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"vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo"—Col. 3:3

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Introduction

This issue marks the conclusion of a quarter-century of the print version of a journal founded in 1986 to advance Reformed Biblical Theology in the mold of Geerhardus Vos. We are no longer able to afford the costs of the print format. Hence, with sincere regret to those who relish the hand-held genre, we migrate exclusively to cyberspace where we will continue our application of the method and insights of Vos to the depths and riches of the inerrant Word of God, as well as to the system of doctrine taught in the historic Reformed and Presbyterian faith.

Most of the contributions to this journal over twenty-five years have been insightful, edifying and not a few have been remarkably original. We believe the Triune God has been glorified and loved even more by our feeble efforts.

These pages have wonderfully developed the legacy of Vos in ways which would have both pleased and surprised him. Surprised him in the wealth of original contributions ranging through the history of doctrine—patristic, medieval, Reformation and modern: all these remarkable contributions endorsing, advancing, encouraging historic Christian orthodoxy—catholic, evangelical and Reformed. Pleased him in that new methods of penetrating the inspired Word of God have been applied in these pages. However haltingly or inadequately, nevertheless the advances God in his providence has granted to his church in our time have been plundered (aka robbing the Egyptians) in the interest of unpacking treasures old and new which are locked in the mind, heart and Word of God.

We do not bid you farewell; we bid you *auf wiedersehen* as we move our publishing efforts to the Internet and electronic format only. You will find us at Kerux.com with new materials each year in May, September and December.

Thanks for reading us through the years. It has been and continues to be a joy and blessing for us to plumb the depths of God's riches in Christ Jesus—especially for those *abscondita cum Christo in Deo!*

—James T. Dennison, Jr. (Editor)

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G. Vos to B. B. Warfield

Grand Rapids

Nov. 30th, [18]89

Dear Sir [B. B. Warfield],

I shall try to have the notice ready by Dec.15th. Will also write to Dr. K. about the paper you wish him to forward. Hope that the new publication will be a decided success. You may count on me to do everything that lies within my limited powers.

Sincerely yours,

G. Vos

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since the publication of my edition of *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (hereafter *LGV*) in 2005, fifteen postcards and letters previously unknown to me have been inventoried as a result of the reorganization of the Papers of B. B. Warfield by the Special Collections staff of the Princeton Theological Seminary Archives. I was alerted to the existence of these additional items by Prof. Bradley Gundlach and am indebted to him for his kindness in informing me of them.

Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary has pioneered the publication of Vos's sermons and ephemera since its inception in 1986. We are no less committed to making Vos's remains public now. To that end, we intend to publish all the newly uncovered postcards and letters in the pages of this journal. We have launched our effort with the note on the postcard above. The fifteen new items date from November 30, 1889 to August 27, 1894. Students of Vos's life and career (cf. my biography of this "Father of Reformed Biblical Theology" in *LGV*, pp. 13-85) will be able to fill in some gaps in his life story, giving us an even more complete portrait of the magisterial scholar and Christian believer—though there will be no startling revelations, nor unexpected surprises. We present our type-written transcriptions of Vos's handwritten originals with the gracious permission of Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries, Princeton, New Jersey. I wish also to acknowledge the prompt and cordial cooperation of Mr. Kenneth W. Henke, Reference Archivist.

Anent the above note to Warfield. The "notice" to which Vos refers is his Book Review of *Leesboek over de Gereformeerde geloofsleer*, by H. E. Gravemeijer. It would appear in the initial (January) number of the newly inaugurated *Presbyterian and Reformed Review 1* (1890): 146-149. For the background to the demise of this journal's predecessor (*Presbyterian Review*) and the conflict over revision of the Westminster Standards, which was the *cause célèbre*, cf. *LGV*, pp. 26-27, n. 54 and 55; cpr. the letters to Herman Bavinck (*LGV*, pp. 131-33, dated Feb. 1, 1890) and Abraham Kuyper (*LGV*, pp. 133-35, also dated Feb. 1, 1890).

"Dr. K." is Abraham Kuyper and the paper to which Vos refers is likely Warfield's request that Kuyper provide an article on "Recent Theological Thought in Holland" or "Recent Dogmatic Works in Holland" (cf. Vos's letter to Kuyper, dated Feb.1, 1890, *LGV*, p. 134). Kuyper did not succeed in fulfilling this request (though Bavinck did, cf. Vos's translation of his "Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands," *Presbyterian and Reformed* Review 3 [1892]: 209-228), begging instead for a different "choice of topic" (cf. Vos's letter to Kuyper dated July 12, 1890, *LGV*, p. 140). What would eventuate from this exchange was Vos's translation of Kuyper's "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review 2* (1891): 369-399.

Vos's pledge "to do everything that lies within my limited powers" was fulfilled, as one notices, when browsing his bibliography from 1890 to 1902 (*LGV*, pp. 90-94). He would contribute translations (Kuyper and Bavinck), book reviews and some still remarkably profound articles on the 8th century B.C. prophets—Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Micah.

—James T. Dennison, Jr.

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John Milton on Christ's Advent

… the true
Anointed King Messiah might be born
Barred of his right; yet at his birth a star,
Unseen before in Heav'n, proclaims him come;
And guides the eastern sages, who inquire
His place, to offer incense, myrrh, and gold:
His place of birth a solemn Angel tells
To simple shepherds, keeping watch by night;
They gladly thither haste, and by a Choir
Of squadron'd Angels hear his carol sung.
A virgin is his mother, but his sire
The power of the Most High: He shall ascend
The throne hereditary, and bound his reign
With Earth's wide bounds, his glory with the Heavens.
… thy Saviour, shall recure,
Not by destroying Satan, but his works

In thee, and in thy seed: Nor can this be,
But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,
Obedience to the law of God, imposed
On penalty of death, and suffering death;
The penalty to thy transgression due,
And due to theirs which out of thine will grow:
So only can high Justice rest appaid.
The law of God exact he shall fulfil
Both by obedience and by love, though love
Alone fulfil the law; thy punishment
He shall endure, by coming in the flesh
To a reproachful life, and cursed death;
Proclaiming life to all who shall believe
In his redemption; and that his obedience,
Imputed, becomes theirs by faith; his merits
To save them, not their own, though legal works.
For this he shall live hated, be blasphemed,
Seiz'd on by force, judged, and to death condemned
A shameful and accursed, nailed to the cross
By his own nation; slain for bringing life:
But to the cross he nails thy enemies
… But soon revives; Death over him no power
Shall long usurp; ere the third dawning light

Return, the stars of morn shall see him rise
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,
Thy ransom paid, which Man from death redeems,
His death for Man, as many as offered life
Neglect not, and the benefit embrace
By faith not void of works: This God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldest have died,
In sin for ever lost from life; this act
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength,
Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms;
And fix far deeper in his head their stings
Than temporal death shall bruise the Victor's heel…
(Paradise Lost, Book XII, 358ff.)

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The Christian Apologist in the Present State of Redemptive-History

William D. Dennison

As Christ's church lives out her pilgrimage in the sovereign plan of the triune God of the Bible, we face the question—should her present status in that plan include a significant role as a defender of the truth of orthodox Christian thought? Typically, the church's present position in redemptive-history is not a serious consideration for the Christian apologist. Although aware that he is operating in history with the canon of Scripture closed and the data for the evidence of Christianity now considered effectively somewhat complete, the typical apologist does not make a self-conscious effort to understand his task in the context of his position in the progressive providential plan of God. Normally, apologetics involves engaging a non-Christian, or non-Christian thought, by building deductive and/or inductive arguments in order to demonstrate the authentic truth of the Christian religion. In other words, this particular apologist goes into the marketplace of ideas equipped with tools: the laws of logic, capable of convincing any rational creature of the evidences for Christianity; Christian revelation capable of compelling surrender from any autonomous creature; and/or the stories of personal experience capable of melting the heart of any unbeliever. Clearly, for many engaged in the apologetics, the goal is to defend the historic truth of the religion found in the Bible—*to present and win* the arguments of engagement in the hope of the unbeliever's becoming convinced of the Christian faith.

On the other hand, a different and richer view of the apologist's task before the unbelieving world emerges when that task is shaped by a commitment to the self-attesting Christ of Scripture in conformity to the progressive revelation of God in history. This version of apologetics keeps a focus on where the church stands in revelational history, acknowledging that with respect to the metaphysical, psychological, epistemological, and ethical elements of the apologetic task, a change has occurred in history—Christ has arrived and has been exalted. The "fullness of time"—redemptive history—has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:4). The gracious promise of God in the federal head of the new covenant (the eternal Son) has come into history as one born under the law in order to bring the transition of the *eschaton* into the life of Christ's bride and the creation (Gal. 3:15–19, 29; Col. 1:15–18). The church has now moved into the period when the justifying grace of God in Christ has dissolved the divide between Jew and Gentile, slavery and freedom, male and female (Gal. 3:28–29). By virtue of the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the kingdom of heaven has already arrived—the *eschaton* "now" is (Mark 1:15; Luke 4: 16-21; 4:43; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 1:1; 1 Jn. 2:18). Although the *eschaton* has "already" begun (Gal. 4:4; 2 Cor. 5:17; 6:2; Eph. 2:2-3, 12-13; Titus 2:12; Phil. 2:15), it has "not yet" been consummated, i.e., its completion still remains in the future (Rom. 8:18; Eph. 1:21; 2:7; 2 Tim. 3:1; 4:1).

In the construct of Paul's eschatology in harmony with the canon of the New Testament, the church/believer now lives in two aeons or worlds: the age/world to come and the present evil age/world. Although the present pilgrimage continues in the tension of the two ages, the church/believer is only a member or citizen of the age to come—not a member or citizen of the present evil age (Phil. 3:20). More specifically, the covenantal flock of Christ has its citizenship in heaven where she enjoys her exclusive identity in union with Christ (Rom. 6:1–14; Gal. 6:14–15; Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1–4; 1 Cor. 1:30–31). Hence, in Paul's eschatological structure, the age to come (glory of heaven) is identified with its federal head, the Last Adam, i.e., the person and work of Christ as grounded in his death, resurrection, and ascension. By contrast, the present evil age is identified with its federal head, the First Adam, i.e., the person of Adam, fallen into sin, caught in the web of seduction of the god of that age, Satan (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–23; 2 Cor. 4:4).

The implications of this eschatological position are crucial for believers facing the apologetic task. To begin with, the apologist does not stand on earth pointing the unbeliever to heaven (where Christ is); rather, the apologist stands in heaven—"age to come"—pointing the unbeliever to heaven. You must start with heaven to get to heaven; you must start with eternal life to receive eternal life; you must start with God to inherit God; and you must start with the gift (grace) in order to receive the gift (grace). In apologetics, you begin with your identity in Christ as part of the bride of Christ in the heavenly places, and you defend Christ and full-orbed Christian theism from this position of identity (a heavenly atmospheric presence). For this reason, the apologist cannot start with an independent appeal to the faculty of reason (logic) or temporal experience (empirical data), since the apologist, through Christ's Spirit, is already draped in the glorious atmosphere of Christ's presence in heaven. In Christ, the apologist's faculty of reason and experience has been transformed by the mind of Christ—locked by a perspective of heavenly existence as he defends the sacred faith against those whose reason and experience is conditioned by the mind of rebellion and suppression against the truth of the Creator. This antithetical status between the age to come and the present evil age, the kingdom of heaven (triune God) and the kingdom of hell (Satan), and the believer and the unbeliever, does not share a common platform of reason and experience. The Christian apologist's mind is shaped by the cognitive translation of all things through union with Christ in the heavenly places, whereas the unbeliever's mind is blindly, stubbornly, and arrogantly translating all things through a grid of obedience to the evil one. The former binds reason and experience to a heavenly existence: the latter binds reason and experience to a temporal and earthy existence. After all, as the Westminster Confession speaks of all our human faculties being affected by the fall, clearly, all our human faculties would be affected and transformed by our redemption in Christ. Christians who fail to acknowledge this point will continue to live equally in the world of classical synthesis between secular Greco-Roman thought and in the world of Christian revelation. As Van Til has demonstrated, such a position is found in Roman Catholic thought, Arminianism, and less-than-consistent Calvinism. The world of antiquity and the coherent understanding of Christian revelation are antithetical; and, thus, the Christian apologist should never surrender or compromise their heavenly life in Christ in order to attempt to win unbelievers to the gospel—to do so allows the invasion of secularization into a holy

heavenly existence (2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; Rev. 21–22).

Plainly, the apologist cannot overlook the fact that nothing is the same since Jesus came. Having ascended into the heavenly places with Christ, one can now, through faith-union with Christ, view all things through the new spectacles of heavenly reason and experience. The actual and literal historical work of Christ has changed everything; the event has ushered in a new interpretation. The eschatological event of Christ shapes the interpretation of all things, as the apologist is now in heaven even while continuing his pilgrimage in the creation. Unmistakably, in this condition and state of grace, the apologist will not discover such positions as Aristotle's view of reason or Locke's view of experience to be credible analogies to the truths in the eschatological mind of Christ Jesus.

The apologist is involved in a defense (*apologia*) of the eschatological state of heavenly life in Christ. For this reason, the apologist begins the apologetic task not with a creaturely or temporal conception of reason and experience on the same level as the unbeliever lives; rather, he begins with an imperative—the sanctity (*hagiasate*) of his covenant Lord in his heart as he enters into defense. What is the object of that defense? It is the *hope* that the Spirit of God has placed in the believing apologist (1 Peter 3:15). Peter places the corpus of this hope before the believer: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3–5, NKJ). In a hostile world of suffering and persecution, the apologist defends the person and work of Christ (the gospel)—the assurance of what Christ's resurrection has "already" accomplished in history as the foundation of the believer's "not yet" resurrection (that *hope*) that is to come. With this context before us, it should be noted that if "reason" is the best translation for the term *logos* that appears within 1 Peter 3:15, the point stated earlier about the believer's use of reason is confirmed, i.e., this faculty must operate within the sanctified covenantal devotion to the Lord and his secured work of redemption in Christ. Herein, Peter's thinking can be supplemented with the revelation of the author of Hebrews, i.e., the apologist is always accompanied by faith that embraces

the God who has spoken through his Son in these last days (Heb. 1:1–3), a faith that rests upon Christ as the source of "things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

It seems odd that academic apologists often have used 1 Peter 3:15 to justify their discipline in a seminary curriculum. Such professionals use this particular verse to declare that it is imperative for all believers to be engaged in an *academic* defense of the Christian faith. I have never been convinced of that particular interpretation of Peter's text, and my skepticism has been reinforced by looking at passages in the New Testament where the word *apologia* and its cognates are used—especially such references in the writings of Luke, not only his gospel, but also the Acts of the Apostles.

As we focus on this term in the Biblical theology of Luke-Acts, an interesting pattern emerges. First, in Luke 12:11–12, we note that Christ is speaking to his disciples (12:1); he is warning them about those who deny him and those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit (vs. 9–10). He then states, "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer [verb form: *apololesethe* from *apologeomai*], or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (12:11–12). The verb form of *apologeomai* is the subjunctive, aorist, middle, 2nd person plural. In v. 11, Luke presents a phrase that has the following construct: me ("not") + aorist subjunctive = prohibitory subjunctive. The idea here is this: his phrase refers to action that has not yet begun. Specifically, the action of the disciples in providing an answer in persecution has not yet begun; hence, when the time of persecution arrives, they are not to worry because their response *will be contingent* upon the presence and words of the Holy Spirit (pointing to post-Pentecost). Moreover, as we add the *middle* voice here, we note that the disciples will speak receiving the active directive of the Holy Spirit.

Second, we turn our attention to Luke 21:14, where once again Christ is speaking to his disciples. Note the context in 21:12: Christ informs the disciples that they will be persecuted as they are delivered to synagogues and prisons—brought before rulers and kings; he then charges them, "Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer [verb form: *apologethenai* from *apologeomai*]; for I will give you a mouth

and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist" (21:14–15). In this case, the verb form is the infinitive, aorist passive, communicating that the disciples will be passive, while the Lord will be the active transmitter of their wisdom.

Note the pattern: Christ is delivering a sincere and serious prophecy—the disciples will face suffering and persecution after he departs from them. Even so, Christ also declares a promise which will secure them in their trial. He promises that the Holy Spirit will provide for them an *answer*, a *defense*, for the gospel that is within them. In fact, both passages in Luke advise no prior preparation concerning what they are to say, e.g., a rehearsed answer, or academic apologetic talking-points. Rather, the presence of Christ through his Spirit will be sufficient. We must be careful to be precise here. Christ is not saying that the disciples are to go before their persecutors with a blank mind (a spiritual *tabula rasa*). Rather, he is saying that the Spirit will lead them with respect to the testimony that he has already placed within them—a testimony of the truth of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Their defense will arise by the directive and wisdom of the Holy Spirit which corresponds to the truth and testimony of the gospel that has taken root and is continuing to grow in their hearts. In other words, no one can say, "Jesus is Lord,"—no one can make a true *defense* that "Jesus is Lord" and all that that phrase means except by the Spirit of God. It is this type of confession and defense that Christ is promising to his disciples before their future persecutors.

The pattern here involves prophecy and promise: Christ prophesies the trial for his disciples, and Christ promises perseverance in that trial. We must not overlook the movement here in the history of redemption as espoused by Luke. This gospel is immersed in the prophetic dictates from the lips of our Savior, the one who controls the providential sequence of the whole course of history. Christ's prophecy takes place *prior* to his death, resurrection, and ascension (Lk. 12:11–12; 21:12–15). Therefore, after he leaves them at his ascension—in the period between his death, resurrection, and ascension and his second coming—Christ will continue to preserve them. The disciples will enter into an era defined by Christ—an era of church and kingdom characterized by trial, suffering, and persecution, in synagogues as well as in prisons; a time when kings and rulers will abstain from nothing to prevent the furtherance of the gospel. This harassment is the reality of living in the apostolic age—the reality of living between Christ's ascension and his second coming. In this final

era of the history of redemption, what is Christ's gracious gift to the disciples in the church? It is his continual presence as mediator in the midst of his people through the release and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ's Spirit is the gift of grace to the disciples to secure their redemption and the church for the final day of Christ's glory.

What role does the present gift of the Holy Spirit play in the context of persecution? At the heart of Christians' perseverance, the Spirit provides a credible defense, i.e., an answer and testimony of the gospel in the midst of hostile opposition. Christ's prophecy and his promise of assurance in the final era of salvation for the disciples and the church will be fulfilled. Is this a trained defense or a professional academic defense? No, it is one defined by the events of the gospel—the redemptive acts and facts of God's work in the accomplished redemption of his Son in history. One's defense, one's answer is grounded in the work of Christ; what true believers have come to know in their heart and confess with their lips about the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 10:10). The work of the factual activity of the triune God in history is the content of our defense; we (covenant people/church) do not first look to the temporal construct of reason and/or experience to mediate that activity. Rather, as Christ is seated on the right hand of his heavenly Father, he sends his Spirit who mediates the apologetic answer in the midst of suffering and trial, while the apologist is positioned in faith-union with Christ in heaven. The believer's reason and experience has been saturated by the aroma of glorification and from this glorified status of union with Christ, believers respond, through the Spirit, to attacks of unbelievers with the affirmation of the eschatological declaration of the Psalmist: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Ps. 118:6; cf. Rom. 8:31–39). Through his Spirit, Christ will not forsake his promise. We rely on this promise to the disciples and the church because of the testimony of Christ's letter to us from the pen of Luke. Christ takes the oath of promise, fulfills the promise, and records that fulfillment (in Luke-Acts) as a testimony of his covenant faithfulness to the truth of his word. Let us turn to that page of revelational history.

Luke takes us to Paul, who is Christ's chosen disciple and apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:8; 26:1). In the midst of hostile opponents—from the Jews and the Romans who bound him in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1) to Ananias, the high priest, and the Roman governor, Felix (Acts 24:10); from

Festus (Acts 25:8) to King Agrippa (Acts 26:1)—Paul gives his defense (his answer) to his accusers about his relationship with the gospel of Christ. There is no mistake about the testimony that Paul delivers: Paul's life has been radically transformed by the appearance of the ascended Christ to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1–9). As we see Paul testify before his accusers about this incredible event, we must be careful not to misconstrue his words as justification for a kind of personal testimony popular in the church today, which places subjective, self-gratification and self-authentication upon a pedestal. For too many evangelicals, the example of Paul's rehearsal of his conversion before his accusers (Jews/Romans in Acts 22:3–21; Agrippa in 26:2–27) is validation for all who get converted to give their personal testimony before the congregation or before those in the marketplace, thus granting personal testimonies center stage as the apologetic evidence of the work of Christ in the midst of the church.

A serious problem emerges if we view elevation of personal testimonies as the point of this passage concerning Paul in Luke's narrative. Religions (e.g., Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism) and systems of thought (e.g., Marxism, Socialism, and Democratic capitalism) also push to center stage the personal testimonies of their converts as evidence that their position is true. In that case, whose personal testimony must be believed? Which one can be authenticated as evidence of truth? On what basis should one believe the personal testimony of the convert to Christ over against the convert to Buddhism? No doubt, I have just opened a host of questions that I will not be able to address here. However, the reason we must deal with this issue of personal testimonies in the context of conversion is that it is imperative to perceive the unique character of Paul's conversion on the landscape of redemptive-history and its position in his defense (answer) before his accusers.

Paul's conversion is unique; it is a distinctive revelation of the exalted Christ to one who had persecuted Christ and his church, to one who has been designated the "apostle to the Gentiles" in redemptive-history. Such a conversion in relationship to his mission has neither been duplicated nor will it be duplicated in its full revelatory sense in the history of the church. Hence, when we place Paul's conversion in its appropriate position in the organic flow of redemptive-history, significant points are worth noting. As the Lord "appeared" to Abram to confirm his covenant to him—calling him out of the

midst of pagan Gentile religious worship (Gen. 12:7), likewise, Christ "appears" as the "light" of the world to Paul in order to call him out of an apostate Jewish religion in order to return him to the Gentile world in order to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:16). This unique position in relation to the historic revelatory "appearance" of the "Lord" in "covenant" to his chosen servant both ties and propels the gospel to the nations—the Gentiles (Gen. 12:7; 17:5; Acts 1:8; 9:15; 26:16–17). This point is further impressed upon us in the context of Paul's own persecution and imprisonment. Hear the pointed words of Christ as he comes to assure Paul of his unique status in the history of redemption (Acts 23:11): "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

Furthermore, Christ's "appearance" to Paul on the road to Damascus not only directs us back to the Abrahamic covenant, but it also opens up to us the revelatory content of Christ as the "light of the world:" he appears to Paul as "light"—pushing us to reflect upon the fact that Christ has come into the world to overcome the darkness of sin and evil. Christ's appearance in association with the light impels us back to the original creation, in which God separates the darkness from the light (Gen. 1:3–5; first day). Indeed, in the original creation the light brings resolution to a dark universe. In Paul's conversion, Christ's grace penetrates Paul's heart of darkness, which had hated and persecuted the church. Yes, Christ reveals himself in the light—a light so glorious and so marvelous that it brings blindness to this new elect servant so that he can understand that no eye has seen what Christ has laid aside in glory for those whom he loves. Indeed, when sight is restored to Paul, he is completely absorbed with viewing the world through eyes that have been to glory, eyes that have seen the risen Savior in all his splendor, eyes of someone transformed into the new eschatological creation.

Moreover, this Christ revealed in light points Paul to the Old Testament testimony of Christ, including the pillar of fire by night—Israel's "light" in a dark and desolate wilderness, representing the presence of Christ, redeeming them, directing them, and *defending* them. And we cannot forget that other unique appearance of the Lord to a chosen vessel in the midst of a burning bush that would not be consumed. Moses is chosen by the Lord to secure for Israel redemption out of bondage. Then, although Paul is the designated

apostle to the Gentiles, the Lord makes clear that Paul is also called to the lost sheep of Israel (Acts 9:15; 26:17).

This religious transformation in Paul turns his prior life completely on its head. Prior to this conversion event, Paul's reason and experience were shaped by his identity as a Pharisaic Jew born as a Roman citizen. Applying the rational and experimental presuppositions of someone with this identity, Paul could not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, nor did his life as a Roman citizen leave any room for the Lordship of Jesus and citizenship solely in heaven. On the Damascus road, however, those prior presuppositions are entirely truncated by the revelation of the exalted Christ. Paul's life is freed from the bondage of Jewish and Roman unbelief. Specifically, Paul's reason and experience are transformed by the redemptive-historical content of revelation being communicated to him in this conversion event. He now understands (reason) his position in the progressive revelation of the gospel starting with Abraham and leading on to the Gentile world in the apostolic age. The revelation, upon his conversion, has made him a participant in God's revelatory activity in the past, i.e., he is now a *participant* in God's promises to Abraham as well as God's prophetic word for the Gentiles. As a Pharisaic Jew, he had been merely a *spectator* and, thus, he could never truly experience Old Testament revelation as his own experience.

Furthermore, in the revelation of the Christ of heaven, Paul is now a participant in the domain of heaven's glory in Christ, whereas he was previously a spectator of that glory as he savored his citizenship in a kingdom of this world. When we comprehend what God is doing in this unique event of conversion in his progressive revelation, we understand that Paul's conversion is not a model for every conversion that occurs within Christendom. Rather, it is a unique event that serves the Father's purposes as his Son ushers in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). In this new atmosphere of time, God will bring the earthly into captivity of the gospel. In particular, the Lord uses Paul's status of being a Roman citizen in order to fulfill the prophecy Christ gave to him, i.e., as God's chosen servant to the Gentiles, kings, and Israel, his destination is a life of suffering leading to imprisonment and final death (Acts 9:15–16; remember Paul's destiny must always be tied to Acts 1:8). Indeed, irony is involved here. Although Paul's mind, heart, and life reside in the heavenly

places with Christ during his continual earthly journey (Eph. 1:2; 2:6; Col. 3:1–4; Phil. 3:20), his Roman citizenship assures the prophecy of his Savior that he will suffer for the gospel as his Lord takes him and the gospel to the "end of the earth" (Rome). Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship is not an appeal to a two kingdoms doctrine for the sake of his ministry and the church; rather, Paul's appeal to that citizenship is only to undermine it for the purpose of serving his sole, real, and final citizenship in faith-union with his Savior who now sits at the right hand of his heavenly Father. Paul perceives that his journey even as a Roman citizen is death, but he now knows, in light of his citizenship in Christ's heavenly glory that he will not die. There is no boasting in an earthly domain; there is only boasting in Christ.

We have gone from the prophecy and promise of Christ to Paul's apology in the midst of his opponents and, then, back to Paul's conversion experience. Perhaps, we need to connect the dots clearly. Remember that Paul is Luke's paradigm in relation to Christ's words of prophecy and promise—Christ's prophecy that his disciples will suffer and be persecuted in the hands of kings and rulers and Christ's promises that in this era in redemptive-history the Spirit will provide a defense before their enemies. Christ's promise is fulfilled in Paul before Ananias, the high priest; the Roman governor, Felix (Acts 24:10); Festus (Acts 25:8); and King Agrippa (Acts 26:1). But what is the defense that Christ's Spirit supplies Paul in the midst of persecution and suffering? It is much richer than a personal testimony that we might hear in an evangelical church today. Paul's conversion, apology (defense), and testimony are grounded in the historical revelation of God as embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ's self-revelation to Paul on the Damascus road incorporates the profundity of the original creation, in which light is the resolution to darkness; indeed the light of Christ is the only resolution to the darkness of sin as initiated in Adam's fall. Further, his conversion incorporates the "appearance" of the Lord in "covenant" to the nations—pointing us back to the Abrahamic covenant and the promises the Lord made to that patriarch, that out of Abraham's seed (Christ) the light would be extended to the nations. Moreover, in pointing to Moses, it incorporates the revelation and appearance of the Lord in redemptive-history as a consuming and blessed light that redeems, directs, and defends us. Herein lies the full-orbed gospel that convicted and converted Paul on the road to Damascus; it is the gospel that he came to know and love and declare before his persecutors. In this incredible testimony of sovereign

grace, Christ turned him from being the persecutor to being the persecuted. In fact, in the providence of God, Luke shows that the Apostle Paul, rather than any of the disciples that Christ addresses in Luke's gospel, serves as the paradigm of the Spirit's defense and answer in the synagogues and before kings and rulers. As Christ's prophecy is fulfilled uniquely in this servant, we see the basic pattern of the Spirit's defense, which is extended into the entire period of the eschatological life of the church between Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension and his second coming. Let us return to Peter in order to consider this extension of the church's continual apologetic task.

In the post-apostolic era of the present *eschaton*, a promise from Christ to his church remains—the life pattern of suffering and hope. Peter embraces this promise in writing to his audience so that they realize that their lives will continue to be characterized by suffering after the apostles die (1 Peter 3:14). As long as the age to come and the present evil age collide, evil people will attack and threaten those who are righteous and live in the goodness of the Lord (see 1 Peter 3:10–17). In this context, defending the faithful Word of God will always involve believers' undergoing the tension between suffering and hope. After all, suffering in the hands of the church's accusers can be an extremely painful, agonizing, and even, gruesome experience. Nevertheless, it is in this exact historical context that we find the greatest comfort for the Christian apologist—faith-union with Christ in the heavenly places. From what better position could the Christian apologist present a defense and answer in a painful and sinful world? Even as he is enduring persecution and assault for the sake of the gospel, he is enveloped with the goodness, holiness, righteousness, justice, and peace of Christ's heavenly eternal glory. The apologist's eternal hope is established and assured in a suffering and chaotic world.

With the apologist's present identity with Christ established, how does he combat his accusers? The apologist begins with cleaving to the blessings of being in Christ (1 Peter 3:14). In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter tells us to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." Specifically, this phrase in the original Greek says, "But sanctify (consecrate) Christ as Lord in your hearts." Here Peter is not indicating the believer's process of sanctification; rather, sanctify here means to "set apart" and to be "holy for sacred purposes." Christ the Lord is set apart; the name and person of Christ the Lord is holy for a sacred purpose.

Set apart for what? Holy for what purpose? For the suffering believer's defense, *apologia*, answer, and testimony before accusers; Peter's imperative means that, as the foundation, starting point, and peaceful counselor in the apologetic situation, the believer must set apart Christ as Lord. This Christ—in whom the believer already shares the inheritance of his accomplished redemption—only this Christ compels us always to be ready to give the reason for the *hope* that is in us. At this point, we are reminded of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit in Luke 12:11–12 and Luke 21:14–15 and the fulfillment of that promise in Paul's defense throughout the last part of Acts. There is, however, a notable difference between Christ's word for the disciples facing opposition in the apostolic era and the body of the church facing opposition in the post-apostolic era. For the apostles, Christ's Spirit will immediately intervene with a defense and answer before their adversaries, whereas the post-apostolic church is given an imperative to defend and answer their adversaries. Nevertheless, in both eras the Holy Spirit operates in relationship to the person of Christ at all times. Since the Spirit has placed Christ within believers and has set Christ apart in their heart, the Spirit will voice their defense before accusers as believers testify about the accomplished redemptive-historical work of God in Christ as found in the final canon of Scripture (see 1 Peter 1:11–12; 1:3).

Clearly, the Holy Spirit's voice is to go forth in the apologist with meekness, humility, and fear. Fear of man? No, it is the fear of God because as a believer the apologist is to have absolute reverence for the Lord of blessing and judgment in the marketplace. And when the apologist's Christ-centered hope is placed before his persecutors, he must not deviate from the message of truth that is grounded in Christ so that his "good conduct" (vs. 16; cf. 2:12 same Greek word) will shame unbelief. By contrast, if the apologist's defense crosses the line by vilifying and/or slandering the unbeliever (i.e., the apologist spitefully abuses the unbeliever with a spirit of vengeance), then the apologist has turned to evil, having passed over the bounds of conducting himself "in Christ" (vs. 16).

How can a believer know he is ready for the marketplace? Peter's life offers encouragement as we see how he grew into embracing a mature faith. He had denied his Savior before Christ's sacrificial death, but, as the Holy Spirit invaded his heart in repentance and faith, the tremendous weight of guilt was released by a gracious and redeeming Savior. For this reason, Peter

could face his own death prophesied by Christ with the hope that Christ put in him. Christ remained his hope. The work of Christ in the past assured Peter's blessed inheritance in the future. This hope in Christ is so powerful, so assuring, so convincing, that it is the *apologia*—the defense of the believer in a hostile marketplace. The believer is impregnable when he defends the hope of Christ since his life is encompassed by what Christ has done in the past, what Christ is doing in the present, and what Christ will do in the future (cf. Ps. 27:1–3; 118:6; Rom. 8:31–39). This blessed hope, grounded and centered in one's union with Christ in heaven is what the apologist takes into the hostile world of ideas. And we can rest assured that, as the Christian embraces the full-orbed gospel, the Spirit of Christ is the voice of the believer. Indeed, comprehending the position of the apologist in the history of redemption, we have every reason for confidence, strength, stability, and surety of Christ's preservation in the continuing tension of the two ages since it is an apologetic from Christ's Spirit in heaven. In this apologetic, the apologist's reason and experience is rooted in, shaped by, and projected from an entirely different world-order as the believer stands along-side the enthroned Son at the right hand of the Father.

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[*K:NWTS* 25/3 (December 2010) 25-26]

Geerhardus Vos: Nuggets of Gold From Hebrews

"Eternal" is that which belongs to the heavenly world and partakes of its nature and power. Thus the eternity of Christ's priesthood involves that He was made priest "after the power of an indissoluble life" (7:16). The life here spoken of is not, as some have thought, the life which Christ received at His resurrection, but the eternal life of the Son of God. It was "indissoluble" precisely for this reason that it could not be dissolved by death ("The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation=RHBI* [1980] 153).

…we must remember that according to our author the heavenly eternal world projects itself into the lower temporal sphere. Even now believers are come to the heavenly city and stand in true communion by faith with eternal realities. . . .The sacrifice on the cross was one of the events in which the eternal enters into the temporal, as the headlands of a continent. . . project into the ocean (ibid., 160).

…the bond which links the Old and the New Covenant together is not a purely evolutionary one, inasmuch as the one has grown out of the other; it is, if we may so call it, a transcendental bond: the New Covenant in its preexistent, heavenly state reaches back and stretches its eternal wings over the Old, and the Old Testament people of God were one with us in religious dignity and privilege; they were, to speak in a Pauline figure, sons of the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of all ("Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," *RHBI*, 199).

…the antithesis would be overdrawn and the author's mark overshot if we were to interpret this as meaning the old has only the shadow of the new. As we now know, the author's real intent is this: the old has only the shadow of heaven, the new has the full reality of heaven. And therefore to do the author full justice the stress should not be laid exclusively on the statement that there is "only" a shadow, but equally on the fact that there "is" a shadow of the true things of religion under the Old Covenant. The word in the prophets cannot take the place of the word in the Son, but it is a word in which God spoke (ibid., 202-203).

The author . . . does not content himself with comparing this Old Testament method of procedure with the method now pursued under the new dispensation, but approaches the comparison from the opposite end. He does not say, *they* as well as *we*, but *we* as well as *they* have had an evangel preached unto us . . . No more striking proof of this could be afforded of the fact that he regarded the same spiritual world with the same powers and blessings as having evoked the religious experience of the Old and New Testament alike (ibid., 204).

Legalism lacks the supreme sense of worship. It obeys but it does not adore (ibid., 231. True of Neo-Puritan legalism as it is true of Neo-Republication legalism, Ed.).

Now the original readers of this Epistle were suffering from an acute eschatologism. They were interested in eschatology even to the point of unbelief—unbelief because of the postponement of what they expected. The peculiar feature of eschatology is that it brings something *new*. It brings the eternal side of the promises of God. The author instructs the readers that they must rely less upon the fulfillment than upon the promise. What they need is an eschatology of faith, not an eschatology of imagination. The latter is the fault of all false eschatology, which seeks to picture the fulfillment of the promises in realistic detail. What the author calls upon the readers to do is rather to reduce the promises of God to their spiritual essence, as taught in the Word of God (*The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 21).

[*K:NWTS* 25/3 (December 2010) 27-37]

Joab and Abner: Narrative Symmetries Sandwiching David

2 Samuel 3:6-12, 17-39

James T. Dennison, Jr.

We first meet Joab in 1 Samuel 26:6 where he appears with his brother, Abishai, as David prepares to steal into the camp of King Saul in the wilderness of Zipf. In that passage, Abishai is introduced as the son of Zeruiah—Zeruiah, the mother of Abishai and Joab. She is, in fact, the mother of three boys, as we learn from 1 Chronicles 2:16: Joab, Abishai and Asahel (cf. 2 Sam. 2:18). What's more, Zeruiah is David's sister, which makes the sons of Zeruiah (Joab, Abishai, Asahel) nephews to David, their uncle. There are family ties between David and the sons of Zeruiah. Family ties ever so subtlely hinted at by our narrator, yet family ties which will play a major role in the David narrative. Or is it *ambition* which drives Joab's relationship with David?

Abner makes his initial appearance in the Bible in 1 Samuel 14:50 where he is featured as the captain of the army of King Saul. On the death of Saul at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 31), Abner joins the renegade son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, in a civil war against David and the house of Judah (v. 6). Abner too has family ties—family ties with the house of Saul because his father, Ner, is the brother of Saul's father, Kish. Ner, then, is Saul's uncle (1 Sam. 14:50) and Abner is Saul's cousin and second cousin to Ish-bosheth. Already, we detect symmetries of relation in what we will discover to be symmetrical narratives.

Abner and Ish-bosheth establish their claim to rule over all the territory of Israel from the east bank—the Transjordanian region—placing their capitol across the Jordan River at the city of Mahanaim. And here, Abner exercises the same role for the son as he had for the defunct father—commander of the army (2 Sam.2:8). Family ties between Ish-bosheth and Abner are enhanced by political and military loyalties binding the army commander to the rebel son of Saul. Or is it political and military *ambition* which dominates in the kingdom east of the Jordan? The potentially insidious symmetry in this civil war is ambition—raw, corrupt, brutal ambition.

Joab also makes a lateral transition on the death of Saul—he becomes the captain of David's army. And David? Anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel even while Saul lives—David, on Saul's death, finds he is only king over the territory of Judah, capitol at Hebron. The tussle of a two-year civil war pits David and his military commander, Joab, in Hebron against Ish-bosheth and his military commander, Abner, in Mahanaim. Notice the symmetries of antagonism in this narrative of civil antagonism: King David at Hebron vis-à-vis King Ish-bosheth at Mahanaim; Army Commander, Joab, under David vis-à-vis Army Commander, Abner, under Ish-bosheth.

Initial Symmetries

The narrator lays out these symmetries of relation, political power and military might so as to reveal the character of the players in his drama. Think about it! Of all the stories which could have been recounted by our narrator over the two-year period of civil strife, these stories are featured. More than mere stories, these are narrative cameos demonstrating the character of the protagonists and antagonists in our drama. The real question will be: does the antagonistic positioning of the kingdoms include antagonistic character in the players in this drama; or are their symmetries lurking symmetries—lurking symmetries which are prophetic of character in its future revelations?

The first skirmish our inspired narrator records in this Israel-Judah civil war occurs in the face-off between Abner and Joab at the pool of Gibeon (2 Sam. 2:12f.). This debacle, in which twelve men from each side kill each

other at the same time, carries a faint echo of David, champion of Israel, versus Goliath, champion of Philistia (some modern multi-culturists see the echo of Trojan and Greek champions here, e.g., Hector and Achilles, from Homer's *Iliad*, but that is not likely). Nor does twelve felling twelve settle the conflict. Joab and his army put Abner and his troops to flight. In the hot pursuit, the youngest of the three sons of Zeruiah, Asahel—swift-footed, gazelle-like Asahel—Asahel runs pell-mell into Abner's spear and kills himself. Is there no end of this self-killing in this civil war? Abner would have it end: "shall the sword devour forever?" he cries out to Joab (2 Sam. 2:26). And Joab? Joab calls a halt to the chase as night falls—as the lifeless body of his kid brother lies by the road wallowing in his own blood. Joab calls a halt to the senseless bloodshed while gathering up the bloodied corpse of his baby brother for burial in the family plot at Bethlehem. Antagonist Joab and antagonist Abner have met; their appointed champions have equally fallen twelve on twelve; and the ensuing bloodshed?—the ensuing bloodshed has resulted in a draw. But Joab takes up and carries away more than the bloodied body of Asahel; he carries a grudge, a remorseless antipathy for Abner—and he waits, Joab waits to avenge the ignominious death of his little brother.

Roiling Symmetries

The boiling emotions which are seething in Hebron are symmetrically matched by seething emotions in Mahanaim. The one is fed by a blood feud—Joab nursing a grudge to do unto Abner as he had done unto Asahel. The other? It is fed by a charge of rape or illicit sexual congress and Abner nurses a grudge against Ish-bosheth, declaring, "See if Abner does not do unto Ish-bosheth what Ish-bosheth did unto David." Our narrator selects parallel narratives of seething emotion because they reveal the character of the antagonists in the drama. More cameos of narrative action—action which features the opposition between the warring factions, their rulers, their military commanders—opposition that moves inexorably to a climax in the murder—the cold-blooded murder—the Judas-like murder of Abner by Joab. Character! character displayed in symmetrical narrative dramas.

Abner's character has appeared manipulative. He has placed Ish-bosheth on the throne in Mahanaim. Ish-bosheth, Abner's puppet king; the army's figurehead on the east bank. And Ish-bosheth? He plays the puppet role all too gladly, until . . . . until his champions are slain twelve by twelve, until his army is chased from the field by David's army, until a stalemate emerges and neither he nor his puppet-master general can conquer David, or his army, or his general, Joab. Ish-bosheth is chaffing now—chaffing at his puppet-king role. He is weary of being the pawn in the game—the game which has become a stalemate. And so Ish-bosheth does something to assert his royal dominance; Ish-bosheth ventures to trump Abner. He charges his puppet-master with illicit intercourse with Saul's concubine. "You had sex with that woman; you might just as well take the crown from my head. For to take my father's concubine is to take my father's role. And I am telling you right here and now, I am king! I wear the crown!!"

Now most observers regard Abner's explosion in v. 8 as bluster, prima facie evidence that he is guilty as sin—the sin of rape or consensual fornication. Virtually everyone agrees with Ish-bosheth that Abner is guilty of breaking the seventh commandment. But these indicters of Abner are not reading the narrative the writer has penned; they are reading 21st century sexual obsession and sensationalism into the narrative so as to concur with Ish-bosheth that Abner is a sleazebag. Suffice it to observe at this point that no one asks the woman. Rizpah remains silent in this tête-à-tête, left out of the picture, save to serve as an alleged victim: an alleged victim convenient to Ish-bosheth's agenda. But this woman will reappear in our narrator's drama of the life of David; she will play a tragically heroic role in 2 Samuel 21:10ff. She will not speak—not in that incident, even as she does not speak in this incident. But though her voice is silent, in 2 Samuel 21 she will act—will she ever act in fierce devotion to the dead bodies of her two sons. Surely Rizpah's honor in the matter of her children's corpses is symmetrical of honor in Rizpah here at Ish-bosheth's fierce, slanderous accusation. Narrative symmetries: duplicates of honor and loyalty. Rizpah silent—silent in honor and loyalty and devotion.

We must search for the symmetries, the narrative symmetries which our inspired narrator has sprinkled through his account of the history of David. We must look for the parallel narratives in order to let Scripture interpret Scripture—in order to understand the inner character of the players in the drama.

Symmetries of Abner

Well, what of narrative symmetries in the case of Abner? Abner's dishonor is revealed in his collusion with Ish-bosheth against David's election by God as king over Israel and Judah. He plays king-maker and puppet-master and dishonors himself, dishonors God, dishonors David thereby. There are no excuses for this shameful behavior of political and military connivance, egoism, power-play. This is as dirty a political game as the modern corridors of Washington, DC, Chicago, Illinois, Olympia, Washington or hundreds of other districts in modern America where political dishonor and dishonorable politics is the norm of political power. But with the shameful accusation of the violation of Rizpah, it is as if Abner has been slapped upside the head—stunned out of the stupor induced by thinking he has engendered loyalty and integrity from the man he has propped up as king in Mahanaim. Abner's fulmination, "Am I a dog's head," has suddenly awakened him from his presumption. He has been shamed into realizing the shame of what he has done. What he has done in defying David's God-ordained right to the throne of Israel and Judah. And so, as if in repentance for his folly, Abner swears an oath before God (v. 9) to deliver up the kingdom of Ish-bosheth to David with an exclamation point! "You see if I do not accomplish this for him!"

The about face in Abner here is provoked by a false accusation and Abner recoils from the false accusation by admitting that he was wrong—in the wrong, not with Rizpah, but in the wrong with the dog's head of a king, Ish-bosheth (yes, he is turning that slur back on his accuser). And in demonstration of this wake-up call, Abner declares he will ratify God's election of David by swearing his own fealty to the Lord's anointed. Having vowed to change his dishonorable and misplaced loyalty contrary to the will of Almighty God—having vowed to change his sinful loyalty, Abner acts in accordance with his vow, his repentance, his change of heart, his recognition and submission to the revealed will of God. Abner acts and travels to Hebron (v. 20) where he seals a covenant with David and pledges to deliver all Israel into a like covenant bond with David (v. 21). This is loyalty demonstrated by its fruits—a personal covenant between Abner and David, between former antagonists, now pledged as friends, brothers *and* a national covenant between Israel and Judah—between former enemy nations, now pledged as one body, one people, under God.

The reconciliation between Abner and David is celebrated in a feast (v. 20)—a meal of fellowship following personal reconciliation, mutual loyalty and honor. Abner, now a man of honor, endorses David's kingship as does God himself. And he does so in an honorable way, demonstrating his own change of heart and integrity. And the fruit of reconciliation? The aftermath of a feast of celebration of covenant union and relationship? Shalôm! Shalôm! David sends Abner away in "peace" (v. 21). Enmity resolved; hostility forgiven; antagonists now protagonists; civil war all over but the shoutin'! Abner departs in peace: peace of conscience, peace of relation, peace of honor, peace of integrity. Abner finally wakes up to the Lord's plan and purpose and Abner bows his knee to God's elect; Abner bows his knee to the man after God's own heart; Abner bows his own heart to the will of God and God's anointed.

Symmetries of Joab

We have observed our inspired narrator's literary technique of symmetrical figures and symmetrical narratives: King David in Hebron, King Ish-bosheth in Mahanaim; Joab, captain of the armies of Judah, Abner, captain of the armies of Israel. All this in the antithetical context of a national civil war. We have also observed our inspired narrator's narrative genius with regard to the display or revelation of the character of the players in this redemptive-historical drama. He uses so-called Janus-like or mirror symmetry to unfold the inner character. Abner's character is developed, mirrored, unfolded, displayed by way of his parallel narrative appearances. And as Abner is sandwiched between Ish-bosheth and David, so now we come to Joab. We expect Joab likewise to be sandwiched between Ish-bosheth and David. After all, he is the fierce, grudge-nursing opponent of the one and the ostensibly fierce, loyal commander of the other. Or is he? What do we find in our narrator's inspired narrative? Joab is not sandwiched between Ish-bosheth and David; rather Joab sandwiches David between himself and Abner. Joab squeezes David between himself and Abner. In fact, Joab squeezes the life out of Abner in order to squeeze David under his own power. Joab is an inveterate murderer—a cold-blooded and ruthless murderer; and he squeezes David with his ruthlessness not once, not twice, not three times, but four times he squeezes David under his own power—his military power as king-maker. Yes! Joab plays the game of king-maker

too. Never does he want the throne; ever does he want to control the throne as army chief-of-staff. Whether it is Abner or Absalom or Amasa or even Uriah—Joab wants David to know straight out, "I am the power behind your charisma. Your handsome charisma wows the audiences; my military muscle keeps those audiences in your pocket—in my pocket." Joab squeezes David with his savage power and David?—tragically, sinfully, David is powerless to beard his vicious, power-brokering commander-in-chief.

Our narrator shines his light upon the character of Joab—the nefarious character of Joab in this third chapter. As Abner departs in shalôm with the peace of David's benediction upon him, Joab enters in a fuming fury with the umbrage of an upbraiding rebuke to his king: "What have you done?" (v. 24). What insolence is this? to speak to God's elect and anointed shepherd-king with such a tongue-lashing? Joab's character is beginning to be revealed and the picture is not pretty. Is this the first time a king has been rebuked in this chapter? Oh no, the narrative symmetry recurs in Abner's upbraiding rebuke of Ish-bosheth in v. 8. And Ish-bosheth? He says nary a word to Abner in reply (v. 11). And David? He says nary a word to Joab in reply (vv. 24-26).

Joab's Symmetrical Treachery

Ah, this narrator is indeed a literary genius. The fear that cows Ish-bosheth into silence—is it the fear that silences David? Do we have symmetrical kings quailing symmetrically before their respective military commanders? The charge Joab levels against Abner is a slander; it's a lie. "He came to deceive you" (v. 25). No! we know Abner came to seal a covenant of peace with David under a sworn oath to the Lord. Joab is lying; Abner has been falsely accused . . . . again. The mirror symmetry here echoes the accusation of fornication hurled at Abner by Ish-bosheth. You see what or narrator is doing with these symmetries, don't you? He is showing you that Abner is innocent of Joab's slander *as he is innocent* of Ish-bosheth's slur. Abner was no more guilty of deceit in coming to David than he was guilty of coming to Rizpah for lewd sexual purposes. Abner is doubly slandered, twice over in symmetrical narratives—narratives which interpret one another. Abner is innocent! Innocent of Joab's mendacious charge in v. 25; innocent of Ish-bosheth's salacious charge in v. 8. Abner no more touched Rizpah than he forswore himself before God in

covenanting with David. The dishonor in this narrative belongs not to Abner, but to Joab. And tragically that dishonor in the form of cowardice squeezes David into doing nothing. Cold-blooded, heartless, treacherous, ruthless murder and David does nothing. Joab squeezes David with inaction, with do nothingism, with whining—"these sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me" (v. 39). That's a cop out David. "Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). Even you executed the Amalekite who claimed to have killed King Saul (2 Sam.1). He was a liar, but you silenced his lying tongue because he dared allege that he had killed the Lord's anointed. But here is murder most foul right before your eyes; murder from the treacherous sword of Joab; murder from this Judas who feigns private friendship while thrusting his sword deep into Abner's rib-cage slaying him on the spot. And David does nothing!

David's Passivity

Oh, you say, David did compel Joab to walk in front of Abner's bier, clothed in sackcloth, intoning lamentation (v. 31). You say David humiliates Joab with that public disgrace as he himself brought up the rear of the funeral train wailing "as one falls before the wicked, (so) you have fallen, Abner" (v. 34). David humiliates Joab with public disgrace, but he does not perform public justice. Abner's blood is crying out from the ground for justice: eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood, and David orchestrates a parade. "These sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me." Come on, David! Goliath wasn't too difficult for you. The marauding Amalekites who attacked Ziklag and kidnapped your wife, Abigail, and the wives and children of your armed band weren't too difficult for you (1 Sam. 30). Evading and sparing King Saul—Saul's relentless and murderous pursuit of you—was not too difficult for you. What is it David? What is it that so unnerves you, unmans you, undoes you, un-Davids you? What is it David that renders you unable and unwilling to execute justice in the face of gross, bloody injustice? Is it family ties? They're family so they get a free pass, these sons of Zeruiah. They're politically important, so as political cronies they get a free pass. They're soldiers—in fact, commanding soldiers—and so they have the loyalty of the army and you need the army to prop up your crown, so they get a free pass.

We could go on speculating about why David turns wimp here and winks at bloody injustice. But this much is clear, as our narrator's symmetries make plain. Joab has trumped David—trumped him for the first time. But it will not be the last time. Conniving, colluding, conspiring Joab will trump David again—with Uriah, with Absalom, with Amasa. David will realize that *he* is subject to Joab; Joab is *not* subject to David. For Joab controls David and David knows it; and David refuses to do anything about it—content to cruise along with king-maker Joab and permit this devious commander-in-chief to manipulate, to maneuver, to prop him up on his throne. David from 2 Samuel 3—more a puppet-king than a sovereign, independent monarch. David from 2 Samuel 3—his character more reflective of those he fears than of the Lord God whom he should fear. How tragic is this heart of God squeezed by compromise and manipulation and injustice and turning a blind eye and refusing to do what is right—what is just and right, when what is wrong, what is wrong and unjust is right in front of his face.

How this curse haunts the church and Christian fathers and Christian mothers and Christian pastors who stare injustice and wrong in the face and do nothing because the *other* personality, the other party is too difficult for them. Oh the grief that such inaction, such do nothingism engenders. And oh the consequences of such do nothingism as David was soon to learn.

God's Activity

For while David does nothing, God does not. God is not too weak for Joab and the sons of Zeruiah. Nor is God too weak for the fawning hypocrites of today's church, of today's culture, of today's political establishment, of today's military toadies who do nothing and people are murdered—murdered in cold blood right before their eyes. God will do something and David will learn the hard, sad, painful lesson. And so will nations and political parties and military leaders and ecological utopians. They will learn that God is too strong for them as he confounds their schemes and their injustices and their hypocrisy and their base tyranny—base tyranny by which, like Joab, they dominate others, maneuvering, corrupting, suborning, harassing for the sake of power—raw, absolute power. All modern liberalism is about tyranny—tyranny to control human beings and subjugate persons to the ego of the imperial leader, the messianic

pretender, the party of the elite, the arrogance—the unmitigated arrogance of the dominant forces of the political power-brokers of the age.

David symmetrical with Ish-bosheth? More like David symmetrical with Joab. Joab symmetrical with Abner? More like Abner symmetrical with loyal, devoted Jonathan, another who sealed a covenant with David (1 Sam. 20; 23:18). The jarring juxtaposition of the symmetries which our narrator aligns are revelations—revelations of character. Character which is despicable (Ish-bosheth and Joab); character which is repentant and covenantal (Abner); character which is emasculated by fear and threat—even insolent threat (David). Such weak character may say peace, peace, but there is no peace when justice—blind justice—does not stand shoulder to shoulder with shalôm. There can be no peace without justice.

Christ's Sufficiency

Every sinner knows that: no peace with God without justice. Every sinner knows that justice demands his or her blood. And unless there is blood for blood, justice will haunt, justice will stalk, justice will stand unsatisfied, until that great day when justice will have its fill—eternally! No injustice will go unrequited in that day; no injustice will go unrepaid on that great and terrible day. And the only plea any sinner has in the face of dread justice's proclamation—"You must pay! Blood for blood," says justice—the only plea any sinner has is the blood of Jesus for his or her own blood. David made that plea, praise God! In all his weakness, sinfulness, foolishness, fearfulness, fecklessness, inconsistency—David made that plea: "cleanse me from my iniquity" (Ps. 51:2); "blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes not iniquity" (Ps. 32:2). Joab never made that plea; Ish-bosheth never made that plea. Abner? We don't know for sure, but he too may have sat down at the feast table of the covenant under the canopy of the forgiving grace of God. He may have . . . .

How desperately we need Christ! For justice's sake; for righteousness sake. For the sake of forgiving *our* arrogance and manipulation and domination and refusal to do the right thing—the just thing—because that is to do

God's thing. How desperately we need the blood of Jesus and the assurance that what is right is pleasing to him, regardless of the cost to us. It's not about us; it's not about us—it's about him! David leaves us disappointed, caught in the trap of Joab's manipulation and power over him. The eschatological David never disappoints us. And he—that eschatological Prince of Shalôm, that eschatological Prince of Peace—he appoints us to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6:8).

Reviews

[*K:NWTS* 25/3 (December 2010) 38-43]

N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.195pp.Cloth.ISBN: 978-0-8006-3766-6. $25.00.

In this book, N. T. Wright seeks to interpret Paul in light of the narrative of creation and covenant. The particular approach he takes to each of these elements reveals his continued alliance with the New Perspective on Paul. But like any chef in the kitchen, Dr. Wright adds his own spice to the mix. First, he sees narrative through the eyes of his "critical realism," a view that looks upon narrative through the eyes of a myth. And second, he gives the New Perspective a political apocalyptic turn following the political apocalypticism of Ernst Kasemann. Each of these two elements are not entirely foreign to other advocates of the New Perspective, but are more developed in N.T. Wright.

Certainly, Dr. Wright is correct to recognize the importance of narrative covenant theology in Paul's letters, together with Paul's eschatological perspective. And as such he has brought these issues more fully to light. However, we believe that his approach to Paul's eschatology is skewed, and this leads to his unPauline and unorthodox formulations of justification.

While most of our readers are probably familiar with the New Perspective, Ernst Kasemann may be less familiar. Kasemann wrote after the Second World War and reacted to Bultmann's existentialist interpretation of Paul. He believed that too many German Christians had silently submitted to the Nazis (with notable exceptions), and Bultmann's crisis theology was not a sufficient deterrent. Thus, Kasemann developed a theology of political involvement. He believed that Paul's doctrine of the righteousness of God taught that God

would bring political vindication on the earth. Kasemann's view was followed by Moltmann in his *Theology of Hope* and by the liberation theologians. The latter, of course, believed that God's liberating justice involved the political liberation of the oppressed in this life.

In the book under review, N. T. Wright, follows the Kasemann tradition of interpreting eschatology. And this remains the case even if he does not agree in all respects with the other children of the movement. He is promoting a political eschatology. In this eschatology, the church is called to participate in the present political transformation of earth by the gospel. Such transformation is the outworking of Paul's teaching on the righteousness of God. In this respect, justification may be described as a process. Just as political justice is always in process, so the righteousness of God advocated by Paul is always in process. And so it remains imperfect until it reaches its eschatological end.

This eschatological perspective explains why N. T. Wright is popular among social liberals, some evangelicals, and the Federal Vision. The this-worldly social agenda of classic liberalism is well known. And many evangelicals have joined the fray. As for the advocates of the Federal Vision, most of them have a background in Christian Reconstructionism and believe that the kingdom promises will be fulfilled in the present transformation of all public institutions.

It is our conviction that N. T. Wright's eschatology is the ground for his unPauline doctrine of justification. It is the source of his denial of the imputation of Christ's active righteousness. And his eschatology explains why he believes that the instrumental means of justification is faithfulness rather than faith alone. For faithfulness is a process just like Dr. Wright's view that God's righteousness entails the process of executing political transformation on the earth. A similar eschatological perspective has led those in the Federal Vision to similar errors. (This is not imply that all [or most] Christian Reconstructionists have followed this path. Joe Morecraft for example, has defended justification by the active imputation of Christ's righteousness.)

Ironically, Dr. Wright appeals to 1 Cor. 15 to support his Restitutional eschatology. However, we believe this chapter shows that Paul did not agree with Dr. Wright. For in verse 47, quoted by Wright, Paul says that "the first man is from the earth earthly, the second man is from heaven." In this context

he claims that the present body is a seed of the future resurrection body (v. 37), which will surpass it in glory (v. 40, 41). The arena appropriate to the present body is the earthly arena from which it was created (v. 47). However, the arena appropriate to the heavenly body is the heavenly arena that transformed it, not the earthly arena. Thus, the future eschatological state cannot simply be the earthly arena, even if sin is removed from it. That would only take us back to the state associated with the first Adam (v. 47). At the very least, we must argue that the future eschatological state will surpass the present state to the degree that the future body surpasses the present body. And for Paul, it appears that the arena that transforms the future body is the arena for which it is suited just as Adam's body was suited to the earthly arena from which it was created.

If this is the case, how are we to interpret Romans 8? Does it teach a form of Restitutionalism? One possibility arises from the interpretation of Rom. 8 advocated by Meredith G. Kline. Admittedly, Dr. Kline did not recognize the fact that his interpretation takes Rom. 8 from the Restitutionalists. (He was himself a Restitutionalist of the non-Reconstructionist variety.) Nonetheless, we believe this would be its implication. According to Dr. Kline, Paul is reflecting on Isaiah 24-26 in Rom. 8. According to these chapters, the earth is a mass graveyard for the dead and so is cursed (Isa. 24:4-6). However, when the dead are raised (Isa. 26:19) the earth will "no longer cover her slain" (Isa. 26:21). Dr. Kline believes that this entails the reversal of the curse on the earth in Isa. 24. If this is the case and Paul is reflecting on this passage, then Paul is making a narrower point than either Dr. Kline or Dr. Wright believes. For this suggests that Paul is only reflecting on the bondage that the earth is presently under while the dead are buried in it. It does not necessarily entail the continuation of the present creation after its liberation from the dead. By being liberated from the dead bodies, the creation is thereby released into the freedom of the sons of God. If this interpretation is correct, we may not be able to draw from this passage that Paul believed in the future transformation of the created cosmos for an everlasting existence.

However, even if this interpretation is not deemed acceptable, 1 Corinthians 15 gives us a minimal principle of interpreting Romans 8. At the very least, Paul must be asserting that the new creation will surpass the first creation to the degree that the resurrection body surpasses our present body. This is because

Romans 8 states, "the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." At the very least, Paul is implying that the transformation of the creation will be of the same magnitude as that of our resurrection bodies (v. 23). Our resurrection bodies will be transformed unto conformity to the heavenly state (1 Cor. 15: 47, 49). So also, the creation will be conformed unto that same state (Rom. 8: 21, 23). Whatever this means, it is not the return of the pre-fallen earthy state, now extended to the whole cosmos (ala Dr. Wright). This opens us up to a further thought—that the future age takes on the character of the Spirit. Just as the Spirit transcends the world, so does the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:25-26). If this heavenly Jerusalem is a foretaste of the eschatological, then it does not seem feasible that it will be stripped of its transcendent character in the final eschaton.

Further, Romans 8 does not imply that present political justice is the onward march of God's justice in the world, leading to his final eschatological justice. In order for this to be the case, Romans 8 would have to leave open a door that it closes. It would have to leave open the possibility that political justice can liberate the creation before the resurrection, at least to some degree. Instead, this chapter teaches that the creation remains in "slavery to corruption" until the resurrection of the saints. Paul does not teach that justification entails the transformation of our visible environment even now. In fact he opposes this in Galatians as Judaizing heresy. Thus, we believe that Dr. Wright's view is essentially Jewish political eschatology.

In opposition to his former student John Barclay, Dr. Wright argues that the eschatology of the New Testament has an eye on criticizing the Roman Empire. Therefore, he lays out the historical background of the Roman Empire, noting the ruthless rule of the Romans. Then he lays out a series of parallels to the biblical story of Christ, noting that each Caesar would seek to prove that his predecessor was divine. Proof of this was found in the dead emperor's resurrection from the dead. And so he was declared a son of the gods. Dr. Wright draws from these conclusions that Paul believed that his gospel presented a direct antithesis to the Roman Empire. John Barclay has argued that Paul is only presenting his gospel against evil in general. We believe that Dr. Wright is formally correct at several points. Paul did see his gospel in antithesis to the expression of the powers of evil at that time, insofar as they were embod-

ied in the Roman Empire. God gives forth his revelation in history and has providentially directed the kingdoms of men to prepare the way for this.

However, it seems that Dr. Wright presses this in a direction that we cannot accept. Dr. Wright appears to believe that this is another argument for his political theology. If Paul was opposing the Roman Empire specifically, then Paul had a political agenda to subvert its political power and bring in the political justice of Christ. On this view, it seems that Paul is intentionally setting the stage for Constantine (or if you do not like his politics, for some better form of Christian political justice in the future). However, we do not believe that Wright can justifiably draw this conclusion. Only if there are other grounds for believing that the kingdom is earthly and political can this antithesis be seen in this way.

If on the other hand, the nature of the kingdom is transcendent (as we believe it is in Paul), then his antithesis with Rome must be seen in this light. That is, Paul is opposing Rome and any this-worldly political system that believes that it can impose a perfect form of peace, security and justice in this fallen world. These things are only found in Christ and his transcendent kingdom above. All earthly claims to eschatological finality are ruthless, this-worldly and enslaving. And the tyranny Rome embodied to maintain her esteemed peace and security are well documented. Paul, on the contrary, preaches a kingdom that delivers one from this present evil age by delivering people into the transcendent kingdom of Christ. Only such a transcendent kingdom can give them liberty while they presently live in this world. If the kingdom is not transcendent (but instead this-worldly), freedom in it must await a day when political justice has been accomplished on the earth. Such lack of *present* freedom entails bondage and a return to the law.

Finally, Dr. Wright believes, following the New Perspective, that the works of the law are simply the works one needed to follow in Israel to show that one was truly part of God's people. We agree that the saints in Israel kept the law out of grace. They did not pursue it for meritorious purposes. However, sinful Israel as a whole believed that their obedience to the law would bring in the kingdom of God. This we find in Rom. 9: 32-33. What did they pursue by works? The kingdom of Rom. 9:33, which God brought by grace instead. This is the kingdom in which there is no distinction between Jew and Greek

(Rom. 10:11-12). Thus, the Jews thought they could bring in a kingdom of political justice by their obedience to the law.

As noted, Dr. Wright is defending the New Perspective view that Paul was *not* opposing works righteousness. Now we may ask, is he doing this because he himself is advocating works righteousness? For he is advocating a political kingdom in which the church brings political justice to the earth. And on this view, God uses the church's obedience to bring in this eschatological justice. Sounds very close to the Jewish view of eschatology. And since eschatology is the mother of all theology, it is no wonder that Dr. Wright also rejects the Protestant doctrine of justification. For in so doing, he is implicitly adopting a view of works righteousness with respect to individual salvation. For Paul, the Judaizers did the same. What they believed about eschatology went hand in hand with what they believed about personal salvation. For personal salvation is simply personal identification with that eschatology.

Paul leads us to a better way, one in which the kingdom of God has arrived, one in which God has justified his name among the nations. And he has done this in such a way that his kingdom has come in perfection in the heavenly places, now semi-realized in the church. No kingdom of this world can give true peace in the midst of suffering. And no such kingdom provides the anchor for faith in the things that are not seen. But Paul lived by faith, not by sight. It was only the transcendent kingdom of Christ that allowed him to bear up under persecution as he proclaimed an empire of grace antithetical to the Roman world.

—Scott F. Sanborn

[*K:NWTS* 25/3 (December 2010) 43-45]

James R. Ginther, *The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.207 pp. Paper. ISBN: 0-664-22397-4. $39.95.

Before reviewing the contents and merits of this handbook, I would first like to introduce its author. Dr. Ginther teaches medieval theology at my alma mater, Saint Louis University, and serves as the director of graduate students in its theology department. An expert on the medieval theologian, Robert

Grosseteste, Ginther loves to work with medieval texts, including biblical commentaries, and recently directed a dissertation on medieval Apocalypse commentaries. He works closely with the university's Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and its Vatican film library containing thousands of medieval manuscripts on microfilm. Furthermore, he often organizes sessions at the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan providing opportunities for graduate students and others to share their research with their colleagues.

The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology reflects Ginther's broad knowledge, focused and disciplined research skills, and clear writing style. The introductory material answers the question "What is Medieval Theology?" and contains a section entitled "Resources for Studying Medieval Theology." This section does a great job listing textual resources. However, the incorporation of lists of professional societies, conferences, journals, and programs of study specifically devoted to medieval theology would have provided even more connections for readers interested in the field.

The body of the book consists of an alphabetical arrangement of entries on major Christian thinkers, theological and socio-cultural developments, and key terms associated with medieval theology. For each entry on a person, the handbook provides basic biographical information, his or her important teachings and major contributions, and resources in English for further study. A sample of entries on medieval Christian thinkers includes: Agobard of Lyons, Alcuin, Anselm of Canterbury, Bede, Bernard of Clarivaux, Florus of Lyons, Hugh of Saint Cher, Jean Gerson, John Duns Scotus, Peter John Olivi, Remigius of Auxerre, Theodulf of Orleans, Thomas Aquinas, and William of Ockham. Of course in a handbook of just over 200 pages, its author must exclude many key persons. I would have liked to have read entries on Isidore of Seville and Thomas Bradwardine, both of whom were influential in their own way. The handbook also is conscious of the contributions of female authors to medieval theology and includes entries on Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, and Bridget of Sweden.

A sample of key theological movements and concepts includes Adoptionism, Bull, Conciliarism, Indulgences, Merit, Purgatory, and Simony. In these, I found one minor omission. The Beatific Vision entry mentioned the ninth-

century author John Scotus Erigena who deviated from the Western tradition on this doctrine, and then stated that questions about the doctrine were not raised until the thirteenth century (21). However, significant questions on the beatific vision were raised among Erigena's contemporaries, as revealed in the lively discussions on this theological concept in the extant writings of Gottschalk of Orbais and Hincmar of Reims. Entries related to socio-cultural developments intersecting with medieval theology include Cathedral Schools, Crusade, Florilegia, Hierarchy, Inquisition, and Sentence commentaries. The handbook's bibliography proved helpful. In it, I discovered about fifteen new books that I would like to read of which I was previously unaware.

Because it is a handbook and not encyclopedic in scope, naturally there are certain limitations to its content. For example, theological developments within Eastern Orthodoxy are not represented, so if one were researching Hesychasm, for example, one would have to consult another reference work. The same is true if one were searching for information on various medieval popes, for which there are other capable reference works available (i.e., *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*). On the positive side, although it is not a handbook on medieval philosophy, since the disciplines of philosophy and theology intersect, it includes entries on Aristotle, Being, Substance, and Universals.

In my opinion, the chief ingredient that makes a good reference work is its usefulness to researchers, and this book squarely hits the mark. For example, if one were inquiring about the theology of the Lord's Supper in the middle ages, one would find entries on Eucharist, Berengar of Tours, Ratramnus of Corbie, Paschasius Radbertus, Lanfranc, Sacraments, and Transubstantiation. If investigating so-called "precursors of the Reformation," in this handbook one would find informative entries on Claudius of Turin, Waldensians, Lollards, John Wyclif, and Jan Hus.

The chief merits of *The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology* are its concise, varied, and accurate entries on people and subjects related to medieval theology, its usefulness to researchers, and its affordability. It would be an asset to every library, whether personal or institutional, in which study of medieval theology takes place.

—Francis X. Gumerlock

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D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008. 243pp., Paper. ISBN: 0-8028-3174-5. $24.00.

In light of what seems an enormous contemporary interest among evangelicals in "influencing the culture for Christ"—consider the number of voices urging us to be engaged in the arts, politics, sports, and the like, not infrequently in reaction to earlier, "fundamentalist" prohibitions against such involvements—a book by a respected evangelical thinker on Christ and culture is no doubt a welcome thing.

D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of nearly fifty books on an impressive range of topics. His *Christ and Culture Revisited* is, as one might guess, a revisit of H. Richard Niebuhr's five models for seeing the relationship between Christ and culture, as set out in his famous 1951 work by that title. Carson's is also a revisit of the broader question of Christ and culture in general, dramatically changed as it is from Niebuhr's day.

It is changed largely for three reasons: (a) the Church today confronts, and, as a result of advancements in communication, knows itself to be confronting, not a single culture (Western, say), but vastly different cultures across the globe; (b) our modern, heightened sensitivity to the question of the superiority or inferiority of one culture as over against another, under the pressure, chiefly, of multiculturalism; and (c) a similar and related sensitivity to how the way we think about Christ and culture (and everything else) is governed by our own particular culture, that is, is "necessarily perspectival"—a sensitivity induced, or intensified, in no small part by postmodern relativism.

Carson begins with a discussion of the meaning of "culture" and settles, for general purposes, on the definition of Clifford Geertz: "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life" (2).

As for the meaning of "Christ" in Niebuhr's thinking: "the sweep of the interpretations of 'Christ' that he embraces is doubtless too broad, if one is

trying to limit oneself to the forms of confessional Christianity that explicitly and self-consciously try to live under the authority of Scripture. As a result, certain elements of his understanding of the possibilities of the relationship between Christ and culture should, I think, be ruled out of court, where they are decisively shaped by a frankly sub-biblical grasp of who Christ is" (10).

But all of that, important as it is, is prolegomena. Soon enough Carson gets to the main subject, Niebuhr's "fivefold paradigm." And although Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* is almost sixty years old, "it is difficult, at least in the English-speaking world, to ignore him. His work, for good or ill, has shaped much of the discussion" (xi). Nonetheless, says Carson, it is not without its flaws. Its five options—(1) Christ against Culture, (2) The Christ of Culture, (3) Christ above Culture, (4) Christ and Culture in Paradox, and (5) Christ the Transformer of Culture—thus come in for two chapters of review and critique.

Carson takes aim principally at Niebuhr's handling of Scripture, as it bears on his paradigm. Though Niebuhr's is "a commendable attempt to ground his configuration in the foundation documents of the Christian faith," his attempt "fails in certain respects." Niebuhr's second option (The Christ of Culture), for instance, according to Carson, "is certainly found in historical movements" (those indebted to Schleiermacher, F. D. Maurice, or Albrecht Ritschl, the "cultural Christians" of nineteenth century classical theological liberalism), but these movements are "of doubtful Christian authenticity and have no warrant in the Bible"; and the fifth (Christ the Transformer of Culture) "is found in restricted forms in the New Testament, but certainly not in the strong form Niebuhr would like to see adopted" (40).

The larger problem for Carson, however, is Niebuhr's understanding of the way the Scriptural canon works, again, as he sees it in support of his categories. Niebuhr, says Carson, takes the view that "the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular, provides us with a number of discrete paradigms. We are being faithful to Scripture so long as we align our choices with any one of these paradigms, or perhaps even with some combination of them." Which is to say that, for Niebuhr, "the canon's 'rule' is . . . not so much in the totality of the canon's voice, as in providing the boundaries of the allowable paradigms" (41-42). Thus is it possible, in faithfulness to Scripture (according to Niebuhr), to choose between his five options.

Not so for Carson. Although he acknowledges the diversity of the Bible's modes of presentation, its variety of genres, it is the Bible as a whole that constitutes the canon—"and this canon's 'rule' lies in the totality of the canon's instruction, not in providing a boundary to possible options" (41). So it is, in Carson's judgment, that "we should not think of each pattern in Niebuhr's fivefold scheme as warranted by individual documents in the New Testament, such that we have the option to pick and choose which pattern we prefer, assured that all are equally encompassed by the canon that warrants them individually. Rather, we should be attempting a holistic grasp of the relations between Christ and culture, fully aware, as we make our attempt, that peculiar circumstances may call us to emphasize some elements in one situation, and other elements in another situation" (43).

What Carson means by "a holistic grasp of the relations between Christ and culture" is a comprehensively Scriptural view that incorporates "all the major biblically determined turning points in the history of redemption: creation, fall, the call of Abraham, the exodus and the giving of the law, the rise of the monarchy and the rise of the prophets, the exile, the incarnation, the ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the onset of the kingdom of God, the coming of the Spirit and the consequent ongoing eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet,' the return of Christ and the prospect of a new heaven and a new earth" (81).

This insistence on assessing the relationship of Christ and culture (indeed most things) in terms of a "canon-stipulated vision" is the fulcrum upon which the whole of Carson's discussion turns. It is where he begins and ends and stands throughout. It shows up over and over again. As regards Niebuhr's options, then, it must be asked: "Do the biblical texts offer these types as alternatives that believers are welcome to choose or reject? Or are they embedded in a still larger and more cohesive understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture, such that the four or five options of Niebuhr's typology should be thought of as nothing more than possible emphases within a more comprehensive integrated whole? If the latter, then Christians do not have the right to choose one of the options in the fivefold typology as if it were the whole. The name of that game is reductionism" (206).

Further: "It can be shown that Niebuhr's five options tend to emphasize

a selection of these biblical-theological turning points and downplay others. For example, the second option, 'the Christ of culture,' talks happily about the goodness of creation but seriously downplays the fall and its entailments. On the whole, Niebuhr's discussion is thin with respect to the fact that *current* relations between Christ and the church [did Carson mean "the culture"?] can be properly perceived only in light of eternity, of a hell to be feared and a new heaven and new earth to be gained. *All* of these turning points must be held together all of the time as we try to think constructively and holistically about the relation between Christ and culture" (206, italics in original).

In other words, Niebuhr is not genuinely biblical enough, and is perhaps out of date—especially in an age of violent persecution of the Church in places such as Cambodia or Sudan where "Christians in such environments do not spend a lot of time contemplating Niebuhr's typology." That does not mean of course that Christians in those environments think only in terms of "Christ against culture." It does mean, though, that "the reality turns out to be more complex" than that covered by Niebuhr's scheme (223). Moreover, useful as such schemes might be, "thoughtful Christians need to adopt an extra degree of hesitation about canonizing any of them in an age in which we are learning the extent to which our own cultural location contributes, for better or for worse, to our understanding of these theological matters, as of all theological matters" (224).

Where, then, does that leave us? What should be the Christian's and the Christian community's position in relation to culture? If none of Niebuhr's options, by itself, suffices to explain or guide, what does?

The situation in which we find ourselves is complex, says Carson, and our response to the culture paradoxical. We can be neither fundamentalists nor liberals. A "canon-stipulated vision" will "embrace the exclusive claims of Christ and the uniqueness of the church as the locus of redeeming grace, and yet it will demand of believers that they recognize their creaturely existence in this old, fallen creation and reflect on the ubiquitous commands not only to love God but also to love their neighbors as themselves. Instead of imagining that Christ *against* culture and Christ *transforming* culture are two mutually exclusive stances, the rich complexity of biblical norms, worked out in the Bible's story line, tells us that these two often operate simultaneously." Hence, "to

pursue with a passion the robust and nourishing wholeness of biblical theology as the controlling matrix for our reflection on the relations between Christ and culture will, ironically, help us to be far more flexible than the inflexible grids that are often made to stand in the Bible's place" (226-27, italics in original). In this way "we will live in the tension of claiming every square inch for King Jesus, even while we know full well that the consummation is not yet, that we walk by faith and not by sight, and that the weapons with which we fight are not the weapons of the world (2 Corinthians 10:4)" (228). And even though a Christian worldview will almost certainly produce a way of life opposed to the world's, Christians must live in the world as salt and light (143-44). The opposition, furthermore, is inherent: "believers constitute a separate community distinguishable from the common culture" (165), and, at the extreme, "where opposition, persecution, and even martyrdom await Christians with any pubic face, expansive chatter about theoretically ideal models of possible relations between Christ and culture is little more that speculative farce" (194).

That is the core of Carson's brief: a critique of Niebuhr's typology from a "biblically holistic" point of view and the way in which Niebuhr can be applied, or not, to the current situation, plus broad biblical guidelines for the Christian's and the Christian Church's role in the culture. Along the way Carson takes on a number of other topics pertinent to the prosecution of his case. In sorting out the meaning of "culture," for instance, he finds himself needing to establish (contra certain modern commentators) that there really is such a thing to talk about. He argues (contra postmodernism) that, as regards God, we can in fact know something about him; there is truth out there, even though we might not grasp it all or any of it perfectly. He is unambiguous in his defense of propositional truth and of truth-without-quotation-marks, vis-à-vis, again, postmodernism and the claims of the so-called emerging church. All of chapter five is a useful comment on "Church and State" as that relationship is part of the larger discussion, and includes thoughtful reflections on the significance of Islam for that discussion. But even there, his point is "to demonstrate through this optic, one more time, that choosing one of Niebuhr's models is an exercise in reductionism" (145).

While reminding us at length of the dangers of secularism, power, and the worship of democracy and freedom, the last two being traps into which patriotic American Christians might be prone to fall, Carson is not timid about

labeling as "left-wing" certain "social agendas that relativize all values and all religious claims, except for the dogmatic claim that all such values are to be relativized" (77); as "off-beat" those interpretations of Scripture that contend that "all doctrinal matters are 'open,' and therefore that rigorous biblical theology is impossible, and therefore that biblically based worldview formation is impossible" (83); or as reflecting "almost laughably poor research" those books (there are a number) of the "secular far left" that attempt to tie all evangelical and conservative convictions to "theocratic authoritarianism" (184-85). No drudge for political, or theological, correctness here.

Conspicuously absent from Carson's study, though, is comment on the New Testament's virtual silence on the subject of culture. I know, for a start, of no English concordance where the word occurs. One thinks of C. S. Lewis's remark, "On the whole, the New Testament seemed, if not hostile, yet unmistakably cold to culture. I think we can still believe culture to be innocent after we have read the New Testament; I cannot see that we are encouraged to think it important" ("Christianity and Culture," *Christian Reflections*, 15).

Granted that Lewis is using "culture" to mean (as he tells us) "intellectual and aesthetic activity"; granted also that that is too limited a definition for Carson's purposes ("culture" for him would include such "high culture" but, as we saw, not be restricted to it)—still, it seems, since Carson's (and Niebuhr's) subject is Christ and *culture*, that the Scripture's silence, if only its failure to use the word (in any sense), might be an interesting and useful place to begin.

Similarly the New Testament's, in particular Paul's, view of "the world," is almost always negative—but, except for minimal treatment in the chapter on church and state, hardly dealt with here. While "culture" and "world" may not be interchangeable, they often connote, especially perhaps in the ordinary Christian mind, much the same thing. As the juxtaposition "Church and state" is not the same juxtaposition as "Christ and culture," but germane to it, so in my estimation might "the world" and its connection to "culture" merit consideration as well.

Nevertheless, the book can and should be read (as Carson himself recommends) as "a meditation on how a robust biblical theology tends to safeguard

Christians against the most egregious reductionisms" (82), Niebuhr's not least.

Carson makes that point well; and although he makes it perhaps too often—the book, for my tastes, could have been tighter and therefore shorter—he does make the point. Given Niebuhr's nearly iconic status, not to mention the importance of the topic, it is a point worth making. Carson's reflections on the Christian response to culture in the contemporary world, as well as those on postmodernism and Islam, are likewise helpful.

—Richard A. Riesen