Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

The Lord of the Rings: Intersectionality between Theology and Ecocriticism in Middle-earth

David Marshall

Nature is a key feature of Tolkien's Middle-Earth. One would find it quite impossible to separate nature from the epic Tolkien has carefully constructed. Middle-Earth contains elements of nature in its various cultures; it is the lifeblood of the world. In the instances where nature is made to be inconsequential within the story, it is made to be a grievous thing. Contemporary scholarship recognizes "environment" to be more than the preservation of the natural world, but key to our own well-being. To this end, we study Ecocriticism to discover the lasting impacts of the environment in a mental and spiritual sense. As a Christian, I can neither divorce the Christian philosophy of stewardship nor the sense of the divine spirit from the existing dialectic between humanity and its connection to nature. Tolkien, in "*The Lord of the Rings"*, takes a similar stance pertaining to the divine and our connection to nature, which is manifested in both the book and the surrounding mythos that he has written pertaining to Middle-Earth. To this end, I utilize Ecocriticism to examine Tolkien's narrative of the divine and nature, the exploitation of nature, and the effects of such exploitive forces upon culture is an assertion, within a Christian framework, that humanity must acknowledge its role as steward of nature.

Tolkien correlates humanity's connection to the divine and nature. Ecocriticism is more than "treating" the environment better. As Dr. Timothy Morton says, it is summarily connected to constructs pertaining to the psychological and sociological systems of society— it is coexistence (Morton 2). Ecocriticism and *The Lord of the Rings* go beautifully together as there exists between the two a complementary view of nature and its connection to the human spirit. This complementary union is evaluated in Chris Brawley's "The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in the Lord of the Rings",

> For ecocritics, literature is a means to a paradigm shift, a learning of a new language which places the non-human in a central position as part of the whole; this paradigm shift replaces anthropocentric worldviews with ecocentric worldviews, where the environment is viewed with respect. Fantasy's subversiveness allows for a shift from the human to the non-human and thereby allows readers to experience what is not covered by our rational modes of knowledge (Brawley 1).

Reading *The Lord of the Rings* requires the reader to set aside their anthropocentric tendencies, which prioritizes the needs of humans likely in an exploitative manner, and adopt a more ecocentric perspective which allows for a diverse population in which trees and animals are seen. Given the magical properties of Middle-Earth, this perspective is ripe with opportunity as there are many instances where both animals and trees (nonhumans) are given either personality or "being". In commenting on this opportunity, Brawley adds in his analysis of Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories",

> Fantasy has the unique ability to subvert normal categories of thought, such as those between human and non-human, in order for a fusion of new possibilities which are not available in mimetic works. Subverting normative categories permits what Tolkien terms "**Recovery,**" a renewed relationship to the earth which acknowledges its numinous essence ("On Fairy- stories" 57). This renewed relationship with the natural world seeks to view nature as a part of a community, not a commodity. (Brawley 1)

This subversion that Brawley speaks to allows for a necessary amount of play for readers to encounter new perspectives allowing for the reframing of our own worlds. Our own world does not allow us to apply personhood to trees; however, through characterization/personification, we can examine the whole of nature as a type of being. There are many instances in the book where the stewarding of nature is defined in a positive light, wherein Tolkien seems to indicate a sort of communal connection between the steward and their "charge". This communal connection, as it pertains to stewardship, is a reality where the steward and the "charge" are both owed respect in their own right, but the "charge" decidedly takes on a submissive role to the steward, and the steward takes on a more dominant role to the "charge" (each to variable degrees). In Fellowship of the Rings, Tom Bombadil may be the "lord" of the Old Forest, yet the forest has a sense of being and is untamable. Tom has made for himself a home in the midst of one of the most dangerous woods, "The grass under their feet was smooth and short, as if it had been mown or shaven. The eaves of the Forest behind were clipped, and trim as a hedge. The path was now plain before them, well-tended and bordered with stone"(Tolkien 137), yet, it is a harmonious relationship, though the woods are most distrustful:

> Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers (Tolkien 147).

Tom Bombadil, though not of the trees himself, is quite attuned to the forest, to the point where he communes in a deep spirit and tends to it as if it were his own garden, yet he would not treat the Old Forest as a plaything that he has every right to, for he knows the wood to have a sense of spirit and grants it dignity. Another such instance is shown between Gandalf and Shadowfax, while the men of Rohan would have the horse bend to their will, it will bow its head to no one (Tolkien 30). Rather than being the lord of Shadowfax, Gandalf calls him a friend (Tolkien 297); though Shadowfax is free, he would go to Gandalf if he were called (Tolkien 297). The connection between Bombadil and Gandalf is that they are higher beings with no small source of power, yet they choose not to dominate the beings below them. Tolkien's portrayal of these relationships invites readers to reconsider the role of stewardship as a divine calling—one that demands humility and reverence for the natural world. In Middle-Earth, stewardship is not defined by power or control but by the willingness to coexist and nurture, drawing upon the sacred connection between humanity, nature, and the divine. This connection mirrors the Christian philosophy of dominion tempered with care, portraying humanity's role as one of guardianship rather than exploitation.

The antithetical answer to stewardship in *The Lord of the Rings* is exploitation. Tolkien takes this moment to bend the previously discussed harmonious relationship towards a destructive and exploitive end with the character of Saruman. In his quest for power, Saruman sought to understand things mechanically by breaking them apart. The spirit of Saruman has cast a long shadow over the era of the West, imprisoning our notions of nature within the metaphor of the machine (Simpson 1). Power for power's sake is not one of the chief arguments within *The Lord of the Rings*, for the pursuit of power is fuel for great evil. Saruman's quest for power does not merely poison him, but it is a poison that seeps into anything he touches. For as long as power is his goal, he shall exploit those around him until he achieves such a consuming goal. As Treebeard states, "He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things…" (Tolkien 76). As a blue wizard, Saruman was given a level of stewardship within Middle-Earth, it is a role bestowed upon him as a Maiar to tend to the well-being of the inhabitants as well as to stand as a representative of those who sent the Maiar. However, Saruman rejected this role of cultivator, ultimately rejecting Alluvatar. This rejection does not only affect Saruman's relationship with

Alluvatar, but to the Ents (of whom he had deep connection once), and to all nations. In this, the sullied relationship between Saruman and Fangorn Forest is but a reflection of the sullied relationship between Saruman and all the races previously entrusted in his care, to which many were condemned to ruin. Saruman's mechanistic worldview, devoid of reverence or empathy for the natural world, leads him to devastate the once-vibrant Isengard. The lush greenery surrounding the fortress is replaced with barren pits and industrial machinery, symbolizing the consequences of exploitative practices on the environment.

The effects of such exploitive forces drive disharmony between humankind and nature. "Tolkien's fascination with trees makes it all but impossible to read his work without the feeling that there is an underlying moral or message, a message that is most frequently suggested to be a critique of the consequences of industrialization" (O'Byrne 2). The deforestation of the Old Forest and the attack on Fangorn Forest further reveal the cost of such exploitation. The Ents, ancient beings who embody the spirit of the woods, lament the loss of their kin and the destruction of their home. Their grief and eventual retaliation highlight the inherent imbalance created when nature is treated as a mere resource to be consumed. This point is further driven by this excerpt from "The Fellowship of the Ring", "It was not called the Old Forest without reason, for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords" (Tolkien 147). In 1972, Tolkien connected the dangerous nature of the Old Forest to the past deeds of men, stating the trees of the Old Forest were "hostile to two legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries… [and that] in all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies" (Tolkien 419). Ultimately, the exploitation of nature in *The Lord of the Rings* is not only an environmental tragedy but also a profound cultural and spiritual loss. Through the lens of Ecocriticism, Saruman becomes a representation of modern humanity's failure to uphold its sacred responsibility to the earth, a failure that disrupts the balance between humans and the natural world. Tolkien's work reminds us that nature, when exploited, exacts a heavy toll—not just in ecological terms, but in the erosion of the values that define humanity's highest purpose.

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Before

Michael Vass

Abstract

The poem "Before" is infused with references to epic poetry as journeys to God, bringing the ideas of glory and renown back to the root, Him. I have enjoyed reading epic poems as they address heroism and greatness, but the most a Christian can hope for is to be faithful with what they are given, even if it seems unimportant. I hope this poem inspires readers to reflect on epic themes and how God can be seen through them.

***Keywords*:** epic, poetry, Christian hope

Before, before Beowulf was nevermore.
Before the glutted Grendel's arm he tore.

Before, before the laurel poets wore,
Before Eros' poison settled the score.

Before, before he shot suitors galore,
Before Calypso bound Noman on shore.

Before, before Homer's epic of war.
Before by gods the heroes fought and swore.

Before, before Milton's Adam thought more
Before the bitter bite for Eve he tore.

Before, before the skies outstretched Atlas bore.
Before me now the one that I adore.

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See The Word

Emma Osborn

Artist Statement

I have been a Christian all my life and know that God uses people to share the open invitation of His love, and I wanted to be one of those people. My time since high school has been spent studying photography and American Sign Language (ASL), not only to become proficient in both but so that I can become a light for Christ in these areas. I can look through a camera lens or communicate through another language, and both actions lead me to see the diversity and beauty of God's creation and people. When I learned that photography was not one of the mediums Deaf artists used within a genre called Deaf View Image Art (De'VIA), I wondered why and started looking for any photographic work of ASL on the internet. However, I could not find anything and took this as a challenge to find my own methods of capturing the feeling and movement of sign language with a camera. In the years since, I have become very proficient in the long exposure and light painting techniques that have allowed me to bring about this body of work. Every step of the way, I have learned to adjust settings through trial after trial to perfect the technique. Whenever a new step forward works, I catch myself jumping up and down in pure excitement, thinking ahead to when Deaf and hearing people alike can see the final work and God can use it to bring people into His loving family.

Keywords: *Photography, Long Exposure, American Sign Language, Deaf.*

Introduction

In photography, an artist can use long exposure techniques to capture movement in ways unique to the typical, quick-shutter look of static photos. In my series, I use these techniques in order to capture the movement and feeling of American Sign Language better than stationary photos would. Image 1, "Philippians 4:8," is a collage of signs which become the translated message of the verse, which was chosen and translated by the man who signed it. Austin Cary is Deaf and an active participant at the Grove Deaf Church in Riverside, CA. I met him after attending a service there and watched him lead worship, from which I saw his heart for Christ and his church. Although it may seem like an inconsequential church, Deaf churches where the message of Christ is taught and exemplified in their native language of ASL are a necessity for the Deaf community– and there is a drastic lack of them. According to statistics that the pastor mentioned the day I visited, "only 2 to 4% of Deaf people claim to know Jesus as their Savior and fewer than 8 out of every 100 deaf people in the US attend church. Fewer than 4 out 100 claim a person relationship with Jesus." As we know from the Bible, Jesus frequently ministered to and healed the deaf and blind–not because they were "defective," but because no one in society at that time would help them. This project is an opportunity to give access to gospel messages in a photographic medium in an effort to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Image 1

"Philippians 4:8"

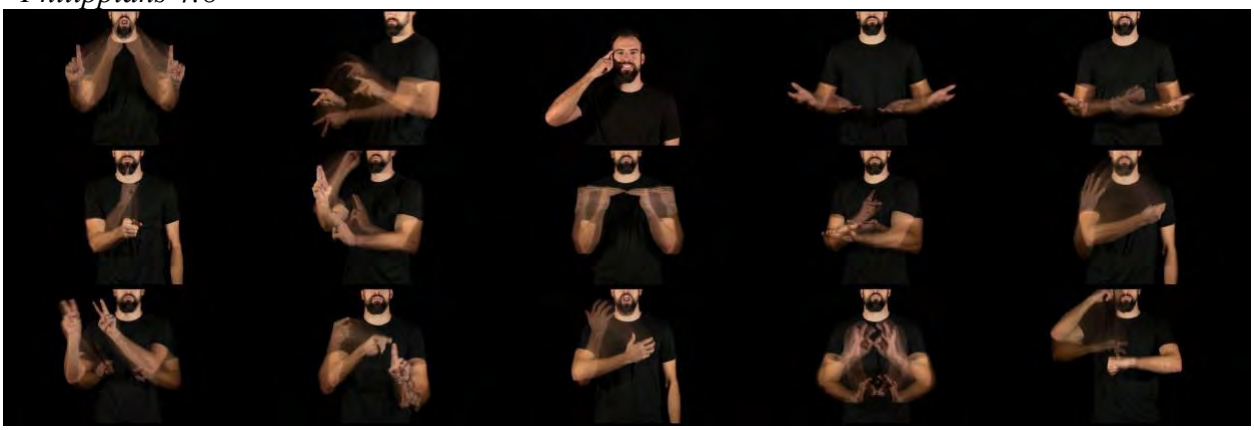

Image 2

"JESUS"

Image 3

"SPIRIT"

Conclusion

This work is meant to inspire you as much as it has provided continued inspiration for me, both artistically and spiritually. When Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to go to all nations, that included the deaf community who are apart of our nation. They are so often excluded from a lack of willingness to learn their language and teach using it. Austin has had the blessing of living near a deaf church with a wonderful bible smart deaf pastor who builds a community of deaf Christians. I hope this project can inspire both the deaf and hearing to share God's message to all of God's people. So I urge you brothers and sisters, think about such things and do not be afraid to share them with those around you.

At its heart, this work is meant to inspire the viewer as much as it has inspired me, both artistically and spiritually. While Christ followers are intrinsically aware of Jesus' final commandment, to make disciples of all nations, we as a community far too frequently forget to extend this invitation to those we feel are "different," even within our own nation. Deaf people are so often excluded from these circles due to a lack of willingness to learn their language and meet them using it. Austin may have had the blessing of living near a Deaf church who builds up a community of Deaf Christians, but so many are not so lucky. It is my hope that this project inspires both deaf and hearing people to share God's message, and so I urge you, brothers and sisters, to think about such things–and not be afraid to share them with those around you.

Communion

Michael Vass

Abstract

The poem, "Communion," comes from my Christian experience studying denominations. It works through allusions to various Christian traditions, as the Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist churches have different views of its meaning and effectiveness. I hope it encourages people to reflect on the sacrifice of Christ and His second coming.

***Keywords*:** Christian traditions, communion, sacrifice

Abstain again, Attend again:
Broken body for bread,
Chalice dripping for the Christian,
Devine one three days dead,
Eucharist everyone else eats.
Forsake instead of feed:
God's grape-graven presence that greets,
Healing for gnawing need.
Is not this image enough of
Jesus; of just Jesus' love.

On Doing Nothing

Richard Decker

Abstract

I believe in God's providence over my life, but this poem emerged from a question I believe all Christians ask even when they are aware of His providence: "God, did I make the right choices?" I am also a firm believer that good literature can lead readers closer to Truth, and this poem is a result of its speaker seeking to determine who he is meant to be in Christ and what to do if he discovers he is not. May this poem also provide readers with a space to ask similar questions and, ultimately, find their answers in Christ.

***Keywords*:** providence, Christ, questions

". . . so that at least he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, 'I now see that I spent most of my life in doing *neither* what I ought *nor* what I liked.' . . . And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man's best years . . . ."[1]

-Screwtape to Wormwood, *The Screwtape Letters*

I'm so afraid
that I will come to find
in my lifetime
I neither did what I had hoped
nor what I was meant to do
that I will come to find
I simply came and went
like a dandelion seed
swept away by a short breath
landing on a sidewalk
several feet from the grass

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters (with "Screwtape Proposes a Toast")*, in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics*, first paperback ed. (HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 219.

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"Get in Touch with Mother": *Future Home of the Living God* and a New Leper Village

Laura Underwood

Future Home of the Living God by Louise Erdrich clearly establishes themes of total control and the restriction of women's autonomy through the course of the novel. Though there is limited scholarship available, critics have read Louise Erdrich's novel as a commentary on proleptic mourning and relationality (Martínez-Falquina), or to exemplify the importance of Native authors writing about their experiences (Mootz). These scholars interpret the novel as a metaphor for an overlying connectedness, either between the author and audience or the characters with each other. While this analysis is worthwhile, I fill a gap in the research by highlighting the isolation in the novel, specifically as it relates to the heavy surveillance present throughout. This society allegedly elevates women, but actually isolates them through oppressive surveillance technologies to maintain control. Read in light of Foucault's concept of the "leper" and the "panopticon" from *Discipline and Punish,* Erdrich's novel shows that Foucaultian power structures further oppress marginalized groups such as women of color.

Michel Foucault theorizes about established structures of power used to monitor and exclude people that a society perceives as threatening. Within this metaphor, he compares leprous people to the marginalized and excluded in modern society. Medieval leprous people were sent to live outside of the village and mark themselves as unclean for the benefit of the group. Foucault argues that this enables oppression, saying, "On the one hand, the lepers are treated as plague victims; the tactics of individualizing disciplines are imposed on the excluded; and, on the other hand, the universality of disciplinary controls makes it possible to brand the 'leper' and to bring into play against him the dualistic mechanisms of exclusion" (Foucault 199). This concept creates an "us versus them" mentality to push certain people out of society. In modern day, power structures such as religion, medicine, or surveillance systems are used to maintain binaries and eliminate threats. In *Future Home of the Living God,* the people in power tell the women that they are a part of the village, working together to outcast the "leper," in this case the de-evolution issue as a whole. In actuality, the women are themselves the lepers, and the people in power are gaining their trust in order to get what they want. In the metaphor of the leper and the village, the village wants the leper gone. In a revival of this idea, the village of *Future Home* wants to utilize their lepers to develop a vaccine: to counter the de-evolution of the human race by birthing more babies with the same genetic makeup as from before this de-evolution.

One way that the government attempts this measure is through heavy surveillance, akin to Foucault's Panopticon. In the Panopticon, prisoners are made to think that a guard surveys all of the prisoners at once, "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201). Put simply, it prevents anyone from doing anything wrong because they are constantly afraid of being caught. This model is used to eliminate threats and prune a society so only the most well behaved succeed. In addition, it calls for self-policing such as turning themselves in if they pose a threat to their community.

Foucault's society is organized around a scapegoat, where a person is named a threat and everyone else gives roles out in order to eliminate that threat. The book of Leviticus defines a scapegoat as a goat used as "a sin offering…presented alive before the Lord to make atonement

over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel" (*English Standard Version,* Leviticus 16:8-10). The animal of sacrifice was burdened with the sins of the people, then sent into the wilderness to represent those sins being cast out from the village. It was meant as performance: the members of society watch an innocent animal pay for their sins as they will watch Christ do the same. Foucault identifies the folly of scapegoating in *Discipline and Punish,* saying that the spectacle of chain gangs showed "the scapegoat that is struck as it is chased away… the play of truth and infamy, the procession of notoriety and shame, invective against the guilty who have been unmasked and, on the other hand, the joyous avowal of crimes" (Foucault 259). People blamed for the actions of others, often due to their expedience, are not the only ones hurt. The society that blames them becomes polar: hating the wrongdoings of the weak, but at the same time openly claiming crimes of their own with no backlash. Although the pregnant women in the novel are not blamed for the genetic de-evolution, they have been burdened with solving it through governmental use of their bodies without their consent, taking on the role of the replacement scapegoat in the revival of this idea.

When searching for the Panopticon and scapegoat in Erdrich's novel, it is clear that Mother fulfills the former. Readers see this after Phil smashes the computer and it still pleads, "'We don't seem to be communicating very well…Please get in touch with Mother. Please get in touch,' it says, in pieces on the floor" (Erdrich 186), and the line immediately following, "They have us," (Erdrich 189), once she is taken. Cedar being captured immediately after denying the computer information proves that it has a way of surveying the women in order to maintain control over them. Women will not be able to escape or hide - even through an unusable computer, Mother will know where they are. This is not the only source of surveillance in the novel. The government clearly believes that a higher power surveys them, evident by the streets being named after Bible verses (Erdrich 158), and the title sign predicting the landing place of God (Erdrich 19). The hospital clearly views God as the ultimate panopticon to inspire self-policing. Cedar reflects that "It isn't hard to get a Bible in this place. Even the Slider approves my request and smiles thinly as she hands over The Zondervan Compact Reference Bible" (Erdrich 215-216). This is a part of the self-policing authority framework - for people to regulate themselves based on the rules laid out by the Bible. Phil also seems to believe that a higher power ultimately surveys them, which readers discover when Cedar said she "asked who was in charge. Phil said God. I said that was the most terrifying thing I'd ever heard and he said, 'Yeah, me too. That's why I bought the Bushmaster'" (Erdrich 137). The government surveys its people through drones, as well. Cedar attempts to hide from one, saying, "Then something flickers around me, a tiny bird, clicking and whirring. And a transparent oval floats past my clasped fingers… [I] keep the blanket around me and fall stiffly into the car. I already know what's happened. I've been seen" (Erdrich 359). The society of Erdrich's novel is always watching, and always for the purpose of regulating the population's behavior.

However, surveillance finds its root in places far deeper than the sentient computer or religious beliefs of the characters. Stephanie Hammer reflects on sci-fi technological absence in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* which holds strong similarities to Erdrich's novel, saying, "this apparent technological absence… is not what it appears to be. Instead, a very different kind of technology is at work here-insidious because it is at once invisible and all pervasive-and that is, very simply, the technology of power which Michel Foucault has called discipline" (Hammer 45). Though this commentary was made on Atwood's novel, the same reigns true for *Future Home.* Hammer goes on to say that *The Handmaid's Tale* and novels like it "warn us of the imperceptible technology of power, of the subtle domination of women by men, and of our

unconscious imprisoning of each other and ourselves by ourselves" (Hammer 47). The issue of dystopia is not that an outside threat tunnels in, but rather that humans continually exercise power over the weak in their own burrow. Ultimately, the topic of discourse is inconsequential so long as maintaining the argument also maintains an imbalance of power. Foucault says that the prison riots of his time are about "it's very materiality as an instrument and vector of power; it is this whole technology of power over the body, that the technology of the 'soul' - that of the educationalists, psychologists and psychiatrists - fails either to conceal or to compensate, for the simple reason that it is one of its tools" (Foucault 30). Foucault argues that discipline, punishment, and surveillance transcend from the school yard to the jail yard; it is an invisible technology that perpetuates imbalance. Though *Future Home* is not sci-fi in the way of having advanced technology, it remains dystopian by showing Foucaultian structures of power that control society in much the same way that technology would control a sci-fi world. Though actual technology, artificial intelligence, and religious power structures are at play, the most dangerous technology in the novel is the imbalance of power.

The patriarchal society in *Future Home* cycles between elevating and isolating women in order to oppress them. First, the women are given a special role that only they can fulfill to make them feel important to the cause. This is seen when Mother first requests that Cedar turn herself in, saying, "They failed to destroy Mother. I will always be here for you... I wonder if you have the courage to save the country we love. We need you to be a Patriot. We need you to volunteer. If you are a woman, if you are pregnant, go to any of our Future Home Reception Centers" (140-141). In addition, even calling herself Mother is meant to invoke a familial sense of loyalty that might make the women want to come out of hiding. Mother claims to *need* the women, not for herself but for the betterment of the nation as a whole. When in the Stillwater facility, the staff says, "Women are powerful… women are heroes, Superheroes, in fact. I care about each and every one of you one hundred percent and forever" (Erdrich 397). This manipulation through the form of compliments and love bombing is an attempt to distract and sway the women who were just kidnapped.

They also appeal to women of color's maternal instincts, emphasizing the priorities to preserve the well-being of the babies. Cedar hears this sentiment targeted specifically towards women of color on the radio, when the woman on the other end said that they "took the leftovers. The embryos not labeled Caucasian. We're going to have them all and keep them all. All are sacred" (141). The promise to be there for the women listening is a manipulation tactic to make them feel as though the people in power have the women's best interests in mind. These embryos are clearly not prioritized, even being referred to as the embryos that were left over after the Caucasian babies were taken. This is another example of the government cycling between elevating and isolating women of color. They first demean women of color's role by prioritizing the white babies, but also assure the women that all are sacred. It is clear that this manipulation works in some respects because of the role of Bernice. When meeting Bernice, Cedar said that she was "either…a very good person and incredibly deluded, or else she is completely evil" (Erdrich 194). Cedar sees Bernice, another woman of color, as having to either be evil or stupid in order to side with the government. Her response shows a tendency to see women of color as a monolithic group in their response to governmental oppression.

However, if the women do not fall for this false illusion of choice, they are forced to participate in the leper role to find a solution regardless. When hiding for their freedom, the women are forced into isolation in much the same way as Foucault's original leper. Foucault says that the hatred of the leper causes the village to put their differences aside and divide roles up amongst

themselves in order to outcast them effectively. As Foucault explains, “Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, and organization in-depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power” (Foucault 198). This method is used in the novel by the new government, when Phil points out that “They’re offering rewards now for anyone who turns in a pregnant neighbor, acquaintance, family member, whatever. There’s billboards. Ads up on lampposts. It’s true” (Erdrich 133). When it becomes clear that the leper cannot be convinced that they are needed, the village must work together to hunt them down. Cedar is caught and taken to the hospital to be used as a womb warrior. In a revival of the leper/village analogy, where the leper is used as a vaccine, the new government switches between elevating the women’s importance and roles in the new society, to then removing their autonomy in a total show of power. This ultimately leads to further oppression of women of color and further advancement of those already in power.

The novel has a clear theme of the restriction of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. Dorothy Roberts contests that women of color are often portrayed “only as victims of population control policies. It assumes that…women of color play no part in the politics of reprogenetics, except by their exclusion or exploitation” (Roberts 785). Society often depicts women of color solely as victims of policies related to controlling population growth. Andrea Smith came to a similar conclusion, when a woman she knew was asked what she thought about reproductive rights and she answered, “‘Who cares about reproductive rights; we don't have any rights, period’” (Smith 135), Smith followed this anecdote by saying:

> What her response suggests is that a reproductive justice agenda must make the dismantling of capitalism, white supremacy, and colonialism central to its agenda, and not just as principles added to organizations' promotional material designed to appeal to women of color, with no budget to support making these principles a reality (Smith 135)

The culprit behind women of color being targeted by the pro-life and pro-choice movements alike is not the women, but capitalism, white supremacy, and colonialism. Ultimately, this reduces them to victims rather than allowing them to play a role in shaping reproductive politics. This is reflected throughout the novel as women are not trusted to take control of their own reproduction.

Erdrich’s novel shows that these theories and power structures are not effective at maintaining order or safety for marginalized groups. Women of color are not only suffering themselves, but as the leper in the village, they are forced to bear the burden of others suffering. Readers see this when Phil returns and reveals he was tortured into revealing Cedar’s location. Cedar reflects on Phil’s admission of sacrifice, saying “Someone in this world will always be suffering on your behalf. If it comes your time to suffer, just remember. Someone suffered for you. That is what taking on a cloak of human flesh is all about, the willingness to hurt for another human being” (Erdrich 376). Not only are the women stripped of *their* bodily autonomy; they must also commiserate for the people tortured on their behalf. She explicitly connects this to the pain of childbirth. Rather than finding a way to terminate the pregnancy, she chooses to continue her pregnancy and suffer on her child's behalf, even framing it in religious language like the incarnation. With Cedar’s initiative, it is clear that Erdrich believes women of color should be agents in their own reproduction, rather than passive victims that are acted upon. The Foucaultian model of society does not leave room for the leper to respond, Erdrich’s novel does.

Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* shows that Foucaultian structures of power oppress women of color. By examining the Panopticon and the leper and the village, a clear parallel appears. The women in the novel represent the leper, and the society is the village that

outcasts them. However, in this revival of the Foucaultian idea, the women are burdened with the responsibility of saving the village rather than fully being exiled. The Panopticon is clear within the story as well, with the women constantly being surveyed by technology, artificial intelligence, religion, and the government. Not only are the women of color in the novel forced to be the solution to this society's reproductive apocalypse, but they must also shoulder the burden of knowing that if they do not comply, others will suffer on their behalf. The importance of this analysis lies in the modern connotations of reproductive politics, mass over-surveillance, and scapegoating women of color. The novel, through Foucaultian power structures, reflects real life power structures that are used to oppress women of color.

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Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

The Mind of the Writer

Joseph Young

Writing is not only an act of expression, a means to get a grade, or a way to be understood; it is a unique form of creativity. Being creative is a foundational characteristic exclusive to humans, and I believe it is because humans are image-bearers of God. Since He first created, and therefore, is creative by nature, it is a wonderful privilege to create out of an expression of our shared attributes with God. I hope to help students see how their assignments and papers can have an impact and relevance outside of getting a grade by analyzing famous Christian writers: C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers. Both authors share my beliefs that writing is a way to exercise faith and worship God by using the creative capacities we all have. Sayers and Lewis give guidelines in their works, *The Mind of the Maker* and "On Stories," on how Christian faith and creative writing intersect to make well-crafted stories and god-honoring artists: while Lewis advocates writing stories with complexity and layers of meaning, Sayers talks about portraying the world as it really is. Both authors' perspectives could foster greater meaning and dedication to the craft of writing among students.

C.S. Lewis strongly advocates stories that go beyond the superficial and exciting. He challenges writers to intentionally create things that can truly be impactful and more substantive than cliché action, drama, or fantasy stories. In his essay "On Stories," Lewis allegorizes his belief that stories shouldn't be merely exciting. Using wine as the story, and the alcohol is the excitement of reading it, he explains that excitement is not the primary reason *good* stories are enjoyed: "If a man loves wine and yet hates one of the strongest wines, then surely the sole source of pleasure in wine cannot be the alcohol" (Lewis 7). There is something more than excitement that a story must contain for it to be deemed good, according to Lewis. A good story should not be deemed good simply because it is exciting; there must be something deeper that it contains. Scholar Peter Shakel agrees with this idea in his paper "Imagination and the Arts of C.S. Lewis," where he writes that "the imaginative appeal of story begins with . . . excitement" (54). The word "begins" implies that excitement is not the end goal of a story; stories, when reread, still contain excitement. However, "On Stories" contains a distinction: it is a different quality of surprise (Lewis 17). This second read-through gets readers to think rather than to solely experience what they are reading, where Lewis says that the re-reader can discover the surprises that were surprising during the first read-through and enjoy them more fully because they know what is coming (Lewis 17-18). Good stories should have complexities that warrant re-reading, so the reader can look for and enjoy the surprises in literature again and again and experience something that the story was designed to do. Likewise, the article "C.S. Lewis, Evangelism, and the Role of the Story" explains the purpose of stories: Rebecca Hans notes that the main thing a piece of art calls readers to do is to get out of the way, stop, listen, and observe (qtd. in Dyrness 9). Good art should be thought-provoking as well as observably beautiful. These things are what Lewis believes make for good stories because they add depth to the story rather than produce a predictable yet exciting story. Not only do stories have to go beyond the exciting, but they also need to have messages and/or content applicable to all ages.

Lewis asserted that good stories must be appreciated and applicable to children and to adults. Can stories really be impactful and worth reading and analyzing if they only apply to a specific age group? Lewis seems to think not, as "On Stories" reflects multiple times: "No book is

really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally [or more so] worth reading at the age of fifty" (15). If children are the only audience that can take away ideas, morals, or enjoyment from a book, then there is something more transcendent and profound missing from it that the adult reader notices. This shows a story's lack of depth because it does not speak of truths and realities that a broader age group can recognize. Lewis states that a "mature [literary] palate will probably not much care for *crème de menthe* [an alcoholic beverage]; but it ought still to enjoy bread and butter and honey" (15). It is not enough for Lewis to say that stories are intellectually stimulating or novel, but they can speak to the child, the mature, and the child-like nature within mature readers. By making stories that can be universally accessible and applicable, the writer has done something truly challenging because children and adults are so different. But both of them share a commonality of desires and dreams that a good story can and should speak to, which both age groups can derive enjoyment, ideas, or comfort from. This type of depth means that the writer must be mindful of how the reader's perceptions of the story's content can and will change as they mature; this is a difficult yet worthwhile pursuit.

Lewis finally points out that good stories add depth by touching on the divine. Schakel articulates this idea as the "Mythopoeic" which is the "making of stories that involve the marvelous or supernatural" (62). Good writing transcends the normal, the mundane, and the worldly. Good stories should reflect the eternality of human beings. Furthermore, Lewis's ideology about the connection between story, imagination, and faith is articulated in the essay, "C. S. Lewis & Christological Prefigurement" by P. H. Brazier, where he states that stories "can under certain circumstances be an oracle through which God gives some understanding of a revelatory nature." There is no shortage of imagination exerted in writing and reading good stories. Lewis would, most likely, agree with this idea of the imagination through stories as a means by which God can call people to Himself or testify to His existence. The article continues that "[Lewis asserted] that God used . . . fallen human imagination . . . to communicate some sort of intimation of God's salvific actions: the prefiguring images/myths were . . . pneumatologically given, not humanly invented." Lewis states that stories depicting the divine can be entertaining and a witness to God. This implies that imagination is a gift of God, even if we are fallen creatures, and that God can use it to bring glory to himself and to spread the truth about the reality of a spiritual realm, God, and man's depravity. These truths add complexity and value to a story and provide entertainment if done well. This is an incredible responsibility that Christian artists are called to consider and incorporate into their works. Interestingly, Sayers agrees with this idea of storytelling, but she also believes in not reducing a story to a sermon.

Sayers also advocates for acknowledging the responsibility to storytelling as a Christian: most notably, depicting the world accurately by giving the devil his due. In her non-fiction work *The Mind of the Maker,* she touches on the significance of creating in relation to Christians and their identity as created beings by God. This privilege, to Sayers, in *The Mind of the Maker,* brings with it a responsibility of communicating truth. She states that a writer cannot acknowledge God's existence without acknowledging the devil's existence (53). Sayers is concerned with making a strong story by accurately portraying good *and* evil, and she calls Christians, who know intimately of God and Satan, to write about both. Discounting one and highlighting the other in isolation can lead to a pragmatic yet inaccurate picture of the world and human experience. Sayers believes that depicting the malevolent power sin has in lives and on the world, through a detective work, for example, becomes a more lasting and impactful Christian witness than an apologetics paper on sin (p 8), says Christine Fletcher, in her paper "Dorothy Sayers and the Responsibilities of the Christian Writer". There is nothing wrong with Christian apologetics, and it is a vital tool to

understand the doctrine of Scripture, but Sayers suggests that fiction allows readers to vicariously *experience* the weight and pain of life in a sinful world. To do the opposite and portray the world inaccurately to Christians and unbelievers would be a disservice and a lie that can only lead to frustration. Both believers and non-believers feel the weight of living in a broken world every day. Christian writers, therefore, should not deny this fact but acknowledge it and even depict it. This is not to glorify it, but to empathize with the audience and accept this reality. Once this is done, the writer can then speak truth from God —implicitly or explicitly— to a searching heart for hope.

Sayers also believes in the artist's honor and responsibility in sharing in the role of creator with God. According to the *English Standard Version Bible*, in the beginning, Jesus, the Word of God, describes how the world was made through Him. (John 1. 3). It is not insignificant that the first act God performed was the act of creation. Additionally, readers see this promised act of creation again at the end of Revelation, where the Lord Jesus promises He is "making all things new." (21. 5). The first and closest to last action of the Christ is to create because it is part of His nature. And because humans are made in the image of God, they share some of his attributes, such as knowing good and evil, self-awareness, and free will. Sayers states in *The Mind of the Maker* that God and man share another common characteristic: humans are the only creatures that can and want to make things (22). Sayers believed that writers should and do create not to get money or fame but because it is an intrinsic quality of humans. How much more should Christians write, create, and build new worlds out of nothing, if not to at least share in God's nature? This is a profound privilege that God has given to humanity, but Sayers seems to challenge the Christian writer to a higher artistic and integrous standard.

Sayers challenges Christians to write with integrity. She notes that if Christians are to be good stewards of their words, they should not merely write to please an audience or to half-heartedly put out work to gain money. Christians can and should be mindful of the content and images they write about. Especially because words have great power, and because Christians know the reality of the world better than unregenerate man, they have a responsibility to use their words carefully. Sayers writes, in a letter within the paper, *Dorothy Sayers and the Responsibility of the Christian Writer,* by Christine Fletcher (qtd. From Sayers) the following:

> To his charge that she is the 'itch' to write with her Christian duty, she reminds him that with the exception of The Mind of the Maker, 'everything, almost, I have written has been a commissioned job.' To accept any job honestly, she must ask, if she has any truth 'asking to be communicated.' If not, then neither the money nor the audience nor anything else should influence her, or any other artist, to accept the job. (5)

This is an integral perspective of Christian writing. Christians are called to do everything to the glory of God. Christians, like Sayers, are to think of their artistic ability as from God. Because of this, like any gift received from God, it should be managed and used in a way that glorifies Him. Fletcher goes on to (qt. Sayers) that Sayers' aim of writing was to "tell that story to the best of my ability, within the medium at my disposal—in short to make as good a work of art as I could." (8). Whatever Christians do, God calls them to do it well and in a way that glorifies Him. This is crucial for the Christian writer, because it allows them to shift their target audience, ultimately, from people to God. This will enable them to be more courageous writers and dedicated to their craft. This includes being mindful and discerning about the impact, content, and influence of the words a writer uses. It encourages them to write excellently in their craft and their content. For Lewis and Sayers, all of these things can better help writers approach their work more methodically.

In their literary works, "On Stories" and *The Mind of the Maker,* Lewis and Sayers both communicate their thoughts about how Christian faith can influence writing and the writer. This is

seen through Lewis's beliefs that good stories should be complex, where the story contains more than excitement, and is reflective of the divine, while Sayers states that good writing helps the writer glorify God, because writing allows the author to depict the world as it really is –giving the devil his due-- without dismissing the benevolence of God, and to partake in God's creative nature. Understanding these connections can help readers to appreciate what good art can be, and it can help writers develop their craft with intentionality and joy that their work can have an impact for the Kingdom of God.

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The House Remembers

Kalena Yanez

Abstract

My Christian worldview shapes how I approach and view Gothic literature and horror, not as genres that glorify darkness, but as spaces that reveal it and make room for honest confrontation with pain. Trauma is often central in these stories, and I believe faith allows us to explore that brokenness while still pointing toward hope and healing. My work embraces the shadows not to celebrate them, but to acknowledge the reality of suffering—and to affirm that, even in the darkest places, redemption is possible.

Keywords**:** Gothic, brokenness, shadows

The walls do not speak,
but they echo.
Each floorboard holds a breath,
trapped like a whisper never voiced—
a memory buried beneath centuries
of polite silence and peeled wallpaper.
There is always a house
in Gothic stories.
It groans not from age,
but from the weight of what it saw.
A locked room,
a shadow moving where no one stands,
the wind howling like a wound.
This is trauma,
dressed in velvet,
framed in candlelight,

Screaming quietly down long halls.
We write these stories

because sometimes the monsters
look too much like us.
Because grief walks beside us,
and we need a name for its footsteps.
We craft ghosts
because we are haunted.
By the things we survived.
By what we buried
that still claws at the floor.
Horror knows what it’s like
to carry pain in the body,
to wake up with dread
in the marrow of your bones.
And yet—
it speaks.
It says: you are not alone
in your terror.
There are others

who build cathedrals of shadow
just to survive the light.
And when the sun rises,
it does not undo the dark.
But it tells us
we lived through it.

Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

The Greco-Roman Socio-Cultural Background Of The Early Church: A Historical Analysis Of Acts 16:16-21

Delaney Donahue

Abstract

Like any historical writing, understanding the historical context of the book of Acts is critical to understanding both the author's intended message and what it communicated to its original audience. This analysis acknowledges the historical context of Acts 16:16-21 – socially, culturally, and economically – to assess the passage's greater theological implications. Through an examination of relevant socio-economic and cultural elements, including Hellenistic influences, traditional beliefs about spirituality, and the complex relationship between slavery and the economy, the passage is better understood in its original context. As a result, the reader more accurately concludes the text's implications of exorcism in Jesus' name and the economic opposition faced by the early church.

Keywords*: Acts of the Apostles, Book of Acts, Acts 16:16-21, Greco-Roman Historical Background, Roman Slavery, Jewish Spirituality, Roman Slavery and Economy*

ACTS EXEGESIS PAPER

It is true that many Christians today experience Christianity in a more convenient way than ever before: the Bible App holds hundreds of different translations and devotionals at one's fingertips, church worship services are streamed online, and a simple internet search provides access to the culmination of over two thousand years of theological study. Modern Christians do, however, experience (at least) one disadvantage over the early church: the early church received and wrestled with the writings of the New Testament within a society that either closely resembled or was the original context in and audience to which it was written. Because modern society is vastly different than that of the early church, Christians today often misinterpret or simply miss the theological implications of the texts they study because they are not accustomed to the socio-economic and historical contexts in which they were written. Concepts and implications that, to a first-century audience, could not have been more clear instead seem cryptic to an audience in the twenty-first century. Specifically, the modern church lacks the experience and understanding of Greco-Roman beliefs about spirituality that first-century Christians lived amongst, informed by their first-hand experiences of Jesus' exorcism miracles and proximity to Jewish tradition. Likewise, the modern church does not exist in an economy structured around and sustained by slavery, while this was commonplace for the first-century church. Instead, the contemporary understanding of slavery is heavily informed by American history, rather than the Greco-Roman context that is critical to understanding the dynamic between slavery and the economy. As such, this analysis examines Acts 16:16-21 and its historical implications to frame it in its first-century context and clarify what the passage's underlying implications communicated to its original audience.

Section 1: The Passage in Context

The book of Acts is the fifth book in the New Testament canon and the second volume in the greater work of Luke-Acts (composed by Luke, a physician and companion of Paul). The book's primary theme is outlined in Jesus' instruction to the disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit and thus be empowered to bear witness to his resurrection throughout Judea, Samaria, and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth (1:8). The events of Acts 16:16-24 occur while the apostles minister "to the ends of the earth," on Paul's second missionary journey.

After Paul and Barnabas separate in Antioch (15:36-40), Paul takes Silas with him through Syria and Cilicia (15:41). Having passed through Galatia and been "forbidden by the Holy Spirit" to preach in Asia (16:6), Paul had a vision calling him to preach in Macedonia (16:9-10). Paul and his companions arrived in Philippi, and without a synagogue to go to on the Sabbath, they found what the text calls a "place of prayer" (v.13) outside the city gate (16:11-13). It was there that they met Lydia, the "seller of purple goods" (16:14), who believed the Gospel and was baptized (16:15).

The following four verses are the subject of this analysis: For several days, they were followed and harassed by a slave girl possessed by a demonic spirit (v.16), who announced them as "servants of the Most High God" (v.17). Paul, annoyed (v.18), cast the spirit out of her. Her holders, perceiving that she could no longer earn them profit by fortune-telling, dragged Paul and Silas before the Roman authorities (v.19) and stated their presence, as Jews, was "disrupt[ive]" to the city of Philippi (v.20) because of the "customs" they practice (v.21).

There is much to unpack here: They were there to proclaim the Gospel and serve God, so why was Paul "annoyed" by her announcement of their identity? Was he justified in using the power of the name of Christ to perform the exorcism on this basis? Why exactly were the girl's

holders upset by the exorcism? If the girl's holders were upset by the loss of profit specifically, why did they accuse Paul and Silas on the basis of them being Jewish? Did Paul understand the offense he was committing?

Because this passage serves as the foundation for Paul and Silas' imprisonment (16:23-24) and the conversion of the Philippian jailer (16:25-34), understanding the cultural and economic implications within the text is critical to understanding the narrative of Acts 16 and the overarching narrative and themes of Acts as a whole.

Section 2: Background Analysis

There are two underlying socio-economic elements in Acts 16:16-21 that Luke's original intended audience would have naturally understood. First is the nature and reality of Greco-Roman spirituality in light of Greek Hellenistic cultural influence and Roman political authority. This section first seeks to establish this spiritual context to explain aspects such as the "spirit of divination" (v.16). The second underlying element is the nature and reality of slavery and the economic implications of slavery under the authority of the Roman Empire; this section attempts to explain the relevant socio-cultural understanding of slavery and its relevance to and relationship with the economy.

Greco-Roman Spirituality

Over four hundred years before Paul and Silas' arrest, Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia expanded the reign of the Greek Empire and, thus, Greek influence. This expansion of Greek authority included the intentional integration of Greek culture, known as Hellenism.[1] Hellenism accounts for the Greek-style cities built throughout the region, the spread of the Greek language, and "to some extent," the adoption of the "Greek way of life."[2] This included Greek ideas of spirituality.

While the early church certainly experienced this Greek cultural influence, they were subject to Rome's political authority. This dual influence is described in the era of "Roman Hellenism," which "formed the background of the New Testament."[3] The religious landscape surrounding the early church was polytheistic, with each deity fulfilling "different roles and duties."[4] This "non-exclusive" nature of paganism resulted in increased interest in "divine deeds and power" rather than "divine personalities."[5] Pagan deities were tied to conventional measures; "as the needs and circumstances" of believers changed, "so changed their religion."[6]

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[1] G. R. Stanton, "Hellenism," in *The Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 425.

[2] J. A. S. Evans, *Daily Life in the Hellenistic Age: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), VIII.

[3] Fredrick C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1962), 83.

[4] Michael Walsh, "Inside Pagan Worship," *Christian History*, January 1, 1993, https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/CH37s.pdf, 14.

[5] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 173-74.

[6] Jon D. Mikalson, *Religion in Hellenistic Athens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

In Acts 16:16, the Greek word used to describe the girl's "spirit of divination") refers to "pagan or false prophecy."[7] Scholars suggest the "spirit of divination" (v.16) was the python spirit of the Greek god Apollo. From Hellenistic influence, Jews "understood Greek religion" and "knew Greek mythological themes."[8] They were by no means unaware of the spiritual culture surrounding them.

As such, they were aware of the Greek phenomenon of Delphi prophecy.[9] In fact, many Christians believed that python spirits did indeed prophesy and "cast them out as demons."[10] Furthermore, many Jews believed "the gods of the pagans were demons." They believed demons "sought to reveal divine secrets"[11] and would do so by entering people and "forcing them to do what the demons desired."[12]

This was further problematic for first-century Christians because they understood that even if a spirit prophesied true information, "its testimony was unwelcome." Spirits "reveal[ed] activities that [were] not [their] place to reveal," "compromise[ing] God's blessing" that is the testimony of the Holy Spirit as witness to the Gospel. [13]

Slavery & the Economy

In contemporary America, the term "slavery" most likely triggers memories of high school history class: learning about our country's transgressional involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, its dependence on slave labor, and the ultimate emancipation of southern slaves during the Civil War. While this comprehension of slavery is relevant to understanding how America's past affects our society today, slavery in the Roman Empire was much different and, thus, must be distinguished from slavery in its modern American context.

For starters, Roman law recognized slavery as "an institution of the law of nations." Although Roman jurists[14] considered slavery "to be against nature," they did not believe it to be "morally wrong." Instead, it was seen as "legitimate, proper" and even "morally right."[15] Similar to the American institution, slavery operated within the understanding that the "master," or slaveholder, was "superior" to the slave and was to "command" the slaves' behavior and actions. The slave's role was "to obey" the master's commands.[16]

The institution of slavery played a critical role in Ancient Roman society, with the "most basic distinction among people under Roman law" being their status as slave or free.

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[7] Craig Keener, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 2422.

[8] Keener, *Acts*, 2423.

[9] Keener, *Acts*, 2422.

[10] Keener, *Acts*, 2429.

[11] Keener, *Acts*, 2456.

[12] Keener, *Acts*, 2435.

[13] Keener, *Acts*, 2456.

[14] In Ancient Rome: legal specialists or interpreters of the law.

[15] J.A. Harril, "Slavery," in *The Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 1124.

[16] Keener, *Acts*, 1906.

Approximately one-third of the Roman Empire's population were slaves.[17] While slaves were legally recognized as humans, they were economically and culturally treated as slaves.[18] As such, slaves were taxed as property and recognized as such in the division of estates.[19] Interfering with another's economic property, especially as a foreign visitor, was considered one of the highest forms of disrespect and dishonor against the owner of that property; this principle applied to slaves as well.

Within the slave population itself was a hierarchical structure, with the abilities and skills of slaves ranging between those who were simply "manual laborers" to those who were "well-educated." These distinctions determined the "price" put on that individual's life.[20] While many slaves served in a "domestic capacity,"[21] others were physicians, business managers, and estate managers.[22] Slaves were not "segregated from free-borns"[23] in their work, but they were subjected to the rule of their masters. This often included physical abuse, which was legal under Roman law, and in some cases, sexual abuse.[24]

The role of slavery in the first-century Roman Empire is closely tied to its role in the economy, as the demand for slaves was "fueled" by geo-political expansion and the growth of the economy.[25] A slave with "special abilities" would have been treated better than a slave without.[26] Given the pagan context, the popularity of soothsaying and fortune-telling, and the practice of people seeking "oracular consultation and stationary shrines,"[27] slaves with these abilities were likely economic assets to their holders.

Section 3: Insight into the Passage

Understanding the Greco-Roman context of Paul and Silas' offense in Philippi is critical to understanding their accusation and imprisonment. Without this foundational understanding, one might assume that Paul acted out of genuine annoyance and, therefore, misused the authority of Christ's name. Likewise, it could be confusing that the girl's holders accuse Paul and Silas on account of their Jewishness rather than the exorcism that offended them; one might even skip over or miss this discrepancy entirely. Fortunately, these potential misinterpretations are remedied by the proper knowledge of the passage's background.

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[17] Keener, *Acts*, 1907.

[18] Keener, *Acts*, 1914, 1923.

[19] Keener, *Acts*, 1915.

[20] Keener, *Acts*, 1908.

[21] Keener, *Acts*, 1912.

[22] Keener, *Acts*, 1908-09.

[23] Harril, "Slavery," 1124.

[24] Keener, *Acts*, 1915.

[25] Keener, *Acts*, 1907.

[26] Keener, *Acts*, 2465

[27] Keener, *Acts*, 2422.

First, Paul did not perform the exorcism because he was "annoyed" (v.18). Rather, the Greek verb "διαπονέομαι" is used, which can mean either "greatly annoyed" or "deeply distressed."[28] While it is possible that Paul *was* annoyed after being followed for days on end, it is unlikely that Luke would attribute Paul's exorcism to such an emotional motivation, let alone justify Paul using Christ's name because he was merely uncomfortable. From an understanding of the significance of witness of God's power coming from the Holy Spirit, the latter translation is likely more accurate. Paul was "deeply distraught"[29] by the girl's proclamations, not because he was annoyed, but because he knew that God does not welcome demonic testimony.[30] Paul did not abuse the power of Christ's name out of his own discomfort. Instead, Paul relied on the power of the Spirit to do God's will because he understood that the source of the testimony compromised the testimony itself.[31]

Second, it is clear the girl's holders were upset by the loss of profit Paul's exorcism causes, as they "saw that their hope of gain was gone" (v.19). Given the social understanding that interfering with one's slave, and thus, their economic endeavors was highly disrespectful, the girl's owners likely felt personally offended in addition to Paul's economic interference. This understanding clarifies the reason for Luke's including these details: to reinforce Luke's argument that "when Gentiles oppose the Christian mission, they do so for economic reasons."[32]

This theme of economic opposition is also illustrated in Luke's Gospel (Luke 8:26-39), where the crowd of Gerasenes sent Jesus away after he cast demons into a herd of pigs that ended up drowning in the sea.[33] The Gerasenes were too upset by their economic loss to realize the miracle that Jesus had performed right in front of them. Likewise, the slave girl's holders do not revel in the power of Christ's name but are instead upset by its economic effect. While they lack specificity in their claim of the "customs" (v.21) they oppose, their real opposition is to the economic interference caused by the spiritual practices and priorities of Christians. They likely base their accusation on the proclamation of Christ, however, because they knew this would elicit a more aggressive response by the officials. This example serves to illustrate opposition to Christian witness, a theme developed throughout the book of Acts.

Finally, because Paul had spent his entire life living in a societal culture built upon Hellenistic principles, he understood that his exorcism would be disruptive. The widespread social influence of Hellenism permeated the entirety of Alexander's former empire, even under the new Roman authority.[34] While there were likely considerable differences between Judea and Philippi,

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[28] Philip J. Long, "Acts 16:16-18 – The Spirit of Python," Reading Acts, published March 12, 2019, https://readingacts.com/2019/03/12/acts-1616-18-the-spirit-of-python/#:~:text=While%20walking%20through%20the%20marketplace,Parnassus.

[29] Long, "Acts 16:16-18."

[30] Keener, *Acts*, 2456.

[31] Keener, *Acts*, 2456.

[32] Daniel R. Schwartz, "The Accusation and the Accusers at Philippi (Acts 16:20-21)," *Biblica* 65, no. 3 (December 31, 1984): 358, https://research-ebsco-com.libproxy.calbaptist.edu/.

[33] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 358.

[34] Grant, *Roman Hellenism*, 83.

ethnic and religious social principles of tolerance were extremely similar, if not identical.[35] Beyond his understanding, Paul likely expected and anticipated the potential consequences of the exorcism yet decided to proceed anyway.

A closer look at the girl's words reveals that she announced they proclaimed "*a* way of salvation" rather than "*the* way of salvation" through "god the highest" (v.17), a phrase used to describe pagan supreme beings rather than specifically the "God of Israel."[36] "The absence of the definite article," as well as the classification of God as one of the many pagan deities, qualifies the girl's testimony as "misleading" and therefore dangerous.[37] While Paul understood the socio-political consequences of the exorcism, he also understood that the consequences of tolerating unwelcome and misleading testimony by demonic power were far more significant.

With these new insights, Acts 16:16-21 can be understood in its original context: For several days, Paula and Silas were followed and harassed by a slave girl possessed by a demonic spirit (v.16), believed to be the python spirit of the Roman god Apollo. She announced them as "servants of the Most High God" (v.17), which the spirit within her described as a pagan supreme being rather than the one true God. Paul, understanding the potentially destructive nature of this misleading demonic testimony (v.18), cast the spirit out of her. Her holders, perceiving that she could no longer earn them profit by fortune-telling, were offended by Paul's intrusion upon their economic property and prosperity. They dragged Paul and Silas before the Roman authorities (v.19) and stated their presence, as Jews who acted with the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's will, was "disrupt[ive]" to the city of Philippi (v.20) because of the "customs" (v.21) they practiced in their willingness to interfere with the socio-economic status-quo.

Conclusion

Context is critical to understanding any message being communicated, especially in reading the New Testament. Without it, the risk of reading outside ideas and incorrect hermeneutics into the text is significantly greater. The historical nature of the book of Acts is best understood with an understanding of the socio-economic and historical context in which it was written. In Acts 16:16-21, understanding common influences and beliefs of spirituality and the complex relationship and social implications of slavery and the economy in their first-century context is critical to understanding the actions and reactions of Paul, the slave girl, and the girl's holders. Without this proper exegesis, readers misinterpret (or completely miss) the distinction between the reactions and motivations of Paul and the slave holders. Even more so, understanding these interactions is vital to understanding the theological implications of Paul's exorcism, which are easily misinterpreted without the proper context. This leaves room for misapplication of the scripture; For example, if one were to overlook the potentially dangerous implications of the girl's claim and conclude that Paul exorcised the spirit out of an emotional reaction, they may also conclude that it is acceptable to use the name of Jesus for their personal benefit, regardless of God's will's, even in reactionary circumstances. This exemplifies how misinterpretation can not only create the illusion of a contradiction in scripture but also lead a believer farther from the

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[35] Bock, *Acts*, 538.

[36] Janusz Kucucki, "The Mission to the Gentiles: The Second Mission Journey of Paul According to Acts 15, 36—18, 22," *Journal of the Nanzan Academic Society Humanities and Natural Sciences* 11, no. 1 (January 2016: 124.

[37] Kucucki, "Mission to the Gentiles," 124.

character and will of God rather than closer to him. Beyond the specific conclusions of this analysis, however, this examination first and foremost serves as an example of the importance of understanding the historical context of a passage in order to understand the intended message.

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Faith In Fear: An Exegetical Narrative Analysis Of Mark 5:21-43

Delaney Donahue

Abstract

Analyzing the gospels as narratives not only allows for a greater understanding of their literary structure and composition but also cultivates a greater appreciation for Jesus and his ministry. This two-part exegetical analysis examines the narrative structure of Mark 5:21-43 and explores how this narrative contributes to the overall gospel of Mark. A horizontal reading compares the parallel account of Luke 8:40-56 and discusses potential explanations for the contrasting narrative elements present. By examining this passage through the lens of narrative analysis, the reader gains a greater perspective of the complexity and meaning of the text.

***Keywords**: Narrative Analysis, Exegesis, Gospel of Mark, Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56, Biblical Literature*

MARK EXEGESIS PAPER

The best stories are often also the most memorable, not just because of the storylines themselves, but because of intentional design by the author. For centuries, narrative structure has been employed by authors to enhance storytelling efforts by organizing story elements in a memorable, meaningful, and engaging framework. This framework highlights the moral lesson or primary objective the author intends to communicate. While contemporary readers would most likely recognize narrative structure in classical literature and children's books alike, this literary method is also evident throughout scripture. In Mark's Gospel account, the story of Jesus's life is framed within a narrative structure. Additionally, this overarching narrative is comprised of more specific accounts of Jesus' ministry, including the passage of Mark 5:21-43, which are structured in the same manner. By exegetically analyzing this passage through the lens of narrative structure, the reader gains a greater perspective and understanding of the passage's primary message, and thus, the overall message of the Gospel of Mark.

Section 1: Narrative Analysis

This analysis of Mark 5:21-43 first places the narrative in the context of Jesus' ministry within the Gospel of Mark. After defining the elements of narrative structure, these elements are identified within this specific passage. The final part of this section discusses the passage's significance in developing not only the Gospel of Mark but a greater understanding of the works of Jesus.

The Narrative in Context

The healing of Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman (Mark 5:21-43) takes place during Jesus' Galilean ministry. This period of his ministry is characterized by various miracles and healings, all contributing to the dialogue regarding Jesus' identity and authority. The two miracles encompassed by Mark 5:21-43 exist in a greater series of four different miracles that make up Jesus' Galilean ministry, each an illustration of power that exceeded any prior miracle of Jesus.[1]

This specific narrative follows the healing of the demon-possessed man in Decapolis and the people of the region begging Jesus to leave (vv. 1-21). This story contains what is arguably one of the most vivid depictions of misery in the Bible, let alone the New Testament. After the spirits leave the man, the people of Decapolis beg Jesus to leave their region, as they are more upset by the death of their pigs than moved by the miraculous exorcism.

Like many stories in the Gospel of Mark, this narrative follows the intercalation structure. This structure enables Mark's vivid parallels between these two contrasting stories in three different scenes. While this passage is written as if these scenes occur chronologically one right after another, some consider it more probable that the stories occurred separately, it is more likely that Mark combined them for the purpose of illustrating their "common themes and purposes."[2] This understanding allows a targeted analysis of *why* Mark chose to structure this particular narrative this way.

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[1]Arnold, Clinton E., and Mark L. Strauss. *Mark*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

[2]Brooks, James A. *Mark*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Narrative Analysis of Mark 5:21-43

The design of Mark's Gospel as a narrative requires a careful analysis of the structural elements within the individual narratives that comprise the greater Gospel. In his book "Reading the Gospels Wisely," Jonathan Pennington defines and explains the core elements of any narrative story: the rising tension, the climax, the resolution, and the falling action.[3]

When reading for comprehension, most narratives are best understood in chronological order. However, when reading for analysis, it is advantageous to begin by identifying the climax. By viewing the narrative as climax-centric, the climax will inform and aid the identification of the rising tension, resolution, and falling action. For the purpose of this paper, that is where this analysis begins.

The climax of a narrative is defined as the point in the text where the primary problem or conflict reaches it "highest point."[4] The climax is the turning point of the narrative, where based on a crucial decision or action, the story will go in one direction or another. In this narrative, the climax is Jesus prompting Jairus to "not fear," but instead "believe," and Jesus telling the girl to "arise" (vv. 35-41). Not only does this section of the passage illustrate Jairus facing a climactic decision between faith and despair at Jesus' prompting,[5] but also the critical moment between Jesus' command to the girl and when she rises, as the people present wait to see what will happen. The suspense developed between these two commands of Jesus constitutes the turning point of this narrative.

The rising tension of a story is best described as the development of a conflict. This could be an internal or external conflict, anything from a minor problem to a major dilemma. The rising tension of a narrative lays the foundation for the conflict to occur, serving as the beginning of the plot development.[6] The rising tension of this passage, therefore, is the text between Jairus asking Jesus to heal his daughter and Jairus learning of his daughter's death (vv. 21-34). This section primarily consists of the sub-narrative of the bleeding woman, in which Mark includes an exemplary illustration of healing because of faith. While this section could be analyzed as a narrative of its own, in the intercalation narrative structure of Mark 21-43, it serves as the rising action because it provides a model of faith that serves as the foundation for Jairus' decision.[7]

The resolution of a story is the solution to whatever problem comes to a head at the climax. The resolution reveals which direction the story will take after the climactic turning point.[8] In this narrative, the resolution is the girl rising (v. 42[a]), as it reveals the success of Jesus' healing and reconciles the suspense created by the climax.

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[3]Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

[4]Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

[5]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark. Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[6]Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

[7]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[8]Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

The falling action of a story is the ending of the narrative. This section typically finalizes any details, provides additional commentary on the resolution, and "ties up any loose ends."[9] The falling action in this narrative is the girl's family being amazed at her healing and Jesus telling them not to tell anyone (vv. 42[b]-43). These verses provide a satisfactory culmination of the narrative, adequately concluding the passage in the final element of its structure.

Narrative Analysis of Mark 5:25-34

While verses 25 through 34 serve as the rising tension in the overall intercalative narrative, this passage also contains a narrative of its own. The story of the bleeding woman can stand on its own as a complete story, but it is better understood by its connection to the rest of the passage. An analysis of the narrative structure of the woman's healing provides greater insight to the intercalative narrative as a whole.

Once again, identifying the elements of a narrative becomes clearer once the climax is defined. In the story of the woman, the climax is Jesus turning to the woman after she falls at his feet after being healed (v. 35). She is "fearful," either because she believed she would be reprimanded because of her impure contact with Jesus, or she was in awe of Jesus' power and her healing.[10] Either way, Jesus' attention is now on her and he is about to speak to her. Both Jesus' audience in the story and the audience Mark writes to are brought to the story's turning point as the tension reaches its climax.

The rising tension of the story is found in verses 25 through 32, as the woman approaches Jesus, touches his clothing, and is miraculously healed. These details lay the foundation of the narrative, as understanding the woman's healing and approach to Jesus is critical to understanding Jesus' response.

The resolution of this narrative is Jesus' response to the woman, telling her that she has been healed *because* of her faith (v. 34). This resolves the suspense created by the climax by revealing Jesus' reaction to the woman's healing and the fact that she had touched him while she was unclean.

Due to the intercalative structure of Mark 5:21-43, the narrative within verses 25-34 concludes without a distinct section of falling action. Because this story concludes with Jesus' words before the narrative returns to Jairus, the ending is ambiguous. The falling action here is the *lack* of falling action, which could either convey that the ending of this interaction was so insignificant that Mark did not want to include it in his fast-paced narrative style, or reiterate that the story of the woman is intended to be interpreted with Jairus' story rather than as a complete stand-alone narrative.

The Narrative's Significance in Mark

One of the most striking aspects of this narrative is the parallels drawn between the two contrasting miracles. Both miracles involve healing because of faith coinciding with some extent of physical contact with Jesus. The woman's twelve years of suffering align with the girl's twelve years of age. Jesus refers to the woman as "daughter" (v. 34) and Jairus asks for healing for his daughter. There are, however, significant contrasts as well: Jairus verbalizes a plea for healing to

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[9]Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

[10] Arnold, Clinton E., and Mark L. Strauss. *Mark*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Jesus, while the woman quietly seeks his mere touch. Jairus's faith is limited by his knowledge of Jesus' miracles, while the woman possesses hopeful faith for a unique miracle. Jairus' religious authority gives him prompt access to Jesus, while the woman's lack of influence quietly conceals her within the crowd.

This complex parallel-contrast relationship extends into the characterization of Jairus and the woman. Jairus is introduced as a "ruler of the synagogue" (v. 22). From the beginning, Mark characterizes him as a powerful, well-respected member of religious society. The woman, however, is not just characterized but identified by her suffering. She is ritually unclean and therefore excluded from religious society. Not even her name is recorded. Despite this power imbalance, the characters' interactions with Jesus communicate the insignificance of social status in comparison to the significance of faith. Mark establishes that it is not one's authority that gives them access to Jesus, but their belief in his authority.

When the woman is healed, Mark illustrates a solemn yet significant demonstration of faith. While the woman's "desperation is quieter,"[11] her faith is no less strong. In accordance with ancient belief regarding the extension of one's power to their clothing,[12] she believes that if she can just graze the edge of Jesus' cloak, then she will be healed – and she is, immediately. Both Jesus and the woman immediately understand what has happened, but Jesus uses her healing as a public demonstration of the power of faith. He explains that it is her "faith [that] has made [her] well" (v. 34). The woman's faith that results in her healing causes her to become "the model of faith for Jairus."[13]

When Jairus first approaches Jesus, he emphasizes the urgency of the matter and asks that Jesus heals his daughter *before* she dies. After the woman's healing, when he is informed of his daughter's death, his faith is minute if not completely expired. The extent of his faith mirrors the extent of Jesus' miracles up until this point. Surely, Jesus cannot raise his daughter from the dead. Jesus' command to "not fear, only believe" (v. 36) challenges this assumption, presenting Jairus with a critical decision: "to believe only in what circumstances allow, or to believe in the God who makes all things possible."[14] As a result of his choice to believe, his daughter is healed.

Jesus' assertion that Jairus' daughter is merely "sleeping" (Mark 5:39, Luke 8:52) further establishes Jesus' confidence in his authority over death. While he likely understood that the girl was dead, he "refused to accept the finality of death."[15] While the primary message of this passage is often understood relative to Jesus' authority over illness, even death, it also foreshadows Jesus' ultimate authority over death, realized in his resurrection. In the earliest parts of his ministry, Jesus was already laying the foundation for his work on the cross.

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[11]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[12]Brooks, James A. *Mark*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

[13]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[14]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[15]Brooks, James A. *Mark*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Section 2: Horizontal Reading

The healings of Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman in Mark 5:21-43 are also found in Luke 8:40-56. While the narratives are nearly identical, a careful comparison of the two passages yields discrepancies. Structurally, the passages follow the same organizational pattern, but the greater gospels they are contained within do not. While the significant setting of both passages is the same, they can be understood as such for distinct reasons. The characterization of the narrative's primary subjects is consistent across the gospels, understandably due to the Four Source Hypothesis.[16] While each gospel contains plot details independent to the other, the details unique to Luke bear a more significant influence on the understanding of the narrative.

Structure

Both accounts of this story follow the intercalation structure, with the story of the woman's healing being placed in the middle of the Jairus story. Following the Four-Source Hypothesis, which provides that the Gospel of Mark was consulted in the process of writing the Gospel of Luke,[17] it is reasonable that the author of Luke would maintain this structure from Mark. This is especially understandable given that it unknown for certain whether Mark's narrative is organized chronologically or topically, and the author of Mark beautifully crafted the intercalation of this passage to clearly illustrate the choice between fear and faith. Given that both Mark and Luke were written to gentile audiences,[18] this style of organization effectively communicates the central message of the passage in a way that is not only understandable but impactful.

Recall the detail in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus had yet to perform a resurrection miracle at the time Jairus approaches Jesus, explaining the limitations of Jairus' faith. Within the greater context of the Gospel of Luke, however, this narrative is placed *after* another resurrection miracle: the resurrection of the Nain widow's son (Luke 7:11-17).[19] It is entirely possible that like Mark, Luke's organization priority was topical organization, explaining the chronological discrepancies.

Setting

The setting of significant events in Jesus' ministry occurring during his travels, while he is "on the way" to his next place, is woven throughout both Mark and Luke. In these particular passages, the healing of the woman occurs while Jesus is 'on the way' to Jairus' house. In many cases, Jesus performing miracles while he is moving towards his next destination serves as foreshadowing for the fact that he is moving towards three significant final destinations: the cross, the grave, and heaven. This non-setting as the setting of the woman's healing is significant for both gospels, but in different ways. While Luke's focus is on demonstrating the connection between Jesus to the Old Testament promises of a Messiah, Mark's attention is communicating Jesus' *identity* as the Messiah.

The difference in audience is a critical factor here, as Luke provides an account intended to increase the understanding of Christians, while Mark focuses on demonstrating Jesus' identity

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[16]Williams, Peter J. *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

[17]Williams, Peter J. *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

[18]Gladd, Benjamin L. *From the Manger to the Throne: A Theology of Luke*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.

[19]Branch, Robin Gallaher. "Literary comparisons and contrasts in Mark 5:21−43." *Die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (2014): e1–e9.

and authority to non-believers. While Mark provides a spiritually elementary account for the purpose of communicating the identity and authority of Jesus, Luke is crafted to develop a better *understanding* of Jesus in relation to the Old Testament.

Characters

Like structure and setting, the characterization of the characters within this narrative are consistent between Mark's and Luke's accounts. Jairus is characterized as an authoritative religious figure, "falling at Jesus' feet" (Luke 8:41, Mark 5:22) to plead for the life of his sick daughter. His faith is present but limited and largely skeptical. The woman is characterized by her "quiet"[20] desperation and strong faith, and she is ultimately recognized by Jesus *because* of that faith. The mourners are depicted as in complete ignorance of Jesus' ability to heal, mocking Jesus' comment about the girl sleeping (Mark 5:39, Luke 8:52). This consistency is best understood as explained by the Four-Source Hypothesis[21]: Luke consulted Mark's characterization when writing his Gospel.

Plot

While many elements of this narrative are consistent between Mark's and Luke's accounts, there is a plethora of differences between the plot details of each account. For example, Mark includes the inner-thoughts and reasoning of the woman's attempt to reach Jesus.[22] Considering Mark's audience is primarily Roman gentiles, this addition reasoning to explain the woman's belief and motivation was likely included to contribute to the faith theme Mark depicts for his audience of non-believers.

Luke contains multiple additional plot details not found in the Gospel of Mark[23]. This includes Jesus' words, "she will be well" (Luke 8:50) at the end of his prompting of Jairus' faith over fear and the detail that before the girl rose, "her spirit returned" (Luke 8:55) These additional details may have come from Luke's use of Source Q or Paul's knowledge of Jesus' ministry that he shared with Luke. These details significantly contribute to Luke's account, as Jesus' affirmation that Jairus' daughter would be healed further encourages Jairus to choose faith over fear. The return of the girl's spirit affirms that she did, in fact, die and was resurrected by Jesus, contrary to skepticism that she was comatose.

Conclusion

A narrative analysis of Mark 5:21-43 produces and nurtures a greater understanding of Mark's gospel by revealing the ways in which it was carefully crafted to illustrate Jesus' identity and authority. The contrast created between Jairus' miracle and that of the woman emphasizes the parallel message of their stories: faith versus fear. A horizontal reading of Luke 8:40-56 drives a deeper analysis of the intentions and strategies of each author in writing their unique gospel. While

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[20]Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

[21]Williams, Peter J. *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

[22]Branch, Robin Gallaher. "Literary comparisons and contrasts in Mark 5:21−43." *Die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (2014): e1–e9.

[23]Branch, Robin Gallaher. "Literary comparisons and contrasts in Mark 5:21−43." *Die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (2014): e1–e9.

Mark focuses on the identity and authority of Jesus, Luke emphasizes connecting Jesus to the Old Testament promises of a Messiah.

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The Poetics of Humiliation: Revisiting W. H. Auden's *The Shield of Achilles*

Adam Ryan Barton

Abstract

Given that most students encounter poems in anthologies removed from their initial published context, poetry books offer us a chance to see a poet's project in a different light, allowing us to piece together connections and gain a greater appreciation and critical scope than individual, uncontextualized poems might allow. By revisiting W.H. Auden's 1955 poetry collection, The Shield of Achilles, republished as a critical edition last May by Princeton University Press, I offer a reading that attends to a running thread in Auden's work, thereby connecting the collection's three constituent parts. My essay argues first that, in the wake of modernity, Auden's Shield poses the question of human solidarity, seeking an answer to the question of how humans might love their neighbors. By reading a selection of poems in Auden's collection, I argue that Auden contributes a "poetics of humiliation," which I take to be lyrical self-degradation of both the lyricist and the reader. I contend that by engaging in humiliation, Auden places the lyrical subject in a sinful, low condition in which the only remaining option is a radical, willful acceptance of grace, the likes of which offer an opportunity to have a sacramental vision of the neighbor.

***Keywords*:** W.H. Auden, humiliation, poetry, classical

One is perhaps reluctant, however, to only give a selection of a novel, though some do, but a poem removed from its book raises less eyebrows. Why? By republishing *The Shield of Achilles* in May of 2024, Princeton University Press contested a gap in our critical approach to poetry. Despite committees bestowing awards onto poetry collections yearly,[1] readers seldom regard poetry within its book-length context. We instead tend to relegate the contents of poetry books to anthological selections.[2] Unlike canonical novels, poetry collections stand to be forgotten, so it remains significant that publishers find it good and necessary to extend the life of an author's collection. Alan Jacobs, editor of this recent critical edition of Auden's *Shield of Achilles*, suggests that it "is an integral work of art."[3] In general, this case could be made for many poetry collections, should we credit that poets are just as artful as novelists in structuring the wider context of their work, so Jacobs is right also to attribute this "integration" to Auden's work.

The answer to this essay's opening question is beyond the scope of this piece, but I do hope instead to challenge the conventional standards by which we often approach poems by revisiting Auden's 1955 work. To revisit a poetry collection is to engage thoughtfully with its content in a manner that anthologies may not allow. We face something like an artistic intent by placing a work within its structural context, and this allows us readers a better window into the arch of a poet's perspective as well as a greater density of interpretive thought. A poem like "The Shield of Achilles" stands alone, yet its significance within its 1955 publication compels us to consider not just the poem's project but also the larger scope of Auden's project. Why does the collection's

[1] *The Shield of Achilles*, for example, won the 1956 National Book Award for poetry.

[2] We should recognize, however, that poets often create anthologies of their own work, which warrant their own critical assessments.

[3] Jacobs, Alan. "Introduction." Auden, W.H., *The Shield of Achilles,* edited by Alan Jacobs (Princeton UP, 2024), x. All subsequent citations of Jacobs's introduction and Auden's *Shield* will come from this edition and be cited parenthetically.

second part begin with it? What is its relationship to other poems in the collection? We can raise such questions only by attending to a book's vision. My critical revisitation or "review" argues that the scope of Auden's *The Shield of Achilles* posits what I refer to as a *poetics of humiliation*, in which the lyric imagination degrades itself and its speaker, perhaps compelling its reader to do likewise. For Auden, this humiliation reflects what he stylized as his "return to Christianity," for his collection, in its poetics of humiliation, offers a mimetic attempt to contemplate the mystery of coming to terms with the limitations of the human person, and as it grapples with such difficulties, it finds within the experience of limitation a grace that opens us to regard our neighbor.

In this way, "The Shield of Achilles" and the other poems in the collection stand in Auden's corpus as continued examinations into the problem of human solidarity in the modern age, asking the question, "Given the world as it is, how do I love my neighbor?"[4] Auden's poetry often uses the familiar imagery of modernity to raise the question of how we can live together given how divided we are—given, too, that we might destroy one another any moment.[5] His poetry provokes its reader because it unveils a strident sense of human weakness, thereby forcing the reader, alongside its lyricist, to confront the dread of becoming human. From such dread, however, springs human solidarity, because it is by such dread that one recognizes, too, the human in their neighbor. Only by humiliation—self-effacing, self-affronting, self-conscious intentions to posit one's weakness—that one might, as the titular poem portrays it, "weep *because* another wept" (25; my emphasis).

Such an argument necessitates seeing some connection between the poem's various parts. Given the name of the collection, there is some justification to begin with the "Shield of Achilles" as an orientating device. The poem appropriates Book XVIII of the *Iliad* in which Achilles's mother, Thetis, beseeches the god Hephaestos to make armor for her son worthy of his great glory. Auden uses this narrative to emphasize the dissonance between the classical, totalized world of the Greeks and the fragmentary condition of the world after the Second Great War. The poem contrasts Thetis's expectation of a glorious shield with the terrifying reality of what Hephaestos renders, and it differentiates its mimesis through a repetition of antithesis between expectation and reality, potency and actuality. While Thetis seeks "vines and olive trees, / Marble well-governed cities / And ships upon untamed seas," she finds instead "[a]n artificial wilderness / And a sky like lead" (23). The first stanza of Auden's poem gives the sense that the world is not quite the same, the implications of which suggest art cannot be the same.

While the geographical ramifications of modernity are evident in these antithetical descriptions, so too are its moral ramifications. In the penultimate stanza, we meet a "ragged urchin," whose condition is anything but righteous given the logic of the world he enters. Were this ragged urchin capable, he would impose upon himself an ethics with which he is unfamiliar. We learn that the space in which he lives is one in which atrocities such as murders and rapes "[w]ere axioms to him, who'd never heard / Of any world where promises were kept / Or one could weep because another wept" (25). The resounding bleakness cannot be quelled, but it will be suffered. Just as the ragged urchin lacks the imaginative capacity to envision a world in which humans empathize with one another, so too does the poem portray others living in this same condition. Stanza two of the poem shows "[a] million eyes, a million boots in line, / Without

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[4] See his famous mid-career poems "As I Walk Out One Evening" (1937) and "September 1, 1939" (1939), which both offer some contemplative disposition towards the topic of human solidarity.

[5] See Auden's 1965 essay for *The New York Times*, "The Corruption of Innocent Neutrons," in *Prose, Vol. V,* edited by Edward Mendelson (Princeton UP, 2015), 160-164.

expression, waiting for a sign" (23), and stanza three promptly answers their waiting when they hear a bodiless voice proving "by statistics that some cause was just" (23). The deliberation of men behind closed doors, who find their warmongering just and expect other humans to fall in line, makes ready the urchin's appearance in the penultimate stanza. They are the offspring of the same violent world, and it is this logic that Hephaestos's artistry follows.

The poem's mimetic effect is less contained in its ekphrastic "shield" than it is in the artifice that is the twentieth century itself. Thetis, Hephaestos, and Achilles only remind us of what disparity exists between the idealized past and the deadly present. Even as Hephaestos "hobbled away" and Thetis weeps at the end of the poem, the speaker reminds its reader that the god creates the shield not for Thetis but for Achilles, of whom Auden lays adjective after adjective to describe as "the strong / Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles / Who would not live long" (25). By reworking an ancient, classical image to construct one pertinent to the modern, Auden suggests that even the mimetic works of the twentieth century endow themselves not with the beauty that we expect from them but rather the evil from which they are concocted. Achilles's art is, at the end of the day, a weapon of war, a gift for one who delights in its affairs. One can imagine the onslaught of twentieth century propaganda and the mass production of weapons as a kind of artistry in which annihilation is the final cause and the measure of art. "Art" becomes artifice, and artifice is politically effective and destructive to human affections. To become re-affected, to be "disenchanted and disintoxicated" as Auden would later suggest in *The Dyer's Hand* (1962).[6] Auden's poetry, then, offers a corrective to our dwindling, disaffected sensibilities, and his poetics functions, then, as a rhetorical candor by putting before his readers their feeble conditions. Opening the collection's second part, the title poem evidences the fact of what so many of us are: we are the Thetis who cannot face the truth of the world, the Hephaestos whose truth-telling lacks charity, or the Achilles whose warmongering delights himself. This focus binds the work's constituent parts and offers a spiritual vision that distinguishes Auden from angry cynicism: instead of looking outwards and condemning the world, Auden's work asks its reader to look inward as an act of spiritual humiliation. Only by attesting to the low status of one's qualities will one find a suitable response to the spiritual condition of the whole. Even as "The Shield of Achilles" proposes a nightmarish reality greatly antithetical to an ideal one, its self-confronting rhetorical appeal becomes a necessary corrective to opening its reader to grace. If Auden's collection has a narrative arc, it seems most apparent in how his three parts develop a poetics of regarding the self with humility then ends with a unifying sense of human collectivity under Christian grace. My argument implies, then, that the collection's title poem constitutes something like a lyrical occasion—a context from which the poet binds other poems. In the case of "Shield," Auden introduces the disparity between neighbor and self in modernity, about which he compels his reader to examine throughout the collection's three parts, which include "Bucolics," "In Sunshine and In Shade," and the sequence of poems unified under the Latin title *Horae Canonicae*.

The first part contains seven pastoral-like poems that account for some aspects of nature, exploring the relationship between a natural setting and its influence on the lyricist. "Woods," written in nine sestains, considers forestry, with the main idea being, "The trees encountered on a country stroll / Reveal a lot about a country's soul" (8). After developing the idea that humans appropriate woods for their uses, the final stanzas conclude:

A small grove massacred to the last ash,
An oak with heart-rot, give away the show:
This great society is going smash;

[6] See Auden, W.H. *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (Vintage Books, 1989), 27

They cannot fool us with how fast they go,
How much they cost each other and the gods!
A culture is no better than its woods. (9)

Auden imagines the natural elements one encounters as a revelation of oneself; the final stanza reminds us that what we do to the world reflects who we are. Because our destructive efforts suggest an outpouring of our destructive souls, we simultaneously condemn ourselves because our actions are symptomatic of our spiritual condition. Our landscapes somehow become images of what we are, and whether we project ourselves onto them or they onto us, we are left with something nearly determinative. Auden thereby develops a paradox: although we have the power to cut down a forest, our seeming power only portrays the status of our hearts. We are, then, subject to our wrongs, and what appears to be power is in the final analysis really weakness as we succumb to the quality of our work. We do not, in other words, run perpendicular to what exists apart from ourselves, but we run parallel. The content of our being exists in union with the production of our actions. We are not, then, above what we do, but what we perform is the material of who we are. We cannot escape ourselves, and we are reminded of this very reality in the world we either choose to embrace or shun. Thus our being subjected makes its lyricist strangely weak in the very act of asserting power.

Yet weakness itself is nothing for which to despair. The final bucolic, "Streams," a poem of eighteen quatrains, begins by describing the tranquility of resting by the water with the narrator offering praise, attributing to it "[p]ure being" (17). After a series of dreams, the narrator wakes to conclude that the water must be grateful "to run with the human race" (20), because, the poet muses, it wishes "the least of men their / Figures of splendor, their holy places" (20). The poet's understanding of the streams alludes to the consolation of nature. It provides the lowest of men a setting for introspection, and it thereby allows something sacred to come out of such introspection. Nature, then, humbles us, whether we seek to dominate it or allow nature its due.

This concern with humility and weakness continues into the second part of the collection, which at times displays Auden's ironic dark humor. In the "heroic" couplet, "Epitaph for the Unknown Soldier," Auden's brevity provokes self-reflection: "To save your world you asked this man to die: / Would this man, could he see you now, ask why? (37). The poet's presupposing notion here is the disparity between what the soldier died to save and the object of his saving. When one recognizes that the columns on which our society stands are solidified on the bones of others, one must reckon ourselves with *how* their living honors the dead. The poet contrasts the contemporary world with its medium of communication, that being the heroic couplet, about which he asks us to be suspicious. We ask now, does the life of the living rewrite history, making those who were heroes into monuments of dread?

Auden does not answer such questions, but his asking them offers implications; we are left to imagine the full extent of what he describes. Despite the ambiguity of some of his work, *Shield* is most interested in poetically portraying the paradoxical struggle of the human soul, not in answering questions. His poetry consistently emphasizes the human condition of toeing the line between good and corruption without necessarily making a positive or negative claim. In this way, it attacks the limitations of being able to treat any person as exhaustively "good" or "bad." Yet Auden affirms a sinful nature—one that unceasingly conflicts with the soul's potential and desire to rise above its nature. In "The Truest of Poetry is the Most Feigning," the speaker describes the sinful nature of man to illuminate man's relationship to creativity. Written in couplets, the poem's final stanza highlights the tension of making art as a sinner:

For given Man, by birth, by education,
Imago Dei who forgot his station,
The self-made creature who himself unmakes,
The only creature ever made who fakes,
With no more nature in his loving smile
Than in his theories of a natural style,
What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
Can trick his lying nature into saying
That love, or truth in any serious sense,
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence. (32)

The opening verbal play of the poem's final stanza offers two alternatives to what follows: is Man *forgiven,* or are we to consider the next lines *given* what Man already is? The verbal play, the refusal to "solve" the problem, anticipates the conclusive movement. Although created in the image of God, the person retreats from this status, and that naturally determines poetic action. Auden imagines poetry here as the act of "verbal playing" by which we "trick" our "lying nature" by affirming something to which we are only halfheartedly committed. When we speak of love, for example, we do so as unfit lovers. To call love or truth a "reticence" here indicates that such poetic affirmations are acts against our natural tendencies, yet such diffidence also carries grace as it reveals our need for grace itself. This approach to art bears something like an Augustinian will, with the conceit of the poem being the existential task of having to throw ourselves at something we are neither fit to receive nor ready to perform. His poem tells the truth, then, by humiliating the power we think we have over even our creative acts.

Auden offers theological perspective consistent with Augustine, who exercises a self-oriented rhetoric of candor and humiliation throughout his *Confessions*. On more than one occasion, Augustine even speculates the possibility of God mocking him.[7] But Augustine's attention emphasizes the chief virtue of any Christian: humility. While Auden's lyrical occasion in parts I and II of his work heed humility, the final section of Auden's poem extends his poetic project into the question of how a Christian should respond to such self-aware limitations. In navigating these humiliating limitations, Auden digs a passage into repentance and faith, so *The Shield of Achilles* concluding with the religious sequence of poems *Horae Canonicae* or "Canonical Hours," a poem that portrays the complexities of the religious life of a sinner by drawing a connection between liturgical devotion and the execution of Christ, seems a fitting end.

The poem's epigraph, "*Immolatus vicerit*" (42), haunts the sequence as it contrasts the temporal with the eternal in its grammatical construction. The Latin verb "vicerit," being in the *future perfect* tense, suggests the spiritual dimension of the work as ongoing, not limited to its historical situation. The epigraph's translation, "Sacrificed, he will be victorious," evinces the spiritual conflict of the limited vision of humans by mapping them *in* temporal history while they experience an event with eternal, ongoing ramifications. The narrator emphasizes this temporality in "Prime," relating, "The world is present, about, / And I know that I am, here, not alone" (45). His chronological limitation contrasts his place in history with the divine time of the event itself. Each section in the poem is named after an hour in the canonical hours—Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, Compline, and Lauds—and, in constructing his poem this way, Auden envisions the phenomena of encountering the eternal in the chronological, the infringement of divine, kairotic time on human time. As the eternal intrudes on the temporal, the speaker's guilt opens him up to

[7] See Augustine's *Confessions,* I.6.7, III.10.18, and VI.6.9.

receiving grace, however, for the object of his murder *was* "sacrificed" (*immolatus*) but *is* "victorious" (*vicerit*). In the very self-abashing of the human's temporal condition, the work contrastingly offers its speaker grace on account of its Christian vision. The poem renders guilt temporal but forgiveness eternal.

In "Prime," the narrator describes himself and his city as sinful by nature, expressing this temporal guilt as the fulfillment of an impulse against a moral intrusion:

> and my name
> Stands for my historical share of care
> For a lying self-made city,
> Afraid of our living task, the dying
> Which the coming day will ask. (46)

As he and his accomplices prepare for the execution to come, he is struck by his implicit acceptance of its arrival, thereby likening himself to a guilty participant in the event to unfold. Although he may not have performed the act itself, his willingness to go along with it makes him sinful—and the anxiety of this sinfulness increases as the sequence progresses.

In "Nones," having already committed the act, the guilt of it stains the narrator as well as the geography of the locale:

> the blood
> Of our sacrifice is already
> Dry on the grass: we are not prepared
> For silence so sudden and so soon;
> The date is too hot, too bright, too still,
> Too ever, the dead remains too nothing. (53)

These lines demonstrate the temporal anxiety of having to live with the guilt of one's actions. The Experience becomes modified as a kind of "too-muchness" when its subject cannot bear the weight of responsibility. The spiritual condition hangs in temporal suspension, for the promise remains undelivered and the guilt too persisting. The poem continues by describing the narrator's desire for reprieve from the silent aftermath of the execution because the context of silence causes reflection. Poetic excuses offer no solution; despite whatever justifications can be given, the execution and "its meaning / Waits for our lives" (55). Given this condition, the mimetic turn offers a surprising reconciliation not by suggesting some retreaded point about art being salvific but instead by degrading the artistic act itself. Embodying guilt means that even poetic expressions to push beyond such guilt only retain the condition of sin. What reprieve do our institutions, mimetic renderings, or even our repressive instincts have when measured against what we know to be true? It does not take a Christian imagination to belittle oneself to this state; rather, all one must know is the consequences of the givenness of one's character. Are humans basically good? Even if they are, an individual fails enough to warrant the question. Are poets basically good? Any self-examining artist ought to have the humility to say otherwise.

The penultimate poem, "Compline," asks this very question: "Can poets… / Be saved?" (61). Read in conjunction with Auden's portrayal of poetry in "The Truest Poetry," the question becomes whether there is grace for those who deceive, who attempt to justify their wrongdoing in verbal play, who use art as artifice such as "The Shield of Achilles" implies. In the sequence of the poem, sleep offers no consolation for the events that transpired. The poem's contrition reaches its zenith in humility. When self-justification is impossible, when one's conscience is guilty, one must

ask for intercession, praying for knowledge of the meaning of one's guilt and requesting to "come to the picnic / With nothing to hide, join the dance / As it moves in perichoresis, / Turns about the abiding tree" (61). The near-final action of Auden's sequence posits an act of willfulness to embody a radical shift by relying on the Trinitarian movement and taking such a movement on for oneself.

Horae Canonicae ends with the benedictive "Lauds" as a conclusive action to the poet's radical shift, which celebrates the natural and temporal world, giving a new vision in which "[m]en of their neighbors become sensible" (62), a stark contrast to the ragged urchin's mutilated sensitivity in the title poem. Because nature becomes a key element of the collection's ending, we find ourselves returning to the "Bucolics" of Part I with a sacramental vision, a renewed understanding of the true meaning of these things, by which we can see differently because we see them with the humility our weakness begets. We repeat with Auden's speaker, as a liturgy would induce us, "God bless the Realm, God bless the People, / God bless this green world temporal" (62) Each of the three-line stanzas in "Lauds" ends with the refrain, "*In solitude, for company*," affirming, in repetitive liturgy, *how* we bless and *for whom* we bless. Humans act alone, for individuals alone are responsible for their actions, yet they do it for the benefit of their neighbors, to have solidarity with the other, to "weep because another wept" (25).

In Auden's work, empathy's cost is exceedingly great, as it will have nothing but humiliation. It demands we reimagine who we are, and that we degrade ourselves, yet this humiliation will be the only method of solidarity. Auden's corrective poetics in *The Shield of Achilles*, which I have here called the poetics of humiliation, qualifies the human person as inept but not incapable of living virtuously. For Auden, one must have the humility to recognize their shortcomings, accept their station, affirm their need for grace given our flesh, and then look on our neighbors and see them for what they are: humans. Looking at others with grace, crediting them their humanity, and having the empathy to weep with them is Auden's humanist response to the crisis he diagnoses in "The Shield of Achilles." Revisiting Auden's collection attends to his poetics as being larger than his collection, even if it takes a poetics of humiliation to compel the human heart to walk its path.

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Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

Creative Works: Welcome to Monster Hill, Stories That Build Brave Hearts

Jessica Dalton

Abstract

My Christian faith has been the foundation of Monster Hill Books since its beginning. The very first story was born in a moment of prayer and surrender. As a mom navigating the emotional needs of my children, especially one who is neurodivergent, I constantly lean on God's guidance for wisdom, strength, and grace. These stories are my way of living out Proverbs 22:6, believing that every child deserves to be seen, supported, and reminded of their value. Through storytelling, I hope to plant seeds of courage and faith that will grow long after the last page is read. This is why I've started Monster Hill Books. The whole concept began in the midst of a very difficult moment when my kids were arguing at the dinner table, my husband was out of town, and I was one second away from losing my composure. Instead of yelling, I did something unexpected: I told my kids, "I need a time out," and I walked away from the table and into my bedroom.That moment turned into a story. And that story turned into something bigger—a mission.

Introduction

Monster Hill is a series of children's picture books that help kids (but mostly their parents) navigate big feelings, tough moments, and everyday challenges with courage, compassion, and joy. Inspired by my own experiences raising a neurodivergent child and powered by a deep faith in God, these books are my love letters to families like mine. Families doing their best in an overwhelming world.

I am obsessed with research, personal development, self-improvement, non-traditional ways of achieving health and healing, and finding solutions to anything life throws at me. I have learned so much as a mom, career woman, and I have achieved things I probably shouldn't have given my circumstances growing up. But that's a story for another time.

Here on the blog, I'll share my journey and the behind the scenes moments of building a children's book brand, parenting from a place of purpose, and the ups and downs of chasing a dream. I have no idea what I'm doing when it comes to writing, but I have the passion and desire to make this a success, so I have hired an amazing author coach to help me along the way.
So if you're looking for stories that build strong minds, practical tools for emotional growth, or just a reminder that you're not alone—you're in the right place.

Monster Hill isn't perfect. But it's real. And it's rooted in something true: the belief that every child deserves to feel confident, seen, and deeply loved. *"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."*— Proverbs 22:6

Creative Works

https://monsterhillbooks.com/2017/06/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1djdt1jrdr8
Instagram @MonsterHillBooks

Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

An Analysis of Leadership During COVID-19

Nikki Cook

Abstract

This paper will discuss the reasons why leadership and clear messaging are vital in communicating with people during a crisis. In times of crisis, effective leadership and communication are crucial for ensuring that people receive timely and accurate information. From a Christian perspective, leadership during a crisis also reflects a responsibility to serve others with compassion, honesty, and care. These values are rooted in biblical principles and exemplified by Jesus throughout His ministry. This paper will examine how effective leadership helps manage public perception, reduce uncertainty, and support a coordinated response.

Introduction

This paper will discuss the reasons why leadership and clear messaging are vital in communicating with people during a crisis. In times of crisis, effective leadership and communication are essential for ensuring that people receive timely information that is also accurate. From a Christian perspective, leadership during a crisis also reflects a responsibility to serve others with compassion, honesty, and care. These are values rooted in biblical principles and modeled by Jesus throughout His ministry. This paper will examine how effective leadership helps manage public perception, reduce uncertainty, and support a coordinated response. Additionally, it will explore the communication theories that inform effective crisis communication strategies and how they contribute to building trust, providing clarity, and guiding decision-making in high pressure situations. The role of empathy and adaptability in leadership will also be looked at, showing how these qualities enhance the effectiveness of crisis communication. Lastly, it will tie into Christian leadership traits and show that there are similarities between our faith and good effective leadership and communication.

Introduction

Leadership and clear messaging are essential during a crisis because they not only ensure public safety but also build trust in those leading the response. In those times of uncertainty, people depend on leaders for guidance, reassurance and timely and accurate updates. A well-prepared strategy and plan could lessen any panic and prevent any misinformation from being communicated. Strategic communication focuses on this type of messaging. It ensures that the information is delivered efficiently, consistently, and transparently across all platforms. The ability to respond quickly to urgent situations is essential for government leaders. Hart (2009)

One example of this kind of leadership can be seen in the story of Jesus Calming the Storm in Mark 4 of the New Testament. When the disciples were afraid, Jesus responded with peace and authority, saying, “Peace! be still.” (ESV Study Bible, 2016, Mark 4:39). His words calmed the wind and waves, but they also calmed the fear in the people with Him. That moment shows how strong leadership and steady communication can bring comfort and stability during a crisis.

Keeping information current and concise across different type of media is important. According to the article by Williams (2022), he states the importance of keeping the public up to date on a situation. He highlighted how organizations used social media to keep the public informed during a crisis. For example, they created a special hashtag related so they could reassure

people that they were safe via their real time updates. In addition, they kept an updated YouTube Channel, and had virtual sessions on Facebook live to engage directly with the public. These strategies made sure that accurate information was widely accessible and consistently reinforced. These strategies made sure that accurate information was easily found, reducing any questioning, and reinforcing trust.

According to Gamble (2012), an effective leader should demonstrate strong communication skills. He emphasizes that communication competence is an important trait of successful leaders. One of the most important qualities in crisis leadership is empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the emotions of others. By having empathy, the leaders can understand and share other persons' feelings and see their perspective. When they do this, they gain and keep trust and cooperation from the people that they are leading. These qualities reflect Christlike leadership. Throughout Scripture, Jesus showed compassion and connection to others, especially during moments of fear, confusion, or pain. Leaders should also be ethical in their choices and actions, since they set the tone for their organizations (Gamble, 2012, p. 25). A leader who is honest, compassionate, and consistent not only strengthens communication but also reflects a biblical approach to guiding and serving others during difficult times.

Article Summary

The article shows the critical role of leadership roles and the importance of clear messaging in large-scale crisis, such as the COVID 19 pandemic. When a crisis happens, misinformation can make people anxious and upset, so it is vital that the information that is being presented is relevant, accurate and timely. The article shows that effective crisis leadership goes beyond strong decision-making. It is when those leaders make connections with people and maintain their messaging consistently across all platforms. The article highlights the COVID-19 pandemic and how important it was to get the correct information out in a timely manner. Barbara Reynolds, who is Senior Crisis and Risk Communication Advisor, noted that "The right message at the right time from the right person can save lives." Eldridge (2020, p.50). This shows the powerful role that communication plays in crisis management and the need for leadership that is able to solve problems, and be compassionate and transparent to their followers.

Effective leadership goes beyond just delivering the facts; it requires engagement, showing empathy, reassuring, and informing the public. In times of crisis, people look at their leaders for guidance and also stability and confidence that the situation will be handled correctly and safely. Leaders need to be adaptable and able to utilize different methods like social media, press, and virtual meetings to ensure that the messages reach diverse audiences with varying needs and concerns. The article shows that strong leadership and well-thought-out communication strategies are essential in managing crises effectively and preventing panic among the people.

Overall, the article shows that effective leadership and communication are essential in crisis situations. Strong leadership and well-thought-out communication strategies play a crucial role in managing an emergency situation effectively. Those strategies will manage the crisis while minimizing any confusion and preventing the public from panicking. Then they can reinforce trust, encourage cooperation, and help these people get through difficult situations with clarity and faith. People depend upon their leaders to give them correct, credible information that is timely and up to date. By being reliable and empathetic sources of information, these leaders can inspire confidence and guide their people through challenging situations. In turn, their followers will have built trust and confidence in them and will look up to them as leaders for the future.

Theoretical Contributions

This article makes a connection to the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Theory (CERC). There are six key principles to this theory. They are:1: to be first, 2: be right, 3: be credible, 4: express empathy, 5: promote action, and 6: show respect. It explains how people process information under stress, showing that initial messaging is crucial as people tend to believe and hold onto the first information they receive. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) developed this theory to guide effective communication during public health emergencies. In addition to having empathy and respect, it is important to "…establish an open and honest flow of information." CDC (2014)

This study explores leadership communication strategies, focusing on consistent, transparent messaging in reducing panic and misinformation. According to Gamble, a leader's behavior is …" transparent, fair, and caring." (2014, p.36). This includes sharing information, decision-making processes, and accountability.

These values also reflect the core of servant leadership, where the leader's focus is on meeting the needs of others through honesty, care, and humility. This supports the CERC model by prioritizing empathy and trust during high-stress situations.

Joseph's leadership during the famine in Egypt is an example of this type of crisis communication (ESV Study Bible, 2016, Genesis 41). He recognized the urgency of the situation, clearly communicated the need for preparation, and helped organize a plan that saved lives. His actions reflect the core ideas behind the CERC model. He showed how early, credible, and compassionate communication can prevent panic and promote trust, which are essential qualities for any leader guiding people through a crisis.

The article that discussed the crisis leadership of the Bush presidency directly relates to the main article studied, Communication During Crisis Eldridge (2020). It references that effective communication is central to crisis leadership. There are 3 primary tasks of crisis leadership, which include: 1: sense-making, 2: decision-making, and 3: meaning-making. The sense-making is when gathering the correct information, decision-making is coordinating the correct responses, and meaning-making, which is communicating a clear message to the public. Hart (2009).

Analysis

This study shows the importance of clear leadership and communication during a crisis. It used an example of COVID-19 to make it relevant and relatable. The study shows that empathy, consistency and credibility are important and essential to getting the correct message across without causing panic in people. This study is effective in showing the importance of clear, timely, and communication during crisis. It provides clear information on how to communicate effectively in high stress situations. It shows how people process information under stress and that early messaging is critical. It clearly outlines the role of leadership and trust during crisis situations. It also notes some of the common barriers to effective communication, such as wrong information being given, late information, and organizational failures.

This study could have been more useful if it gave some new research instead of using existing data. It could have expanded on the digital media role, which is crucial in a modern crisis response. People rely on social media for current updates and current stories, which is helpful since they are in real time. Another thing that would have been a good contribution to this study would have been to use some quantitative methods to test the effectiveness of messaging strategies. A survey would have been helpful in this case, actual data could have been shown to see what types of messaging worked best.

People tend to believe and hold on to the first information they receive, so it's vital that they receive the correct information right away. They also need to consider the source they receive the information from and make sure that it is creditable. Empathy plays an important role in leadership and enhances credibility. Messages from leaders that acknowledge fear and uncertainty build a stronger trust as opposed to those leaders that just give out the information or don't display any feelings or empathy towards others. This makes a difference in a leader and can even affect his credibility. A Christian leader is called to lead with truth and compassion, showing care for others while guiding them through uncertainty with wisdom and strength.

Contribution to the Profession

This study is useful and a valuable source for leadership and communication strategies and they can learn from those strategies and lessons. It can be useful for those in various fields, such as public relations, strategic communication, crisis communication, and news media. It gives some valuable insights on messaging strategies and insights that can help professionals manage public perception, reduce misinformation, and build trust during these emergency situations. More specifically, it outlines the CERT theory, which is a guideline for developing crisis communication plans. Since stress affects the information processing, it also highlights the need for clear, concise, and repeated messaging. It also shows that professionals can use the insight given to coordinate timely, and accurate messaging across all platforms. These platforms can consist of traditional media, social media, official websites and television.

Overall, this study provides a good solid foundation and makes it useful for crisis training, public relations training, and leadership coaching. The example used, which was the COVID-19 pandemic, was effective and familiar because it was a current event. It was an event that many can relate to and understand Those insights and ideas are relevant and valuable to the reader.

Scholarly Thoughts

The article explains how effective messaging helps manage public response in emergencies. It displays that stress impacts information processing, so it makes simple and repetitive communication essential. This study was helpful because it outlined key parts of communication and leadership that should be followed to be accurate and reliable. It provides a strong foundation for understanding the role of effective messaging in critical situations. The use of the CERC Theory displayed the importance of an effective delivery process. Clear and concise messaging is imperative when communicating during a crisis. This article also supports the importance of clear, simple, and repetitive messaging. This is important in crisis communication and messaging. When leaders prioritize these elements, they can prevent the spread of misinformation, build public confidence, and keep a sense of order. By communicating effectively during these emergency situations, it helps establish long-term trust between leaders and the public. This shows the importance and necessity of strong leadership and well thought out strategies in guiding the people and the communities through those difficult times.

Faith Integration

The article ties into Christianity because it puts emphasis on empathy and honesty, which go hand in hand with servant leadership. Christian leadership includes compassion and integrity and the serving of others. Christian leadership shows compassion, integrity, and service to others. These values can extend from leaders to anyone that is of influence. It could include workplace or personal and family life. Jesus demonstrated servant leadership through his actions, which

includes washing the feet of his disciples to sacrificing his life for humanity. By integrating these qualities into their own leadership, people can align their actions into God's teachings. They can model themselves after his empathy, honesty, and service.

Effective communication is about giving truth and earning trust, which ties into the Christian way of sharing God's word. Christian leaders should prioritize honesty and transparency, as those are essential in building strong relationships, just like in the workplace and personal life. Strong leadership requires honesty, empathy, and integrity, which are core Christian values. Jesus modeled servant leadership by putting others first, leading with compassion, and speaking truth. These qualities are essential in crisis communication to build trust and provide reassurance. Just as leaders must be clear and transparent, Christians are called to communicate truthfully and with care. By following these principles, leaders can guide people through uncertainty while strengthening faith and confidence, reflecting Christ's example of leadership. As Proverbs reminds us, "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and healing to the body" (ESV Study Bible, 2016, Proverbs 16:23–24).

This article can help people reflect on their current faith and see how they can integrate the qualities into their own lives. Leaders can draw examples from faith and Christian qualities to incorporate into their communication style. They could show their audience how they can be closer to God by following his ways.

Conclusion

Strong leadership and clear communication are crucial during a crisis to lessen any misinformation, build trust and keep people informed. Without proper messaging, confusion and panic can spread, making it more difficult to manage the crisis or emergency effectively. The study shows how important it is to be consistent, timely, and accurate by getting messages out across different type of media. The articles reference to integrity and transparency directly aligns with Christian leadership principles, where leaders are called to lead with honesty, empathy, and service to others. Jesus demonstrated his servant leadership, by putting the needs of others first, and effective leaders should also prioritize the well-being of those who they lead. By showing compassion and empathy, listening to the people, and being honest, leaders can build credibility and keep trust even in the most stressful situations.

Besides handling crisis, this study shows the importance of ethical leadership and effective communication in our everyday life. This could be applied to our personal or work lives. No matter what the setting is, practicing clear, honest and compassionate communication is essential for building and maintaining those connections and giving the guidance that can promote our faith. Overall, the study shows valuable insights for leaders on the importance of crisis communication in keeping stability and trust. It serves as a reminder that effective communication, especially during challenging times, can not only guide people through a crisis but also strengthen their faith, helping them draw closer to God by following the example of God's leadership. With these values in mind, it shows that strong leadership and clear communication are not only effective strategies during a crisis, but also a reflection of faith in action.

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