

A CONCISE THEOLOGY
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT



FRANK J. MATERA

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To the memory of Father Robert L. Beloin (1947–2018)
In gratitude for his friendship and ministry

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Preface to the Series

This series, *Biblical Studies from the Catholic Biblical Association of America*, seeks to bridge the gap between the technical exegetical work of the academic community and the educational and pastoral needs of the ecclesial community. Combining careful exegesis with a theological understanding of the text, the members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America and those invited by the Association have written these volumes in a style that is accessible to an educated, nonspecialized audience, without compromising academic integrity.

These volumes deal with biblical texts and themes that are important and vital for the life and ministry of the Church. While some focus on specific biblical books or particular texts, others are concerned with important theological themes, others with archaeological and geographical issues, and still others with questions of interpretation. Through this series, the members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America are eager to present the results of their research in a way that is relevant to an interested audience that goes beyond the confines of the academic community.

Preface

The study of the theology of the New Testament has been a life-long passion for me that began in 1964 when Professor Jean Giblest introduced me to the study of the Synoptic Gospels at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. While his lectures made abundant use of the historical-critical method, Professor Giblest always returned to the theological meaning of the text. In doing so, he taught me to read the New Testament for its theological as well as for its historical meaning. This is the approach I have tried to bring to my life-long study of, and love for, the New Testament. What does the text say? What does it mean for the life of the Church? What does it mean for me as a believer? My study of the theology of the New Testament has not disappointed me. Indeed, it has sustained my life's journey as an academic and as a priest.

It is my hope that this volume will be helpful to those who want to know more about the theological meaning of the New Testament. My purpose is fourfold: (1) to provide a nontechnical overview of the discipline we call New Testament theology, (2) to summarize the diverse theologies in the writings of the New Testament, (3) to identify the overall theological vision of the New Testament, and (4) to explain the contribution that New Testament theology can make to the life of the Church, as well as the contribution that the life of the Church can make to it.

I am greatly indebted and grateful to Amy Ekeh, J. Enrique Aguilar, and Joseph Atkinson for their careful reading of this manuscript and for the many helpful and insightful suggestions (and corrections!) they have made. Thanks to their diligence, this is a much better work than it would have been if it had not been reviewed by them.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this volume to the memory of Father Robert L. Beloin (1947—2018), the longtime Catholic chaplain of Saint Thomas More House at Yale University. Bob was an outstanding priest whose ministry at Yale deeply touched thousands of students. He was also a friend of mine for fifty years. His friendship and ministry enriched and supported me. In gratitude for his friendship and ministry, I have dedicated this book to him.

Frank J. Matera

Professor Emeritus
The Catholic University of America

What Is New Testament Theology?

Biblical theology is a relatively new discipline whose beginnings are traced to a lecture given by Johannes Gabler in 1787.¹ Gabler envisioned the discipline as a way of identifying the pure and enduring theology in the Bible so that theologians would have the biblical data needed to write their theologies. Its purpose was not to replace systematic theology but to provide theologians with a biblical foundation for their discipline.

Although biblical theology has become a specialized field, the Church has always read its Sacred Scriptures with a view to growing in her understanding of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. In the patristic period the great expositors of Sacred Scripture such as Augustine and John Chrysostom were also the great preachers of the sacred text. They did theology by preaching from the "sacred page." When theology became a more systematic discipline in the Middle Ages, the study of Scripture and its theological meaning continued to play a central role in the life of the Church, as Henri de Lubac has shown in his magisterial work *Medieval Exegesis*.² Scholastic theologians such as Bonaventure and Aquinas, who were masters of the sacred page, wrote biblical commentaries as well as systematic theologies. Consequently, it would be a mistake to think that the task of mining the Bible for its theological meaning began with the discipline of biblical theology. The theological interpretation of Scripture has been going on for a long time, especially through preaching and commenting on the sacred page.

The discipline of New Testament theology (NTT) provides the ecclesial and academic communities with a more organized exposition of the theology and theologies in the New Testament. It asks what the writings of the New Testament claim about God, Jesus Christ, the Spirit, the Church, redemption, salvation, the human person, morality, and the final destiny of humanity. NTT has been approached in two ways. First, many scholars give their attention to the diverse theologies *in* the New Testament: for example, the varied theologies in the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel, and the Pauline writings. When approached in this way, NTT is a discipline that

highlights *the many theologies* in the New Testament. Second, a few scholars focus on the theology *of* the New Testament. When approached in this way, NTT is a discipline that highlights *the theological unity* of the New Testament. This second approach is less common and more difficult, since the writings of the New Testament were composed by many authors who were responding to different situations. But if one views the New Testament as the Church's canonical Scriptures, inspired by the Spirit and intended as a norm for her faith, the question of unity must be attended to. In this work, I will employ both approaches: the diverse theologies *in* the New Testament (chaps. 1—4) and the overall theological unity *of* the New Testament (chaps. 5—6).

I will be working with the following assumptions. First, NTT should work in cooperation with systematic theology; it is not a discipline intended to replace or supplant it. Just as systematic theology can learn from NTT, so NTT can learn from systematic theology. Second, NTT seeks to identify the various theologies *in* the New Testament. In doing so, however, its purpose is not merely to highlight the diversity in the New Testament but, when possible, to show how these theologies cohere in a broader theological vision. Third, NTT is the fruit of exegesis. It should only be undertaken by those willing to be intimately engaged with the text. My understanding of NTT can be summarized in this way: *the discipline of NTT investigates and clarifies the diverse theologies in the New Testament and the unifying theology of the New Testament.*

While authors approach the task of NTT differently, I suggest that those engaged in the discipline should deal with the following dimensions of the New Testament and its writings: the historical, the literary, the theological, and the canonical.

The Historical Dimension. The word of God that the New Testament proclaims is inscribed in a historical document. Just as the eternal Word of God was made flesh in a human being, so God's word has found expression in the historical writings Christians call the Old and New Testaments.

The historical dimension of the New Testament is of supreme importance since Christian faith is grounded in the events that occurred in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, while the message of the New Testament transcends time and culture because it is rooted in the eternal Word of God spoken in Jesus Christ, this message is found in writings that

belong to a particular time, place, and culture. Therefore, the New Testament requires the assistance of a historical-critical method that seeks to clarify the literal meaning of the text: what the author or authors of the text were seeking to communicate. The historical-critical method, for example, helps to clarify what the evangelists meant when they wrote about the kingdom of God or the Messiah. It is this same method that helps us to understand what Paul intended when he wrote about the righteousness of God or the Parousia. To understand the literal meaning of the text, we need to clarify, *to the extent that we can*, what the writers of the New Testament were trying to communicate.³

To achieve this goal, the historical-critical method asks a variety of questions about the writings it investigates: When were they written? How were they written? What sources were employed in their composition? Who wrote them? Why were they written? Where were they written? It deals with questions of textual criticism, grammar, and the language of the original text so that we can understand these writings in their historical and cultural settings. This approach is of immense help for establishing the literal or plain meaning of the text. The historical-critical approach to the New Testament becomes problematic when scholars insist that the historical meaning is the *only* meaning of the text, or that anything beyond the historical meaning has no place in NTT. William Wrede argued that the purpose of NTT was to produce an accurate history of the thought of the New Testament.⁴ Wrede was a brilliant scholar whose work remains important to this day. But his insistence on a purely historical approach to NTT was restrictive. For, if the discipline ends there, it is merely a historical enterprise that does not grasp the full meaning of the New Testament.

The challenge of NTT is to integrate history and theology. If history and theology are not in dialogue, NTT will devolve into a historical enterprise that ignores the theological meaning of the text, or a theological undertaking that is not grounded in history. The model of NTT I am proposing is rooted in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The eternal Word of God became flesh in Jesus, and this incarnate Word was taken into the life of God through Jesus's death and resurrection. When understood in the light of the incarnation, NTT respects the historical origin of the New Testament because God's Word was revealed in the incarnate Son of God. But since the incarnate one was taken into the life of

God through his death and resurrection, *the words* of the New Testament about *the Word* are not exhausted by a historical report of what happened. They must be understood from the perspective of faith in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Word. For, while history gives us insight into what happened, faith probes the mystery and meaning of God's work in Jesus Christ.

The Literary Dimension. The writings of the New Testament make use of many literary genres to communicate their theology. Consequently, there is also a literary dimension to NTT. The four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are narratives that communicate their theology through the stories they tell. The Gospels narrate the story of Jesus, and the Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the early Church, giving special attention to the preaching of Peter and Paul. Because the Gospels tell the story of Jesus, they are similar to a life of Jesus, and because Acts narrates the story of the early Church, it presents something akin to a history of the Christian movement. But there is an element to these writings that distinguishes them from the lives of famous individuals and the histories of the Greco-Roman world: the Gospels and Acts narrate the story of Jesus and the early Church to strengthen the faith of those who already believe, and to call others to faith in Christ. They are not so much histories of Jesus and the early Church as they are proclamations of faith: *They tell their story to communicate a message, which they view as vital for the salvation of the world.* This message is not only about Jesus and the Church; it is about how God was at work in Jesus and continues to be at work in the Church.

The theology of the Gospels and Acts is communicated through the stories they narrate rather than by a series of propositional statements about God and Jesus. We learn who God is by hearing the story of Jesus. The Gospel according to Mark, for example, narrates a story in which Jesus proclaims the in-breaking of God's kingdom. As the story unfolds, we begin to understand that God's rule is already present in the life and ministry of Jesus. It is through the story that we learn how the kingdom of God is present in the crucified and risen Christ. And it is only at the end of the story that we understand the vital message the Gospel communicates: God was active in the life and ministry of Jesus and continues to be active in the crucified one whom he raised from the dead.

The Acts of the Apostles is an extended narrative that includes other genres such as speeches and sermons to communicate its understanding of how God was at work in Jesus's ministry, and how the risen Lord continues to guide and protect the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Like the Gospels, it communicates its theology through the story it narrates. In this story, however, the one who proclaimed the kingdom has become the content of the Church's proclamation. Through the narrative it communicates, Acts teaches that God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the one who raises the dead and fulfills the hope of Israel by inaugurating the resurrection of the dead in his Son (see Acts 26:6, 8).

Whereas the Gospels and Acts communicate their theology through the stories they tell, the Pauline and Catholic Letters make use of the letter form to relate their message. These letters were written to provide instruction, to address problems and disputes, and to give advice and counsel. They were revered because of the authoritative figures that stand behind them. Through these letters, Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude (or those who wrote in their names) communicated their understanding of God's work in Christ. For example, when Paul argues that Gentile converts do not need to be circumcised to be saved, he develops a sophisticated teaching about justification (how one receives the gift of God's righteousness) through faith in Jesus Christ. When John warns his congregations about those who deny that *Jesus* is the Christ, he is developing a teaching about the incarnation and the anointing of the Spirit. When Peter addresses his Gentile audience, he provides them with a profound understanding of the Church of which they are living stones being built into the temple of God. In this way pastoral concerns led to the development of the New Testament's Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and so on.

The New Testament contains other genres as well. Hebrews is a word of encouragement, an extended sermon that presents its audience with a teaching on the priesthood of Christ. The Book of Revelation is a prophecy that exhorts the Church to persevere despite persecution because God's victory has been won in Christ. Finally, there are subgenres such as miracles, parables, sayings of the Lord, and hymn-like passages that communicate God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

New Testament Theology

- Is a subdiscipline of biblical theology, the counterpart of Old Testament Theology

- Investigates the theological claims the New Testament makes about God, Christ, the Spirit, the Church, humanity, and the goal and purpose of life in Christ

- Focuses on the theological claims of the individual writings and highlights the diverse theologies in the New Testament

- Focuses on the overarching claims of the New Testament and highlights the unity of the New Testament

- Considers the historical event of Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament, how that event is communicated through various genres, the theological meaning of that event for the Christian life, and the authority of that event as prescribed by the canon

The Theological Dimension. The name of the discipline we are considering, “New Testament theology,” indicates its theological component. The precise role of theology in this discipline, however, is disputed. Do we mean the theologies *in* the New Testament? Or do we mean the theology *of* the New Testament: the overall theological unity of the New Testament understood as the Church’s Scriptures? The task, in my view, includes both.

First, NTT must deal with the theologies *in* the New Testament. This task is historical, literary, and theological because it asks about the distinctive theological vision of each writing. For example, what is the theological contribution of the Gospel of John? How does it express its understanding of Jesus and the Father? What is Paul’s understanding of God’s work in Christ? What does Hebrews mean when it identifies Jesus as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek?

Second, NTT needs to think theologically and holistically about the book we call the “New Testament.” What is its relationship to Israel’s Scriptures? What authority does it have? How are its diverse writings related to each other? What is their point of unity? Developing a theology of the New Testament requires a theological understanding of the significance and meaning of the New Testament in the life of the Church. Consequently, NTT must give an account of how the New Testament has and continues to function in the life of the believing community that cherishes it as Sacred

Scripture. This aspect of NTT is concerned with the unity and coherence of the theological claims of the New Testament.

NTT is a theological enterprise that reflects on God's action in Christ *in the light of faith*, for it is only from the perspective of faith that we understand the New Testament *from within*. By understanding the New Testament *from within*, I mean reading it in the way it wants to be read: from the perspective of faith in Jesus Christ, within a living tradition that has handed on this faith from generation to generation. Such an approach goes beyond a historical report of the theologies in the New Testament because it seeks to understand the New Testament in the light of faith as well as in the light of history. When approached from the perspective of faith, NTT is a theological as well as a historical discipline. It is faith seeking understanding about God's work in Christ, God's activity in the world, the goal and purpose of life in Christ, and the final goal and meaning of the world in the light of Christ.

The Canonical Dimension. NTT has a canonical dimension as well as a historical, literary, and theological dimension. Its writings belong to a collection that the Church views as normative for her faith. Consequently, if NTT is to be faithful to its name, it must take into consideration the canonical shape of these writings.

The Church recognizes the twenty-seven writings of the New Testament as normative for her faith and views them in relationship to the sacred writings of Israel. This has important implications. First, by establishing a collection of authoritative writings alongside Israel's Scriptures, the canon highlights the intimate relationship between both testaments that points to the unity of God's redemptive plan. The writings of the New Testament do not stand by themselves; they are the fulfillment of promise and prophecy. It is not surprising, then, that the New Testament begins with a genealogy that presents Jesus as the culmination of Israel's history and ends with a prophecy that points to God's new creation. From beginning to end, the writings of the New Testament understand themselves as proclaiming Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's promises.⁵

Second, by bringing together these diverse writings that make up the New Testament, the canon implies there is a center that unites them. For example, although there are points of divergence between the four Gospels, the canon includes all four rather than privileging one of them. It includes

the Gospel of Mark with its distinctive theology of the cross, the Gospel of Matthew with its theology of righteousness, the Gospel of Luke with its theology of promise and fulfillment, and the Gospel of John with its theology of the incarnation. The existence of the canon proclaims that the Gospels need not be harmonized, thereby inviting those engaged in NTT to reflect on the theological meaning and implications of this diversity.

Third, the way the canon presently orders these writings suggests a narrative that can be summarized as follows. The four Gospels recount the story of Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection. The Acts of the Apostles narrates the growth of the nascent church and shows how the one who proclaimed the gospel (Jesus) became the content of the Church's proclamation (God raised Jesus from the dead). Next, there follow two letter collections (the Pauline Letters and the Catholic Epistles) that show how major figures of the early Church taught and defended the gospel. Finally, the Book of Revelation provides a fitting conclusion to the story of the New Testament by reminding the Church that God has won the victory that will be revealed at the end of time. This canonical narrative provides interpreters with a way to understand the overall message of the New Testament. What Is New Testament Theology?

One can write a NTT without considering the canonical shape of the New Testament. It has been done and will be done again. The most significant NTT of the twentieth century, the two-volume work of Rudolf Bultmann, is a case in point.⁶ But when the canon is not taken into consideration, there is a danger of highlighting certain writings to the detriment of others, as occurred in Bultmann's work, which is essentially a theology of Paul and John.

Summary

NTT is a relatively new discipline that seeks to summarize and, to some extent, systematize the theology of the New Testament. The discipline has been approached in different ways. I have argued that NTT has two tasks. The first is to identify the different theologies in the writings of the New Testament. This task highlights the diversity of the New Testament. The second and more difficult task is to identify the theological unity of the New Testament. This task explains how the many witnesses of the New

Testament testify to God's singular work in Jesus Christ, albeit in different ways. To accomplish these two tasks, NTT must respect the historical, literary, theological, and canonical dimensions of the text. The historical dimension reminds us that the theology of the New Testament is grounded in a historical event: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The literary dimension reminds us that the theology of the New Testament is communicated through a variety of genres. The theological dimension reminds us that the theology of the New Testament is faith seeking to understand the meaning of the saving acts of God in history. The canonical dimension reminds us that the theology of the New Testament is grounded in a collection of writings normative for the faith of the Church.

In the first four chapters of this book, I will summarize the faith claims the writings of the New Testament make about God, Jesus, the Spirit, the Church, humanity, and God's final victory in Christ. To accomplish this I have divided the writings of the New Testament into four traditions: (1) the Synoptic Tradition, represented by the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, including the Acts of the Apostles; (2) the Johannine Tradition, represented by the Gospel of John; (3) the Pauline Tradition, represented by the thirteen letters attributed to Paul; and (4) Diverse Traditions that include the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles (James; 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2, & 3 John; and Jude), and the Book of Revelation.

In the Synoptic Tradition, my focus will be on the way these writings present the preaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God and how that preaching developed in the early Church in the light of the resurrection. In the Johannine Tradition, my focus will be on the way the Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Son whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world. In the Pauline Tradition, my focus will be on the way the Pauline Letters proclaim the salvific significance of Jesus's death and resurrection. Finally, in my study of the Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and the Book of Revelation, I will discuss a variety of traditions that deal with topics such as the high priesthood of Jesus, how believers should live in the world, dangers that threaten the unity and faith of the Church, and God's final victory in Christ.

After reviewing these different theologies *in* the New Testament (chaps. 1—4), I will consider the theology *of* the New Testament in terms of the external and internal unity of the New Testament (5—6). The external unity

of the New Testament can be seen in the way the New Testament is structured, whereas its internal unity derives from several unifying theological themes found in its diverse writings. I invite those who would like to pursue these issues in greater detail to consult my detailed study of NTT, *The Theology of the New Testament: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

The Synoptic Tradition

The Synoptic Tradition comprises the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Although the Acts of the Apostles does not belong to the Synoptic Tradition, I will include it here because of its intimate relationship to the Gospel of Luke and thus to the Synoptics. The Synoptic Tradition is called that because there is a literary interdependence among these three Gospels that allows them to be placed in parallel columns in a book called a synopsis. According to the hypothesis of *Markan Priority*, Mark was the earliest of the Gospels to have been written. Matthew and Luke made use of Mark's Gospel as their primary source. They then supplemented it with other traditions, some of which they had in common, others of which were peculiar to them. According to the hypothesis of *Matthean Priority*, Matthew was the earliest of the Gospels to have been written. Luke then made use of and revised Matthew's Gospel. Then, Mark made use of, edited, and abbreviated the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in composing his Gospel. Although these two hypotheses understand the composition of the Synoptic Gospels differently, they agree that there is a literary interdependence among the three Gospels that accounts for their similarity.

The similarity of the Synoptic Gospels is evident in their overall structure: (1) the appearance of John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus the Messiah; (2) the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan and his subsequent ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God in Galilee; (3) Jesus's announcement of his rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection, and his decision to go to Jerusalem; (4) Jesus's ministry in Jerusalem and his conflict with the religious leaders over his temple ministry; and (5) Jesus's arrest, trial, passion, death, and resurrection. The way the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus is also similar. They agree that his central message is about the kingdom of God, which is making its appearance in his ministry. This is the decisive moment in God's redemptive plan that will result in judgment or salvation. They also agree that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man whose destiny is to suffer, die, and rise, to accomplish God's redemptive work.

In addition to these similarities, there are differences that result from the way each evangelist shapes the material to heighten certain aspects of the meaning and significance of Jesus's life and ministry. For example, Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with Infancy Narratives (but it should be noted that these narratives are different from each other). They also relate teaching about the kingdom and discipleship not found in the Gospel of Mark, as well as differing accounts about the appearances of the risen Lord. Finally, Luke has a more extended account of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem than either Mark or Matthew.

The similarity and differences among the Synoptic Gospels present several challenges: What is the relationship between the theology and theologies of the Synoptic Gospels? What is the overall theology of the Synoptic Tradition? What is the distinctive theology of each evangelist? Are their theologies in conflict or do they supplement each other? In this chapter, I will highlight the distinctive theologies of the Synoptic Gospels. When referring to Gospel as a genre, I will capitalize *Gospel*, and when referring to the gospel as the good news that Jesus brings, I will use the lower case, *gospel*.

Mark's Theology of God's Gospel

The theology of the Gospel according to Mark is summarized in its opening verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." At the outset of the Gospel, Jesus is identified as "Christ, the Son of God." While neither term is defined, the narrative that follows enables us to understand the meaning of these titles. This narrative begins with the appearance of John the Baptist, who prepares the way for Jesus in accordance with the words spoken in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The beginning of the gospel, then, is rooted in Israel's Scriptures. It is the fulfillment of the words of the prophet who announced the appearance of John, who prepares the way for God's Son, the Christ, by calling Israel to repentance.

The words of the opening verse, "the gospel of Jesus Christ," can be construed in two ways: (1) the gospel/good news *about* Jesus Christ, or (2) the gospel/good news *that* Jesus proclaims. In the first instance, Jesus is the content or object of the gospel. The gospel is about him. In the second instance, the gospel is the good news that Jesus proclaims, the good news

about the kingdom of God. While the second meaning seems to best fit the narrative that follows, there is no need to exclude the first. The gospel is the good news *that* Jesus brings and the good news *about* Jesus. Jesus is both the *subject and content* of the gospel. In the narrative that follows he proclaims the gospel, and the story that unfolds is about him.

The central theological claim of the Gospel according to Mark concerns the gospel of and about Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. To illustrate this, I will focus on three themes: the gospel of the kingdom, the identity of Jesus, and the call to discipleship.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The central theme of the Gospel according to Mark is the kingdom of God, which refers to God's rule over history and creation. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus proclaims, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15). In this proclamation Jesus summarizes the content of the gospel he will proclaim in this way. First, the period of waiting has ended because the kingdom of God is making its appearance in his ministry. Second, because the kingdom is making its appearance in his person and ministry, those who hear his message of the kingdom must repent and believe in the gospel. The "gospel" to which Jesus refers is "the gospel of God" (see 1:14), which is God's own good news that God's rule is making its appearance in Jesus's ministry. There is an intimate relationship, therefore, between the gospel of God and the gospel that Jesus proclaims. God's good news is that God is reasserting rulership over creation and history in the person of Jesus, who proclaims the gospel of the kingdom.

God, of course, has always ruled over history and creation, but humanity has rebelled against God's rule, and Satan is seeking to establish his rule in opposition to God's rule. With the appearance of Jesus, however, the rule of Satan is coming to an end; for in Jesus, God's sovereignty is breaking forth. The proclamation about the kingdom is the central theological theme that unfolds in the rest of the Gospel. Everything Jesus does is for and about the kingdom of God. When he teaches, it is about the kingdom. When he heals and expels demons, he is clearing a space for God's kingdom. When he calls others to follow him in the way of discipleship, it is for the kingdom.

When he suffers, dies, and is raised from the dead, it is for the sake of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is the content of the salvation Jesus brings, and his proclamation of the kingdom is an invitation to live under God's rule. Those who live in the sphere of the kingdom will be saved when Jesus returns at the end of the ages in his capacity as the glorious Son of Man who has been vindicated by God. Those who do not live in the sphere of the kingdom will be condemned. To live in the kingdom is to enter life now and be assured of it at the end of the ages. To live in and for the kingdom is to live with and for Jesus, who embodies the kingdom. The appearance of Jesus and the kingdom are coterminous. Commitment to him and commitment to the kingdom are one.

The kingdom has a present and future dimension, as the parables of Mark 4 show. On the one hand, it is already present in a hidden way in the life and ministry of Jesus to all who believe in the gospel of God that he proclaims. On the other hand, it will not appear in power and glory until the end of the ages, when Jesus will return as the glorious Son of Man as God's end-time judge. In the meantime, the kingdom grows in a hidden way, changing and transforming those who embrace it.

Because the gospel that Jesus preaches is *God's* gospel, the good news of the kingdom is about God. *God* is the central, albeit hidden, actor of the gospel Jesus proclaims. Those who embrace the gospel understand the new way God is acting in the person of Jesus. God does not force the kingdom upon humanity. Nor is the kingdom a display of power as humans understand the term. God works in the person of his Son to bring about the kingdom through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the crucified Messiah. The paradoxical nature of the kingdom points to the way God manifests power—in the weakness and folly of the cross and in service to others.

The Identity of Jesus

Jesus's identity in the Gospel according to Mark is not defined in textbook fashion. It is revealed through his ministry as narrated in the Gospel. The meaning of his person, however, remains a mystery, even at the end of the Gospel. The general contours of this mystery, however, are revealed by what he does and how he is identified in the Gospel.

Jesus makes his appearance as the herald of the kingdom (1:14–15). He proclaims and teaches about the kingdom of God and makes it present by healing those who are sick or possessed by demons. He calls disciples to proclaim the kingdom and live in a way that accords with its demands (1:16–20), and he ultimately gives his life as a ransom for many (10:45) so that the kingdom can make its appearance. Because the kingdom is appearing in his ministry, Jesus summons others to follow him in the way of discipleship that is defined by the kingdom. Jesus is the embodiment of the gospel he preaches, and in him the kingdom makes its appearance. It is impossible to understand the kingdom apart from him, and it is impossible to understand him apart from the kingdom. He is the preacher of the kingdom because he is the embodiment of the gospel he proclaims.

Jesus, the herald of the kingdom, however, is not just another prophet. He is the Christ/Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man whose destiny is to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. At Jesus's baptism, God proclaims that Jesus is his beloved Son (1:11). At the transfiguration, God again reveals that Jesus is his beloved Son and commands Peter, James, and John *to listen to him* (9:7): they are to listen to what he says about the suffering and death of the Messiah. Finally, after Jesus's death, the Roman centurion becomes the first human being to recognize who Jesus was: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).

Jesus the Son of God is God's anointed one, the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. Peter correctly confesses that he is the Messiah (8:29), even though he does not fully comprehend what this means. Jesus acknowledges before the high priest that he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One (14:61–62). But to understand what the Gospel according to Mark means by "Son of God" and "Messiah," we must consider the destiny of Jesus, which is expressed in the title "Son of Man." This puzzling term, which could be interpreted as referring to the humanity of Jesus (the son of a human being) has a deeper meaning. Rooted in the mysterious figure described in Daniel 7:13–14, it refers to Jesus's destiny to suffer, die, rise, and return as God's end-time judge. Just as the one like a son of man in Daniel was vindicated and granted kingship after a period of suffering, so Jesus will be vindicated after his suffering and death when God raises him from the dead.

Jesus the Son of God, the Messiah, is the suffering Son of Man whom God vindicates by raising him from the dead. His filial relationship to God

and his messiahship cannot be understood apart from his passion, death, and resurrection. The Son of God is the one who dies on the cross; the Messiah is the one who is crucified. The preacher of the kingdom embodies the gospel he preaches because he is the Son of God, the Messiah, the suffering Son of Man who gives his life as a ransom for many (10:45). By his death and resurrection, he enters the fullness of the kingdom he proclaims.

The Theology of Mark

- The *gospel of God*: God's good news about God's rule that is making its appearance in Jesus
 - The *gospel of Jesus Christ*: the good news about Jesus as well as the good news of the kingdom that Jesus preaches
 - The gospel of and about Jesus reveals how God is at work in the world
 - To embrace the gospel is to follow Jesus in the way of discipleship
 - Discipleship characterized by humble service that imitates the humble service of Jesus
 - The identity of Jesus and the nature of discipleship are understood in the light of Jesus's death and resurrection
 - To give one's life for Jesus is to give one's life for the gospel
 - The destiny of the Son of Man: to be rejected, to suffer, to die, and to rise and enter the fullness of God's kingdom

The Call to Discipleship

Discipleship is intimately related to Jesus's identity and his proclamation of the kingdom. As the messianic Son of God, he calls Israel to repentance because the kingdom is making its appearance in his ministry. After his initial proclamation of the kingdom, he summons Peter, John, James, and Andrew, who will enjoy an intimate relationship with him (1:16–20). These four are the nucleus of the Twelve that Jesus will choose (3:13–19) and send on mission to proclaim the kingdom (6:7–13). The choice of the Twelve is significant since they form the nucleus of a renewed people of God.

The portrait of the disciples that emerges in the Gospel is complex. Jesus reveals the mystery of the kingdom of God to them but not to the crowds.

He teaches them that the Son of Man must be rejected, suffer, and die before rising on the third day. Despite the initial generosity of the disciples, who leave everything to follow him, and despite the privileged information they receive about the mystery of the kingdom and the destiny of the Son of Man, they fail to understand the nature of discipleship and the need for Jesus to suffer and die. When Jesus's passion arrives, Judas betrays him, Peter denies him, and the other disciples abandon him.

This complex portrait of the disciples is related to the mystery of the kingdom and Jesus's person, which must be understood in the light of his death and resurrection. The disciples know that the kingdom is making its appearance in Jesus's ministry, but they do not understand that the kingdom will not arrive in power and glory until he suffers, dies, rises, and returns as the glorious Son of Man. They confess that he is the Messiah, but they do not grasp what kind of Messiah he is because he has not died and risen from the dead. Consequently, they think of discipleship in terms of power and glory rather than as service to others. The mystery of Jesus and the kingdom can only be understood in the light of his suffering, death, and resurrection.

Conclusion

The theology of the Gospel according to Mark revolves around the person of Jesus, his proclamation of the kingdom, and his call to discipleship. Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom is a revelation of God's activity in the world. His person shows the paradoxical way God brings about salvation. His call to discipleship is an invitation to enter the mystery of the kingdom and encounter God who is revealed in suffering and service to others.

Matthew's Theology of Righteousness

The Gospel according to Matthew proclaims the central theological themes found in the Gospel according to Mark: Jesus is the messianic Son of God who proclaims the kingdom of God, which Matthew usually refers to as the kingdom of heaven.¹ The Matthean Gospel, however, begins with a carefully composed genealogy that roots Jesus in the line of Abraham and David, and an Infancy Narrative that presents him as the one who relives the history of God's people. It concludes with accounts of the appearances

of the risen Christ. What is most distinctive about this Gospel, however, is the attention it devotes to Jesus's teaching about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus gives detailed teaching about the kingdom of heaven and how disciples should live in it. This instruction is found throughout the Gospel, but most of it is concentrated in a series of discourses,² the most important being the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5—7), which calls disciples to practice the righteousness of the kingdom that Jesus teaches. In what follows, I will focus on two themes: (1) how the Infancy Narrative proclaims who Jesus is, and (2) how Jesus develops the theme of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Messiah

The genealogy that opens the Gospel proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (1:1). Beginning with Abraham and working its way to Jesus, it summarizes Israel's history: from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to the appearance of the Messiah. The birth of Jesus is the culmination and climax of Israel's history. The story that follows is deeply rooted in Israel's history. It is the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel through the prophets, something Matthew emphasizes by a series of fulfillment quotations that occur throughout the Gospel (see, 1:22–23; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 12:17–21; 13:35).

But there is a glaring anomaly in the genealogy. At the end of it, Matthew does not say, "Joseph the father of Jesus," as one would expect, but, "Joseph the husband of Mary. *Of her was born Jesus* who is called Messiah." The reason for this is clarified in the next episode when the angel reveals to Joseph that Mary has conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (1:30). Jesus is adopted into the line of David through Joseph. Joseph is not his father, for Jesus is the Son of God.

The Infancy Narrative identifies *who* Jesus is and *where* he comes from. In terms of *who* he is, it teaches that he is God's Son, born of a virgin through the power of the Spirit; he is the Son of God. He is "Emmanuel" because he is the one in whom God is present to his people (1:23; 18:23; 28:20). He is the king of the Jews, the Messiah, the ruler and shepherd of Israel (2:2–6), the one to whom all the nations of the world will offer

homage (2:7–12). In terms of *where* Jesus comes from, the Infancy Narrative explains that while he grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, he was born in Bethlehem of Judah in accordance with the prophecy of Micah. After fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod, the family could not return to Bethlehem because Archelaus (Herod's son) was as ruthless as his father.

The narrative of Jesus's birth shows that he is the Messiah who relives the history of his people; he is the Messiah in whom the history of God's people is summed up. The scriptural quotations that occur in the Infancy Narrative (1:22; 2:15, 17–18, 23) testify that the events of Jesus's birth are the fulfillment of prophecy. The massacre of the innocents, the flight into Egypt, and the call of God's Son out of Egypt echo the great events of Israel's past and proclaim that Jesus fulfills the history of his people, Israel.

The genealogy and Infancy Narrative make a powerful christological statement that shows how the rest of the Gospel should be understood: Jesus is the Messiah of the Jewish people, the culmination of Israel's history, and the fulfillment of God's promises. He embodies the hopes and history of his people, and he will bring them forgiveness of sins because he is the Son of God, conceived by the power of God's Spirit. All that he says and does will be accomplished in his capacity as God's messianic Son.

The Theology of Matthew

- Affirms the central theological themes of Mark's Gospel about the identity of Jesus, the kingdom of God, and discipleship
- Expands Mark's understanding of the person of Jesus by rooting Jesus in the history of God's people and introducing the theme of the virgin birth
- Develops Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom through a series of discourses that teach disciples how to live in the kingdom
- Describes the righteousness of the kingdom that characterizes Jesus's disciples: conduct that accords with the law as taught by Jesus Messiah
- Highlights the ethical demands of the kingdom

A Greater Righteousness

At the outset of his public ministry, when Jesus presents himself for baptism, John the Baptist tries to prevent it, but Jesus replies, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). Later,

toward the end of his ministry, when the religious leaders challenge his authority, Jesus replies, “When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him” (21:32). These verses, which function as bookends around Jesus’s ministry, highlight the importance of righteousness for the message that Jesus proclaims. John the Baptist preached a way of righteousness, understood as right conduct, and Jesus comes to fulfill God’s righteousness, by doing what is necessary to bring about God’s plan.

This theme of righteousness is closely related to Jesus’s proclamation of the kingdom. In addition to proclaiming the kingdom, he teaches his disciples how to live now that the kingdom has made its appearance in his ministry. Accordingly, after his initial proclamation of the kingdom (4:17), he delivers the Sermon on the Mount, in which he teaches the demands of the kingdom, which are made possible by the grace of the kingdom. This kingdom belongs to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6) and are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (5:10). The righteousness the kingdom requires does not abolish the law or the prophets, but it goes beyond the way the scribes and Pharisees practice righteousness (5:20) since it is a more abundant righteousness that fulfills the law and the prophets as taught by Jesus Messiah. The first duty of those who belong to the kingdom, then, is to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (6:33).

Righteousness means right conduct in accord with God’s will *as taught by Jesus Messiah*. This conduct is not another form of law observance; it is conduct modeled and taught by Jesus, a way of life that fulfills the deepest meaning of God’s law. It is conduct made possible by the in-breaking of God’s rule in Jesus’s ministry. It is the way Jesus’s disciples should live because the kingdom has made its appearance.

The Gospel of Matthew highlights Jesus’s teaching about right conduct throughout the Gospel. Before he sends his disciples on mission, he provides them with an extended teaching on how to conduct themselves (10:5–42). He teaches them about the kingdom and how to produce its fruit (13:1–53). He instructs them how to live in community (18:1–35). He warns them not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees (23:1–36). He teaches them how to live in the time before he returns at the end of the ages to judge the nations (24:3–46). Finally, when he commissions the

Eleven, he says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe *all that I have commanded you*” (28:19–20).

Conclusion

As with the Gospel according to Mark, the central theme of the Gospel according to Matthew is the proclamation of the kingdom. Matthew’s contribution to this theme is the righteousness the kingdom brings and requires. The in-breaking of God’s rule has a profound effect on the behavior of those who embrace the kingdom. The long-awaited Messiah teaches Israel and the nations how to observe the law and the prophets as God requires. He teaches his disciples how to live righteously within the kingdom.

Luke’s Theology of Promise and Fulfillment

The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are two volumes of a cohesive work that proclaims a powerful theological vision of God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ. I will treat them together because the theological claims of the Gospel find their completion in the Acts of the Apostles. The overarching vision of this two-volume work can be stated in this way: in Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the promises made to Israel, and the fulfillment of these promises has resulted in a reversal of fortunes for many and an offer of salvation for all. Given the scope of Luke–Acts (nearly one-fourth of the New Testament), I will only treat selected themes: the relationship of the story of Jesus to the story of Israel, the great reversal the kingdom brings, the universal scope of salvation, and the relationship of Israel and the Church.

The Continuation of Israel’s Story

Like Mark and Matthew, Luke draws a relationship between the story of Jesus and the story of Israel. To emphasize this relationship, he composes the opening chapters of his Gospel in a style reminiscent of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), thereby suggesting that the story of Jesus is the continuation and fulfillment of Israel’s history.

The story of Jesus begins in the temple, in the holy city of Jerusalem. The aged priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, are pious Israelites who have observed all the “commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly” (1:6). Although Elizabeth is barren, she gives birth to a child who will be the precursor of the Messiah. Mary and Joseph are also pious Israelites who have been faithful to God who is faithful to them. Although Mary is a virgin, she bears a son through the power of God’s Spirit: the Son of God, who will sit on the throne of David his father forever. Finally, the aged Simeon and Anna, pious Israelites, see the Messiah of the Lord (2:26), who will fulfill the hopes of those waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (2:38). By making these pious Israelites the central characters of the Infancy Narrative, Luke proclaims that the promises God made to Israel are being fulfilled. The God of Israel is faithful to Israel. To highlight the importance of God’s faithfulness to Israel, the Lukan Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem, in the temple of Jerusalem (24:52), and the Acts of the Apostles begins with the risen Messiah sending his apostles from Jerusalem, the city of salvation, to the ends of the earth (1:8).

The central theological claim the Gospel makes about God concerns the faithfulness of God to Israel, albeit in a surprising way—through a crucified Messiah who brings about the rise and fall of many (2:34). Mary celebrates this faithfulness when she proclaims,

He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and his descendants forever. (1:54–55)

Zechariah does the same when he prophesies,

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people. (1:68)

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter exhorts those in Jerusalem to repent and be baptized because God’s promises about the Messiah, which are being fulfilled in Jesus, were made to them and their children (1:38–39). Paul affirms the same when he tells his fellow Jews in Antioch of Pisidia that he is proclaiming the good news to them “that what God promised our ancestors he has brought to fulfillment for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (13:32–33). Later, when he stands before King Agrippa, Paul defends himself by insisting that he is on trial because of his hope “in the

promise made by God to our ancestors” (26:6), by which he means Israel’s hope in the resurrection of the dead, which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus (26:8).

To summarize, the Gospel begins with an Infancy Narrative that announces that the promises of God are being fulfilled in Mary’s child. The story that follows shows how these promises were fulfilled in the suffering and death of the Messiah, which was the fulfillment of what is written in the prophets and the Psalms (24:44). The Acts of the Apostles proclaims that the resurrection of the Messiah was the fulfillment of Israel’s deepest hope. God is the faithful God who fulfills promises in unexpected ways: in a crucified Messiah raised from the dead, in the poor and outcasts to whom the good news of the gospel is preached, to Samaritans and Gentiles, as well as to Israel.

A Great Reversal

The kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’s message; it is the good news he proclaims to the poor (7:22). At the outset of his ministry, he enters the synagogue of Nazareth, where he reads from the text of Isaiah 61 and proclaims that what the prophet said is being fulfilled in his ministry. *He* is the one who has been anointed by the Spirit of the Lord

to bring glad tidings to the poor...
to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. (4:18–19)

In Jesus’s ministry, the kingdom of God is bringing about a reversal of fortunes.

In the Beatitudes and woes of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus highlights the reversal of fortunes the kingdom is bringing. The kingdom belongs to those who are poor, hungry, weeping and ill-spoken of *now*, whereas those who are rich, well-fed, laughing, and well-spoken of *now* will be excluded from the kingdom when it makes its appearance in power and glory at the end of the ages (6:20–26). This reversal of fortunes is related to the way the Lukan Gospel portrays God. The God of Israel, who is faithful to the promises made to Israel, is concerned about the poor, the weak, sinners, and outcasts (1:51–53). The kingdom of God brings a reversal of fortunes

whereby those who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first (13:30).

The reversal of fortunes the kingdom brings is foreshadowed in the Infancy Narrative. Mary and Elizabeth are women on the margins of society, but they play a central role in God's redemptive plan. The shepherds are of no account, but they hear the good news of the Savior's birth. Simeon and Anna are poor pious Israelites, but they see and recognize the Messiah.

The reversal of fortunes the kingdom brings is a theme that occurs throughout the Gospel. A sinful woman who repents is praised, whereas a prominent Pharisee who is confident of his righteousness is not (7:36–50). Samaritans are presented in a positive light in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29–37) and in the story of the Samaritan who returns to thank Jesus for healing him (17:11–19). When Jesus sees how the guests exalt themselves by choosing places of honor, he tells the parable of the great feast to warn of the reversal the kingdom of God will bring (14:7–24). The repentant son rather than the obedient son is praised (15:1–31). Lazarus rather than the rich man enters eternal life (16:19–31). The tax collector rather than the Pharisee is justified (18:9–14).

This reversal of fortunes finds its climax in the resurrection of Jesus. The Jewish leadership conspires with Pilate, and Pilate conspires with Herod to put Jesus to death, but God raises him from the dead because it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things to enter his glory (24:26, 46). The Acts of the Apostles also highlights this reversal of fortunes. At Pentecost, Peter tells the crowds, “This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, *you killed*, using lawless men to crucify him. *But God raised him up*” (2:23–24a). After curing a crippled beggar in the temple of Jerusalem, Peter proclaims, “The author of life *you put to death, but God raised him from the dead*” (3:15). Paul also highlights this theme in his sermon at Antioch in Pisidia: “And when they accomplished all that was written about him, *they took him down from the tree, and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead*” (13:29–30).

The resurrection of Jesus has two aspects. First, through the resurrection, Jesus enters the fullness of the kingdom he proclaimed. Second, the resurrection is the culmination of the reversal of fortunes the kingdom of God brings about.

The Universal Scope of Salvation

Salvation through the death and the resurrection of the Messiah is the outcome of the promises God made to Israel. Zechariah identifies Jesus as the source of this salvation: “He [God] has raised up a horn for our salvation within the house of David his servant” (Luke 1:69). Simeon recognizes this salvation when Joseph and Mary bring their child to the temple: “My eyes have seen your salvation” (2:30). Luke announces this salvation when he introduces the ministry of John the Baptist with a quotation from the Prophet Isaiah that concludes, “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (3:6). Jesus describes the salvation that he brings when he tells the messengers of John to report what they have seen and heard: “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (7:22). In another example of a reversal of fortunes, Jesus assures the despised tax collector, Zacchaeus, that salvation has come to him (19:9).

Whereas in the Gospel Jesus proclaims the message of salvation, in the Acts of the Apostles it is the good news about Jesus’s death and resurrection that brings salvation. By raising Jesus from the dead, God exalted him as “leader and savior” to grant Israel “repentance and forgiveness of sins” (5:31). Consequently, “there is no salvation through anyone else” (4:12). When Peter preaches to the crowd in Jerusalem, he applies the prophecy of Joel to them: “And it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord” (2:21). Paul is keenly aware that the salvation God has brought through Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. He understands that the word of God must be spoken to Israel first since Israel has been hoping for God’s salvation. But when the greater portion of Israel refuses this salvation, he turns to the Gentiles (13:46–47; 18:6; 28:26), thereby highlighting the reversal of fortunes that is taking place. The message of salvation is still about the kingdom of God (28:31), but now that God has raised Jesus from the dead, the kingdom is defined by resurrection from the dead and the reversal of fortunes it brings.

The Theology of Luke

- Major themes of Infancy Narrative developed throughout Luke–Acts
- The faithfulness of God who is faithful to Israel

- The kingdom of God that brings a reversal of fortunes for many in Israel
 - Beatitudes, woes, and parables that highlight the reversal of fortunes the kingdom brings
 - The universal dimension of the salvation the kingdom brings
 - Salvation for Samaritans and Gentiles as well as for Israel
 - The Church as that portion of Israel that has repented and believed in the gospel

Israel and the Church

Whereas Matthew and Mark conclude their Gospels with the story of Jesus's death and resurrection, Luke extends his Gospel to include the story of the Church. In doing so, he provides his audience with a fuller account of "the events that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1). The story of Jesus does not end with his death and resurrection; it continues with an account of the giving of the Spirit and how his followers, strengthened by that Spirit, proclaimed the kingdom to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The preacher of the kingdom (Jesus) becomes the content of the Church's proclamation (God has raised Jesus from the dead). The apostles whom Jesus sent to renew Israel become the nucleus of the Church of God that preaches repentance and forgiveness of sins, witnessing to Jesus's resurrection and to all he did (Luke 24:47–48; Acts 1:8). Empowered by the Spirit the risen Lord has bestowed (Acts 2:33), Jesus's followers become a dynamic missionary community that proclaims the kingdom by witnessing to the resurrection. Although he has been taken up into heaven, Jesus remains present to the Church through the gift of the Spirit.

The designation of the community of disciples as "the Church" occurs for the first time in Acts 5:11. Thereafter it appears with more regularity (8:3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22; 18:22; 20:17, 18). The Church is born in and has its home in Jerusalem, but in accord with Jesus's command it spreads to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). While the apostles are the rulers over the Church in Jerusalem, presbyters are appointed to watch over the churches that others establish. The Jerusalem congregation remains the center and origin of the Church, but by the end of Acts there are other congregations as well.

Acts never identifies the Church as the “new Israel” or the “true Israel” or even as “Israel.” Nor does it say the Church has displaced Israel. There is a sense, however, that the future belongs to this new congregation, the portion of Israel that has believed in Jesus and now includes God-fearers, Samaritans, and Gentiles as well as Jews because of the great reversal brought about by the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

While the Lukan Gospel remains faithful to the outline of the Gospel according to Mark, it develops Mark’s understanding of the Gospel. The kingdom of God holds center stage, but the Lukan Gospel enriches this theme by introducing other themes such as the great reversal and the universal scope of salvation the kingdom brings. It expands the story of Jesus by presenting it as the continuation of the story of Israel and recounting the story of the early Church.

The Johannine Tradition

Those who read the Gospel according to John enter a different world from that of the Synoptic Tradition. The narrative about Jesus remains essentially the same (the story of his ministry that culminates in his death and resurrection), but the way the Johannine Evangelist constructs this narrative and the manner he presents the person and message of Jesus is different. For example, the Gospel begins with a Prologue (rather than an Infancy Narrative) that identifies Jesus as the one in whom the preexistent Word of God was made flesh. It presents John the Baptist as a *witness* to Jesus who *testifies* that Jesus is the Son of God upon whom the Spirit has descended and remains (1:33–34). Jesus’s ministry begins in Galilee, but most of it takes place in and around Jerusalem. Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus performs miracles and exorcisms that point to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, in the Johannine Gospel he performs a series of signs that point to him as the one whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world. The content of Jesus’s proclamation is no longer the kingdom of God but Jesus himself, the Son of God, who reveals the Father. Accordingly, the Johannine Jesus delivers a series of discourses, rather than parables about the kingdom, in which he identifies himself as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, and the Good Shepherd. The death of Jesus is “the hour” when he glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies him. His death is the hour he passes over and returns to the Father who sent him into the world, and so the glory of the resurrection is already revealed in his death.

The Seven Signs Jesus Performs in the Gospel of John

- Turning water into wine: a sign of the abundant revelation Jesus brings
- Healing the centurion’s son: a sign that Jesus is the giver of life
- Walking on the Sea of Galilee: a sign in which Jesus is revealed as “I Am”
- Feeding of the five thousand: a sign that Jesus is the bread that has come down from heaven

- Healing of the lame man on the Sabbath: a sign that Jesus does what the Father does

- Healing of the man born blind: a sign that Jesus is the light of the world

- The raising of Lazarus: a sign that Jesus is the resurrection and the life

The most distinctive aspect of the Johannine Gospel is the way it presents Jesus as the one in whom the Word became flesh: what theology calls the incarnation. Because the preexistent Word of God became flesh in Jesus, he is the perfect revelation of the Father who sent him into the world. He is the revelation of the Father because he is the Son to whom the Father has revealed all things. When Jesus comes into the world, he reveals what he has seen and heard in the presence of the Father. In doing so, he discloses the true situation of the world: apart from the Father, the world dwells in the darkness of sin of which it is not even aware until Jesus, the light of the world, comes into the world. While both John and the Synoptics proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Johannine Gospel enriches these titles by presenting Jesus as the one in whom the Word became flesh. In what follows I will discuss the importance of the Prologue for understanding Jesus and how the Gospel portrays Jesus as the one sent into the world to reveal the Father.

The Word Made Flesh

The key to understanding what Jesus says and does in the Fourth Gospel is the Prologue (1:1–18). Apart from the Prologue, the claims Jesus makes would be delusional, and one would have to agree with his opponents that he is “possessed” (8:52). After all, how can any human claim that he and the Father are one (10:30), that he is the resurrection and the life (11:25), that whoever has seen him has seen the Father (14:9)? The claims Jesus makes about his person, his teaching, and his relationship to the Father can only be understood in the light of the statement of the Prologue: “the Word became flesh” (1:14). Because the people within the narrative world of the Gospel (those who believe in Jesus as well as those who do not) have not heard the Prologue, they do not comprehend the person of Jesus. Some, however, have begun to believe in Jesus because the works and signs he performs point to him as the one whom the Father has sent into the world. Others refuse to believe this, even though Jesus performs so many signs in

their presence (12:37). Thus, the world is divided between faith and unbelief, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, those who believe that Jesus comes from God and those who do not. Those who have heard the Prologue, however, know the answer to the question the people within the narrative are asking: Jesus is the incarnation of God's Word, who has come from God. But even they must decide if they will believe in the truth that has been revealed to them.

The *truth* is that the Word existed with God from eternity because "the Word was God" (1:1). The *truth* is that all things came into being through the Word (1:2–5). The *truth* is that John testified to the Word as the true light of the world (1:6–9, 15). The *truth* is that whereas the world rejected the Word, those who accepted the Word became children of God (1:10–13). The *truth* is that the Word became flesh in Jesus (1:14). The *truth* is that no one has seen the Father except the Son who reveals the Father (1:18). To understand the Gospel according to John, then, one must hear it with the Prologue in mind.

The Sending of the Son into the World

Because Jesus is the one in whom the Word became flesh, he speaks of himself as the one the Father sent into the world. The sending of the Son into the world by the Father points to the origin of Jesus's person and mission. Whereas Israel's prophets were sent in history to proclaim the Word of God, the sending of Jesus is from eternity. When Jesus says, "God did not *send* his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (3:17), he points to himself as the one whose origin "is at the Father's side" (1:18). When his opponents think they know where he is from because they know his human origins, he responds, "You know me and also know where I am from. Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who *sent* me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, and because I am from him, and he *sent* me" (7:28–29). Jesus knows the Father because he is the incarnation of the Word that dwells with the Father. Those who do not know Jesus's origin from God do not know the Father because they refuse to believe in the one the Father sent into the world.

When Jesus's opponents accuse him of blasphemy because he reveals that he and the Father are one (10:30, 33), he identifies himself as the one

whom the Father has “consecrated and sent into the world” (10:36). Jesus can say that he and the Father are one because he has been sent by the Father; his origins are in God. Eventually, his disciples begin to understand that he has been sent by the Father. Therefore, Jesus says in his high priestly prayer, “This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent” (17:3). He then prays for his disciples: “I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me” (17:8). The world, however, does not know the Father because it does not believe that Jesus has come from the Father. Faith that the Father has sent the Son into the world is the dividing line between light and darkness, truth and falsehood. Because the world does not know and believe that Jesus is the Son who comes from the Father, it dwells in the darkness that is sin.

For some commentators, the revelation Jesus brings about God has no content. According to these commentators, Jesus does not reveal the deep mysteries of God’s being. He does not reveal new truths that can be codified. Accordingly, they claim there is little if any content to what Jesus reveals; he only reveals that he comes from the Father who sent him into the world. But it is precisely this that is central to Jesus’s revelation about God; for if Jesus is the incarnate Son whom the Father sent into the world, those who hear what the Son says and see the works the Son does have heard and seen what God is saying and doing. Jesus becomes the way God is revealed to the world, and this revelation unveils the true situation of the world that lives as if God did not exist. To illustrate what I mean, I will consider some statements in which the Son reveals who he is and, in doing so, reveals the Father.

I Am the Bread of Life

In chapter 6, after feeding the five thousand in the wilderness and revealing himself to his disciples on the storm-tossed sea, Jesus delivers an extended discourse in which he identifies himself as the bread of life that has come down from heaven for the life of the world (6:26–58). When the crowds ask for a sign so that they can believe in him, he tells them that his Father is giving them the true bread from heaven (6:32). When they ask for this bread, he responds, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (6:35). Jesus insists that he came down from heaven not to do his own will but the will of the

One who sent him (6:38). Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him has eternal life and will rise on the last day (6:40). Jesus is the living bread that has come down from heaven, and whoever eats this bread will live forever (6:51). By revealing that he is the bread of life that has come down from heaven, Jesus reveals that the Father is the source of life. There is no life apart from the life the Son brings from the Father. This is the reason that Jesus says he is the bread of life.

I Am the Light of the World

While in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus proclaims, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (8:12). Then, before he gives sight to the man born blind, Jesus tells his disciples that while he is in the world, he is the light of the world (9:5). Finally, at the end of his public ministry, he cries out, “I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness” (12:46). The world, however, prefers the darkness to the light, lest the light expose and convict it of sin (3:19–21). In revealing that he is the light of the world, Jesus reveals that God is light, and that in God there is no darkness (1 John 1:5). Jesus’s self-revelation is a revelation of God.

I Am the Gate, the Good Shepherd

After showing that he is the light of the world by opening the eyes of a man born blind, Jesus identifies himself as the gate through whom the sheep enter so that they will be saved (10:9), and as the good shepherd who knows his sheep and lays down his life for them (10:11, 14–15). No one takes his life from him, because he freely lays it down, and he has power to take it up again. This is why the Father loves the Son (10:17–18). By revealing that he is the gate and the shepherd, Jesus reveals that he is the one through whom the Father has chosen to bring life to the world. The love of the good shepherd who lays down his life reveals the love of the Father who sent the Son into the world.

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

At the end of his public ministry, Jesus performs his seventh and greatest sign by raising Lazarus from the dead. In doing so, he reveals that he is the resurrection and the life, and he promises Martha, “Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (11:25–26). By revealing that he is the resurrection and the life, Jesus echoes what he said when he healed the lame man on the Sabbath: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes” (5:21). The Son does what the Father does because “the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does” (5:20). In revealing that he is the resurrection and the life, Jesus reveals that God is the One who raises the dead.

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

During his farewell discourse, before he returns to the Father, Jesus assures his disciples that he is leaving them to prepare a place for them. When Thomas responds that the disciples do not know where he is going and asks how they can know the way, Jesus proclaims, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6). Jesus is the way to the Father because the Father sent him into the world, and now he is returning to the Father through his death and resurrection. He is the truth because grace and truth came through the one who is at the Father’s side (1:17–18). He came into the world to testify to the truth that is God (18:37). He is the life because he is the resurrection and the life. Accordingly, when Philip asks Jesus to show the disciples the Father, Jesus responds, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” for the Father dwells in Jesus and Jesus dwells in the Father (14:9–10). In this astounding statement, Jesus teaches his disciples that God is revealed in all that he says and does: to see him is to see the Father, and to hear him is to hear the Father.

I Am the Vine

In the same farewell discourse, Jesus reveals the intimate relationship that exists between the Son, the Father, and those who believe in the Son: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower....I am the vine, you are the branches” (15:1, 5). By revealing he is the vine and his Father the vine

grower, Jesus shows his total dependence on the Father, and the dependence of his disciples on him. For, just as the Father sustains him, so he sustains the disciples. To be united with Jesus the vine is to be intimately related to the one whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world. By revealing that he is the vine, Jesus reveals that God is the source of all life.

To summarize, by revealing himself as the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate and shepherd of the sheep, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, the life, and the vine, Jesus reveals the Father as well as himself, since those who have seen and heard him have heard and seen the Father who is life, light, and truth. To understand the full force of these sayings, however, we must recall Jesus's statement in 8:58: "Amen, amen, I say to you before Abraham came to be, I AM." Here, "I AM" echoes the Divine Name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14 ("This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you"). The one who says, "I am the Bread of Life," "I am the Light of the World," and so forth, is "I AM."

The World, the Jews, and the Disciples

I now turn my attention to a final area of Johannine theology: John's use of the terms "the world," "the Jews," and "the disciples" as indicating different ways humanity responds to Jesus.

Within the Johannine Gospel "the world" (*ho kosmos*) can be understood as the physical world in which humanity dwells or as a metaphor for humanity, especially unbelieving humanity. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that those who believe in the Son might not perish but have eternal life (3:16). The created world came into existence through the agency of God's Word, but the world did not know him. He came to his own people (the Jewish world), but they did not accept him (1:10–11). The incarnate Word, Jesus, is the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29), a sin of which the world is not even aware because it dwells in the darkness of falsehood rather than in the light of truth. The world of humanity prefers the darkness to the light lest its deeds be exposed and condemned (1:19–20). And so, the Son comes into the world as the light of the world to take away the sin of the world by exposing the darkness in which the world dwells. Those who align themselves with the

world, therefore, hate Jesus and his disciples because the light of Jesus exposes their sin. But despite the hatred of the world, Jesus has overcome the world by passing from death to life and returning to the Father who sent him into the world. Although the world hates Jesus, he sends his disciples into the world just as the Father sent him into the world (17:18) to reveal what God has revealed to him so that the world will be saved.

The expression “the Jews” occurs frequently in the Fourth Gospel and can be jarring, especially if it is always interpreted as referring to all the Jewish people. In many instances it does refer to the Jewish people. When the Gospel says that many of “the Jews” came to Martha and Mary to console them at the death of their brother Lazarus (11:19), it is referring to the Jewish people without any negative connotation. At other times, however, the expression refers to the leaders of the Jewish people who oppose Jesus. In the story of the healing of the man born blind, for example, when the Gospel says that the parents of the blind man (who are Jewish) were afraid of “the Jews” because “the Jews” had agreed to expel anyone from the synagogue who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, “the Jews” refers to a leadership group hostile to Jesus. This leadership group refuses to believe that Jesus comes from the Father and seeks to destroy him. When “the Jews” refers to this leadership group, it is a metaphor similar to “the world,” which designates those who oppose the light because they refuse to believe in Jesus.

The Fourth Gospel, however, is profoundly aware of the positive and necessary role the Jewish people play in God’s plan of redemption. The Samaritan woman identifies Jesus as “a Jew” (4:9). Jesus states that “salvation is from the Jews” (4:22); and there are Jews who believe in him (8:31; 11:45; 12:11). He insists that the Jewish Scriptures testify on his behalf and that Moses wrote about him (5:39, 46). But whereas the law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ (1:17). Thus, while the unbelief of certain segments of the Jewish people plays a disturbing role in the Fourth Gospel, it is not the only word. For just as the Son did not come to condemn but to save the world, so the Son comes to save the Jewish people to whom he belongs. And just as there are many from “the world” who believe, so there are many from “the Jews” who believe as well. Among these are the disciples.

The disciples in John's Gospel are the community of those who believe that Jesus has come from the Father. Not all of his disciples, however, persist in faith. There are those who find his words difficult to accept and leave him (6:60), but others continue to believe he has the words of eternal life (6:68). These believers are the ones to whom Jesus reveals the name of the Father, and for whom he prays in chapter 17. The world will hate them just as it hated him. Accordingly, they no longer belong to the world, just as Jesus does not belong to the world, understood as the sphere of darkness. Rather, they have been consecrated in the truth, which is the word about the Father that Jesus has revealed to them. And now, just as the Father sent Jesus into the world to reveal the Father, so Jesus sends the disciples into the world to reveal what he has taught them.

To summarize, the theology of the Fourth Gospel highlights the incarnation of the Word. The Father sends Jesus, the incarnate Word, into the world to reveal God's love for the world. Those who believe that Jesus is the one whom the Father sent have life. Those who refuse to believe exclude themselves from the life and revelation the Son brings. Whereas Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God in the Synoptics as the way to life, in the Fourth Gospel he proclaims that faith in him, the one whom the Father has sent into the world, is the way to life.

The Pauline Tradition

The theology of the Pauline Letters represents the third great theological tradition in the New Testament, the other two being the Synoptic and Johannine Traditions. But whereas the focus of the Synoptic Tradition is on Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God and the focus of the Johannine Tradition is on the revelation of the Son whom the Father sent into the world, the focus of the Pauline Tradition is on the saving event of Christ's death and resurrection. This is not to say that Jesus's death and resurrection do not play a central role in the Synoptic and Johannine Traditions. They do. But while those traditions proclaim the Lord's death and resurrection within the context of Jesus's ministry, the Pauline Tradition focuses on the meaning and consequences of the salvific event of the Lord's death and resurrection. The one who preached the gospel about the kingdom of God (Synoptic Tradition) and revealed himself as the Son sent by the Father (Johannine Tradition) becomes the content of the gospel that Paul preaches.

When we try to structure the Pauline Tradition, however, we are faced with a fundamental question. Are we describing the theology of Paul or are we describing the theology of the Pauline Letters? If our task is to present *Paul's own theology*, it is crucial to distinguish between those letters we are confident he wrote (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon) and those that may have been written in his name by others (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus). But if our task is to outline *a Pauline theology*, we must account for the theology in all the letters that the New Testament attributes to Paul, even if some were written by others in his name.

In my view, the task of NTT is to present the theology of the *writings* in the New Testament rather than to reconstruct what lies behind them (a task that is legitimate but not the goal of a NTT). My focus, therefore, is on the theology of the Pauline Letters rather than on the theology of the historical figure of Paul. This is not to say that the figure of Paul is unimportant; he is the author of many of these letters and the inspiration for the others.¹ My purpose, however, is to present the theology of *all* the letters that the New

Testament attributes to him. That said, every theology of the Pauline Letters is limited, since these letters were written in response to the specific needs of the recipients rather than as theological essays. Consequently, I will respect the occasional and historical nature of these letters even as I present their overarching theological themes.

In what follows, I will arrange the Pauline Letters in the following way: the Early Letters, the Great Letters, the Letters from Prison, and the Pastoral Letters. This arrangement has the advantage of including all the letters in a sequence that follows the general outline of Paul's career.

Early Letters: Christ Will Come Again

Written less than twenty years after the death of Jesus, 1 Thessalonians is the earliest of the Pauline Letters we possess. If Paul is the author of 2 Thessalonians, it is also one of his earliest letters. If it was written by another, it dates from a later period. For our purposes, however, I will treat these letters together since they witness to a common theme: the Parousia, or return of the Lord at the end of the ages.

The Parousia

- The moment of Christ's return or appearance at the end of the ages
- The moment when those who are "asleep in Christ" will be raised from the dead
- An event that will come suddenly and unexpectedly
- The moment of condemnation for those who have persecuted the elect
- The moment when the power of lawlessness will be destroyed

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9b–10, Paul gives an indication of the gospel he preached to the Thessalonians: "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath." Here there are several points to note. First, Paul called his Gentile converts to repent and turn to the living and true God, the God of Israel, by believing in Jesus, the Son of God, whom God raised from the dead. Second, he warned them that the resurrection of God's Son was an event that announced the coming judgment (God's wrath) that was about to engulf humanity. Third, he assured them that by turning to the living and true God, they would be

delivered from judgment when Jesus, the risen Son of God, returned to gather the elect. The Parousia of Jesus, then, will be the final event that brings an end to the old age of sin and death and ushers in the new age of God's life and grace. If one hopes to share in the new age, it is imperative to turn to the living and true God by believing in Jesus, his Son.

If Paul told the Thessalonians something about the life and ministry of Jesus, he does not mention it. He is primarily concerned with the coming event of the Lord's return, which has been made possible by his resurrection from the dead. The Parousia will be the moment of God's judgment, and it will mean salvation for some and condemnation for others. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9–10, Paul speaks of the punishment that will come upon those who are disobedient to God: "These will pay the penalty of eternal ruin, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes to be glorified among his holy ones and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, for our testimony to you was believed."

Paul and the Thessalonians had a vibrant hope for the Lord's imminent return because they understood that Jesus's resurrection had set in motion the events of the end-time. The resurrection was not one event among others. It was *the* event that inaugurated the new age, and because this age began with the resurrection, their Lord could return at any moment, even in their lifetime. It was this lively hope in the imminent return of their Lord, however, that caused problems for the Thessalonians. Accordingly, Paul must address two issues. In 1 Thessalonians 4—5, he must assure the Thessalonians that even though some of their compatriots have already died, they will not be deprived of the salvation that Jesus will bring when he returns. For even though they have died, they will be raised from the dead: "For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess 4:16). The problem is different in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Some are disturbed by a report or a letter, purportedly from Paul, that the Lord has returned, and they are fearful they have missed his return. Paul must assure them that this is not the case since a series of other events must occur before the Lord returns: a great apostasy and the appearance of a lawless figure whose coming (Parousia) springs from Satan.

In both letters, hope for the Lord's return plays a central role because *the Parousia is the outcome of the resurrection that will bring about the completion of God's work of salvation in Christ*. The Parousia will be the moment when the crucified Jesus is vindicated as the risen Lord. At that moment, the risen one will play a crucial role in God's judgment. In both letters, Paul and the Thessalonians are still at an early stage in their understanding of this event, and their hope for the Lord's return results in problems when it does not occur in the way they expect. Some are disappointed that it has not already occurred; others think it has occurred. Paul and his converts needed to grow in their understanding of this event, as does the Church of every age.

The theological contribution of these early letters is enduring. There is an intimate bond between the resurrection and the Parousia. The resurrection of Jesus has inaugurated a new age, and so the Lord can return at any moment. How and when he will return, and what his return means are questions the Church must reflect upon until he returns.

The Great Letters: Christ's Death, Resurrection, and the Righteousness of God

I call 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans "the Great Letters" because of their length and the maturity of their theological thought. These four letters develop the Pauline gospel of the saving justice of God that was manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, when God justified and reconciled humanity and so destined us for resurrection life. While each letter has something to say about these themes, my discussion of 1 & 2 Corinthians will focus on the cross, the resurrection, and apostolic ministry, while my discussion of Galatians and Romans will deal with justification and the saving righteousness of God.

Paul deals with the themes noted above as he responds to issues in the communities of Corinth, Galatia, and Romans. In 1 Corinthians he must deal with a variety of problems and remind his converts of the gospel of the crucified Christ whom God raised from the dead. In 2 Corinthians he deals with challenges to the legitimacy of his apostleship by showing the Corinthians how his apostolic ministry embodies the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection. In Galatians he tries to dissuade his converts from

adopting a Jewish way of life (doing the works of the Mosaic law) by assuring them they have *already* been justified (declared innocent and put in a right relationship with God) by what God has done in Christ. And in Romans he preaches the gospel of God's saving righteousness (God's faithfulness and justice) to a community that has heard about Paul's preaching but has not heard Paul preach the gospel. In every case, Paul provides a profound theological understanding of the gospel that responds to the needs of the community to which he writes.

Death and Resurrection

The gospel Paul preaches is the good news of the saving work God accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although death and resurrection can be distinguished as two events, one occurring on Good Friday and the other on Easter, Paul views them as a single event. Without the resurrection, the death of Jesus is a tragic event, and without the death of Jesus there is no resurrection. The cross is the gateway to the resurrection, and it is the resurrection that gives meaning and purpose to the cross. It is not by chance, then, that the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians deals with the proclamation of the cross and 1 Corinthians 15 with the resurrection of the dead. Paul's discussion of the crucified Christ is the prelude to his exposition of the resurrection of Christ and those who believe in him.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are on the way to perdition since the world cannot understand how the cross can bring life. For Greeks who seek wisdom, the proclamation of a crucified savior is folly (1 Cor 1:22). How can a crucified criminal save anyone? For the Jewish world, the cross is a scandal, since it implies that the Messiah was under God's curse (see Deut 21:23 and Gal 3:13). But it is precisely in the foolish and scandalous event of the cross that Paul sees the power and wisdom of God at work in Christ. And it is in this event of the cross, understood in the light of the resurrection, that Paul develops his theology of the cross. The power and wisdom of God were at work in the folly and weakness of the cross. The crucified Christ is "wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). If we ask how Paul came to this insight and what validates it, the answer is the resurrection. By the resurrection God vindicated the crucified Jesus, thereby demonstrating that

God was at work in the crucified one. Consequently, what the world calls foolishness and weakness is the locus for God's wisdom and power (1 Cor 1:23–24). In the crucified Jesus, God has and continues to manifest himself in a way the Church will never fully fathom until her Lord returns. Weakness is God's power, and foolishness is God's wisdom. From start to finish all is paradox, and this paradox requires us to think of God in a way that can only be approached by the folly and weakness of the cross.

But the cross cannot be understood apart from the resurrection. Therefore, before concluding his letter to the Corinthians, Paul provides them with his most extensive teaching on the resurrection of Christ and those who believe in him (1 Cor 15). This chapter is not a theological essay, although it comes close to being one. It is a response to two questions that plagued the Church at Corinth: *Will the dead be raised? What does resurrection from the dead mean?* Paul begins by reminding his converts of what he received and handed on to them: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (15:3–4). What he handed on to the Corinthians was not something novel. It was the apostolic tradition of the Church that Christ died and rose in accordance with the Scriptures. That he was truly raised from the dead was attested by a series of witnesses that includes Paul who saw the risen Lord (15:5–9).

Having reminded the Corinthians of the Church's fundamental proclamation, in 15:12–35 Paul draws out the intimate relationship between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of those who believe in him (15:12–35). Christ's resurrection was the beginning of the resurrection of the dead, not an isolated event; he is the firstfruits of the general resurrection. Consequently, if Christ has not been raised, believers will not be raised, and if believers will not be raised, Christ has not been raised.

Next, Paul discusses what it means to be raised from the dead (15:35–58). He distinguishes between resurrection and resuscitation. Those who are raised from the dead are not raised to their former way of life but transformed into the pattern of Christ's risen body. Therefore, while there is continuity between the earthly and risen body, there is no comparison, for whereas the former is mortal and corruptible, the latter is immortal and incorruptible because it is made alive by the Spirit of God that the risen Christ bestows upon it.

To summarize, Paul's gospel is an exposition of the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection, which clarifies and defines the life of those who believe in him.

Cross and Resurrection

- The cross as the locus of God's power and wisdom
- The cross as intimately related to the resurrection
- The resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection of the dead
- The resurrection of believers as a moment of transformation

Modeling the Gospel

Whereas in 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds his converts of the gospel he preached to them, in 2 Corinthians he provides them with the witness of his apostolic ministry so that they will have a living example of what the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection means for the Christian life.

In 2 Corinthians Paul must address a serious challenge to his ministry from some members of the community who prefer the ministry of other preachers who have come to Corinth boasting of their achievements. Rather than boast of his accomplishments, Paul boasts of his weaknesses, which conform him to the death of Christ. In doing so, he preaches by the example of his ministry, thereby showing his converts how to embody the paschal mystery in their lives. Two examples will illustrate this.

In 2 Corinthians 3—4, Paul describes his ministry as the ministry of a new covenant empowered by the Spirit (3:6), a ministry greater than the ministry of Moses because it leads to life and transforms believers into the image of Christ, who is the image of God (3:7–18). After describing his Spirit-empowered ministry, Paul turns to the sufferings he endures as an apostle of Christ (4:1–18). As glorious as his ministry is, he exercises it in a mortal and corruptible body that is wasting away (4:16). But Paul is not discouraged because he knows that he is “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in his body” (4:10). He understands that the afflictions and humiliations he endures for the sake of the gospel are the way in which the paschal mystery is at work in his life. Consequently, he preaches the gospel of Christ's death

and resurrection by the example of his ministry as well as by the words he proclaims.

In 2 Corinthians 11:30—12:10, Paul engages in what he calls “foolish boasting” to show his converts how his life and ministry embody the gospel he proclaims. Whereas others boast in their strength, Paul boasts in the sufferings and hardships he endures for Christ; he even boasts of his failures and weaknesses. He concludes, “I will rather boast more gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me....For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9–10). With this statement, Paul shows how the theology of the cross that he preached in 1 Corinthians impacts his life. Just as Christ “was crucified out of weakness” but now lives “by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4), so Paul rejoices in his weakness confident that God, who manifests power in weakness, will bring him and his converts to resurrection life.

To summarize, Paul’s theology of the paschal mystery highlights the paradoxical message of the cross, which is the gateway to the resurrection. It reveals how God was at work in Christ and is now at work through weakness, persecution, and suffering in those who believe in him. The resurrection is already present in the cross, and the cross is ever present in the resurrection.

The Justification of Believers

The Pauline teaching on justification by faith is grounded in the gospel of the Lord’s death and resurrection, for in this event God manifested his saving righteousness by justifying sinners. This teaching was forged in the controversy Paul experienced at Galatia, where his Gentile converts were tempted to have themselves circumcised and do the works of the law in addition to believing in Christ in order to assure their justification (innocence or acquittal before God). Paul, however, understood the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection in a way that many of his contemporaries did not. He argued that “if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:21). Why would God have sent his Son “to ransom those under the law” (Gal 4:5) if they could have been declared innocent and put in a right relationship with God by doing the works of the law? Beginning with the event of Christ’s death and

resurrection, which Paul views as the end of the old age of sin and death and the beginning of the new age of grace and life, he concludes that God sent his Son to do what the law “weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do” (Rom 8:3).

Whereas Paul’s Galatian converts may have viewed circumcision and doing the works of the law as a way of manifesting their faith in Christ, Paul maintains that what God did in Christ is sufficient for their salvation. Those who seek to be justified by legal observance have fallen from God’s grace in Christ (5:5). For if God has already justified sinners through the saving death and resurrection of his Son, what need is there to add circumcision and doing the works of the Mosaic law to what God has done in Christ?

The Language of Justification

To justify: To declare someone innocent, acquitted of wrongdoing, because he or she stands in a right relationship to the law

Just/righteousness: the status of someone who has been justified or acquitted because he or she stands in a right relationship to the law

Justification: Vindication or acquittal, a declaration of innocence, a term Paul uses to summarize the new situation of someone who has been justified by Christ on the basis of faith in Christ rather than on the basis of doing the works of the law

To be justified by faith: To be in a right relationship with God because one trusts in God’s saving work in Christ rather than in his or her own achievements

The Pauline teaching on justification affirms the unmerited grace of God. Human beings cannot justify or declare themselves innocent before God, nor can they reconcile themselves (restore the covenant relationship) to God. Justification and reconciliation are the free, unmerited gifts of God made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection. But if this is so, why did God give the law? Did it fail? What was its purpose?

According to Galatians, the Mosaic law had a temporary role in God’s plan. It was given after God made the promise to Abraham in order to deal with transgressions until the appearance of Christ, the true heir of the promise that God made to Abraham (3:19). The law revealed how people should live, and it exposed their transgressions; but Paul insists that it was

never the purpose of the law to bring about righteousness: “For if a law had been given that could bring life, then righteousness would in reality come through the law” (3:21). Paul insists “a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16). In saying this, Paul affirms that believers stand in a right relationship to God because of what God has done in Christ, not because of anything they have done. Because God has brought about justification through Christ’s death on the cross, the response of the justified to God’s work in Christ is trusting faith in what God has done in Christ.

To summarize, the Pauline doctrine of justification highlights the unmerited grace of God revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection. It teaches that God has given believers what they seek: a new relationship with God through faith in Christ. Believers live a morally good life by the power of the Spirit that dwells in them (Gal 5—6), for their new life is the outcome of their faith in Christ working through love (Gal 5:6).

The Saving Righteousness of God

In Romans Paul develops his teaching on justification by faith in a less polemical manner. He introduces himself to the Roman community by preaching the gospel through the letter he writes to them. In doing so, he develops a new theme: the righteousness of God (by which he means God’s saving righteousness as well as the gift of righteousness), which is the outcome of justification. Paul announces this theme at the outset of Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel...For in it is revealed the righteousness of God” (1:16–17). He returns to this theme a few chapters later, after describing humanity’s rebellion against God: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:21–22). Then, toward the end of the letter, in his discussion of Israel’s failure to believe, he writes, “For, in their unawareness of the righteousness that comes from God and their attempt to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God” (10:3).

The righteousness of God is Paul’s way of speaking about God’s saving work in the world, just as the kingdom of God is Jesus’s way for describing God’s saving work in the world. Just as the kingdom of God points to God’s

rule over history and creation, so the righteousness of God points to God's saving work in Christ by which God restores creation. Both terms are cosmic in scope, highlighting the covenant faithfulness of God, who does not abandon creation; for the whole cosmos is being restored and renewed in Christ (8:18–21). It is the righteousness of God that justifies sinners. It is the righteousness of God that deals with the cosmic powers of sin and death that enslave humanity. It is the righteousness of God that is revealed in Christ's obedience on the cross. It is the righteousness of God that releases the power of the Spirit so that the justified can fulfill what the law requires. It is the righteousness of God that brings salvation to the Gentiles and will bring about the restoration of Israel. Apart from the righteousness of God, humanity cannot be justified and reconciled to God.

God's Righteousness in Romans

- A dynamic concept that refers to God's saving activity in history
- A dynamic concept that testifies to God's faithfulness to the covenant
- Paul's way of speaking of God's saving work in the world
- The gift of righteousness bestowed on believers because of God's saving righteousness in Christ

The theology of the Great Letters can be summarized in this way: The gospel is the good news of Christ's saving death and life-giving resurrection whereby God reveals righteousness in the weakness and folly of the cross. By his saving righteousness, God justifies and reconciles humanity so that believers can live in Christ's resurrection life in a world restored by God's saving grace in Jesus Christ.

Letters from Prison: Christ and His Church

Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians are letters that Paul wrote while in prison. Although the authorship of Colossians and Ephesians is contested, I treat their theology in the light of what they teach about Christ and the Church. To be sure, all the Pauline Letters speak of Christ and the Church, but these letters (apart from Philemon) make a special contribution to Pauline Christology and ecclesiology by the way they focus on the preexistent and cosmic Christ and present the Church as the Body of the cosmic Christ.

The hymn-like passages of Philippians 2:6–11 and Colossians 1:15–20, and the great benediction of Ephesians 1:3–14, speak of Christ in terms that affirm his preexistence and highlight the cosmic dimensions of his work. The Christ hymn of Philippians begins by affirming that Christ was in the “form” of God but did not regard “equality with God as something to be grasped” (2:6). Instead, he emptied himself taking the “form of a slave” so that he was “found human in appearance,” enduring death by crucifixion, a death reserved for slaves (2:7–8). Because of Jesus’s humble obedience, God exalted him by bestowing his own name (“Lord”) upon Jesus so that the entire cosmos must now confess that Jesus Christ is “Lord” (Phil 2:9–10; see Isa 45:23, “To me [God] every knee shall bend, by me every tongue shall swear”).

In Colossians, Christ is identified as the “image of the invisible God, the first born of creation” (1:15), the one in whom, through whom, and for whom, all things were created and hold together (1:16–17a). He is the “head of the body” that is the Church and, as “the firstborn from the dead,” the fullness of God dwells in him so that the cosmos has been reconciled to God in, through, and for him (1:18b–20).

Finally, the great benediction of Ephesians presents Christ as the focal point of God’s “economy” (plan) of salvation. God elected/chose us in Christ before the world was created and, in Christ, destined us for adoption (1:3–6). Christ is the one in whom God revealed “the mystery of his will,” namely, “to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (1:7–10). We have been chosen and destined in Christ to exist for the praise of God’s glory (1:11–14).

While these passages do not speak of the preexistence of Christ in the explicit way the Johannine Prologue does, they presuppose that Christ preexisted with God, that he is the key to understanding the mystery of God’s economy of salvation. God’s work in Christ is cosmic in scope because it embraces heaven as well as earth.

The statement of Colossians that Christ is “the head of the body, the church” (1:18), develops the Pauline notion of the Church as the Body of Christ found in Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:27. In Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, and Colossians 1:18, however, the Church is the Body, and Christ is the head of the Body, thereby highlighting the cosmic dimension of the Church, whose “head” is the cosmic Christ. Believers share in the fullness

of Christ, who is “the head of every principality and power” (Col 2:10). Because they are the Body of Christ, they have been raised up with him, in faith, who is seated at the right hand of God (Col 2:12; 3:1). God has subjected all things to Christ, and made him head of the Church, which is his Body, the fullness of God (Eph 1:22–24). Because the Church is the Body of Christ, believers have been raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavens (Eph 2:6).

The christological and ecclesiological vision of these letters is breathtaking in scope. Although they do not employ the explicit language of incarnation and preexistence, they present Christ as a preexistent and cosmic figure who is the head of the Church, his Body, so that the Church is cosmic in scope in virtue of its head.

Pastoral Letters: Safeguarding the Gospel

The letters Paul writes to Timothy and Titus are called the Pastoral Epistles because Paul provides Timothy and Titus with pastoral guidance for shepherding the Church. For example, in 1 Timothy he describes the qualities necessary for those who function as bishops and deacons, and the qualifications for widows to be enrolled in the Church’s order of widows. In his letter to Titus, he instructs his trusted delegate how to deal with men and women of every age. In 2 Timothy, he writes from prison and encourages Timothy to bear his share of the sufferings of the gospel, since the time of Paul’s ministry is coming to an end. Although the Pastoral Epistles are sometimes viewed as a falling away from an earlier, more vibrant Pauline theology, they make an important contribution to Pauline theology.

The Pastorals highlight the importance of guarding and handing on the gospel to the next generation. In 1 Timothy 6:20, for example, Paul writes, “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you,” and in 2 Timothy 2:2, he says, “And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.” If the gospel is to flourish, then Timothy, Titus, and others must faithfully hand on what they have received from Paul. How they will respond to this challenge is crucial since there are many who teach in a way that betrays the gospel. They teach “false doctrines” and “concern themselves with

myths and endless genealogies” (1 Tim 1:3–4). Timothy and Titus and those they appoint must counter such teaching with “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Paul does not need to summarize the gospel he has handed on to Timothy and Titus since they are familiar with it; nor is it necessary to explain what he means by sound teaching. But there are moments in these letters when he recalls important aspects of the gospel he has taught. For example, there is one God, one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:5–6). Christ appeared in the flesh, was vindicated in the spirit, was seen by angels, proclaimed to the Gentiles, believed throughout the whole world, and taken up in glory (1 Tim 3:16). God called us to a holy life, not because of our works but according to his own plan for salvation and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:9–10). Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, was raised from the dead (2 Tim 2:8). If believers die with Christ, they will live with him; if they persevere, they will reign with him (2 Tim 2:12). Christ Jesus is our Savior (Titus 1:4), and in him the grace of God has appeared (Titus 2:11). The love of God our Savior made its appearance not because of any righteous deeds we did but because of God’s mercy. God saved us through “the bath of rebirth and renewal of the holy Spirit” through “Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4–7). Although the language in these examples may be different from that in Paul’s other letters, the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ remains constant.

The theological contribution of the Pastorals can be summarized in this way. There is a *content* to the gospel that must be handed on from generation to generation. While this content can be expressed in different ways, its meaning must not deviate from the gospel Paul handed on lest the gospel devolve into endless speculation rather than focus on the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Pauline gospel is the paschal mystery that was revealed to Paul at his call/conversion: the saving death and life-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ whereby Christ now lives in believers through the power of the Spirit. Whoever is ashamed of the scandal of the cross does not understand the gospel. Whoever finds the resurrection of the dead too difficult to accept does not understand the gospel. Whoever fails to understand the unbreakable bond between the death and resurrection of Christ falsifies the gospel. Whoever sets aside the paschal mystery sets aside the gospel.

Diverse Theological Traditions

Thus far we have examined three important traditions in the New Testament: the Synoptic Tradition, the Johannine Tradition, and the Pauline Tradition. The remaining writings of the New Testament—Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and the Book of Revelation—are more difficult to organize since they do not constitute a single tradition. Aside from the letters of John, which can be viewed as part of the Johannine Tradition, they represent diverse theological traditions. The Letter to the Hebrews presents a theology of priesthood and sacrifice and, while it enjoys some affinities with the Pauline Tradition, it is a distinctive tradition within the New Testament. The same can be said for the Letter of James and the Book of Revelation. James echoes many of the themes of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, but it too is a distinctive tradition. Likewise, although the Book of Revelation is often placed within the Johannine Tradition, I view it as a distinctive tradition since its eschatology differs from that of the Gospel. Finally, while 1 & 2 Peter may be viewed as witnesses to a Petrine Tradition, some aspects of the theology of 2 Peter are more closely associated with the Letter of Jude than 1 Peter.

Hebrews: A Theology of Priesthood and Sacrifice

The Letter to the Hebrews exhibits one of the most distinctive theologies of Christ and his redemptive work in the New Testament. Like Romans it manifests a carefully thought-out theology of salvation, and like the Gospel of John it plumbs the depths of Christology. What makes it distinctive, however, is the way it develops its Christology and soteriology. Christ, the Son of God, is an eternal high priest who has offered the perfect sacrifice of himself and entered the true holy of holies, heaven itself. While there are allusions to priesthood in other writings, only Hebrews explicitly identifies Jesus as a high priest.¹

The central soteriological issue for Hebrews is the problem of sin. The Levitical cult had numerous priests who offered sacrifices daily. In the view

of Hebrews, the need for these daily sacrifices indicates that they could not bring about the forgiveness of sins *once and for all*. The law, which established the Levitical cult with its priesthood and sanctuary was “a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them” (Heb 10:1). It could not lead worshipers to perfection by bringing about the forgiveness of sins once and for all. Hebrews argues in this way: *If perfection came through the Levitical priesthood, what need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek (7:11)?* In other words, if the sacrifices of the Levitical cult could have brought about the forgiveness of sins once and for all, what need would there have been for another priest (Christ) to die for sins once and for all?

Hebrews affirms the salvific nature of Christ’s death as a sacrifice that brings about the forgiveness of sins once and for all, thereby inaugurating the new covenant announced in the Book of Jeremiah (Heb 8:4–13; see Jer 31:31–34). From this soteriological starting point, Hebrews develops its priestly Christology through its exegesis of Psalm 110. Whereas other writings of the New Testament focus on the first verse of the psalm to establish the enthronement of the risen Christ (“The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool’”), Hebrews focuses on the fourth verse: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:6; see Ps 110:4). Aware that Jesus was not qualified to be a priest because he belonged to the tribe of Judah rather than to the tribe of Levi, Hebrews uses Psalm 110:4 to argue that Jesus was established as an eternal high priest according to the line of Melchizedek when he entered the heavenly sanctuary through his death and resurrection. The death of Jesus is the perfect sacrifice that brings about the forgiveness of sins. By this sacrifice, he entered the true holy of holies, heaven itself, as an eternal priest who intercedes on our behalf before God. There is no further need for sacrifices; there is no further need for Levitical priests; there is no further need for the temple cult because the Son of God, the eternal high priest, has brought about the forgiveness of sins once and for all.

Jesus is “the leader” or “pathfinder” (Heb 2:10) who has shown his followers the way into the heavenly sanctuary. He is a “merciful and faithful high priest” (2:17) who has expiated the sins of God’s people. He is the new Joshua who has led God’s people by his suffering and death into God’s Sabbath rest (4:1–11), which is the heavenly city (11:22), the New

Jerusalem, the true holy of holies. He opens the way into the heavenly sanctuary.

Like other major witnesses of the New Testament, Hebrews confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, whose death was a sacrifice for sins. Like other major witnesses of the New Testament, Hebrews argues that Christ brought about the fullness of salvation, which the Mosaic law could not. What Hebrews adds to the other major witnesses of the New Testament is its identification of Christ as a high priest and his death as a priestly sacrifice.

James: A Theology of Wisdom and Praxis

The Letter of James is attributed to James, the brother of the Lord, the leader of the Church at Jerusalem. Known as a staunch Jewish Christian, his letter upholds the abiding validity of the Mosaic law for those who have accepted “the word of truth” (Jas 1:18), which is the gospel.

James presents readers with instruction for becoming perfect through the observance of the law and receiving the wisdom that comes from above. He is especially concerned with praxis, with doing as opposed to merely hearing the word of God. Accordingly, James focuses on the importance of works such as caring for orphans and widows (1:27). He teaches readers not to show partiality to the rich (2:1), and he warns the rich of the impending judgment they face (5:1). The final judgment is imminent, and “the Judge is standing before the gates” (5:9). Therefore, James encourages his audience, which he describes as “the twelve tribes in the dispersion” (1:1), to persevere in trials and temptation, to tame the tongue (3:8), and to seek the wisdom that comes from above (3:17), from God, who is “the Father of lights.”

James wants believers to be “doers of the word” rather than mere hearers of it (1:22). This word is “the word of truth” (1:18), the gospel, that has been planted in them and is able to save their souls (1:21). Those who want to be perfect must keep the whole law, what James calls “the perfect law of freedom” (1:25), “the royal law” (2:8), “the law of freedom” (2:12). This law has been illuminated by the implanted word of truth that is the gospel. Thus, there is an affinity between the teaching of James and the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. Just as Jesus calls disciples

to a greater righteousness by bringing the law to its fulfillment, so James calls those who have been enlightened by the wisdom from above to be perfect in their observance of the law.

The most controversial aspect of the Letter of James is the latter part of chapter 2, where James argues that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (2:14–26). While it may appear that James is challenging Paul’s teaching on justification by faith, a closer reading shows that he is addressing a different question than Paul. He is dealing with an understanding of justification that views faith as merely an intellectual assent to the truth rather than as trusting faith that leads to profound obedience to God’s will, as Paul affirms when he speaks of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). For James, faith must manifest itself in good works; for Paul, what matters is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). Although Paul and James speak differently about faith and justification, both agree that faith that does not result in a morally good life is empty.

The contribution of James can be summarized in this way. The word of truth, the gospel, has made those who embrace it God’s people, who are destined for perfection, which comes from faithful endurance and observance of the law of liberty. God’s people live as a community of the wise because they have received the gift of wisdom from above. Aware that the Lord is near, they express their faith in deeds that testify to their faith in Jesus Christ.

1 Peter: A Theology of God’s Pilgrim People

Whereas the Letter of James is addressed to “the twelve tribes in the dispersion,” 1 Peter is addressed “to the chosen sojourners of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1), thereby highlighting two important theological motifs of this letter. First, Peter is writing to people whom he identifies as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (2:9). Second, these chosen ones are presently living in the world as if they were “aliens and sojourners” (2:11) as they await “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7), for “the end of all things is at hand” (4:7). The purpose of 1 Peter, therefore, is to encourage and strengthen Christians who find themselves in a society hostile to them because of their faith in Christ. Peter addresses this situation by (1) reminding his audience of their

new situation in Christ, and by (2) assuring them that Christ has provided them with an example to follow that will bring them to resurrection life.

The new situation of believers can be summarized in this way. First, they have been born anew by the power of Christ's resurrection, which has given them "a living hope" (1:3, 23). Second, they are the beneficiaries of the prophetic promises, which have found their fulfillment in Christ (1:11–12). Third, they have been ransomed from their futile way of life by "the precious blood of Christ" (1:19). Because of God's work in Christ, they are "living stones" who are being built "into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (2:5). There was a time when they did not belong to God's people, but they are now God's people because of the mercy God has shown them in Christ (2:10). The opening chapters of 1 Peter, then, present a rich ecclesiology that gives a new identity to Gentile believers in Asia Minor. Applying privileges to them that were reserved for Israel (see Exod 19:6), Peter identifies them as a living temple, a royal priesthood, a holy nation that offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God because of what God has done in Christ (1 Pet 2:9–10).

These recent converts, however, are living in a hostile world suspicious of their new faith in Christ—a faith that does not have a visible priesthood, temple, or sacrifice. Because of the hostility they are experiencing, they are like strangers and aliens dwelling in a foreign land, even if they are living in the land of their birth. To encourage and strengthen these new converts, Peter provides them with a rich Christology that enables them to persevere during the time of their sojourn. He reminds them that Christ left them an example to follow. Although he was insulted, he did not return insult for insult (2:23). He suffered for sinners that he might lead them to God. Therefore, they must learn from him, the righteous one who suffered for the sake of the unrighteous (3:18; 4:1). They are to rejoice to the extent they share in the sufferings of Christ (4:13), and should they suffer as Christians, there is no shame in this (4:16). For, if they share in Christ's sufferings, they will participate in the glory of his resurrection. The insults and afflictions they presently endure because of their faith are their share in Christ's sufferings, and this participation in his sufferings is their assurance they will share in his glorious resurrection.

The Christology and ecclesiology of 1 Peter are deeply rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ. By his sufferings, Christ has left believers an example to follow. By his death, he has rescued them from sin. By his resurrection, he has given them a new birth that has made them a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation that is being built into a living temple.

1, 2, 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude: A Theology for Living in a Time of Error

While Peter provides believers with a theology for living in a world hostile to their faith in Christ, the Johannine Letters, 2 Peter, and Jude warn the Church of dangers that come from *within* it. In doing so, they provide the Church with a way to understand and respond to deviations from the apostolic faith that has been handed on to them. In the Johannine Letters the central issue has to do with Christology, in 2 Peter with eschatology, and in Jude with morality.

The Johannine Letters share the Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Jesus is the incarnate one, the Word made flesh. In the Gospel, the opposition to this teaching comes from those who refuse to believe in Jesus, but in the Johannine Letters it arises from within the community of faith. The community has experienced a schism. Some who belonged to the community have left. From the point of view of the Johannine Letters, the central issue has to do with a correct understanding of Jesus: Is *Jesus* the Christ? John insists that whoever denies that *Jesus* is the Christ is a liar, and whoever denies the Father and the Son is the antichrist; for no one who denies the Son has the Father (1 John 2:22–23).

What is at stake is nothing less than the truth of the incarnation. The Johannine author identifies those who have left the community as “antichrists” because they deny that *Jesus* is the Christ. They refuse to accept that the eternal Word of God became flesh in the human one, Jesus. Second John states the problem this way: “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh; such is the deceitful one and the antichrist” (2 John 7). The theological issue the Johannine Letters address is one that has arisen often: Is Jesus truly the incarnate Son of God?

The response of 1 John is multidimensional. First, in a Prologue reminiscent of the Gospel Prologue, the witnesses behind 1 John testify to what they have heard and seen so that others may share in their fellowship (1:1–4). Second, they remind the community of the new commandment of love it has received (2:7–11). Third, they warn the community not to deny the reality of sin or to commit sin (3:4–10). Fourth, they assure the community that it has an anointing that teaches it what is true and false (2:27). Fifth, they urge the community to test the spirits since the true spirit acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (4:2). The witnesses behind the Johannine Letters insist that if the Church is to persevere in faith and resist error, it must hold fast to the witness it has received, live with an intense love for the members of the Church, acknowledge the reality of sin and avoid it, and test every spirit by the anointing of the Spirit it has received. Authentic faith can only be preserved within the community of the Church guided by authentic witnesses, love, and the Spirit.

Like the Johannine Letters, 2 Peter and the Letter of Jude respond to a crisis that has arisen within the Church by those who have deviated from the faith handed on to the Church. In 2 Peter, the central issue has to do with the delay of the Parousia. In the Letter of Jude, it is the immoral behavior of some within the community of the Church.

Second Peter is written in the genre of a farewell letter. Peter reminds his audience of certain things, even though they are already established in the truth, because he knows that the time of his “departure” is at hand (1:1–15). He assures his audience that they can rely on his testimony because he was present on the holy mountain at the time of the Lord’s transfiguration and heard the divine voice proclaim, “This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (1:17). What Peter says, therefore, is not his own teaching but his testimony to what he has seen and heard.

Peter warns the community that just as there were false prophets in the past, “there will be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive heresies and even deny the Master who ransomed them” (2:1). The description he gives of these teachers (2:10–22) is similar to that of the false teachers in the Letter of Jude, which suggests some sort of literary interdependence between these writings.

In chapter 3, Peter addresses the main issue: the delay of the Lord’s return has given rise to false teachers who are asking, “Where is the

promise of his coming?” (3:4). Faced with this challenge, Peter reminds his audience that just as the heavens and earth were once destroyed by the waters of the great flood, so the present heavens and the present earth will be destroyed by fire on the day of judgment (3:5–7). The judgment of the world that happened at the time of Noah assures believers of the coming judgment of God. While the passage of time leads false teachers to claim that the promise of the Lord’s return is a cleverly concocted myth, Peter teaches the community that God reckons time differently: one day is a thousand years for God, and a thousand years like a single day. Patience is needed since there is no delay from God’s point of view. Just as the world was destroyed once, so everything will be dissolved again, and when this happens there will be “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (3:13).

Although 2 Peter does not manifest the theological depth of 1 John or 1 Peter, it provides the Church with a way to understand and deal with false teaching. First, it reminds the Church that just as false prophets arose in the past, so they will arise in the future. Second, it teaches that the antidote to their teaching is the apostolic tradition handed on to the Church by those who have seen and heard the Lord.

The author of Jude identifies himself as “a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (the author of the Letter of James). His original intent was to write to his unspecified audience about their common salvation. However, false teachers have arisen in the Church, and Jude finds it necessary to encourage his audience to hold on to the faith that was handed on to them because of these teachers “who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). The problem, then, is a libertine behavior that perverts God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

Jude reminds his audience how God punished those who did not believe at the time of the exodus, how God punished the angels who did not keep their proper domain, and how God dealt with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5–7). He compares these false teachers to Cain, Balaam, and Korah (Jude 8–11). Enoch prophesied about them long ago (Jude 14–15), and the apostles warned of their coming (Jude 17–18).

The strategy of Jude for dealing with false teaching is similar to that of 2 Peter. First, the Church should not be surprised when they arise. They arose

in the past, and they will arise again. The strongest defense against them is to hold on to the Church's apostolic teaching.

The Book of Revelation: A Theology of God's Victory in Christ

The Book of Revelation is a prophetic message to the seven churches of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea). It identifies itself as a “revelation of Jesus Christ” intended to show his servants what must happen soon. This revelation is given to the churches through John by an angel. It is to be read aloud since “the appointed time is near” (1:1–3). The theological message of this prophecy can be summarized in this way: God has already won the victory over the forces of evil (Satan) through the blood of the Lamb. At present, those who belong to the Lamb must give witness to God and the Lamb rather than to the beasts (Rome and its surrogates) who do the bidding of the great dragon (Satan). The present is a period of intense suffering for the servants of Jesus, but those who persevere will enter God's kingdom, the New Jerusalem. The Book of Revelation, then, is as much about the past and the present as it is about the future.

In terms of the *past*, the Book of Revelation assures those who hear its message that God's victory has been won and is already being celebrated in heaven. In the vision of the risen Christ that opens this prophecy, the Lord proclaims, “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld” (1:17–18). In the vision of God seated upon the heavenly throne, Jesus is presented as the slain Lamb who is worthy to open the scroll in God's right hand, and the heavenly court sings,

Worthy are you to receive the scroll
and to break open its seals,
for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God
those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation.

You have made them a kingdom and priests for our God,
and they will reign on the earth. (5:9–10)

In chapter 12 a woman (Israel), who is about to give birth to a son (the Messiah), is pursued by a great dragon (Satan). The woman gives birth to her son who is destined to rule the nations. Her son is then taken up to God and his throne (a sign of Christ's victory over death). The dragon is then defeated by the angel Michael and thrown down to earth, where he wages war against the woman's offspring (the followers of Jesus). Through these

images, the Book of Revelation assures its audience that God's victory has already been won by the death and resurrection of Christ, the Lamb, who is enthroned with God. Although the Dragon, who is Satan, continues to do battle on earth with God's elect, the outcome has been determined.

In terms of the *present*, the Book of Revelation describes the suffering and afflictions of the churches. In the letters to the seven churches (2:1—3:22), for instance, the risen Christ assures them that he is aware of their trials, and he encourages them to persevere in their witness to him so that they can share in God's final triumph. The story of the two witnesses who are put to death (11:1–13) and the account of the two beasts (13:1–18) describe the suffering the Church is enduring. Finally, the visions of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven plagues attest to the suffering and tribulations of the present time. The present is a time of testing and tribulation for the Church, and only those who worship and witness to the Lamb will be saved.

In terms of the *future*, the Book of Revelation points to the punishment and fall of Babylon/Rome (chap. 18), the final defeat of the Dragon and the two beasts that serve it (chap. 20), and the appearance of a new heaven and a new earth, the New Jerusalem that has no need of sun or moon, “for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb” (21:23). The future that the Book of Revelation describes is the final appearance of the kingdom of God, the outcome of the Parousia, which is the Wedding Banquet of the Lamb (19:9). Some have mistakenly interpreted the images of this prophecy (the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls, the Dragon, and the two beasts) as a divine code that outlines how history will unfold. But the message is more profound and timely: God has already won the victory through the blood of the Lamb (the past). Nevertheless, because the great dragon, who is Satan, continues to challenge God's authority, the Church is persecuted and must witness to the Lamb (the present). The outcome, however, has been determined and is already being celebrated in God's heavenly throne room (the future).

Summary

The diverse writings presented in this section provide the Church with guidance and encouragement for living in the world. Hebrews assures the

Church that it has an eternal high priest who has offered the one perfect sacrifice for sins. There is no need for further sacrifice and the cultic priesthood of old. First Peter and Revelation instruct the Church how to live in a hostile world by imitating the suffering of Christ and witnessing to the Lamb. James exhorts believers to live perfect lives by obeying the law and being doers of the word, the gospel that has been planted in them. The Johannine Letters, 2 Peter, and Jude warn the Church of the errors that arise when believers neglect the teaching the Apostles handed on to them.

Having dealt with the diverse theologies in the New Testament writings, I now turn to the theological unity of the New Testament.

Diverse Theologies of the New Testament

- Hebrews: A theology of Christ the high priest whose self-sacrifice brings forgiveness of sins once and for all so that believers can enter God's Sabbath rest
- James: A theology of faith and wisdom that exhorts believers to do the royal law of God
- 1 Peter: A theology of suffering and endurance for believers living in exile from their heavenly home
- 2 Peter & Jude: A theology for recognizing and resisting error that arises from within the community of faith
- Johannine Letters: A theology of the incarnation that insists *Jesus* is the Christ
- Revelation: A theology of God's final victory over evil that has occurred in Christ

The External Unity of the New Testament

In the previous chapters I dealt with the theologies *in* the New Testament. The discipline of NTT, however, must also address the issue of the theology *of* the New Testament. Is there an overarching theological structure of the New Testament that embraces its many theologies, or is the New Testament a collection of diverse theologies, some of which cohere, while others contradict each other? In this chapter I will propose that there is an external unity that brings these diverse theologies together. This external unity has to do with the Church's decision to embrace these twenty-seven writings as her canon or rule of faith. In the next chapter I will discuss the internal unity of the New Testament manifested in its theology.

The New Testament is not a collection of writings commissioned by the Church to present her faith in a uniform way. Rather, it is a book of diverse writings in which the Church *recognizes* the faith she professes. The formation of the canon, which unfolded over several centuries, is the story of how the Church judged that certain writings constitute her rule of faith.¹ During this period the Church discerned that these writings represent an authentic witness to her faith because of their teaching, their use in the Church's liturgy, and their relationship to certain apostolic figures. In them, and not in other writings, the Church discerned the inspiration of the Spirit, judging that they are the norm for the faith that ought to be believed. That the Church settled on these writings as the "canon" or "rule" of her faith suggests that there is a coherence in what they proclaim and witness. The formation of the canon of the New Testament indicates that the believing community intuits a unity that binds these writings together.

The external unity of the New Testament is reflected in the canonical shape of the New Testament: (1) the four Gospels, (2) the Acts of the Apostles, (3) the Pauline Letters, (4) the Catholic Letters, and (5) the Book of Revelation. While there have been times when these writings were ordered differently, and while academic introductions to the New Testament often arrange them in the order of their composition, the present ordering of these writings implies a narrative that witnesses to the Church's faith. When

I speak of the external unity of the New Testament, then, I mean the unity that derives from the way the believing community orders the writings it cherishes as inspired Scripture.

The Four Gospels

The New Testament begins with four Gospels that offer a fourfold witness to the *one* gospel of and about Jesus Christ. It would have been easier for the Church to settle on a single Gospel. Such a decision would have saved her the need to explain the differences among the Gospels. The decision to include four Gospels that do not agree in detail reveals that the Church was more interested in a diverse witness to unity than in uniformity.

The four Gospels begin with the apostolic witness of the Gospel according to Matthew, whose genealogy and Infancy Narrative ground the New Testament in the story of God's covenant with Israel. Any attempt to separate Jesus from Israel stands in stark opposition to the Church's rule of faith. The narrative of Jesus's ministry that follows reinforces this unity between the story of Israel and the story of Jesus by its use of quotations from Israel's Scriptures to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel, and by five great discourses that evoke the five books of Moses. Among these discourses the Sermon on the Mount, which presents Jesus's teaching on the law and prophets, holds pride of place.

After one has read the Matthean Gospel, the Markan Gospel may seem redundant, since it has so much in common with Matthew. Its fast-paced narrative, however, which focuses on the mystery of the person of Jesus, the demands of discipleship, and the centrality of the cross, affords the Church another vantage point for understanding Jesus and his gospel of the kingdom of God. Consequently, even though those who have read Matthew's Gospel will be familiar with the content of Mark's Gospel; the distinctive way Mark presents the person and work of Jesus affords them a new and powerful witness to Christ that unrelentingly focuses on the cross.

The Gospel according to Luke presents a third witness to the Christ. It begins with an Infancy Narrative and contains both a genealogy and another account of Jesus's great sermon different from what we find in the Gospel according to Matthew. If the believing community was seeking uniformity, it would have chosen between Matthew and Luke. Instead, the Church

accepted both as authentic witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lukan Infancy Narrative presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel, assuring the Church that God has been faithful to Israel. Luke insists that Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms point to the sufferings of the Messiah. As in the Matthean Gospel, faith in Christ is deeply and irrevocably rooted in Israel's faith, but it is also open to the whole of humanity. For example, in his genealogy of Jesus, Luke traces Jesus's origins to Adam, the progenitor of all humanity, and in his version of Jesus's great sermon, he presents Jesus's teaching in a manner accessible to Gentiles as well as to Jews. In this way, the Gospel of Luke witnesses to the inclusive nature of the gospel, which includes the poor as well as the rich, women as well as men, those on the margin of society as well as those at the center. In doing so the Gospel expands upon what is found but not fully developed in other Gospels.

The most distinctive witness among the Gospels is the Fourth Gospel. Its Prologue provides a profound witness to the incarnation. It proclaims that the one whom the Synoptic Gospels confess as the Messiah, the Son of God, is the eternal Word of God, who became flesh in Jesus. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Johannine Jesus becomes the content of the gospel he proclaims. Rather than speak about the kingdom of God, he proclaims that he is the one who has come from the Father to reveal the Father to the world. To see and hear him is to hear and see the Father. The placement of the Johannine witness after the Synoptic Gospels is significant. Had it come first, it would have been easy to overlook the humanity of Jesus. Coming after the witness of the Synoptic Gospels, it complements them: the Son of Man whom they identify as the Christ is the *incarnate* Son of God.

The four Gospels provide the Church with a powerful witness to her Lord without concealing the differences among them. Their fourfold witness proclaims that the central figure of the New Testament is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel in a way that has significance for all, Gentile as well as Jew, because he is the Son of God in the profoundest sense; he is the incarnate Word.

The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles comes immediately after the witness of the four Gospels. Its placement between the Gospels and the Pauline and Catholic Letters allows it to function in two ways. First, it continues the story of Jesus that the Gospels tell by explaining what happened to the community of his disciples after his death and resurrection. Second, it introduces four important figures of the early Church—Peter, John, James, and Paul—whose writings make up the two collections of letters that follow: the Pauline and Catholic Epistles.

The one who proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom (Jesus) becomes the content of the gospel the early Church preaches (God raised Jesus from the dead). In the speeches that Peter gives in Jerusalem, for example, and in the speeches that Paul delivers on his missionary journeys, the central message is constant: God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead and enthroning him at his right hand as Lord and Messiah. The gospel that the Church proclaims, then, is that God has vindicated the one who was rejected by raising and exalting him as Messiah and Lord. The Acts of the Apostles shows that the Church understands that even though it must endure many struggles before it can enter the fullness of the kingdom of God, the risen and exalted Christ has already entered the kingdom he proclaimed through his death and resurrection. The Church's proclamation about Jesus stands in continuity with his proclamation about the kingdom because the one who proclaimed the kingdom has been raised from the dead.

In addition to providing a link between the life and ministry of Jesus and the mission of the Church, the Acts of the Apostles prepares readers for the Pauline and Catholic Epistles by the stories it tells about Peter, John, James, and Paul. Peter is the central figure of the first part of Acts, with John and James playing important but subsidiary roles, while Paul is the dominant figure of the second part. In the first half of Acts, Peter delivers a series of speeches in which he witnesses to the resurrection and becomes the instrument of the Holy Spirit by which the Gentile household of Cornelius receives the gospel. John plays a secondary role alongside Peter, and James becomes the leading figure in the Church at Jerusalem, the representative of a law-observant faith in Jesus the Messiah. In contrast to them, Paul is the great missionary to the Gentiles. These portraits of Peter, John, James, and Paul provide a narrative context to hear the writings that follow. Readers of the Pauline Epistles now have an account of Paul's call, his relationship to

Jerusalem, his missionary activity in Asia Minor and Greece, and his arrival at Rome. Readers of the Letter of James are informed of his role as the law-observant leader of the Jerusalem Church, and those who read the Johannine Letters have heard of the close relationship between Peter and John who proclaimed the gospel in Jerusalem.

To summarize, the Acts of the Apostles has a twofold function: to show the continuity between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of the early Church, and to provide readers with a literary context for understanding the apostolic letters that follow.

The Pauline Letters

The collection of Paul's letters dominates the New Testament in two ways. First, it contains thirteen writings (fourteen if we include Hebrews), nearly half the writings of the New Testament. Second, the theology of Paul's letters is a comprehensive and compelling statement of the significance of God's redemptive work in Christ. Although Hebrews makes no claim to Pauline authorship, I treat it with the Pauline collection because of its position in the canon and its complementary themes.²

The first nine letters of the Pauline collection (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians) are addressed to seven communities arranged in order of length, the longer letters coming first. The next four (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) are addressed to individuals. Hebrews, which was viewed as Pauline in some parts of the early Church, occurs at the end of the Pauline collection as a kind of canonical conclusion to the Pauline Letters, as I will explain.

Romans is the most complete statement of Paul's gospel. Standing at the head of the Pauline collection, it provides a lens for reading the letters that follow. The Corinthian correspondence is more occasional and personal than Romans, but no less theological, offering a profound presentation of Christ's death and resurrection and its meaning for the life of the Church. Galatians is a passionate defense of justification by faith, which is given a rich theological context by Romans and the Corinthian correspondence.

Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians provide readers with a theology of the Church as the Body of Christ and of Christ as the preexistent Son of

God in whom the fullness of God dwells. First and Second Thessalonians are among Paul's earliest letters. The letters that precede them in the canon, however, provide a fuller context for understanding Paul's teaching about the Parousia. For example, 1 Corinthians 15 sets the Parousia within the wider context of the general resurrection from the dead. Finally, the Pastoral Letters remind the Church how Paul ensured that the gospel would be handed on to future generations, while Philemon confirms the Apostle's enduring concern for the churches he established.

The position of Hebrews after the Pauline Letters invites readers to view it as complementing Paul's theology, especially his soteriology.³ Paul argues that the law was not able to bring about the justification of sinners, therefore God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to do what the law, weakened by sin, could not do (Rom 8:3–4). Hebrews maintains that the Levitical priesthood was not able to deal with the forgiveness of sins once and for all, therefore Christ offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for sins (Heb 7:11). Romans identifies Christ as *the place of atonement* (Rom 3:25). Hebrews affirms that Christ is *the high priest who made atonement* once and for all by entering the heavenly sanctuary by his death and resurrection (Heb 9:11–14). From the perspective of the canon, then, the Pauline Letters and Hebrews complement each other, the former focusing on justification through faith in Christ apart from the law, the latter focusing on the forgiveness of sins through Christ the high priest.

While the Pauline Letters can be read in any order, it can be helpful to read them in their canonical order. Romans provides a summary of the Pauline gospel that provides a context for understanding the letters that follow. The Corinthian correspondence provides a theology of the Lord's death, resurrection, and Parousia that the Thessalonian correspondence does not. And Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians afford insight to the mystery of the Church not found in the Pastorals.

The Catholic Epistles

The Catholic Epistles are the second great collection of letters in the New Testament. Ascribed to four apostolic figures (James and Jude, brothers of the Lord; Peter and John, apostles of the Lord), they present the Church with four additional witnesses to Christ.⁴ The Letter of James echoes the

strong Jewish-Christian faith of James, the leader of the Church at Jerusalem. Its insistence on faith manifesting itself in good works reminds the Church that Paul's teaching on justification is not a license to do whatever one pleases. (Paul would agree!)

The letters of Peter and John are ascribed to two figures who play prominent roles in the Gospels as well as the Acts of the Apostles, something the reader of the Pauline Letters might forget, given the powerful witness of Paul's letters. First Peter's description of the Church as a temple of living stones and the need for Christians to suffer with Christ, and 2 Peter's report of what Peter heard at the transfiguration recall themes that play a prominent role in the Gospels as well as in the Pauline Letters. The Johannine Letters echo the central message of the Fourth Gospel that the Word was made flesh, while the Letter of Jude recalls warnings found in the Pastorals about false teachers who will make their appearance in the final days. The function of the Catholic Epistles within the canon can be summarized in this way. First, they provide four additional apostolic voices that witness to Christ. Second, their witness echoes theological themes of the Gospels and the Pauline Letters. Third, they serve as a counterweight to any attempt to reduce the Church's witness to Christ to an exaggerated Paulinism that views Paul's letters as the only statement of the faith.

The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is a fitting conclusion to the New Testament, as well as to the entire Bible. Filled with echoes of Israel's Scriptures, it employs numerous images to assure believers of God's final victory over evil. The new city, the city of God, and the New Jerusalem are images of the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed and of the fulfillment of the Parousia that the Church awaits. As the last book of the Christian Bible, the Book of Revelation recalls themes and motifs found in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. For example, "the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1) recalls the river that waters the garden in Genesis 2:10. In a similar fashion, the "tree of life" in Revelation 22:2, 14, 19 recalls the tree of life in Genesis 2:9. These and other echoes of Genesis bring closure to the story of salvation that finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Summary

The *external unity* of the New Testament can be summarized in this way. First, the four Gospels witness to the centrality of Jesus the Christ in God's redemptive plan. It is Jesus who announces the kingdom and reveals the Father to the world. In Jesus's life, ministry, and death, God fulfills the promise made to Israel. Israel's sacred history comes to a climactic moment in the person of Jesus the Christ, to whom the law, the Psalms, and the prophets witness because he is the incarnation of God's Word.

Second, the Acts of the Apostles provides a context for reading the letters that follow and testifies that the ministry of Jesus continues in the ministry of the Church, which proclaims the kingdom of God by witnessing to her Lord's resurrection. Because the resurrection of the dead has begun in Christ, the final in-breaking of the kingdom of God is at hand. The community of the Church that Acts describes is universal in scope, including Gentiles as well as Jews. Within this community, salvation is found in the name of Jesus.

Third, the Pauline Letters focus on the decisive event of Christ's death and resurrection. God's salvific work is found in this event. By Christ's

resurrection, God has overcome the power of death once and for all, and believers are promised resurrection from the dead. By Christ's death, God has dealt with sin once and for all so that it is proper to view Christ as a high priest, as Hebrews affirms.

Fourth, the newness of life in the Spirit that believers enjoy in Christ must bear fruit in good works and deeds. For while believers are already justified and reconciled, they continue to live in a hostile world in which evil is present that will defile the Church if the believing community is not vigilant. Thus, the frequent warnings of the Catholic Epistles are ever relevant to the life of the Church.

Fifth, the final victory belongs to God and to the Lamb. The power of evil continues to afflict those who follow the Lamb, and many will be slain because of their witness to the Lamb. Believers, however, can be confident that God will reveal the victory that has already been won. The unifying themes of the theology of the New Testament, which I will address in the next chapter, will take up these central ideas of God's redemptive work in Christ and the community of believers that has been redeemed and continues Christ's mission as it waits for the consummation of all things in Christ.

The Canonical Shape of the New Testament

1. The Gospels witness to the ministry, message, death, and resurrection of Christ.
2. The Acts of the Apostles shows the continuity between the ministry and proclamation of Jesus and the ministry and proclamation of the Church.
3. The Pauline Letters proclaim the meaning of the implication of Jesus's death and resurrection.
4. The Catholic Epistles present the witness of John, Peter, James, and Jude to the gospel.
5. The Book of Revelation testifies to the final victory of God in Jesus.

The Internal Unity of the New Testament

Having discussed the external unity of the New Testament, in this chapter I will turn to the internal unity of the New Testament. By the internal unity of the New Testament, I mean the way the diverse writings of the New Testament witness to what God has done in Christ. This unity, however, is not to be confused with uniformity, as if all the writings speak in one voice. They do not; there is a rich diversity in the way the New Testament proclaims what God has done in Christ. This diversity is not opposed to unity, since witnesses can testify to the same event from different perspectives.

For example, the Gospels provide a witness that includes Jesus's ministry, whereas the Pauline Letters witness to his death and resurrection. Both testify to God's work in Christ but from different vantage points. Likewise, the Acts of the Apostles witnesses to how the early Church proclaimed the resurrection, whereas the Book of Revelation testifies to God's final victory in Christ. Accordingly, while there are multiple ways of witnessing to God's work in Christ, Christ is the central figure. In this section, I will summarize the unity of the New Testament from five perspectives that correspond to traditional theological categories: *God in Christ* (theology and Christology), *Humanity in Christ* (anthropology and soteriology), *Community in Christ* (ecclesiology), *Life in Christ* (Christian ethics), *All Things in Christ* (eschatology).

God in Christ

Christ is the focal point of the diverse theologies in the New Testament. He is the central figure of the Gospels, the one whom the Church proclaims in the Acts of the Apostles, the content of the gospel that the Pauline and Catholic Letters proclaim, and the one through whom God brings final victory in the Book of Revelation. Christ is the focal point of the theologies in the New Testament because in and through him believers understand what God is doing in the world. In the New Testament, Israel's God is

revealed in Christ, and Christ is identified in the light of his unique relationship to God. To know Christ is to know God, and to know God is to know Christ.

The Synoptic Gospels testify that Jesus is the herald of the kingdom of God, the Christ, the anointed one, God's Messiah. In doing so they endow the notion of messiahship with new meaning. As the Christ, Jesus is the Son of God, whose destiny is the destiny of the Son of Man who suffers, dies, and brings to fulfillment the kingdom he proclaims. He is the crucified Messiah, whose resurrection ushers in the kingdom of God. The Gospel of John continues to speak of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man, but it adds a distinctive witness when it testifies that Jesus is the incarnate Word whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world. The Acts of the Apostles testifies that God vindicated the crucified Jesus by raising him from the dead, exalting him as Lord and Messiah. The witness of the Pauline Epistles focuses more intently on the death and resurrection of Christ as the locus of God's redemptive work. The Letter to the Hebrews adds a further dimension when it testifies that Christ is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The Johannine Epistles insist that *Jesus* is the Christ, and the Book of Revelation presents him as the Lamb who was slain and now sits on the throne with God (5:1–14).

Although the writings of the New Testament identify Christ in different ways, they agree that God is revealed in and through him. All that Jesus says and does is a revelation of the Father. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the one whom the Father sent into the world, know God in and through Jesus the Christ. His life, ministry, death, and resurrection are the ways they know God. Jesus's proclamation of the in-breaking kingdom of God, for example, reveals God's presence to the world. His ministry to sinners and those on the margins of society reveals God's mercy and forgiveness. His death and resurrection reveal that God is the one who justifies the ungodly, reconciles the world, and gives life to the dead. God in Christ is the starting point for understanding the theological unity of the New Testament, for it is in Christ that God is revealed.

Humanity in Christ

In addition to witnessing that God is revealed in Christ, the writings of the New Testament testify that God's work in Christ reveals the human condition. When Jesus proclaims in the Synoptic Gospels that the kingdom of God is making its appearance in his ministry, he reveals that God is reasserting his rule over humanity, which has refused to acknowledge God as Lord of history and creation. The in-breaking of the kingdom repairs the covenant relationship between God and humanity. It establishes a right relationship between creation and its Creator so that humanity can live in a new creation renewed by the grace and forgiveness that God offers in Jesus's ministry. Jesus establishes this new creation by his death and resurrection, thereby making it possible for others to follow.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaims that he is the one whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father and give the gift of becoming "children of God" (1:12). In doing so, he discloses the condition of the world when it lives apart from God. In revealing that he is the light of the world who reveals the truth that is God, Jesus discloses that the world dwells in the darkness of sin, which is ignorance of the truth that is God. The world refuses to dwell in the light of the revelation that Jesus brings lest its deeds be exposed to the light. It prefers the lie to the truth, the darkness to the light. Although the kingdom of God is not the content of Jesus's teaching in the Johannine Gospel, Jesus's proclamation of himself as the one who comes from the Father, like his proclamation of the kingdom of God, reveals humanity's true situation and profound need for the salvation God offers in him.

In the Pauline Letters, motifs such as justification, reconciliation, righteousness, and salvation witness to the human condition from another perspective. Paul insists that the sending of the Son into the world in the likeness of human flesh reveals that humanity was in a situation from which it could not extricate itself. If justification could have come by observing the law, why did God send the Son into the world? In Paul's view, apart from God's saving grace in Christ, humanity is under the cosmic powers of Sin and Death, which frustrate its attempt to fulfill God's law. Apart from God's grace, humanity lives in the realm of Sin and Death inaugurated by Adam's transgression. God's purpose in sending the Son was to redeem humanity from a plight from which it could not save itself. By the obedient death of God's Son, humanity is placed in a new relationship with God; it is justified and reconciled to its Creator. Those who are in Christ fulfill what

the law requires because they are in the realm of God's grace inaugurated by the obedience of the new Adam. Having been associated with Christ's death through baptism, they will be fully conformed to the risen Lord at the resurrection of the dead when they, like Christ, will enter the kingdom of God.

Apart from Christ, humanity no longer lives under God's rule because it is under the powers of Sin and Death unleashed by Adam's transgression, and so it dwells in the darkness that is sin. But when humanity enters the realm of God's rule, it lives in the new Adam, the realm of the Spirit, the realm of God's grace. It lives in the light and the truth that is God. Just as Christ is the one in whom God is revealed, so Christ is the one in whom the human condition is revealed.

Hebrews highlights the need for the forgiveness of sins, once and for all, that can only occur in Christ, while 1 Peter presents Jesus as the just one who suffered for our sins. For their part, the Johannine Letters proclaim that Jesus, the righteous one, is the expiation for our sins, while the Book of Revelation presents him as the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, the slain Lamb who has made us a kingdom of priests for our God by his death.

Community in Christ

In addition to testifying that the human condition is revealed in Christ, the witnesses of the New Testament affirm that Christ is the focal point of a new community that embraces all who are baptized into Christ.

The Gospels testify to the origin of this community during the ministry of Jesus, who gathered disciples to follow him because the kingdom of God was making its appearance in his ministry. From these disciples, Jesus chose twelve who became the nucleus of a renewed Israel. The Act of the Apostles recounts how the Spirit empowered the Twelve to witness to his resurrection. Beginning in Jerusalem and going to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, this new community becomes the Church that embraces Gentiles as well as Jews.

The Pauline Epistles present a rich theology of the Church. The Church is the community of those who have been called and elected by God in Christ. It is the community of those who have been baptized into Christ. It is the

Body of Christ, Christ being its head. The Church is the realm of God's grace, the temple where the Spirit of God dwells. To live in the Church is to live in Christ. For Paul, the Church is the place where every barrier has been broken down: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). The Church is a sign to the world of the in-breaking kingdom of God; it is the place where the justified and reconciled live in peace and unity; it is the sphere where darkness has been overcome.

This new community is made possible because of its intimate union with Christ, its Lord. He is the bridegroom; the Church is his bride. He is the head; the Church is his Body. And so, just as the writings of the New Testament testify that God and the human condition are revealed in Christ, so they testify that the Church finds its origin, meaning, and goal through its participation in Christ. By being baptized into Christ, believers enter the community of the Church, and by sharing in the Eucharist, they participate in a common life with each other in Christ.

The New Testament witnesses that there is no life in Christ apart from life in the community of the Church because the Church is the Body of the crucified and risen Christ. To separate oneself from the communion of the Church is to separate oneself from Christ. This union between Christ and the Church explains why Paul devotes so much time correcting and teaching his converts how to live in the community of the Church. It also clarifies why writings such as the Johannine Epistles, 2 Peter, Jude, and the Book of Revelation are concerned about dangers that arise from within the Church and threaten to destroy its communion in Christ.

Life in Christ

The many writings of the New Testament testify that those who live in the Church live in Christ. Their behavior, their moral and ethical decisions, are determined by their new life in Christ. For such people the moral life is defined and empowered by the newness of life, which is the Spirit, that comes from living in Christ, in the community of believers, the Body of the crucified and risen Christ

Jesus inaugurates this new life when he calls people to discipleship. The in-breaking kingdom of God, which makes its appearance in his ministry,

empowers the community of his disciples to live in a new way. Therefore, when Jesus calls disciples, he commands them to leave their former way of life and follow him because the kingdom of God requires a new way of thinking and acting (Rom 12:1–2). This new way of life encounters resistance, especially when Jesus eats with and forgives sinners. By associating with those on the margins of society, he shows that the kingdom is breaking down those boundaries that once separated people from each other.

The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete statement of how disciples should live in the light of the kingdom. They are to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48). They are to be single-minded and undivided in their allegiance to God. They are to practice a righteousness that surpasses how their contemporaries observe the law. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides disciples with concrete examples of this righteous behavior by stating what the law says and then giving an interpretation of the law that highlights its meaning in the light of the kingdom of God. For example, the law says you shall not kill, but disciples of the kingdom must avoid the angry word that can lead to murder. The law says you shall not commit adultery, but disciples must avoid the lustful thought that can lead to adultery.

Jesus comes to fulfill the law, which is summarized in the commandment to love God and neighbor. When disciples understand the law in the light of this double commandment, they practice a righteousness that manifests itself in acts of love and mercy. This righteousness, however, is not the result of their effort; it is a way of living made possible by the presence of Jesus who is the embodiment of the kingdom.

In the Gospel of John (chap. 15), Jesus employs the metaphor of the vine to teach disciples that they cannot do anything apart from him. He is the vine, they are the branches, and his Father is the vine grower. As long as disciples live in Jesus, they will bear fruit because they obey his new commandment to love one another as he has loved them. But if they cut themselves off from the vine, if they separate themselves from the community of his disciples, it is no longer possible to bear this fruit. Jesus, then, is both the teacher and the enabler of the moral life. On the one hand, he teaches disciples how to live now that the kingdom of God has made its appearance. On the other, he empowers them to live the morally good life

by bringing them into the realm of the kingdom where they enjoy an intimate relationship with him that brings them into a new relationship with the Father.

The Pauline Letters provide a powerful exposition of what it means to live a morally good life in Christ. For Paul, as for Jesus, the love commandment stands at the center of the moral life as the summation of all the commandments. Paul calls his converts to make this commandment the test of their new life in Christ. In addition to teaching and exhorting them to live in a community formed by love, Paul presents them with the example of his own life, which is being conformed to the pattern of Christ's death and resurrection (Gal 2:19–20; Phil 3:17–21). If they imitate the pattern of his dying and rising with Christ, they will understand what it means to practice love.

Paul's most distinctive contribution is the way in which he relates the moral life to life in the Spirit. Aware of the power of sin that Adam introduced into the world by his disobedience and the abundant life of grace that Christ introduced by his obedience, Paul summons his converts to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. Those who live according to the flesh are in the realm of the old Adam; they cannot fulfill the law because the power of sin dwells in them. Those who live according to the Spirit live "in Christ," who is the new Adam (Rom 5:14). They *fulfill* the law through the power of the Spirit that empowers them to know and fulfill God's will.

The Catholic Letters draw out the implications of Jesus's teaching for the community of faith that lives in the world after its Lord's death and resurrection. The Letter of James echoes the Sermon on the Mount as it calls believers to do the royal law, the perfect law of freedom. The Johannine Letters remind the community of the new commandment of love that Jesus gave them, and 1 Peter exhorts believers to follow the example of the righteous Christ who suffered for them. In every instance, the teaching and example of Jesus stand at the center of the moral life for the community of faith.

For the community of believers, the moral life is life in Christ. Christ is the origin, the content, and the goal of believers' ethical life. What he taught and how he acted is the norm for their behavior. The Spirit that Christ

bestows on believers is the indwelling power that enables them to live a life that is ethically good because it is guided by God's Spirit.

All Things in Christ

The writings of the New Testament witness to God's victory in Christ. All will be well because all things will be restored to God in Christ (Eph 1:10). The new creation that has begun with the in-breaking of the kingdom of God and the resurrection of Christ will be completed when all things are subjected to Christ, and the last enemy, the great enemy—death—is defeated (1 Cor 15:26–27). Put simply, the writings of the New Testament bear witness to God's victory in Christ.

Jesus testifies to God's victory when he assures disciples that he will return on the clouds of heaven as God's end-time judge (Matt 24:30). Paul speaks in a similar way when he writes about the Parousia, the return of the risen Christ, which will usher in the general resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:23). Second Peter provides a robust defense for the Parousia despite the seeming delay of the Lord's return. The Book of Revelation describes the returning Christ as a rider on a white horse brandishing the sword of God's Word. Hope for the Lord's return permeates the writings of the New Testament, which end with the cry, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20). The *imagery* the New Testament employs for the Parousia, however, is not to be confused with its *reality*. Like all imagery, it conveys the meaning of something beyond human description. Exegetes see the imagery of the returning Christ as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, or as the heavenly rider on a white horse, not as a factual description of what will happen, but as an affirmation that Christ will play the decisive role in God's victory, when and however that victory occurs.

Most writings of the New Testament conceive of the Parousia as a future event that will happen at the end of the ages, thereby setting up a linear scheme of Parousia, general resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. In distinction to them, the Johannine Gospel collapses the future into the present so that the final event has already occurred in Christ. The victory has been won, and the world has been judged. Thus, the Johannine Gospel overcomes the difficulty of an apparent delay in the Parousia by testifying that the victory of God has been won in Christ.

There is a tension between the way the Synoptic Gospels, the Pauline Letters, and the Book of Revelation present God's final victory in Christ and the manner in which the Gospel of John understands this event. The former make use of a temporal scheme, whereas the Johannine Gospel collapses time into eternity. Both approaches, however, point to God's victory in Christ. All things have been created by God in and through Christ and, in a way known only to God, all things will find their meaning in Christ.

Summing Up

Christ is the point of unity for the New Testament because the many theologies of the New Testament converge in him. Because of what God has done in Christ, Christ is the one in whom the writers and writings of the New Testament know and understand God. Because of what God has done in Christ, Christ is the one in whom the redeemed understand their need for redemption and the salvation that has been won in Christ. Because of what God has done in Christ, the redeemed live in the community of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. Because of what God has done in Christ, the redeemed live in Christ, who empowers them to live in holiness, in communion with God. Finally, because of what God has done in Christ, all things will be restored and renewed in Christ at a time and in a manner known only to God.

CONCLUSION

New Testament Theology and the Life of the Church

New Testament theology can be viewed as a discipline that is purely historical and academic. When approached in this way, it is no longer in dialogue with the believing community that gave birth to the Scriptures. While it may contribute to the life of the Church, since the faith of the believing community is grounded in historical events, its primary purpose is academic and historical rather than ecclesial and theological.¹ But since NTT deals with issues of faith, it can also be viewed as a theological discipline that enters into a dialogue with the life of the Church, contributing to and learning from the faith experience of the believing community. In this conclusion, I will discuss (1) how the discipline of NTT enriches the life of the Church and (2) how the life of the Church enriches the discipline of NTT.

How New Testament Theology Enriches the Church

The discipline of NTT is broader in scope than those books that identify themselves as works of NTT. It includes articles and monographs that focus on various aspects of the theology in and of the New Testament, as well as commentaries that concern themselves with the theological meaning of the text. Whenever interpreters investigate the theological claims of the text, they are engaged in the work of NTT, even if they are not explicitly writing a theology of the New Testament. When this work is done with the believing community in view, NTT enriches the life of the Church (1) by helping to ground the Church's theological understanding of its faith in the word of God, (2) by highlighting the content of the gospel the Church proclaims, and (3) by explaining the diverse unity that characterizes the faith of the Church.

NTT and the Church's Theology

Systematic theology is akin to, but different from, biblical theology. It is a more complex and diverse discipline. Whereas biblical theology studies the faith claims of the sacred text, systematic theology must also consider the living tradition and doctrinal statements of the believing community. To carry out the task of organizing the Church's faith, most theologians employ other disciplines, especially philosophy, to present their work in a comprehensive and systematic way accessible to the believing community. As complex as the theological task is, however, it must remain grounded in the biblical text if it is to be faithful to its origins.

A biblical theology of the New Testament can help theologians remain faithful to the word of God by clarifying the faith claims that the New Testament makes about God's work of salvation in Christ. It explains how the New Testament presents the person of Christ, the role of the Spirit, the human condition, God's response in Christ to the human condition, the nature and mission of the Church, and the goal and purpose of God's plan. In addition to summarizing the faith claims the New Testament makes, NTT assists theologians in the task of interpreting the text within its historical context in a way that shows the relationship between history and theology.

NTT and systematic theology are not rivals, as if biblical theology were an inferior form of theology, or systematic theology a corruption of a purer biblical teaching. The theology *of* and *in* the New Testament can and ought to enrich the task of systematic theology, and the work of systematic theology should assist those engaged in biblical theology, as I will suggest below.

NTT and the Church's Proclamation

Just as NTT can assist theologians in coming to a deeper understanding of the faith claims made by the writings of the New Testament, so it can assist the Church in its pastoral work of proclaiming the gospel. What should the believing community proclaim? What is most important and central to its faith? To be sure, the believing community has proclaimed the gospel from the beginning and so knows what it must proclaim. The discipline of NTT, however, can assist the believing community by summarizing, organizing, and explaining how the New Testament presents the teaching of Jesus and the apostolic Church.

The discipline of NTT supports the preaching of the Church in several ways. First, it summarizes and explains how Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and presented himself as the Son whom the Father sent into the world to reveal the Father to the world. Second, it shows preachers how the one who proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom became the content of the gospel in the Church's proclamation of his death and resurrection. Third, it summarizes the Pauline gospel of justification, reconciliation, redemption, and salvation. Fourth, it explains how Christ is a high priest who offered the singular sacrifice of himself for the atonement of sins. Fifth, it reminds believers how the Church dealt with false teaching in the past and assures the community of faith that the final victory belongs to God. Other themes could be mentioned such as the role of the Spirit in the life of believers, the Church as the Body of Christ, and love as the fullness of the Christian life, but these are sufficient to highlight how NTT can assist the Church's proclamation of the gospel by summarizing the great themes that should be proclaimed to every generation.

NTT and the Unity of the Church

One of the most important contributions of NTT is to remind the believing community of the diverse unity of the New Testament. By "diverse unity" I mean the way in which the New Testament witnesses to different theological perspectives that are held in unity by faith in God's salvific work in Jesus Christ. We have seen that the New Testament embraces many theological traditions: the Synoptic Tradition, the Johannine Tradition, the Pauline Tradition, the Petrine Tradition, and other diverse traditions. Rather than stifle their voices, the New Testament allows each to speak in its distinctive way. The Synoptic Tradition presents Jesus as the herald of the kingdom. Hebrews presents him as a high priest, and the Johannine Tradition presents him as the revealer of the Father. By allowing these diverse voices to speak, the New Testament testifies that the mystery of God's work in Christ cannot be reduced to a single voice or a rigid unity. Rather than uniformity, the New Testament proclaims a unity that expresses itself in a diversity held together by a common faith in Jesus Christ.

The tension in which the New Testament holds its diverse theologies reminds the Church that the Body of Christ can express its unity in ways that embrace diverse expressions of faith. It reminds the Church, which

experiences division in every age, that the path to unity is found in an appreciation of diverse expressions of faith in Christ rather than in a rigid uniformity. If diverse expressions of faith exist in the New Testament, they should exist today if they are faithful to what the New Testament proclaims.

The Church Enriches New Testament Theology

Just as NTT contributes to the life of the Church, so the faith of the Church contributes to and enriches the discipline of NTT by reminding those engaged in the task of NTT how the community of faith uses the biblical text as Sacred Scripture. To explain what I mean, I will focus on the way the Church uses Scripture in its confession of faith and worship.

The Church's Faith and NTT

Although NTT is a relatively recent discipline, the believing community has been reading the New Testament theologically from the beginning. For example, when the early Church was confronted with the threat of Gnosticism, Irenaeus of Lyon wrote a massive defense of the Church's faith, *Against Heresies*, that explained how the Church interprets the Scriptures. In doing so, he produced something akin to a biblical theology that provided the Church with an overarching understanding of the biblical narrative. In a similar way, when the Church wanted to summarize the essential content of faith for those who did not have access to the Scriptures, it produced creedal formulas that summarized the content of its biblical faith. Cyril of Jerusalem writes in his catechetical instruction, "Although not everyone is able to read the Scriptures,...we have gathered together the whole of the faith in a few concise articles" (*De fide et symbolo*, 12). Finally, when theology became a more systematic discipline, it developed specific categories such as Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, anthropology, and eschatology to organize the content of the faith in ways that account for the data of Scripture and the Church's tradition.

The faith and theology of the believing community enriches the work of biblical theology by reminding exegetes how believers have interpreted, and continue to interpret, these writings. The believing community's

understanding of the story of the Bible provides biblical theology with a guide for interpreting the biblical narrative, and the categories that systematic theology has developed provide biblical theologians with a way to organize and study the data of the New Testament. Finally, the way in which theologians have wrestled with topics such as the incarnation and the resurrection provide biblical theologians with insights they might otherwise overlook. Thus, while exegetes have developed sophisticated ways of reading and interpreting the text, they can still benefit from how the believing community interprets it.

The Worship of the Church and NTT

In addition to benefiting from how the Church has reflected theologically about the text, biblical theologians can learn from how the believing community employs the sacred text in its worship inasmuch as the worship of the Church expresses the faith of the Church (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). Just as a text can be interpreted in the light of its historical and literary context, so it can be interpreted in the light of its liturgical context. Here is one example.

The Roman Catholic Church makes use of two lectionaries to proclaim the Scriptures: a Sunday Lectionary read over the course of a three-year cycle, and a Weekly Lectionary read over the course of a two-year cycle. Although neither lectionary includes the whole Bible, both present the biblical text in a way that allows the believing community to hear the story of its salvation. For example, the Sunday Lectionary enables believers to see the coherence between the Old and New Testament, to hear the Synoptic Gospels over a three-year cycle, as well as significant portions of the Pauline Epistles. The Weekly Lectionary is more comprehensive and includes extensive readings from the Old Testament that are arranged in a way that recounts the story of salvation. Furthermore, the seasons of the Church's liturgical year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time) provide a further context for hearing God's word. For example, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah plays an important role during Advent because the believing community reads it as prophecy pointing to Christ. The Johannine Letters are read during the Christmas season in the light of the incarnation. The Gospel of John is read during Lent and Easter, and the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season to highlight the new life the

community enjoys in Christ. A careful study of both lectionaries reveals they were composed with a view *to telling the story of the Church's faith as embodied in the story of Israel, the story of Jesus, and the story of the early Church*. By studying the composition of these lectionaries and paying attention to how the liturgical year provides a context for believers to hear the word of God, biblical theology enriches its understanding of the theological meaning of the text and the unity of the Bible. The introduction, which prefaces both the Sunday and weekly lectionaries, provides a rich and sophisticated rationale for the choice of texts in each lectionary and the relationship of these texts to the liturgical year.

† † † †

It is possible to write a theology of the New Testament apart from the life of the Church, but such an endeavor is a missed opportunity for the discipline of NTT and for the life of the Church. More than an academic and historical study of the Bible, NTT is a theological discipline that has the promise of enriching, and being enriched by, the life of the believing community. I have tried to highlight the theological and ecclesial nature of this discipline by pointing to the unity as well as the diversity of the theology *in and of* the New Testament. On the one hand, there are a variety of theologies *in* the New Testament because its writings were composed for diverse circumstances. On the other hand, despite this diversity there is an underlying unity since these diverse theologies witness to the same, unfathomable mystery: God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ. When NTT embraces both unity and diversity, it is of immense value to the believing community.

Notes

Introduction

1. The lecture was delivered at the University of Altdorf. For an English translation, see John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, “J. P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980): 133–58.
2. Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 2000, 2009).
3. When trying to understand what the author is communicating, it is important to remember that the meaning of a text is greater than authorial intent. Texts such as the Gospels and Epistles take on new levels of meaning when they are placed in a collection of writings such as the New Testament.
4. William Wrede, “The Task and Methods of ‘New Testament Theology,’” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, ed. Robert Morgan, SBT, Second Series 25 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1973; German original, 1897), 69–116.
5. The expression “in accordance with the scriptures,” which occurs in the New Testament (see 1 Cor 15:3–4), implies there is a unity between the writings that testify to Jesus and the Sacred Scriptures of Israel, because what happened in Christ was announced in Israel’s Scriptures, albeit in a hidden way that was only made apparent by Christ’s death and resurrection.
6. For a new edition of this classic work, see Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

Chapter One

1. While Matthew uses “the kingdom of God,” he favors “the kingdom of heaven,” which has a more Jewish resonance for him since “heaven” refers to God indirectly.
2. The Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7); the Missionary Discourse (chap. 10); the Discourse of Parables of the Kingdom (chap. 13); the Discourse on Church Life (chap. 18); and the Discourse on the return of the Son of Man (chaps. 24–25).

Chapter Three

1. While the theology of the “historical Paul” remains important, the primary concern of NTT is the theology of the letters attributed to Paul, even if Paul did not compose them. The term *Pauline Tradition* includes the theology of 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus, whose Pauline authorship is disputed. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Frank J. Matera, *God’s Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–15.

Chapter Four

1. There are other places in the New Testament where there are references to priesthood in the New Testament. The texts of 1 Pet 2:9 and Rev 1:6 highlight the priesthood of all believers, while Rev 1:13 alludes to the priesthood of Christ. In Rom 15:16, Paul speaks of his “priestly service of the gospel of God.”

Chapter Five

1. Although the main contours of the canon of the New Testament were in place by the end of the second century (the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles), there were writings whose canonical status was disputed. The Easter Letter of Bishop Athanasius in 367 laid out the shape of the canon for the New Testament in an authoritative way. For a history of the formation of the canon, see Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).
2. In the present order of the canon, the Epistle to the Hebrews occurs between the Pauline collection and the Catholic Epistles. Its present position suggests it can be read as complementing the theology of the Pauline collection, especially its

soteriology. For example, whereas Paul argues that the law could not bring about justification, Hebrews argues that the Levitical cult could not bring about the forgiveness of sins.

3. See Frank J. Matera, "A Study of Two Soteriologies: Romans and Hebrews," *Estudios Biblicos* (2018): 33–53.
4. It may well be that the Apostles Peter and John and the brothers James and Jude were not the authors of the letters ascribed to them. The ascription of these letters to them, however, suggests some relationship to them that led the early church to view them as enjoying an authority rooted in the apostolic generation.

Conclusion

1. For a purely historical approach to the theology of the New Testament, see Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2000).

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