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"vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo"
Colossians 3:3

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Voices for the Supernatural and Revealed Word of God: John William Burgon and Geerhardus Vos

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A growing and increasingly accepted liberalism in biblical interpretation has become a cancer threatening to destroy faith in the inspired and providentially preserved Word of God. John William Burgon diagnosed the onset of the disease when he responded in detail to the five essays and two reviews contained in *Essays and Reviews* (1860)—these written by clergymen in the Church of England in response to challenges to orthodox religion—in his *Inspiration and Interpretation: Being an Answer to a Volume entitled "Essays and Reviews"* (1861). Burgon immediately identified the bizarre and cancerous nuclei threatening its aggressive spread within the orthodox body as disbelief in the inspired Word of God. Such disbelief leads quickly to a view that the Bible is only an ordinary book.

In *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate About the Messianic Consciousness* (1953), Geerhardus Vos notes that the modern search for what is of permanent value in Christianity has settled upon the question of the identity of Jesus, discovering in the Messianic character of Jesus a "great rock of offense…, a rock not easy to remove" ("Preface"). The Messianic question, Vos insists, "has meaning only within the limits of a strict Biblical supernaturalism; it presupposes the recognition of the supernatural provenience of both prophecy and the fulfillment of prophecy" (13). He says, "Anyone who lacks the sensorium for the supernatural cannot but walk through them [the figurative language of the Old Testament] as the rationalist would walk through the scenes of a wonder-land" (23). History, prophecy, typology, and miracle, however, must all be excised from a book that is no longer viewed as "entirely sui generis; and claiming to be the work of Inspiration" (Burgon clxii). Likewise, Vos calls "perverse" the modern mind habituated to rejecting Jesus' Messianic consciousness (16). "How halting and inwardly disrupted a religious approach to Jesus must be which feels bound to stop short of accepting and receiving Him at the face value of his own central self-estimate!" (16).

In *Inspiration and Interpretation*, Burgon answered what he considered heretical and false statements by seven writers, six of the authors being ministers of the Church of England. The problem with Frederick Temple's ideas are that they reflect a belief in progress and a mature humanity, influenced by developments in physical science and history, which dethrones God and sets up Self (conscience) in his place (xvii). Biblical revelation gives way to natural revelation. Rowland Williams attacks the traditional notion of predictive prophecy. Burgon characterizes Williams as "a man who explains away Miracles, denies Prophecy, and idealizes Scripture; the man who disparages the formulæ he uses daily, mutilates the Canon, and evacuates the most solemn doctrines of the Church!" (xlv). Baden Powell attacks the miracles of Scripture, largely based on their being contrary to the uniformity of Nature (xlviii). Henry Bristow Wilson makes

the claim that the National Church should be regarded as a purely secular institution concerned with ethics, not divinity, and that people should be freed from intellectual bondage to traditional doctrines and creeds (lxv). Charles Goodwin's intent finds Moses, the author of Genesis, absurd and ignorant and argues a literal interpretation of Genesis should not bear a moment's serious discussion (civ). Mark Pattison wants a free-handling of religious and moral truths in keeping with current knowledge (cxiii). Benjamin Jowett, in the seventh and last essay, makes explicit his disbelief that the Bible is the word of God and insists it should be interpreted like any other book (cxli). Burgon describes a concerted effort on the part of the seven writers in *Essays and Reviews* to destroy traditional faith by advancing interpretation without inspiration—and thereby reducing the Bible to a "ghostly phantom" (ccxxiv). Burgon concludes these writers have conspired to free-handle God's divine truth.

Geerhardus Vos explains "the doubt cast upon Jesus' Messianic consciousness" springs "from an inner dislike of it," with the dislike coming out of an attempt to correlate it with other approaches to the identity of Jesus. He concedes there may be nothing intentional in the process of such critical treatment (16). Vos identifies "a historico-critical" approach as one such impediment to Jesus' Messianic identity. He further finds the "modern" and "liberal" thought-form as provoking protest to the Messianic. He goes on to observe, "The religious mentality centering in the Messiahship is necessarily one of absolute submission to a rule imposed from above" (17). It is exactly at the point of this vertical and horizontal interface that the modern mind stumbles, denying the vertical and seeking to locate truth in the linear, temporal, and historical plane. For Vos, though, "the Messiah is the incarnate representation of… divine authoritativeness," bodily manifesting eschatological fulfillment. Jesus, as prophesized, represents divine interposition and consummation: "Everywhere in the New Testament the Christ is, even to his humanity, an eternalized figure whose redemptive significance is not subject to eclipse" (18, 19, 20). Concerning this Messianic Jesus, Vos declares, "The conception of the Messiahship is the most pronouncedly supernaturalistic conception in the whole range of Biblical religion" (22). The miracles of the New Testament "are the appropriate supernatural concomitants of the supernatural Christ; they are signs of the times" (23). The appearance of the Messiah serves as the vector and "first act of the great drama of the End" in which God restores the primordial harmonies, which existed at the beginning of the world (22). Redemptive history is both linear and vertical; the temporal, permeated by the Eternal. The denial of the Messianic becomes, finally, a scheme "for bringing Jesus down to the level of a man feeling at home in, and drawing his inspiration from, the purely natural realm" (23).

Dean Burgon and Geerhardus Vos come together in condemning the disbelief that has been eating away at the Bible as the inspired Word of God, excising Supernatural revelation, denying prophecy, typology, the reality of miracles, eschatology and divine plan, and finding offensive any Messianic identity of Jesus. As Vos notes, the question of Messianic consciousness "deals exclusively with the problem of whether or not Jesus believed himself to be, and claimed to be, the Messiah. Those who are inclined to answer in the negative do not, as a rule, occupy the standpoint of supernaturalism" (13). They prefer to see Jesus in a non-supernatural garb—"as a

religious genius, an ethical teacher, or a social reformer" (13). The movement of the modern mind may not be, however, so much a "conspiracy against faith," as Burgon describes the results of *Essays and Reviews* (xi), but a "something warmer," as described by Vos (14). Vos explains, the modern mind prefers "to take its departure from Christ in addressing itself to the world rather than a movement seeking the Person of Christ in order to occupy itself with Him" (37). Eliminating Messianic consciousness from Jesus has taken several important turns: outright denial, agnosticism, a theory of progressive Messiahship, a hypothesis of a gradually developing consciousness of Messiahship, and a view of Messiahship as a merely formal conception. Vos spends significant time examining and dispensing with each of these approaches. He follows these with discussion of the various titles for Jesus: the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the Savior. With respect to the historical Jesus, he makes a pivotal and significant observation: "Our Lord's human nature and all that entered into it of spiritual experience was not something existing for its own sake; it existed and operated for the sake of his Messianic calling" (104). Jesus' Messianic consciousness holds everything else in "subordination and subservience to . . . regnant purpose" (15). Vos expresses admiration for the theological tradition of the Church, which defines the "threefold office of Christ as that as Prophet, Priest and King" (117).

Naturalism forms the antithesis to Supernaturalism, and this dualistic, dichotomous tension can be found everywhere in the names or titles used in conjunction with the historical Jesus and the Anointed Messianic King and Christ. Vos says that "in present day usage the name of Christ is in danger of suffering neglect, and the name of Jesus, mostly without realization of its etymological import, has almost become the exclusive designation." He goes on to conclude, "this is perhaps a symptom of the generally shifting attitude in the religious appraisal of our Lord from the official to the merely human" (109). With the early Church and Paul, Vos favors the combination of "Jesus Christ," which expresses "a strong appreciation for the legitimate standing of Jesus in His office of the Christ," this attested from heaven at his baptism and transfiguration (109).

Beyond the discussion of whether phrases of importance became "petrified into conventional designation" as "the Messiah," the title takes on connotations of both heaven and earth, with current criticism preferring the earthly (Vos, 105). This earthly approach will find in the title a reference to the People of Israel as opposed to the eschatological King, with its backward and forward outlook (106, 21). Vos finds the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions pertaining to the Messiah as integral and forming "the innermost core of the Saviour's Messiahship" rather than concomitant to Christhood (117, 112).

In each of the other titles, a similar tension manifests itself in both human and divine interpretive possibilities. "The Lord" bears connotations of the sub-Messianic as well as the Messianic, an ordinary polite address or designation for exalted Savior (Vos 118). To "go before the Lord" can refer to Jesus or Jehovah, or Jesus as God. Vos makes the point, however, that "The early Christians were not so one-sidedly occupied with 'the historical Jesus' as certain groups of modern Christians are" (121). Their preoccupation, he says, was "with Christ in heaven" (121). This preoccupation shows itself in the controversy accompanying Wilhelm Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*

(1913), which argues Jesus never bore the title Kyrios, that Kyrios was a common title for the cult-god of pagan religion, and that Paul adapted the name into Christology (137). Vos identifies Bousset's real purpose as an attempt "to sever the Pauline form of Christianity, with its deification and worship of Jesus," preferring instead, a historical Jesus as a mere man (138).

With "Son of God," the "manward relations of the Messianic office" reverse into a relationship between God and the Messiah (141). The discussion here pertains to whether: (1) Son of God should be translated "child of God;" (2) understood as Messianic office (with the Messiah the heir and representative of God); (3) explained as a nativistic usage ascribed to the paternity of God; or (4) refer to a Trinitarian affirmation of sonship existing in eternity (142). Vos devotes three chapters to his exploration of this title, devoting one chapter to the title itself, one to those who used the title in relation to Jesus, and another, to discussing the sonship presented in the gospel of John. It must be remembered that Vos discusses the consciousness of Jesus himself [and he is not happy with the inward, subjective turn suggested by "consciousness"] by which he means "the unifying, comprehensive character" holding everything else into subordination and subservience (15). Vos makes the point that liberal tradition has "ruled out the trinitarian and nativistic," retaining "historical belief only in the official-Messianic and the ethico-religious," with skepticism to all Messianic claims, leaving finally, only the fact that "Jesus called himself a 'child of God'" (143).

As for the "Son of Man," Vos holds to prophetic and typological interpretation: "the figure to which it is attached in Daniel 7 was from the outset the figure of the Messiah," thus excluding any interpretation as a solemn title or "simply man" (227). The fact that Jesus alone employs the title to himself and that the Synoptics and John use the title with frequency of occurrence, more than eighty times, "calls for notice" (230). Vos declares, "there must have existed in our Lord's mind a potent reason why He preferred this way of designating Himself to all others," acknowledging or a least not repudiating other names, but almost eliminating them in his use, except for Son of God, with even this used with less frequency (254). Vos makes the critical point explicit: "the potent reason lay in the fact that the title Son of Man stood farthest removed from every possible Jewish prostitution of the Messianic office" (254). He goes on to explain that in the spirit of Daniel, "it suggested a Messianic career in which, all of a sudden, without human interference or military conflict, through an immediate act of God, the highest dignity and power are conferred" (254). Those who prefer the mere historical will find this most objectionable because "The kingship here portrayed is not only supernatural; it is 'transcendental'" (254).

In his chapter on "The Saviour," Vos notes an irony: "the half century of toil of the 'liberal' theology, instead of rehabilitating the historical Jesus, has only resulted in the construction of a far different figure—a figure which is now being felt unhistorical after all" (272). He says this, in part, is due to a modernizing of the character of Jesus that has "seized upon the *Soter* idea… because it seems to offer a point of contact with the favorite liberal conception of Him as a humanitarian idealist. The term 'Saviour' seems best adapted to mark Him as the Uplifter and Benefactor, bent mainly upon relieving all manner of distress and abnormality among men" (271). Vos concludes,

however, “the title and function of *Soter* prove themselves ill-fitted for incorporation into the philosophy of the life of Jesus” (272). This is so because the Messianic mission, not always attached to his various names, has characteristically been described as “to save” [*soter* being a noun to go with the verbal form “to save”] without any clear distinction being made in the modern mind between the two meanings of “to deliver” and “to heal” (256). Etymologically, “the latter represents the original concept out of which the former developed as a general term for all deliverance from any kind of evil” (256). The act of healing carries with it a specific background precluding its interpretation in a purely medical or therapeutic way: “The healing purpose is subordinated to a higher purpose,” and the higher idea that stands in the background is “that of *the transference out of the sphere of death into the sphere of life*” (258). To the objection that the conjoining of life and salvation does not have to lead beyond beneficence and philanthropy, Vos says, would be to miss the function faith plays in the matter: such a view overlooks “the distinctly religious nature of the transaction involved: it is not life as such, not physical life, as an ultimate end in itself, but life religiously considered, that is aimed at” (259).

In the life of Jesus, “the Messiahship was too comprehensive and centralizing a life-category” not to bring the “mystery of His death” and “the consciousness of His Messiahship” into “the closest of unions” (274). “And a death Messianically viewed cannot but acquire the character of absolute necessity with reference to the fulfillment of the Messianic program” (274). Vos discovers Jesus giving utmost care to the “momentous juncture” of eliciting from Peter the confession of Messiahship and the subjoining of it to the idea of his death: “The one protected and balanced the other” (276). For Jesus, his Messianic calling and sense of approaching Messianic death bring no new revelation but fulfill the “pre-existent” will and rational purpose of God expressed beforehand in prophecy (277, 279). In his own self-disclosure, Jesus understands “His approaching death to be an integral part of His Messianic task” (278).

“What really underlies the aversion to the idea of Messiahship… is simply the desire to get rid of the large bulk of supernaturalism the Messiah trails in His wake” (23). Vos traces the desire to its inception: “it is the naturalism of the modern way of thinking that seeks to expel the supernaturalism of the old and, historically considered, the only possible view” (23). In his life, Jesus “lived and moved and had His being in the world of the supernatural. The thought of the world to come was to Him the life-breath of religion,” and this mind “cannot be fitted into… humanitarian idealism” (25). The “soteric element,” Vos explains, belongs not to ancient Hellenist custom but is indigenous to the Old Testament (25). Salvation was to come through the Messiah. Jesus “was a Saviour…, and into this flowed all the powers of His Messianic life,” and “to save” in its spiritual sense means “to rescue from the judgment and to introduce the blessedness of the world to come” (27). It is, nonetheless, this “idea of salvation… [that] has become an offense to the modern mind” (27). Vos says, modern thinking has “attempted to free the Jesus of the Gospels from the antiquated, ‘magical’ idea of salvation” by stripping him of his Messianic character (28). Finally, the Messiah occupies “a specifically religious position… between God and man,” and includes “His right to receive worship and His identification with God” (28). Vos makes a final

point succinctly: “When faith has taken the infinitely greater leap of affirming the deity of Jesus, it can only by a queer perversity of mind hesitate to take the smaller one of affirming His Messianic character” (29).

Both Burgon and Vos understand the drift of thinking away from any belief in the supernatural, modernists preferring rather to fit the Bible and Jesus into the world of experience, to find in the Bible a set of lessons or general truths or a reference to historical events. In the case of Jesus, modern thinking would drop the Christ and see him as “a teacher, a leader, a point of departure in religion” (30). As Vos describes it, “The whole innate trend of modern religious thinking is against the recognition of Jesus’ Messianic consciousness,” and it “produces not only the rejection of the Messiahship, but ultimately the rejection of Jesus Himself” (30). Ironically, though, the way back to the Divine and Supernatural will come through Jesus: “the divine in Jesus plants itself squarely in our pathway when the moment for dealing with Him religiously is upon us” (30). This is the “something warmer” that animates much of the exegetical and historical denial or affirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus (14). “The conception of the Messiahship is the most pronouncedly supernaturalistic conception in the whole range of Biblical religion” (22).

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Geerhardus Vos and Michael Wolter on Paul's Eschatology

James T. Dennison, Jr.

The massive 2011 volume, *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, ed. by Jan G. van der Watt, contains articles on the eschatology of each book and author of the NT by respected scholars of the liberal critical school. It affords the reader a window into the current state of the question with respect to the unity and diversity in the eschatologies of the NT corpus. In particular, the contribution on the Pauline eschatology by Michael Wolter[1] provides a bench mark for comparing the modern consensus on this topic with the conclusions reached by the great Princetonian, Geerhardus Vos, more than a century ago. NB: Vos first offered his course on Pauline Eschatology in 1904-05 according to the Princeton Seminary Catalogue of those years (p. 24). He first published on the subject in 1911, "The Pauline Eschatology and Chiliasm" (*Princeton Theological Review* 9 [1911]: 26-60)—an article which was incorporated into his book *The Pauline Eschatology* (published by the author, 1930 and reprinted by Eerdmans in 1952 and P&R in 1991) as chapter X, "The Question of Chiliasm in Paul" (226-60). We note that a few other chapters of Vos's *The Pauline Eschatology* previously appeared in the *Princeton Theological Review*: chapter I, "The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology," 27 (1929): 403-44; chapter VI ("The Resurrection") "The Pauline Doctrine of the Resurrection," 27 (1929): 1-35; and chapter VII, "Alleged Development in Paul's Teaching on the Resurrection," 27 (1929): 193-226.[2]

First, we must ascertain the range of the primary documents for Paul's eschatology. Wolter takes the dominant higher critical position in attenuating the Pauline corpus. That is, he accepts only Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon as primary Pauline documents. Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastorals (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) he dismisses as "Deutero-pauline"[3]. Ironically (or disingenuously), Wolter notes that Colossians contains the same eschatological "concepts as Paul" (420), but is ***not*** Pauline. In other words, the author of Colossians was a liar or a plagiarist, not only claiming to be Paul (when he was not), but stealing Paul's eschatology without really attributing it to the apostle. No amount of academic and critical sophistication and stature can conceal this "dirty little secret" of the higher critical fundamentalists. According to their reconstruction, six of the thirteen Pauline epistles (so

[1] Professor of New Testament at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms University of Bonn, Germany. His article entitled "The Distinctiveness of Paul's Eschatology" appears on pages 416-26.

[2] For a full bibliography of Vos, cf. James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (2005) 89-112 with supplements as follows http://kerux.com/doc/2601A1.asp, http://kerux.com/doc/2401A1.asp, http://kerux.com/doc/2503A1.asp and http://kerux.com/doc/2502A1.asp.

[3] This is his term for Colossians (p. 420) and by extrapolation places him in the category of all higher critics who maintain that Paul's only authentic letters are the seven noted above. The critical position runs afoul of the Muratorian Canon of ca. 170 A.D., which lists thirteen authentic epistles of Paul. More significantly, it contradicts the author noted in the so-called 'Deutero-pauline' letters, cf. Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1.

labeled in the text of the NT) were written by mendacious frauds who stole the famous apostle's name in order to gain acceptance with Christian audiences.

Wolter works with a reduced Pauline canon and thus stands in stark contrast with Vos who uses the robust canon of thirteen Pauline primary documents. We are already alerted to the greater riches gathered from the greater number of authentic Pauline epistles as harvested by the inimitable Geerhardus Vos. More Pauline documents means more Pauline eschatological treasures; or the basic riches further enriched in multiform ways by the inspired apostle who unfolds the organic redemptive-historical connection of the whole counsel of our eschatological God in Christ through the Spirit. But here we have undertaken to measure the so-called "bottom line" consensus in the Pauline eschatology using Wolter as our bench mark; thus, we must work with what he gives us, impoverished, attenuated, incomplete, deficient, diminished, etc. as it is.[4]

Wolter proposes to discuss Paul's eschatology in terms of past, present and future (416). This is of course promising and all the more so since the contemporary consensus (even with an attenuated Pauline corpus) reaches the same schematic outline as the great Princetonian. There is however a significant difference. For Wolter, "past" extends only back to the life, death and resurrection of Christ. For him, the "Christ event"[5] (a term virtually echoing Bultmanian existentialism) is the beginning of the Pauline eschatology. This means that he defines Paul's eschatology only in terms of Christ's past, the Christian's present ("between the times") and the believer's future (beyond the times—past and present). In fine, this is a subtle philosophical redefinition of Paul's eschatology.

Readers of this journal will automatically recognize that Vos too schematically interfaces Paul's eschatology with past, present and future vectors.[6] The Latin dedication page[7] of Vos's *The Pauline Eschatology* as well as the first chapter of this *magnum opus* echo and re-echo this retrospective, perspective and prospective paradigm: God as Creator, time past; God as Redeemer, time present; God as Consummator, time future.

Vos folds Paul's eschatology back to creation, enveloping believers, through divine and supernatural grace in the primeval, patriarchal and Jewish OT era of redemptive history, into the fruition of the *visio Dei*, while he reminds us that for the apostle, future hope and delight in the Lord belongs to the children of grace ("elect from the foundation of the world," in Paul's Ephesians

[4] We note that Wolter's article is a mere ten pages in length and is thus a summary of Paul's views. Comparing him to Vos's 319-page treatise may seem unfair, but we shall attempt to keep the discussion focused on the summary nature of the issue. An English translation of Wolter's *Paulus: ein Grundriss seiner Theologie* (2011) has just been scheduled for release in November by Baylor University Press under the title *Paul: an Outline of his Theology*. It will be more than 460 pages in length. We acknowledge that in his book, Wolter will provide more detailed information of the apostle's eschatology, but his own critical stance will not be altered. We regard the present article under review as a summary outline of the case he presents in the larger work.

[5] He uses the term numerous times, cf. 417, 418, 419, 425.

[6] Cf. the present writer's survey in *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, 49-59.

[7] Page iii of the original 1930 volume: Deus Creator Redemptor Consummator In His Tribus Religio Nostra Universa Pendet ("God the Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: on these three things our whole religion depends").

1:4 terminology) from Adam the first to Adam the last (so 1 Cor 15: 45 and Rom 5:18-19). Wolter does not provide any clue about what he thinks of Paul's OT eschatology, especially for OT believers. Thus, he ignores eschatological motifs patriarchal, Davidic/royal-monarchic, prophetic and Messianic from the former revelation (effectively de-eschatologizing the OT Scriptures for Paul). All of these are foundational anticipations prospectively of, to use Wolter's phrase, the "Christ event". Wolter narrowly focuses on Paul's eschatology for Christian believers (the existential factor) and does not address the possession or inheritance eschatology of believers from Adam to Christ. Vos therefore provides a richer tapestry of the plan of salvation from protological to eschatological Adam for those who inherit the reality, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:6).

Similarly, when Vos places God's redemptive acts in organic eschatological tandem (*The Pauline Eschatology*, 36-41), he folds the future back upon the present so as to define the redeeming life, death and resurrection of the Son of God as a realization of the 'not yet' in the 'now'.[8] Wolter will use the vocabulary of what Vos labels the "semi-eschatological" state (38), but without the drama with which Paul invests the concept. The present life of the Christian believer (saved by divine and supernatural grace, i.e., the supernatural element[9]) is a possession of the redemptive eschatological benefits of the life of Christ Jesus, the death of Christ Jesus and the resurrection of Christ Jesus. All these past historical once-and-for-all accomplishments are a present realization of the guarantee (Greek *arrabon*) of a final eschatological righteous life (in the life of Christ), a final death to death (in the death of Christ) and a final resurrection body (in the resurrection body of the risen Christ). There is no future attenuation of all the Christ benefits presently realized, possessed and enjoyed by the one "in Christ" (a favorite phrase of Paul, but never mentioned by Wolter, though the apostle uses it more than fifty times in Wolter's truncated Pauline corpus). All present gifts are future possessions (because it is a present possession and inheritance), now and not yet. Wolter agrees with the vocabulary; Vos makes the vocabulary alive and vibrant as Paul himself does. It is not existential stasis that undergirds Paul; rather it is supernatural drama erupting in history in its fullness and graciously, unmeritoriously gifted to the sons and daughters of the age to come *en Christo*. Rather for Wolter, the relation is merely existential, not covenantal,

[8] "As soon as the direction of the actual spiritual life-contact becomes involved, the horizontal movement of thought on the time-plane must give way immediately to a vertical projection of the eschatological interest into the supernal region, because there, even more than in the historical development below, the center of all religious values and forces has come to lie. The other, the higher world is in existence there, and there is no escape for the Christian from its supreme dominion over his life. Thus the other world, hitherto future, has become present" (37-38). "We think and theologize out of the present into the future, because our base of existence is in the present . . . To the early Christians a different orientation had been given, and that not merely as a matter of practical religious outlook, but likewise through the teaching of Revelation . . . The light of the world to come cast its clarifying and glorifying radiance backward into the present through the medium of teaching and prophecy concerning the future . . . Living, then, in a world of semi-futurities there is every reason to expect that the thought of the earliest Christians should have moved backwards from the anticipated attainment in its fulness to the present partial experiences and interpreted these in terms of the former" (42-43).

[9] ". . . for Paul, as elsewhere in Scripture, eschatology is supernaturalism in the *n*th degree" (62).

identificational, participational, inclusional (i.e., not folded into the eschatological person—Son of the Father—and the eschatological arena—heaven).

Wolter's article is subdivided into comments on Paul's "retrospective eschatology" (417-19); its "between the times" features (419-22); "the reality of present salvation in the light of the future" (422-24); the hortatory "now is the day of salvation" (425-26). We will examine each of these in order not only to understand in précis current liberal critical thinking on these matters, but to observe how Vos anticipates the consensus (in formal terms) even as he differs (in essential metaphysico-philosophical terms) while penetrating more profoundly the *status quaestionis*.

By "retrospective eschatology", Wolter means the eschatological significance of the "Christ event" (417, 418). This language has existential overtones and raises the question of whether Wolter dissolves the "Christ event" into mere "encounter" (a term which we admit does not appear in his essay). The "event" occurs in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4) "relating to the fate of Jesus of Nazareth" (417).[10] It includes his death and resurrection which are part of the "temporal dimension" in Paul's proclamation (although Wolter never uses the word "historical" in his essay). However, Wolter does not address the relationship between Christ's death on the cross and this eschatological redemption. What is the nature of the crucifixion in his thought? Is it symbol ("image"—a term he prefers elsewhere) or is it concrete historical reality? Is it the experience of eschatological judgment *pro nobis*? Is it the satisfaction of eschatological divine wrath (another word conspicuously absent from this essay) against sin for the sons and daughters of God's grace? In avoiding these questions, Wolter ignores the finality attached to the issues—the eschatological finality which was experienced in history by the God-man (theanthropos), Jesus Christ, for those who died, were condemned, forgiven and justified once-and-for-all from sin, death and Hell as Jesus himself was.

It should be noted that Wolter begs the question entirely with respect to Paul's doctrine of justification—the justification of Christ through his perfectly righteous life and his bloody, atoning death—all vindicated or declared as such by his triumphant resurrection (in Rom 4:25, the resurrection is the declaration of Jesus' own justification as righteous Savior who is at once damnation-bearing Savior—and it is the justification of those "in Christ" acquitted by his righteous life, forgiven the eternal guilt-condemnation of sin in his vicarious death, vindicated as resurrected together with him since the powers of grave and Hell have no hold on his body-soul; so too their body-soul united to his possesses the resurrection life of the eternal age to come). For Vos, Paul's doctrine of justification is suffused with eschatology because justification consists in final things performed by the Son of God and, by faith, those final things belong to believers because they belong to the justified and justifying Lord Jesus Christ, ontological Son of God.[11]

[10] Vos has a much more profound analysis/exegesis of this passage in *The Pauline Eschatology* (83-84, 289) where he recognizes the shift from *chronos* to *aionios*.

[11] For Vos on the eschatological aspect of Paul's doctrine of justification, see *The Pauline Eschatology*, 55, 151. Also: ". . . the resurrection of Jesus is in a very real sense the justification of Christ . . .," Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect

Having affirmed the twin poles of Paul's eschatology (now/not yet), Wolter proceeds to consider the Christian state "between the times" (i.e., in the midst of the poles). Recognizing Paul's label for the "present evil age" (Gal 1:4), Wolter grapples with what continues (sin, evil, depravity—JTD's words) even as a "new creation" breaks in. And yet, a new creation which is not the "heavenly world" (419). Those belonging to this interim new thing (as Paul declares) are already glorified (Rom 8:30), elected (Rom 8:33), sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:14-17). Outside of this evil age, they are not regarded as God's enemies (420); rather, they are reconciled to him (Rom 5:10). Faith, for Paul, possess the essence of the Christ event while leaving "sight" of the future aeon in prospect (more 'now' and 'not yet'). This *Zwischen den Zeiten* distinction is pronounced in Paul's concept of glorification (421). Though this glory is yet to come, Paul considers it so certain that it is already bestowed.

Wolter has correctly explained glorification in Paul, but he does not attach the concept to Christ's own glorification. As Vos suggests, if, in fact, glorification is a present reality for the Christian believer, it cannot be so *in abstracto*. It must be present in concrete, objective history—i.e., by someone who lived in this present evil world, passed in body-soul through death, burial, resurrection, final judgment and was glorified. That someone was Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, glorified Lord and Savior. Only if the "event" is historical concretely may believers have a sure and certain hope of their own already/not yet glorification. If Jesus is already glorified, so are those "in Christ". If Jesus is glorified eternally, so are those "in Christ". Vos, in distinction from Wolter, folds the interim life of the believer (in history) into the historical and eternal life of the Son of God (personal and covenantal incorporation as union with Christ). No mysticism there; no mere existential symbol or image there; no fabrication there (as higher criticism and liberal fundamentalism endlessly contrives); no abstraction there (as much modern evangelicalism moralistically preaches). Vos was as intolerant of vapid preachy applicationism as he was of reductionistic anti-supernatural liberalism.

Wolter outlines the "temporal succession" (421) inherent to Paul's interim eschatology. A further transformation remains; the corruptible must put on incorruption (1 Cor 15: 53). But Wolter does not penetrate Paul's argument here. In fact, he avoids it with 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 49-54 entirely absent from his treatment. Compare that with Vos's profound work on the nature of the resurrection body (*The Pauline Eschatology*, 206-14). Wolter rather immanentizes the eschatological life of the believer from 1 Corinthians 13.[12] The three virtues of that famous passage are central to Christian community—semi-eschatologically so (to borrow Vos's expression). But though Wolter has a profound insight into the temporary existence of the "spiritual gifts" (423), he tends to romanticize them for the present while neglecting their heavenly dimension in Christ and in the eschaton.

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of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (1980) 109. Also, James T. Dennison, Jr., "The Eschatological Aspect of Justification." *Kerux* 10/1 (May 1995): 10-16 http://kerux.com/doc/1001A2.asp.

[12] Cf. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, n. 37, p. 29.

Wolter is alert to the urgency in Paul's eschatology (425). Here he notes the gift of God's grace (2 Cor 6:1) which coordinates with the gift of faith in Christ (Rom 13:11). As he interfaces with Christ's death and resurrection, Paul's proclamation of the "Christ event" becomes an "eschatological event". (Do we detect here a category derived from modern existentialism, i.e., actualization through kerygmatic proclamation?) Wolter is simply adding Paul's preaching of the gospel to the "already" eschatological reality of the interim. At the same time, he concludes on a universalistic note eerily reminiscent of neo-orthodox (Barthian) universalism: "God has acted eschatologically in Jesus Christ to the benefit of all men" (426). This statement stands in stark contrast to remarks he has penned but a few short pages prior (424): "In this text (1 Thess 5:1-11) Paul distinguishes between the salvation of the Christian community and the condemnation of the 'others' (v. 6). . . . [T]he community's reality of salvation . . . will not bring it condemnation. The present reality of the "other's" condemnation stands in opposition to this . . .. '[T]he day of the Lord' will bring inevitable condemnation to the 'others' (1 Thess 5:13), but to [believers] the transformation will result in a state of salvation, which will indeed continue eternally." Is this not dialectics with a vengeance?!

Conclusion

As we assume Wolter was selected to write his article for the massive symposium in which it appears—a compilation of contemporary (early 21st century) consensus on NT eschatologies—we may use his comments about Paul's eschatology to summarize the current academic, scholarly, critical majority view on the topic.

He vigorously defends a retrospective, existential, prospective paradigm for the apostle's eschatological thought. He particularly distinguishes present "already" eschatology from future "not yet" eschatology in Paul, yet underscores that both are inseparably bound in the "Christ event". For the nature of the Christian life (Christian community) in the interim between the first and second advent of Christ, he details faith, gifts of the Spirit, hope and assurance (all anchored in the death and resurrection of Christ). While he confesses a universalism of divine eschatological benefit for all mankind (the universal act of benefit in the universal man, Jesus Christ), he dialectically recognizes that the apostle has a notion of "condemnation" for those who are different ("other") from believers—an eventuality associated with the coming "day of the Lord" (1 Thess 5:2). And he writes that Paul construes the present Christian experience "in the light of the future" (cf. his four-point summary at the outset of his article, 416).

What is remarkable about all this is that Vos began to articulate it more than a century ago. And in his great book, *The Pauline Eschatology*, he detailed the riches of Paul's eschatology more profoundly than Wolter's brief article. The conclusion remains: the formal vocabulary of what Wolter describes as the modern consensus on Paul's eschatology was observed and described as Paul's eschatology years ago by Geerhardus Vos. So carefully did Vos read the eschatology of Paul that modern scholars agree with his formal conclusions, even when they are ignorant of his meticulous work.

The formal terms of the vocabulary and basic conceptions of the Pauline eschatology coincide as we read Wolter and Vos. Still, for all the formal similarities, we have the following concerns. We have already noted Wolter's commitment to the higher critical Deutero-paulinism. We have also indicated the failure (or, at least, hesitancy) to extend the eschatological horizon of the apostle back over the OT. Without wishing to make too much of this brief summary article, it is nonetheless peculiar that Wolter's own outline does not refer to one OT text (he does reference the person "Adam"). In our opinion, this truncates his presentation by minimizing (if not outright eliminating) eschatological categories of covenantal union (with God "in Christ" by anticipation as well as by realization) as well as the unfolding eschatological drama contained in the previous history of redemption (having now reached its concrete "fullness" in the incarnation of the ontological Son of God in history). We have observed his dialecticism as a possible echo of classic 20th century Neo-orthodoxy. However, our greatest concern arises from the language of actualization, "event" orientation and realization which is "existentially" (421) present in Christ.

Wolter does not come to Paul without presuppositions nor without previous academic and scholarly influences. Do we detect the rudiments of Bultmanian and post-Bultmanian existentialism (as re-imaged in modern or post-modern categories)? Wolter has been impacted by his German NT context—Ernst Kaseman and Hans Conzelmann to mention a few. This also places him squarely in the line of Enlightenment presuppositions and the infamous "Ugly Ditch" of G. E. Lessing. In other words, he is a post-Kantian for whom genuine supernaturalism remains problematic if not wholly impossible. This, in turn, influences Wolter's commitment to the Enlightenment paradigm which is to reconstruct the language and message of the Bible from the standpoint of the prevailing modern worldview (late 20th now 21st century *weltanschauung*). Paul, then, must be made relevant to the prevailing 21st century ethos and worldview. This means that the "event" which actualized or authenticated Paul's transformation must be re-imaged or reconstructed for modern mankind's "salvation". The language needs no objective historicity (in fact, objective historicity would destroy its fungibility)—it needs only the dilemma of human finitude and death.

Paul's eschatology speaks to this radical crisis and proclaims hope, faith and assurance through the image-symbols of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While this formal language may address man's modern crises, it falls short of uniting his (objective) history with an (objective) history lived via incarnation (and that, real ontological incarnation). If God the Son joins and unites himself to concrete human history, then history has been changed forever. If not, all the religious language of the Bible, Paul included, is mere symbol, image, 'myth'. Perhaps, Wolter's larger opus may persuade us to be less skeptical of his presuppositions and thus even more appreciative of his formal analysis of Paul's eschatology. In the meantime, we stand with Vos on more solid ground (in our opinion)—the ground of historic Christian orthodoxy enriched by the concrete, objective eschatology performed in history by Jesus of Nazareth who wonderfully draws our concrete objective history into that marvelous eschatological arena which Paul has articulated so majestically.

K: JNWTS 30/2 (September 2015): 16

George Downame: The Affirmation of Merit in Sinners is Blasphemy[1]

We therefore being no way able to render what is due to God, but on the contrary by our sins making ourselves debtors to him, owing unto him deserved punishment; is it any less, than antichristian insolency, or rather blasphemy, for sinful men to profess themselves able to merit any good thing at the hands of God, and to make him their debtor? Neither can I sufficiently wonder, how men, whose conscience (if it be not cauterized), tells them that they sin daily against God, and by sin provoke his judgments, can speak or think of meriting anything in justice at the hand of God but punishment. For as Augustine says . . . , "If God would deal according to merits, he should find none but whom he should condemn."[2]

[1] Born ca. 1565, Downame was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge (the nursery of Calvinistic Puritanism during the tenure of William Perkins, Laurence Chaderton, et al) earning the MA degree in 1588. He was appointed Professor of Logic there in 1590 and advanced the systematic method of Ramism (from Peter Ramus, †1572). He signed the protest against the infamous 1595 Cambridge lectures of 'Arminian' Peter Baro (†1599) in opposition to unconditional election. This attack engendered the predestinarian reaction of Perkins and others in defense of the Calvinistic and Biblical doctrine, including the Lambeth Articles of 1595 (cf. the introduction in James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (2012) 3:745). Though he was an advocate of *jure divino* episcopacy, Downame was not exclusively so, noting the salient arguments of his Presbyterian brothers. In 1604, he preached a sermon on John 8:36 which was reprinted in 1631 under the title *The Covenant of Grace*. The previous year (1603), he had released his defense of the then contemporary evangelical conviction that the Pope was the Antichrist (*A Treatise Concerning Antichrist*). The quotation above is from *A Treatise of Justification* (1633) 553 (spelling and punctuation have been modernized). Downame died in 1634 in Ireland where he had been made Bishop of Derry in 1616.

[2] The Latin text of Augustine's statement reads: *si Deus vellet pro meritis agere, non inveniret nisi quos damnaret*. It is found *"In Psalmum XCIV Ennaratio"* in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 37:1219.

K: JNWTS 30/2 (September 2015): 17-24

On The Road to Zion

Psalm 120:1-7

Marcus J. Renkema

A Song of Ascents

1 In my distress I cried to the LORD,
and He heard me.

2 Deliver my soul, O LORD,
from **lying lips**
And from a **deceitful tongue.**
3 What shall be given to you,
Or what shall be done to you,
You **false tongue?**
4 Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With coals of the broom tree!

5 Woe is me,
t**hat I dwell**
in Meshech,
That I dwell
among the tents of Kedar!
6 My soul has dwelt too long
With one who hates peace.

7 I am for peace;
But when I speak,
they are for war.

The heart of every true believer is drawn to the heavenly Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, Israel was drawn to the city of Jerusalem as the place where God dwelt among his people. Here they worshipped the Lord in the beauty of his temple. Here their souls could find rest and peace with God. And yet even among these Old Testament saints of God there was anticipation for something greater. According to the book of Hebrews, the Israelite believer was longing for a greater city, a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God himself. Believers of every age recognize that here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one which is above—the new and heavenly Jerusalem.

The majesty and glory of this great city is described for us in the book of Revelation, chapter 21. It is a city filled with the glory of God: a city of magnificent beauty; a city of great security and

peace; a city of true worship and communion with God; a perfect city unmarred by sin; a place without grief or misery. Here the multitudes of every tribe, nation and tongue gather in white robes to sing the praises of the Lord.

It is upon this city that our hearts are set. Set upon things above where Christ is. We are pilgrims here. Marching on the road to Zion. Longing for our destination. Our current struggles and suffering fill us with eager anticipation for the peace and joy of the New Jerusalem. We are strangers here. Pilgrims through this barren land. The new and heavenly Jerusalem is our home.

In Psalm 120, we see the heart of the psalmist awaken. His eyes are opened to his surroundings. He sees the wickedness of the world around him. He had fallen asleep in the tents of Kedar. He had dwelt too long in Meshech. His heart is filled with longing for peace. He cries out to God. He is drawn to leave his life among the wicked and begin his pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

This Psalm is the first of a collection of fifteen psalms that begin with Psalm 120 and continue to Psalm 134. Each of these psalms is labeled in their headings as one of the Psalms of Ascents. Some of these psalms are said to be written by David, one by Solomon, but others of them are by unknown authors and may have been written at different times throughout Israel's history. A quick glance at these psalms will reveal a fair amount of diversity with regard to the subject of the psalms. So much so, that you may wonder why it is that they are included together under the same heading. Why have they been clustered together in the book of Psalms? What makes them a collection? Why are they called 'psalms of ascents'?

Definition

What is a psalm of ascents? There are a fair amount of different views on this matter. The Hebrew word for 'ascents' simply means 'to go up'. It has been suggested that the heading simply referred to the music itself which was sung in a higher key or was a tune which continued to rise throughout the song. However, there is little evidence for this opinion. Others suggest that the ascent spoken of can be found in the nature of the poetry of the psalms. The repetition of key words in a stair-step pattern. But this is found in other Psalms as well and is not unique to these psalms nor is this pattern found in all the Psalms of this collection. Some suggest that these fifteen Psalms corresponded to the fifteen steps which rose up from the outer courts of the temple to the inner court. Calvin calls this "silly conjecture" and I am inclined to agree.

The most common understanding of the psalms of ascents is that they were used by the people of God as they traveled toward Jerusalem. These are songs of pilgrimage, songs for the journey, songs for the road, traveling songs, songs which reflected the people's longing for the holy city and its holy temple. Thus the heading of the psalm is indicative of how these psalms were used. They were used as God's people journeyed toward Zion, the city of God.

It would appear that some of the psalms in this collection (written as they were by David and his son, Solomon) were part of the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem—namely, three times each year

for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. But others were likely composed and sung by the returning exiles from Babylon as they journeyed back to Jerusalem. In both cases, one has the sense of the journey or the pilgrimage along with its objective, the city of God and its temple.

It is this understanding of the headings that makes the most sense for several reasons. If you look at the biblical language you will see that the Scriptures frequently speak of the journey to Jerusalem in terms of going up or ascending. Take Psalm 24 for example, when it says in the third verse, "Who may **ascend** into the hill of the LORD?"; or Isaiah 2:3 which says, "Come, and let us **go up** to the mountain of the LORD." Or as one of the psalms in this collection itself states, "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes **go up.** The tribes of the LORD, to the testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD" (Ps. 122:3-4). The journey to Jerusalem involved the physical rise in elevation, as it was a city upon a hill 'beautiful in elevation' (Ps. 48:2).

The Jerusalem Below

For many of the psalms in this collection of songs, this tie to Jerusalem is obvious. Jerusalem or Zion is directly mentioned in them. The temple, its priests and the worship of God in that city are clearly referenced. Think of Psalm 122: "Let us go to the house of the Lord" (v. 1). Psalm 125: "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion" (v. 1). Psalm 132: "Let us go into His tabernacle; let us worship at His footstool" (v. 7). In a couple of these psalms, this relationship is less obvious but nonetheless certainly there.

Take for example, our passage in Psalm 120 and the allusions to both the journey and the city are less obvious. One might expect that the psalm which begins this collection would be one which would be most explicit in setting forth the overall theme. Yet as you consider this psalm more closely you can see that the psalm speaks of the stirring of the heart which serves to initiate the journey in the first place. The heart is what motivates the psalmist to make the journey.

Look at verse 5 in particular. The psalmist is disturbed. Woe is me, for I have dwelt in Meshech and in the tents of Kedar far too long. Meshech was outside of Israel to the north, in Asia Minor. Kedar was outside of Israel but to the south. His life is lived outside of the land, in the midst of liars and those who hate peace. He has lived among them too long. His heart is stirred up to move. The implication being that if he is to find peace, he must leave his current dwelling outside of Israel and make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He cannot remain where he is. True peace will not be found among the wicked but will be found with the God who answers prayer. The God whose dwelling place is in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Above

I spend some time on this because this understanding of this collection enables us to appreciate the orientation of these psalms. It is the orientation of the OT believer which is described for us in Hebrews 11:13ff. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

This is also our own orientation as we look at our own life on this earth. We are called "pilgrims of the dispersion" in 1 Peter 1:1. "Strangers and pilgrims" in 1 Peter 2:11. In Colossians 3, we are called to set our minds upon things above where Christ is. According to Hebrews 13:14, here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. This is the goal of our journey. As it says in Hebrews 12:22ff.: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel."

This is the orientation we have. We are pilgrims. We are on a journey. Our objective is the city of God, the new and heavenly Jerusalem. These psalms of ascent are our songs—the songs of our journey, the songs which encourage us upon the way. Our eyes are set upon the heavenly city. Our hearts are set upon Christ who embodies the temple. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is the great High Priest. He is the once for all sacrifice who atones for sin. He is the one who frees us from the curse giving us peace with God. He is the King of the everlasting kingdom. This is the orientation of our whole life as believers. We are heading to the city whose builder and maker is God himself. The journey is not always easy, but the objective keeps us moving forward.

The Eschatological Pilgrim

But as you look at these Psalms, you must also recognize something else. At the head of this pilgrimage, the person leading us on this journey is none other than Christ himself, the eschatological pilgrim. He has pilgrimmed before us. He leads the way. The trials of the journey were his before they were ours. In the gospels, we see Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He makes his way to the city and to the temple. He joins the pilgrims at the feast of Passover. But his objective takes him beyond the temporal city to the celestial city. His goal is not merely a temple made by human hands, of rock and wood. His objective is above all that. He will go up, he will ascend the holy mountain into the heavenly city and to the heavenly temple taking with him all who follow him.

In other words, as we look at these psalms, we must look at our earthly journey in light of Christ's earthly journey. We must consider our ultimate objective in light of Christ's own ultimate objective. This perspective makes all the difference in the world when we consider our own journey as those who follow Christ.

Christ is at the center of these pilgrimage psalms. He is not merely tacked on. He is the objective. He is the author and finisher of the journey. He is our strength along the way. He has called us to follow him on the narrow and difficult path. He has secured the way. He has thrown open the gates to the heavenly Jerusalem and he has called us to enter in. The psalms of ascent beckon us to follow Christ.

Psalm 120 in Detail

Looking specifically now at Psalm 120, we notice that the structure of the psalm is fairly simple. Verse one is the introduction. It speaks of the psalmist's prayer uttered in distress and the Lord's subsequent answer to that prayer. The prayer has two concerns. In verses 2-4, the psalmist speaks of those who speak lies and are deceitful. In verses 5-7, the psalmist speaks of those who hate peace and are for war. These two petitions are the substance his prayer. The psalmist seeks deliverance from God from liars and warmongers.

Verse 1 of this psalm is particularly interesting. It may seem like an introductory verse that you quickly pass over to get to the substance of the matter, but there is something very intriguing, even surprising, about the way the psalmist speaks in this opening verse.

It is not a surprise to us to find the psalmist in distress. Certainly we find that this is the case with many psalmists. There are many cries that are made to the Lord in the midst of great trial. There are many struggles in life and on the journey that bring us to our knees seeking God's deliverance. We can identify with the psalmist's distress because we have found ourselves in very similar situations—lying lips, trouble makers disturbing our peace. Who has not endured these types of struggles?

Nor is it a surprise to us that we find the psalmist on his knees before God in such a situation. Crying out to God in the midst of struggles, in the middle of conflict and strife. It is what the psalmists do. It is what we do. We appeal to God's aid because we cannot do it on our own. We are dependent upon the guidance of the Lord. We need his help in times of distress. He is our help and our aid. Our ever present help in trouble. Where else would we turn but to the Lord?

Neither are we surprised to read that God hears the cries of the psalmist. The Lord, after all, hears the cries of the righteous. He answers their prayers. He listens to those who call upon him in truth. We know that he has the power to deliver and indeed he will rise to deliver those who are his. Many of the psalmists speak in similar language.

So what is so intriguing about this opening verse? It is this—the psalmist speaks of his prayer being answered by God even before he embarks on his journey. Even before he takes a step on his journey out of Meshech and Kedar toward Jerusalem, he is confident of God's answer to his prayer. He knows he has been delivered from lying lips. He knows that God has delivered him from those who hate peace. His vindication and his peace will be found in the courts of the Lord—in Jerusalem.

Certainly we understand that when we say that God hears, it does not simply indicate that the Lord has listened to what was said, but then ignored the content of the psalmist's petitions. When the psalmist says that the Lord hears, he is indicating that not only had God listened, but that in listening he acted to deliver.

But all we have before us in the psalm is petition. There is no indication of the answer to his prayer. Yet the psalmist is clearly stating in the opening verse that the answer had already been given. God had heard his prayer. Let us be clear also that he does not say that the Lord will hear my prayer as if it were future, but rather he says that God heard, past tense, his prayer.

Notice that the psalmist sees the end of the journey from the beginning. God has established his city. His temple had been built there. All that he needed was already there. There was his peace. There was vindication of the righteous. Those whose hearts were set upon that city could be assured of victory. The psalmist embarks upon his journey certain of its outcome. He leaves Kedar and Meshech, the world behind, with the knowledge that his vindication and peace are found in God who dwells in the midst of his people.

Do we not embark on the journey in the same way? Confident that as citizens of the New Jerusalem our vindication against lying lips is the Lord. Our peace is found in the Lord who dwells there. Are we not encouraged in our journey with this knowledge? Our end is secured even from the beginning. Lying lips cannot hurt us because our lives are lived before the Lord. Lovers of war cannot undo our peace because our dwelling place is with God.

The Psalmist's Distress

As you continue in this psalm, you see that the psalmist is in distress. His heart is troubled. It is as if he had suddenly come to an awareness of his surroundings. He had awakened to the hostility of those around him. He could see that the life he had been living in this world was not friendly but in opposition to him. His appeal to God in the opening verse is one of great urgency. To be in distress is to recognize that one's very life is at stake. That his current state is one that cannot be maintained without dire consequence. He needs help. He needs to be delivered by God.

His distress is caused by several things. First of all, he is distressed by the lying lips of those around him. He may have been the victim of slander personally, but his distress is related to the fact that he is dwelling among those who can be characterized as deceitful. He lives among those who are liars—among those who speak falsely, whose lips are filled with deceit. Deceitfulness marks the

core of their being. It is who they are. They are of their father, the devil, the chief deceiver. They reflect his character. These are those who practice deceit. It flows out of their heart. Throughout the Scriptures, the life of the wicked is characterized by deceit—deceit which is primarily directed against God and his people.

Second, the psalmist is distressed by the fact that those around him are haters of peace. They are lovers of war. Again, the psalmist is not speaking simply of the fact that the unbelievers around him enjoy mounting their horses and going off to fight in battle. He is speaking of the fabric of their character. It is as James 4 states: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war" (vv. 1-2). They fight because they are consumed with self. In big skirmishes and small, they fight for their own glory, their own selfish ends, at the expense of others. But ultimately, they are at enmity with God. That enmity spills over to the people of God.

Finally, the psalmist is distressed that he has spent too long among these people—Meshech by the Black Sea, way to the north; Kedar to the southeast, both far apart. In Genesis 25:13-14, we read these are the sons of Ishmael. In Ezekiel 32:26, along with other passages, Meshech is mentioned as one nation at war with the kingdom of God.

This is where the psalmist lived. Among those hostile to God and his people. He had spent "too long" there. These are those outside. As it says in Rev 22:14: "Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."

What is his concern? Certainly, he is concerned about his own safety among them. Hence his desire to be delivered from them. But the concern runs deeper than that. The longer he remains, he will become as one of them. If he does not return, he will become one of them. He lives in their tents. He fellowships with them. And as one of them, he will become subject also to God's ultimate judgment against the wicked. He is compelled to leave.

The judgment is coming as indicated in verse 4. God will direct his arrows at the deceivers. Coals of the broom tree burn hot and long. There will be justice. God will defeat the wicked. The psalmist does not want to remain among them. There is real danger in remaining. As Psalm 5:6 says, "You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man."

The psalmist is giving us a portrayal of life in this world. A life among those who are in rebellion against God. We are called out of this life—called to Jerusalem from out of the nations. Children of the diaspora are called home, to leave their place of exile and to pilgrim to the city of God. We were among them, but we must not remain there. We must come to the Lord.

The Psalmist in Christ, Christ in the Psalmist

The psalmist's experience among the liars and haters of peace is ultimately that of Christ. He comes to earth and dwells among those in rebellion against God. He lives among those who are outside the kingdom. He faces their lies and slander. This is especially so in the trial of Christ. False witnesses presented against him. He comes in peace, but they are for war. They despise and reject him to the point of death, the death of the cross.

But Jesus is the answer to the psalmist's prayer. He comes into the world to call his people out of it. He calls us to follow him. Through his death and resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven, we are delivered from the world and brought to the heavenly Jerusalem.

While we are called out and delivered by God, we are still on the journey. We are subject to the abuse of the world—its hostility, even as Christ was. World full of lies—lies about Christianity, lies about Scripture, lies which attack our integrity. We also live in a world which is at war against God and his anointed. There is much enmity against the Christian faith. We are for peace, but they are for war. This is what Jesus says about the church in the beatitudes. We are peace makers and yet we are also told in Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Our hope is for ultimate vindication. Vindication by God. God will justly punish lying lips. He knows the truth. There will be justice against liars, deceivers and slanderers. Many might lie and cheat us, but God knows the heart, will reveal it to be true in the end. This is the hope of a life united to Christ. People spoke lies against him. They reviled him. He suffers and dies at their hands. But he is vindicated. The lies are exposed. The truth revealed. He enters the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. Such is the case with all those who follow Jesus. Our hope is for this heavenly city. In this city there is no sin, no misery, no war, no deceit. It is the perfect city. The city upon a hill. The city of every believer's longing heart. Listen to what Jesus says in John 16:33: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Leave Meshech. Forsake the tents of Kedar—the liars and the warmongers. Rather follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. Set your heart on things above. Join the eschatological pilgrim on the narrow path toward the celestial city.

Review

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Roland Meynet, *Luke: The Gospel of the Children of Israel*. Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2015. 912 pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-88-7839-306-6. $90.

Meynet's commentary is a tour de force. It is a major accomplishment and will reward the pastor and student with structural, narrative and biblical-theological insights throughout.

In the "Introduction", Meynet observes how higher critics argue that Luke is composed of disordered pericopes. He then traces this absurd approach in terms of the form critical method (i.e., the gospel writers merely served as compilers of disparate versions of oral traditions—thus making the gospel writers compilers of folklore). As a result, form critics atomize the text, destroying the unity of the Lukan narrative. Next came the redaction critics who built on form critics's notion that the gospel writers were collectors. Redaction critics maintained the writers were creative theological editors (redactors). One result of this approach was to search through the redactional layers of the gospels so as to ascertain the "original" source as it arose from the "original" religious community—a community which created the tradition as well as the theology, advancing the redaction as its own agenda. To all of which Meynet makes this stunning remark: "the 'final redactor' is considered an idiot . . . as he felt obliged . . . to leave his text full of a multitude of mistakes" (9).

Then came the shift in literary criticism "away from historicizing research" (i.e., form critics and redaction critics) "of both the diachronic and genetic kind" (ibid). New synchronic, structural and narrative approaches have appeared which take the text of the gospels "in their final state". Finally, Meynet notes the rise of what he calls "rhetorical and biblical analysis" which he distinguishes from classical Greco-Roman rhetorical criticism. His point is that biblical rhetorical analysis is unique to the Bible—"there is a biblical rhetoric, different from western rhetoric" (10).

Rather than accuse Luke of awkward, confusing, even contradictory pericopes, "the reader may discover that . . . the third gospel is composed and very well composed" (11). Hence Meynet's commentary seeks to unfold the well-ordered (and theologically intentioned) composition that Luke has left us—i.e., an appreciation for the "whole" gospel in its integrity. Meynet then disavows any intention on his own part to write a "scholarly" (i.e., higher critical) commentary: "this book is a new kind of commentary" (11). It seeks "to place oneself inside [Luke's] world and his culture, in short, inside his rhetoric, rather than outside" (10).

Meynet organizes his commentary according to three methodological labels: composition (syntagmatic analysis); biblical context (paradigmatic connections); and interpretation (hermeneutic extrapolation [my term, JTD], drawing out the previous two examinations). "[T]he interpretation flows, at least when it is well conducted, from the relations that the [syntagmatic] composition has brought out and from the links that have been discovered in the [paradigmatic]

biblical context" (14). And Meynet is honest enough to confess the "subjective aspect" of the "interpretation" element—a refreshing acknowledgement of (ultimately) his own fallibility.

The author also provides a helpful short glossary of technical terms (19-21) so as to aid the reader in understanding his rhetoric-literary lingo.

All of this is refreshing. From our point of view (orthodox Calvinistic biblical-theology), such an approach may serve the supernaturalism of the incarnation and the inerrant inscripturation of that narrative as it is fraught with dramatic, powerful and life-transforming (regenerating) significance. For Luke's text is the *ipsissimsa verba et acta* of God the Father, in and through God the Son, through God the Holy Spirit for the redemption of his people—the new Israel of God (all of which Luke the evangelist clearly believed and recorded). Where we may differ from Meynet (on account of our high Christian and Protestant orthodoxy), we nonetheless are indebted to him for enabling us to see "treasurers new and old" (to borrow our Lord's phrase in Matthew 13:52) in this magnificent third evangel.

The commentary which follows is a model of elucidation, penetration and theological riches. Every excursion into Luke's narrative of the words and works of Christ provokes new insights into the treasures locked up in this majestic literary-theological masterpiece. Meynet is to be thanked (as is his English translator; the French original third edition of this work appeared in 2011) for unpacking these riches for the benefit of those who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (as Luke's beloved companion, Paul, puts it in Ephesians 6:24, KJV).

—James T. Dennison, Jr.