SCRIPTURE FIRST

Biblical Interpretation That Fosters Christian Unity

Edited By

Daniel B. Oden & J. David Stark

FOREWORD BY MARK W. HAMILTON

Praise for
Scripture First

"Oden and Stark have assembled six powerful essays firmly grounded in Old and New Testament depictions of God's people striving to understand God's word. Rather than the divisive patternistic restorationism often used in Churches of Christ, the authors convincingly advocate methods of interpreting Scripture that focus on the core affirmations of Christian faith—especially those proclaimed at and embodied in baptism. The object of godly biblical interpretation is the formation of the church into the image of Christ. These authors provide perhaps the healthiest and most hopeful way forward toward this goal seen today in Churches of Christ."

—Douglas A. Foster, University Scholar in Residence, Abilene Christian University

"These essays spark creative thought regarding how biblical interpretation impacts Christian unity. While focused on those related to the Stone-Campbell movement, the authors' analyses of texts and methods can benefit those in a much wider circle. A good read for anyone meditating on the concept of a rule of faith and its role in understanding Scripture and building up the body of Christ."

—Susan Bubbers, Dean, The Center for Anglican Theology

"*Scripture First* calls us to consider what it means to take Scripture seriously. The authors prompt us to avoid blindly accepting or quickly rejecting the Restoration Movement principle of finding unity through adherence to Scripture. This work is challenging and thought-provoking; and, hopefully, it will spark significant conversations within the Stone-Campbell Movement and outside it as well."

—Todd Brenneman, Professor of Christian History, Faulkner University

"The Restoration Movement was birthed from a holy desire to unify divided Christian communities under the authority of sacred Scripture. While some hermeneutical commitments evinced in the movement have proven insufficient for that lofty goal, recent historical and theological work and increasing self-awareness have made possible new interpretive vistas that are critically and faithfully grounded in the achievements

of Christian forebears—both Restorationists and others. These essays exhibit the best characteristics of such work. My hope is that *Scripture First* will be read widely to the edification and gentle provocation of all still committed to sharing in the mysterious work of the Father, reconciling all things in heaven and on earth in the Son through the Holy Spirit."

—Joseph K. Gordon, Associate Professor of Theology, Johnson University

"*Scripture First* calls for a new kind of patternism. Grounded in a close reading of Scripture, the authors recognize the core affirmations of the faith, promote the historic confession of those affirmations, and call for their expression in both liturgy and communal reading. This project faithfully reads Scripture and offers a path toward a fuller embodiment of the visible unity of the body of Christ. The integration of Scripture, the great tradition of the church, and a living community is, as Thomas Campbell speculated there might be, a 'better way' to realize unity in the present."

—John Mark Hicks, Professor of Theology, Lipscomb University

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Foreword

Mark W. Hamilton

In the introduction to his translation of the Vulgate, John Wyclif pointed to the horizons of biblical interpretation, landmarking both the character of the reader and the divine purposes for human beings. Signaling the need to read the Bible in multilayered ways appropriate both to its nature and the readers' needs, he wrote:

> Whatever thing in God's word may not be referred properly to seemliness of virtues or to the truth of faith, it is figurative speech. Seemliness of virtues pertains to love God and the neighbor; truth of faith pertains to know God and the neighbor. Holy Scripture commands nothing but charity, it blames nothing but illicit desire, and in that manner, it informs the virtues or good conditions of men. Holy Scripture affirms nothing but Christian faith by things past, present, and to come, and

> all these things pertain to nourish charity, and make it strong, and to overcome and quench illicit desire.[1]

In other words, the church reads the Bible with a view toward the spiritual and intellectual encounter with God, as well as relationships with other human beings. Doctrine and life closely relate as sound teaching quenches the soul's squalid attempts to master others and use them for its own purposes. No biblical interpretation should aid the movement away from virtue—that is, away from the God who gave the word in the first place.

The authors of the present book stand in a line descending directly from Wyclif's work from six centuries ago. All free-church Protestants do. Despite his intentions, the "morning star of the Reformation" has begotten a galaxy, of which the Churches of Christ comprise a small but shiny constellation. Yet, too often, we have reduced (or traduced) the Bible to a blueprint for church structure, its specifications not so much shining forth in the plain sense of the stories, laws, poems, and prophecies making up the bulk of Holy Writ as tucked away in inferences drawn from snippets cut and pasted together to justify a pattern that has emerged in the interpreter's mind. At our best, we have celebrated the power of obedience through concrete acts of service. At our worst, we

[1] Wyclif's original text in late Middle English is available in John Wyclif, "The Wycliffite Bible: From the Prologue," in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. James M. Dean, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, MI: Teaching Association for Medieval Studies [TEAMS], 1996), 61. The text there runs,

> Whatever thing in Goddis word may not be referrid propirly to onesté of vertues neither to the treuthe of feith, it is figuratyf speche. Onestee of vertues perteyneth to love God and the neighebore; treuthe of faith perteyneth to knowe God and the neighebore. Hooly Scripture comaundith no thing no but charité, it blamith no thing no but coveitise; and in that manere it enfoormeth the vertues either goode condiscouns of men. Holy Scripture affermith no thing no but Cristen feith bi thingis passid, present, and to comynge, and alle these things perteynen to nursche charité, and make it strong, and to overcome and quenche coveitise.

For readability, I have given the text above in a modern English translation.

have substituted works' righteousness for the more radical path of trust in the God who saves—and reveals.

Over the past four decades, biblical scholars, theologians, and preachers in Churches of Christ have increasingly rejected the patternism, prooftexting, and legalism of our immediate past. Sometimes this liberation came through historical criticism, the careful examination of the literary shaping of the biblical text in its earliest recoverable settings of creation and reception. Sometimes it came through attention to the spiritual disciplines, both individual and congregational. And sometimes it came out of nausea at the ever-intensifying odors of legalism, with its endless efforts at purging all "false teachers" whose views deviated ever so slightly from the groupthink of the powers that aspired to be. Whatever its sources, change has occurred.

Yet, as many have discovered, helping our nonbeliefs is much easier than living by our beliefs. As the authors of this volume make clear, if we want to read the Bible more fully, we must do more than identify what we no longer think. We must attend to a careful exegesis of both the biblical text and the work of the community of readers as it lives with that text over time. Attempts to return to the New Testament (or the Bible as a whole) as though it objectively described a world beyond history and culture are doomed to fail because they rest on false assumptions about the text and the readers. Primitivist restorationism ignores the literary genres of the Bible, the history of its creation and canonization, and the further substantive history of its reception in formal theology, sermons, and the arts. Primitivist restorationism is an exercise in pretending that Scripture differs greatly from its true nature. And primitivist restorationism invites division, as it invests one person's or group's interpretation with the prestige of the ancient church itself.

Still, something of the old instincts remains relevant. Valuable parts of the legacy of Churches of Christ include (1) a commitment

to close reading of the biblical text; (2) a sense that the text matters in some ultimate way to the lives of individuals and communities because it bears witness to God, not just to human experiences of a given time and place; and (3) the belief that the church as a whole is a proper reader of the biblical text, not just scholars or individual pious Christians.

The authors of this work address these themes with skill and courage. They engage the Bible itself with great care, identifying ways in which the writers of Scripture set their words within the larger context of core Christian confessions of God's saving work through Jesus Christ. The longstanding idea that Scripture must be understood in light of the church's life as a saved people is put forward afresh through careful exegesis of the Bible's own creedal consciousness. Several contributors remind us that the sharp distinction between creed and Scripture does not appear in the Bible itself.

They also remind us that the Bible is most at home not in debates about ever-narrower points of congregational practice but in the life of worship and deeds of service. And in so arguing, they show themselves profoundly loyal to the core commitments of Churches of Christ. As Thomas Campbell expressed those commitments more than two centuries ago, "were it possible, we would also desire to adopt and recommend such measures, as would give rest to our brethren throughout all the churches;—as would restore unity, peace, and purity, to the whole church of God."[2] While Campbell's biblical minimalism has not delivered the results he hoped for, his theological generosity and desire for truth amid the haze of opinion and human striving still resonate today. They certainly do in this volume.

[2] Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's* Declaration and Address: *Text and Studies*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann, ATLA Monograph Series 46 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 3.

Finally, any proposal for interpreting Scripture ought to be logically coherent, responsive to the long history of biblical interpretation and reflection thereon, and able to account for the biblical text we have rather than some imaginary, more pristine text. Such a proposal ought to help form a community that is both historically conscious and spiritually sensitive. The central work of biblical interpretation ought to be identifying how biblical texts think about humanity before God. Questions of textual origins, the stuff of technical exegesis, and the like should not disappear but should serve the higher purpose of understanding how the biblical texts dealt with successive, interlocking problems raised by the ongoing Israelite, Jewish, and Christian encounter with the God of Moses and Jesus.

Not only must any theory of biblical inspiration, authority, or usage account for the sort of text the Bible is (as the failure to do so causes fundamentalist proposals to fail), but proposals for reconstructing the history of the text must account for it as a theological document in a robust sense. The authors of this book blaze compatible paths toward such an accounting. For that, we owe them a great debt of gratitude, best repaid through ongoing discussion, teaching, and prayer.

Introduction

Daniel B. Oden and J. David Stark

From very early in its heritage, the American Restoration Movement articulated two core principles: unity among Christians and the use of Scripture alone as Christians' authority for faith and practice.[1] In emphasizing the latter, the Restoration Movement amplified the European Reformation's rejection of church tradition. As a function of their emphasis on Scripture alone, Stone-Campbell fellowships have regularly defined "tradition" (e.g., councils, creeds, confessions, catechisms) as antithetical to Scripture.

Scripture is of divine origin; tradition is wholly human. Scripture is wholly truthful; tradition can be wrong and likely

[1]Greg Sterling reaffirmed and called for restoration heirs to maintain these distinctive emphases in his plenary address "Memory, Tradition, and the Future of Faith," at the Fourth Annual Abraham J. Malherbe Plenary, Christian Scholars Conference in Nashville, TN, on June 9, 2017. For a recording of Sterling's address, see https://ww2.lipscomb.edu/csc/lecture-and-plenary-speakers/2017-plenary-videos.

is. Scripture has all authority; tradition has none. That the situation is not so simple has sometimes been recognized, not least by pointing to positive references to tradition within the biblical text itself (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). But often enough, any positive function for tradition has been regarded as entirely subsumed in the witness of the biblical text. Therefore, tradition as such is unnecessary and ineffective for proper biblical interpretation. Readers of Scripture are then entirely equipped for their task once they have Scripture alone as read through a proper interpretive method.

Unfortunately, after a century and a half, it is clear that the Restoration Movement has not been able to attain and maintain visible Christian unity by stressing uniformity in patternistic interpretive method. Instead,

> [e]ndless debates have ensued over which beliefs and practices are scriptural, which of those are necessary to salvation, and, in turn, who can be fellowshipped. Restoration, based on the Bible alone, pursued as a solution to the problem of division, has not fared much better with regard to unity than the confessional Presbyterianism from which the disenchanted founders departed.[2]

The expectation that a uniformity of interpretive method would result in Christian unity lies unrealized, and past decades suggest that future ones are not likely to fare much better. Clearly, the failure lies not with Scripture but with the kind of hermeneutic expectation that has been brought to Scripture.

In such a paradigm, the emphasis on Scripture's absolute authority surely is to be cherished. And the piety that animates a

[2] Keith D. Stanglin, "The Restoration Movement, the Habit of Schism, and a Proposal for Unity," *Christian Studies* 28 (2016): 12.

desire to faithfully obey this authority in all things is likewise to be desired and emulated. At the same time, it is largely the burden of this volume to suggest that—to adapt G. K. Chesterton's comment on Christianity in general—the Restoration plea has not been so much tried and found wanting as it has not yet been sufficiently heard and attempted.[3]

Instead of being actualized, the good and right impulse for the divine word to govern the church has been interpreted in ways proving inconsistent with that word. Originally, the impulse for Scripture alone to be the church's sole authority never meant to speak of Scripture's functioning in the absence of true and right Christian faith. Yet, Restorationism has often both identified its functioning Scripture as a pattern or model and isolated Scripture, reading the Bible as if in a vacuum, claiming to read and apply Scripture without the assistance of history or a tradition of faithful, receptive community.[4] As Keith Stanglin describes, the good and right Scripture-alone (*sola scriptura*) impulse became interpreted to mean that a much poorer "bare Scripture" (*nuda scriptura*) was what the church ought to have as a final authority.[5] Unfortunately, such a bare Scripture has ended up getting clothed with garments that have proven only too tattered and ill fitting.

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[3] See G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1910), 48.

[4] To this day, restoration heirs remain familiar with the tension between a rejection of "tradition" in practicing biblical interpretation and an acknowledgment of the need for the church to be a contemporary community of interpretation. See M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997).

[5] Keith D. Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 130–32, 222. Stanglin employs the phrase from Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 95.

Consequently, several essays in this volume critique the application of patternism when applied as a wholly sufficient and mechanically reliable interpretive method. But as the first two essays indicate, this challenge largely arises when patternism is reductively defined and understood. Such patternism falters because it needs to be informed by a richer, fuller reading of the biblical text.

Daniel B. Oden (Harding University) discusses this dynamic within the Old Testament. Oden observes how earlier Old Testament texts document and give rise to communal affirmations of Israel's beliefs about their God and their experience of him. Intending no anachronism, Oden terms these communal affirmations "creeds." He then traces how these creeds are rehearsed within and impact the formation of later Old Testament texts. In doing so, Oden shows how this traditional material is part and parcel to the Old Testament itself.

From the New Testament, J. David Stark (Kearley Graduate School of Theology) takes as a case study 1 Corinthians 15. At the beginning of that chapter, Paul explicitly cites traditional material that was formed early enough for him to receive it from others (vv. 1–5). Stark shows how the particular claim that the Messiah was raised according to the Scriptures (v. 4) provides Paul an interpretive starting point or basis for his scriptural interpretation in the balance of the chapter.

On the one hand, these essays show how tradition has become Scripture. On the other hand, both essays explore the ways in which this inscripturated tradition has determined how the biblical text defines what counts as proper engagement with itself. Consequently, these essays invite readers to a kind of patternism—but a patternism that is shaped by the often-overlooked ways in which the biblical text engages with itself. These essays demonstrate a biblical grounding for crystalizing certain core

affirmations around which the people of God may cohere. And fidelity to the scriptural tradition requires that those who would read this tradition most fully should come under the sway of the core affirmations that the biblical text itself prioritizes.

The middle two essays especially address the Stone-Campbell heritage and its relationship to history. Keith D. Stanglin (Austin Graduate School of Theology) particularly focuses on the unity project Thomas Campbell articulates in his *Declaration and Address*. Acknowledging that there might be various appropriate goals for Christian work in different contexts, Stanglin argues that Campbell's main goal in his *Declaration and Address* was to foster Christian unity. Campbell had a clear program for how to achieve this unity. But what is often less appreciated is that Campbell also maintained an openness to other ways of faithfully achieving unity aside from (and perhaps more promising than) the one he proposed. Stanglin's essay thus shows how the Stone-Campbell tradition has—even at its earliest roots—a broader range of resources for fostering a faithful and unified Christian community. In particular, Stanglin recommends a reconsideration of the Apostles' Creed, of which Alexander Campbell explicitly approved, as a possible resource for fostering visible unity.

Stephen D. Lawson (Austin Graduate School of Theology) argues for a greater appreciation of the continuity of history between the time of the New Testament and the centuries in which the American Restoration Movement sprung into being. Lawson traces how some historical narratives within Stone-Campbell circles and other reform movements unhelpfully appeal to a cataclysmic fall narrative in which, after some pristine past period, all became malformed until whatever movement arrived on the scene to properly restore the primitive form. Lawson incisively warns of the dangers of this narrative, arguing that it invites the

past to be remade in an image that is comfortable to the present and that thereby short circuits precisely the kind of reform efforts that appeal to this narrative.

The final two essays propose different practical turns for how guidance might be sought for biblical interpretation that will foster Christian unity. Scott Adair (Harding University) cites baptism as a prominent marker within Stone-Campbell circles of who does or does not share Christian identity. On this basis, Adair seeks to unpack the doctrinal and ethical content latent in baptismal practice. Because baptism admits people to Christian fellowship, Adair argues that Christians should prioritize the doctrinal and ethical content of the rite. In this way, baptism provides a locus for identifying what is central to Christian identity and what is not. The rite of baptism is many things. But in all of these, it is nothing less than a physical, visible enactment of core Christian commitments. Baptismal practice thereby invites readings of Scripture that focus on these central elements.

Lauren Smelser White (Lipscomb University) draws an analogy between maternal and hermeneutic discernment. Drawing on such noteworthy thinkers as Martin Luther, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, White problematizes the notion that readers of Scripture can perform their task well at a distance. Instead, White urges, readers must risk getting themselves caught up in the biblical text's witness and finding themselves directly addressed by the text. This address is ultimately "Christomorphic," or one that shapes readers into the image of Christ. And for White, discerning a Christomorphic interpretation is fundamentally analogous to a mother's deeply embodied responsiveness in discerning how best to care for her child.

From these essays, there emerges an orientation to Scripture that emphasizes the need for hermeneutic engagement to be governed by a communally affirmed and deeply biblical "rule of faith," or "rule of truth," that can clarify precisely "the area in which

the church hears the word of God."[6] The biblical text, subsequent Christian history, and current Christian practice all clearly show how properly and fully Christian biblical interpretation needs to be animated by a proper understanding, or "fore-conception," of what it seeks in the biblical text.[7] According to the early apologist Irenaeus of Lyons, biblical interpretation is problematic

> when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, [and anyone] should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should re-arrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog. . . . [On the other hand,] he . . . who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognise the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use . . . of them. For, though he will acknowledge the gems, he will certainly not receive the fox instead of the likeness of the king. But when he has restored every one of the expressions quoted to its proper position, and has fitted it to the

[6] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 99.

[7] Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. and trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed., Bloomsbury Revelations (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 305–6, 379, 443.

> body of the truth, he will lay bare, and prove to be without any foundation, the figment of these heretics.[8]

Not only does such a biblical "rule of truth" enable discernment of when biblical interpretation has gone awry, but it also enables readers to encounter Scripture precisely according to the image of the king whom they should properly find there.

With this volume's three pairs of essays, clearly a great many questions are left unresolved. For the present, the contributors have mainly tried to articulate a faithful starting point for biblical interpretation that might foster unity both within Stone-Campbell circles and beyond. In particular, there is a great need for the interpretive engagement with particular biblical texts along the lines suggested here. And we are hopeful that, in part, this volume will constitute an invitation to partnership in such readings and in refining the basic orientation proposed here.

In closing, we would like to thank each of the contributors for their efforts in making this volume as helpful as possible. We would also like to thank the several peers who, at various points, contributed helpful insights to assist in the refinement of this volume's individual essays. These include Fred Aquino (Abilene Christian University), Joshua Fleer (Oakland University), Mark Hamilton (Abilene Christian University), Ron Highfield (Pepperdine University), Noemí Palomares (Boston College), Floyd Parker (Faulkner University), Mark Powell (Harding School of Theology), Jared Saltz (Florida College), Mark Wiebe (Lubbock Christian University), and Kevin Youngblood (Harding University). We would also like to thank Jason Fikes and ACU Press for being such wonderful partners in bringing this volume to fruition. Finally, and most importantly, we would like to voice

[8] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," §§1.8.1, 1.9.4, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 326, 330.

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1

Creedal Expressions and Their Development in the Hebrew Bible

Daniel B. Oden

The canon of Scripture has come to us through and within community—through the same community that also preserved tradition. As Keith Stanglin has reminded us, the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures was likewise first guided within the earliest Christian communities through baptismal formulas and a "common belief in the content of the apostolic proclamation," both of which appear in the New Testament of the later Christian community.[1] The purpose of this essay is to emphasize that within the Hebrew Scriptures, the creedal formulas that are spoken, recited, developed, and revised by the community were used as interpretative lenses in every stage of scriptural production and

[1]See Keith D. Stanglin, "The Restoration Movement, the Habit of Schism, and a Proposal for Unity," *Christian Studies* 28 (2016): 15.

I would like to thank Jared Saltz for reading and responding to an earlier version of this essay.

reception: forming, redacting, editing, receiving, and preserving the Scriptures.

Creedal Expressions in Hebrew Scripture

During the month of Sivan in synagogues around the world, congregations read the Torah portion *Sh'lach* (Num. 13:1–15:41). When they arrive in their reading at Numbers 14:18, they hear one of the first and greatest recitations in Scripture as Moses bravely recounts the Lord's proclamation of the divine character back to God, cooling God's anger against Israel for their refusal to enter the land. As Numbers 14:17 makes clear, Moses's recitation was an act of trust in God's revealed character, which the Lord had proclaimed to Moses when he appeared to him on Sinai following Israel's sin in worshiping the golden calf. That Numbers 14:17–18 may be considered a type of creedal statement is justified in part by the ubiquitous presence of its statement in varied forms throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Biblical writers incorporate creedal statements and their elements in narratives, rites, psalms, and prophetic oracles. For example, some direct parallels in phrases and distinct forms of the creedal statement are found among (1) Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:18; (2) Exodus 34:7 and Nahum 1:3; (3) Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9; (4) Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2; and (5) Jeremiah 32:18 and Nehemiah 9:17. Many other biblical texts echo phrases from these primary forms or allude to specific elements of the creedal statement.[2] The similar formal characteristics and verbal expressions (elements) in multiple variants of the creedal statement, the fluidity of those elements, and their appearance and interpretative nuancing in different genres and settings throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (and perhaps

[2] For more examples, see Michael Widmer, "Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer" (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2003), 127. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3138/.

evidenced in an extrabiblical Hebrew inscription) are not only suggestive of a communal orality of the creed but demonstrative of the consistent transmission of it in multiple, related forms.

Whether the transmitting community is conjectured to be limited to smaller circles of literate elites, in royal, priestly, or priestly prophetic circles, or to have included a society of the mostly illiterate, who repeated or recited the creed in cultic or liturgical response, the function of a creedal statement is to guide (or challenge) readers in the proper interpretation of the surrounding text. Within the texts of Scripture, the creedal statement may affirm or defy biblical actors and speakers in interpreting a prophetic oracle; in the interpretation of an event or law; or, as in the case of Numbers 14:17–18, in interpreting the character of God. Therefore, in addition to differences in wording and variations in the phrasing of a given creedal form, there are often fragmentary, canonical "echoes" of the creed's discrete elements scattered throughout Scripture.

These fragmented echoes, however, particularly as witnessed in the Book of the Twelve (i.e., Hosea to Malachi, the minor prophets), are not simply isolated forms or memories but pieces of a puzzle that join together the different minor prophets, designing a holistic message out of their diverse historical settings, theological emphases, and rhetorical strategies. That creeds are also "recitals" stems from another aspect of such statements that differentiates creedal expressions from other summaries of dogma: the statements to which we appeal in the Hebrew Bible are creedal in that they are written as if spoken. Creeds are spoken in a register of profession or recital. The examples discussed in this essay originate in divine speech but become the core for prophetic intercessory prayer (Num. 14:18) and community recital (Deut. 5:1–6:25).

Further, it is clear that the "biblical reader" is not primarily an individual but a community, whether a prophetic house, priestly scribes, or a royal chancellery (in the Scriptures' early formative

periods); or the synagogue, a sectarian community, the temple priesthood; or the Jesus movement (during the Scriptures' continued development into these later receptive periods).[3] As Robert W. Jenson has observed, "The community positioned to perceive what a scriptural text is truly up to is the church, and the creed is the set of instructions for discerning this agenda."[4]

Creedal Recital in the Hebrew Scriptures

Mark Boda's recent work *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology* informs these observations, as he ties together a unified theology from the diverse tapestry of the canon of the Hebrew Bible by selectively identifying "core expressions of God that appear throughout the [Old Testament] canon."[5] Boda hears three rhythms of Old Testament theology—the first being a narrative rhythm that echoes the emphasis on salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) in the works of Geerhardus Vos, Gerhard von Rad, and G. E. Wright. As Wright stated, "Biblical Theology is the *confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God*."[6] Von Rad emphasized short historical creeds (*kleine geschichtliche Credo*), which are typically communally

[3] For works that examine the scribal practices and social institutions that shaped literacy and texts in the ancient Levant, ancient Israel, Judah, and postexilic Yahud, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 111–286; Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 76–172; William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48–194; and Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 109–265.

[4] Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 81. Early restorationists, to their credit, assumed this principle in their then contemporary practice. See M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 25–26.

[5] Mark Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 7.

[6] Boda, *Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 10n3.

recited summaries of God's redemptive acts in Scripture (Deut. 6:21–23; 26:5–9) but can also be expressed as divine revelation, such as is found in Joshua 24:2–13.[7] Boda performs a selective analysis of the texts most commonly identified as confessional recitals of God's acts and identifies several actions that recur throughout these texts.[8] He explains that the "core actions" of the Old Testament's narrative creedal expressions are the Exodus and Conquest narratives. Actions involving the ancestors, wilderness traditions, life in the land, destruction, and exile "extend" God's core narrative actions in Israel's memory. Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 appear in the second theological rhythm Boda monitors: a rhythm he designates as "the character rhythm."[9] Here, Brevard Childs detected the pulse of God's character as creedal confession, in which the "frequent use" of Exodus 34:6–7 throughout the Hebrew Bible "is an eloquent testimony to the centrality of this understanding of God's person."[10]

> The Lord passed before him, and pronounced: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in faithful love and faithfulness, keeping faithful love to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the parents on children and children's children, unto the third and the fourth generation."[11]

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[7] Boda, *Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 12–13.

[8] Exod. 15:1–19; Deut. 6:21–23, 26:5–9, 29:2–9, 32:1–47; Josh. 24:2–13; Judg. 2:1–3, 6:8–10, 11:16–24; 1 Sam. 12:8; Ps. 78:1–72, 105:1–45, 106:1–48, 135:1–21; Neh. 9:6–31; Jer. 2:6–7, 32:17–23; Ezek. 20:5–29.

[9] Boda, *Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 27–51.

[10] Boda, *Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 28, citing Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 612.

[11] Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture translations are the author's.

God's steadfast love (*ḥesed*) and severe justice (expressed above in the phrase *pōqēd ʿăwōn ʾābôt,* "visiting the iniquity of the parents") are the core characteristics of this creedal expression. The final rhythm that Boda detects he calls the "relational rhythm," an alliterative appellation for covenantal theology. The core elements of relational creeds center on God and Father. Texts in which Boda hears this third creedal expression include Genesis 17:7–8; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 11:45, 22:33, 25:38, 26:12; Numbers 15:41; Deuteronomy 29:12 (Eng. v. 13); 2 Samuel 7:14; Jeremiah 31:33; Psalms 89:27–28; and 1 Chronicles 17:13; 22:10.[12]

Boda's book is an excellent contribution to Old Testament theology that creatively integrates all three rhythms or expressions throughout the entirety of the Protestant Christian canon, including their influence on the New Testament and the present Christian community. For the purpose of this essay, Boda's identification and analysis of repeated, summarizing, confessional biblical creeds supports the idea that biblical creedal statements serve as exegetical lenses through which the developing prophetic oracles and narrative traditions were read by the community.

Returning to Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 illustrates Boda's observed, ubiquitous characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures: contextualized creedal expressions serve as theological confessions and unifying statements for the community and a means by which the community is taught to read the Torah and interpret prophecy.[13]

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[12] Boda, *Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, 54–55.

[13] In relation to the two creedal texts discussed in this essay, see (1) Isa. 11:16, Hosea 2:17 (Eng. v. 15), and Mic. 6:4 in relation to Exod. 20:1 and 32:6; and (2) Mic. 7:18, Ezek. 44:10–12, and Nah. 1:3 in relation to Exod. 34:6–7 and Num. 14:17–18. The influence of these creedal summaries as hermeneutics that frame the community's theological interpretation of the Torah and prophecy is further suggested by Ezekiel's protracted rebuttal of the community's interpretation of the principle of divine collective punishment in Ezek. 18.

Numbers 14:17–18, Exodus 34:6–7, and Their Parallels

The close literary relationship between Numbers 14:18 and Exodus 34:6–7, while generating no overwhelming scholarly consensus regarding each passage's independent origin and development, is nonetheless a commonly accepted tenet of biblical studies.[14] Comparison of the two texts reveals their general agreement, the distinct elements shared by both when compared to other biblical examples of the creed, as well as their differences.[15]

וַיִּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל־פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד
וֶאֱמֶת נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן
אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים

> The LORD passed before him, and pronounced: "The LORD, **the LORD**, a God merciful and gracious, **slow to anger, and abundant in faithful love** and faithfulness, keeping faithful love to the thousandth generation, **forgiving iniquity and transgression** and sin, **but by no means clearing the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the parents on children** and children's children, **unto the third and the fourth generation**." (Exod. 34:6–7)

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[14] See J. P. Bosnan, "The Paradoxical Presence of Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve," *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 233–43; Mark A. O'Brien, "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32–34)," *Australian Biblical Review* 60 (2012): 18–31; H. Spieckermann, "Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr . . .," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102 (1990): 1–18; Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2/8 (Stuttgart: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

[15] In the comparison of examples of this creedal statement in the Hebrew Bible undertaken in this essay, I partially have relied on Abba Bendavid, *Parallels in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1965), 182–83 (in Hebrew). The text of the Hebrew Bible used throughout this essay is the Accordance Bible electronic edition (BHS-T) of Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* 5th rev. ed. prepared by Adrian Schenker (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997).

וְעַתָּה יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹּחַ אֲדֹנָי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר יְהוָה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפָשַׁע וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים

> And now, may the power of the Lord be great—as when you previously spoke, saying, "**The Lord—slow to anger, and abundant in faithful love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty: visiting the iniquity of parents on children, unto the third and the fourth (generation)**." (Num. 14:17–18)

The recitation of the creedal statements of Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:17–18 occurs at significant moments in the historical narratives of Israel and in the redaction of the Pentateuch. As such, this foundational belief statement describing the character of God serves as both an interpretative foundation and a foil for the community of exiles, its prophets, and its scribes. Its presence and function within the Book of the Twelve further solidifies the formative nature of this scriptural creed.[16] The creed's phrases may serve as a framework for the oracles of doom (Nah. 1:3) or laments (Jer. 15:15; Ps. 86:15–16a), as an exegetical lens through which to interpret prophetic oracles and books (Jon. 4:2), or as an inspiration for the "responsive-creeds" of Judah (Ezek. 18; Jer. 16). (In the following discussion, however, I do not presume to have exhaustively identified allusions within the Hebrew Scriptures to the character creedal statements of Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:17–18.)

Exodus 34:6–7 presents the most expansive version of the creedal statement in Scripture, including several phrases found in the prophetic and poetic forms of the creedal statement that are not present in Numbers 14:17–18. These phrases include אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן

[16] J. P. Bosnan, "The Paradoxical Presence," 238–42, notes the influence of Exod. 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve in Hosea 1:6, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Mic. 7:18–20, and Nah. 1:3a.

("a God merciful and gracious"), variations of which are found in Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; and Nehemiah 9:17; וֶאֱמֶת ("and faithfulness"), shared only with Psalm 86:15; נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים ("keeping faithful love to the thousandth generation"), shared with Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:10, and Jeremiah 32:18 (which render the phrase עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לַאֲלָפִים—literally "doing faithful love to thousands"); and וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים ("and the children's children"), a phrase unique to the version of the statement in Exodus 34:7.

The entirety of the statement in Numbers 14:17–18 is found within that of Exodus 34:6–7. Of the phrases that appear in both texts, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם ("slow to anger") always appears preceded by the divine name or other divine titulary (such as אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן, "God merciful and gracious") in creedal contexts (Jon. 4:2; Nah. 1:3; Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Neh. 9:17). In texts that likely allude to the creedal statement, such as Isaiah 48:9 and Jeremiah 15:15, the phrase אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם ("slow to anger") similarly describes or assumes the divine character expressed in the creed. Only in the frequent use of the phrase אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם ("slow to anger") in Proverbs is the phrase not preceded by a divine titulary (Prov. 14:29, 15:18, 16:32, 19:11, 25:15). However, it is likely that these proverbs should be understood in light of the ubiquitous creedal context of the phrase—one who is "slow to anger" shares the divine character—see especially Prov. 14:29, where the phrase "slow to anger" is followed not by רַב־חֶסֶד ("abundant in faithful love") but by רַב־תְּבוּנָה ("abundant in understanding"). The phrase נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע ("forgiving iniquity and transgression") occurs only in the creedal statements of Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:17–18, while וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה ("but by no means clearing the guilty") occurs elsewhere only in the creedal statement of Nahum 1:3, though a variation of this phrase appears in the divine speech of Jeremiah 30:11 and 46:28 (a repeated oracle against the nations). Finally, the last phrase, פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים ("visiting the iniquity of parents on children unto the third and the fourth") appears elsewhere only in

Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9. One may see allusions to the phrase פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן ("visiting the iniquity of . . ."), employing finite and infinitive forms of the root פקד ("to visit") paired with the noun עֲוֹן ("iniquity of") in Leviticus 18:25, Isaiah 26:21, and Lamentations 4:22. All of these allusions either describe divine action or are written as divine speech.

In addition to the biblical texts presented here, inscriptional evidence from Judah suggests that some of the elements included in the biblical creedal statement of Exodus 34:6–7 and echoed throughout the Hebrew Bible were independently "recited" in ancient Judah. An inscription discovered in a burial cave near Khirbet Beit Lei (*BLei* 6), dated by some to the eighth to sixth centuries BCE, but by others to the Hellenistic era, may share three elements of the creedal phrasing of Exodus 34:6–7: פקד יה :אל חנן נקה יה יהוה ("Attend! O gracious God! Acquit! O YHWH!").[17] Alice Mandell and Jeremy Smoak have argued sensibly for greater attention to the funerary context of the inscription. However, their focus on the function of the inscriptions in its original place (in situ) may risk deadening the voice of the text, as if there was no

[17] The reading is that in F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J. J. M. Roberts, C. J. Seow, R. E. Whitaker, eds., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 130–31. For alternative readings of the inscription, see A. Lemaire, "*Prières en temps de crise: Les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei*," *Revue Biblique* 84, no. 4 (1976): 558–68. The word *yh*, repeated in the inscription, is understood here as a vocative particle rather than an alternate form of the divine name. See Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 131, and Nadav Naʿaman, "The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Biblica* 91, no. 1 (2010): 1–23. Alternatively, if one understands *yh* to be a form of the divine name, the repetition of the divine name, *yh yhwh*, could be akin to that in Exod. 34:6–7. See P. D. Miller, "Psalms and Inscriptions," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1981): 311–32. For the view that the material context suggests a Hellenistic era date, see A. Mandell and J. D. Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Iron Age Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16, no. 2 (2016): 197.

connection between the funerary inscription and likely living recitations of the formula outside the cave.[18]

Exodus 34:6–7, Numbers 14:17–18, and Their Narrative Contexts

Within the golden-calf narrative of the failure of Israel at Sinai (Exod. 32–34) and the story of the failure of the people to enter the land (Num. 13–14), the recitation of God's character is an integral element of each narrative's plot and structure. Moreover, the two narratives, in which the creedal statement and its recitation are embedded, share other parallel structural elements and techniques of narrative crafting. Direct verbal correspondences between the two narratives are few, limited mainly to the recitation of the creedal statement. Yet the relative lack of shared, verbatim expressions brings common structural plot elements and narrative crafting to the fore.

In each narrative, after an episode of the people's rebellion, and after a period of waiting for forty days (Exod. 32:1–8; cf. Exod. 24:18 and Num. 13:25–14:10), the Lord appears, declaring he will destroy the nation and create a new nation through Moses alone (Exod. 32:9–10; Num. 14:11–12). Moses intercedes on behalf of the people in both narratives, reminding the Lord that the Egyptians will hear of the people's destruction and ridicule the Lord or the Lord's people (Exod. 32:11–12; Num. 14:13–16). In Exodus 32:13–14, Moses reminds the Lord of the promises he swore to the patriarchs, causing the Lord "to relent from the disaster he spoke of doing to his people." Moses repeats the divine recital of the Lord's character creed (Exod. 34:6–7) in Numbers 14:10, and the Lord pardons the iniquity of the people on the basis of Moses's recitation of the creed (Num. 14:20): סָלַחְתִּי כִּדְבָרֶךָ ("I have pardoned—according to

[18] For a rebuttal of previous scholarship on both the dating of the inscriptions at Khirbet Beit Lei and an affirmation of the contextual relationship of the inscriptions to their material, funerary setting, see Mandell and Smoak, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions," 192–245.

your word"). Notwithstanding the pardon of Numbers 14:20, both narratives then move to describe an immediate punishment by plague against a portion of the people (Exod. 32:35; Num. 14:37).

The primary difference in the use of the creedal statement in the two narratives is that in Numbers 13–14, the recited creed becomes the basis for Moses's appeal for divine pardon, which is granted: "I have pardoned, *according to your word*." Nonetheless, pardon is not granted to עֵדָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת ("this evil generation"; Num. 14:21–23, 26–35), excepting the households of Joshua and Caleb. Further, all of the children of the "evil" Exodus generation suffer along with their parents during the forty-year duration of divine punishment (Num. 14:33).

In Exodus 32–34, Moses's plea for divine pardon is answered by the Lord with a plague as punishment, though limited to the individuals who sinned against the Lord (Exod. 32:22). Moreover, the Lord never explicitly pardons the people in the matter of the golden calf, unless one infers pardon from the Lord's relenting in bringing disaster to the entire community. Rather, the divinely proclaimed creed of Exodus 34:6–7 becomes the basis for a new iteration of the Sinai covenant (see Exod. 34:1–35:29).

Interestingly then, Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14 know not only the creed as recited within their own narratives, ending in transgenerational punishment, but both narratives evoke the "revised" creed of Deuteronomy 7:9–10: "You know that the Lord your God, he is God; the trusted God who keeps covenant and faithful love for those who love him, those keeping his commandments, to a thousand generations—yet repaying to his face the one who hates him, by destroying him. He will not delay with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face." Those who are guilty die, and their children endure a visitation of divine recompense, limited to the lifetime of the evil generation.

Anticreedal Recital in the Hebrew Scriptures. A variation of the "character" creedal statements of Exodus 34:6–7 and Numbers 14:17–18 appears in the second commandment according to the Jewish order (Exod. 20:5–6; Deut. 5:9–10). Yet the Ten Commandments or "Ten Words" begin with a distinctive creedal expression, a "salvation-history" creedal statement that, like the "character creed" of Exodus 34:5–7, is found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." The first "word" (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6) is a declaration, an oration, and more like a creed than a commandment. In an ironic twist, this salvation-history creed becomes a "negative creed" or heterodox creed when Aaron recites it almost verbatim in Exodus 32:6, in reference to deities enthroned upon (or represented by) the golden calf crafted out of the people's earrings: "These are your gods who brought you out of [or, up from] the land of Egypt." In fact, this creed nowhere appears in an orthodox form in Exodus 32, whether in v. 1, where the people recite the anticreed in their derisive comments about Moses, or when their words are paraphrased by Aaron in v. 23:

> When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (NRSV)

One must wait for the second giving of the law to hear again the orthodox version of this short creed in Deuteronomy 20:1: "Whenever you set out to battle against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people, many more than your own, you shall not fear them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Deuteronomy 20:1 seems more

evocative of the Numbers 13–14 spies narrative than either the decalogue setting of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 or the golden-calf narrative of Exodus 32–34.

Elaborate, intentional narrative crafting and shared theological expressions have shaped and informed the "calf/calves" narratives of Exodus 32–34 and 1 Kings 12–14.[19] Among the elements indicating a close textual relationship between 1 Kings 12–14 and Exodus 32–34, one finds a shared creedal expression (more accurately, an anticreed). A foundational section of the so-called Deuteronomistic history, 1 Kings 12:28 shares with Exodus 32–34 the famous negative creed of Aaron in Exodus 32:4. Jeroboam made two calves of gold, one of which he set in Bethel and the other in Dan, to discourage Israel from returning to the temple in Jerusalem. When he first presented the calves to the people, Jeroboam recited Aaron's anticreed: "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Regardless of the original direction of compositional influence, one sees in these two accounts a reflective process of editing by a community (or communities) committed to remembering and interpreting their past and present through the recital of such creedal expressions. Thus a common theological identity and unity are created, perpetuated, and reinforced, while competing theological expressions are rejected. The distortion of the creed in Exodus 32:4 (reported in 32:8) denies the orthodox monotheism that the reciting community knows is demanded of them. In form and, acutely, in pronunciation, the heterodox creed is almost correct. The minimal (but profound) variation occurs in

[19] On the relationship between Exod. 32–34 and 1 Kings 12–14, see M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam and the Golden Calves," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 2 (1967): 129–40; S. Lasine, "Reading Jeroboam's Intentions: Intertextuality, Rhetoric and History in 1 Kings 12," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. N. Fewell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 133–52; M. Leuchter, "Jeroboam the Ephratite," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 1 (2006): 51–72.

the plural verbs of the dependent adjectival noun clause: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt," rather than "For the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Thus, hearing Jeroboam recite the heterodox creed of Exodus 32:4 in 1 Kings 12:28 in reference to the calves he erected at Dan and Bethel informs the reading community that the sin of Jeroboam is not simply an illegitimate cultic and political appropriation of the Exodus-salvation narrative (*Heilsgeschichte*) but also a denial of the divine nature and sovereignty of the God of Israel. Perhaps more importantly, recital of the anticreed, though initially drawing the community's ear to Exodus 32:4, invites the community to return to Exodus 20 (Deut. 5). The corrective to Aaron's and Jeroboam's heterodox confession, Exodus 20:1 (Deut. 5:6), draws the community deeper into the recitation of the divine character as it is revealed in the Ten Words, Exodus 20:4–6 (Deut. 5:9–10):

> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. (NRSV)

The historian of Kings connects for his readers Jeroboam's sin to Aaron's and Israel's sin at Sinai. In so doing, the editor of Kings also reconnects the reader to the orthodox creed in the divinely written tablets from Sinai. Jeroboam's anticreed, coupled with his calves and rival altars, reminds readers of Kings about the character of the saving God who brought Israel out of Egypt, whose stern justice results in transgenerational punishment, albeit for

transgenerational sin. (That Kings and Deuteronomy are here reciting a developed creed, one addressing not only transgenerational punishment but also transgenerational sin, will be addressed later.) Nadab's perpetuation of his father's cultic transgressions is explicit (1 Kings 15:26, 30), insinuating the character creed as stated in Exodus 20:4–6 (Deut. 5:9–10). Jeroboam's dynasty will be limited to one descendant, Nadab, whose reign will be cut short by Baasha, son of Ahijah (1 Kings 15:27).[20] Correspondingly, 1 Kings 15 begins with the application of the creedal statement's principle of transgenerational mercy and reward. For the sake of David, his righteousness (הַיָּשָׁר) was extended to the third generation of his dynasty (1 Kings 15:1–5). While Jeroboam's heir Nadab is punished in fulfillment of Jehu's prophecy, the sins of Rehoboam's heir Abijam are covered for David's sake, even though Abijam continued in Rehoboam's sins. The content and structure of 1 Kings 15 intentionally reflect elements of the statements in Exodus 20:1–4 (Deut. 5:6–10), which articulate and interpret these foundational creedal confessions of the Hebrew Bible.

On one hand, these creedal and anticreedal expressions appear in narratives that repeat the story of God's redemption of Israel in the powerful acts he performed in bringing about the nation's exodus from Egypt. On the other hand, the repetition and echoing of these key creedal texts in different narrative traditions suggest that the texts are not merely passengers in the biblical narrative, but are used intentionally to shape the present form and content of the narratives, accounting for much of the intertextuality that scholars see in Exodus 32–24, Numbers 13–14, and 1 Kings 12–14. That is, regardless of the antiquity of the creedal expression themselves, their employment in these

[20] I have benefitted here from B. Levenson, "The Human Voice in Revelation: The Problem of Authority in Biblical Law," in *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, ed. M. A. Williams, C. Cox, and M. S. Jaffee (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 48.

complex narratives, built from putative pluriform traditions, unifies the accounts. The confessional statement serves as a kind of "canonical tissue" that connects and unifies originally discreet traditions, all of which cohere around the activity of the same deity whose character is articulated in the variations of the creedal statement.[21] One surmises that a key purpose of these intentional scribal and theological practices was that of forming and maintaining a harmonious, healthy, and unified community, even one far removed in time and place from the events described in the narratives.

The narrative of Numbers 13–14 also retells the story of God's redemption of Israel from Egypt, with close associations to Exodus 32–34, but here the setting of the orthodox creed of Numbers 14:18 integrates all three of Boda's expressions. God's anger rises when it is clear that the salvation-history creed of redemption in the Exodus narrative is lost on the Israelites in the wilderness, whose derision of Moses has turned to derision of the Lord: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not trust in me, in all the signs that I have done among them?'" (Num. 14:11). In Moses's intercession for the people, he recites what Boda calls a "relational" expression by appealing to God's presence among his people (an indication of his steadfast love). God's presence is expressed in God's self-revelation through core covenantal promises, which are ultimately upheld by God's righteousness, not Israel's obedience. Moses does not ask God to deny God's own holiness or justice. Therefore, the creedal statement is not simply a recital of a principle, but becomes an appeal to a living being, whose aseity may be expressed in both punishment and in the provision of extraordinary forgiveness, so that divine ability is not misconstrued among the nations:

[21] I am indebted to Kevin Youngblood for this observation in his helpful review of this essay, which incorporates several of his suggestions.

> But Moses said to the Lord, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people; for you, O Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 'It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' . . . Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now." (Num. 14:13–16, 19 NRSV)

Here, the creedal formula appears in a context where Moses is interceding to prevent Israel's destruction, recalling the earlier (at least canonically) case of Moses's successful intercession in Exodus 32–34. The creed in this context serves as a canonical thread, connecting the rebellion episodes in order to encourage the community to read and interpret them in reference to each other.

Scripture as Exegetical Commentary

Among the most influential works of biblical interpretation published in the twentieth century, one may include Michael Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, in which Fishbane explored the development of biblical traditions, describing the processes of their transmission (*traditio*), and especially focused on the practice of exegesis *within* the Hebrew Bible.[22] According to Fishbane, biblical scholarship of the previous two centuries largely raised

[22] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 3.

questions about the diachronic development of biblical texts from prebiblical sources and traditions. Tradition history, rooted in the historical-philological method, supposes that the content of any particular tradition, a *traditum* (whether a legal document, cultic rule, narrative motif, or poetic fragment), was preserved and received into biblical texts through *traditio*, a "long and varied process of transmission."[23] The tradition-history approach to Scripture, raising questions about its earlier literary and oral stages, remains a valuable discipline, though its results are often speculative and tenuous, as sometimes observed even by its most influential practitioners.[24]

Less speculative is the application of the methods of tradition history for the study of the postbiblical exegesis seen in the New Testament and other Second Temple Jewish literature. Here, the texts of the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish texts, as *traditum*, appear in the process of their transmission into these later literatures (*traditio*), interpreted with fresh eyes by the newly formed communities. By means of their reinterpretation, a new *traditum* emerges. Or, more specifically, an old *traditum*, preserved on account of its authority for the later community (*traditio*), is reinterpreted by its later readers, who exert their own (subordinating) authority in their exegesis. The authority of the old *traditum* is observed, but the content and context of the old *traditum* are redefined, conceivably even displacing the old *traditum*, in the process of interpretation. Under the authority of the old *traditum*, a new *traditum* is established, through the process of interpretation (*traditio*). Fishbane's purpose is to demonstrate that one does not have to wait until the postbiblical period of Second Temple interpretation to see exegetical processes: exegesis is already occurring within the biblical text itself. To prove

[23] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 6.

[24] See Fishbane's discussion of Martin Noth. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 8.

this concept, Fishbane locates within the biblical text an example in which an established legal *datum* (*traditum*) is exegeted by an authoritative teacher who incorporates into the general *traditum* a specific interpretation in the process of interpretation (*traditio*) and thereby teaches the *traditum* to a new generation. Fishbane refers us to Numbers 15:22–31, in which a third party (not the Lord or Moses, the sources of the *traditum*), the narrator, as a preacher of Torah "teaches and interprets the divine law."[25] The relevant portion of this text follows:

> But if you unintentionally fail to observe all these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses—everything that the Lord has commanded you by Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and thereafter, throughout your generations—then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, the whole congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering. . . . All the congregation of the Israelites shall be forgiven, as well as the aliens residing among them, because the whole people was involved in the error. (Num. 15:22–24a, 26 NRSV)

Fishbane draws the conclusion: "That this *traditio* is now incorporated into the established legal *traditum* not only authorizes and legitimates the new teaching for all time, but indicates that the *traditio* of the exegetical teacher was formally and functionally subordinate to the divine revelation. And, what is more, it means that the teacher does not stand forth alone, on his own authority."[26]

To state it simply, Fishbane argues that a straightforward reading of Numbers 15:22–31 indicates that this explanatory pericope does not belong to an original transmission of revelation from the Lord to Moses (*datum* or *traditum*). Rather, this portion of

[25] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 260.
[26] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 261.

Numbers is *via traditio* from a later teacher, in which the teacher explains and applies the earlier legislation given to Moses to the teacher's (later) community. Fishbane describes this phenomenon that appears in the Hebrew Bible as a revelation-tradition dialectic, in which it is noteworthy that human exegetical authority (namely, any exegetical activity) is observable in biblical legal and historiographical contexts, even into the post-exilic period.[27]

Moving from more explicitly marked examples of scribal exegesis, expressed by means of technical terms used in the Masoretic text, to the observed transmission of Hebrew Bible textual variants (differences between Qumran, Septuagint, and Masoretic manuscripts) and parallel texts (such as revision in Chronicles and Samuel/Kings), to scribal editorial glosses, pious revisions, and theological explanations, Fishbane proceeds to describe inner-biblical exegesis in three categories: legal (halakhic explanation and revision), aggadic (theological and narrative explanation), and mantological (prophetic/oracular/vision explanation).

The implications of these principles of *traditum* and *traditio*, if accurate descriptions of some aspects in the development of the canonical Hebrew Scriptures, are profound. Fishbane is not proposing that the exegetical activity of revelation (*traditio*) belongs only to the periods subsequent to the formation of the canon; on the contrary, commentary on revelation (*traditum*) first appears prior to the canon's final fixed form.[28]

The Nexus of Narrative, Creed, and Commentary: Developments throughout Scripture

The creedal modifications and development that primarily concern one here are the explanations and clarifications appearing throughout the Hebrew Bible in reference to the closing phrases

[27] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 16.

[28] See Levenson and the concepts of biblical "lemmatic citation" and "lemmatic exegesis" in "The Human Voice in Revelation," 37–38.

of the character creed, "visiting the iniquity of the ancestors on the children, and on the grandchildren, and on the third and on the fourth (generations)." The creed, as expressed in Exodus 34:7 and Numbers 14:18, presents an unresolved tension, in which divine mercy and divine justice are juxtaposed. The theological tension of Exodus 34:7 and Numbers 14:18 is engaged and explored through narratives within the Hebrew Bible that relate instances of forgiveness and vicarious punishment (2 Sam. 12:13–14), transgenerational reward (mercy), and punishment (1 Kings 15:1–4, 26–30), and individual punishment and pardon (Exod. 32:34; Num. 14:20–35), whether deferred or immediate. In this way, the *traditum* of the character creed is not simply repeated, but commented upon with multiple interpretations through the process of its transmission throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Regardless of whether one sees the variety of exegetical applications of the creed in the Scriptures as contrastive or complementary, biblical writers regularly go beyond the simple repetition of the creed in their use of it. To account for the dexterity with which biblical writers selectively employ these character creedal statements and develop "deliberate exegetical modifications," Fishbane sees Exodus 34:6–7 as the authoritative model for the exegetical reuses of the phrase throughout the Hebrew Bible due to its complete form and "relative antiquity."[29] Whether Exodus 34:6–7 represents an inclusive, more mature and developed form of the character creed than the leaner text of Numbers 14:17–18, or vice versa, certainly Fishbane is right to observe that the narrative placement of Exodus 34:6–7 within the Pentateuch accords its form of the creed an authoritative status because, on the canonical ordering of the narrative, Numbers 14:17 assumes the divine revelation of Exodus 34:6–7. So what are readers to make of selective applications in Scripture of one or more of the discrete creedal elements, while ignoring

[29] Fishbane refers to Exod. 34:6–7 as the "divine attribute formulary." See *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 335.

or revising other elements? How does the *traditum* of Exodus 34:6–7 have ongoing authority when theological clarifications and explanations accrue throughout the Scripture in the development and revision of the creed? How can the *traditio*, the process of prophetic revision in the application of the creed to a specific community, participate in the authority of the *traditum*, which is seemingly set aside?

Refining Communal Creedal Interpretation: Ezekiel and Deuteronomy

Creedal statements in the Hebrew Bible such as Exodus 20:1, 4–6, and Numbers 14:18 are not only foundational faith statements and interpretive lenses that serve as literary building blocks for the structure and content of canonical Hebrew Scriptures. These creedal statements are themselves subject to editorial revision and theological clarification within the canon, prompting Bernard Levenson to characterize the revision of these foundational statements as a type of exegetical subversion.[30]

Levenson uses the language of exegetical subversion to describe the reception of Exodus 20:1–4 and its doctrine of "transgenerational punishment" elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. The best-known example that Levenson examines is that found in Ezekiel 18:1–4 (see also Jeremiah 31:29–30):

> What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel: "The parents [lit.: 'fathers'] have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. (NRSV)

[30] Levenson, "Human Voice in Revelation," 53.

The verses immediately following (Ezek. 18:5–29) form the most sustained argument in the Hebrew Bible against Judah's presumption of an unassailable doctrine of "transgenerational punishment," Levenson's term for what seems to be a straightforward and accurate exegesis of Exodus 20:5–6, and one consistent with the theological argument of 1 Kings 15.[31] The proverb, against which Ezekiel and Jeremiah proclaimed a doctrine of "individual punishment," was rooted in just such a straightforward exegetical tradition of Exodus 20:5–6's divinely revealed creed, "visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation." According to Levenson, both Ezekiel and Jeremiah avoid direct alteration of Exodus 20:4–6 through their "radical innovation" of the proverb's "human voice" (tradition), rather than the "divine voice" (revelation) speaking in Exodus's decalogue. Ezekiel, on the other hand, evoking a statement from Deuteronomy, revises even further the transgenerational punishment emphasized in Exodus 20:4–6. Deuteronomy 7:9–10 retains the language of transgenerational favor for those who love God but promises individual punishment for each person who hates God (i.e., who refuses to keep the Torah):

> You know that the Lord your God, he is God, the trusted God who keeps covenant and faithful love for those who love him, those keeping his commandments, to a thousand generations—yet repaying to his face the one who hates him, by destroying him. He will not delay with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.

[31] The historian blames the punishment of Israel and Judah not only on previous kings (e.g., Manasseh in 2 Kings 23:26) but also on the perpetuation of those sins by their contemporary descendants (2 Kings 24:9). Such a move seems to reflect Deuteronomy's own revision of the decalogue of Exod. 20:1–4. See Levenson, "The Human Voice in Revelation," 54–55.

The quotation style of Deuteronomy 7:9–10 indicates its dependence on Exodus 20:5–6, while the similar but different expressions and content in the Deuteronomy passage innovate the latter, revising or clarifying the transgenerational punishment therein. Levenson sees this Deuteronomic innovation to the creed as an entirely new, elegant, sophisticated, but tendentious reworking of Exodus 20:5–6:

> At a single bold stroke the authors of this text (i.e., Deut. 7:9–10) reject the authority of the Decalogue and justifying their legal innovation. . . . They invoke the authority of the older revelation only to subvert it, only to transfer its authority to their own new doctrine of individual responsibility.[32]

Based on the analysis of the creedal formulas within their broader narrative contexts presented herein, such clarification and revision of the theological content of the creedal statements may be noticed even within the narrative context in which they are embedded.

Conclusion

Fishbane's and Levenson's theses are provocative. While observed and declared complexities of textual development should be carefully examined, with a healthy awareness that other solutions may better explain a text's current structure and content, it would be hasty and unhelpful to dismiss Fishbane or Levenson out of hand or solely based on ideology. Restoration heirs have long held that Scripture is best interpreted through Scripture, and may concur with Fishbane that at times, the earliest commentary on Scripture is within Scripture itself. Thus one observes that in the authoritative interpretative traditions that appear in the literature of Second Temple Judaism—such as the *pesharim* (canonical commentaries)

[32] Levenson, "The Human Voice in Revelation," 54–55.

from Qumran—later communities grant their exegetical interpretations an authoritative status.[33] Indeed, the *pesharim* provide evidence for a strategy of biblical interpretation that is paralleled in the New Testament. As Christians, we confess, recite, and have canonized our community's authoritative interpretations (*traditio*) of the Hebrew Scriptures (*traditum*). One can see this same principle in Rabbinic Judaism's Midrashic expansions of *haggadic* literature, and developed *halakhic* applications and interpretations. Clearly, in the case of the New Testament, interpretative commentary on the received Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, guided by the Holy Spirit, becomes authoritative and eventually becomes canonized Scripture. The emphasis for the thesis here is similar to that of Levenson: even within the canon of the Hebrew Bible, interpretative commentary, supplied by later interpretive communities, is contained within Scripture itself.[34] Thus the community and the canon stand in a complementary relationship with each other. The divine authority of the canon is imparted to the community via their submission to it. The influence of the community is discernible because the Scriptures are shaped by it and the canon(s) that it preserves.

[33] For example, 1QpHab II, 1–2.

[34] See more generally J. Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do Not Know* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 21–40. Neusner has observed that if Christianity had progressed on a path similar to Rabbinic Judaism, the transmission of the New Testament would flow in a single stream, along with the exegesis and commentary of its earliest interpreters.

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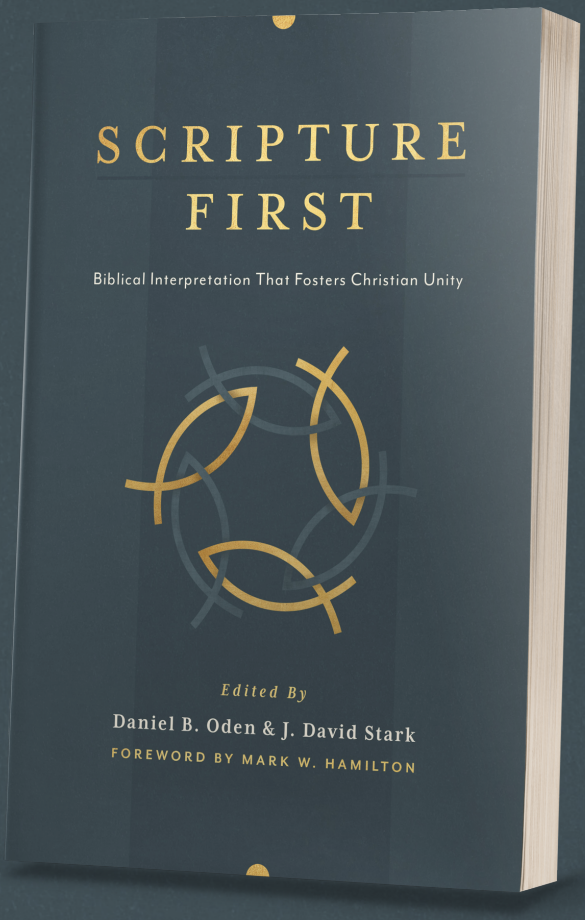

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