17)

When Jesus drives out those buying and selling in the temple (Mk. 11:15), the verb used, ἐκβάλλειν, is the same word that is employed when he expels demons (see Mk. 1:34, 43; 3:15; 9:38 as examples). As was said before, exorcisms are a sign of the end of the old age of captivity and the in-breaking of the new. The clearing of the temple precincts by the expulsion of the buyers and sellers and the overturning of the money changers' tables and the dove sellers' seats (Mk. 11:15–16) can be seen as a fulfillment of Zech. 14:21—"And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day," one description of what will happen on the day of the Lord.

How can we understand "And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple" (Mk. 11:16)? According to the *Mishnah*, "one should not enter the temple mount with his walking stick, his shoes, his money bag, or with dust on his feet. And one should not use [the temple mount] for a shortcut" (*Berakhot* 9:5). Is Jesus just trying to preserve the sacredness of the temple complex? Is this act about purifying the temple? If we relate this though to the fig tree episode, to what happened in the previous scene, and to the withering that will be observed in the next, preservation of sacredness and purification do not fit. The cursing and drying up of the fig tree points to an end. How can we reconcile what happened to the fig tree with Jesus' temple actions?

[41]Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 521.

As we did with Jesus' first visit to the temple, let us again imagine what Jesus enacted: he throws out those buying and selling; he interrupts those changing coins and peddling doves; he prevents anyone carrying anything to pass through. In effect, all activity ceases in the area Jesus is able to cover. The temple (represented by the space Jesus occupies) is at a standstill. The way the New Revised Standard Version translates the astonished way the people reacted strengthens the image we have constructed—they are "spellbound" (Mk. 11:18).

This is where we see the advantage of focusing our interpretation on the aspect of καιρὸς and not on the image of kingdom: things ground to a halt in the temple. It was as if time stopped. And this is the meaning of Jesus' temple demonstration: the age of the temple is judged to be ended.

Echoes of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11

Jesus in Mk. 11:17 then teaches, saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Isa. 56:7)'? But you have made it a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11)."[42] How do these two biblical allusions serve to interpret what Jesus has just done? Following the methodology which we have described previously, we will now consider the larger context of these allusions.

Atomistic exegesis can mislead us into thinking that the point of "house of prayer for all nations" is the concern for the Gentiles. But Isa. 56:7 is part of an eschatological vision of God's future intervention to save Israel. It is about a salvation about to come, a justice about to be revealed (Isa. 56:1). A future house of prayer for all who observe what is right, who do what is pleasing to God (vv. 1, 4, 7), is promised

[42]In previous teaching scenes in Mark, what Jesus says is not reported. But his words are usually accompanied by great deeds (for example, see Mk. 1:21–27, where he teaches and then cures the demoniac; Mk. 1:39, where he preaches and expels demons; Mk. 2:1–12, where he interrupts his teaching to heal the paralytic; and so on). Jesus teaches not only with his words but with his deeds. And when a teaching is reported that is close to a mighty deed, we must see it as the interpretation of that deed.

not only to Israel but to foreigners, eunuchs, and others (see vv. 3–4, 6, and 8).[43] Thus, two signs of the time of fulfillment are a new temple and the gathering of Israel and the Gentiles.

It should be reiterated that in Jesus' time, though the Babylonian exile was over, "the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in thrall to foreigners."[44] The temple had been rebuilt twice—by Zerubbabel and, in a much grander fashion, Herod the Great. But there was still an expectation of a future temple other than what they had, and to this future temple peoples from all nations would flock.

This two-fold expectation finds resonance in other texts from the second-temple period. The last chapter of the Book of Tobit, dated by most scholars in the second century B.C.E., presupposes the existence of Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple but still says:

> But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfilment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth …. All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth. (Tob. 14:5–7)

This is the real post-exilic restoration of which the previous one (beginning in 538 B.C.E.) was simply a foretaste.[45]

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[43]Some scholars place too much emphasis on the Sabbath observance of the eunuchs and foreigners (vv. 4, 6), but the Sabbath, as mentioned before in another footnote, can just be a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of the Lord. This can be seen when vv. 4 and 6 are read as examples of synonymous parallelism.

[44]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269.

[45]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 270.

Another example is found in the visions in 1 Enoch, written during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.):

> I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up: all its pillars were new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which he had taken away. (1 Enoch 90:29)[46]

If one continues reading 1 Enoch 90 until verse 39, we will see all people being drawn to this "new house" and a new humanity formed.

"Jesus' citation of Isa 56:7 should not be read simply as a statement about a desired state of affairs that Jesus did not find when he entered the temple precincts."[47] Yes, there might have been activities there that were, to refer to Isaiah 56, "not right" and "not pleasing to God," but these are not the point of the temple event. The temple scene should have emphasized these activities and what was wrong with them, if that were the case. Instead, we are only left to conjecture about them. But what is emphasized is eschatology. Jesus stops temple activities, symbolizing that he is stopping temple time, and ends the era of this temple to make way for the future. The "shall" in Isa. 56:7 is significant. Herod's temple, no matter how grandiose it was, did not fill the role of God's promised dwelling place with his people. Something else shall.

Culpepper explains what Gray calls metalepsis in this way:

> In order to grasp the full significance of the quotation, one must remember that in the first century, there were no chapter and verse divisions in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that quotation marks, footnotes, and cross references were not yet in use. Therefore, brief quotations of key phrases were often used to evoke the larger context of a familiar passage of Scripture.[48]

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[46] Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* Vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004).

[47] Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 516.

[48] Culpepper, *Mark*, 379.

What does the brief quotation of "house of prayer for all nations" evoke? It should remind the reader of a future temple that will fulfill God's covenant—though as we all find out later, not in the way the Jews expected.

Atomistic exegesis of Jer. 7:11 can mislead us into thinking that the point of "den of robbers" is how Jewish leaders have robbed the people in the various ways illustrated before. We can get lost looking for the best way to translate "λῃστῶν." It, after all, was used by Jesus when he was arrested and he asked in Mk. 14:48, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit (λῃστὴν)?" Two revolutionaries (the New American Bible's translation of λῃστάς) or insurrectionists were also crucified with Jesus (Mk. 15:27).

Looking more closely at the text of Mk. 11:17, we see a parallelism between "house of prayer" and "den of thieves"—more pointedly, the parallelism is between "house" and "den."[49] The focus therefore should not be on "prayer" or "robbers" but on the temple.

In Jer. 7:1–15, the focal image is clear in the use of "the Lord's house"; "gate/gates"; "dwell" (three occurrences); "place" (five occurrences); "house, which is called by my name" (three occurrences); den of robbers; and "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." The people of Judah (not just their leaders) have made the temple a place where they can hide after committing abominations. They think that they will be safe there; they have made it something of an idol or a magical charm. Now comes the judgment. God says to the people of Judah, "I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh" (Jer. 7:14).

What should the brief quotation of "den of robbers" evoke? It should remind us of the end of the first temple. Jesus, too, in Mk. 11:15–17, mirroring the judgment on the fruitless fig tree, pronounces judgment

[49]This stands out more when "for all nations" is dropped. Is this why Matthew and Luke, the acknowledged more elegant writers, discard this even if they, too, show Jesus as having concern for the Gentiles?

on the temple. The chief priests and the scribes hear it as the disciples heard the curse on the fig tree. Jesus' demonstration, to say it again, has symbolized the temple's end.

In summary, Mk. 11:17 brings together two quotes from the prophets that interpret Jesus' temple actions in this way: "The time of this temple has ended. There is a future temple in our horizon."

We have been focusing on the temple in the last few paragraphs, and so we must again remind ourselves that what is at stake here is not just the temple. N. T. Wright compares Jesus' action in the temple to the burning of a flag.[50] When someone burns a flag, he or she is not just incinerating a piece of cloth; he or she is symbolically setting fire to a land, a people, a government, a sovereignty, and all the other narratives implied in the flag. Jesus was passing judgment not just on the temple but on all of Judaism; he was ending not just the time of the temple but everything Israel knew. In Jer. 7:15, the next verse after the judgment on the temple, God says, "And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim." We can read the judgment on the temple and the judgment on the people as synonymous parallels. The end of the temple is also the end of the people—this is also what Jesus symbolized with the temple demonstration. No wonder the Jewish leaders wanted him killed.

The Fig Tree Withered (Mk. 11:20–26)

Even Jeremiah, well known as the prophet of doom, has a book of consolation. Ezekiel as well prophesies the destruction of the temple, but once the temple is destroyed, his message becomes one of promise that the temple will be rebuilt and that God's people will return to Jerusalem. Jesus has just prophetically ended the time of the temple. Will he also point to a new beginning? This is what we see when Jesus and the disciples revisit the fig tree.

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[50]N. T. Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 62.

First, they see that the fig tree is "withered to its roots," utterly ended, just like the temple. Another reminder of what happened in the temple is in Mk. 11:23: "Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you." The mountain can be any proverbial mountain, but considering that Jesus and the disciples were walking to Jerusalem and that Jesus used the demonstrative pronoun "this" (τούτῳ), it is possible that Jesus was pointing to the temple mount in Jerusalem. And Jesus, with his prophetic act of judgment the previous day, had symbolically "taken up" the temple mount and "thrown" it into the chaos of the sea.

In Wisdom literature, different sayings and proverbs can be grouped together without logical development and with only the verbal association as the connection. Is this also true for the seemingly disparate and loosely related exhortations about faith, prayer, and forgiveness in Mk. 11:22–25? Kirk reminds us of the integral part so far of Isa. 56:7 in the prophecy of the temple's end.[51] What eschatological temple will replace the existing one? What will be the new house of prayer for all peoples? It is the position of this writer that the community of disciples will be the new temple. The community of disciples is what unites Mk. 11:22–25.

One proof of this is that Peter is acting as a representative of the disciples in this pericope. Note that while it is Peter who expresses "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered" (Mk. 11:21), Jesus directs his response to all (Mk. 11:22). Next, Jesus teaching the disciples to "have faith" and stressing the need for prayer should remind us of one other time Jesus emphasized faith and prayer—during the healing of the boy with a demon in Mk. 9:14–29. The themes here are also faith and belief ("Everything is possible to one who has faith" [Mk. 9:23]) and prayer ("This kind can only come out through prayer" [Mk. 9:29]). Liberation from demons, as seen earlier, is a sign of the inbreaking time of fulfillment. If the disciples want to be a part of this

[51]Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 524.

dynamic, they must have faith and pray. In the same way, if the disciples want to be part of the new temple, they must also have faith and pray.

This argument, however, will only be as strong as the link between the image of the temple and the community of disciples. Thus, it is important that we establish the withered fig tree as symbolic of the temple's end and "this" mountain (referring to the temple mount) being uprooted and thrown into the sea as representative of the temple's fate. The pericope about the withered fig tree ends with Jesus saying to the disciples, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." "Stand praying" and "forgive" should put the disciples opposite the temple. Does not the temple stand as a house of prayer? Is not the temple the place to offer sacrifice for atonement and forgiveness? The community of disciples are now the new locus of these activities. As long as they keep on praying and forgiving, they are the new temple.

That the disciples should be given such importance should not surprise us. Jesus' first act after his baptism, after he proclaims the summary of his message, "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand …," is to call the first disciples. Mk. 1:14–8:30, in the outline of Mark proposed by many exegetes, is usually identified as the section where Jesus establishes the stage for his ministry. It is when he reveals in word and deed what his mission is all about. This section can be subdivided into three cycles (1:14–3:6; 3:7–6:6a; 6:6b–8:30) which follow a pattern of summary, a scene involving the disciples, mighty words and/or deeds, and rejection. The importance of the disciples in every cycle is already apparent, but it will be further stressed in Mk. 8:31–10:52, the second major section of Mark, also known as "the Way." This part can be read as Jesus forming the community gathered around him, molding them into a model of discipleship patterned after his passion, death, and resurrection (which he predicts three times here).

That Jesus seems to be creating something new with the disciples should also not surprise us because the theme of new creation has been present from the very beginning of Mark. Echoes of Genesis

can be heard in Mark 1 with mentions of "beginning" (which is also one of the first words of Genesis), God's Spirit (which hovered over the waters before creation), and Jesus among wild beasts (a possible allusion to the garden).

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and his demonstration in the temple are acts of judgment. Judgment in the Old Testament is not just the promulgation of a decree or decision. It is better understood as an act of intervention and rectification.[52] On the present state of the temple, Israel, and the world, God, through Jesus, has pronounced his judgment. The old time has ended. God's intervention and rectification is to signal the new era borne now by the new temple, the community of disciples, and another figure.

Jesus is also the New Temple

The new house of prayer for all peoples is also Jesus. A clue that leads us to this assertion is in how Jesus concludes the parable of the tenants. It is quite clear that Jesus is the son of the vineyard owner whom the tenants seize and kill. But Jesus suddenly switches metaphors at the end of the parable. He shifts from agricultural to temple imagery: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." Ironically, this passage comes also from Ps. 118 (see vv. 22–23), which the crowds used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem.

Another clue is "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" in Mk. 14:58. This is easily applied to Jesus and his resurrection. But why is this presented in Mark's account of Jesus' trial in front of the Sanhedrin as false testimony about which the lying witnesses cannot agree (Mk. 14:57, 59)? Perhaps what is false about it is that Jesus is not the one who will destroy the temple but God, and it is God who will vindicate the New Temple by raising him up on the third day. Or

[52]Richard J. Clifford, "The Prophets," class lecture, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Boston, MA: April 2, 2013).

maybe this is an example of Markan irony. While the false witnesses' intent is to lie about Jesus, resulting in inconsistent testimonies, they actually end up saying the truth.

Still another clue that Jesus is the New Temple lies in the close parallelism between the preparation for the entry into Jerusalem and the preparation for the Passover. In both sequences, two disciples are sent ahead, and they find someone who can help them with what Jesus needs. Gray summarizes the strong verbal resonances between Mk. 11:1–11 and Mk. 14:12–17 in the chart[53] reproduced below:

	Mark 11		Mark 14
vv. 1c–2a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς	v. 13a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς
v. 2a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν κώμην	v. 13a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν
v. 3b	εἴπατε· ὁ κύριος	v. 14b	εἴπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότῃ ὅτι ὁ διδάσκαλος
v. 4a	καὶ εὗρον	v. 16b	καὶ εὗρον
v. 11b	ὀψίας ἤδη οὔσης τῆς ὥρας, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα	v. 17	Καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα

Mark 11 and Mark 14 signal the beginnings of the two narrative halves of Mk. 11–15. Mk. 11–12 is about the temple: Jesus enters it, judges it, and teaches in it. Mk. 14–15 is centered on Jesus: he offers his disciples his body and blood, he is arrested and tried, he offers his body and blood on the cross. In between these two halves is Mark 13, which speaks about the end of the temple and even the end of the world. Looking at these three parts together, we have a good summary of the flow of Mk. 11–15: the time of the temple—and everything it stands for—has come to an end. Jesus establishes a new beginning.

[53]See Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 8.

Two scenes in the three-part structure above strengthen the image of Jesus as the New Temple.[54] The first part (Mk. 11–12) ends with the image of the poor widow giving "everything she had, all she had to live on," to the temple (Mk. 12:41–44). Early in Mk. 14–15 is a parallel image: a woman pours costly genuine spikenard on Jesus' head. She breaks the alabaster jar the perfumed oil is in; all of the oil, with nothing left or saved, is used to anoint Jesus (Mk. 14:3–9). Just as the poor widow gave all she had to the temple, this woman now gives all her oil[55] to Jesus, the New Temple. This anticipates, as Jesus points out (Mk. 14:8), his own giving of everything he has.

The Temple Curtain

The subject of this study is the temple controversy, but this writer does not want to imply in any way that it is the climax of Mark's Gospel. Counting the report of the resurrection in Mark 16 as more of an epilogue, as many other exegetes do, the climax must then be when Jesus dies on the cross (Mk. 15:33–41). At this particular scene, the temple (now referred to as ναός) is again mentioned: "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mk. 15:38).

Jesus' temple demonstration was a prophetic act symbolizing the end of the temple, its time, and everything it symbolized. It was a dramatic event that happened in the outer courts as seen by the use of the word ἱερόν in Mk. 11:15 and 16. At Jesus' even more dramatic death, the climax of Mark's Gospel and the most definitive sign of God's eschatological action, we are directed to the inner sanctuary (ναός) of the temple, its very core. We take the temple curtain that Mark refers to here to be the inner veil that served as the barrier to the holy of holies and not just the outer veil that served as the entrance

[54]This writer is indebted to Timothy Gray for the insight presented here. See Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 8–9.

[55]The oil was supposed to have cost more than three hundred days' wages (Mk. 14:5). Unless the woman was very wealthy, it can also be said that she gave not just the oil but "everything she had," just like the poor widow, to Jesus.

to the sanctuary.[56] When the veil is torn, the temple is symbolically destroyed. At Jesus' death, the veil is rent in two. Jesus now becomes the figurative destroyer of the temple. He is vindicated from the mocking he received on the cross (Mk. 15:29–30): "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" But the final vindication will come when the New Temple "not made with hands" is raised up again in three days.

The torn veil was adorned with stars and constellation—a symbol of the heavens. The temple, in Jewish belief, is the center of the universe.[57] Its destruction is a sign of cosmic upheaval, a symbol of the eschatological inbreaking of the new καιρὸς. When Jesus was baptized by John, the heavens were also reported by Mark to have been torn.[58] The same verb, σχίζω, is also used for the tearing of the veil. Moreover, in both reports of tearing, the divine passive is used. God has definitively acted to shred the old era and to begin the new.

A Pastoral Note

We have focused on καιρὸς and time in talking about eschatology. Today, this image has strong advantages over using the "overused" metaphor of the kingdom of God. Though kingdom or βασιλεία is supposed to be a dynamic concept, our present political systems have rendered it antiquated. Kings and queens are relics of the past. What may be better able to communicate today is the image of time. We speak of "Generation X," "Generation Why," the "Millennials," and so on. To these groups, we can proclaim a Jesus who has established a new and everlasting generation, a time that will last forever.

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[56]See Gray's reasons for positing this (*The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 188–189). The importance of Jesus' death would also symbolically warrant the choice for the more important veil.

[57]Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," 359–360.

[58]It should be noted that the same verb, σχίζω, is used for the two tearings.

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