A HOPEFUL DEMISE: A BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF EXILE FOR THE CANADIAN CHURCH TODAY

by

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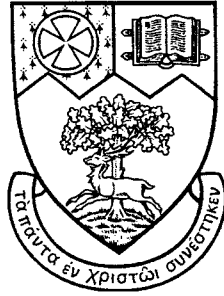Hamilton, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

A Hopeful Demise: A Biblical and Practical Theology of Exile for the Canadian Church Today

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This dissertation is an attempt to apply the motif of exile to the church in Canada today

and employ biblical resources to guide the church in its engagement with Canadian culture. At

one time the church held a place at the centre of Canadian life and contributed to the formation

of national culture. As the nation has evolved, the role of the church has shifted significantly.

The advent of secularization and a post-Christian, postmodern culture has moved the church

from the centre to the margins of Canadian society. The proposal offered here is that this move

can be understood as a form of exile. Exile is a rich motif in the history of the Christian faith.

Our ancestors in the faith, the nation of Israel, were exiled by foreign nations. The Old

Testament is, in many respects, a witness to that experience. Second Temple Jews continued to

live under the authority of foreign powers and they also produced literature that testifies to their

own sense of remaining in and responding to exile. The early church also understood itself as

living in theological exile. The literature of the New Testament demonstrates how the first

Christians sought to live faithfully while yet separated from their true, eschatological home. An

understanding of exile in these texts and the theological approach that they offer can inform the

church in Canada today as it also seeks to live faithfully in its particular contemporary context.

This study seeks to engage the biblical materials with a view to applying their exilic wisdom to

the life of the Canadian Church today. While the sociological demise of the church in Canada is

now part of its historic narrative, exile can offer the contemporary church a paradigm for theological re-orientation, even as it did for Israel and the early church. Thus, adopting an exilic outlook and various aspects of a practical theology of exile can equip the Church in Canada with hope as it faces the challenges of its current circumstances.

Acknowledgements

Sometimes a life changing moment is nothing more than making an impulse purchase at a bookstore. So it is with me. Sometime in 2001 while browsing through the bookstore at Tyndale University-College and Seminary I decided to purchase a collection of Walter Brueggemann's essays entitled *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope*. I cannot recall exactly why I was drawn to the book but after buying it and starting to read it, I was instantly taken in by Brueggemann's insight into culture, the place of the church in culture, and his use of scripture as a guide to how the church should respond. Primarily I was captured by the connections that Brueggemann made between the exile of Israel and the situation of the church in North America today. His suggestion that the metaphor of exile had relevance to the contemporary church was compelling to me and ultimately changed me in a way that led to the writing of this dissertation.

Subsequently, while finishing my Masters of Divinity degree, I had the opportunity to do a directed study course with Dr. Rebecca Idestrom at Tyndale Seminary. Dr. Idestrom was not only willing to take me on as a student despite an already full semester but she also allowed me to pursue exile as a metaphor for the Canadian church as a topic for the course. This study allowed me to do initial research into the topic and fuelled my interest to continue pursuing it. I want to thank Dr. Idestrom for her openness, wisdom, prayers, and empowering supervision of that project. Her contribution to this dissertation is truly foundational in that it was her work with me that provided the basis for me to continue to build on.

Dissertations cannot be co-authored. However, to say that they are an individual work is to misunderstand the process; at least that is the case here. Dr. Michael Knowles has consistently

gone above and beyond the call of duty as my doctoral supervisor. His influence runs throughout this work. His skill as an editor is what ultimately brought it to the place that it was fit to be submitted for consideration. Even more than this, Dr. Knowles has been a mentor, spiritual director, and friend. My appreciation for his hours of work and commitment to the success of my doctoral journey cannot be fully expressed in a short paragraph. Suffice to say I consider myself blessed to have had the good fortune to be supervised by such a fine man and scholar. His imprint on my life will last for as long as I live.

I have also been blessed to have as a second reader Dr. Mark Boda. Dr. Boda is a unique scholar, broad in his knowledge of a diverse range of subjects but deep in his ability to analyze an argument and see where it needs further work. Mark's critical reading, constructive suggestions and incisive editing have made this dissertation so much better than it would have been without his input. His help in the Old Testament section and with the development of my understanding of Biblical Theology cannot be overstated.

Writing a dissertation is hard work. Supervising and reading a dissertation is equally hard work but I could not have hoped for two better people to have worked with. Our meetings together were inevitably joyous occasions, even if the result of them usually meant more work for all of us.

Dr. Richard Middleton served as external reader for the project. He was our first choice for this role and I am extremely grateful to him for agreeing to serve on the committee. I want to acknowledge his help in forcing me to define my use of exile more closely and for helping me understand the lament tradition in the Old Testament more fully. Further, his suggestions on how to re-work the section on postmodernism made the project, as a whole, stronger. He was

also a gracious examiner whose participation in this project further contributed to making it the enriching experience that it was.

Throughout my doctoral journey I had the good fortune of working as part of the faculty at McMaster Divinity College. I want to thank Dr. Stanley Porter for the opportunity that was afforded me to grow professionally while also studying at the College. He, the faculty and staff of the school have provided a truly empowering environment for students to grow in and I will be forever grateful to be associated with such a fine institution.

Finally, but ultimately I want to thank my family. My in-laws, Bob and Louella Gould have provided consistent support and encouragement, including a place to write for extended periods when I needed to get away from the demands of home life in order to focus and get lots of writing done. My mother, Gwen Beach has always been a tremendous support. She and my father Jim provided a foundation for life that I will always be thankful for and throughout my doctoral journey she has be a constant source of practical help around our house. Her presence in our lives is a genuine gift from the Lord. My children Josh and Alexandra kept me happily distracted throughout this process. Attending their hockey and football games, volunteering with their various sports teams and watching them grow up into truly fine young people has kept me grounded and reminded me that there are more important things in life than dissertation writing.

I used to be a bit cynical when I would read at the beginning of a dissertation or book, the mention of the spouse at the conclusion of the acknowledgements. It seemed that it was the thing that everyone did as an almost expected ritual. That was until I actually wrote a dissertation of my own. Now I understand why such an acknowledgement is absolutely necessary and appropriate. My wife Joanne has made this whole project possible. She was the

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Chapter Three: Exile in Second Temple and New Testament Literature

Chapter Four: Living in Exile: The Need for a Practical theology of Exile in the Canadian Church Today

Introduction: Exile as a Motif for the Church in Canada Today

I. Introduction

These are unique days for the church in Canada. The Canadian culture, like most of the world, is in a time of tremendous change. Perhaps the only thing that does not change today is the fact that things are always changing. Representative of this reality is the place that the church occupies in Canadian culture. At one time in the history of this relatively young nation the church played a significant role in the shaping of culture and the daily lives of its citizens. For the most part, the early years of Canadian life were highly conducive to Christianity in its many expressions.[1]

While the influence of Christianity slowly began to wane as the nation moved into the twentieth-century, it certainly did not dissipate immediately. As Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue in their book *A Full Orbed Christianity,* Protestant Churches in particular enjoyed their greatest cultural influence in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Christie and Gauvreau explore ways in which various Christian leaders and reformers expanded the church's influence through mass revivalism, social work, and education in Canadian universities. The enthusiasm for cultural formation demonstrated by many clergymen and lay people in the pre-World War Two years "marked a period of renewal of Canadian Protestantism and its unprecedented expansion into all facets of social and cultural life."[2] This movement placed great emphasis on social action as a barometer of Christian commitment and thus linked private and public morality.[3] This zeal for a Canada that reflected true Christian piety and ethics resulted in

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[1] For evidence of this see Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada,* 284.
[2] Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity,* xii.
[3] Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity,* 245.

high levels of influence over the shape of public life for the church. The result was a

society that played welcoming host to the Christian community.[4]

This can no longer be considered true of the contemporary setting for the church

in Canada. The place of the church is shifting significantly as the culture in which we

find ourselves increasingly wrestles with, and is at times even hostile toward, distinctive

Christian values.[5] By this I do not mean that there is overt anger toward or persecution of

Christian beliefs, although that may occur at times. Rather, when examined—even in a

cursory way— it is clear that the norms of Canadian culture sometimes move in a

direction that challenges the church and its identity within the culture. Christianity,

which at one time stood at (or at least near) the centre of Canadian culture and could

presume for itself a privileged voice, has witnessed that centre unravel and watched as its

place at the centre has ceased to exist. This is evidenced in the work of sociologists such

as Michael Adams and Reginald Bibby, whose studies of Canadian culture consistently

demonstrate Christian belief and practice at all-time lows, with trends continuing to move

away from traditional Christian ethics.[6]

Walter Brueggemann's observations concerning American culture apply to

Canadian life also,

> There was a time … when a Christian preacher could count on the
> shared premises of the listening community, reflective of a large
> theological consensus. There was a time, when the *assumption of God*
> completely dominated Western imagination, and the holy Catholic

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[4] Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity,* xiii.

[5] Defining the term "culture" is difficult; however my use of the term here and throughout the dissertation, unless otherwise specified, is broad and refers to the range of things that characterize a society such as its customs, modes of behavior, beliefs, social practices, social structures and the arts. See Jonathan Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture,* vii–viii.

[6] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* and *Fire and Ice.* Also, Bibby, *Fragmented Gods, Canada's Teens* and *The New Millennials.* This is further illustrated by recent polling data published in MacLean's magazine that demonstrated increasing acceptance for things like abortion, same sex marriage, and euthanasia, all of which have traditionally been opposed by large sectors of the church. MacQueen, "What Canadians Really Believe."

> Church roughly uttered the shared consensus of all parties. That
> consensus was rough and perhaps not very healthy, but at least the
> preacher could work from it.[7]

Brueggemann's comments present a fair picture of the contrast between former days and the situation as it now stands. Bryan Stone agrees when he writes,

> The church can no longer assume that the surrounding culture will
> assist in the task of producing Christians. The home base from which
> Christians thought to Christianize the rest of the world feels less and
> less like "home."[8]

With the lack of anything close to a Christian cultural consensus, the church must continue to wrestle with ways to define itself and engage the culture of which it is a part. Some church traditions are consciously aware of this need. Others may be less aware that something has changed, and even if they are aware they may not feel overly compelled to respond. However, many who are serious about the future of the church are looking for new ways to understand how better to express the uniqueness of Christian faith in our current cultural context.

In considering how to do this it may be that the motif of exile offers one of the most provocative and potentially fruitful ways for the church to define itself in this particular historical epoch. There is an emerging conviction that the situation of the contemporary church may be similar to that of ancient Israel or the early church in their respective, and distinctive, focus on exile.[9]

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[7] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope*, 1.

[8] Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 10–11. In the same context Stone describes the church in contemporary culture as being, "in a sort of diaspora at the margins," 10.

[9] For example see Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home* and Bruggemann, *Deep Memory Exuberant Hope*. In both of these books Brueggemann works from a perspective that exile is the best motif for understanding the place of the Christian church in contemporary Western culture. Middleton and Walsh utilize this theme throughout their book, *Truth is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Klein also concludes his study, *Israel in Exile*, with reflection on how the motif aptly connects with the Western church in contemporary culture, (pp.149–54). See also Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*.

II. Exile as a Potential Motif for the Canadian Church

Perhaps exile is the way that the people of God should understand themselves at all times in their history.[10] Christendom, it can be argued, is an anomaly which produced disastrous results for the church's mission and identity.[11] In light of this it could be that the recovery of an exilic paradigm as a means of self definition is absolutely necessary for the Canadian church in postmodern, post-Christian times.

In order to appreciate the full potential of this motif we must understand that the concept of exile entails more than the stereotypical definition of being displaced from one's native country as a result of forced expulsion or voluntary separation. Exile implies much more than simple geographical dislocation. Brueggemann writes,

> The notion of exile is initially geographical. It suggests a physical dislocation. Exile, however, is not primarily geographical. It is a cultural, liturgical, spiritual condition; it is an awareness that one is in a hostile, alien environment where the predominant temptation is assimilation, that is, to accept and conform to the dominant values that are incongruent with one's faith and destiny.[12]

In other words, one can experience exile even when one returns to or remains in their homeland. Well beyond the sphere of religious identity, this observation is confirmed by the experience of artists, poets, political dissidents, philosophers and religious leaders in countries throughout the world. In his important study on the experience of exile, Paul Tabori reflects on the concept of "inner exile" and comments,

> In our own times the examples of the *inner exile,* of being an outcast within one's own country, have depressingly multiplied. What Wittlin called "the grandeur and sorrow of exile" can be experienced both inside and outside one's motherland.[13]

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[10] See Carroll, "Exile! What exile?" 66–7 where he discusses the idea that exile is *the* biblical story. Also, Jacob Neusner, *Exile and Return,* 221, where he states, "The paradigm of exile and return contains all Judaisms over all times, to the present."

[11] Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom,* 11.

[12] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home,* 115.

[13] Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile,* 32.

From a cultural and sociological perspective Tabori's work reveals the possible

extent of exilic experience and how it includes, but should not be limited to, physical

displacement. Reflecting on modern Jewish experience and the reality of experiencing

exile even while within one's own homeland, Lee Bennett Gaber observes that even

though the people of Israel have had a land to call their own since 1948 this fact does not

eradicate the experience of exile, even for those who have established themselves in the

land:

> Apparently, on a physical level, exile may be eradicated, but it remains
> psychologically an elusive motivating factor in both the individual and
> collective behaviour of the Jewish people.[14]

Gaber goes on to observe that there seems to be within the Jewish consciousness

a sense of "inner exile" that is an important element of Jewish identity.

Gaber underscores the fact that one can be "in the land" and yet still be in exile.

Exile is, in its very essence, living away from home.[15] This is at the heart of Christian

faith as we live away from our ultimate eschatological community. Exile is, further, a

result of understanding ourselves as a distinct people, strangers in the world. This

distinction is defined by our relationship with the supreme God and is rooted in God's

call for us to live our lives in accord with this relationship, often in ways that will come

into conflict with the dominant culture. This sense of exile is experienced by anyone who

feels alienated, cast adrift or marginalized by their inability or unwillingness to conform

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[14] Gaber, *The Psychological Phenomenology of Exile*, 32.

[15] See Suleiman, *Introduction,* 1. Suleiman expands the traditional definition of exile by stating that exile "designates every kind of estrangement or displacement, from the physical to the geographical to the spiritual" (p. 2).

to the tyranny of majority opinion.[16] Simply put, Edward Saïd writes that exile is "the

perilous territory of not belonging."[17]

For Christians in Canada this experience of general cultural marginalization may

be compounded by the postmodern ethos that permeates Canadian culture today, leading

to what Saïd characterizes as an experience of dislocation or "rootlessness."[18]

Postmodernism is intrinsically a cultural ethos that tends to leave its citizens feeling

homeless. At its heart it is a culture that rejects any universal narrative or collective ethic

that might offer a sense of common foundation to its inhabitants.

This is because postmodernism is ultimately a reaction to modernism, and as

such is a deconstructive movement rather than a reconstructionist one. Postmodernism is,

by definition, a tearing down of former beliefs and patterns of life. It produces not a new

"order" of things, but rather a new "disorder." Walsh and Keesmaat indicate that the

postmodern ethos that questions former assumptions, entertains multiple possibilities and

posits few conclusions is a culture of fragmentation. They write, "When one is

accustomed to toying with a multiplicity of perspectives, identities, and worldviews it is

not surprising that life starts to feel fragmented."[19] Such an outlook produces a

fragmented culture and potentially a fragmented self. Such fragmentation can be an

isolating experience. In postmodernism the self can slip into a form of isolation that is

the result of a loss of connection with stabilizing community.[20] This destabilizing

cultural ethos is compounded all the more when one's social group was once at the centre

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[16] Everett and Wagstaff, *Introduction,* x.
[17] Saïd, *Reflections on Exile,* 177. For a thorough overview of the range of potential uses of exile, and how it is being explored within biblical studies and practical theology today see Scalise, "The End of the Old Testament."
[18] Saïd. *Reflections on Exile,* 177.
[19] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 25.
[20] Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols,* 92.

of cultural power and is now increasingly at the margins, as is the case with Christianity

in Canada. In such a situation, exile becomes a useful way of self understanding for the

church in Canada today.

This brief survey of the potential of exile as a description of Canadian Christian

experience requires a more detailed delineation in order for there to be a clear

understanding of how the term "exile" is being used in this project. First, it must be

understood that there are various aspects, experiences, or types of exile. The first such

type is *societal exile*, which occurs when we experience one or more of the following:

- Political exile — Disenfranchisement, loss of power, influence and privilege.

- Social exile — Inconsistency and incongruency with prevailing social values.

- Philosophical exile — This can occur when society has no explicit or
  dominant centre of values. In this case all social
  groups are disenfranchised.

Second, there is a *psychology* of exile. This has been already been briefly

explored through the thinking of Gaber and Tabori, who provide us with an introduction

to the reality of exile as an inner experience.

Third, exile can also be understood from a *theological* perspective. As noted

this happens as we understand that our true home is not in this world but in the heavenly

realm with God. Thus our exile serves as a metaphor, insofar as we live in this world

while our citizenship is in heaven, even as it includes chronological elements as we

understand ourselves to be waiting for our ultimate eschatological return to our true

home.[21] Further, theologically we understand ourselves to be a distinct people with a

distinct identity as followers of Jesus. This naturally contributes to a sense of being ill at

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[21] Paul Tabori explores the intrinsically "temporary" nature of some experiences of exile, in that sometimes, as circumstances change, exiles are permitted to "go home," *The Anatomy of Exile,* 34. In a similar way this is ultimately the Christian experience of exile.

ease within the host country whose identifying norms may be drastically at odds with those that are foundational to Christian identity. Also, as is the prevailing view of the Old Testament, we may understand exile as a form of judgment that God uses as a way of refining and re-orienting his people to their original calling.

For the church in Canada all of these perceptions of exile are germane to our current experience and will inform how the concept of exile is presented throughout the dissertation project. However the prevailing way in which exile will be applied to the church today is through the lens of theo-sociological exile. This acknowledges that our exile encompasses both of these aspects. As we will see, exile is a deeply theological experience for Israel, and continued to be so for Second Temple Jews. Even in the New Testament, exile is a theologically charged idea that has implications for the ministry of Jesus and the early church. In this study it will be demonstrated that the Canadian continues to share a theological kinship with such people. Further, we will explore how our experience of being de-centreed within Canadian culture also places us in sociological kinship with Israel, Second Temple Jews, and the early church in a way that the resources that they produced can inform our contemporary experience.

It must be said that when appropriating a motif such as exile one must do so cautiously and with deep respect for the seriousness of the term. Exile has been a terrifying experience for many and glorifying the idea of being stripped of cultural power may seem romantic on the surface, when it does not actually infringe on personal rights, but it is far less appealing when it results in actual violence, forced removal and disenfranchisement. Some will be quick to embrace a post-Christendom identity and its subsequent outsider status for the church. However Sze-War Kan warns that when truly

stripped of power, exiles experience a longing to regain power rather than celebrate its loss.[22] Caren Kaplan writes about using the exilic motif in a "faddish" way and thus divesting it of any serious meaning.[23] In the same vein Edward Saïd wonders, "If true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture?"[24] These critiques must be heard and we have to be sensitive in our appropriation of the exilic motif for the Canadian church today. However its legitimacy comes in part from the fact that exile is not a new motif for the biblical people of God.

In biblical perspective, the people of God are by nature exilic. Throughout history those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have often perceived themselves to be a threatened minority, struggling to preserve their particular identity and beliefs. From the original couple being cast out (exiled) from the Garden, to the wanderings of Cain, to the nomadic journeys of the aforementioned patriarchs, to slavery in Egypt, the constant threats of enemies throughout the period of the monarchy, including both the Northern and Southern kingdoms final period where both kings were essentially vassals to Mesopotamian power, to conquest by the Assyrians (8th Century), the Babylonians (6th Century), and their subsequent existence under Persian, Greek and Roman rule, the people of Israel never had the pleasure of living with a permanent sense of national security. Neither did the Christians who made up the first generations of the church. Thus, the people of ancient Israel, Second Temple Jews, and early Christians were plunged into cultural situations where *who* they were and what they were called to be was at odds, sometimes drastically so, with *where* they found themselves to be.

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[22] Wan, "Does Diaspora Identity imply Some Sort of Universality?" 119.
[23] Kaplan, *Questions of Travel,* 63.
[24] Saïd, *Reflections on Exile,* 137.

This experience can aptly describe the situation of the church in Canada today and just as the ancient Israelite, Jewish and Christian communities understood their exile in ways similar to the senses delineated above, they responded to their exilic existence with a variety of resources. In fact exile was for Israel a time of immense creativity, as it was also for the early church. For the community to thrive in exile it would take more than simply going back to former practices. A fresh interpretation of faith would be necessary not only to sustain it but also to meet the challenges of a new life setting. Walter Brueggemann articulates these challenges:

> the situation of exile created enormous theological crises in Israel and evoked astonishing theological creativity. The crises emerged because God's absence suggested God's defeat, failure and infidelity. In response, in exile Judaism was birthed and the canonical literature of the Bible was decisively shaped.[25]

Brueggemann elaborates by stating that, "exile evoked the most brilliant literature and the most daring theological articulation in the Old Testament."[26] In similar terms, Michael Frost speaks directly to the challenge at hand for the contemporary Western church when he suggests that the work of exile is to rediscover the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the early church and apply them to life on the soil of a post-Christian empire.[27]

Indeed, exile tends to infuse communities with new creative energy that rises to meet the challenges of new cultural circumstances.[28] Accordingly, the responses to exile

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[25] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home,* 115. Also Klein comments, "Exile was and is a catalyst for translating the faith," *Israel in Exile,* 153.

[26] Brueggeman, *Cadences of Home,* 3.

[27] Frost, *Exiles,* 26.

[28] For an exploration of how exile is an impetus to creativity see Bauman, *Assimilation into Exile,* 321, where he writes, "in exile, uncertainty meets freedom. Creation is the issue of that wedlock." Also, Sulieman, "Introduction," 1, asks rehetorically, "Is this distance a falling away from some original wholeness and source of creativity, or is it on the contrary a spur to creativity?" Finally this theme is also explored by McSpadden in "Contemplating Repatriation to Eritrea," 46, as she writes about the way that exile allows one to critique one's own country or established patterns.

that are offered by the communities depicted in Scripture provide resources to the

contemporary church and its own formation as an exilic people. This dissertation

proposes that the example and resources of Israel and the early church are pertinent to the

Canadian church as it too seeks to live as an exile within contemporary culture. That is,

exile is an appropriate motif for the Canadian church's understanding of itself and its

mission in its current setting; a robust biblical and practical theology rooted in both the

Old Testament and New Testament visions of exile can inform the contemporary

church's self-understanding and mission.

While, as has already been noted, exile is increasingly being suggested as a

pertinent motif for the Western church, no study to date has engaged biblical and Second

Temple resources or sketched a biblical theology with a thorough application to

contemporary ecclesiology and ministry. This project can help to fill this void and

contribute to an ongoing theological conversation that seeks to understand the church in

exilic terms, and thereby help it to engage the surrounding culture more effectively within

the postmodern, post-Christendom context.

III. Research Methodology/Model/Framework

This dissertation is a work of practical theology. The discipline of practical (or

pastoral) theology is notoriously difficult to define,[29] however this dissertation will

proceed along the lines of the methodology outlined by Derek Tidball in his book *Skillful*

Shepherds. Tidball works from a perspective that views the bible as normative for

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[29] The terms "pastoral theology" and "practical theology" are sometimes used interchangeably, especially in the U.K. For an overview of the discussion around the definition of these terms see Pattison and Woodward, "An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology."

pastoral ministry and as a foundation for its practice.[30] One of the primary orienting

questions that Tidball asks is, "Do the Scriptures and theology give any insights into how

(the) pastoral task is to be conducted?"[31] This question undergirds the present work. Can

scripture provide an adequate motif, and the subsequent resources, to help the Canadian

church understand its place in contemporary culture and how it can fulfill its calling

within that setting? With these questions clearly in mind, the first chapter will seek to

describe our social and historical setting, chapters two and three will seek to mine the

wisdom of the biblical resources for this context, and chapter four will reflect on how

these resources can apply to the Canadian church today. This approach is rooted in the

idea that by securing the practices of ministry in the theology of scripture, the church

discovers an anchor and point of departure that will energize its ministry and prevent it

from moving in unproductive directions.[32]

This study will primarily employ a literature-based research methodology,

exploring primary and secondary sources for information that is pertinent to the topic of

exile in biblical and Second temple literature, as well as a socio-cultural analysis of

contemporary Canadian society.

This multi-faceted approach will require a close study of trends within Canadian

culture that demonstrate how exile can be considered a viable motif for Christian self-

definition. My methodology for the section on the contemporary Canadian scene will

employ a form of "content analysis" and "secondary analysis." Content analysis involves

the systematic coding of information from various sources (textbooks, surveys,

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[30] Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 7
[31] Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 24
[32] Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 24. Tidball's work is reflective of this approach as he devotes the first half of his book to consideration of biblical materials and then seeks to apply them to contemporary ministry in the second half.

periodicals, etc.) for the purpose of quantitative analysis.[33] This form of research is a means of examining social change as the writings of a people reflect changes in values and perspectives over the course of time. It is also effective in describing those changes as research is analyzed and hypotheses are developed.[34] However, it is not my intention to undertake firsthand research and content analysis. The approach taken in this study will be one of secondary analysis. This means that I will be using research undertaken by others as the basis for my own analysis.[35] Secondary researchers often bring new and possibly even more objective opinions to the topics under consideration.[36] Thus, I will engage a variety of sources which describe the church's place in Canadian society as it has evolved through the twentieth century, as well as literature that offers analyses of the postmodern context. Drawing from these sources I will offer my own analysis of their content and seek to employ it in ways that effectively support the primary goals of this dissertation. Specifically, the study will first examine trajectories in Canadian culture and the place of the church within them over the last hundred years. Second, it will examine in particular the influence of postmodernism as a social and philosophical phenomenon, together with specific social practices which flow out of a postmodern worldview and currently affect Canadian society and the church's place within it.

After developing a cultural perspective, I will develop a biblical theology of certain exilic themes through the lens of various Old Testament perspectives, particularly the prayer language of Israel as seen in Lamentations and selected "exilic' Psalms, as well as three "exilic characters" presented in the Old Testament; Esther, Daniel and

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[33] Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods,* 239.
[34] Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods,* 241.
[35] Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods,* 259.
[36] Chadwick et al., *Social Science Research Methods,* 260. For a further introduction to these concepts see also, Simon, *Basic Research Methods in Social Science.*

Jonah. Examining these biblical texts by means of appropriate exegetical strategies will elucidate their potential contribution to a biblical theology of exile. I will take a similar approach to Second Temple texts such as First Enoch, Tobit, the book of Jubilees, 1 Baruch, 2 Maccabees and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, which speak to the exilic experience of Jewish communities during this period. While these texts are not part of the Protestant canon, and they will not play as prescriptive a role in the applicational section of this study, they act as important background material for the New Testament. They also reflect a continuation of an exilic mindset in Israelite thinking as well as inform the perspective of those who wrote New Testament literature. Finally, an overview of the New Testament with a particular focus on the ministry of Jesus and the epistle of 1 Peter will be offered. While these materials are diverse, I will seek to identify responses to exile which can be found in the Old Testament, Second Temple and New Testament literature. This exegetical work, combined with cultural analysis, will lay the foundation for the third part of the dissertation, which introduces practical theology and implementation. In this section I will reflect on ways in which the exegetical and theological perspectives developed from the biblical texts can be employed by the Canadian church as a resource for facing its own exilic situation.[37]

This dissertation is rooted in biblical theology. While it is undeniably true that there is a great diversity in approaches to biblical theology[38] I will take a thematic approach that is sensitive to various methodologies that are available for interpreting specific passages. Specifically, I seek to approach the discipline from a perspective that

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[37] As a work of Biblical Theology, the canonical voices will play a central role in the application section of the dissertation. The Second Temple voice will play a more secondary role as one that adds insight, but is not treated as authoritative.

[38] See Sailhammer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology,* for an in-depth analysis of potential approaches. Also, see Hasel, *Old Testament Theology.*

tries to understand a particular theme throughout specific parts of the biblical canon. It involves 1) the selection of relevant texts; 2) the exegesis of these texts; 3) the comparison of the information in each text with the information from the other texts studied; 4) an attempt to analyze the material to discern what kind of "biblical" picture emerges; 5) reflection on the theological and practical meaning of these texts for the church today. Ultimately the goal is to establish trajectories within the biblical text as a whole that can be appropriated by the church in its current context.[39]

Brevard Childs warns that this kind of tracing of a theme in biblical theology runs the danger of distorting the biblical material by dividing things that belong together or joining together things that should be kept separate. He says the success of the method depends on "how critically and skillfully it is employed."[40] In response to this, I. Howard Marshall's method offers a fruitful methodological guide.[41] He writes, "The approach taken here is to let each of the individual books of the New Testament speak for themselves and then to attempt some kind of synthesis of their teaching."[42] The same approach applies to passages from the Old Testament, New Testament literature that deal with the theme of exile.

It is true that both the canonical and non-canonical materials being considered are diverse and have different emphases, perhaps even different viewpoints. While this study will pay attention to the diverse aspects of the theme of exile, it would not be appropriate for a study that is ultimately interested in application merely to display ideas

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[39] It bears repeating that, while Second Temple literature is a part of the dissertation research its role is designed to establish exile as a part of the Jewish consciousness, particularly as it informs the writers of New Testament literature.

[40] Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments,* 15–16.

[41] Marshall, *New Testament Theology.*

[42] Marshall, *New Testament Theology,* 9.

from various writers without trying to relate them to each other. After a consideration of the texts and their emphases, ideas will be brought together so as to discover ways in which they complement one another and thus offer a constructive perspective for the church today. In this sense, Biblical Theology will inform this dissertation according to its tasks of description and synthesis.

Thereafter the thesis will attend to some applicational concerns for the church in Canada today. Treating the biblical texts as normative for the believing community both then and now, a series of applications will be proposed between the biblical material and the contemporary Canadian scene. In doing this, the methodology employed here fits the description offered by Charles Scobie, who advocates an "intermediate biblical theology which functions as a 'bridge' between the historical study of the Bible and the use of the Bible as authoritative Scripture by the church."[43] This methodology seeks to take seriously the critical study of Scripture, but also the role that the life of the church plays in doing biblical theology. The church asks the questions that inspire the work of biblical theology, and then also becomes the "end user" of the results yielded by biblical theological inquiry. Biblical theology thus serves as an intermediary not only between text and community, but also between the needs and practices of the church.[44] This methodology envisions the biblical text not as being simply descriptive of Israel, or the early church in exilic terms, but also as having a normative function in the church today. In view here is the conviction that the text in its canonical form mediates the ancient

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[43] Scobie, *The Ways of our God*, 8. Once again I thank Lois Fuller for her help in identifying Scobie's perspective and helping me clarify this aspect of my methodology.

[44] For a vivid exploration of how ministry calls for Biblical Theology see Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," 102–43.

world for the contemporary reader and allows him or her to enter into it and appropriate it for life in the contemporary world.[45]

IV. Conclusion

It is almost universally agreed that the church in the Western world is in decline. After having played a central role in the development of Western culture the church now finds itself on the sidelines wondering how it can make a valid contribution to society. The goal of this dissertation is to contribute to the necessary and ongoing conversation around the church's identity in changing times by offering a biblically informed reflection on who the church is and how an exilic self-understanding can put us in touch with life-giving resources essential for renewal with the hope that the church can continue to have influence in our country, albeit from a very different position in society. As exile was— for Israel— a time for self-evaluation and reorientation, so it can be for the Canadian church. The way forward is to look around and understand our context, to look back and gather the resources that our Christian faith offers us, and then, to look forward with a clear vision of how the church ought to, and can function as God's people in contemporary Canadian exile. This dissertation seeks to help inform all three aspects of that necessary process in the hope that the renewal of the church will be the result.

This dissertation proposes that exile provides an appropriate motif by which the Canadian church can understand itself and its mission in its current setting. Afterall, Canada is a nation of immigrants. Since exile from one's homeland is a natural metaphor for immigrants, our ethnic history makes us open to such a theological analysis. While this thesis pertains primarily to Anglo-Saxon Protestant experience, exile is also a highly relevant metaphor for churches primarily made up of immigrants from other nations or, in

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[45] See Boda, A *Severe Mercy*, 4–5.

a different sense, First Nations people. However, since the experience of each of the later is unique, exploration of it falls outside of the purview of this work. Nonetheless, a robust biblical and practical theology that focuses on the exilic identity of God's people, as described by Old and New Testament texts can inform the self-understanding and mission of Protestant and Evangelical Canadian churches today.

Chapter One

Yesterday and Today: Understanding our Context

I. Introduction

It can be credibly asserted that there was a time in Canadian history when the

church held a place at the centre of the nation's culture. For the most part, the early years

of nationhood were highly influenced by the various expressions of Christianity that were

present at the inception of Confederation. As historian Mark Noll states,

> The nineteenth-century may properly be regarded as a "Christian
> century" in Canada. Both in Quebec, where Roman Catholicism
> provided the dynamism and the institutions for an entire way of life,
> and in English Canada, where Protestants enjoyed a cultural influence
> even greater than their counterparts in the United States, the Christian
> faith provided the foundation for personal and experience.[1]

This is despite the fact that, as the idea of a new confederation was being

conceived, church leaders of the day were lukewarm to the idea of a new nation and did

little to bring it into being. Like others in the mid-1800s, they surveyed the vastness of

the land, the diversity of its inhabitants and the possible self-serving motives of those

who wanted to establish the new country as reason enough to be suspicious of it.[2]

Historian John Webster Grant, assessing the beginning of Confederation states,

> Confederation was an offspring of secular statesmanship, born of
> political and economic necessity, fathered by politicians and railway
> promoters. Its purpose was not to create a covenant people or hasten
> the coming of the kingdom of God but to ensure a continued British
> presence in North America that would be strong enough to withstand
> powerful pressures towards continental consolidation.[3]

While the church in general may not have been overly enthusiastic about

Confederation, it certainly did not abdicate its role as a purveyor of cultural norms. As

we will see, Canada developed as a Christian nation from the very beginning and the

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[1] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 284.
[2] Airhart, *Ordering a New Nation and Reordering Protestantism 1867-1914*, 98.
[3] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 24.

church, in all of its forms, worked hard to see that this was so. As we consider the theme of exile it is crucial for us to understand just how much Canada was truly "home" for the church at one time. By understanding the centrality of the church's role in molding Canadian culture and its significant influence on the nation's citizens and how that influence has waned, we can begin to see how the immense cultural changes that have taken place from Confederation up to today make exile an appropriate motif for the church's self-understanding. In this chapter we will seek to understand how the church played the role of nation builder in the early years of Canada's development, then we will consider how the influence of the church largely began to dissipate and the country grew increasingly secular in its national identity. In the second half of the chapter we will explore the philosophical movement of Postmodernism and the effect it is having on contemporary culture in general and Canada in particular. This will lead us to consider specifically how these trends affect how the culture relates to the church and vice-versa.

II. The Church in Canadian Culture 1867–1967: A Synopsis

In the days of Confederation, church involvement was a central part of the social fabric for a large majority of Canadians. Catholics and Protestants alike were predisposed to having some affiliation with their local church congregation. Religious convictions were only a small part of the reason for this preference. As historian Brian Clarke reports, church attendance, especially among the middle-class, was a way of establishing one's place in society, and for business people a way to make contacts and demonstrate their respectability to potential clients or customers. Not to attend church could in fact harm one's social reputation as it could be taken to indicate a lack of character and moral sensibility. Added to these factors the Sunday morning service was a

significant place of social gathering, a respectable place for courtship and a place to hear some of the best music and oratory available.[4]

Beyond these functions the church took its role as nation builder seriously and exerted its influence in the development of Canadian life. Even in the middle part of the nineteenth century, prior to Confederation in 1867, Methodists, led by Egerton Ryerson, saw the need for Christian public education and became deeply involved in the development of a public school system that would help ensure the transmission of Christian values into the lives of the young.[5] These values were also apparent in higher education, where an evangelical passion and the ethical currents of Scottish university culture gave the Bible a central place in academic study.[6] Early in its history as a nation, Presbyterians and Anglicans tied themselves closely to the world of Upper Canadian politics. Their vision of their role in the emergence of the nation was not to see themselves as an "otherworldly" sect, but rather to envisage a nation in which the religious establishment was central to the identity of the country. Those who could see in Canada the potential of a truly Christian nation also saw that if it was to happen, Canada would need its church to be a central player in its development. Thus, a close alliance between church and state defined the vision of church leaders in Canada's formative years.[7]

The role of the church as nation builder was a natural one since the majority of Canada's citizens in the mid-nineteenth century were affiliated with a church and in

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[4] Clarke, "English Speaking Canada," 278.
[5] Gauvreau. *Protestantism Transformed,* 90–1. Later in Canadian history, the early twentieth century pastor and politician, J. S. Woodsworth would also acknowledge the need for the public schools in helping instill Christian ideals. See Miller, "Unity/Diversity," 74.
[6] Gauvreau. *The Evangelical Century,* 65
[7] Westfall, *Two Worlds,* 82–3.

practical terms there were few, if any, countries in the Western world where religion

exerted a greater influence on the development of national life than in Canada.[8] There

prevailed among many Protestants in Upper Canada, and Catholics in Quebec, a belief

that a distinctly Canadian character could be developed. This concept of a "Canadian

character" provided impetus for leaders of the Christian religion to engage in the task of

moral and spiritual crusading as a means to bring this character to fruition. This zeal was

fused with an urgency that reflected a desire to see Canada become a truly Christian

nation, inspiring preachers to spread the influence of the Christian message all across the

newly confederated land.[9]

In the early days of Confederation Christian leaders were also concerned about

the encroachment of commercial values and materialism into the fabric of Canadian life

and attempted to address such "evils" with an emphasis on Christian moral teaching.

This contributed to the development of, for instance, the Women's Christian Temperance

Movement and the Dominion Alliance, both of which sought to enforce a ban on the

consumption of alcohol and succeeded as various Provinces (except Quebec) eventually

adopted a ban on the sale of alcohol.[10] In addition, the Lord's Day Alliance was a group

concerned about the implications of industrialization and its effects on the spiritual lives

of those who were not able to take time for leisure and worship. This alliance, made up

of leaders from across denominations, pressed for legislation that would curb or eliminate

certain activities deemed inappropriate for a Sunday. The group succeeded in persuading

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[8] Airhart, *Ordering a New Nation*, 99.

[9] Airhart, *Ordering a New Nation*, 101. Also, Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 68.

[10] By 1918 all provinces, except Quebec, were "dry" and in that same year the federal government adopted a ban on liquor sales until the end of the World War. Clarke, *English Speaking Canada from 1854*, 327.

the government to pass the Lord's Day act in 1906, which regulated business activities

and public events on Sundays.[11]

Church historian Gordon Heath states that Protestant churches at the end of the

nineteenth century "had an influence on English Canadian society unlike any other

institution."[12] This influence is reflected in the proliferation and content of the Canadian

church press of the time. This literature leaves no doubt that at the end of the nineteenth

century the English Protestant churches had taken it upon themselves to be more than just

church builders; they were nation-builders. Heath observes that, "While nation-building

meant many things, at the very least it meant building a united, democratic, distinctly

Christian nation."[13] One of the leading periodical publishers at the time of Confederation

was John Dougall of Montreal. Dougall oversaw a number of periodicals, including most

notably, the *Montreal Witness*. Dougall had a goal of providing inexpensive religious

materials that would be accessible to society at large as a means for the moral

improvement of Canadians. He did this through a combination of devotional content,

societal commentary, and political analysis.[14] The successes of Dougall's publications

demonstrate that there was a definite market for periodicals that sought to perpetuate

Christian ideals in Canadian life and that Canadians of the day had an appetite for the

particular agenda that Dougall offered.[15] This kind of zeal and the influence that it

wrought leads some commentators to observe that religion had a uniquely powerful

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[11] Clarke, "English Speaking Canada," 326. Also, see Airhart, *Ordering a New Nation, 122–23.*
[12] Heath, "Forming Sound Public Opinion," 109.
[13] Heath, "Forming Sound Public Opinion," 125. Heath cites the explicit mission statement of the *Westminster,* a Presbyterian paper that claimed as its chief aim, "to stand ready to deal with questions as they emerge and to help in the forming of sound public opinion upon subjects of public concern," 137.
[14] Vander Hoef, "John Dougall (1808-1886)," 116.
[15] In fact one of Dougall's editors wrote an editorial arguing that the Canadian periodical industry had a duty to promote the Christian cause and even assist in the conversion of souls. This was of such importance, the writer argued, that editors held a position of privilege among God's elect. See Vander Hoef, "John Dougall (1808-1886)," 127.

influence in Canada.[16] Citing Canadian literary icon Northrop Fry, Heath notes that

religion was a major, perhaps even *the* major, cultural force in Canada's first decades of

existence.[17]

At the outset of the twentieth-century, Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier had

declared that the new century would be "Canada's century," and the churches of the

nation were as determined as ever to see that the century of Canada would be a distinctly

Christian one. In Quebec, the Catholic Church not only played a central role in the

definition of public morality, but also helped French Canada maintain its distinct culture

and social cohesion in the face of a British-dominated government at the time of

Confederation. The church played a central role in assuring that the citizens of Quebec

were properly cared for. As Roberto Perin writes, the church provided social services to

the people of Quebec "from the cradle to the grave."[18] This occurred when some of the

British politicians of the day thought that urbanization would inevitably lead French

Canada more deeply into the influence of British culture and the eventual demise of their

own.[19]

While there were clear differences in theological belief and vision for the nation

between the various Christian denominations, what undergirded their collective efforts

was a "conviction that in the main the institutions and values of Western society rested on

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[16] The paper's circulation reflected its influence; in 1872 the paper reached a circulation of 23,100 and a daily distribution of another 10,500. Beyond Montreal it was read throughout the Ottawa Valley and as far west as London and east into the Maritimes. See VanderHoef, "John Dougall (1808-1886)," 126.

[17] Heath, "Forming Sound Public Opinion," 110.

[18] Perin, "Elaborating a Culture," 100. The role of the Catholic church in Quebec is a significant, but distinct part of the development and influence of Christianity in Canada. To deal effectively with its special dynamics would involve more space than is allotted here. Therefore this study will focus primarily on Protestantism in English Canada. For a thorough overview of the Quebec situation see Murphy, *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada,* especially chapters one, two and four. Also see Gauvreau and Hubert, *The churches and Social Order in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Canada,* see especially Chapters five and six which focus on how the Catholic church served Quebec society and promoted Catholicism through the school system and church charitable societies.

[19] Perin, "Elaborating a Culture," 100.

a Christian foundation."[20] This perspective, that Canada was destined to become a part of

Christendom, was assumed by all the major religious players in early Canada. Webster

Grant articulates the prevailing attitude of church leaders and many of the nation's early

builders when he writes,

> The movements that gave shape to Canadian church history sprang
> from the womb of Christendom and assumed its continued vitality.
> Traditionalists wished to transfer the patterns of Christendom to the
> new world and to conserve its values against the disintegrating
> influence of the frontier.[21]

This vision continued to give shape to the nation's development into the

twentieth century. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue in *A Full Orbed*

Christianity that Protestant churches in particular enjoyed their greatest cultural influence

in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Christie and Gauvreau explore ways in

which various Christian leaders and reformers expanded the church's influence through

mass revivalism, social work, and education in Canadian universities. The enthusiasm

for cultural formation demonstrated by many clergymen and lay people in the pre-World

War Two years, "marked a period of renewal of Canadian Protestantism and its

unprecedented expansion into all facets of social and cultural life."[22] This movement

placed great emphasis on social action as a barometer of Christian commitment and thus

linked private and public morality.[23] Again, this zeal for a Canada that reflected true

Christian piety and ethics resulted in the church exerting a high degree of influence over

the shape of public life. As we have already noted, Protestant Churches expanded their

social base through mass revivalism, social work and sociology in university and church

college curricula, and aggressively sought the leadership of social reform by

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[20] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 213.
[21] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 215.
[22] Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity*, xii.
[23] Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full Orbed Christianity*, 245.

incorporating independent reform organizations into the church-sponsored Social Service

Council of Canada. The net result was a society that played welcoming host to the

Christian community.[24]

The prominent place of the church as a culture-shaping institution crossed

denominational lines. The Catholic Church, always the largest segment of the church in

terms of sheer numbers, played a significant role in the shaping of the country's identity

through its influence over adherents.[25] The major Protestant denominations —Anglican,

Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist— had also grown accustomed to having considerable

influence in the intellectual, social, and cultural life of the growing nation.[26] Although

considerably smaller in number, fundamentalist and more theologically conservative

denominations also played their part in reinforcing Christian ideals within the broader

culture. While conservative evangelicals stressed personal salvation and liberals stressed

the redemption of society, all agreed that Canada should be fashioned into "God's

dominion."[27]

This vision was consonant with the mainline church's adoption of the "social

gospel" as a particular aspect of their social agenda for Canada at the time. As Richard

Allen explains,

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[24] Indeed Christie and Gauvreau state that, "Between 1900 and 1930 the Methodist and Presbyterian churches envisioned their mission as nothing less than the complete Christianization of Canadian life," *A Full Orbed Christianity*, xiii. This reflects a continuation of the vision present among churches at the time of confederation.

[25] The Canadian census reports between 1911and 1941 demonstrate that anywhere between 38-43% of the population identified themselves as Catholic. See Wright, "The Canadian Protestant Tradition," 141.

[26] Wright. "The Canadian Protestant Tradition ," 139.

[27] Wright, "The Canadian Protestant Tradition," 151. Wright draws attention to the remarkable unity among churches in this era. This unity was typified in the forming of the United church out of Methodists, Congregationalists and certain Presbyterians.

> The social gospel rested on the premise that Christianity was a social religion, concerned, when the misunderstandings of the ages were stripped away, with the quality of human relations on the earth.[28]

Though not uniquely Canadian, the social gospel movement was part of a broader attempt on the part of the church in North America and Europe to revive and develop social insights that were distinctly Christian and could be applied to collective society (as it continued to emerge).[29] This endeavor led to the formation of a number of different labor movements and societies that had their generative roots in Christian theology on the one hand and church meeting halls on the other. One notable Canadian example of such a society is the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO) which entrenched two sustaining principles in its founding agreement. The first was that "the capitalist economic system is at variance with Christian principles" and the second was that "the creation of a new social order is essential to the realization of the Kingdom of God." The leaders of the society were United Church clergy men and at least one Anglican who all held a vision that Canadian society should be shaped by gospel values.[30]

Along the same lines, Webster Grant documents how in the post-World War One years and during the time of the Great Depression, the church, particularly in Western Canada, led a movement of social reform that had a deep impact on society.[31] This social movement was marked by resentment at the perceived social injustice occurring within the economic system. Grant writes that "pity for ruined farmers and unemployed workers was readily translated into indignation against capitalists and

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[28] Allen, *The Social Passion,* 4.

[29] Allen, *The Social Passion,* 3–4.

[30] Wright, "The Canadian Protestant Tradition," 178. In Quebec the labor movement was guided by the Catholic church under the influence of Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* which addressed the nature of just labor relations. For more see Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 103–5.

[31] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 141.

financiers" whose manipulations had apparently caused an economic slump.[32] Radical reformers within the FCSO believed that the problems were so deep that Canadian society now stood under the judgment of God, and that only a sweeping reordering of society would address the severity of the situation.[33] These resentments, fueled by the theological convictions of the social gospel, led the church to take an active role in speaking out against social injustices. This activism influenced public policy and birthed political initiatives that formed new political parties (the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF]) and caused influential preachers like William Aberhart to include the political ideals of the Social Credit party in his sermons and thus helped bring the party to government in the Alberta provincial election of 1935.[34]

The centrality of Christianity in Canadian public life is unmistakably evident in a speech given by Prime Minister MacKenzie King in 1939, in which he declared World War Two a struggle "between the pagan conception of a social order which ignores the individual and is based upon the doctrine of might, and a civilization based upon the Christian conception of the brotherhood of man with its regard for the sanctity of contractual relations, in the sacredness of human personality."[35] King's clear positioning of Canada as a nation based upon Christian convictions (or at least an interpretation of Christianity) as opposed to the "pagan" views of the enemy is a clear indication of how the nation perceived itself as the middle of the century approached.

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[32] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 141.

[33] Clarke, *English Speaking Canada from 1854,* 347.

[34] Grant. *The church in the Canadian Era,* 140-142. Also see Stebner's work on politician Stanley Knowles and his mixing of a sense of religious calling with his entry into politics. Knowles was driven by a desire to see Christian faith influence society and he accomplished many initiatives both provincially (in Manitoba) and federally as a result of these convictions. Stebner, "Young Man Knowles." Similar Christian religious convictions fueled the careers of influential politicians of this period like J. S. Woodsworth and Tommy Douglas.

[35] King's speech is quoted in Gary Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 21.

However, this concept was slowly beginning to change and the changes would

only increase in their rapidity as the Second World War concluded.

The end of the war brought a desire to return to "normalcy" in Canadian life.

This initially brought about a boom in church attendance and religious involvement. The

fear and instability caused by the war compelled people returning from the war, as well as

their families, to seek security and stability in a number of places, including the church,

> Greatly as it took Canadians by surprise, the return to the church was
> not the result of a sudden mass impulse. In retrospect it seems obvious
> that the sobering experience of the depression and war years had raised
> questions for which many Canadians would ultimately seek answers
> from the churches.[36]

In retrospect, this is not hard to fathom as the influence of the church on the

Canadian psyche had traditionally been strong. After such turmoil, the church became a

natural place for people to turn for comfort and a sense of stability. This return was an

indication of how Christian institutions continued to guide the people of the nation.

Church attendance rose: the United and Anglican Church, for instance, saw their

memberships rise by about 25% between 1951 and 1961. The interest in religion even

began to impact society in new ways, including the flourishing of men's and women's

groups, an increase in service projects, study groups, the sale of religious books and the

desire for religious teaching to be introduced into the public schools in some parts of the

country.[37]

The rise in spiritual interest also began to bring an increased prominence to

formerly marginalized Christian groups. Conservative evangelicals were beneficiaries of

the post-war bulge in church attendance. There already was, even before the end of the

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[36] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 163.
[37] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 163. Also see Stackhouse, "The Protestant Experience in Canada," 199–205, for commentary on the post-war boom.

war, an indication that trends were beginning to shift on the ecclesiastical landscape of

Canadian church life. As early as 1920, mainline denominational leaders had begun to

notice that their congregations were aging as compared to some of the more marginal

Protestant groups. The demographics suggested that the growth potential for major

denominational groups was far lower than that of newer or traditionally smaller

denominations.[38] In the early part of the century those considered to be "outsiders" to the

mainstream of society were not only those identified as non-Christians but also Christians

who belonged to certain groups apart from the mainline denominations. Often these

groups belonged to the more conservative wing of the Protestant Church and could

properly be deemed "fundamentalists." Such groups were often referred to as "sects" by

the mainline church and had only a small voice in the overall conversation regarding

society as a whole. Gary Miedema describes the situation when he writes,

> Together, Canada's political and cultural elites self-consciously defined
> the kind of religion that was welcome in public life to the exclusion of
> smaller, less "respectable" Christian denominations. In twentieth-
> century Canada, Christian denominations outside the mainline
> Protestant and Roman Catholic churches were often dismissed in the
> dominant culture as insignificant minorities or, worse, as groups of
> self-serving, deluded, and immature individuals.[39]

This experience of being marginalized was common among evangelicals as they

had focused their own social efforts on a narrow grouping of causes, primarily issues

around alcohol and poverty. Such efforts had largely been directed to personal and mass

evangelization as opposed to attempts to transform society through involvement in direct

political activism.[40] The latter initiatives, however, were not widely valued by members

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[38] Wright, *The Canadian Protestant Tradition*, 191.
[39] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 22.
[40] Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 13.

of mainline denominations. Nonetheless, as the century wore on evangelicals began to

grow in numbers and societal influence.[41]

One clear indication of this growth is seen through the careers of William

Aberhart and Ernest Manning. Aberhart combined his work as a fundamentalist preacher

with his job as Premier of Alberta during the years 1935–1943. Aberhart built a

significant profile and did not hesitate to criticize mainline denominations for their

perceived failings.[42] He increasingly mixed fundamentalist Christian theology[43] with

political ideas which eventually spawned the Social Credit party. This demonstrated

that, in some parts of Canada at least, formerly marginalized religious ideas could find a

hearing and leaders associated with smaller denominations (or no denomination) could

rise to political power and influence public policy.

Aberhart's successor, Ernest Manning, continued his mentor's legacy as both a

fundamentalist radio preacher and political leader. Manning built a national radio

ministry at the same time as he served as Alberta's premier, taking over from Aberhart in

1943 and serving in office until he stepped down in 1968. Manning's development as a

national figure further indicates that mainline churches no longer had a monopoly on the

church's social influence in Canada as the twentieth century moved into its second half.

In reflecting on the legacy of Aberhart and Manning, historian David Marshall writes,

> From 1935, when Aberhart's Social Credit Party swept into power in
> Alberta, to 1968, when Ernest Manning stepped down from the

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[41] The experience of Evangelicals as socially marginal—both in relationship to the culture and establishment Christianity—means that "exile" is a much more common experience than for mainline Christians who encounter social marginalization much later and after having enjoyed a certain amount of cultural power.

[42] Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 33–45. Stackhouse notes Aberhart's referral to the United church as "Sardis" and the Baptist Union as "Ephesus" from the book of Revelation chapters 2-3 (p. 41).

[43] By this I mean the kind of Christianity that approaches the Bible in a highly literalistic, dispensationalist way.

premier's chair, politics and government in Alberta were dominated by
men who were heard weekly over the radio preaching the Bible as the
inerrant word of God and that the second coming of Christ was
imminent.[44]

Manning built a national radio ministry and, while he faced certain

"persecutions" from Canadian parliament and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

regarding his fund raising practices for a religious radio program that also included

healthy doses of political commentary, he enjoyed large success as both a preacher and a

shaper of public policy. [45] Again Marshall reflects how, despite the criticism that

Manning received, his blending of fundamentalist religion and politics came to be

understood in the same vein as liberal Christianity's appropriation of the social gospel as

a theological impetus for their own political endeavors. The inroads that Aberhart and

Manning made into mainstream politics despite (or perhaps because of) their highly

theologically conservative viewpoints demonstrated a move toward an increased

acceptance of evangelical religion. Marshall writes,

> These two positions were within the mainstream of reformed minded
> public discourse and the heritage of historic churches in Canada, and
> therefore were not met with charges that such advocacy somehow
> breached the boundaries between religion and politics.[46]

Thus, those Christians who for the first seven decades of Confederation had

been seen as sectarian and only marginal players in both church and culture were no

longer being relegated to the sidelines as a voice in culture-shaping. As the twentieth

century moved into its second half their presence on the religious landscape had to be

taken seriously. In fact, as mainline churches continued to decline in both numbers and

influence in the second half of the century, evangelicals continued to experience a slow

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[44] Marshall, "Premier E.C. Manning Back to the Bible Hour," 237.
[45] Marshall, "Premier E.C. Manning Back to the Bible Hour," 243–45.
[46] Marshall, "Premier E.C. Manning Back to the Bible Hour," 249.

increase in both areas. Sociologist Reginald Bibby chronicled the statistical decline of

mainline churches and the concurrent increase in a number of Evangelical denominations

over the course of the twentieth century. His research clearly demonstrates that United,

Anglican, certain Baptist and Presbyterian denominations lost a significant percentage of

the Canadian population who earlier in the century identified themselves with these

denominations. On the other hand, Bibby's research also clearly shows the increase in

the percentage of the Canadian populace who affiliated themselves with the Pentecostal

Assemblies of Canada, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Salvation Army.[47]

John Stackhouse notes that by the end of the twentieth century the two streams of

mainline and evangelical Christianity had, statistically, drawn very close together.[48] He

cites a study which concludes that by the late Seventies, "active constituencies" of those

churches considered to be "believer's churches" were greater than those of the Protestant

paedo-baptist churches.[49]

While trends in Canadian Christianity were changing, the church continued to

play a central role throughout the majority of the twentieth century as a significant voice

on the national landscape. Gary Miedema illustrates this with a scenario that depicts the

state of Canadian immigration laws in 1964. A Dutch couple who were seeking

Canadian citizenship, and had lived in Ontario for the previous nine years, were denied

their request because they were both self-confessed atheists. The judge in the case made

it clear that their lack of religious conviction made them unworthy candidates for

citizenship in Canada. He cited their lack of church affiliation and faith as grounds for

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[47] Bibby, *Fragmented Gods,* 28. See table 1.1, p.15 and table 2.1.
[48] Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century,* 17.
[49] Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century,* 5.

disallowing their application because the citizenship oath ended with the words "so help me God." Clearly they could not take the oath in good conscience as it would mean nothing to them, he argued. Further he stated, "The things that we believe in this country stand for Christianity…not everyone follows this but that is what we try to attain in this country, the Christian way of life."[50]

While this brief overview of the role that the church played in the development of national life depicts a significant role for the church and a comfortable home for Christians in the first one-hundred years of Confederation, things were changing. The once secure place of Christianity as advisor to the state had already begun to shift and soon would take on a vastly different role. The post-war years ultimately brought more egalitarian and less conservative ideas. Religious doubt grew, ethnic demographics began to change and secularization began to take widespread hold in many sectors of society. These, combined with an ever more pluralist society, were pushing Canada in a new direction.[51]

Perhaps no event in Canadian history depicts more clearly both the role that Christianity played in the nation's culture as well as the change that was coming in that role, than the country's one-hundredth birthday. It acknowledged the past, and at that point the present reality of the nation's religious life, but also revealed that the national future would move in decidedly different directions. Miedema illustrates this with a particularly paradigmatic moment in his book *For Canada's Sake* when he writes about a particular event that took place on Canada Day, 1967.

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[50] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 16. The decision was eventually overturned after two appeals and a trip to the Ontario court of appeal. See Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, 214 (n.12).

[51] For a concise overview of this trend see Murphy, *Epilogue*.

July 1, 1967 was a beautiful summer day as a crowd of twenty-five thousand people gathered on Parliament Hill for a Canada Day celebration that began with a prayer service. The service was carried on national television and was a centre piece of the day's events. The crowd waited as various dignitaries arrived for the service including the Prime Minister, cabinet and members of the Senate. When the guest of honor, her majesty Queen Elizabeth accompanied by her husband the Duke of Edinburgh arrived they were greeted by eight members of the clergy who escorted them to their respective places on the dais. The service consisted of scripture readings from the Bible including a reading by then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, who read from 1 Peter 3: 8–14. Hymns from the Christian tradition were sung and prayers, including a prayer of confession for the sins of the nation and a recitation of the Lord's Prayer, were offered. A litany was recited and those gathered were invited to respond with the words "We re-dedicate ourselves, O Lord." The service was a clear nod to the role that the Christian church had played in the first one hundred years of the nation's development. The message was that Canada was a religious country, a country whose religion was decidedly Christian.[52]

However, there was a sub-text running through the prevailing narrative of that day. Included on the dais of that prayer service was Rabbi S. M. Zambrowski—and even more significantly—Mr. Lavy N. Becker, chairman of the Canadian Interfaith Council. The presence of these leaders was significant because, while the service itself was predominantly Christian in its flavor, another message was apparent—that while Canada

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[52] For a more detailed description of the prayer service as well as some fine insight on its significance see Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* xi–xvi.

may be predominantly Christian it could make a place for other religious perspectives in its national life.[53]

The centennial celebrations were designed not only to celebrate Canada's past but also to cast a vision for its future. In fact, when the Centennial Commission was formed in 1963 to oversee the celebrations, "national stocktaking and rededication to the future" were suggested as two of its primary goals.[54] In keeping with these goals the man appointed as centennial commissioner, Mr. John Fisher, responded to an interviewer's question about the ongoing significance of the celebrations by stating that the intent was something more transcendent than just a big birthday party. Fisher described the goal as calling Canadians to look back to say thanks, look at one another to say "let's build," and look ahead to what the future could be.[55] Officially the overarching goal was to use the celebrations to "foster national unity."[56] Thus, the celebrations focused on demonstrating that Canada was a land of diversity and tolerance. The religious nature of these celebrations was overseen by the especially formed Canadian Interfaith Council (CIC). This committee was a conglomeration of religious faith leaders, chaired by Lavy Becker, and given the job of overseeing the role of religion in the national centennial celebrations. Formed in July of 1965, by 1967 it consisted of 33 faith groups as diverse as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Roman Catholics, and Buddhists.[57] The CIC was responsible for producing literature and planning a variety of events throughout the

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[53] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* xv.

[54] Kuffert, *A Great Duty,* 225.

[55] Kuffert, *A Great Duty,* 226.

[56] This was explicitly stated in the official handbook of the Centennial Celebration Commission, the group charged with the responsibility for planning the celebrations. See Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 70. Also, for further commentary on the Centennial Celebrations and their significance for developing national identity, see Pierre Burton, *1967: The Last Good Year,* especially chapter 6. Also, see Peter Ackroyd's book, *The Anniversary Compulsion: Canada's Centennial Celebrations.*

[57] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 71–72.

centennial year that would demonstrate the diversity and tolerance of religious life within

Canada. Miedema captures the nature of the council's work and comments on its

symbolic significance when he writes,

> Dedicated to instilling a religious presence in the Centennial
> celebrations and closely linked to the federal government through the
> Centennial Commission, the CIC demonstrated that even in the
> tumultuous 1960's religion continued to play an important role in
> national public life… At the same time, however, it left historic
> patterns of dominant forms of public religion in Canada far behind and
> graphically illustrated the impact of the Pearson government's
> reconstruction of Canada on the way religion would be welcomed in
> national public life.[58]

The CIC aided the government in making the centennial celebrations a more

inclusive, pluralistic and united national event and thus symbolically represented the

model of national life that was emerging in Canada.

This development was not confined to religion alone. In that same year, 1967,

Montreal hosted the World Exposition. This event would also be indicative of the

Canadian commitment to a broader social perspective. As Miedema notes, it is no

surprise that Canadians used Expo '67 as a vehicle to express their vision for what their

country could become as the use of festivals and cultural celebrations has always been a

means of expressing a national vision. Expo '67 clearly portrayed its intent through its

choice of the theme, "Man and His World." The exposition would be a declaration of the

advancement of humanity and the great possibilities that the future held as a result of

science, technology and human ingenuity. The Canadian pavilion, as was appropriate for

the host country, was the centrepiece of the fair. It stressed the history of the nation and

its people and their essential unity. The name chosen for the pavilion, *Katimavik,* an

Inuktitut word which is properly translated "gathering place," was strategically chosen

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[58] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 73.

because it captured the ancient origins of Canada's first people, as well as, according to

the organizers, the concept of Canada as a "gathering place" for all those who wished to

explore their world.[59] The pavilion displayed the ethnic and religious diversity within

Canada and left some observers acknowledging that Canada was a bit of an oddity as it

stood out as a truly international nation.[60] Miedema summarizes the expansiveness of the

Canadian pavilion at the festival as trying to portray the same values and spirit that the

centennial celebrations tried to portray, that

> Canada was a country that welcomed everyone into participation in its
> national life. This image of Canada stood in stark contrast to the one
> much more familiar to many Canadians: the older conception of a
> Christian, British Canada with a French minority.[61]

In the context of 1967, Canadians had been struggling for at least a decade over

what their nation would become. It is fair to say that, "At the very moment that

Canadians entered into yearlong celebrations and representations of their country, how

one defined 'Canada' or 'Canadians' was in dispute."[62] What seemed clear was that a

religiously and racially exclusive society was no longer what Canadians desired. While

the leaders of the centennial celebrations desired to make Canadians think about the

future, their intent was likely to help this consideration of the future remain relatively

restrained and not venture into too radical a re-invention. However, as L. B. Kuffert has

observed, 1967 signaled the end of the road for critics who resisted fast-paced change in

modern life. Instead, the post-'67 period left Canadians with a certain nervous energy to

explore and discover the values that they had just celebrated.[63] The Canada of the future,

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[59] Kuffert, *A Great Duty,* 231.
[60] See Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 120–24, and Burton, *1967: The Last Good Year,* 280 for a summary of the Canadian pavilion.
[61] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 124.
[62] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* xvii.
[63] Kuffert, *A Great Duty,* 232.

as Expo '67 presaged, would be one of inclusivity and pluralism. Miedema summarizes

his research on this transitional period when he writes;

> In the postwar period, historians have contended the increasingly more
> egalitarian and less conservative attitudes and values of Canadians
> combined with an ever more pluralist society to push many citizens,
> both in the churches and the state, to move their conception of Canada
> toward a "religiously neutral" position. That shift represents nothing
> less, in the words of one historian, than the end of Christendom in
> Canada.[64]

A definite change was underway and the Centennial celebrations combined with

the World Expo of 1967 offered Canadians and even the world a window on the nation's

cultural evolution.[65]

III. The Changing Shape of Canadian Culture from 1967 to the Present

The extent of this social evolution may be captured in another snapshot taken of

another public service on Parliament Hill, this one thirty-four years after the centennial

service of 1967. On September 14th, 2001 a gathering took place in front of the

Parliament buildings three days after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York

City and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11th. A crowd estimated at close to

100,000 people gathered on the hill for a "Day of Mourning" to commemorate the lives

that had been lost in those attacks. While the reason for the gathering could not have

been more different and the tone more distinct than the one in 1967, the proceedings were

even more telling in terms of demonstrating the sea change that had now taken place in

Canadian cultural life.

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[64] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake*, xvii. Here Miedema cites the work of Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 216.

[65] For further reflection on how these changes affected the church and its place in the broader culture see Stackhouse, "The Protestant Experience in Canada."

While representatives from several religions were seated on the dais that day, no Christian clergy (or leader of any religion) were invited to participate in any way. The memorial service, which lasted one half hour, was a quiet service that included brief remarks by Prime Minister Jean Chretien, American ambassador Paul Celucci, and Governor General Adrienne Clarkson. No scripture was read, no prayers were offered, and no hymns were sung. The only remark that could be considered the least bit religious was the Prime Minister's words that in a time like this, "we cling to our humanity and our common goodness and above all, to our prayers."[66]

The contrast between the 1967 gathering and the 2001 gathering could not be clearer. Each ceremony represents the Canada of its era, and acts as a bellwether for how Canada was dramatically changing as a nation, and in fact how drastic those changes had been in a single generation. If the Canada of the early-to mid-twentieth century was one decisively shaped by its Christian religious heritage, the Canada of the twenty-first century was one in which no one religious faith of any stripe, let alone Christianity, took centre stage at times of national gathering. In fact, even in a time of "national mourning" religion was not seen as a necessary part of the grieving process. If such national gatherings provide insight into the ethos of the nation, then in thirty-four years Canada had moved from a nation in which the church played a major role to one where it was no longer included at all.

How can this shifting of the culture be explained, or at least understood? Answering this question is a large and far-ranging task. However, we can begin to understand how this shift took place in such a dramatic and swift way by examining,

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[66] See Fieguth, "Rallying in the Face of Horror." Also, "Further my God," *National Post* editorial, September 18, 2001, A7.

briefly, several factors that emerged in Canadian culture in the 1960's and thereafter. This is not to imply that these factors were not present prior to 1960. However, what may have been latent and slowly simmering underneath the cultural surface prior to 1960 bubbled to the top in the later decades of the twentieth century and left the nation significantly changed as it continued to move into its second century.

1. A Growing Affluence in the Population

The first development that we must consider in understanding this cultural shift is the unmistakable growth in national affluence in the post-war years. There was a boom in manufacturing as factories that had been established to help in the war effort were turned into production facilities for consumer goods. Commodities such as iron, uranium, and oil became predominant exports; some of these resources remained in Canada and were consumed by an increasingly urban population who were buying houses and cars in growing numbers. The advent of the suburbs, just on the outskirts of large cities provided opportunities for young, middle class families to buy homes and establish themselves in subdivisions populated by other families who, like themselves, were seeking to build their post-war lives in a way that assured that their children would "have it better" than they did. *Maclean's* magazine declared the suburb the "great phenomenon of the twentieth century."[67] Grant offers an analysis of this trend by commenting that,

> Life in suburbia was geared not to production but to consumption,
> giving rise to patterns to which popular sociologists coined such
> phrases as "built in obsolescence," "conspicuous consumption," and
> "status seeking." Standards were set, most often, not by what others
> said but by what others bought.[68]

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[67] Owram, *Born at the Right Time,* 55.
[68] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 165.

Despite a recession in the late 50's that lasted until 1962, affluence was a dominant theme of cultural discussion in the 1950's and 60's. Despite the complexities of the Cold War, affluence was taken as a normal condition and the struggles of the Depression and travails of the World War Two period were now a distant memory and had minimal hold over the new generation of Baby Boomers.[69] The economic abundance produced by the post-war manufacturing boom was also a catalyst for a rise in the technology sector. These developments brought about overall state growth and an increase in overall individual wealth.[70]

The rise of material security and comfort and the freedom of choice that came with it cannot be overlooked as contributing factors to the overall secularization of Canada as it led some to abandon any sense of need for religious consolation. While the nation had enjoyed a certain amount of affluence for most of its history, and the pursuit of affluence was certainly not something new in the evolution of human history, it occurred in an unprecedented way in Canadian life in the post-war years and saw a significant rise in the 1960's. This advent of new affluence for many Canadians brought changes to their lives and the lifestyles that they chose. These choices affected their participation in certain traditional practices, sometimes including religious ones. It also provoked them to question some of the standards that had long been in place in Canadian society as they sought to use their new found affluence to enjoy a variety of worldly possibilities. This adventurous spirit was to some extent inspired by the fact that many Canadians returned from the war having been exposed to other cultures and having

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[69] Owram, *Born at the Right Time,* 183.
[70] For an in-depth consideration and assessment of this period and its affects on culture see Owram, *Born at the Right Time,* especially chapter 3. Also, for a brief synopsis see Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 31.

acquired a taste for things that up until then had either been foreign or were considered

taboo. Once back they insisted on the opportunity to access some of these things at

home. Thus, there was in post war Canada a growing leniency on things like social

drinking, sexual mores (including so called "blue laws"), and Sunday as a day of "rest."

The new consumers were eager to surround themselves with products that contributed to

a lifestyle of gracious living. Former, more puritanical, ways of living were condemned

as restrictive of natural human freedoms.[71]

2. Changing Immigration Patterns

Also contributing to the changing shape of the nation was the shifting of

immigration laws and patterns. While immigration had slumped during the Depression

and Second World War it began to rise again following the conclusion of the war.

Immigration came largely from Western and Eastern Europe in the early post-war period,

and then began to flow increasingly from other regions, including South East Asia and

India.[72] In 1971 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau acknowledged the government's vision

for welcoming more people from visible ethnic groups when he announced a federal

government policy that reflected the new realities of Canadian culture by enshrining

"multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" as the guiding philosophy of Canada's

approach to immigration. This policy would include assistance to all cultural groups to

help them interact with other cultures.[73] Such a policy, states author Robert Choquette,

made a significant contribution to Canada's departure from a Christian monochrome to a

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[71] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 166–67 and Owram, *Born at the Right Time,* 256–58.
[72] Census statistics demonstrate that between 1972 and 2000 immigration from Europe, Australia and North and Central America dropped off considerably while immigration from Africa and Asia grew exponentially. See Bumstead, *Canada's Diverse Peoples,* 282.
[73] Bumstead, *Canada's Diverse Peoples,* 253.

religious kaleidoscope during the second half of the twentieth century.[74] This influenced

and shaped the cultural contours of the nation in significant ways. New immigrants

brought with them new fashions and cuisines which further impacted consumer habits

and opened up new options for adventurous Canadian shoppers and diners. New

Canadians also brought new ideas. These included cultural customs and religious beliefs

alike. This new reality tested, but also ultimately expanded Canadian tolerance. As

immigrant populations settled they increasingly desired and even demanded that their

particular views be recognized and accepted as legitimate in the public life of their

adopted nation. In many ways this was a particularly significant development in the

changing state of the country.[75] Reflecting on these changes, Paul Bramadat notes that

they have ensured that no single religion can any longer exert a simple hegemonic

influence over other religions or over Canadian society as a whole.

> Over the 20th century not only have the churches lost much of their
> formal and assumed social control, but the Canadian state itself has also
> increasingly distanced itself from a simple endorsement of Christian
> values and beliefs.[76]

Bramadat continues that the result has been largely a privatization of faith,

removing it from the public sphere.[77]

This growing openness was in keeping with the evolution of the national

identity. Canada was founded with two "official" languages at its inception and had long

understood itself as a "tolerant" and open nation. Even before 1967, Canada was clearly

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[74] Choquette, *Canada's Diverse Religions,* 378.

[75] Some say that the single most important factor in understanding the decline of Christendom in Canada is the country's changing ethnic population; see Clarke, *A Concise History of Christianity,* 358. Clarke asserts that the growing diversity of the Canadian population made sustaining the homogenization of Protestant culture impossible. See also Choquette, *Canada's Diverse Religions,* 378.

[76] Bramadat, *Beyond Christian Canada,* 4–5.

[77] Bramadat, *Beyond Christian Canada,* 5. For a full exploration of how immigration also affected the church itself see the book by Bramadat and Seljak, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada.*

positioning itself as a nation that was open to a variety of ideas. With the 1963 election of Lester B. Pearson as Prime Minister the Canadian people put into office a man considered a "cosmopolitan" leader who embodied the values of liberalism, relativism and progress. He was described as a person who was eager to break with traditions of the past that no longer served the nation well and had a vision for a unified country.[78] This meant bringing together the disparate citizenship of the nation in a manner that would allow the country to move forward as a whole, under the banner of a single nation.

Perhaps no political initiative illustrates Pearson's ideas and also the way Canada sought to symbolically unify its people of all ethnicities and religions better than the creation of a national flag.[79]

It was 1964 and the Royal Ensign had served as Canada's national flag since Confederation. In the summer of 1964 Pearson proposed the idea of a new flag to Parliament with a view to having it in place for the centennial celebrations of 1967. Pearson saw the new flag as a rallying symbol for national unity and an opportunity to present a more inclusive representation of the country to the world than the Royal Ensign.

The introduction of this idea to Parliament was not well-received in all quarters. Parliamentarians were divided themselves over the idea and there was concern from the public too. Part of the concern was that the proposed new symbol, the maple leaf, lacked any religious meaning.[80] Parliamentarians and private citizens alike made speeches and sent letters to the Prime Minister's office declaring their opposition to the new flag's

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[78] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 45.

[79] The development of the flag and its ensuing controversies are concisely documented by Miedema in *For Canada's Sake,* 42–45. My narration of the process here is largely predicated upon his work.

[80] Attempts to make it a symbol for the Centennial celebrations had met with the criticism that it looked too much like the Star of David. See Kuffert, *A Great Duty,* 226.

design and questioning its fidelity to the Christian history of the Canadian nation. The

Primate of the Anglican Church noted that it was significant that the new flag did not

contain a "cross upon it."[81] Other clergymen wondered how they could in good

conscience "bless a national flag which utterly ignores our holy heritage."[82] Similar

sentiments were widely expressed; however, the Liberal government was committed

enough to the idea of bringing a new image to Canadians that they endured the political

storm and by Christmas 1964 a vote had been taken in the House of Commons and

Canada had a new flag. As Miedema notes,

> Significantly, the new flag contained no reference to any particular
> ethnicity or to any particular faith. It was a broad, inclusive symbol for
> an increasingly diverse and tolerant country.[83]

This appetite for the tolerance of diversity and the desire for symbols that

reflected it was part of the response to a country that was experiencing, and would

continue to experience, the reality of ethnic and religious diversity that was the result of

immigration and secularization.

3. The Changing Relationship between Church and State

Another important aspect of the shifting place of the church in Canadian culture

can be seen in the changing relationship between the church and the state, and in

particular the expansion of the state into areas that had once been considered the domain

of the church. In part because of the role that the church had played in shaping the

nation's conscience, Canada grew as a welfare state, a place that sought to care for the

needs of all its people, especially those with material or physical needs. The growth of

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[81] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 44.
[82] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 44.
[83] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 44.

the welfare state brought with it certain consequences for the structures of those institutions that had been most influential in the construction of the dominant culture. The necessary expansion of state bureaucracy due to the growth of the population and expansion of social welfare programs changed the way older, more informal non-governmental networks once worked to serve the public need. Most notably, the state took over areas of social service that had once been the domain of the church. Education, health care and welfare were removed from the influence of direct church control.[84] This also changed the perception of, and the role of the Christian clergy. While the clergy continued to have a respected role in the community and were largely perceived as important community servants, they were beginning to be seen as social workers and counselors as opposed to being leaders in society.[85]

The changes in the relationship between church and state were influenced by the high value that was being placed upon science, technology and the social sciences. As these disciplines emerged and developed in the post-war years the population increasingly looked to them to answer their questions and solve their problems. The church was no longer the first place people looked for the kind of services that they had counted on it to provide for many years. This worried church leaders as the perception

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[84] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 26. Also, Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era,* 179–80. The changing role of the church was nowhere more clearly seen in Canada than in Quebec. The "Quiet Revolution" that took hold in the 1960's turned the province upside down and stripped the church of most of its former authority and control in the Province. As already noted, a full exploration of this unique situation lays outside the purview of this project. For a brief but helpful synopsis see Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada,* 448–50.

[85] Stackhouse , The *Protestant Experience in Canada,* 179. Also, Choquette chronicles the effects of this shift and notes that "any visible religious presence practically disappeared from Canada's schools and hospitals," *Canada's Religion,* 364.

grew that the role they had played would now be better filled by those who were genuine experts in the social and technical sciences.[86]

4. Secularization

At an even deeper level these changes drew their life from the momentum that could be found in the movement of secularization which had begun to emerge early in the nation's life, yet took firmer hold in the post-World War Two years. A brief examination of secularism and its influence on Canadian life is necessary if we are to forge a basic understanding of how exile becomes a viable paradigm for the church to understand itself in the twenty-first century.[87]

In the early years of Canada's nationhood the forces of secularization were already beginning to encroach on public life all throughout the Western world. Thus, it is wrong to assume that the process of secularization only began in the 1960's. However, as we have seen, Canada's development as a nation had a strong religious tone to it and was not influenced by secularizing forces in an obvious way, at least until after World War Two. However, upon close scrutiny it is not hard to discern how the secular trends of the West as a whole were echoed in the evolution of Canadian society.

McGill University professor Charles Taylor, who has written extensively on the issue of secularism, identifies the many nuances that mark it as both a philosophy and as

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[86] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 50.

[87] It must be noted that secularism, as a philosophy and secularization, as a social movement are multi-faceted and not simply defined. A thorough analysis of these forces in Western culture is beyond the purview of this current work. What follows here is a tracing of the major contours of both as they affected (and continue to affect) Canadian life. For an interesting delineation of these terms is offered by someone writing at the time that Canada was coming to grips with the swirling winds of secularizing forces, see Macguigan, "Unity in the Secular City," 149–50. For a brief but helpful comparison of various understandings of secularization in contemporary thought as it pertains to its effect on religion in Western Europe (and also indirectly to Canada) see the essay by Jeffery Cox, "Master Narratives of Long-Term Religious Change."

a movement. He offers a partial definition when he writes that the shift to secularity

consists, among other things, in "a move from a society where belief in God is

unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one

option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[88] Similarly, historian

Ramsey Cook, in his survey of the secularization of Canada, defines it simply as, "the

shift from a religious explanation of man's [sic] behaviour to a non-religious one."[89]

This shift was increasingly taking place as Canada moved from being a nation that valued

religion and Christian religion in particular as a central part of its national identity, to a

nation that was no longer inclined to give preference to any one religion.[90] Paul

Bramadat identifies the two broader cultural forces that converge in the secularization

process as rationalism (the process of organizing life around scientific and logical

principles) and disenchantment (the gradual disempowerment of ideas or institutions

associated with magic or religion).[91] The forces that drove secularism were rooted in

scientific and religious studies. The growing acceptance of Darwinian evolution

provided a scientific explanation for the world that no longer necessitated belief in God,

or at least made belief in God less compelling to those who were disinclined toward

belief in the first place. The advent of historical criticism in biblical studies in the

nineteenth century, as well as the emerging field of comparative religion, provided a

religious critique of long-held Christian beliefs and gave people alternative ways of

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[88] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 3.

[89] Cook, *The Regenerators,* 4.

[90] This is not to insinuate that the idea of religious neutrality was brand new to Canada. Many influential leaders in early Canada were not overly religious or insisted that one religion (or denomination) should never be preferred over another. In certain ways it can be argued that this was the founding view of Canadian society. As Miller notes in "Unity/Diversity," John A. Macdonald's founding vision was one of "unity in diversity," 71. The prominence of Christian belief came about as a matter of fact, simply because most of the early citizens of Canada were practicing Christians. The valuing of religion then, was more an intrinsic value than one that was legislated. See Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith,* 22–24.

[91] Bramadat, *Beyond Christian Canada,* 4.

thinking about Christian faith. In many ways it allowed for a relaxation of those

beliefs.[92] Religion was re-framed as something from a "pre-modern" era. As Bramadat

observes,

> This period witnessed a kind of chasm slowly opening up between
> religion and society; in the new modern world, there would certainly be
> room for religion, but it must respect its inherent limits.[93]

A move away from Christian adherence also allowed for the increase in beliefs

and practices that had often been considered taboo by the religious establishment. In

certain ways this was epitomized by the move toward consumerism. The consumeristic

impulse is a part of any developing society and is accepted as a natural part of life. That

said, some, such as historian George Rawlyk, theorize that the movement of

secularization in Canada was ultimately more driven by the "internal decay" brought on

by consumerism than it was by the "external attacks" delivered by Darwin or the German

biblical scholars with the historical criticism that they espoused.[94] Re-iterating this view

is sociologist Steve Bruce, who acknowledges that science has certainly undermined

Christian faith in the Western world but that the real issue is not science's overt

intellectual conflict with religion as much as its empowerment of a rationalistic

worldview. Bruce writes,

> I suggest that the primary secularizing effects of science came not from
> its direct refutation of religious ideas but through the general
> encouragement to a rationalistic orientation to the world that science
> has given; the embodiment of that rationalistic outlook in bureaucracy
> as the dominant form of social organization; and the role of technology
> in increasing our sense of mastery over our own fate.[95]

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[92] For a concise overview of the influence of Darwin and Historical Criticism see Clarke, *English Speaking Canada*, 317–22. Also, Kuffert traces the movement of science and technology in the shaping of the consciousness of Canadian society in chapter 3 of *A Great Duty*.

[93] Bramadat, *Beyond Christian Canada*, 4

[94] Rawlyk, *Canadian Baptists and Christian Higher Education*, 36–7.

[95] Bruce, *God is Dead*, 73.

Whether Rawlyk's and Bruce's analyses are correct or not, they nonetheless remind us that numerous secularizing forces were at work and were slowly but steadily, changing the complexion of Canadian life. A scientific worldview was replacing the Christian one as Canada evolved into an urban-industrial society where there were multiple indications of decline in the moral authority of the churches and in religious commitment among its citizens.[96] This shift developed in a way that led Canadians away from ecclesiastical authority and toward individual authority and the individual's ability to pursue personal fulfillment without regard to any particular set of religious beliefs or codes.

David Marshall, in his study on the church's role in the secularization of Canadian life, observes how this process occurred gradually. He writes that,

> There was not a crisis or a serious rupture from a religious past. The process of secularization in Canada, for the most part, was slow and at times imperceptible.[97]

However, as the process unfolded, Marshall further observes how the prospect of a society where religious beliefs and institutions were in decline brought about much consternation for many Canadians, as Christianity had been considered foundational to the nation's moral life and social order.[98] In an article published in the *Presbyterian Record* in 1967, William E. Hume noted the effect of secularization on Presbyterian ministry when he wrote,

> Society is undergoing a process called secularization. God was once considered indigenous to our culture. Today he is being moved out of the culture. He is a sectarian symbol in a pluralistic society. This

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[96] Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith,* 16.
[97] Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith,* 19.
[98] Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith,* 4.

> church, therefore, is feeling the pinch of being just one institution
> among others attempting to justify its existence.[99]

However, the reality of Canada's secularization was not only felt by the church—some would say it was perpetuated by the church. An ongoing debate continues among historians regarding the role that the church played in the advancement of secularism in this country. Ramsey Cook makes the argument that the religious crises engendered by Darwinism and historical criticism of the Bible encouraged religious people to make Christianity into an essentially social religion. Cook believes that during the rise of secularism the Christian church in Canada substituted sociology for theology and came increasingly to represent a religion that sought to appeal to the public on essentially secular grounds.[100]

Although unintentionally so, this move toward the secularization of the church was assisted in large measure by the rise of the social gospel movement. The social gospel as it was conceived and popularized by American theologian Walter Rauschenbusch and New York City pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick made its inroads into Canada through pastor-politicians like J.S. Woodsworth and Tommy Douglas. At its core the social gospel movement sought to take seriously Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God and apply it to the realities of modern social life. It tried to instill a social conscience into the Christian church, urging the church to take seriously its role in responding to the plight of the marginalized, in the same way that Jesus had done. It

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[99] Hume, "The Care of Your Minister," 10, as cited in Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 56. The secularization of Canada was most vividly and in many ways drastically experienced in Quebec through the so called "quiet revolution." This "revolution" involved a clear departure from a society where the Catholic church influenced and administrated public policy to one that rejected and became hostile to the church and many of its fundamental teachings. While a review of this shift in Quebec society is beyond the scope of this current study see Perrin, *French Speaking Canada.,* also, Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics,* especially chapter fourteen, and Baum, *The church in Quebec,* especially chapters one and two.
[100] Cook, *The Regenerators,* 4.

seemed apparent, especially to many mainline clergy, that those who had traditionally been influencers of Canadian public policy, demanded a response that called for a reformulation of Christian social teaching. The thinking was that if Christianity could be translated into a message of social reform and good citizenship its relevance could be maintained.[101] Therefore the social gospel in Canada sought to integrate Christian principles into the life of urban-industrial society and thus foster a new Christianity, one that took seriously the challenges presented by an increasingly secular nation and an increasingly marginalized church. The thinking was that this kind of Christianity would not only be faithful to the essence of the gospel but could also provide the Protestant church with the ability to thrive in a modern society.[102] Further, ecclesiastical leaders were worried about the decreasing willingness of Canadians to listen to them on matters that were perceived to be better handled by experts in the social sciences.[103] In response, programs and projects were developed by mainline churches that demonstrated their accommodation to liberalism, egalitarianism, and diversity.[104]

Inevitably, many historians argue, this accommodation led the church to become less influential and more accommodated to the prevailing culture. Those denominations that had formerly been so much a part of the shaping of Canadian culture were now desperately trying to remain in dialogue with a nation that was rapidly changing. However, in many ways the die was already cast because of what was happening in the culture at large. Cook states this clearly when he writes,

> By urging Christians to emphasize social utility and to downplay or
> ignore doctrine, these advocates of the social gospel were in fact

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[101] Cook, *The Regenerators,* 229–30.
[102] See Allen's, *The Social Passion* for an in depth analysis of the social gospel movement and its development in Canadian society.
[103] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 50.
[104] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 50.

> making the church irrelevant in a world where other institutions were better equipped to perform the socially useful roles once fulfilled by the church.[105]

Other historians do not concur with this assessment of the church's role in secularization. Michael Gauvreau in particular has argued that drawing a straight line between the evangelical Protestant thought of the mid-nineteenth century and its demise in late twentieth century Canadian culture is overly simplistic. Gauvreau contends that there was a "constructive dialogue" between Protestant theology and modern thought which allowed it to adapt to its changing environment and even continue to help shape it. The ongoing efforts of the Protestant Church to rethink its theology in the face of emerging trends allowed it to remain a vital force in Canadian life, particularly in the early part of the twentieth century. In his view, if the church was guilty of anything it was in being too inflexible in its theology and thus marginalizing its voice in society.[106]

While the response of the church to secularization is a debated point, what is unquestionably clear is that in the second half of the twentieth century the Christian church lost its place at the centre of Canadian culture, with no sign of the slide abating. John Webster Grant captures the spirit of the age when he bluntly states,

> As institutions the church stood for the old-world traditions with which few Canadians felt at home, for moral codes to which few of them adhered, for beliefs that had little to do with the presuppositions by which most of them lived.[107]

In the post-World War Two period, Canadians were thus less and less willing to privilege the place of the Christian church and endorse Christianity as the religion of

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[105] Cook, *The Regenerators*, 6. It must be noted that this point is contentious among historians. Christie and Gauvreau claim that the idea that the church aided the advance of secularism is much overblown. See their introduction in *A Full Orbed Christianity*.

[106] Gauvreau thoroughly plays this argument out in, *The Evangelical Century*, 5–8. Gauvreau addresses the issue further (with Nancy Christie) in *A Full Orbed Christianity*. For a concise sketch of the debate see Gauvreau and Hubert, *Beyond church History*. The significance of this debate should not be underestimated and it provides an important resource for considering how the church can exist in exile.

[107] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 182.

choice in Canadian life. The citizenship of Canada was increasingly suspicious of

hierarchy, authority and exclusive truth claims. Younger Canadians were less inclined to

turn to the institutions that had long determined Canadian life and indeed began to turn

away from them and the social norms for which they stood. The result for the church, all

sectors of it, was that its role as a social guarantor was in grave decline.[108]

IV. Summary

1967 was a year both of looking back and remembering the traditions that had

helped to shape Canada and looking forward to a society that was already well on its way

to becoming markedly different from what it had been in its first one hundred years.

While it would be incorrect to imply that an immediate mass migration from church and

Christian values took place as the seventies and eighties unfolded, it is not incorrect to

suggest that, ideologically, the public sphere was becoming a much more competitive

place. The faces at the table of public opinion were no longer as uniform as they once

had been. They now had differing colors, philosophies and religions. Gary Miedema

cites Canadian anthropologist Raymond Breton's assessment of Canadian life in the latter

half of the twentieth century when he writes,

> Canadians who formerly held a privileged place in the symbolic order
> of Canada were relegated to a position of equality with all others. The
> restructuring of the ethnic component of Canada's symbolic order
> necessarily involved the demotion of those who had been over
> represented in that order, to make room for those who had formerly
> been under-represented.[109]

While this departure from former influence was all-encompassing, we have seen

that some sectors of the church, particularly evangelicals, actually grew in numbers in the

midst of this culture shift. Reginald Bibby, reflecting on his research in the late 1980's,

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[108] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 39.
[109] Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 80.

stated that some evangelical Protestant groups were growing "faster than the population this century."[110] However, this growth did not mean that evangelicals replaced mainline denominations at the table of cultural influence. While evangelicalism became at least as strong as, if not stronger than, mainline Protestantism in the last two decades of the twentieth century, it was a "good news, bad news" scenario for evangelicals. John Stackhouse accurately portrays the reality of the situation when he writes,

> While evangelicals could rejoice in their newly won status, they confronted a society that had become only more secular as they had become more powerful. Their position relative to mainline Christianity, that is, had come from losses among the major denominations at least as much as from growth among evangelicals.[111]

Mainline churches, which had played such a central role in shaping the nation in its early stages and had continued to influence culture through its emphasis on the social gospel, were now losing influence and adherents at an alarming pace. Evangelicals who had long stood outside the mainstream of both social and ecclesiastical circles were finding themselves increasingly accepted in both spheres but at a time when the overall role of the church in society was quickly diminishing. As these two streams of Christian expression "met in the middle" in terms of their social influence, both found that the culture was ever less welcoming of what they had to offer. In his primatial address to the Anglican Church's triennial synod in 1965, Archbishop H. H. Clark reflected on this movement toward marginalization when it was still in its early stages. Speaking with an acute apprehension of what was happening in Canadian culture, Clark said to those assembled,

> Do we understand that this means the end of Christendom as we have known it, and the end, therefore, of the privileges and favored position

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[110] Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 27.
[111] Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 199–200. See also, Murphy, *Epilogue* for further analysis of this trend, 365–66.

> that the church once enjoyed? Now the Christian confronts the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Moslem, the Communist, and the Humanist, with no prior advantages.[112]

Clark's analysis is an accurate assessment of Canada after one hundred years of Confederation; however it only captured things as they stood in the sixties. Clark's words were true, and perhaps even prophetic, but they did not fully anticipate the extent of the sweeping changes that were even then taking place. The forces of affluence, consumerism, immigration, secularization and the resulting shift in the church's relationship with the state were all having their influence on Canadian life as the country entered its second century of nationhood. For the church there was an unmistakable movement taking place that was leading it from the centre of cultural life toward the margins. This movement is typical of exilic experience and explains why the motif of exile corresponds to Canadian church experience. All this having been said, the de-centreing of the church was only just underway. The cultural changes that we have just examined were a forerunner to a full-blown philosophical shift that was already subtly at work in the Canadian culture. At the end of the 1960's, the postmodern era was just dawning and the emergence of this cultural philosophy would contribute to the ongoing redefinition of Canadian culture and the further marginalization of the church in Canada.

V. The Emergence of Postmodernity as a Cultural Experience

It is not our aim here to offer an analysis of postmodern philosophy, rather it is to offer some reflection on postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon and how it contributes to and even heightens the appropriateness of exile as a motif for the church in Canadian culture.

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[112] From the "President's Address," 7–8, as cited in Miedema, *For Canada's Sake,* 54.

There are several characteristics of postmodern culture that deserve a brief review because they directly affect the sense of being which commends exile as an operative motif. These realities contribute to the relevance of exile for the Canadian church's self-understanding in these days because they demonstrate how contemporary culture challenges Christian ideals. This is a culture shaped by the forces of secularization and the implications of postmodernism. Some of the primary cultural manifestations of this outlook include the following.

1. *Globalization*

Both Canadian and American value systems are being shaped by the globalization of technology, trade, travel, finance, communications and culture.[113] While the term "globalization" is frequently used, often meaning different things in different contexts, for our purposes it will be defined primarily as the kind of economic globalization which is most adversarial to the nurture of Christian faith, that is, a globalization marked by corporate control of power. This is the kind of globalization which author Naomi Klein seeks to deconstruct in her book, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. Klein proposes that the world is controlled financially by large corporations who increasingly hold the power over large segments of the world economy and its workers. These corporations wield broad influence on consumer habits with their investment of billions of dollars in advertising campaigns. They also enjoy tremendous political influence all over the world because of their ability to employ large numbers of workers in countries where economies are desperate for employment opportunities and the tax money that they generate. In many ways, globalization as a social trend has in

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[113] Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 191.

large measure been an economically driven movement which is controlled by multinational corporations.[114]

Critics of this form of globalization have noted that it is much more than simply the production and consumption of consumer goods per se, but "the construction of a global consumer consciousness."[115] This movement is concerned with the shaping of a world culture where what *is* and *is not* important in people's lives is redefined by the influence of a materialist, consumerist agenda. This agenda is not just about spending and earning money, but about constructing this universal consciousness that drives consumer impulses.

This premise is illustrated by Klein in *Fences and Windows,* in which she writes about her interaction with people living in the Czech Republic. Having been raised under communism and now living under Western capitalism and its widespread global influence, the people with whom Klein interacted observed that both systems have things in common,

> They both centralize power into the hands of a few, and they both treat people as if they are less than fully human. Where communism saw them only as potential producers, capitalism sees them only as potential consumers.[116]

In the end the economic engine that drives globalization is about much more than simple economics: it is about power. Klien observes sharply, "So many of the debates we have about globalization theory are actually about power; who holds it, who is exercising it and who is disguising it, pretending that it no longer matters."[117]

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[114] For a full analysis and critique see Klein, *No Logo: Taking aim at the Brand Bullies.*
[115] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 29.
[116] Klein, *Fences and Windows,* 35.
[117] Klein, *Fences and Windows,* 83.

This aspect of globalization has brought with it many ramifications, among them the following,

i. *An explosion in technology*

Paul Kennedy articulates well what many of us sense intuitively when he writes,

> It is hard to believe that the flurry of inventions of the past 50 or so years— jet aircraft, telecommunications, great advances in biotechnology and health sciences, space exploration, to name but a few— is not transforming our lives in an even more intense and rapid way than in any previous era.[118]

This has led many to adopt an expansive optimism that the years ahead will only yield increased benefits for humanity. Some believe that economic trends toward growth are essentially unstoppable because of the technological advances that have been and will continue to be made in the years ahead.[119] Others are not so sure that this optimism is well-founded, especially as it pertains to large portions of the world population in the global south. This leads us to consider another globalization trend.

ii. *The Widening Gap Between Rich and Poor*

Kennedy demonstrates the realities of the disparity between rich and poor with a brief but penetrating look at statistical realities which reveal that while gross world product has doubled several times in the last fifty years, the standard of living in "rich" countries versus that of "poor" countries, which was drastically different even fifty years ago, "is perhaps even more severe today...human beings have permitted a situation in which certain of their societies enjoy levels of consumption 200 times greater than other societies."[120] This situation does not appear to be reversing itself as we look to the future.

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[118] Kennedy, *Global Challenges,* 10.
[119] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 28.
[120] Kennedy, *Global Challenges,* 7.

While it is possible that economies will grow in much of the world, it is likely that
disparities will also grow or at least remain the same as they are now.[121]

Sallie McFague addresses this trend insightfully as she critiques the concept of
"growth" which has been adopted, across the board, as the ideal goal for a national
economy. Indeed growth takes precedence even over other important goals such as
sustainability. McFague reiterates how this ideal has served many in North America and
Western societies well, but has not always produced similar results for those living in
other parts of the world. She seeks to make the case that for economies to keep growing
so that everyone can benefit and enjoy lifestyles beyond simple subsistence it would take
resources far beyond what this planet can ever produce.[122]

iii. *The Homogenization of Culture*

As globalization takes root throughout the world it should allow for a greater
exposure to new cultures and forms of expression. The truth, however, is that
globalization driven by consumer capitalism exports a culture all its own that takes root
and becomes extremely homogeneous. One can travel to remote parts of Asia or Africa
and find local residents sporting Toronto Raptor basketball uniforms, drinking the same
soft drinks as one would find in a vending machine in Toronto and even watching the
latest Hollywood blockbuster depicting a car chase through the streets of Toronto.
Indeed globalization has been characterized by the export of the dominant economic
culture, so that, instead of an increase in variety, world culture is becoming increasingly
homogenized. Robert Schrieter calls this a "hyperculture" and comments that,

> The experience of homogenization in global culture is heightened by a
> hyperculture (that is, an overarching culture proposal that is itself not a

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[121] Kennedy, *Global Challenges*, 8–9.
[122] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 80.

complete culture) based on consumption and marketed by icons of
consumption derived from the most powerful of the homogenizing
cultures, that of the United States. These icons include clothing (T-
shirts, denim jeans, athletic shoes), food (McDonald's, Coca-Cola), and
entertainment (American TV, films, videos and music).[123]

While heterogeneity is often touted as the wonderful outworking of
globalization (and there is certainly some truth to this assertion), the true progeny of
global capitalism is actually the homogenization of culture. As Walsh and Keesmaat
poignantly assert,

> Do we really raise a toast to heterogeneity when our glasses are full of
> the same beverages produced by the same international corporations
> and we are all wearing the same brand of blue jeans and using
> Microsoft technology to communicate with each other?...are we mostly
> following the consumeristic dictates of the market?[124]

The reality of this homogenization is reflective of a second cultural reality.

2. *Consumerism*

There is little doubt that Canadian culture at the beginning of the twenty-first
century is a consumer culture. As part of the affluent West, we are a society of people
who love to buy things. Tragically, in too many ways we have, so to speak, bought into
the belief that the acquisition of goods will deliver happiness to our souls. Consumption
plays the role that religion once played in public life. Spending money and buying things
becomes the harbinger of happiness, which is the "obvious" goal of life!

In a popular television show entitled *Extreme Homemakeover* a needy family is
chosen each week to receive a major home renovation. Many of the stories are truly
heart rending. Perhaps one member of the family is severely handicapped and the family
is struggling financially as a result; perhaps a "good" family was struck by tragedy or else
their home was severely damaged by fire and they did not have proper insurance.

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[123] Schrieter, *The New Catholicity*, 10.
[124] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 30–31.

Whatever the cause of the family's need, once selected the family is shuttled off to an exotic location for an extravagant one week vacation while the makeover crew comes in and completely remodels their home. No expense is spared, new furniture is purchased, rooms are gutted and remodeled, children's rooms are lavishly decorated in their favorite themes and expensive gifts are left for the family to discover when they return from their vacation. The final segment of the show follows the family as they go through their "new" home. It inevitably results in screams of ecstasy, many repetitions of the phrase "oh my God!" and much gratitude expressed to the team who did the work. To be sure, many of the families are truly needy and their stories are compelling. Their gratitude is without doubt genuine. However, at its core the show sends a message that life's hardships can be answered and eased—if not eliminated—with one simple solution: new possessions!

Our faith in this dogma is evident from our willingness to invest long hours in work, our refusal to live on one income, and increased levels of personal debt. We think that having more will make us happier and more fulfilled. Richard Horsley scathingly writes, "In consumer capitalism one gains salvation in the acquisition of certain products."[125] As Sallie McFague notes,

> We have allowed economic theory to tell us who we are; we have let it become our ideology, even our religion. We have allowed the economy not just to produce things, but people—the people we have become at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We have become consumers— not citizens or children of God, or lovers of the world, but consumers.[126]

The idea that consumerism transcends the simple act of acquiring what one needs was tellingly illustrated when immediately following the harrowing tragedy of

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[125] Horsely, "Religion and other Products of Empire," 36.
[126] McFague, *Life Abundant,* 96.

September 11, 2001, the President of the United States urged his country's citizens to not let the terrorists win. While this message was itself unsurprising, his prescription for victory was unexpected. He called on Americans to continue their regular routines, which specifically included shopping and visiting restaurants. A similar message was echoed by then Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien. What both communicated was that it was imperative that the economy not be drastically affected in the aftermath of the attacks. When consumerism is king one can demonstrate their patriotism by going shopping.

3. *Individualism*

The material impulses of global capitalism naturally lead to an increased emphasis on the place and needs of the individual. Observers of social trends in North America recognize the growing predominance of individualism in both Canada and the United States since the 1950's.[127] In our belief that goods can produce happiness and that the economy must be kept going at all costs, it is essential that individuals be given paramount importance and appealed to as the most significant persons in the world. Activist and author Ron Sider trenchantly critiques the results of unchecked capitalist economics and the resulting consumerism. He writes,

> The stunning success of market economies in producing ever greater material abundance nurtured a practical materialism that has maximized individual choice. Desiring ever growing sales to produce ever growing profits, business discovered the power of seductive advertising. Ever more subtle ads persuaded ever more self-centred materialists that the way to joy and fulfillment was via greater and greater material abundance.[128]

While Sider's comments may appear harsh, it is difficult to deny their validity. As he implies, the advertising world amply illustrates this philosophy. Walsh and

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[127] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* 192.
[128] Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience,* 89.

Keesmaat point to an AT&T Canada advertisement which depicts people with a globe in their hand or sitting on their laptop. The advertising copy reads,

> A world of communication tools for the only world that matters. Yours.

The consumerist impulses of post-modern culture are decidedly individualistic.[129] The desires of every individual are legitimate and to be indulged: this is the message that the mass media of our day consistently communicates.[130]

One result is the dilution of communal life. In this new model the needs of the individual consistently supersede those of the community. Structures which once were seen as the sustaining framework of the society (care of neighbour, care of elderly family members, care of nature, communal care for children) no longer take priority over the desire for self-actualization and self-fulfillment.

Wendell Berry summarizes these realities when he writes,

> However frustrated, disappointed and unfulfilled it may be, the pursuit of self liberation is still the strongest force now operating in our society...it determines the ethics of the professional class; it defines increasingly the ambitions of politicians and other public servants. This purpose is publicly sanctioned and publicly supported, and it operates invariably to the detriment of community life and community values.[131]

This trend has significant effects on religious life as it tends to minimize the binding effect of communal religious experience and fragments that experience into a highly personalized mix-and-match approach where each person buys the "product" that is best suited to them, whether or not the experience connects them with others.[132] Further, it undermines any sense of authority that resides in any source outside of self.

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[129] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians,* 27.

[130] A relatively new daily paper called "Dose," launched in Canada for commuters aged 18–35 appeals to its readers with the inviting slogan: "Welcome to Dose: Everything revolves around you," *Dose,* April 4, 2005, 22.

[131] Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community,* 152.

[132] Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World,* 233.

The postmodern sensibility tells us that we are able to make our own way in the world and while connection to a community may be helpful it is not necessary. Steve Bruce comments,

> It may be that the citizens of a postmodern world will feel alienated and lost, but one element of the postmodern depiction suggests that we now reject authoritative views because we have sufficient self confidence to 'make up our own minds' and choose our own destinies.[133]

4. *Fragmentation*

The ramifications of economic globalization lead our society toward the ever increasing reality of fragmentation. As individualism becomes the norm it follows that the experience of many will not be one of social unity. Rather, societal cohesion is severely compromised when the focus of society rests on the good of the individual instead of the common good. Individualism also meshes with the postmodern ideal of eschewing metanarratives, thus leaving the individual to judge the "truthfulness" of any given idea or behavior for themselves. Accordingly, living in community is deemed good only to the extent that it benefits the self, whose needs and desires supplant those of the community each time. As a result, say Walsh and Keesmaat, the culture we find ourselves in is "all about keeping your options open and not closing down new experiences, perspectives, rituals and beliefs without trying them out."[134] Commitment to a foundational set of beliefs or to a particular group of people is not seen as liberating. Thus, as author Tom Beaudoin, who has written extensively about young people raised in these postmodern, globalized times, says,

> Both our *experience* and or *imagination* of ourselves are characterized more by incoherence than coherence, more by fragmentation than

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[133] Bruce, *God is Dead*, 235.
[134] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians*, 24.

> unity…We seem to have many centres, each of them shifting and unstable.[135]

Thus, globalization, which on the surface appears to offer a coming together of the world's cultures, in many ways delivers an individualization of culture. It speaks a message of individualized choice and freedom that supersedes any deep sense of community. This is not to diminish the worth of individual decision, but rather points out the priority given to the individual over the community as a result of current social trends. Thus fragmentation ensues as the realities of globalization, consumerism, and individualization increasingly command the forefront of the cultural stage.

This new postmodern secularism of Canadian culture is intrinsically a cultural ethos prone to leaving its citizens feeling homeless, even if they have never left the land of their birth. At its heart is a culture that rejects any stabilizing narrative or normative ethic that might otherwise offer a sense of foundation or orientation to its inhabitants. Robin Usher and Richard Edwards write,

> Postmodernity, then, describes a world where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points. It is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning floats.[136]

The fluidity of postmodern thought gives birth to a culture that is also fluid and can leave its citizens feeling adrift. Kevin Vanhoozer points out that in a culture of disposable ideas and shifting fancies, a key metaphor becomes that of the "nomad."[137] A nomad is one who passes through, who does not dwell or make a home. The culture of postmodernity is given to such an experience. "In a postmodern world we are all homeless," write Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh in *Truth is Stranger than it Used to*

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[135] Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith,* 137.

[136] Usher and Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education,* 7, as cited in Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 23.

[137] Vanhoozer, "Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity," 14–15.

Be. Stripped of our modernist myths we are left as "homeless nomads in a postmodern desert."[138] Thus, the reality of Canadian life is marked by a sense of "homelessness," which is an intrinsically exilic experience.

These cultural contours affect the entire Western world, and also have an impact of other parts of the world as well. For Canada these global trends are defining the realities of the postmodern life that we share. Further, we can discern the effects of postmodern thinking in even more tangible ways when we consider recent research that has identified emerging (or in some cases already present) trends in Canadian life.

VII. Canadian Culture in a Postmodern Age

Sociologist and pollster Michael Adams has chronicled societal trends in Canada and has identified a clear movement in the direction of postmodern ideals. For instance, in keeping with the individualistic tendencies of postmodern thinking there is a noticeable decline in confidence in traditional institutions such as the church.[139] Adams' research shows that many of the values that have traditionally been associated with the church have come under tremendous scrutiny, only to be discarded or marginalized. Adams analyzes this trend by stating, "The secularization of our country shows no signs of abating. If anything this trend is accelerating."[140] This movement toward secularization should not be understood in abstract philosophical terms but in concrete ways that are manifest in the daily choices that Canadians make in their lives. Significant shifts in morality can be traced in the way that the people of Canada behave. If at one time there

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[138] Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be,* 155.

[139] This is also graphically demonstrated by research presented by Kurt Bowen in his book, *Christians in a Secular World.* He presents responses to the question of how much confidence people have in the church or organized religion. In 1980 70% said a "great deal" by 1996 that had slipped to 52%. 247.

[140] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* 166.

was a cultural consensus about morality, and this consensus could be identified with

some kind of essential Christian worldview, that is now far from the case. The cultural

consensus, if it is even possible to claim that there is one, is now rooted in a secular,

pluralistic view of the world that is much more in keeping with postmodern contours than

any kind of Judeo-Christian philosophy. Based on his research, Adams offers this insight

as a way to describe the prevailing winds of cultural formation in Canada,

> Canadian morality transcends traditional religious definition; it can be
> characterized as a secular, pluralistic and ecological morality, a greater
> responsibility for the other. The Canadian emphasis on egalitarian
> values goes beyond the equality of human beings— whatever their sex,
> age, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation— to the consideration of non-
> human species and the natural environment.[141]

This shift in morality can be demonstrated in a multitude of specific ways, such

as more flexible definitions of family, greater acceptance of sex outside of marriage and

homosexual relationships, and even gay marriage.[142] Sociologist, and noted tracker of

Canadian religious trends Reginald Bibby reports that, based on recent polling data, 72%

of teenagers in Canada believe that sex before marriage is fine when two people are in

love. The same sampling reports an approval rate of 44% for sex between people of the

same gender.[143] Adams reports that one-third of children in Canada are born to couples

living together but not legally married and fewer than half of Canadian families conform

to the traditional ideal of a married couple (man and woman) with kids.[144]

Adams summarizes his findings in regard to post baby-boomer generations by

observing that fear, guilt and duty are no longer motivating factors in the choices that

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[141] Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 193. Adams goes on to add tongue in cheek, "I expect this principle will be codified in the preamble the next time we amend the Canadian constitution."

[142] Bibby, *Social Trends Canadian Style*, 139. Also Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 185.

[143] Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, 48, table 3.2. Among "Young Adults" Bibby reports even more liberal attitudes toward sexual behavior than the teenagers reveal, see *Canada's Teens*, 250.

[144] Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 185.

they make. They no longer feel compelled to adhere to moral formulations for reasons of

tradition or religion. Adams writes of postmodern Canadian generations,

> Young Canadians eagerly embrace a number of egalitarian and
> pluralistic values, including flexible definitions of family, a permissive
> attitude regarding sex, a desire for egalitarian relationships with others,
> including their seniors, and the pursuit of happiness over devotion to
> duty. They reject traditional hierarchical relationships based on title,
> age, seniority or religious injunctions, and in many cases, *believe that
> traditional family, social, and work relationships are, in large part
> responsible for the political, economic and ecological problems that
> confront society in general and their generation in particular.*[145]

Interestingly, Adams reports, this desire for a greater egalitarianism is supported

by older generations as well. His research demonstrated that Canadians of all ages place

a great value on the equality of youth with those who are their seniors. This is indicative

of the overall Canadian value of tolerance and equality that Adams claims now marks

Canadian life and identity.[146] Perhaps this distinction of Canadian culture is best

demonstrated by a poll from Adam's own company, Environics, that interviewed both

Canadians and Americans, asking them to reply to the statement, "The father of the

family must be the master of his own home." This statement, which reflects attitudes

toward traditional values, found assent from 49% of respondents in the United States.

However, only 18% of Canadians agreed with this concept of family life. Of further

interest is the fact that agreement with this statement increased in the U.S. between 1992

and 2000, going from 42% to 49%, while agreement decreased in Canada, falling from

26% to 18%.[147] Further, the region of the U.S. with the *lowest* level of agreement to this

question, New England (29%) far outpaced the province in Canada with the *highest* level

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[145] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* 102–3, (italics added).
[146] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* 187–88.
[147] Adams, *Fire and Ice,* 51.

of agreement, Alberta (21%).[148] While the statement may indeed represent a flawed

understanding of family life, such a statement is certainly an indication of belief in

traditional values. If the response to this question can be considered any indication, it

demonstrates the unique level of departure from previously entrenched values that has

occurred in Canadian culture over the last forty years, as well as the depth of

secularization that has taken hold in Canada as opposed to its neighbors directly to the

south.[149] It is no wonder that Canadian politicians like Preston Manning and Prime

Minister Stephen Harper, both practicing Christians, tend to downplay their faith to the

electorate. Whereas in the United States church attendance is almost mandatory for a

presidential candidate,[150] in Canadian politics, as the trials of failed Prime Ministerial

candidate Stockwell Day in the 2000 election demonstrates, wearing one's faith on one's

sleeve is not politically advisable.

These social realities are indicative of a rejection of religious traditions and even

organized religion as a part of regular life. It may be true that no institution in Canada

has been more affected by the nation's social changes since the 1950's than the Christian

church. Data clearly demonstrates that participation is down, confidence in religious

leadership has decreased, and traditional religious influence is peripheral.[151] As opposed

to the 60+ % of people who attended church regularly in the 1950's, recent statistics

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[148] Adams, *Fire and Ice*, 87.

[149] That said, Canada's secularization bears much more similarity to that of Western Europe. See McLeod and Ustorf, *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000.*

[150] Observe the significant scrutiny placed on the Christian faith of presidential candidate Barack Obama in his run for president in the 2008 election.

[151] Bibby, *Social Trends Canadian Style,* 123. Also see Bibby, *Restless Gods,* 20. Bibby himself has expressed optimism in the possibilities of a religious renaissance in Canada especially in *Restless Gods.* However, not everyone is as optimistic, for example Bowan responds directly to Bibby and notes several ways in which his conclusions may not be as sound as one might wish, Bowan, *Christians in a Secular World,* 274–88.

indicate that the number is somewhere around 17%.[152] Reginald Bibby reports that the

younger generation's involvement in religious life parallels that of the national average,

however, only 21% report that they receive a high level of enjoyment from their

participation in formal religious life.[153] Even more recent polling that Bibby has carried

out demonstrates that the percentage of young Canadians who identify themselves with

any faith at all is shrinking at an alarming rate. In 1984 50% of teens identified

themselves as Catholic, 35% as Protestant, 3% as belonging to other faiths, and 12% as

having no faith at all. After two decades of steady decline, in 2008 32% identified

themselves as Catholic, 13% as Protestant, 16% as belonging to another faith and 32% as

claiming no faith at all.[154] Bibby's comments on his findings in a Macleans magazine

interview are telling. He states, "For years I have been saying that, for all the problems

of organized religion in Canada, God has continued to do well in the polls…That's no

longer the case."[155]

This is just a small sampling of some of the cultural realities that are part of the

postmodern experience in Canadian culture. Despite its truncated nature this exploration

provides us with enough insight into the realities of the social change that has taken place

within Canada that we can understand that the church, and even the tenets of the

Christian faith itself, have become socially marginalized within, perhaps even exiled

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[152] This comes from a 2006 Ipsos-Reid poll as reported by www.canadianchristianity.com. See http://www.canadianchristianity.com/nationalupdates/071206state.html, accessed July 24, 2008. The survey goes on to say, "The assumption has been that the percentage will continue to drop as Canadians become more secularized. That is, it has been expected that church attendance in Canada will soon reach the levels of Western Europe, where it has dropped below 10% in most countries."

[153] Bibby, Canada's Teens, 118. Such statistics only reveal part of the story of the social changes in Canada and its religious life. In observing the secularization of Western Europe, Callum Brown has written that such statistics become more obsolete as the role of the church becomes more marginalized. If one wants to gauge religion and its impact on society church attendance will not reveal it as it once did. See Brown, "The Secularization Decade," 36.

[154] Bibby, The Emerging Millennials, 176. See table 9.11.

[155] Lunau, "Teens Lose Faith in Droves," 43.

from, the life of the nation. This brief statistical analysis offers data that confirms what

many know to be true, that Christianity has been gradually losing its status as a cultural

norm, and has tended to become a local language used only by those who are professing

Christians, but not understood by others.[156] Terrence Murphy summarizes the

implications when he writes,

> One fundamental change, however, does seem to be irrevocable: the
> concept of 'Christendom'— that is, of a society where Christianity and
> culture are essentially integrated— is gone forever in
> Canada…Whatever the fortunes of the Christian churches, they must
> live within a framework that precludes the sort of cultural authority
> they once enjoyed.[157]

Adams himself, who applauds these changes and believes that they hold great

hope for Canadian civilization, summarizes in this way,

> The evolution of social values in Canada is a winding journey from the
> death of God and traditional notions of family and community, to a
> highly individualistic population focused on personal control and
> autonomy, to a new embryonic but fast-growing sense of human
> interconnectedness with technology and nature. These developments I
> believe are natural extensions of our efforts to transcend the traditional
> demographic characteristics that defined and often limited the paths we
> followed in our lives.[158]

Sociologist Steve Bruce, whose work focuses primarily on religious trends in

Great Britain, but whose comments can certainly be applied to Canada as well, observes

that, the trends of secularization will not abate any time soon. He observes that,

> Where diversity and egalitarianism have become deeply embedded in
> the public consciousness and embodied in liberal democracy, where
> states remains sufficiently prosperous and stable that the fact of
> diversity and the attitude of egalitarianism are not swept away by some
> currently unimaginable cataclysm, I see no grounds for secularism to be
> reversed.[159]

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[156] McLeod, *Introduction,* 11.

[157] Murphy, *Epilogue,* 369.

[158] Adams, *Sex in the Snow,* 200.

[159] Bruce, *God is Dead,* 241.

VIII. Summary

This is the reality of Canada in the postmodern era. There is within contemporary culture a deconstruction of former beliefs, patterns of life, and conventions that defined the world for many generations but no longer do. This tearing down of the structures of modernity is akin to a revolution that strips power away from those in control and dismantles the systems that perpetuated their power. As in a political revolution it leaves those who enjoyed a place at the table of power scrambling to discover where they now fit within a new cultural and social reality. In the postmodern revolution it is fair to say that the church is one of those former power brokers who once enjoyed a place of influence at the cultural table, but is now seeking its place amidst the ever changing dynamics of postmodern culture.

While the church once helped define various forms of empire in the Western world, including Canadian ideals in its early years, this analysis provides an initial introduction to the new social reality in which the Canadian church finds itself today. Clearly it is a cultural and philosophical empire whose overarching contours run in opposition to much of what defines the Christian faith. This does not mean to imply that all of the things that traditional Christianity in Canada stood for were infallible expressions of the gospel. It is simply to assert that in a former day the culture itself was friendly to and largely shaped by a church that was, in imperfect ways, trying to express an explicitly Christian vision in a new and developing society.

While these changes are difficult for many to accept, they also offer a certain prospect of hope. They offer to us a chance to re-evaluate what the church is supposed to be, and where it fits in a non-Christian society. As author Hugh McLeod optimistically

reminds us while reflecting on the decline of 'Christendom' in Western Europe,

"Christendom is no more than a phase in the history of Christianity, and it represents only

one out of many possible relationships between the church and society."[160] Even John

Webster Grant, writing in 1972, saw the potential for renewal in the church as it became

increasingly marginalized. He too chose the motif of exile to express his thoughts:

> The end of Christendom does not imply the end of Christianity or
> necessarily even any diminution of the influence of the church on its
> members or on society. The church grew and permeated Graeco-
> Roman society for centuries in the face of official hostility and mob
> hatred, and there are many who regard its adoption by Emperor
> Constantine as its greatest misfortune. A period of *exile* to the
> periphery of power might well release Christian energies that have been
> smothered for centuries.[161]

This is when postmodernism and its effects can offer a therapeutic voice to the

church, both as a corrective to modernist error, and as a call to define itself with an exilic

mindset. As Middleton and Walsh remind us,

> It is precisely when we experience ourselves as exiles, displaced and
> uprooted, that the biblical story can speak most eloquently to us as
> being at home in a secure creation.[162]

IX. Conclusion

Having briefly explored the history of the church as a cultural shaper in Canada,

we can see that where Canada was once "home" for Christianity and the church, the

church now plays a marginalized role. Further, we can begin to see that to live faithfully

as followers of Jesus in these days will demand that we determine how to make an

informed response to these new cultural realities. While the church has sometimes been

guilty of capitulation to culture, its calling is most often to stand apart from culture and

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[160] McLeod, *Introduction*, 2.
[161] Grant, *The church in the Canadian Era*, 216–17, (italics added).
[162] Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger*, 155.

offer an alternative way of life. There are times that the church must see itself as an alien within the host culture. For the Canadian church today this requires an orientation that concludes that while once we were at "home" this is no longer the case. Our situation of having moved from the centre to the margins is indeed a form of exile.

Of course, exile is not a new experience for the people of God. The Hebrew Scriptures, literature from the Second Temple period, and the New Testament records our spiritual ancestors' experience of exile and thus offers us a rich resource to draw from as we consider how we can approach our own exile. It can not only inspire us to survive but to be renewed in the midst of this daunting social reality. In an exilic situation the church must return to its founding narrative— the story of God's people as recorded in scripture—and there find the resources it needs to recover its identity. There above all we are reminded that we are not the first generation to have faced exile; others have also been there before us and have left us a textual legacy to draw from. It is to these texts that we now turn.

Chapter Two

Exile in the Old Testament

I. Introduction

Exile was a defining experience for the nation of Israel. While debate over the

extent and nature of their captivity and subsequent return continues, the impact of this

experience plays a highly formative role in the national life of Israel, even to this day.[1]

In this section we will consider a brief history and sociology of the exile and

Israelite life during the Babylonian and Persian periods.[2] We will then consider the

primary theological responses to exilic life with a particular focus on the *Diasporic*

advice tale as embodying a theology designed to encourage and teach Israel how to thrive

in its life in exile. Understanding these things will contribute to the Canadian church's

ability to forge its identity as an exilic people in Canadian society today.

II. A Brief History of the Exile

The history of Israel and Judah was a turbulent one. The northern kingdom,

Israel, went into exile under the Assyrians first in 734 BCE, with a second deportation in

722 BCE. Judah's captivity began almost a century and a half later at the hands of the

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[1] For example Robert Carroll, "Exile! What Exile?" 66–7, expressly calls the exile a "myth" while at the same time recognizing its ideological potency in shaping the identity of the Jewish nation. Conversely, Peter Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration,* 237–38, argues for the historicity of the exile, while admitting that its "Precise description in detail is a matter of great difficulty." Despite any murkiness in historical detail, he is unequivocal that the experience of exile is decisive in the theological thought of Israel. Also, as noted in the Introduction, prolific Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner." "Exile and Return as the History of Judaism," 221, states that "The paradigm of exile and return contains all Judaisms over all times, to the present."

[2] In this study "Israel" will be employed to refer to the nation as a historic people. This includes both the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah. Judah will be employed when referring directly (and exclusively) to the Southern Kingdom.

Babylonians. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and his general, Nebuzaradan, forcibly intruded on Judah and Jerusalem three times, in 597, 587 and 581.[3]

The invasion was the culmination of an ongoing Babylonian threat against Jerusalem which began in 605. In the course of the three invasions evidence indicates that all, or virtually all, of the towns in the heartland of Judah incurred serious damage.[4] This included the city of Jerusalem which was destroyed, including the temple, in the second invasion.

The result of these actions is an issue of some debate. This stems, in part, from the paucity of available information. Rainer Albertz refers to the exile as a "historical lacuna" and writes, "It stands as a murky, gaping hole in the history of Yahweh and his people, illuminated only briefly by isolated beams of light."[5] As a result, some have expressed doubt about the severity of the exile and the experience of those who were taken away. C. C. Torrey, writing in the early part of the last century, stated that the exile "was in reality a small and relatively insignificant affair."[6] More recently Hans Barstad has played down the significance of exilic events. Characteristic of his position is his statement that "the Chronicler's use of the image of the land being 'emptied' was an exaggeration that may well be part of an ideological prejudice of the exiled communities against those who were left behind."[7]

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[3] Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament.* 322. For a concise overview of the history of the exile that weaves biblical and extra–biblical sources together see Middlemas, *The Templeless Age,* 9–27. For an extended treatment see Albertz, *Israel in Exile.*

[4] For an overview of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of surrounding villages in Judah see Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem,* 36–97.

[5] Albertz, *Israel in Exile,* 3.

[6] Torrey, "The Exile and the Restoration," 285. For a review of the scholarly debate around the extent of the exile see Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud,* 39 –50.

[7] Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land,* 20. For further reflection on the seeming ambiguity and debate surrounding the history of the exile see Grabbe, *Leading Captivity Captive,* and Davies, *In Search*

While archeological evidence is inconclusive, and thus, the exact history of the exilic period remains, to a large degree, uncertain, it is hard to believe that any experience of displacement that includes subjugation by a long-time oppressor and dispersement from one's homeland can be understood as anything other than tremendously difficult. In his studies on this period Daniel Smith-Christopher cites modern exilic experiences as being, without exception, traumatic for those who must live through them. He cites the work of author Edward Saïd who writes, "to think of exile as beneficial, as a spur to humanism or to creativity, is to belittle its mutilations…Think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created, of refugees without urbanity, with only ration cards and agency numbers."[8] Saïd's remarks alert us to the reality of exilic experience as one of upheaval, even if it may be deemed as "not that bad" when compared to other peoples' experience of exile.

Indeed there is archaeological and biblical evidence that points to the Babylonian exile as a period of immense difficulty for the nation of Israel.[9] Citing recent archaeological evidence Smith-Christopher writes, "The end of the Davidic monarchy and the destruction and pillaging of the Jerusalem Temple alone suggests that all the basic organizations did not continue in 'much the same way'…In the seventh century, at the end of the monarchy, there are at least 116 sites in Judah (cities, towns, and villages).

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of Ancient Israel. Also, for a helpful overview of the period see Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period,* chapter 1.

[8] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 21. Quoting from Saïd, "The Mind of Winter," 50.

[9] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 48. For further reflection on this perspective see Albertz, *Israel in Exile,* 90–96, and Oded, *Judah and the Exile.*

In the 6th Century (in the Babylonian period) the number drops to 41 sites."[10] He also

points to recent evidence that numerous towns near Jerusalem were levelled.[11]

Further, the biblical text provides evidence of the severity of the experience of

exile by using graphic language to describe it. The book of Lamentations speaks

dramatically: "Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude" (1:3); "All

her people groan as they search for bread; they trade treasures for food to revive their

strength" (1:11). In response to other scholars' opinions that the exilic experience was

not especially severe, Smith-Christopher protests that, "The poetry of Lamentations is

about horrific devastation."[12] Equally dramatic is the description of Jerusalem's fall by

the prophet Jeremiah, "On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine became so severe

in the city that there was no food for the people of the land" (52:6). The Psalmist reflects

on those same events by moaning, "They have given the bodies of your servants to the

birds of the air for food…They have poured out their blood like water all around

Jerusalem" (Ps 79:2-3, see also 44:13).[13] In chapter 10 of his prophecies Ezekiel

graphically describes, through a vision, the overwhelming significance of the exile and its

spiritual implications for the nation. He speaks of God's departure from the Temple:

"On a vehicle not unlike the chariot throne of chapter 1, the glory moved to the threshold

of the temple, then on to its east gate (10:19), and finally to the Mount of Olives (11:23).

One senses in this hesitant departure a grieving over the destruction it symbolized."[14]

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[10] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 47.

[11] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 59.

[12] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* , 47.

[13] There are four Psalms which can be dated with reasonable certainty to the time of exile Pss 44, 74, 79 and 89. Psalm 137 also contains overt reflection on exilic experience. See Raitt, *A Theology of Exile,* 87. Others would include Pss 102 and 106 on the list, see Middlemas, *The Templeless Age,* 36.

[14] Klein, *Israel in Exile,* 76. A further source for understanding the consequences of Babylonian captivity comes from non–biblical evidence that points to the reality of harsh treatment by the Babylonians

For the people of Judah these events must have had devastating consequences. Their experience of exile, like that of modern day exiles, was one of horrific displacement, powerlessness and painful memory. "To read these texts without some sense of trauma of exile is tantamount to blaming the victim at the very least, and perhaps grossly misunderstanding much of the power of the text in its social context."[15]

While it is outside the purview of the present work to examine the various arguments over the exact nature of the Babylonian exile in detail, we will proceed on the assumption that the exile had major consequences for the national life and identity of the people of Israel and Judah. That said, other archeological, biblical and extra-biblical evidence also points to the fact that for some the exilic experience was not harsh and that once the trauma of the initial captivity had subsided life did settle into a certain pattern that included the undertaking of normal human activities both for those in captivity and for those left in the land. Thus, the fact that both extremes are "true" inspires a variety of responses from within the community.

The sociology of Israel in exile, including the Babylonian and Persian captivities,[16] is a rich, multi-faceted cultural matrix that warrants extended consideration. For our purposes, however, that of connecting Israel's ancient experience of exile with that of the contemporary Canadian church, a brief review of some significant social

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toward those they have conquered, including Judah. See Smith-Christopher, *Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of or the Babylonian Exile*, 23–25.

[15] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 104.

[16] There is discussion about the term "post–exilic" and its appropriateness as a description of the Persian period. For all intents and purposes Israel remained in captivity during this period, as they did under Greek and Roman rule. In this dissertation I will use the term "exile" even when referring to life in Persia (and subsequently) because I take the term to be a fair description of the continued life experience for Israel even after 539 BCE although their overlords may have changed. Jill Middlemas addresses the difficulty in terminology around "exile" and "post exile" (as well as the historical ambiguity of the experience) by suggesting that the term "exile" be dropped altogether and the term "Templeless Age" be adopted to properly describe the period between the destruction of the first temple and construction of the second. See Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 3–7.

contours will be sufficient to offer some suggestive linkages between ancient history and today's situation.

In describing the severity of the exile the Bible itself is ambiguous regarding the exact number of people who were deported from the land of Judah to Babylon during the three invasions that took place between 597 and 581 BCE. Jeremiah 52:28–30 records a total of 4,600 being taken from the land in the course of three distinct deportations. Second Kings reports that in the eighth year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar took 10,000 people of the elite population of Jerusalem into exile (24:14) and then approximately ten years later, following King Zedekiah's rebellion, he exiled another segment of the population centreed around Jerusalem, leaving only "some of the poorest people to work the land" (25:11–12).[17] What can reasonably be concluded from the biblical texts is that the result of Babylonian aggression was that some of the population were murdered, some were deported, some fled and some were left in the land. The fact that some remained while others were sent away created interesting social and theological dynamics, which we will explore later. First, let us consider the fate of those who were sent from the land of Judah into exile in the kingdom of Babylon.[18]

A large point of agreement between the biblical text and contemporary scholarship is that it was primarily those from the educated and wealthy class who were sent to Babylon. In Babylon these people served the purposes of the burgeoning Babylonian state that had a variety of needs which could be fulfilled by educated

[17] For a brief but helpful reflection on these varying numbers see Provan et.al., *A Biblical History of Israel*, 281–2.
[18] Jeremiah also makes reference to a group who took refuge in Egypt (41:11–44:30). What became of them is unknown although it seems clear that some did return from Egypt to Judah as the preservation of Jeremiah's oracle and description indicates. See Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 39, n.1.

people.[19] There are many indications that life in exile did not mean slavery in the same way that slavery is often understood in modern contexts. The book of Jeremiah demonstrates the ability of the exiles to build homes, develop business interests and marry (29:5–7). The books of Daniel (in Babylonia) and Esther (in the Persian capital of Susa), whether historical in all of their details or not, indicate that some of the exiles were able to attain significant positions in the governments of their captors. Nehemiah's position as royal cupbearer offers another example of such status. Also, extra-biblical evidence gives credence to this perspective. For example, the archives of the Murashû family offers evidence from a local business, albeit from a slightly later period, that the firm had clients with Jewish names. These clients were land owners and were employed as officials and administrators of the state.[20] This shows that some Jews who stayed in their new land and did not return to their old home, even after Persia overtook Babylonia, experienced prosperity over a long period of time in their new home.

This does not mean that this was the common experience of all the exiles. For some the experience of deportation would have been devastating. Even if their subjugators were reasonably benign, exile still represented the loss of political autonomy and familiar patterns of life. They were left to find new ways of practicing their customs and religious faith in a climate that was often less accommodating of what the local population would have determined to be strange practices.

Those left in the land were supervised by a garrison of troops and a Babylonian-appointed leader named Gedaliah (2 Kgs 25:22). The presence of Babylonian military and a non-Davidic leader were constant reminders to the people that life as they once had

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[19] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 15–17.

[20] For further explanation and notation see Provan, et.al., *A Biblical History of Israel,* 282–83. Also Davies and Rogerson, *The Old Testament World,* 86

known it was gone. While those who remained may have inherited some of the land left behind by the deportees, their lack of financial means (they are described as the "poor of the land") and education left them vulnerable to the Babylonians and those of other nations who may have used their power to take advantage of the Judahites, weakened situation.[21]

III. Living in Exile

Sociological research indicates that dramatic displacement affects the displaced people's sense of identity and causes them to respond to their displacement in a variety of ways.[22] The reality of a military takeover that brought some real measure of violence, a removal of key citizens from the land and a relocation of some of the population would have clearly shaped the communal response to it, both from those left in the land and those deported or fleeing from it. The evidence that this was the case for ancient Israel is clear in the work of the prophets. Their words display the trauma of exilic experience and the diversity of responses. Jill Middlemas offers four kinds of religious responses that seem to have occurred in Israel while in Babylonian, and later Persian, captivity. Middlemas's categories indicate how some members of the exiled population adapted readily to their captors context, while others refused and sought to find ways to preserve their national identity. Middlemas gives these responses as specifically descriptive of Israel's reaction to their captivity:

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[21] While no foreign populations were deliberately introduced there is evidence that some from other nations; the Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites, may have moved into the land and taken some of the land for their own purposes. See Davies and Rogerson, *The Old Testament World,* 87. This is corroborated by Provan, et.al., *A Biblical History of Israel,* 285.

[22] Daniel Smith cites the work of sociologist Brian Wilson who offers seven different ways that religious people groups traditionally respond to displacement, *The Religion of the Landless,* 51–52.

- ❖ Abandonment of traditional religion in favor of the religion of the foreign conquerors.

- ❖ Continuity with or reinforcement of indigenous elements in religion. (In terms of Yahwistic religion, this would coincide with the resurgence of worship practices thought to be Canaanite or foreign in origin.)

- ❖ Concentration on religion as being orthodox and monotheistic.

- ❖ Reformulation of religion in a new political and social context.[23]

These socio-religious categories offer a helpful reflection on the realities of exilic experience. They can certainly be seen as legitimate when we consider the experience of ancient Israel as seen thorough the witness of the biblical material that is the real concern of this study.

Further, these categories help us to understand the importance of the crises and allow us to proceed to analyze the crisis that exile represented. The various perspectives on just how destructive the exile was remind us of the basic fact that exile meant military defeat, loss of autonomy, and domination by a foreign power. Such an experience leads people whose worldview is centreed on a monotheistic understanding of the world and who apply that understanding in a way that sees themselves as a uniquely chosen and blessed people to question how that reality can now be understood in the midst of drastically different circumstances. For those left in the land the presence of a puppet king and Babylonian soldiers was a constant reminder that they were no longer an independent people. For those deported, their presence in a foreign land never ceased to leave them aware of their position as a conquered minority.

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[23] Middlemas, *The Templeless Age,* 7.

However, while it was true that not everyone in ancient Israel responded to exile in the same way, there was a prevailing response that ultimately shaped the vision of the nation for its exilic existence. This response can be identified, using Middlemas's categories, as a "reformulation." The remainder of this section will work from the premise that the outworking of this "reformulation" is what largely shapes the canonical witness. In the Hebrew Scriptures we see Israel offering a theological interpretation of their new sociological circumstances so as to reformulate their religion in a new context. Understanding the outworking of this response will be tremendously useful as it can provide theological resources for the Canadian church as it responds to its own sociological circumstances.

The real emphasis of Old Testament exilic theology in the canonical scriptures is on those who were sent out of the land and into Babylon. Davies and Rogerson note this emphasis when they comment on the thrust of the biblical text by writing that "the majority who remained are of little or no interest or significance."[24] It may even be significant to note the distinct sense that those who were exiled from the homeland were somehow the "true" Israel and those left behind were an apostate group who had abandoned their 'Israelite' status and, among other things, had intermarried with non-Judeans.[25] This rivalry and the triumph of the returning exiles as the ultimate shapers of canonical history gives the scriptural account its exilic perspective. Thus, with the emphasis of this study on a canonical understanding of exile, we are compelled to

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[24] Davies and Rogerson, *The Old Testament World,* 88.
[25] Davies and Rogerson, *The Old Testament World,* 88. Also see Jer 24:1–10, the prophet employs the image of two fig baskets, one filled with good figs and one with bad ones. The good ones are clearly those in exile and the bad those left in the land who are affiliated with Zedekiah and his policies. Ezekiel emphasizes that the deportees from Judea have suffered their punishment through their banishment from the land, however those left behind will still face further judgment for their iniquities (Ezek 33:21–31).

consider the prevailing theological perspectives of exile as they are handed down to us through the Hebrew Scriptures.

The religious nature of Israel drove the people to seek a theological understanding for their captivity. The canonical materials contain these hopeful streams of thinking that call Israel to re-orientation. The many voices of biblical exilic literature offer not only a diagnosis of the people's situation but a prescription for re-conception that can help inform our own exilic situation as the Canadian church. Identifying this aspect of the Hebrew Bible's witness Walter Bruggemann states,

> Exile did not lead Jews in the Old Testament to abandon faith or to settle for abdicating despair, nor to retreat to privatistic religion. On the contrary, exile evoked the most brilliant literature and the most daring theological articulation in the Old Testament.[26]

This demonstrates that while there are many ways that exiled groups will respond to their captivity, and in Israel some may have thrown their lot in with their conquerors and others may have chosen a separatist approach, the central core of Israel responded to their sociological exile with theological reform. What is clear is that the exilic period demonstrates the disorientation that new social realities bring and how theological reflection on the nature of God as revealed through the sacred text and human experience can produce wisdom to respond effectively to these new realities. Thus, an examination of exilic literature offers us a way to consider exactly how Israel reoriented itself in its new state of exile.

To do this we will follow a thematic flow that can be identified in the biblical literature as an unfolding, evolving theological response by Israel to their captivity. This flow unfolds in three stages: reaction, understanding, and response. This thematic

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[26] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 3.

approach is an adaptation of various approaches used to understand the stages or response

that Israel adopted as a result of exile.[27] Each of these stages is marked by a specific

action on behalf of the people, as typified in the literature. These actions are rooted in the

liturgical life of the community as expressed through the exilic Psalms and Lamentations.

Out of the worship/prayer tradition springs the language that leads to actions that enable

the community to move through its new lived experience as exiles. Consideration of

these materials can inform how the Canadian church can respond effectively to its exilic

circumstances. As with Israel our new sociological realities demand a theological

response. The resources offered by an Old Testament theology, which directed Israel's

exilic journey, can also inform the exilic journey of the Canadian church.

IV. Reacting to Exile: Lament

For a religious people the language of prayer and worship become primary

vehicles through which meaning is made out of life experience. For those Judahites cast

out of their land this was certainly the case. Their initial reaction to exile can be found in

various psalms and laments that depict the prayer language of the period. The prayer

language of exile is rich and varied, however, we will focus on the prayers found in the

book of Lamentations and the Psalms that can be placed during the period of Babylonian

exile with reasonable certainty (Pss 44, 74, 79, 89, 102, 106 and 137).[28] In words of

anger, frustration and disbelief the poets of Israel express their sense of God's absence.

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[27] For a similar understanding see the approach that Jill Middlemas takes in *The Templeless Age.*
Also see Brueggemann, *Deep Memory,* 59–75.

[28] See Raitt, *A Theology of Exile,* 87 and Middlemas, *The Templeless Age,* 36. Middlemas notes
that Ps 44 is debatable in terms of its exilic context, however, it is often listed along with the other exilic
Psalms, *The Templeless Age,* 36, n. 2. Also see Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73–150.* Psalm 137 is not
necessarily to be dated during the exilic period, but is a clear reflection on life during that period.

The theological crisis with which these texts wrestle and to which they give voice is the perception that the "transcendence of God is placed in deep jeopardy by the exile."[29]

For Israel exile was marked by a profound sense of the absence of God. Losing their land and political autonomy seemed to imply abandonment by God. Such a sense of dislocation and deep betrayal as experienced by the Israelite community in Babylonian exile and subsequently in Persian captivity could only be expressed through lament. The laments of the Hebrew Bible during the early exilic period are bold acts of discourse which reveal Israel's unwillingness to remain passive in the face of their plight. These prayers are the aggressive initiatives of a faith shaken but unwilling to give up. As a genre prayers of lament are multi-faceted and also include positive elements of both trust and hope. According to Westermann's classic analysis, lament typically includes the following elements (although the order and emphasis varies from psalm to psalm): 1) *complaint* (honest description of the problem—which may include God, enemies or oneself), 2) *petition* (request for God's action to remedy the problem), 3) *confession of trust* (often looking back to God's previous actions or confessing present trust—usually functioning as motivation for God to act) and 4) a *vow of praise* (based on hopeful anticipation of God's new redemptive action in the future—especially in individual laments). This section of our study focuses on the first element of Westermann's analysis: complaint.[30]

The theological reflection that is at the heart of biblical lament usually begins by naming the situation as it truly is:

> The first task among exiles is to represent the catastrophe, to state what
> is happening by way of loss in vivid images so that the loss can be

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[29] Clifford, *Psalms,* 199.

[30] Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation.*

> named by its right name and so that it can be publicly faced in the
> depths of its negativity. Such a naming and facing permits the loss to
> be addressed to God, who is implicated in the loss as less than faithful
> in a context seen to be one of fickleness and failure.[31]

Thus the prayer language of lament gives voice to the anguish of exile. Lament is the genre of God-speech that expresses the incongruity of life experience with what one previously understood to be the character of Yahweh.[32] In discussing their sense of God's absence, the writers of Lamentations and the Psalms offer a range of perspectives on how God is involved in their exilic experience. Yet, however multi-faceted this language expresses Israel's sense of abandonment by God and reflects a determination to speak honestly to God about a lack of satisfaction with their lot in the world and God's seeming inaction or injustice. Here we can identify three characteristic responses.

The first such facet that emerges in the language of Psalms and Lamentations is the idea of *God's wilful withdrawal from Israel*. This can be seen in the plaintive language of Lam 5:20,

> Why have you forsaken us completely?
> Why have you forsaken us these many days?

The language used in other sections of Lamentations is even more graphic as the poet clearly expresses sorrow to God;

> My eyes are spent with weeping, my stomach churns;
> My bile is poured out on the ground. (2:11)
>
> You invited my enemies from all around
> As if for a day of festival;
> And on the day of the anger of the Lord
> No one escaped or survived. (2:22)
>
> He has made my flesh and my skin waste away,
> And broken my bones. (3:4)

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[31] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 16.

[32] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 321. In Jonah, the prophet may in fact understand the character of God quite well (4:2), however, he does not want to accept it. The incongruity comes out of God being who he says he is and Jonah's wishing it was not so.

The language of the exilic Psalms reflects a similar perspective:

> How long, O Lord will you be angry forever?
>> Will your jealous wrath burn like fire? (Ps 79:5)

> Lord where is your steadfast love of old,
>> Which by your faithfulness you swore to David? (Ps 89:49)

Lament complains to God about one's plight. It questions God's activities, or lack thereof. It refuses to politely accept that current circumstances are just and fair.

> Now the lamenter has been cut off from the source of his life. Not only
> has he been deprived of the protection he expected from the Lord of
> history, but he has also been dispossessed of his divine filiality.[33]

In the language of lament, Israel comes before God in honest prayer despite the fact that such bold speech may run the risk of offending him.

Psalm 44 accuses God of having rejected his people and left them deserted in their battle with the Babylonians (44: 9). Further, he has sold them for no high price (v. 12) and, using language common in ancient expressions of abandonment by a deity, the poet addresses Yahweh as a God who has hidden himself in such a way that it seems like he has fallen asleep (v. 23).[34] If victory was a sign of God's favor (v. 4), then surely defeat indicates his rejection.[35] Thus, the psalm reflects a community whose world was being drastically reshaped and saw no other solid explanation but to see their collapse as the inaction of God on their behalf.

The writer of Ps 74 highlights God's absence by questioning his inactivity toward the enemies of Israel. "Why do you hold back your hand?" the poet cries (v. 11). His question articulates a sense of God's neglect. In essence he asks, "Why do you act as if you are not there?" This is a clear violation of the traditions on which the nation has

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[33] Terrien, *The Elusive Presence,* 322.
[34] Mrozek and Votto, "The Motif of the Sleeping Deity," 415–19.
[35] Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith,* 140.

come to rely. For, in the "Zion tradition, God should defend the dwelling place of his name and his congregation."[36]

In Ps 79 the writer calls attention to the fact that God's absence is obvious even to his enemies, "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'"(v. 10). In a similar way in Ps 137 the writer painfully recalls the taunt of his enemies who demanded that the people, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (v. 3). This mockery is depicted as a way for the enemies to remind Israel that their God has been defeated. Further, he did not deliver, and thus, the reality of his presence should be questioned. The loss of the temple in particular (Ps 79:1) was a reminder in graphic physical form that God's presence had been lost, a loss that was apparent to all.[37]

Psalm 89 is raw in its emotion as it drastically shifts from a poem of praise to God for steadfast covenant loyalty to a pained expression of loss and abandonment.

How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? (v. 46)

Lord where is your steadfast love? (v. 49)

With almost unparalleled vitriol the writer accuses God of neglect. "Every defeat of the king, every breech in the walls of Jerusalem, every act of plunder means only one thing to the people: God has failed to live up to a solemn promise never to abandon them."[38]

Brueggemann notes that several questions are consistently repeated in the Old Testament literature that address God's absence and hiddeness.[39] Two of the questions that come up repeatedly in these Psalms are "Why?" and "How long?" These interrogatives arise from the lived experience of Israel that expects Yahweh to be in

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[36] Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith,* 152.
[37] Clifford, *Psalms,* 52.
[38] Clifford, *Psalms,* 94–5.
[39] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 319–21.

control and yet finds him inattentive. The questions rise out of the initial experience and

intolerable nature of their life in exile and the perception that God should be more active.

As Brueggemann puts it,

> Israel fully anticipates that the God of its core testimony must and will
> act decisively to intervene and transform unbearable circumstances.
> But the intervention and transformation are not on the horizon—hence
> the question.[40]

A second way that the literature of Lamentations employs daring speech to

address God as absent is by accusing God of taking an active role in their defeat and

actually becoming the enemy. A sampling of this imagery includes the following,

> He has cut down in fierce anger
>   All the might of Israel;
> he has withdrawn his right hand
>   from them. (2:3)
>
> He has bent his bow like an enemy
>   With his right hand set like a foe;
> He has killed all in whom we took pride
>   In the tent of daughter Zion. (2:4)
>
> The Lord has become like an enemy;
>   He has destroyed Israel. (2:5)
>
> He has broken my teeth with gravel. (3:16)

God seems to not only have removed himself from the people but to have

participated in their demise. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp observes,

> The central thrust of the poem's opening section may simply be stated:
> to show in no uncertain terms that God is the chief cause of Jerusalem's
> destruction. Its portrayal of God, as it accentuates God as Judah's
> champion- turned- enemy, God's unquenchable rage, and God's
> merciless destructiveness, is one of the darkest in all of biblical
> literature.[41]

God is absent in that he is not who Israel has depended on him to be: their protector and

defender. It is chilling to note that three times in this section of Lam 2 God is referred to

as the "enemy" (vv. 4a, 4b, 5a). "That a Judean prophet could call God 'enemy' is a

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[40] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 319.

[41] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations,* 79.

telling sign of the deep distress and unparalleled suffering brought on by the

catastrophe."[42]

Third, there is in the language of lament a sense of *God's betrayal.* God is

presented as neglecting his covenant loyalties. For example, God's absence is depicted in

vv. 6 and 7 by drawing out language that clearly provokes sacred images of God's

presence now withdrawn from his temple,

> He has broken down his booth
> like a garden,
> he has destroyed his tabernacle. (v. 6)

> The Lord has scorned his altar,
> disowned his sanctuary. (v. 7)

The image of God departing from the dwelling in which he once happily resided

graphically reminds the people of Judah that when God is not present the possibility for

catastrophe is at hand.

Chapter three of the book continues the same theme, spoken in the voice of an

individual member of the community;[43] it continues to reflect absence as the foundational

motif of exilic spirituality;

> Though I call out and ask for help,
> He shuts out my prayer. (v. 8)

> You have wrapped yourself with a cloud
> So that no prayer can pass through. (v. 44)

> My eyes will flow without ceasing,
> Without respite,
> Until the Lord from heaven

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[42] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations,* 79. There is significant debate over the language used by the poet here. Some say the word "like" seems to make the claim of God as enemy into a simile, thus slightly softer. See Mandolfo, *God in the Dock,* 131–32. Others like Dobbs-Allsopp *Lamentations*, 83, see the Hebrew "כִּי" ("like") as a "later theological addition" to the text, "designed to stress that God was only 'acting' as if he were an enemy." Thus, the idea that the poet is offering regarding God's antagonistic posture toward Israel needs to be understood quite literally.

[43] The use of the individual voice is a source of discussion among scholars. The voice may be representative of the community as a whole, a composite of several poetic voices or a single voice representing one of the many poetic traditions that have been melded together by the final redactor of the poem as a whole. See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations,* 106–08, also Westermann, *Lamentations*, 172.

> Looks down and sees. (vv. 49–50)

Mingled with the assertions that God is somehow behind the plight of his people comes a steadfast plea for help, albeit to no avail. In the midst of unceasing tears the poet tries to "goad, flatter, shame, or otherwise compel God into acting in deliverance."[44] The agony of God's removal of himself from amongst his people is almost unbearable.

Finally, in the closing strains of the poem the disappointment, frustration and fear of life without Yahweh is expressed in haunting words of abandonment tinged with the slightest hew of residual hope:

> Why have you forsaken us completely?
> Why have you forsaken us these many days?
>
> Restore us to yourself, O Lord
> That we may be restored;
> Renew our days as of old
> Unless you have utterly rejected us,
> And are angry with us beyond measure. (5:20–22)

Coming as it does at the end of the book, these words reinforce the overriding sense of distance from God that is the impetus for the prayers of the whole book. Brueggemann captures this essence when he writes,

> The speaker does not question that God has abandoned. The abandonment by Yahweh is taken as a given. In asking "why," the speaker does not seek an explanation from God, but seeks to assert that the absence of God is inexplicable and inexcusable.[45]

Such language, and its multiple perspectives on the exact nature of God's role in Israel's exile, is disconcerting and difficult to read. Yet it appears in Hebrew Scripture as a description of exilic experience. It is no wonder that Linafelt sees the main theme of Lamentations as "survival."[46]

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[44] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 125.

[45] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, 78.

[46] Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 18. He writes that one of the hermeneutical keys to a large section of the book is "survival, rather than the theological categories of guilt or hope…"

Thus the first response to exile for Israel was to offer a jarringly honest approach to Yahweh in the form of the speech of lament. This response reflects an unwillingness to politely drift along in quiet acceptance; it is both a somber and a hopeful act. Its sober tone is evident in the content of the speech, full as it is of pain, anguish and loss. But it is also hopeful because it is prayer. Despite the disappointment with their God and the subsequent confusion regarding his role in their downfall, these prayers of lament are reflections of sustained faith. Exile has not left the community without words to say to God, or the heart to say them. This initial reaction to exile demonstrates that while the people of Israel may feel abandoned, they are determined to survive.

V. Understanding Exile: Repentance

The lament literature itself provides some of the transitional language that moved the people from the raw response that typifies the bulk of the literature to an acceptance of their fate. As we will see, lament also began to hint at the idea that perhaps Israel's plight was founded upon their own failure as covenant partners with Yahweh. In lamenting their affliction Israel also affirmed their desire to look forward and reach out for life. Thus from within their lament came language designed to move the community beyond the confines of complaint alone.

The penitential prayer tradition evolves in the prayer life of Israel as they move on from lament to new imaginings of the future. Penitence is present in early exilic prayer language only in a minimalist way. Yet it cannot be discounted as a significant

minority voice since it provides the beginning of a path forward for the ancient community.[47]

An examination of the exilic Psalms reveals a posture typical of the early lament tradition. Little acknowledgement of sin is offered. Primarily God is requested to note the plight of the people, see the injustice, stop being angry and deliver them. At times the language is highly defensive as the people make their innocence plain:

> All this has come upon us,
>   Yet we have not forgotten you,
>   Or been false to your covenant.
> Our heart has not turned back ,
>   Nor have our steps departed from you. (Ps 44:17–18)

Confession breaks through at various points:

> Help us, O God of our salvation,
>   For the glory of your name;
> Deliver us, and forgive our sins,
>   For your name's sake. (Ps 79:9)

This confession, while certainly an acknowledgement of sin, is linked with the desire for deliverance. Thus, the cry to "forgive our sins" means not only to wipe the slate clean but also, "to take away the terrible situation our sins have brought on us."[48]

The book of Lamentations is the key to the transition into penitence as the way forward for the Israelite community. The opening poem begins to let the stream of confession flow (albeit in a trickle):

> The Lord is right,
>   For I have rebelled against his word. (1:18)

> See O Lord, how distressed I am;
>   My stomach churns,
> My heart is wrung within me,
>   Because I am very rebellious. (1:20)

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[47] See Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," for an exploration of the development of the penitential prayer tradition beyond Lamentations and Psalms. See also Boda, et.al., *Seeking the Favor of God,* vol. 1, 2 and 3. For our purposes, as mentioned on p. 13, we will maintain a focus on the language found in the corpus of those two biblical books.

[48] Clifford, *Psalms,* 51.

While couched in the discourse of lament and expression to God of the pain his actions

have caused, a sense of ownership is emerging. God's ways are just and guilt is to be

acknowledged.

Lamentations 3 provides an important transition in the spirituality of exile as we

discover in it, "the theological emphasis key to transitioning Judah from the bitterness of

their lament to the expression of their penitence."[49]

> Why should any who draw breath complain
> About the punishment of their sins? (v. 39)

> We have transgressed and rebelled
> And you have not forgiven. (v. 42)

The transition is marked by the fact that ownership of sin and exoneration of God

begins to take place in small but clear ways. The way forward is to acknowledge sin.

This will begin the process of restoration.

> The cultural assumption that sin triggers divine anger and punishment
> was matched in antiquity by an equally strong assumption that
> repentance should bring about divine compassion and forgiveness.[50]

This theological understanding is foundational not only to the way the

worship/prayer life of Israel was shaped but also to how they understood their history.

As the people of Judah sought to comprehend their experience in exile it is not surprising

to discover that they perceived the divine hand at work. However, while we can see the

initial emergence of an acknowledgement of sin in the prayers of lament it is even clearer

that the reaction of the people to their exile is one that sees God's punishment as far too

severe for the crimes Israel has committed.[51] The role that sin plays in the downfall of

Israel and Judah, and the subsequent acceptance of their responsibility, while emphasized

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[49] Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 66.

[50] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations,* 123.

[51] Middlemas, *Templeless Age,* 47–9. It is worth noting that specific sins are rarely named.

in the exilic prophets, appears to originate elsewhere—in the theological outlook of the

Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) and its formula of blessing and curse.[52] The DtrH

consistently demonstrates a cyclical pattern in Israel's history. Human disobedience

results in divine wrath which leads to human repentance, which ultimately evokes divine

mercy. Further, Yahweh always acts consistently with the words of his true prophets and

is always in control of things.[53] Only by means of this perspective can Israel begin to

perceive how the actions of the Babylonians are in actuality the work of God, acting in

judgment upon his unfaithful people.

On the surface a case can be made that the exile was the work of current

geopolitical forces. The days in the period of exile were tumultuous ones in the ancient

Near East. Judah's environment during the seventh and sixth centuries was a time of

"Extraordinary political upheaval with the rise and fall of superpowers."[54] The

Babylonians saw the land of Judah as an advantageous acquisition in light of their

expansionist imperial policies,[55] so they acted as any powerful state in those days would

be expected to.

For the writers and poets of the day, however, such an explanation was

inadequate, if not completely inaccurate. As we will see, "Israel never doubted that its

exile is a theological happening."[56]

The literature of ancient Israel is explicit in its understanding of the exile as the

work of God. It is depicted as not only something that God has prompted but an

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[52] The DtrH is the term given to the historical books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and part of the book of Deuteronomy. For a concise overview of the DtrH see Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 52–63. For an extended treatment see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 271–302. Also, Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History*.

[53] Middlemas, 61–2.

[54] Birch, et. al., *A Theological Introduction*, 320.

[55] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 111.

[56] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 111.

eventuality that he warned would happen. The judgment of Yahweh is a response to the

wickedness of his people, particularly as it is personified in their leaders. The kings of

Israel were, for the most part, a less than pristine group. While a few of them

demonstrate a high degree of covenant loyalty, the majority do not. In 2 Kgs 21 King

Manasseh represents a culmination of all that is evil about Israelite kingship. In vv. 3–5

he is depicted as worshiping false gods, constructing altars for them in the temple,

practicing soothsaying, employing mediums, and sacrificing his son in the fire. In v. 16

we are told that he "shed very much innocent blood." Therefore, the Lord speaks through

his prophets:

> Because king Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations, and has
> caused Judah also to sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God
> of Israel...I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria and the
> plummet for the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish,
> wiping it and turning it upside down. I will cast off the remnant of my
> heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies (2 Kgs 21:11–15).

False worship, idolatry and mistreatment of the marginalized are the major

offenses that bring about Yahweh's wrath. Even the faithful kingship of Manasseh's

grandson Josiah could not overturn this judgment. Despite all of Josiah's righteous acts

we read in 2 Kgs 23:26–27 that the Lord did not turn away from his wrath against Judah.

Finally, during the reign of King Jehoiakim the Lord raises up the Babylonians as he

sends them against Judah to destroy it (2 Kgs 24: 1–2). The biblical writer reflects on

these events by stating, "Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to

remove them out of his sight for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he committed" (2 Kgs

24:3).

To the ancient historian, the sins of Manasseh and his predecessors fully justify

the events of 587. Insofar as the covenant functioned on the condition of Israel's

response of faithfulness to God (Deut 11:31–32; 30: 19–20), their lack of faithfulness

justified a response of divine wrath. Thus, the ensuing events were not simply the

triumph of hostile geopolitical forces, they were in fact the outworking of the divine will.

Peter Ackroyd observes, "The disaster of the exile is to be attributed not to some

accident, but to the divine will operating through the prophetic word."[57] Judah was

getting its just desserts for its failure in its covenant partnership with Yahweh.

This idea, that the exile was an expression and outworking of the

Deuteronomistic theodicy, plays a large role in the theology of the prophetic literature of

that period. David Noel Freedman goes so far as to say that, "This ideology flourished in

the years before the fall and it is the starting point for all sixth century thought."[58] Thus,

the prophetic literature in the exilic period recognizes the "basic justice of the disaster in

the context of divine judgment."[59] Reflecting on the traditions of Jeremiah and Ezekiel,

Thomas Raitt asserts that those prophets *"never"* entertain the possibility that the events

of 597 and 587 were anything other than "God's direct and proportionate punishment on

Judah's sin."[60] Jeremiah is unequivocal on this point, even portraying Yahweh as calling

Nebuchadnezzar "My servant" (25:9; 27:6). "The feared and hated ruler of Babylon,

who is about to dismantle Jerusalem is understood as an instrument of Yahweh's

purpose…Thus Yahweh wills the end of Judah."[61]

While the biblical text is absolutely clear in its assertion that the exile is a

divinely appointed event and a result of Israel's flagrant disobedience, it would be wrong

to understand this event merely as a mechanical, judicial transaction. God is not simply a

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[57] Ackroyd, "Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile," 341.
[58] Freedman, "Son of Man," 175.
[59] Freedman, "Son of Man," 177.
[60] Raitt, *A Theology of Exile,* 84.
[61] Birch, *A Theological Introduction,* 333.

judge rendering a decision in a matter-of-fact way. Jeremiah eloquently sets forth two illustrations that demonstrate this. In 2:2–3 and 3:1–5, the prophet presents Yahweh as an offended husband and Israel as a wayward wife. The tone employed in the words of Yahweh as he reflects on the unfaithfulness of his "spouse" implies a sense of sadness and loss. Later in 8:21–22 and 30:12–13 Israel is portrayed as horribly sick and beyond help. Though there is a promise for eventual restoration, now is the time for grieving, as one might grieve over a terminal patient who has consistently abused their body and is now reaping the consequences of their choices.

Thus, the exile cannot be simply interpreted in judge-defendant terms, or reduced to an overly simplistic understanding of the theology of blessing and curse. It bears the marks of an interaction between God and his people as their relationship deteriorates to the point that God is now sovereignly allowing Judah to be abandoned to its own chosen destruction. The images presented by Jeremiah move away from issues of real world politics and juridical categories to the categories of relationship and human suffering. The poet seeks to "take his listeners inside the vexed life of Yahweh, to show that for Yahweh, who is inordinately sensitive and caring, the conduct and attitude of Judah have made life for Yahweh completely unbearable."[62]

In the same way that the initial liturgical reaction to the circumstances of exile is largely pessimistic, the DtrH seems to leave little room for optimism in its assessment of Israel's historical patterns. However, just as the prayer language of lament offers some faint notes of repentance and the possibility that God is present and able to act, so too does the DtrH leave the door open to the idea that Israel's fate is not without hope. Both it and the liturgical literature present a deity who is not absent from the affairs of his

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[62] Birch, *A Theological Introduction,* 330.

people but has consistently shown himself as the God who acts mercifully and intervenes in the suffering of his people.

VI. Responding to Exile: Hope

The initial liturgical reaction in Lamentations and the Psalms begins to sketch out the landscape of hope, which becomes the ultimate response of Israel in its ongoing exile in Babylonian and Persian captivity.

The spiritual life of the exiles is marked by a steadfast refusal to abandon their God, despite their sense of abandonment by him. Laments notwithstanding, hope is never far from the surface of exilic prayer. In the prayer language of ancient Israel there is a refusal to give in to their circumstances. Through prayer there is an expression of a clear "counter-reality" which is a summons to an alternative reality, a way of seeing that counters their lived experience.[63] This counter-reality offers the possibility that God's grace will allow for and bring about the restoration of his presence and blessing. While the experience of exile has initially led the people of Judah to question God's presence, such prayer is a clear sign that they believe God to be present in some fashion, even if he is not immediately discernable. It is this indeterminate, indiscernible presence that evokes their lament:

> You have wrapped yourself with a cloud,
> So that no prayer can pass through. (Lam 3:44)

This perspective expresses the hiddeness of God, and his removal from the people, but still recognizes that God is somehow present even in apparent absence. Accordingly if God is not entirely absent he can be interrogated, and if he can be interrogated, then the possibility of restoration is not altogether lost:

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[63] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 76.

> Why have you forsaken us these many days?
> Restore us to yourself O Lord, that we may be restored.
> (Lam 5:20-21)

This is the fulcrum of hope for those in exile. God is never fully absent: there is a chance that he will hear their prayer, see their repentance and restore their lives. There lingers in the hearts of the praying poets a memory of the divine presence that in the past made things right. This experience of "presence in absence" means that hope is always alive and therefore can be a generative spiritual resource. It also means that an appeal for restoration can remain a part of the vocabulary of exilic prayer.

Theologically, this experience of "presence in absence" is more than just a memory of past days. It is a hope-inducing, despair-disabling resource that pushes the community forward. It fully embraces God's hiddenness and recognizes that in his hiddenness he is still present. Paradoxically Yahweh's passive enablement of exile is part of his presence with the community of faith. God's abandonment still contains within it his cosmic presence. Even if he is not near in immediate experience he is always in the background, and his presence is experienced through his decision to abandon.[64] This is the foundational hope of exilic prayer.

> For Israel, moving against God, can at the same time only have recourse to God, can only cling to God against God. The force of the psalmist's 'why' – the force, that is, of bewilderment and indignation - implies an insistent yes to the divine promise.[65]

Thus the spirituality of exile is ultimately hope-filled, because even when God is absent he is nevertheless present and— should he so choose—can move in restorative

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[64] For brief discussions on the concept of presence in absence see Terrien, *The Elusive Presence,* 321–324, and Brueggemann, *Deep Memory,* 82–83. Brueggemann sees the logic of the position but denies that it fully captures what is going on in the speech expressions of exilic texts.

[65] Boulton, "Forsaking God," 77.

power. Thus the writer of Ps 44, in accusing God of slumbering, hiding his face and

forgetting his afflicted people also calls for him to

> Rise up, come to our help.
> Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. (v. 26)

His absence is not so total and final that prayer for deliverance is out of the question.

While events led to the questioning of God, they also led to a turning to God.

> Psalm 44 provides a window into the vibrant faith of a community
> whose whole world was collapsing, and which had no alternative but to
> blame that collapse on God, but whose appeal is nonetheless to the One
> who cares.[66]

This is the essential spirituality of the exilic community: experiencing hope in

the midst of God's mysterious working in their communal life. The exilic literature

demonstrates that within the exilic community there was at least a section of the

population who refused to accept their exilic situation as final. Indication that the people

never lost hope is found in their anticipation of God's judgment on Babylon (Isa 13:1—

14:23), their prayers for the restoration of Jerusalem, and their talk of reconstitution of

the nation (Ezek 40—48). This is accompanied by the prophetic assurance that despite

all outward appearances, God had not abandoned his people; in fact he was with them in

their exile. This perspective reminds Israel that just as God has not abandoned his people

in the past (Isa 48:21), so he will not be absent from them now.

However, prayer is only one avenue for understanding Israel's vision of life in

exile. To understand it further we must look to discover how the prophets sought to offer

Israel a way of imagining itself in their new circumstances. The prophets speak to the

question of how Israel would embody their identity as God's people, even while living as

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[66] Crow, "The Rhetoric of Psalm 44," 401.

exiles. Several responses of hope can be identified, a number of which have generative

possibilities for the Canadian church in its distinctive form of exile.[67]

1. God's presence on foreign soil

Prior to exile the three symbols of God's presence with Israel had been the land,

the Davidic kingship and the Jerusalem temple. These three stood as signs of God's

promises and covenant loyalty. Exile stripped Israel of all three foundational identity

markers and left the people confused about where God was to be found in the midst of

their new experience. The prophets spoke words of assurance that despite outward

appearances God had not abandoned his people; he was still with them in their exile.

For example, the reality of God's presence is creatively presented in the mystical

vision of Ezekiel 1. God is depicted on wheels and mobile as his glory departs the temple

and flees the land because he can no longer be present in a place of such immense sin

(1:1–21). The key idea in this vision is that of a God who is not restricted to Jerusalem.

He is on the move and is going into exile with his people. This being the case, life and

faith can continue apart from the old institutions. A similar vision is presented in

chapters 8–10 where the temple of Jerusalem is clearly characterized as a place of

heinous blasphemy and idolatry to the point that Yahweh can certainly not remain there.

Ezekiel 10:15–22 depicts the "glory of Yahweh" leaving the temple and flying off to be

with the exiles in Babylonia.[68]

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[67] The categories that follow reflect my own synthesis of a variety of sources that have also reflected on the hopeful streams that emerge from the exilic literature of the Hebrew Bible. Most, if not all, of these sources are reflected in the footnotes.

[68] Bruggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 672.

This vision of God as mobile and himself exiled from the temple speaks of a God not restricted to a place. Yahweh's glory is not restricted to the temple; it is present wherever he chooses to reveal it, including Babylon.[69] This theology of the God who is present is essential to a people who find themselves stripped of old certainties, institutions and religious foundations.

In a slightly more oblique way we can see this theme in Jer 29:4–7 where the exiles are instructed to work for the good of Babylon. While Jeremiah ultimately predicts deliverance from Babylon for the exiles (29:10), that blessing will come to Babylon as the exiles work for the good of their captors. This possibility of blessing is clearly tied to the sovereignty of Yahweh as the one who ultimately decides on whom to bestow favor. The idea here is clear, that as God's people settle in and live faithfully, the Lord will give his blessing to their captor state. In other words, he will continue to be active in the affairs of his people and in the affairs of their host nation, despite the fact that they are away from their land. This may have flown in the face of some in the community who would have rather seen God judge Babylon as opposed to bless them. Yet, we see that God's commitment to blessing the obedience of his people is still intact, although now that blessing will also extend through them to their enemies. This affirms God's universal sovereignty and agency in the life of all nations, but still gives Israel a special role to play as the instrument of God's blessing. Later as we consider how exile also clarified the mission of Israel as a light to the nations we will see how this principle is leveraged even further as God's ultimate desire is to see foreign nations become his worshipers. But that begins with Israel as an instrument of blessing to the Babylonians.

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[69] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 672.

The explicit and implicit images of God as being in exile with his people are the foundation of hope for Israel. If Yahweh is truly present with them and willing to work amongst them as they work amongst their captors then not only is there hope of survival, but the hope of deliverance also remains alive.

2. Holiness

Within the prophetic textual response to exile there is a call for the community to distinguish itself as a distinct people through practices of holiness designed to bring a renewed sense of communal identity, specifically as a people separate from the practices of the larger culture. The heightened stress on renewing covenant practices of faithfulness can easily be understood as an attempt "to maintain a separate identity as an elect people in an alien culture, a culture in which assimilation seemed to offer more chance for success."[70] These practices were designated as acts of faithfulness to Yahweh, which in Babylon would have been "highly confessional" acts making Israel stand out from its environment.[71] Accordingly, the Holiness Code that takes its final shape during exile is both a response to exile and a witness to others.

There is general agreement that the Holiness Code was definitively shaped around the sixth-century BCE, and is usually considered to be a part of the Priestly stream within the Pentateuch. It is a "recognizable block of material in Lev 17—26 that shares an unswerving focus on the holiness of Yahweh and requirements for correct social relations within Israel."[72] This literature functions to help Israel establish its identity as a people in relationship with the holy God, Yahweh and it gives concrete expression to what it means

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[70] Klein, *Israel in Exile,* 6.
[71] Klein, *Israel in Exile,* 126.
[72] Middlemas, *The Templeless Age,* 126.

to live as Yahweh's holy people.[73] The code stipulates positive behaviors as well as ones that Israel must refrain from if they are to be identified as God's people and not bring his name into disrepute. These requirements are rooted in the relational nature of the deity and his people. This is clear through the repetition of the phrase "I am the Lord your God," which occurs twenty-two times in the code (eg. Lev 20:7, 26; 21:8). The holiness of their deity makes it imperative that his people also show themselves to be holy (Lev 19:2; 20:7).[74] This entailed things such as not profaning the name of Yahweh by participating in false worship to other gods (Lev 18:21), not lying to one another, not stealing from one another and not swearing falsely by Yahweh's name (Lev 19:11–12). Further, an intrinsic part of this calling to be separate was a renewal of Sabbath keeping (Jer 17:19–27; Isa 56:2–6; Ezek 44:24). This call to renewed holiness capitalizes on the blessing-curse scheme found in the DtrH, which promises blessing for obedience to Yahweh's laws and curses for those who fail to obey, and reminds the people that the way to experience restoration and blessing is through renewed faithfulness in covenant practices.

For the exiles a commitment to holiness and separateness, demonstrated in acts of renewed covenant loyalty would be a demonstration of their peculiarity in their world. It was also a subtle rejection of Babylonian norms, a way of saying that they were not of Babylon but residents of a different place. Daniel Smith-Christopher proposes the idea

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[73] For a brief overview of the scholarly discussion around the formation of the Holiness Code see Middlemas, *Templeless Age,* 125–29. For an extended treatment see Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code.*

[74] Middlemas, *Templeless Age,* 130–34.

that "purity" in such a social context becomes the language of "non-conformity."[75]

Indeed, this perspective was intrinsic to the prophetic response to Babylonian exile.

The importance of holiness as a sign of distinctiveness continued as exilic life shifted from Babylonian captivity to life back in their former land under Persian rule. In this season of "exile"[76] former religious conventions, such as temple worship, were slowly restored but expressions of separateness continued to be emphasized. While the ethical distinctions continued, ethnic distinctions became increasingly significant. The writings of Ezra and Nehemiah are particularly radical in this area. These texts employ their "purity ideology" to help reconfigure the Judean community through the redefinition of who is a Judean and the expulsion of those classed as aliens.[77] These works increase the intensity of the Pentateuchal traditions by stating that Israel is not just a "holy people" but that they are a holy seed which can be desecrated by intermarriage between its people and foreigners (Ezra 9:1–4; 10:1–5). As Hannah K. Harrington has noted, in Ezra-Nehemiah intermarriage entails a kind of ritual contamination or impurity that is not just sinful but also communicable.[78] This calls for particularly radical separation from intimate relations with foreigners because there is no purification available for such contamination.

> This is clearly not just a religious issue, for then the spouses could simply convert to the faith of Israel, e.g. Ruth. Rather, there is no way of overcoming or purifying the impurity of foreigners. This notion begins in Ezra-Nehemiah and continues in many versions of Second Temple Judaism.[79]

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[75] Smith–Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* 160. See also Bruggemann, *Cadences of Home,* 6–7.

[76] Here I use the term "exile" in the sense that though there is a return to the land under Persian rulership Israel remains essentially under their complete control and without autonomy.

[77] For an exploration of this see Olyan's article, "Purity Ideology in Ezra–Nehemiah."

[78] Harrington, "Holiness and Purity in Ezra–Nehemiah," 116.

[79] Harrington, "Holiness and Purity in Ezra–Nehemiah," 116.

Further, the project undertaken by Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is not simply a renewal of the urban landscape but is employed as a device for maintaining the physical separation, and thus social, even ritual purity of the community. Esler demonstrates this by recounting a passage from Nehemiah 10,

> Thus, among the promises made by the people to obey God's law is that they will buy nothing from the local (non-Israelite) inhabitants of the land on the sabbath or a holy day (Neh. 10:31-32). Later, however, Nehemiah discovers that Tyrians who live in Jerusalem are bringing in foodstuffs to sell on the sabbath. As well as reprimanding the authorities for profaning the sabbath, Nehemiah orders that just before sunset on the afternoon preceding each sabbath, the gates of Jerusalem will be shut and not opened again until the sabbath is over (Neh. 13:16–19). Here we clearly have a co-ordinated set of physical and symbolical prescriptions and proscriptions aimed at preserving the boundaries and hence identity of Israel.[80]

Thus, as the importance of holiness evolves in the community of Israel not only does ethical purity play a role in delineating their difference from other people but also ethnic purity becomes a renewed emphasis in covenant fidelity because it demonstrates the idea that ultimately it is only Israel who belongs to Yahweh. As we will note later in the dissertation, particularly in relation to the story of Jonah, this kind of strict ethnic boundary setting needed to be critiqued because it could it misconstrued the nature of God's love for all nations. However, Nehemiah's emphasis on ethnic boundaries reflects a renewed commitment on the part of God's people to embody an appropriate holiness by emphasising their distinctiveness from other nations (even if subsequent readers choose not to employ a similar strategy).

The literature of exilic life for Israel reflects a return to purity as a way of securing a communal identity for Israel while they lived under the rule of foreign power. The call to holiness not only secured a distinct identity for the exilic community but also

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[80] Esler, "Ezra–Nehemiah as a Narrative," 425.

provided it with clear modes of behavior that functioned almost sacramentally, as a way

for the community to consciously acknowledge God's presence among them and

establish itself as a worshipping community.[81]

3. Mission

One of the most dynamic aspects of the turn to hope in exilic life was the renewal

of Israel's sense of being a people of mission. While this may seem to contradict the

preceding section, exile brought about a renewed sense that Israel had a role to play

among the nations of the world in declaring the supremacy of Yahweh. This is most

evident in Second Isaiah where the prophet articulates a compelling call for the people of

Yahweh to once again act as light to the nations (42:5–7; 49:5–6). It is not strange that

given their context as a captive people living among "the nations," Israel would reflect on

their responsibility towards foreign people. The words of Second Isaiah recall the core

teaching of Pentateuchal faith as found in Gen 12:3 and Ex 19:6, whereby Israel is

founded as a people who will serve the good of the nations around them. This prompts a

call for a renewed vision for Israel to see itself as not living in a vacuum but as a

responsible steward of all the gifts that God has given it as his partner.[82] This calling

audaciously reorients the sense of defeat that exile naturally brought with it and asserts

that the conquerors are to be converted to the faith of the vanquished. In the ancient

world where the gods were often understood in a highly territorial way, and the defeat of

one nation by another was also assumed to be the defeat of one god by another, this was a

highly counter-ideological thrust that offered mission as a radical response to exile. It

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[81] Brueggemann explores this idea in *Cadences of Home,* 8–9.
[82] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 433–34.

denied that Yahweh had been defeated and promoted the counter-reality that Israel's

enemies needed to in fact become Yahweh worshippers.[83]

Central to this missional mindset are four passages found in Deutero-Isaiah

(42:1–9; 49:1–6; 50:4–10; and 52:13—53:12). Traditionally referred to as the "servant

songs," they provide a daring theology of mission to Israel as Yahweh's unique servant.

The actual identity of the servant is a highly controversial matter in biblical

scholarship, and a full exploration of all its dimensions is outside the scope of this

study.[84] Yet there is good reason to believe that some of the poems refer directly to Israel

itself as the servant in question. Rabbi Allen S. Mailer represents this potential

interpretation when he writes,

> In Jewish thought the prophet Isaiah himself provides the strongest
> evidence for the claim that the servant is Israel, the Jewish People.
> Several verses in prior chapters of Isaiah specifically state that Israel/
> Jacob is God's servant. *"You Israel are my servant,* Jacob whom I have
> chosen" (41:8), "Hear me now, *Jacob my servant,* hear me, Israel my
> chosen" (44:1), "Have no fear, *Jacob my servant:* Jeshurun whom I
> have chosen" (44:2), "Remember all this, Jacob, remember *Israel for
> you are my servant"* (44:21). These verses make it clear that
> Israel/Jacob is God's chosen servant. The national community is spoken
> of in terms of an individual, as is often the case in the Bible (see
> Jeremiah 30:10).[85]

In this sense Israel is the servant referred to in the poems, one who will act as a

light to the nations, will be rejected and will suffer. If it is true that the servant actually is

Israel, then it is clear that, "she will suffer unjustly for the salvation of the world."[86] In a

fully orbed theology of exile, "Israel is innocent in comparison to her captors and

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[83] See Isa 45:20–25 and also Isa 56.

[84] For a discussion on the issue of the identity of the servant see Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66,* 92–3. Seitz, "You are my Servant," 117–34. Gignilliat, "Who is Isaiah's Servant?" 134, sums up the debate by stating, "The language used to describe the Servant is 'cryptic and veiled' with the intention of remaining historically diffuse." Middlemas, *Templeless Age,* 100–2, also offers a concise overview of potential ways that the various poems may apply to one or more figures.

[85] Mailer, "Isaiah's Suffering Servant," 9.

[86] Freedman, "Son of Man," 185.

enemies. The overarching, historical purpose of her suffering is the world's conversion."[87]

This view of the servant's identity may not be accepted by all, but the theological thrust of the servant's work articulated by this view captures the significance of Second Isaiah's view that Israel's role as a nation in exile and its future hope resides in its missional identity as witnesses to Yahweh. Even if we conceive of the servant in narrower terms than that of Israel as a whole, it is evident that the mission of the servant is connected to the larger purposes that God has for his people:

> The Servant's mission is God's mission (Isaiah 49:1–6); the Servant is God's means of redeeming his people and drawing in the nations. One catches a glimpse in the narrative identity of the Servant of a figure whose entire being and reason for existence is to carry out obediently the will of God's redemptive purposes (Isaiah 50:4–10).[88]

This vision aligns with the aforementioned passage in Jer 29:7 to seek the welfare of Babylon. That passage can also be understood missionally. Israel's faithfulness to Yahweh will bring blessing to Babylon. This will testify to the fact that God is present with them, and will act as a witness to their foreign rulers regarding the superiority of Israel's God.

Exile clarified the principle that Israel is not designed to be a segregated people in the sense that they are to remove themselves from interaction with foreigners. "(Israel) is rather intended for full participation in the life of the dominant culture."[89] This does not imply that everything about foreign nations was positive, for Second Isaiah delights in the destruction of Babylon (ch. 47), but Israel nonetheless had a role to play in the

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[87] Freedman, "Son of Man," 186. Blenkinsopp has commented that Israel begins to see herself as a "confessional community" who is now "open to converts." See, "Second Isaiah–Prophet of Universalism," 86.

[88] Gignilliat, "Who is Isaiah's Servant?" 133.

[89] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 13.

transformation of the nations. God had no intention of abandoning his mission to the world while Israel languished in exile. Through the exile God would use Israel redemptively, and the people were called to co-operate in the outworking of that ultimate purpose.

This kind of hope was spawned through the use of what Brueggemann calls "prophetic imagination."[90] This term describes the need for spiritual leadership to infuse the community of faith with the kinds of resources that empower it to see their God as "in control" when everything around them seems to say otherwise. This faith-sustaining imagination forms the basis for construing ways in which faith may be expressed in exile. As an example of this kind of work Brueggemann points to the prophet Isaiah in Babylon and his uttering of God's words to the people of Israel found in Isa 43:8–12. Here the prophet speaks on behalf of the Lord and reminds Israel that they are still his "witnesses" (v. 10). Offering them a juridical metaphor, Isaiah tells Israel that they are now called to testify on Yahweh's behalf in a court of law where all the nations and their gods have been summoned to appear (v. 9). In this courtroom the nations are entreated to bear witness on behalf of their respective gods in a contest to determine which God is most trustworthy. The people of Israel are called to stand as witnesses to their God and declare him as the true God among all the gods of the nations. This prophetic challenge to Israel comes in the midst of their Babylonian captivity and against the contemporary notion that Israel's God must not be as great as Babylon's God (or Assyria's for that matter) since he has not been able to provide victory for his people. Instead, in the context of Isa 43 it is God's declaration that he predicted Israel's exile that is at stake. His faithfulness is

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[90] The following exploration of Brueggemann's use of prophetic imagination is based on a talk given by Dr. Brueggemann at the Association of Theological Field Educator's conference in Atlanta, Georgia January 25, 2009. The thoughts presented here are a mingling of Brueggemann's and my own.

proved by the fact that he warned Israel about the potential for exile and has now allowed

exile to occur, yet he will be present in exile and will redeem from exile. Isaiah delivers

the prophetic word that reminds the people of these things and calls them to stand as

Yahweh's witnesses in the face of theologically charged, exilic circumstances. By all

accounts it is risky, foolish behaviour. Such audacity takes faith inspired by an

imagination that is fuelled by the assurance that things are not what they seem; the

current situation is not fully described in terms of its outward circumstances alone. As

Brueggemann describes it,

> They could not imagine any other status. They accepted
> Babylonian definitions of reality, not because they were
> convinced, but because no alternatives were available. These
> Babylonian claims seemed as if they would endure to
> perpetuity (Isa 47:7, 8, 10). This exiled community was in
> despair because it accepted Babylonian definitions of reality
> and did not know any others were available; that is they were
> hopeless.[91]

The prophet of Second Isaiah challenges his audience with the idea that there is an

alternative vision which offers hope for a different configuration of things. The work of

exilic leadership is to cast that vision of hope.

The same kind of prophetic imagination continues later in exilic history. In Neh

1, approximately one hundred years after the words found in Isa 43, Nehemiah receives a

report about the discouraging circumstances back in Jerusalem.[92] Those who have

returned there under the Persian repatriation policy have found the city in utter disrepair

(1:4). Nehemiah's sadness is detected by the Persian king Artaxerxes for whom

Nehemiah works as royal cupbearer. When asked what is wrong Nehemiah overcomes

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[91] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination,* 95.
[92] This is not to infer that Nehemiah is directly indebted to Isaiah but rather to offer that Nehemiah carries on the tradition of "prophetic imagination." The contrast between the two is that while Isaiah inspired hope with his message, Nehemiah inspires hope with his actions.

his fear to speak and tells the king about the conditions in Jerusalem (2:1–3). The king

then asks what he can do for him, Nehemiah first prays to Yahweh and then asks the king

to allow him to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city's walls. The king grants his

request and also provides military protection and materials for the construction project

(2:4–8). Thus, the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt with Persian government funding and

through the work of Nehemiah the people of Israel receive fresh encouragement for their

continued exilic journey.

Nehemiah is a both a child and a purveyor of prophetic imagination in the sense

that he continues in the exilic tradition of leading his people in a way that encourages

their faith by imagining a better future and that also initiates faith sustaining action. Both

men spoke and acted in audacious ways that demonstrated their faith that Israel still had a

role to play among the nations. While Isaiah and Nehemiah believed that exile would end

and restoration would occur, in the meantime they offered a vision, through word and

deed that engendered hope in their people by stretching them to imagine who God was

and what he could do.

These concepts offered Israel a hopeful vision for its sojourn in exile. This hope

which was an intrinsic part of the prophetic vision for Israel while in exile was reiterated

through a narrative device known as the Diasporic Advice Tale. These stories creatively

expressed hope as their characters depicted heroes of the faith facing the challenges of

living within foreign cultures. They, along with the prophetic and liturgical material

already considered, offered a vision of what life could be even in the midst of exile.

VII. Theological Narratives for Exilic Life: The Diasporic Advice Tale

It is reasonable to assume that exile brought with it tremendous fear and, as Middlemas's categories remind us, there was a temptation to either integrate with Babylonian beliefs or separate completely from them (the same is true for Persian beliefs later on). However as the initial shock of drastically new surroundings began to wear off Israel eventually responded creatively to its circumstances, re-imagining itself in a whole new social and political context. A fresh interpretation of faith would be necessary not only to sustain that faith but also to meet the challenges of a new life setting.

The people of Israel responded to exile with creative theological reflection on their traditions and their ways of understanding God. As we have already seen, the ability to imagine the activity of God as being equally as potent away from the land of Israel and a recasting of the missional nature of Israel. Both demonstrate how exile provoked this creative engagement with theological ideas. Also, as we have seen, new conceptions of faith were formed through reflection on God's apparent absence, ethical ideals were revived through stressing covenant loyalty, and ethnic boundaries were more fully asserted. This engagement then produced new approaches to Israel's faith.

This may in fact be the most remarkable aspect of the Jewish response to exile. Other nations were also subsumed by Assyria, Babylon and Persia (not to mention the Greeks and Romans) and their defeat and capture ultimately led to the extinction of their respective cultures and religions. Yet Israel did not succumb to a similar fate. As a people it found its way through a protracted time of living in the shadow of powerful foreign enemies without completely losing its distinct identity both culturally and religiously. Certainly the experience of defeat, exile and the years of captivity provoked

significant questions. Where was God? Was God really powerful? Did God really love

his people? Was God really faithful? How do we survive? These questions provoked the

kind of creative theological reflection that generated new experimentation and

articulations of the ancestral faith. This reflection was not simply intellectual or

theoretical, but rather it sought to answer the kinds of real world questions that the exile

produced.[93] It also rendered some of the most eloquent and risky literature of the biblical

canon, the Diasporic Advice Tale. This literature provided a narrative response to exile

that helped Israel see how their identity as God's people could be embodied in real exilic

situations. This form of exilic literature was a clear expression of Israel's hope for its

future.

This form of literature consists of stories where the protagonist can be

understood as representing the nation of Israel as a whole. Further the protagonist's

actions offer advice for how the nation should behave while in captivity. As we

specifically consider the stories of Esther, Daniel and Jonah we will see how exilic

themes and ideologies provide us with a rich resource for discerning an appropriate

theological response to the experience of exile. These tales will also inform our study as

we move to the final section and we consider how they can inform the life of the

Canadian church in our own day.[94]

In the context of exilic (or Diasporic) existence, narratives that depicted the lives

of exiles were a form of didactic literature. These narratives usually featured Jewish men

or women who are able to thrive in their displaced context and even rise to places of

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[93] Birch, *A Theological Introduction,* 346.
[94] As an example of how these characters can bring core exilic texts and theological ideas into conversation with contemporary needs see Smith–Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile,* especially chapters 5–7.

significant influence. These characters appear in Diasporic novellas which illustrate how clever, pious heros are able to overcome much more powerful members of the dominant ethnic group and gain favor from the king. Diasporic advice tales are presented in a number of places in scripture and offer wisdom for the Israelite community to draw upon for Diasporic living.[95] Many of these tales emanate from the so-called "post-exilic" period, but inform the lives of a people whose lives are squarely in an exilic or Diasporic state.

Such stories are typical of displaced peoples. It is often the narratives of a people that most vividly depict their understanding of life as it really is and express their beliefs about the best way forward.[96] Roger Bromley in his work on contemporary Diasporic cultural fictions notes that the stories of displaced peoples

> can be seen as participating in new cultural strategies…The essence of this work is the cultural analysis to go beyond the boundaries and exceed the limits of racialised, colonized and national identities. They are not simply narratives about contestation and difference, but achieve their very textualisation through constructions of difference and contestation.[97]

The Diasporic advice tales provide a narrative focus for how Israel could respond to its exilic situation. They are, in a certain way, an applied theology of exile, as they seek to present and make sense of the ongoing social reality of Israel in exile.[98]

John Collins summarizes the nature of what these stories teach in three points. They remind the nation that their monotheistic religion is superior to the paganism and idol worship of the captors, they encourage Jews to remain faithful to God and their

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[95] Some examples of biblical stories that potentially qualify as diasporic advice include Esther, Daniel, Jonah, Ruth, Mordecai and Joseph.

[96] Stories like the Diasporic Advice Tales found in the Hebrew Bible can be found in many (if not all) marginal cultures. For instance the "black spirituals" from the African American slave experience function similarly, as do a genre known as the "clever fox" stories that come from Japanese-American detainment camps, or "black Jesus" stories from South Africa. See Smith. *Religion of the Landless,* 163

[97] Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging,* 3.

[98] White, *Esther: A Feminine Model,* 164–65; Lacocque. *Esther Regina,* 8.

national ideals, just like the heroes in the story do, and they show that God will deliver his people if they will truly believe and trust in him.[99] As Daniel Smith observes, the protagonist "serves as a focus for the group: one in whom hopes are placed and who provides an example as well."[100] While each story contains a different emphasis on exilic life and presents God and the Jews duty in their situation uniquely, there is in these tales a common perception of life in exile.

For our purposes we will examine three "Diasporic Advice Tales" from Old Testament literature: Esther, Daniel, and Jonah, and we will consider how they demonstrate (or embody) the theological themes that we have already seen emerge from the prophetic literature. These highly creative narratives helped Israel formulate both theological and anthropological ideas that created not a new God, but a new understanding of their relationship with God.[101] For contemporary Christians they can provide new understandings about who we are and who God is in our current experience as the church in Canada.

1. Esther

i. Esther as Diasporic Advice

While the book of Esther is set in the Persian period, when King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) was ruler (486—465), it was certainly written later than this period as the opening phrase suggests: "This happened in the days of Ahasuerus." The majority of scholars agree that a precise date for the book is hard to determine.[102] It is generally

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[99] Collins, *The Apocalyptic Visions of the Book of Daniel*, 84–5.
[100] Smith, *Religion*, 164.
[101] LaCocque, *Esther Regina*, 10.
[102] For a concise but thorough discussion see Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 39–41. For an argument for an earlier date (first half of the fifth century BCE) based on an analysis of the Hebrew grammar of the book see Millgram, *Four Biblical Heroines*, 100–2.

assumed, however, that the final Hebrew form of Esther is of late Persian or early

Hellenistic origin.[103] From a purely literary perspective it seems obvious that the Esther

scroll, which is foundational to the Jewish celebration of Purim, is written to demonstrate

the potential of exilic life for those still experiencing this kind of existence.[104]

Esther is an orphaned Jewish girl raised by her cousin Mordecai. Esther is

identified early as a beautiful young woman and when the King of Persia is looking for a

new wife Esther ends up in a beauty contest whose winner will be named queen. As it

transpires, Esther is the contestant who most pleases the king with her beauty and various

other charms, and as a result, she is crowned the new queen of Persia. Throughout the

process, at the urging of Mordecai, she conceals her Jewish identity. Shortly after her

appointment as queen, a royal official named Haman talks the King into issuing an edict

that will have the entire Jewish population of Persia exterminated. Hearing of the plot

Mordecai adjures Esther to use her influence as queen to intervene on behalf of her

people. Despite great personal risk, and through a series of remarkable coincidences and

plot reversals, Esther manages to demonstrate to the king that Haman is a man of

questionable character and thus she is able to secure deliverance for her people. Her

cousin Mordecai is elevated to vice-regent of Persia, Haman is put to death, and many

Persians convert to Judaism as a result of Esther's actions.

In the book of Esther, the stories of Esther and Mordecai become "applied"

theological narratives demonstrating to subsequent generations of Jews (and others) how

the wisdom of God informs life for a minority people in a culture governed by powers

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[103] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 39–41. See also, Bechtel, *Esther*, 3. Bechtel reflects the breadth of opinion as well as the "agreement" among scholars that Esther is to be dated somewhere between 400 and 200 B.C.E.

[104] This said, Berg, *The Book of Esther*, 15, points out the difficulty of determining an author's intention when it is not explicitly stated, as is the case with the author of Esther.

and laws different and even contradictory to their own. Donn Morgan points out that although they contain few (if any) direct references to the Torah or the Prophets, both the book of Esther and the book of Ruth represent faithful living based upon scriptural ideals in this period.[105] He goes on to observe

> The behaviour of the characters provides paradigmatic actions and situations, which the reader or hearer is to ponder. The success of this behavior may provide an impetus for similar behavior in analogous situations or may simply testify to the value of faithfulness and allegiance to God and Judaism.[106]

Such dialogue is part of the creative theological discourse that marked the period of exile and is reflected through the canonical writings of the period. This dialogue provided instruction to the exiled community and gave them important perspectives that informed their existence. Esther offers its readers, both ancient and modern, wisdom to guide life in a minority position. Esther's story reflects several of the overarching exilic themes that we have already explored for Esther is a narrative born out of Israel's theological reflection on its exile. Esther's role as a marginalized person in the powerful empire of Persia offers an example of how God is present on foreign soil, how holiness could be lived out, and how mission could take place.

ii. The Message of Esther

a. God's "Hidden" Presence on Foreign Soil

As we have seen in our previous examination of Lamentations and exilic psalms, the people of God ponder the possibility of God's presence on foreign soil. This is a crucial issue for Israel as they seek to reconstitute themselves in a foreign place. Could they count on their God to help? In his anger had he abandoned them for good? The answer of the exilic prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel was "yes" to the first

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[105] Morgan, *Between Text and Community*, 51.
[106] Morgan, *Between Text and Community*, 52.

question and "no" to the second. Yet, as exile wore on the same question likely recurred.

If God had not abandoned them why was it taking so long for a return to autonomy?

Were their days as a people ultimately numbered? It is questions like this that a narrative

such as Esther addresses.[107]

This may seem like a curious claim as Esther is well known as the only book in

the Bible that does not mention the name of God. This omission has brought about more

than its share of speculation. Some scholars have asserted that Esther is a "secular" book

in which God plays no role.[108] While it is true that the absence of God's name is a

feature unique to Esther, as we will see it in no way eradicates the presence of God in the

story.

The nonappearance of God's name has been explained by numerous theories,

including the idea that it was an intentional deletion to avoid its profanation during the

highly festive celebration of Purim. It has been asserted that the festival, known for its

heavy drinking, was no time to pronounce the sacred name.[109] Other commentators see

the book accentuating the human element of the story. The author wants to stress the role

of human beings in shaping the course of history and their need to take individual

responsibility.[110] Andre Lacocque avers that the author avoids any mention of the deity

in a Persian setting because there is "a theology for the land of Israel and another for the

Dispersion."[111] Yet attempts to explain God's "hiddeness" in the story rarely deny that

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[107] For exploration of these and similar issues see Day, *Esther,* 1–3, and Lacocque, *Esther Regina,* 35–38.

[108] See Fox, *Character and Ideology,* 235, for a synopsis.

[109] Paton, *The Book of Esther,* 95. Fox offers an exploration of this theory, *Character and Ideology,* 239.

[110] Beth Berg, "After the Exile," 107–27.

[111] Lacocque, *The Feminine Unconventional,* 62.

the book has a religious tone.[112]   At the very least, as Michael Fox offers, there is the

possibility that the author is seeking to convey "uncertainty about God's role in

history."[113]   The author is reflecting the idea that, "there can be no definitive knowledge

of the working of God's hand in history."[114]   While Fox's exploration of religious doubt

in Esther presents a provocative approach to the issue of God's hiddeness, it fails to

convince because of all the evidence in the book that seems to point to God's real

presence in the events of which it speaks.

There are allusions to God's presence in a number of places, most notably 4:14

where Mordecai asserts that deliverance for the Jews will come from "another place," if

not from Esther.   While it is debatable whether he is referring to a divine initiative, such a

position is highly tenable.   The assertion of God's presence with Israel in their exile, as

we have seen, reaches back to the exilic prophets themselves.   This is a decisive

theological perspective for the community.   What comes into play at this point in their

life is a return to the concept of Israel as a people rather than a place.[115]   Such a

perspective takes them back to Abram and God's constituting a people for himself long

before they were established in a land.   As Laniak points out, according to biblical history

it was 500 years after God's promise to Abram that his line finally took possession of the

land that was promised.   Nonetheless, his blessing on the patriarchs is evident in

occasional theophanies (Gen 15; 28:10–17) and ongoing prosperity even when they

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[112] Fox, *Character and Ideology,* 237–247, explores various theories concisely but
informatively.

[113] Fox,*Character and Ideology,* 247. This perspective reflects Brueggemann's overall view of
Old Testament Theology. Brueggemann says, "the rhetoric of the Old Testament is characteristically
ambiguous and open… So much is left unsaid that the reader is left uncertain." Brueggemann, *Old
Testament Theology,* 110 (emphasis original).

[114] Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology,* 110.

[115] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 82. Laniak futher states regarding Israel, "God is available to
them anywhere first, then at a designated somewhere (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27)," *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 82.

found themselves in exile like Joseph did in Egypt (Gen 39:2). Laniak observes that

Joseph's presence in a foreign kingdom is a key parallel to Esther, as Joseph brought

prosperity to the foreign kingdom as well as status and deliverance for his people. In the

same way Esther does this for the Jews in Persia. This link reminds us of the central truth

that God's presence with his people is tied to covenant more than land or temple.[116]

This most ancient of theological paradigms needed to be re-appropriated in exilic

life. The author's veiled reference to deliverance is rooted in a theological perspective

that understands that God will not break his covenant with his people. Covenant

transcends land. It is rooted in relationship, and thus, Mordecai is assured that

deliverance will come because Israel is a people in relationship with the sovereign

God.[117]

This reading is influenced by virtue of Esther's place in the Hebrew canon.

Without its canonical context it could well represent a secular vision for Jews in the

Diaspora, one that affirms God's abandonment and the need for self-reliance as the way

forward. However Esther's place as Holy Scripture, while debated throughout ancient

history has been traditionally upheld and should influence how we read the book.[118]

With this perspective 4:14 can be seen as a certain reference to the divine presence active

in superintending the events that the author is describing.

Further we see the divine presence in Esther's own plea for her people to set

aside three days and nights for fasting on her behalf as she prepares to visit her husband

the king and make her case for the salvation of the Jewish people (4:16). While the

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[116] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 81.
[117] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 79–82.
[118] For a brief review of the debate over Esther's place in the canon and a contemporary defense of it, see Bush's article, "The Book of Esther: Opus non Gratum in the Christian Canon."

nature of the fast is not made explicitly religious in the text, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that fasting in the later Jewish tradition is a religious act.[119] Indeed, the tenor of the request is infused with humility. Esther recognizes that her hope of convincing the king to overturn Haman's plot is not in her hands alone; she needs the support of her people, and of her God.

Also, one may discern the presence of God in the numerous "coincidences" that occur throughout the story. For instance, in chapter 6 the king's insomnia leads to his discovery of Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty. The whole series of events that lead to Esther's being chosen as queen is full of "coincidental" events. Haman's entrance into the royal court just as Ahasuerus is trying to think of a way to reward Mordecai (6:4), and the king's return from the garden at the precise moment that Haman literally throws himself on Esther's mercy (7:8) both reflect "coincidental" timing. While the reluctance of the writer to attribute one or any of these "coincidences" directly to God remains a mystery, as David Clines notes, taken together these chance occurrences have a cumulative effect. They demonstrate the guiding hand of God. Clines writes, that divine control of the events is not hidden; it is stated indirectly but clearly by means of the many coincidences in the story.[120]

Reversals that occur within the plot must also be considered as evidence of God's divine direction in Esther. We see these in Mordecai's elevation to vice-regent while Haman takes his place on the gallows that he had built especially for Mordecai, and most explicitly in 9:1 where matters are said to be "turned around for the Jews." As Fox notes, "The core of the story is organized into a series of theses and antitheses, which use

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[119] See White, *Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora*, 162, referring to the work of Wilhelm Vischer, *Esther,* 15.
[120] Clines, *The Esther Scroll,* 153.

the same or similar language."[121] While Fox rightly points out that these reversals do not

prove the presence of God in the story, their proliferation implies a "transcendental force

beyond human control and prediction."[122]

Ultimately it is the rootedness of Esther within the Hebrew exilic tradition that

leaves the reader with the impression that God, while veiled, is intimately involved in the

outcome of the narrative. As a work designed to offer advice to Jewish exiles it reflects

the prophetic assumption that God is at work in the nation even if that influence is not

always immediately apparent. In this sense Esther seems to reflect the community's

latent doubt about God's presence by presenting a tale of God's subversive activity in

coming to the aid of his people in ways that are only discernable in retrospect. Indeed he

delivers at least partly through the actions of his people. Orlando Costas notes that this

perspective contributes to the particular Jewish understanding of Purim that celebrates

God's work, as it were, behind the scenes, as opposed to Passover which celebrates

God's more direct intervention.[123] He continues by stating,

> The story of Esther challenges us to think of God as a verb and not just
> as a noun, or as the one who is known in and through historical events
> as well as in the revelation of the holy name.[124]

While it is undeniable that the author goes to great literary lengths to veil the

presence of God, and thus acknowledge the reality of that experience within the

Diasporic community, there is ample evidence to believe that despite the fact that there is

no mention of Yahweh or no explicit reference to Jewish religious practice in the entire

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[121] Fox, *Character and Ideology,* 243.

[122] Fox, *Character and Ideology,* 243. Using the technical term "peripety" Fox points out that the use of reversals as evidence of the hand of God has scriptural precedence, he writes, "In several psalms and proverbs peripety is understood as a manifestation of God's presence," *Character and Ideology,* 243. Elsewhere he offers a list of examples, *Character and Ideology,* 253.

[123] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith, 78.*

[124] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith, 78.*

text, Esther brings assurance to exiles that God is nonetheless present, for in the events of

Esther divine providence is indeed at work.[125] Perhaps this reality can only be discerned

by a people who are intrinsically motivated by a concern for the world to recognize the

name of Yahweh. With this perspective one can see that the book of Esther presents

Israel's God as the unnamed force behind the events of which it speaks. "This force is

only recognizable to those familiar with YHWH's presence in Israel's sacred past and

ancient traditions."[126] To those who are already familiar with this history, the prophetic

assurance that God will be with Israel in their exilic and Diasporic existence echoes

throughout the story of Esther.

b. *Embodied Holiness*

As oblique as the presence of God is in Esther, the integration of the heroine

within Persian society is quite explicit. The ease with which she functions in Persian

culture, and her apparent moral ambiguity, have at times been a point of contention for

readers of the book. There is certainly room for these charges against Esther and her

overall moral comportment.

> Instead of challenging the king's diet as Daniel once did, she prepares
> his food! This is the one known not for her religious habits, but for her
> beauty and charm—and her erotic capacities. Her choice is not to
> reveal her Jewishness, but to avoid risk by concealing it.[127]

As Sidnie White points out,

> Esther, as a Jew, seems to have no scruples about being married to a
> Gentile or living in a completely heathen environment. These problems
> were at least felt as early as the second century B.C.E. when the Greek
> additions to Esther were composed, adding prayers and explicitly

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[125] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 89. Laniak further reminds us that, "Muted allusion to the presence of YHWH in time and space is characteristic of the wisdom tradition."

[126] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 90.

[127] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 83.

> stating Esther loathes being married to a Gentile and has scrupulously followed the dietary laws.[128]

As the later additions affirm, Esther was perceived as altogether enmeshed in Persian culture, perhaps indeed overly so. Yet this is not unconnected to Jeremiah's words to prepare for an extended exile by settling into life under foreign rule (29:4–7). Esther epitomizes Jewish ability to thrive in the service of a foreign king. Her story is one of coming to terms with living in a foreign land under extraordinary circumstances. She is a model for those who must live in a context of dual loyalties.[129]

The particular Diasporic issue that Esther speaks to is that of living with limited power.[130] While Esther and Mordecai may rise to certain places of power, for the majority of the story they are not the ones who control the situation. Their "success" in the story is always the result of their ability (usually Esther's) to behave wisely in the circumstances that they face. This wise behavior is characterized by their ability to compromise in just the right ways so as to allow their cause to advance. This attempt at "critical compromise"[131] is contrasted with less subtle approaches that backfire and lead to detrimental results. For instance Queen Vashti in her short appearance at the beginning of chapter 1 dramatically refuses, when summoned by her husband the king, to appear at his party. While Vashti's courage in standing up to the king's desire to show her off may be admirable and has endeared her to centuries of feminists, it results in her being banished from the royal court and an edict is declared that seeks to repress any woman who would dare try to defy her husband in a similar way (1:19–22). In contrast

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[128] White, *Esther: A Feminine Model,* 161–62. Terry Muck writes in his General Editors preface to Karen Jobes' commentary on Esther that Esther's behavior would not pass any test of modern ethical theory, see Jobes, *Esther,* 13.

[129] Harvey, *Finding Morality in the Diaspora?* 209.

[130] Bechtel, *Esther,* 11.

[131] Bechtel, *Esther,* 12.

Esther's more flexible approach is depicted as having much more positive consequences.[132]

This approach has meant that some see Esther as a compromised character. However, this does not seem to be the emphasis of the story. Esther acts as a model for cultural engagement in situations of limited power. As one with a minimum amount of official power she is able to find ways to work within her culture and advance the cause of her people. This is the way that exiles must learn to work if they are going to have any hope of transforming the host culture.

Esther's model is also helpful as she demonstrates that her engagement with culture is marked by a proportionality that is distinct from what is characteristic of the people around her. Esther is a book in which key characters are depicted as acting in highly disproportionate ways. King Xerxes throws a six-month drinking party during which he proudly displays his wealth and the splendor of his kingdom (1:3–8). However, Haman easily out-distances Xerxes in disproportion. When a single man (Mordecai) refuses to bow to him, he calls for the extermination of a whole people (the Jews; 3:5–6). When he wants Mordecai to be hanged he builds a gallows that is the equivalent of a modern six-story building (5:14).[133] Esther, on the other hand, represents a distinct contrast to this excess in the way she conducts her life in the Persian court. When given the opportunity to take whatever she wants for her one night with the king, she requests nothing except what Hegai the eunuch advises (2:13, 15). When hearing of the plot to have the king killed she quietly acts to save his life and make sure that Mordecai gets the credit (2:22). As she prepares to approach the king for her momentous uninvited

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[132] Bechtel, *Esther,* 11–14, explores how the theme of working effectively from a subordinate state versus taking stringent stands is depicted in a variety of characters in the book of Esther.

[133] Bechtel, *Esther,* 9.

interview she calls for a three day fast, which is in contrast to the book's other banquets, yet fully appropriate to the significance of the occasion (4:16). When invited by the king to make a request for herself, up to half the kingdom, Esther simply asks that the king and Haman attend a banquet she has prepared for them (5:7–9). When the right time comes for her to unmask Haman's deceit toward the king, Esther's speech demonstrates a modesty that contrasts the excess of Haman's demands (7:1–6). This modesty and sense of proportion is one of the marks of Esther's wisdom as she works within the constraints of Persian culture.[134] She is a model of perpetual cultural engagement; embedded in the culture, employing cultural norms, functioning as a full member of her society but with a humility and sense of proportion that makes her distinct from those around her.

Esther's womanhood cannot be overlooked as a part of what makes her a Diasporic model. She is particularly effective as an exilic model because as a woman she is able to illuminate the power relationship at play between a mighty monarch like the Persian king and a subjugated partner. Like Esther, the young girl who has been chosen to serve the king's need for a trophy queen, the Jews in Diaspora are also in a weak position as a subordinate population. Thus,

> In the book of Esther, their role model for this adjustment is Esther.
> Not only is she a woman, a member of a perpetually subordinate
> population, but she is an orphan, a powerless member of a Jewish
> society. Therefore her position in society is constantly precarious, as
> was the position of the Jews in Diaspora. With no native power of her
> own owing to her sex or position in society, Esther must learn to make
> her way among the powerful and cooperate with others in order to
> make herself secure.[135]

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[134] See Bechtel, *Esther,* 7–11, for a full discussion of this point.
[135] White, *Esther: A Feminine Model,* 167.

For these reasons Esther is able to serve as a vivid example to the Diasporic

population. She demonstrates an ability to adapt to life in Persia and thrive despite all the

odds against her.

> She is observant and graceful, politically astute and prophetically
> courageous. Notwithstanding her respect for and devotion to Mordecai
> and his prophetic role, she is ultimately the one who unmasks Haman
> before the king, achieves the liberation of the Jews, and makes it
> possible for Mordecai to rise to a position of honour.[136]

In this regard Esther models an embodied purity that demonstrates the

importance of holiness for exilic life. As we have already seen, later redactors felt a need

to remedy the apparent lack of attention paid to Esther's ethical standards because she is

not a "tidy" character whose behavior is so one-dimensional that no ambiguity remains

with regard to her fitness as a role model. Nonetheless Esther cannot be judged apart

from her context. While there may indeed be room for her overall conduct to be

scrutinized for potential moral failings, her legacy deserves a far broader analysis.[137]

It would seem that the key to a proper understanding of Esther's morality (and

thus any demonstration of purity) lies in her relationship to and actions on behalf of her

community. If seen in isolation her behavior could be understood as selfish, vain, or even

immoral. But when understood as part of a tale that describes deliverance for the Jews

these actions take on a much more complex, even heroic hue. Sandra Berg understands

this point clearly when she writes,

> Esther's noncompliance with the law stems from her inability to
> separate her own destiny from that of her people (cf. 4:13). To place
> her own safety above theirs produces only negative results: if Esther
> does not intercede for her people, she and her father's house will
> perish, even should some assistance for the Jews appear. The

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[136] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith,* 74.

[137] Harvey, *Finding Morality,* 208. See also Wenham, "The Gap Between Law and Ethics," 17.
See also, White, *Esther: A Feminine Model,* 161–62.

disobedience of Esther, like that of Mordecai, directly results from her
membership in the larger Jewish community.[138]

Following Orlando Costas' study we can identify a number of ways in which

Esther exemplified Diasporic purity. First we see here loyalty to her people over her own

personal safety. She acts on their behalf by going to see the king even though it may well

cost her own life (4:16). Remembering her heritage she determines that the salvation of

her people should take precedence over her own wellbeing.[139]

Further we can fairly surmise that she demonstrates loyalty to her God by

calling her people and her court to a fast, a deeply religious practice, before she attempts

to appear before the king in what might have been an act of political if not personal

suicide (4:16). Her piety is one of action and not just words.[140] As the king unexpectedly

extends his scepter to Esther, in an act of mercy (5:2), she courageously moves forward

in her resolve to save her fellow Jews from execution. Her plot to expose Haman and his

diabolical scheme demonstrates Esther's faith, again not in words but in deeds. She acts

cleverly and effectively on her people's behalf. Costas notes that, "Esther represents a

'word of action' rather than an 'action of the word.'"[141]

What we see in Esther is a character whose actions must be understood in the

communal context. She acts not according to what is "right" by the law, for to do so may

ultimately endanger the welfare of many. Instead she acts in a way that subverts the

power structures of her Persian conquerors and in so doing represents an exilic piety of

action that points toward the delivering hand of God. Esther navigates the many potential

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[138] Berg, *The Book of Esther*, 77.
[139] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith*, 71.
[140] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith*, 72.
[141] Costas, *The Subversiveness of Faith*, 78.

pitfalls of her situation by knowing how to play by the rules in a hostile society. Hers are the virtues of courage, shrewdness, loyalty, discernment and honor.[142]

c. *Mission*

Can a book that never uses the name of God reflect the missional intention of God? Can the exile of Israel result in other nations coming to know the God of Israel? The missional effect of Esther's actions seems to find its expression in the eighth chapter when Mordecai is elevated to vice-regent and we are told that many people of "other nationalities" become Jews (8:17). This is a dramatic expression of the overall impact of Esther's mission. Out of her position of weakness God brings deliverance and that deliverance works to serve as a light to many. The fact that the people who "converted" do so as a result of "fear" of the Jews, can be understood as a reflection of the expected response to a display of God's power (Deut 2:25; 11:25).[143]

This also speaks to God's decision to use unlikely people to participate in his mission to the world.[144] Esther is an orphaned, exiled female. She is a most unlikely leader. Her only qualification is that she has won a beauty contest. Yet she joins a long line of unlikely heroes in the history of Israel. Her participation in God's program speaks eloquently about how God will work through one who is of seeming low esteem to make his name known.

iii. *Summary*

The book of Esther also calls for an understanding of exile that reframes Jewish hopes and aspirations. Exile was a time when the people of Israel longed for a return to Zion and a restoration of their autonomy. Such a return would display the power of

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[142] Laniak. *Esther's Volkcentrism*, 83.
[143] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism*, 89.
[144] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 87.

Yahweh to the nations. Esther calls for a different way for Israel to understand the

concept of restoration. As do other Diasporic advice tales, it beckons not for a return to

nationhood predicated upon place alone, but to nationhood rooted in community. This

type of national identity includes a vision for ongoing mission under the rule of a foreign

governor. Esther ends, not with everyone living happily ever after back home in Zion,

but with everyone living happily ever after in Susa. Esther's risks are not for the sake of

her people's return to an autonomous existence "back home." They are for a safe

existence in Persia.

> The story describes a state of legitimacy, success, and prosperity in
> Persia (10:3). The result is an affirmation of Jewish peoplehood apart
> from a homeland, without a sense of peripherality, and with respect for
> the full potential of Jewish life anywhere... The faith that is
> promulgated in this story is one that is not limited by regional or even
> ethnic boundaries. At a time when others would move back to the
> geographical centre of their threatened world and cling to a rebuilt
> Jerusalem as their only hope for ethnic survival, Esther mediates
> salvation at the centre of the threatening world.[145]

In this way, Esther contributes to the mission of reforming Judaism within new

contexts. Redemption will come from the Jewish people acting faithfully for their God in

exilic or diasporic situations. A recasting of the nation's self-understanding along these

lines was absolutely necessary for it to thrive both as a people and as an instrument of

God.

The book of Esther provided the ancient Jewish people with a theological

narrative of hope because it assured them that God was with them in exile. Even though

they were a marginalized people they could still live holy lives and serve God's purposes.

They could penetrate the power structures of society and be an agent of transformation,

as Mordecai's enduring role in the Persian government indicates, and they could act as an

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[145] Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism*, 81.

agent of protection for the Jewish community, as Esther did. The creative reflections

posited by the book recast Israel's understanding of themselves as a people and created

fresh possibilities for lives in captivity. It may be that the approach offered by Esther can

continue to serve in a similar way even to contemporary communities that experience

themselves living in a culture that is foreign to them. As we will see the wisdom

embodied in Esther still speaks to the church in Canada as an example of how to forge

our own identity as our situation continues to change.

2. Daniel

i. *Daniel as Diasporic Advice Tale*

The similarities between Esther and Daniel are striking and well-documented.[146]

Both stories take place in the royal court of a foreign king and both display the

protagonist faithfully serving the interests of the foreign empire and the Jewish people

alike. In both cases the narrative indicates that Jews can thrive in a foreign context. In

both stories the protagonist's success is based, in part, on their attractive physical

appearance (Esth 2:7–17; Dan 1:4). Both Daniel and Esther include scenes in which

great banquets occur, the heroes and/or heroine find themselves in great danger, the

king's sleep is disturbed and the heroes/heroine's change in fortune extends beyond

themselves and touches the lives of others. In this sense Daniel, like Esther, also offers

advice to Diasporic Jews as to how they can live successfully under foreign rule.

These stories demonstrate ways of dealing with the questions that arise as a

result of exile in Babylon and its aftermath. Collins points out,

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[146] Added to this is the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. See Collins, *Daniel,* 39, see also, Berg, *The Book of Esther,* 143–45.

> The problems which the tales deal with were not likely to arise in the
> theocratic administration in Jerusalem. On the other hand, those
> problems were of daily and vital interest to Jews in the Diaspora.[147]

As we have considered in our examination of Esther, narratives in the form of advice tales became important vehicles that engaged the imagination of Israel and helped to cast a fresh vision for their self-understanding as a people who must learn the art of living with dual loyalties, to Yahweh and a foreign king, in their new circumstances.

ii.   The Message of Daniel

Daniel is set during the Babylonian exile but most likely came into its final form around the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175—163 BCE). However, the source material for the first six chapters of the book dates much earlier, likely from the Persian period.[148] Many tales that offer wisdom for living in an exilic context can be attributed to this period, which suggests a "common literary type which was apparently quite popular in the Ancient Near East at this time."[149] The similarities between these works suggest stock characters, settings, and scene types that were popular among Diasporic Jews.[150] Some of the same categories of theological reflection already evident in Esther can be seen in Daniel as well. The five tales of Dan 1–6 offer "an anthology of various situations that the faithful may encounter as a people living under foreign domination."[151] Regardless of whether those over them are benevolent like Darius or the guards in Dan 1, or more autocratic like Belshazzar, the people of Israel must learn to live out their faith.

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[147] Collins, "The Court–Tales in Daniel," 220.

[148] Humphreys, "A Lifestyle for Diaspora," 218. Collins, "The Court–Tales in Daniel," 229. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 326.

[149] Humphreys, "A Lifestyle of Diaspora," 217.

[150] Berg, *The Book of Esther*, 145. She and others note the Tale of Ahiqar as a story that is similar to Joseph, Esther, Mordecai, and Daniel.

[151] Seow, *Daniel*, 10.

a. God's Presence on Foreign Soil

Unlike Esther, Daniel is a highly theocentric book. God is not only mentioned, but all that happens is ascribed to God. He is the one in control of all of history, including the events of exile (1:2). God is the one who enables Daniel and his companions to excel (1:17), and who delivers them from death (3:17; 6:22). The foreign rulers even perceive the hand of God at work in the circumstances of which they are a part (3:28; 6:26). This narrative portrayal is the antithesis of God's hiddenness in Esther. For the reader of Daniel there can be no doubt that God will remain with his people apart from the land and temple.

While Esther emphasizes the actions of the human protagonist, Daniel and his friends do not bring about their success or release from trouble by any action of their own. Rather they are the beneficiaries of direct divine initiative.[152] As Lacocque puts it, "the God of Daniel is always there where we least expect him: in a stone, a crematory oven, on a whitewashed wall, or in a pit of ferocious beasts."[153]

God's presence in Babylon is made explicit by the way he is referred to in the book of Daniel. He is not only sovereign but is also depicted as "King of heaven" (4:37), "Lord of heaven" (5:23), "God of heaven" (2:18, 19), and the "Most high God" (4:21). As Goldingay points out, "the special name of Yahweh all but disappears in favor of terms that make explicit that he is not merely a peculiarly Jewish god, but the God in/of heaven."[154] This is the shared theme of the stories in Dan 1–6; that the God of the Jews is the one true God to whom all people owe their allegiance. This was an important exilic

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[152] Collins, "The Court Tales in Daniel," 225.
[153] Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel,* 108.
[154] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 329–30.

message evident in the words of Deutero-Isaiah who assured his Babylon-based audience that their God was superior to any God worshipped by their foreign hosts.[155]

Yet, however transcendent he may be, God is not aloof. He is willing to involve himself in human affairs on a regular basis. He not only administrates the events of history, but aids his servants in interpreting dreams and comes to the aid of those placed in furnaces and lion's dens. God's presence in Daniel is both transcendent and immanent. On this theological basis the book lays a foundation for the "possibility that it is possible to be a good Jew in dispersion."[156]

b. Embodied Holiness

Daniel is forced into the service of the Babylonian king (1:3), identifying him with the exiles of Judah. Even if Daniel is given a privileged position in the royal court, he is not there because he desires to be, but because he has been placed there by Babylonian power. Nonetheless, Daniel embodies Jeremiah's call for Israel to settle and work for the benefit of their new home. Daniel is a fully integrated Jew who successfully portrays the potential for exilic life and influence through his service to the various kings with whom he comes in contact. He and his companions impressively demonstrate the possibility of dual loyalties. They serve both king and country yet without compromising their priority commitment of covenant purity and faithfulness to God.

This is explicitly demonstrated by Daniel's three friends when faced with death as a result of their refusal to follow Nebuchadnezzar's edict that all people must bow to his image when the signal to do so was sounded. As the three face the prospect of being

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[155] See, for example, Isa 40:18–20; 44:25. See Laniak, *Esther's Volkcentrism,* 88; Collins, "The Court Tales in Daniel," 223.

[156] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 333.

burned to death in a Babylonian crematorium if they do not comply with the royal

dictum, they express their allegiance to Yahweh by flatly stating,

> If the God we serve is able to deliver us, then he will deliver us from
> the blazing furnace and from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does
> not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your
> gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. (Dan 3:17-18)

Their commitment is not dependent upon any definite expectation of deliverance

or divine reward; it is simply a refusal to bow to any other God other than Yahweh.[157] As

Ernest Lucas points out,

> The youths' primary reason for standing firm is not their confidence that
> God will deliver them, but their adherence to the first two
> commandments of the Decalogue. They will not honor any God but the
> God of Israel, and they will not worship any idol. Their stand is one of
> principle, whether or not it is prudent.[158]

In this scenario we see how collaboration with the state has its limits. Daniel

and his three friends will serve the purposes of Babylon as far as they are able, but they

demonstrate to the reader that fidelity to God's law is more important than keeping the

law of the land even if it means risking one's life.

Here in Daniel there seems to be an acknowledgement that God is somehow

withdrawn and there is a possibility that he will not deliver. Of course, he does deliver

the three young men, but their acknowledgement that he may not amounts to a

recognition of what every Jew of the post-Babylonian exilic period knew, that God, for

whatever reason, does not always deliver the faithful.[159] This does not, however, negate

the need for Jews to remain faithful to the law of Yahweh.

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[157] Lacocque, *Daniel,* 63–64. There is debate around the proper translation of and interpretation of 3:17–18, although the way that I am approaching it here, as well as an overview of the discussion, is well articulated by Lacocque and also Lucas, *Daniel,* 90–91.

[158] Lucas, *Daniel,* 90–91.

[159] Collins, *Daniel,* 188.

The complexity of practicing dual loyalty between God and King is best demonstrated in Chapter 2 when Daniel and his three colleagues offer to interpret the king's dream.[160] Here the four young men participate in a Babylonian category of wisdom, dream interpretation, in order to demonstrate the superiority of their God over the human wisdom of the Babylonians. In this scenario, when the wise men of Babylon are unable to interpret king Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream, Daniel volunteers to give the interpretation (2:16). This places him squarely in the domain of Babylonian convention, although he turns the convention inside out. Dreams certainly found favor as prophetic oracles within Hebrew tradition (e.g. 1 Sam 28:6, 15; Gen 28:12; 31:10–13; 37:5–20), so Daniel volunteers to act as the king's dream interpreter and thereby seeks to beat the Babylonian wise men at their own game. He is willing to participate in a Gentile profession and adapt Hebrew traditions into Gentile categories in order to secure his own and his friends' survival.

He does this by engaging fully in the Babylonian court but insisting on the inferiority of Babylonian techniques compared with reliance on the one true God.[161] When it comes to interpreting the king's dream the Babylonian wise men are depicted as inept and unable to satisfy the king's request because they only have themselves and their own human resources upon which to rely. As Goldingay notes,

> The gods of Babylon are strikingly absent from this story. It is not an
> account of a conflict between the God of heaven and the gods of
> Babylon (or Persia)…but one between the this-worldly wisdom of
> Babylon and the supernatural wisdom of Daniel.[162]

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[160] This is not the only place where Daniel is called upon to interpret dreams or unusual phenomena; see also Dan 4 and 5.

[161] Here Daniel is in the same stream of contempt for Babylonian "wisdom" and its sages as Second Isaiah is.

[162] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 54. Lacocque, *Daniel,* 33, also understands this scenario as, "the difference between wisdom of divine origin and wisdom of human origin,"

In contrast to the absence of any reference to the Babylonian gods, three times Daniel states that it is Israel's God who reveals mysteries (vv. 20–23, 27–28, 29b–30), and each time he recognizes that the one true God is the source of his own wisdom.[163] This is where Daniel's loyalty to the King and his ability to work successfully within Babylonian categories works in harmony with his faithfulness to the ways of Yahweh. He is able to work diplomatically with the King and buy himself some time to interpret the dream as opposed to the court wise men whose request for time is interpreted by the king as a sign that they are devoid of any power to actually determine the content or meaning of his dream. Yet, Daniel remains faithful to God because his allegiance to God forces him to give the credit for his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzer's dream to God. A story like this has no place in the traditional ANE court tale since in the ANE court tales wise men succeed on their own.[164] Yet, Daniel, while functioning fully within the royal court of Babylon, and fulfilling the role of "wise man" within that court, depends upon his God to enable him to serve the king effectively.

Subsequently Daniel remains willing to work within a Babylonian framework and takes charge over the country's "wise men" (2:48), and serves as "chief dream interpreter" (4:6). In doing this, Daniel maintains a positive attitude towards the king and other court officials in Babylon. He is depicted as a collaborator with the state, but on Hebrew terms. His rise to prominence does not mean an abandoning of his religious commitments. Daniel is integrated into Babylonian life and his example serves the exilic

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[163] Lucas, *Daniel*, 78.

[164] Lucas, *Daniel*, 78. Also Goldingay, *Daniel*, 54–5, explores the contrast between divine and human wisdom as a key theme in this story.

community as the patterns of behavior and priorities that the story advocates would have been broadly applicable.[165]

There is nothing subtle about Jewish holiness in the book of Daniel. It is not only clearly embodied by the main characters, but is often the very source of their troubles.

> The piety of Daniel and his companions often contributes to their adversity. Yet the tales clearly indicate that the heroes' eventual success in overcoming danger is due, in fact, to their tenacious loyalty to Yahweh.[166]

The need to remain distinct from many of the practices of their host culture is embodied in Daniel through three separate acts of piety: dietary observance, prayer and allegiance to their God at all cost.

Chapter 1 depicts Daniel and his three friends making arrangements with their Babylonian supervisor to eat a vegetarian and, therefore, kosher diet, as opposed to the food that has been provided for them by royal decree. The result is that they appear better nourished than their Gentile colleagues and thereby surpass them as candidates for leadership in Babylon.

> The point of the story is clear. Jews who rise at court do so because of their wisdom. Their wisdom is given by God. God gives wisdom to his servants who faithfully obey his laws.[167]

Observance of worship expressed through prayer is a further demonstration of a distinctive lifestyle in the Diaspora. Daniel's prayer habits reflect his faithfulness to worship and trust in God (6:10). Indeed it is his commitment to such piety that his opponents use as a way to trap him so that they can dispose of him (6:5). As in Esther, where Haman's premise for exterminating the Jews is that they keep themselves apart

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[165] Collins, *Daniel*, 51.
[166] Berg, *The Book of Esther*, 144.
[167] Collins, "Court Tales in Daniel," 227.

and practice unusual ways (3:8), we see in Daniel how the conscientious practice of Jewish religion will be used as a mechanism for persecution. Once again, however, the book's prevailing message is that God delivers those who are faithful to the practice of their religious obligations. As John Goldingay points out,

> A Jew will remain distinctive, will remain faithful, and will continue to pray toward Jerusalem, but he will do that in a dispersion setting, and will prove that this can be the way to a successful life.[168]

The observance of these practices reflects a general ethic that is pervasive throughout the book of Daniel, namely, intense loyalty to God.[169] This loyalty is all-consuming as characters willingly risk all in taking their stand for their God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into a (devastatingly) hot furnace (only to survive by God's hand), and Daniel is placed in a den of lions (only to experience God's deliverance)—all because they are unwilling to renounce their commitment to Yahweh. While their piety leads them into conflict and the prospect of death, the message of their example is clear; exiled Jews can stand for their distinct identity as people of the highest God and expect to experience deliverance from his hand.

Daniel Smith-Christopher writes about purity as an act of Diasporic non-conformity to subjugating powers.[170] No better example of such practice can be found than in the actions of the title character and his friends in the book of Daniel. Their purity protests the conventions of Babylon non-violently in ways that ultimately turn out to the benefit of the state. The perpetrators of this subversive behaviour outperform other state administrators and lead the king to become a worshipper of Yahweh, and in turn he leads the people along the same path. This piety, which largely avoids sectarianism and

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[168] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 333.

[169] For a full exploration of this theme see Barton, "Theological Ethics in Daniel."

[170] See Chapter 6 in Smith–Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile.*

focuses on issues that should be of concern to all Jews, provides hope to those living in exile that as they practice a non-conformist piety they too can anticipate that God will intervene in the circumstances of their lives in a manner similar to that experienced by Daniel and his friends. Further, as Seow points out, Daniel's career, which lasts and prospers through the reign of three kings and various empires, is a powerful reminder to the readers of the book that faithful practice of covenant piety can lead to the lowly exile outlasting the empire and its leaders.[171]

c. Mission

It seems impossible to read Daniel without noticing the striking royal edicts that acknowledge the superiority of the Jewish God over all others (2:47; 3:39; 6:26). These occur each time Daniel and/or his friends have suffered a near death experience and are ultimately vindicated. There is in Daniel an overarching theme which points to the superiority of Yahweh over all other gods. The actions of Daniel and his compatriots lead to an acknowledgement by non-Jews that the Jewish God is Lord indeed. This motif expresses the exilic hope that suffering will be redeemed and Israel's faithfulness will be held up as an act of witness to the nations. The community remains faithful in the face of tremendous pressure and genuine suffering, yet trusts that it will be redeemed from their plight by the hand of God. This redemption brings about an acknowledgement of Yahweh's ultimacy. Daniel speaks of the pre-eminence of the Hebrew God and points to the fact that no matter what, God's plan cannot be thwarted. While the book as a whole

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[171] Seow, *Daniel*, 96.

speaks of an eschatological age in which God's purposes will be fully realized, the first

six chapters remind us that God still demonstrates his power in this age.[172]

This revelation of divine sovereignty in Daniel depicts a theme that is not found

as clearly elsewhere in the Old Testament, namely, that of the kingdom of God.[173]

Notwithstanding Daniel's high office, the book is concerned to show how God's reign

can become a reality through the faithful witness of a Diasporic community whose trust is

not in mechanisms of political power, but in the power of Yahweh. Again, such a

witness can demonstrate the reign of God apart from the land of Israel: "Believers under

pressure can stand by their convictions sure that the powers that be will ultimately

acknowledge where true power lies and who its witnesses are."[174]

Further, one cannot help but recognize the negative consequences for those who

oppose Daniel and his friends. Similar to Mordecai who is raised up to significant

leadership in the Persian kingdom, so too is Daniel raised to leadership above the other

wise men subsequent to his successful interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (2:48).

Also, similar to Haman, who is put to death for his actions against the Jews in Persia, so

after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are spared in the furnace a decree is proclaimed

that anyone who says anything against them should be chopped up into little pieces and

their homes turned into rubble (3:29). Similarly, after Daniel is removed from the lion's

den those who falsely accused him (and their families) are thrown into the den and they

meet their demise (6:24). These serve as signals that those who oppose Yahweh and his

servants risk facing judgment for such opposition. This confirms Hebrew texts like Deut

19:16–21; Prov 19:5, 9; 21:28; Esth 7:10 that teach that adversaries should be executed in

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[172] See Lacocque, *Daniel,* 121 and Goldingay *Daniel,* 136.

[173] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 330.

[174] Goldingay, *Daniel,* 330.

the place of those that they wrongly accuse. The implementation of these decrees speaks to the infiltration and triumph of Hebrew ideals in a foreign context, thus bearing witness to the superiority of the ways of Yahweh.[175]

Daniel speaks to the transience of empires and the redemptive potential of the community of God's people. Empires crumble like old statues (2:35), and wise people know that taking a stand for God's ideals, which do not give way, will serve as a witness to those who are not able to see as clearly. Such a faith-driven, integrative, pietistic, missional wisdom embodies Jesus' words to be "as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). It is the wisdom of exile.

iii. Summary

The book of Daniel presents a practical theology of exilic living to its audience by making its hero an exemplar to them. Daniel's "success" as a Jewish person in a foreign empire reminds Israel that they too can succeed as a nation through faithful obedience and piety because God is still with them and still in control. Wisdom such as this is much needed for the Canadian church if it is to "succeed" in its own contemporary "exile."

3. Jonah

i. Jonah as Diasporic Advice Tale

Jonah is one of the Bible's most unusual books, the subject of immense scholarly debate regarding its exact nature and proper interpretation. The dating of the book within the Diasporic era, sometime well after the fall of Jerusalem, is one of the few

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[175] Goldingay, *Daniel*, 134–35, see also, Lacocque, *Daniel*, 119–20.

issues that garners a consensus among scholars.[176] One of the major points of discussion among those who study the book has been its genre.[177] The possible options include history, legend, allegory, midrash, parable, satire and advice tale. Clearly there is a sense in which this most enigmatic of biblical books can fit into any of these categories and none of them at the same time.[178] However, the genre that may best encompass all of these possibilities and provide the most fruitful approach to appropriating the book's message for our day is that of the Diasporic advice tale. While the setting of Jonah is less clear than that of the other stories we have considered, like those stories Jonah has a didactic character and involves an individual whose story can both represent and inform the nation. Jonah's presence in a foreign land and the fact that his actions result in a positive outcome for the people of that land is the key theme that commends it as a variation on a common type of Diasporic advice tale.[179] Like the other two narratives we have considered, Jonah casts a fresh vision for Diasporic possibilities for the nation of Israel.

ii. *The Message of Jonah*

The story of Jonah centres around the prophet Jonah the son of Amittai who is known otherwise from a brief statement found in 2 Kgs 14:25, where he is described as a

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[176] See Smith–Christopher, *Biblical Theology,130* and Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah,* 20. For further discussion see Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations,* 23–6, who sees 350 BCE as the earliest possible date. Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah,* takes the view that the Persian Yehud is the likely time of composition. Dell, "Reinventing the Wheel," 86, n.7, offers a brief, insightful rational for a postexilc date. Burrows, "The Literary Category of Jonah," 104. cites the Persian period as the most probable time for the composition of book. Despite the variance in exact opinion represented here the consensus view of a post 587 date is enough to warrant the view that will be taken in this study of the book and its meaning.

[177] For an overview of the primary contours of this discussion see Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah,* 7–66 and Burrows, "The Literary Category of Jonah." For a briefer treatment see Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations,* 41–50.

[178] Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness,* 46–53, concludes his analysis of Jonah's genre by stating that the question is "insoluble."

[179] Beth Berg, *The Book of Esther,* 148. This position acknowledges that while it fits within the broad category of "advice tale" it is also a unique story and its genre is not easy to pinpoint.

prophet who predicts the return of prosperity and the extension of territory for the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (786—746 BCE). The positive, nationalistic tone of his prophecy should not be missed, nor should the fact that Nineveh was the capital of Assyria which conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722. The book of Jonah records God's call for the prophet to preach a message of repentance to the Assyrian city of Nineveh, which represents the worst of God's enemies. Jonah refuses the mission and flees to Tarshish, as far away from Nineveh as possible. While at sea Jonah is swallowed by a great fish and spends three days in the beast's belly where he finally repents of his disobedience and, after being spit out by the fish, carries out his mission to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh responds positively to the message Jonah brings and the city is spared from God's judgment, whereupon the prophet makes his way out of the city and begins to sulk because of the mercy God has shown to the evil Ninevites. A final conversation between God and the prophet, wherein the prophet expresses his frustration at God for his care for the Ninevites, concludes the book.

The same themes that we have seen in Esther and Daniel can be seen in Jonah as well. Just like Esther and Daniel, the book of Jonah embodies key theological perspectives for exilic realities.

a. God's Presence on Foreign Soil

One of the most striking features in the story of Jonah is God's concern for the people of Nineveh. As a city within the Assyrian empire Nineveh would have been perceived by Jewish readers as the worst of the worst in terms of an ungodly enemy nation. The general concept of God caring for nations other than Israel and being present among them is in line with several canonical perspectives on Diasporic life, but this work

goes even further in presenting a perspective on exilic events and how to live in light of them.

Employing irony as a narrative device the author juxtaposes the obedience of the people of Nineveh with the stubbornness of his own people. Jonah, who as a prophet of Israel in some way characterizes the nation as a whole, who is reluctant to serve as a witness to their enemies and see God's grace extended to them, flees God's call. Further, Jonah shows great disappointment in Nineveh's positive response to his message. This reflects a character much different from that of his God. In contrast, Nineveh, who as conquerors characterize the "nations," respond immediately to Jonah's message with a thorough repentance when confronted with God's word through the prophet. The portrayal of Nineveh's people responding faithfully to God's word is ironic when compared to how Israel is sometimes depicted in biblical literature. For instance Nineveh's response can be contrasted with that of King Jehoiakim in Jer 36. Jehoiakim flagrantly refuses to repent after a lengthy written exhortation by Jeremiah, whereas Nineveh repents after just five short words by the foreign prophet. Also, the Ninevites repentance depicts the kind of comprehensive response to which the exilic prophets called Israel, including penance, fasting, prayer and avoidance of sin.[180] This contrast pointedly reminds Jonah's audience that they do not have a corner on God's care and that God is active in the life of nations other than Israel.

More specifically, Jonah 4:2 presents one of the central confessions of Israelite liturgy (Exod 34:6) within a universalistic framework. God's gracious mercy and compassion, known to Israel as core attributes of Yahweh, are now explicitly

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[180] Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah*, 22. The Lacoques, *Jonah*, 17–23, see numerous intertextual links between Jonah and several other texts in the Hebrew Bible.

demonstrated toward a foreign nation, and to make the point even finer, toward the Assyrians. This turns the doctrinal assumptions of Israelite faith—that Yahweh's grace and compassion were particularly directed toward Israel—around by casting a vision of their God as one who shares himself with all people.[181]

As an example of creative exilic theological conversation, Jonah could be considered a critique of the message of Ezra and Nehemiah, which stresses a more isolationist approach toward foreign nations, or to those who limited the vision of Third Isaiah which foresees the nations coming to Jerusalem to worship and even becoming Levites and Priests (66:21). For the book of Jonah, as in Esther and Daniel, Yahweh can be (and is) worshiped on foreign soil, much to the chagrin of those who do not share such a vision. Jonah radically challenges the dogma that Israel is worth more than the other nations, teaching instead that God cares for their enemies. Accordingly, Israel's restoration will include participation with other nations rather than exclusion from them.[182]

b. Embodied Holiness

The primary feature of Jonah's teaching about Israelite holiness is found in the prophet's repentance. The author employs a satirical tone and attitude toward the main character, which demonstrates his intention to make Jonah look ridiculous. The author satirizes the main character as the very opposite of what would normally be expected of a prophet.[183] Jonah offers Israel a mirror through which they are invited to reflect on their own ungodliness as a people. Burrows makes this clear as he reflects on the author's intent:

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[181]Lacoque and Lacoque, *Jonah*, 22.

[182] Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah*, 41–3 and 126–27.

[183] Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 153.

> The satirical tone of the story is not accidental or incidental; it is the
> very essence of the author's intention. The satirical attitude and
> manner of presentation produce a distinctive literary form deliberately
> employed by the author to accomplish his purpose. The spirit and
> conduct exemplified by Jonah *are* ridiculous, they *are* incongruous;
> and the author has chosen the most effective vehicle to demonstrate
> this. [184]

A key theological perspective reflected in the call for Jonah to preach to Nineveh is the potential transformation of one's enemies through repentance.[185] Clearly what God has in mind—and Jonah knows it— is to change the Assyrians' hearts, so that if they repent God will not send judgment upon them. Jonah would rather maintain Nineveh as an enemy than see them transformed into followers of Yahweh and thereby escape divine judgment.

This leads Jonah to flee God's call and choose a destination as far from Nineveh as possible: the city of Tarshish.[186] Jonah's flight from God's call epitomizes his lack of willingness to participate in the salvation of other nations, even as his apparent willingness to sacrifice himself in the sea for the safety of the other sailors rather than go to Nineveh demonstrates the intensity of his lack of desire to engage in the mission to which God has called him. Nonetheless, God is committed to acquiring Jonah's participation in his plan for Nineveh and the storm that he sends is not designed as retribution on Jonah but rather it is an opportunity for re-orientation. Both the storm and the fish are indications of God's beneficence as they act as agents of the divine will

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[184] Burrows, "The Literary Category of Jonah," 96 (italics original).

[185] Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology,* 132.

[186] Although certainly not an invented place, the exact location of Tarshish is impossible to pinpoint. However, it is fair to understand it in this context as the geographical opposite of Nineveh. In keeping with the thick irony in the Jonah story Tarshish is mentioned in Isa 66:19 as a place where the inhabitants have not heard of God's name. Yet God promises that he will send some who survive the exile to proclaim his name to the citizens of those places. Thus, Jonah is just as foolish to think he can escape God's missional purposes by fleeing there. See Sasson, *Jonah,* 79.

designed to move Jonah back into the centre of that will.[187] In particular the great fish

acts as a place of transformation that allows Jonah to act as a didactic model for Israel.

Yvonne Sherwood, drawing from interpretations of Jonah offered by ancient

rabbis, points out how Jonah can be understood as one who becomes a teacher/rabbi to

his people through his watery incarceration. Interacting with the ancient midrash, *Pirke*

de Rabbi Eliezer, Sherwood casts the whale's belly as a synagogue/schul where Jonah is

schooled and also schools his fellow Israelites in the ways of Yahweh.[188]

From the fish's gut we can see how Jonah's response reflects Israel's response

to exile, that is, prayer (2:1–9).[189] Jonah prays to God in a way that reflects the prayer

tradition of Israelite exile as found in Lamentations and the exilic Psalms.

In Jonah's prayer he reflects on the way God has treated him as he languishes in

aquatic incarceration. His words in vv. 3-4a, "*You* hurled me into the deep...*Your* waves

and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight...'" represent

his clear sense that God has brought this torment upon him and he is now experiencing

the horrifying reality of the divine absence. This discourse with God regarding Jonah's

sense of displacement and his lack of comfort with it reflects a connection with Israel's

prayer tradition and a desire, on Jonah's part, to be restored to God. Jonah's prayer

includes a report on past events and his thanksgiving to God for deliverance. It also can

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[187] Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia,* 338.

[188] Sherwood, *A Biblical Text,* 109–112. Sherwood bases these reflections upon a midrash from the ninth century CE, known as *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: The Chapters of R. Eliezer the Great,* trans. G. Friedlander. New York: Sepher Herman, 1981. Also, Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah,* 72.

[189] Sasson carefully demonstrates how the poem of Jonah connects with other prayer traditions in the Old Testament. However, he notes that these traditions "float," and these categories can be seen at many points in Israel's history. See also, Lacocque and Lacocque, *Jonah,* 98 and Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah,* 467–78. That being said, Jonah's prayer continues the ironic tone of the book as it depicts Jonah praying in a way that is appropriate for him, or Israel to pray, yet his subsequent attitude fails to reflect a genuine repentance and thus calls into question the sincerity of his prayer itself. In this way he continues as a kind of anti-hero for Israel.

be understood as an act of repentance as it represents Jonah's turning to God, and away from his disobedience. While it may never become a total transformation, the journey away from God's calling has come to an end and the movement back toward God is beginning. In v. 4b Jonah states that despite feeling banished from God's sight,

> I will look again to your holy temple.

Likewise in v. 7 he prays,

> When my life was ebbing away,
> I remembered you Lord,
> And my prayer rose to you,
> to your holy temple.

Further, in v. 10, Jonah says,

> But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you.

Clearly this is a declaration of thanksgiving. This prayer can be understood as a *todah,* which is a form of thanksgiving that also carries with it elements of confession and remorse.[190] Its placement at this point in the book indicates that it is an expression of piety that signals Jonah's turning back to Yahweh, and begins the process of reconciliation between God and his prophet.

Once again here we see that the spiritual life of the exiles is marked by a steadfast refusal to abandon their God, despite their sense of abandonment by him. Jonah's turning to God in prayer and repentance demonstrates a traditional form of exilic piety and expresses his own hope of restoration. While Jonah's tale ultimately reflects an imperfect repentance, and his story is more of a satire than an ideal, his prayer epitomizes the kind of response that is appropriate to exile.

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[190] See Boda, "Words and Meanings," 296, for an exploration of the *todah* form. Also see Sasson, *Jonah,* 199. For a different view see Perry, *The Honeymoon is Over,* 116–17.

c. Mission

Jonah's call to mission is simple and clear and may be understood to represent

Israel's commission to a similar vocation as prophet to the nations.[191] Nineveh, as we

have already seen, can be understood as representative of other nations. The fact that it

was the capital city of Israel's former captors and one of the vilest, most feared nations

should not be overlooked, even if the regime had long since met its demise.[192]

Since Jonah is more than the story of a reluctant individual prophet, and since his

story is designed to have consequences for Israel as a people, the thrust of Jonah's

message is to clarify Israel's own missional purposes. Not only does the text clearly

present the universal presence of Yahweh, but it reminds the nation, through their

identification with Jonah, that they have a central role to play in God's salvific concern

for all people—even hated enemies. The closing question of the book, "should I not have

concern for the great city Nineveh?" (4:11) is a rhetorical device that both discloses

God's heart for the nations and, in its context, implies the role that Israel plays in serving

his purposes.

Thus, Jonah's anger at God's relenting from destroying Nineveh is a foil that

points out, albeit sarcastically, what Israel should already know, namely that God is

"gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents

from sending calamity" (4:2; cf. Exod 34:6). This also represents an important stream of

exilic theology found in texts like Jer 36:3 and Ezek 18:23, where the forgiving nature of

God toward those who repent is emphasized. Further, it re-iterates the ideas made clear

in Isaiah regarding the place of foreigners in the Israelite community (Isa 56:6–8; 66:20–

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[191] For insight into the missional nature of Israel see Wright, "The Mission of God," especially chapters 6–8 which offer a close study of the topic as it pertains to pre–exilic Israel.

[192] See Nah 3 for another perspective on the evil of the city of Nineveh.

21). This demonstrates the way that Jonah reflects the theological development in Diasporic Israel that caused Israel to think more clearly about the role that it played in the salvation of humankind.[193]

The message to those in Israel who could not countenance the idea of Nineveh receiving God's favor is clear as it condemns those who stand opposed to such theological possibilities. Put in positive terms the story of Jonah calls for recognition of the fact that God is engaged even with cultures that appear to us as ungodly and even oppressive. The book of Jonah is a direct assault on the ideology of those within Israel who think that separation from "the nations" is the way to go. As Lacocque and Lacocque state,

> Thus the book is a plea for radical change of their policy. The ground of the exhortation is that the restoration has not been realized, despite the proclamation of theocracy in the temple by the priests. The restoration, says Jonah will occur only *with* the nations, and not without them.[194]

Ultimately, Jonah plays the role of both the erroneous, disobedient prophet *and* struggling Israel, wrestling to find its new place in their exilic situation. Therefore, God's offer to Israel through Jonah is a call to reconnect with their missional identity. His example presents a radical, theological re-orientation of Israelite identity in its new, Diasporic condition. As Smith-Christopher points out,

> To embody a "Jonah" message in a postexilic world is to suggest that the Israelite communities recognize that they are tools of God's transformative justice and mission. But just as the Israelite people are penitent for their own sin, so are the "nations" to be penitent for their sin. Such language is a radical change from the notions that guided pre-exilic bravado toward the nations, including even prophetic rhetoric of punishment. It is a change, and one that is particularly intelligible in a diasporic context.[195]

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[193] Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology,* 130.

[194] Lacocque and Lacocque, *The Jonah Complex,* 72 (italics original).

[195] Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology,* 135.

As a story that teaches, Jonah connected ancient Israel with key theological themes that would guide and sustain them in their exilic life.

iii. Summary

Jonah is not a typical hero, but then again neither is Esther. Like Esther, Jonah is a flawed character and yet one chosen to undertake a mission set by God. Some have referred to Jonah as an anti-hero,[196] or even as a "pitiable and ludicrous caricature of a prophet."[197] While it is not difficult to understand how these impressions have arisen, the primary issue is that the book of Jonah depicts for his people the potential of exilic life. Daniel Smith defines the diasporic hero in a way that can include Jonah by stating,

> By hero we mean a deliverer and/or example from among the oppressed or dominated population who rises above (or converses with, or encounters, or debates, or in any way is victorious over) the representatives of the dominant power.[198]

As 4:11 makes plain, through Jonah's story the readers are invited to question their own theology and even that of other exilic writer/thinkers in light of Jonah's experience. Thus, Jonah fits well as a diasporic advice tale whose message aims to teach its readers how to make sense of and live in the light of their current experience as an exilic people.[199] This includes cultivating an appreciation for the universal nature of God's salvation and Israel's role as "missionary" to the nations. Their co-operation is demanded even as it requires repentance and a restored obedience to their calling to be a vessel through which God can work for the good of others.

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[196] Dell, "Reinventing the Wheel," 89.
[197] Burrows, "The Literary Category of Jonah," 86.
[198] Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, 163.
[199] Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations*, 48.

VII. Conclusion

For Israel the exile initially brought forth a response of incredulity and deep sadness that slowly graduated into a sense of understanding that they were indeed responsible for their own fate. However, these somber reactions gave way to hope that found expression in a variety of forms embodied in the lively stories of Esther, Daniel and Jonah. These tales taught Israel that God was still present and active in their national life, that holiness would help to establish them among foreign nations, and that as his people they still had a significant role to play in God's mission.

Can these theological responses to exile speak to the church today? For some this is a rhetorical question. To quote Smith-Christopher the potential of exile as an organizing motif for ecclesiological identity represents the most exciting "re-strategizing option for contemporary Christian existence."[200] The response to ancient exile presented by the Prophets as well as the book of Lamentations and the exilic psalms offer highly provocative insights and survival categories for the life of the church today. The embodied theology of Esther, Daniel and Jonah present the church with stories that can help to inform its engagement with a culture that is clearly opposed to the ideals of the gospel. While the materialistic consumerism, agnosticism and increasing secularism in which we find ourselves were not the issues faced by exilic Israel, their challenges still present a template for how we can respond as the Canadian church to our situation.

It may well be that the power once held by the church in Canada was not only temporary but ultimately detrimental to a vibrant gospel witness. The church may find her strongest voice when in conscious exile. It is from this position that the presence of God is discovered most meaningfully, where subversive strategies of integration such as

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[200] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology*, 191.

those demonstrated by Esther and Daniel, are developed. From a place of marginalization the vocabulary of lament, penitence and hope can emerge so as to clarify the failings of the church and offer the best way forward. Further, as in Jonah, the demise of a pseudo-Christendom in Canada can cause the church to reconsider its once privileged place and reconnect with its missional nature. As the Old Testament demonstrates, in exile dramatic new conceptions of faith can be realized. Accordingly we should seek to embrace an exilic paradigm for modern church ministry and apply the wisdom of the ancients to guide and energize our collective life.

For Israel the experience of exile served to guide the community past Persian control and into Greek and Roman rule. This period, usually referred to as the Second Temple period shaped the work of the New Testament writers who continued to employ exilic motifs in their reflection upon the incarnation, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. These works lay the foundation for how the motif of exile can also inform the exilic identity of the Canadian church, as we will see in our next section.

Chapter Three

Exile in Second Temple and New Testament Literature

I. Introduction

There can be no doubt that the events of 587/86 BCE profoundly shaped the

identity of the people of Israel.[1] The experience of Babylonian captivity and reflection

upon it influenced large portions of Hebrew scripture directly and indirectly. The

community was irreparably fragmented and new literature was produced. Jewish self-

understanding was shaped by exile and return under Persian rule (although whether this

was a true return is hotly debated) and subsequent struggles throughout the Roman

occupation of the land. While Hebrew scripture reflects the catastrophic nature of these

events in at least a segment of the ancient community, to fully appreciate how the exile

shaped Jewish identity one must look at the literature of the Second Temple period

(roughly 400 BCE—70 CE) to see how it remains a constant theme which contributes to

the self perception of Jews throughout this formative period in their history. We will

seek to show that for many members of the Jewish and early Christian communities, exile

remained a *primary* motif for self-understanding. We will also consider some of the

specific developments that came out of Second Temple Jewish theological reflection on

how their faith could be integrated into the ongoing realities of exilic life. The particular

ideas that we will consider are not necessarily meant to be prescriptive for the Canadian

church today—although where helpful connections can be made they will be noted—

rather, they demonstrate the ongoing need for God's people to reflect theologically on

their exilic circumstances. In this way the example of our Second Temple ancestors is a

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[1] This assertion, as we will see, can be found in numerous works by scholars of this period. As a
beginning point see Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah.*

model for the Canadian church today. After this we will consider the way that exile is reflected in the ministry of Jesus and how the motif of exile continues into the life of the early church. Finally, we will consider how the epistle of 1 Peter, as a self-consciously exilic letter, provides a helpful example for the Canadian church as it seeks to live as an exilic people today.

N. T. Wright offers the following hypothesis for the worldview that many first century Jews would have held. Using what he refers to as four foundational worldview questions, Wright submits that significant sectors of Israel would have understood themselves in the following ways,

> 1. Who are we? We are Israel the chosen people of the creator god.
>
> 2. Where are we? We are in the holy Land, focused on the Temple but, paradoxically, we are still in exile.
>
> 3. What is wrong? We have the wrong rulers: pagans on the one hand, compromised Jews on the other, or half way between, Herod and his family. We are all involved in a less than ideal situation.
>
> 4. What is the solution? Our God must act again to give us the true sort of rule, that is, his own kingship expressed through properly appointed officials (a true priesthood; possibly a true king); and in the mean time Israel must be faithful to his covenant charter.[2]

If Wright's assessment of first century perspectives is accurate it is because they were formed, at least in part, by the religious literature that shaped the Jewish community during the Second Temple period.

In order to facilitate our investigation into this literature and its thought we will look at some of the main references to exile in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. Following this we will look at the ways exilic thought affected the nation's internal religious life. From here our study will seek to trace how this self understanding affected the formation of Christianity and led many early Christians also to see themselves as a

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[2] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 243.

people who were still living as exiles in the world. Finally, we will look briefly at how an understanding of the influence of an exilic motif on "Middle Judaism"[3] and early Christianity may have implications for contemporary Christian self understanding.

Knowledge of this period and its literature has often been neglected in Protestant theology. This section is an attempt to draw from the rich resources of Second Temple Judaism and begin to think about how one of its predominant ideologies may provide understanding that can help to guide the Canadian church us through our own time of exile.

II. Exile as a Pervasive Second Temple Perspective

Although some literature in the Second Temple period treats the exile in neutral terms, referring to it only as a past event (e.g. Jdt 4:3; 5:18), the majority of passages which make reference to the exile do so in far from neutral ways. Indeed, Peter Ackroyd, in his seminal study *Exile and Restoration,* makes a clear case for the importance of the *idea* of exile in the writings of the Hebrew Bible. Ackroyd's work examines how exile became the predominant point of view for Hebrew authors of the "post exilic" period.[4] Michael Knibb follows Ackroyd by extending this thesis into intertestamental literature.[5] Starting in the canonical book of Jeremiah and the prophet's assertion that the exile would last seventy years (25:11–14 and 29:10–14), Knibb investigates the way in which these passages became paradigmatic for the Israelite understanding of exile. What is of special note is not the predicted length of time but the widespread use of these passages

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[3] This term was coined by Gabrielle Bocccaccini in his book *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 BCE. to 200 CE.* He desires to find a descriptive name for the period between what is commonly known as "ancient Judaism" and "early Christianity. For further comments from the author see pp. 24–25.

[4] Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration,* 237–47. I use the term "post-exilic" here because it is the term employed by Ackroyd (and many other scholars) to describe this period.

[5] Knibb, "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period."

in other Old Testament literature (allusions are found in Zech 1:12; 2 Chr 36:21; and Ezra 1:1) and subsequent writings (1 Esd 1:57ff and Josephus *Ant.* 11: 1,1) indicating that Jeremiah's theological perspective of an exile that would last for an extended period of time was also shared by other writers.

James Vanderkam helpfully catalogues ways in which the concept of exile was employed in Jewish apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period. These categories reflect divided opinion regarding the idea of exile in the Jewish community of that time. First, there was a conception that the idea of exile, as it is presented in the Hebrew Bible, was a specific historical period that lasted only a few decades and had a particular beginning and ending. A second view, by contrast, understood the exile as an ongoing condition that includes the present time and extends to the final judgement. In either case, exile was understood as an experience of ongoing divine justice in response to Israel's sin.[6]

Again, while these understandings of exile exercised a certain influence over the Israelite community in the so called "post-exile" period, the one that shaped the experience and literature of the period most profoundly was that which acknowledged exile as an ongoing experience for the people of God. While the following survey provides only a sampling of this literature, it is fair to say that it is representative of how a significant portion of the Jewish community understood itself, that is, as a people still in exile.

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[6] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 91.

III. Exile in the Literature of the Second Temple Period (400 BCE—100 CE)

In the canonical book of Daniel the author takes Jeremiah's prophecy to mean that the exile was to last not seventy years, but seventy weeks of years (i.e. four hundred and ninety years).

> seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven , 'sevens,' and sixty two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (Dan. 9:24-27)

While the book of Daniel is set in Babylon, it is probably written to Judahites after the Babylonian period is over and they have returned to the land from which they had been exiled. What seems clear from this passage is that although the return from exile in the sixth century is mentioned, it seems as though the author is not really concerned with that event as he understands the whole period to be one of continuing sin and unrighteousness. Nonetheless, what is important to the author is his understanding that his current audience continues in a state of exile that will only come to an end by the intervention of God and the inauguration of the eschatological era.[7] If we assume a date of mid to late second century B.C.E. for the book of Daniel, we can deduce that there was a clear perspective on exile in Jewish literature around this period that understood exile as ongoing. Further, exile would continue until it came to some kind of eschatological end.

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[7] See Knibb, "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 255 and Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration,* 243.

The unsatisfactory nature of Jerusalem's restoration under Persia and the continuing problem of the dispersion are also made clear in *Ben Sirach*, dated around 200 B.C.E. This book is an attempt to preserve the integrity of Hebrew faith while acknowledging the reality of Hellenistic existence for the Jewish people.[8] A prayer in chapter 36 pleads for God's mercy and for the appearance of signs, wonders and God's wrath poured out on Israel's enemies:

> Lift up your hand against foreign nations and let them
> see your might. (v. 3)
>
> Give new signs and work other wonders; make your
> right hand and right arm glorious. (v. 6)
>
> Rouse your anger and pour out your wrath; destroy
> the adversary and wipe out the enemy. (v. 8)[9]

Here the author is looking for God to act in a manner similar to how he did for his people in Egypt. Just as Israel was captive in Egypt, so the current state of the Jewish nation is one of captivity and strong divine intervention is seen as the only source of hope.[10]

A highly representative passage of the exilic view in intertestamental literature is the Vision of Animals in First Enoch 85–90 (late second-early first century B.C.E). Because Enoch was believed to have been caught up into the celestial realms (Gen 5:24) he functioned as the perfect informant on cosmic matters. He was utilized by various writers as a mediator for esoteric knowledge and thus legitimated various Jewish views on celestial things, including divine decrees that related to Israel.[11] The Vision of Animals traces key historical epochs in Israel's history from Adam and Eve until the Maccabean revolt in 160 B.C.E. by employing animal imagery to depict Israel and her

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[8] See Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 95–6.
[9] All translations from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, unless otherwise noted.
[10] Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 207; Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 305.
[11] Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature*, 77.

various enemies.[12] The story is not a simple retelling of the biblical account, but rather is a carefully crafted literary work that ultimately goes beyond the writer's time period to paint a picture of a coming judgement and time of redemption in the age to come.

In the particular use of this analogy of 1 Enoch the writer chooses a familiar biblical image, that of a flock of sheep, to symbolize the people of Israel. This flock is owned by the lord of the sheep (God) but in the second half of the vision is ruled poorly by seventy shepherds. Israel's enemies are represented by a variety of animals and birds, all of which are depicted as predators. There are periods when the relationship between the owner of the sheep and his flock is characterized by harmony and other periods which are explicitly unharmonious. The author states that though various prophets made appeals to the flock for greater levels of obedience, their voices were ignored. Thus at a decisive moment, depicted in 89:56, the lord of the sheep abandons their house and leaves them to the lions and other violent creatures.

> I saw how he left that house of theirs and that tower of theirs and cast
> all of them into the hands of lions—(even) into the hands of all the wild
> beasts— so that they may tear them into pieces and eat them.

At this point seventy shepherds enter and rule the flock for successive periods of time often in less than faithful ways. This is a period of worsening conditions as groups of ravenous birds and dogs set upon the flock and leave only a few survivors and bare bones (90:2–4). Shortly after this an apparent turning point occurs. Enoch reports that some lambs were born to "white sheep" from within the flock and as they open their eyes they call out to the other sheep (90:6). This group, which appears to represent a reform movement, meets with little success as the majority of the sheep pay scant attention to the

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[12] Knibb briefly explores the commonality of such analogies in the Old Testament literature, see "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 256.

cries, their eyes remaining "extremely blind" (90:8). Shortly thereafter, God acts in

judgement:

> Then those seventy shepherds were judged and found guilty; and they
> were cast into that fiery abyss. In the meantime I saw another abyss
> like it, full of fire, was opened wide in the middle of the ground; and
> they brought those blinded sheep all of which were judged, found
> guilty and cast into this fiery abyss. (90: 25–26)

After this a glorious new age begins:

> I went on seeing until the Lord of the sheep brought a new house,
> greater and loftier than the first one, and set it up in the first location
> which had been covered up – all its pillars were new, the columns new,
> and the ornaments new as well and greater than those of the first (that)
> is the old (house) which was gone. All the sheep were within it. (90:
> 29)

What seems to be clear from the Vision of the Animals is that the conditions of

exile persist even after the "return." The only time the people are depicted as secure and

at home is after the decisive judgement of God. As James Vanderkam writes,

> The word *exile* never surfaces in the symbolic narrative of the Animal
> Apocalypse, but the language of dispersion is used and continues to be
> employed even after the end of the historical exile (see e.g. 89:75). For
> the author, exile was an ongoing condition that would soon end with
> the final judgement.[13]

Referring to this section of 1 Enoch, Craig Evans writes that it is reflective of the

Greek period prior to the Maccabean revolt and that its significance lies in its

"assumption that oppression would continue until the messianic era dawned."[14]

Michael Knibb reiterates these perspectives by asserting that,

> What we have here in fact, exactly as in Dan. 9, is an understanding of
> the exilic and post-exilic periods as a unified era which is only to be
> ended when God comes to the earth to establish the Messianic age.[15]

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[13] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 100
[14] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 310.
[15] Knibb, "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 256.

1 Enoch further demonstrates this perspective in a section known as the "Apocalypse of Weeks" (*1 En* 91:12–19 and chapter 93) which, like the Animal vision, divides biblical history into different units of times called "weeks." The sixth week is the unit that includes the historical exile, while the seventh week depicts the time in which the author lives. The eighth week presents the beginning of a series of final judgements (91:12–19) which lead to the culmination of history and Israel's release from exile. In no place prior to this is return from exile ever mentioned. Thus, the clear implication is that the author did not see his own situation of exile—extending from the fall of Jerusalem up until his own day in the early to mid-second century B.C.E.—as having come to an end. Indeed, exile is not destined to end until the coming of a final judgement.[16]

The same perspective can be seen in the book of Jubilees. This work, written around the same time as the Animal Apocalypse (mid-second century B.C.E.), presents a re-written version of biblical history. However, for Jubilees that history extends only from creation to the events of Mount Sinai.

The book is set in the time when Israel is wandering in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt. In a scene where Moses is on Mount Sinai the Lord predicts the unfaithfulness of the people and ultimately says,

> And I shall hide my face from them, and I shall give them over to the
> power of the nations to be captive, and for plunder, and to be
> devoured.[17] (1:13)

Here exile is evidently the result of disobedience. Banishment from the land, however, is not the end of the story for the author of *Jubilees*. In this narrative the Lord predicts that the people will repent while living among the nations and turn back to him. This act of

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[16] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 96.

[17] As translated by Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 2).

repentance will result in their becoming a testimony to the Lord and to the nations around them.

> They will be a blessing, and not a curse. And they will be the head not
> the tail. And I shall build my sanctuary in their midst, and shall dwell
> with them. And I shall be their God and they will be my people truly
> and rightly.[18] (1:17)

Commentators on the book of *Jubilees* posit that what the author has in mind here is an eschatological scene which transcends any known return to the land described in the historical books.[19] As Vanderkam helpfully notes;

> The ideal portrait of a future time looks much more like the new age
> that will arise at the end. If so, then Jubilees is a witness to the idea
> that exile ends only at the eschaton.[20]

Commenting on the theological stance of the author of *Jubilees,* Knibb takes the same position,

> For the author the divine intervention and the return from the exile still
> lay in the future, and again we have the idea of the exile as a state that
> will only be brought to an end with the end of the world order.[21]

It is evident that the scene which the writer of Jubilees portrays has eschatological overtones and thus can rightfully be understood as a depiction of some kind of "end of the age" portrayal of Israel's ultimate destiny. This clearly implies that the theology of the book of *Jubilees* allows for, even promotes, an understanding that exile will only end for the Jewish people as God acts decisively and brings an end to the current age.

The book of Tobit, from the second century B.C.E., further contributes to this understanding of exile. The book explicitly presents Israel as in exile and offers two characters, Tobit and Sarah, as role models for exilic living. Israel's exilic situation is made most explicit in 14:4b–7, where we read in part

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[18] As translated by Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 2).
[19] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 104.
[20] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 104.
[21] Knibb, "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 267.

> And the temple of God in it will be burned to the ground, and it will be
> destroyed for a while. But God will again have mercy on them, and
> God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild
> the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the
> times of fulfillment will come. After this they shall return from their
> exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendour; and in it the temple of
> God will be built, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.

The passage also goes on to discuss the conversion of the Gentiles and a final judgement

that further reinforces the eschatological overtones of this passage,

> Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship
> God in truth. They will abandon their idols, which have deceitfully led
> them into their error, and in righteousness they will praise the eternal
> God. (vv.6–7a)

This leads Knibb to the conclude that,

> There could hardly be a more explicit statement of the view, known to
> us already from Dan. 9, that the return from the exile in the sixth
> century had only a provisional character, and that the post-exilic cultus
> was defective. The decisive change in Israel's condition of exile was
> only to come when the 'times of the age' were completed.[22]

This perspective has already been hinted at in Tobit's prayer from chapter 13.

Donald Gowan notes that this prayer may have been a part of the worship liturgy in

Diasporic Israel, expressing the problems and hopes of Israel.[23] The first part of the

prayer (vv. 1b–7) is a hymn of thanksgiving and is followed by a section which expresses

the hope of a restored and everlasting Jerusalem, reflecting clear overtones of a

traditional "song of Zion."[24] The prayer as a whole is addressed to Israel's

intertestamental malaise and is tinged with futuristic, apocalyptic hope.[25]

> O Jerusalem, the holy city, he afflicted you for the deeds of your hands,
> but will again have mercy on the children of the righteous. (13:9)
>
> For Jerusalem will be built as his house for all ages. How happy I will
> be if a remnant of my descendants should survive to see your glory and
> acknowledge the king of heaven. The gates of Jerusalem will be built

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[22] Knibb, "Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 268. See also Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 310.

[23] Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 209.

[24] Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 209.

[25] Evans, "Exile and Restoration," 306.

with sapphire and emerald, and all your walls with precious stones.
(13:16)

This hope will remain "at least so long as the dispersion continues and the ideal

Jerusalem remains unbuilt."[26] Commenting on the book as a whole, G. W. E.

Nickelsburg reiterates this position when he states,

> Tobit is thoroughly exilic in its viewpoint, and return to the land of
> Israel and Jerusalem is a consummation devoutly to be awaited.[27]

The same can be ascertained from 1 Baruch, a work generally assumed to have

been composed between 150–60 B.C.E., yet set in the Babylonian period. The major part

of the book consists of a prayer that reflects a traditional form of lament and has as its

chief concern the continuation of the exile and the disgrace of Jerusalem (2:26).[28] Setting

the book in Babylon and using the name of Jeremiah's secretary as the author of the work

is reflective of the intention of the author to convey a message to Israel that its current

state remains one of exile. Baruch is an "archetypal exile,"[29] one who is thus able to give

voice to the ongoing experience of the Jewish community. Knibb sees the pivotal

passage of the book as 3:8

> See we are today in our exile where you have scattered us, to be
> reproached and cursed and punished for all the iniquities of our
> ancestors, who forsook the Lord our God.

This sums up the message of the book and is intended to convey a message to the book's

audience that exile remains an ongoing reality.

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[26] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 306.
[27] Nickelsburg, "Tobit," 792.
[28] Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 208.
[29] Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 209. Gowan explores how setting Baruch in Babylon is an important move as he is portrayed in Jeremiah as having remained in Palestine during the deportation to Babylon and was then forced to migrate to Egypt. For many Jews only those who were exiled to Babylonia were considered true Jews. Thus a way was made to get Baruch to Babylonia.

Evans fully agrees with this understanding of 1 Baruch, and joins with other

scholars who conclude that the Jews of the intertestamental period would have

understood themselves as remaining in a condition of exile when he states,

> The disobedience and resultant calamities over which the prophet's
> secretary laments reflect the late intertestamental period and not simply
> what the author imagined the exiles of the sixth century to have
> thought.[30]

That is, 1 Baruch seeks to engender a mindset in the Jewish people of the later

intertestamental period that their experience is the same as that of their ancestors who

were sent to Babylon. Their exile continues, and remains as the lens through which they

should understand their current lives under Roman overlords.

The author of 2 Maccabees leaves us with a similar impression. The book

recounts the Maccabeen revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes' control of the Temple in

Jerusalem and the ultimate cleansing of the Temple and its restoration. According to the

author, who composed his treatise in the late second or early first century B.C.E.,[31] the

period of exile is not over. He writes of the prophet Jeremiah hiding the tent, the ark and

the altar of incense and declaring that the hiding place shall be unknown until God once

again gathers his people and shows them mercy (2:7). The point that this hope remains

unrealized is made obvious in 2:18,

> We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will
> gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has
> rescued us from great evils and has purified the place.

As we have seen in other intertestamental works, so too 2 Maccabees reflects a

theological position that the current time was one of continued punishment and exile.[32]

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[30] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 306-07. Here Evans cites the work of O. H. Steck who also advocates this position.

[31] Tomassino, *Judaism before Jesus,* 21.

[32] For a brief discussion of this passage see Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 307.

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, from the second century B.C.E., also reflect the traditional Deuteronomic pattern of sin, exile and restoration. Again, just like other Second Temple books of this time period this pattern will remain entrenched, and exile will continue until Israel is restored in glory in the eschatological future.[33]

The book as a whole purports to recount the words of the twelve sons of Jacob just prior to his death. Each one gathers his children around him and reflects on his life. Predictions of descendants falling into sin and imminent disaster can be found throughout the book along with predictions that eventually God will have mercy and bring his people back into the land, restore the temple and make Israel a light to all nations.

> The light of knowledge you shall kindle in Jacob, and you shall be the sun for all the posterity of Israel. Blessing shall be given to you and all your posterity in Israel until through his son's compassion the Lord shall visit all the nations forever. (*TLevi* 4:3-4)

> (T)he latter temple will exceed the former glory. The twelve tribes will be gathered there and all the nations, until such a time as the most high shall send forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet. (*TBenj.* 9:2-3a)

Knibb sees the *Testament of the Twelve* as reflecting an eschatological interpretation of the return from exile in a manner similar to Daniel and Enoch.[34] In his mind this book decisively abandons any historical understanding of the exile that includes a historical return to the land. Rather,

> The theological scheme employed in the Testaments explains the fact that the Jews were scattered in Dispersion and looks for the eschatological intervention of God to bring them back into the land.[35]

As we can see, while the pattern of sin, exile, and restoration still guided their theological understanding of Israel's past and future, for the authors of such Second

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[33] Kee, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," 775.

[34] Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 266.

[35] Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 265–66. For a further synopsis of this theme in the book, see Kee, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," 779.

Temple literature, restoration was still incomplete, exile was a current experience and would only end with an eschatological intervention of God.

The *Testament of Moses* (from the first century CE) is particularly clear on the same point. This work offers a stark picture of Israel's exile and offers a gloomy outlook of despair until the appearance of the Kingdom of God. The book even speaks of the people's inability to offer their sacrifices to the Lord.

> Now, the two tribes will remain steadfast in their former faith,
> sorrowful and sighing because they will not be able to offer sacrifices
> to the Lord of their fathers. (4:8)

This contradicts historical fact, as sacrifices were indeed offered during the Diasporic period; however it reflects a sense of extreme condemnation that many writings of this period share.[36] Further, the book reflects the state of dispersion that defined the people's ongoing experience.

> But the ten tribes will grow and spread out during the time of their
> captivity. (4:9)

This seems to reflect a Hellenistic setting, and only when God's kingdom appears "throughout his whole creation" (10:1) will Israel's distress be brought to an end (10:1–10).[37]

2 Baruch agrees with this idea. Composed near the end of the first century C.E. or beginning of the second, it shares a sense of the initial return not being adequate or complete:

> And at that time, after a short time, Zion will be rebuilt again, and the
> offerings will be restored, and the priests will again return to their
> ministry. And the nations will again come to honour it, *but not as fully
> as before.* (68:5–7, emphasis mine)

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[36] Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 261
[37] Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 261. See also Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 310–11.

The inferiority of the Second Temple and its priesthood reflected in these writings emphasises the incompleteness of Israel's recovery during the Diasporic era. True restoration will only come when the current age has finally run its course and God acts decisively in a final move of judgement.[38]

The Qumran writings in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* also shed some light on this widely held perspective on exile and restoration. In his helpful study of the Scrolls Martin Abegg notes that Qumran sectarians described their exile as a part of God's plan. It was not necessarily something foisted upon them by their enemies; instead it was part of God's way of preparing them for his coming. Indeed, "the Qumran Sect expected to remain in exile until the time of God's judgement on the nations (1QM 1:2–3)."[39]

After a sweeping survey of the Scrolls, Abegg finishes by asserting,

> It can now be readily appreciated just how central the theme of exile
> was to the authors of the Qumran manuscripts. While the sojourn in
> Egypt and exile of northern tribes was still reflected in their writings, it
> was the Babylonian exile which had captured the corporate
> imagination. In a very real sense it had become the new paradigm
> which spoke of how God dealt with his people Israel…The faithful then
> waited for God to bring them into the land of promise—the iniquity of
> the Amorites not yet being full—and establish them in their rightful
> place (4Q171 1–10, ii26–iii 2).[40]

Further, in his *Antiquities*, Josephus writes about two men in the first century who made promises to fellow Israelites about "signs" of salvation. One promised to part the waters of the Jordan River (*Ant.* 20.5.1 §97) and the other to bring down the walls of Jerusalem (*Ant.* 20.8.6 §170). Both of these men (one named Theudas and the other known as "the Egyptian Jew" seemed to be laying claim to the deuteronomistic promise

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[38] See Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 310, and Gowan, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic," 211, 215.

[39] Abegg, "Exile and the Dead Sea Scrolls," 123. See also, Garnet, *Salvation and Atonement in the Qumran Scrolls*. In this study Garnet finds that the motif of exile, often employing the vocabulary of the prophetic tradition, can be seen throughout the *Qumran Scrolls*. He concludes that exilic theology played a big role in the communities self-understanding. For them Israel remained in a state of exile, waiting for final redemption.

[40] Abegg, "Exile and the Dead Sea Scrolls," 125.

that someday God would raise up a prophet like Moses. Clearly their claims, to part the

Jordan and bring down the walls of Jerusalem, recall the ministry of Joshua and his

leading of Israel into the Promised Land. While Josephus himself never refers to the

biblical precedents and does not speculate on the men's intentions, it is possible to see in

men like Theudas and the "Egyptian Jew" motives that pointed toward the hope of a new

conquest of the land, perhaps reflecting the hopes of an "eschatological jubilee in which

the dispossessed could reclaim their lost patrimony."[41]

Josephus's record of these two men once again indicates that for some Jews at

the time of the advent of the Common Era there was a perception that they were still in a

state of exile. As Craig Evans observes,

> What may be inferred from such movements of restoration is that many
> Jews regarded Israel as in a state of bondage, even exile. A new
> conquest of the Promised Land presupposes the assumption that the
> people really do not possess the land. They have been dispossessed of
> their land—by foreigners, such as the Greeks and later the Romans, and
> by their own leaders who collaborate with foreigners—and now they
> hope to repossess it.[42]

This was the view that permeated significant portions of the intertestamental

literature and that defined at least a significant segment of Second Temple Judaism.

Indeed, this perspective seems to be evident throughout the literature that we have briefly

surveyed. While different authors present this idea in different ways there can be little

doubt that James Vanderkam is correct when he writes,

> The common portrait of exile in the apocalyptic literature envisages it
> as a state of affairs that began at some point near the end of the
> kingdom of Judah and continued to the author's day and even beyond.[43]

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[41] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 305.

[42] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 305.

[43] Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 94. Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," 271–72, shares his conclusion when he writes, "Despite many differences in presentation the writings that we have been considering all seem to share the view that Israel remained in a state of exile long after the sixth century, and that exile would only be brought to an end when God intervened in this world order to establish his rule." Vanderkam, "Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,"

The consistency of this view brings us back to N. T. Wright's organizing perspectives. As we have already seen Wright understands the Second Temple period as one in which if a Jew were asked "where are we?," the Jew would have answered the question, when reduced to its simplest form, "we are still in exile."[44]

> They believed that, in all the senses which mattered, Israel's exile was still in progress. Although she had come back from Babylon, the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled.[45]

The ramifications of this vision and how it affected the faith and practices of the Jewish people of this period is a question that has a multifaceted answer. In what particular ways did exile shape Second Temple Judaism? To that question we now turn.

IV. Exile and its Effects on Jewish Life and Faith

Having examined the evidence within Second Temple literature that supports the idea that the community of Israel understood itself as continuing in a state of exile we now will look at some of the primary ways that an exilic outlook shaped the religious life of Second Temple Judaism.

Within the Jewish community during the exilic and Diasporic periods there was never one uniform response to their circumstances. However, certain theological themes emerged which shaped the religious life of Second Temple Judaism. While it would be incorrect to assume that these trends were all practiced or emphasized in the same way in every context, a certain commonality of practice and outlook reflected key theological

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104, also reiterates his position that most second temple texts reflect a perspective that exile will not end in historical time.

[44] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 268.

[45] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 268–69.

distinctives within the Jewish community.[46] Commenting on the hope for restoration to the land and rebuilding of the Temple that brought Jews of this period together, N. T. Wright observes,

> In the later parts of the Hebrew Bible, and in the post-biblical Jewish literature, we regularly find the same combination of themes, which summon up the key symbols of Israel's entire worldview.[47]

The purpose of this section is to help us understand the ways that Israel continued to adapt its beliefs and practices to the realities of living "in exile." These theological developments reflect their ongoing attempt to establish their distinct identity as a people and understand the person and working of their God in the context of their exilic experience. Jews of the Second Temple period responded to "exile" in the formation of a canon of sacred scriptures, in the development of the life of the synagogue, in the development of an apocalyptic genre of literature, in their hope for a Messiah or Messiahs, and in speculations about resurrection and the afterlife. We will deal with each of these in turn.

1. Scripture and the Formation of Canon

In order to move ahead there was a paradoxically strong impulse in Israel to go back to their scriptures as a foundation for theological reflection. Thus, a new focus on the received scriptures was characteristic of Judaism during this period. The emergence of this emphasis can be seen in the Persian period with its stress on obedience to the Mosaic Law, as apparent in the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah. Later in the Persian period we can observe how the community began to refer to the writings of the early

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[46] How uniform this theology was is a disputed point within scholarly dialogue. A case for what he calls "normal" or "common" Judaism in that period is made by Sanders in *Judaism: Practice and Belief,* see especially pp. 47–76.

[47] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 299.

prophets with a clear sense of respect for their authority. For example, Zechariah refers to the "former prophets" (1:4) and alludes to Isaiah in 3:8. Malachi also seems to include allusions to the book of Isaiah, and Haggai draws from Amos (compare Hag. 2:17 with Amos 4:9).[48] Such moves indicate a need for Israel to acknowledge its scriptural tradition. It was the scriptures that could ultimately explain the nation's ongoing sense of exile and give shape to its national identity and life. Scripture provided Israel with a foundation for understanding themselves and their God. As James Sanders notes,

> It was this kind of reflection on the old traditions that gave shape to
> God's New Israel, Judaism born in Exile, and gave rise to the concept
> of a canon that could explain the ups and downs, blessings and
> disasters.[49]

The need for a guiding literature probably led to the decisive shaping of both the literature and the canon of the Old Testament. Speculation about the way the canon was formed is widespread, as Lester Grabbe notes, "There is probably no subject in the history of Judaism about which more is said and less is known than that of the canon."[50] Yet there is a reasonable consensus among scholars that "Codification," the process of rendering oral traditions in written form, took significant shape during the exilic and Diasporic age. Further, "Canonization," the process of choosing which traditions were authoritative and collating them as a unit was a lengthy process that transpired over the many years of exile in its various historical senses and manifestations. This is reflected in references to a collection of books that were believed to carry some sense of Divine

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[48] Tomasino, *Judaism Before Jesus,* 73. For some extended exploration of these concepts see Boda and Floyd, *Bringing Out the Treasure* and Boda and Floyd, *Tradition in Transition.*

[49] Sanders, "The Exile and Canon Formation," 54.

[50] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 153.

authority in a number of different intertestamental works such as Sirach, 2 Maccabees, 4

Ezra, the Qumran scrolls, Philo and Josephus.[51]

As Donald Gowan has noted, it may be impossible to say for sure when the use of

written testimonies began to serve as the word of God in Israel, however, it is only during

the period from 400 B.C.E. on that "books became the primary source from which

believers sought to learn the will of God."[52] Thus reliance upon the written word became

foundational for Jewish faith, and the forming of a group of books that could be seen as

authoritative became a central project as the nation's sense of exile continued and the

need for some way to define their identity as a people developed.[53] The fact that many

works of literature that emerged during the Second Temple period were excluded from

the canon speaks to the challenge of determining the nature and shape of the canon. For

even non-canonical works, however diminished their authority, also sought to fill the

need for a written, codified interpretation of Israel's historical experience. In many cases

these works were also interpretations of canonical material, reflecting a national desire

for a self-understanding amidst the tumult of exile and the consequences of exilic life.

The impetus toward a secure foundation for national identity was surely the lack

of stability that people felt living in a displaced or politically marginalized condition.

This situation called for a formalization of the values and core truths that were

representative of the community. Therefore a written work was required to preserve

these foundational, identity shaping beliefs. Such a document (or documents) could then

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[51] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 153–55 offers a brief survey of these references.

[52] Gowan, *The Bridge Between the Testaments,* 321. See also Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 156–57, for a summary of issues pertaining to canon formation and usage during the Second Temple period.

[53] On this note 4 Ezra's rewritten canon demonstrates the desire for this kind of foundation. 4 Ezra's portrayal of Ezra recovering Israel's divinely inspired scripture (Ch. 14) as a response to their national need is a typically 'exilic' point of view. Instability calls out to the voices of the past to act as a guide.

serve as a "communal baseline,"[54] or expression of normative practice and belief. Such a

touchstone is necessary in a climate of immense socio-political instability. Without it,

sacred beliefs might be lost and identity eroded.

It was this turn to scripture that provided Israel with generative power for the

preservation of her national identity. Other nations were conquered by the

Mesopotamian and Roman powers, many of whom may have possessed strong religious

identities, yet were unable to survive under the hand of their conquerors. They

"apparently did not have strong enough traditions and stories to provide a remnant with

identity sufficient to survive."[55] The stories of scripture and the words of the prophets

explained the reasons for their exile and provided stories of exile that could form a

resilient people able to persevere through the perils and uncertainty of living under a

foreign power. Even works that were ultimately judged to be "non-canonical" were

attributed to important, heroic figures from the past like Baruch, Enoch, Ezra and the

Patriarchs, for example. As Sid Leiman perceptively writes,

> The Biblical canon was shaped by a community; it would then
> contribute to the shaping of that community. What scripture did for the
> Jews was more that what the Jews did for scripture. If Jews have
> survived to this very day as Jews, it was precisely because scripture
> provided a framework for Jewish survival. Throughout Jewish history,
> normative self-definition was very much bound up in scripture and how
> it was perceived.[56]

This does not imply that understanding the scriptures was a straightforward

process. Much Jewish thought in this period was innovative as ancient texts were re-read

in new contexts.[57] The question was, just as it is for contemporary communities, how can

an ancient text be authoritative in the present? As Israel formed their canon and it began

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[54] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory,* 44.
[55] Sanders, "The Exile and Canon Formation," 37.
[56] Leiman, "Inspiration and Canonicity," 63.
[57] Sanders, "The Exile and Canon Formation," 54.

to function authoritatively in the nation's life interpretation of its contents and their exact

application to exilic life continued.

As N. T. Wright explains,

> For Philo the strange old stories could come to life through allegory.
> For the later rabbis, and probably their first century predecessors, some
> form of oral Torah enabled the written code to be applied to new
> situations. In apocalyptic writings, scriptural imagery was reused,
> sometimes in bizarre fashions, and characters from the ancient stories
> were used as mouthpieces for fresh words of warning and hope. Within
> ordinary synagogue teaching, the use of midrash and Targum employed
> expanded paraphrase to ram home the relevance of the word for the
> present. And within the Essene community, the *pesher* method took
> prophecies line by line and claimed that the events of the present were
> the real fulfillment of what was spoken generations before.[58]

Such developments are reflective of what was happening in Jewish religion

throughout the centuries of Babylonian exile through Roman occupation as scripture

continued to play a central role in communal life. The formation of the canon which

began while in geographical exile in Babylon continued after the return under Cyrus.

Also a range of religious literature developed to include apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic

literature. Further, the reading and interpretation of Scripture took on fresh and inventive

forms, focusing on issues that were absent or obscure in Old Testament books. This

resulted in a strengthened identity and new explorations of the community's theological

beliefs and practices. Indeed even as the record of Israel's faith and identity took on new

and concrete form in the development of the canon, so the synagogue came to serve as a

place for the study of sacred texts, as well as the worship of God.

2. The Development of the Synagogue and Place of the Temple

One of the obvious places where the Jewish community began to rework their

religious practices in light of their ongoing exile was in their understanding of the Temple

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[58] Wright, *The New Testament,* 242.

and the development of the synagogue as a place of religious worship. While this particular theological development had unique relevance for those Jews who continued to live outside the land, the movement as a whole reflected how Israel as a people had come to understand God in a new way. Their experience in Babylon had forced them to consider how and even if Yahweh could truly be worshipped away from Jerusalem and the Temple. In so far as their experience confirmed that he could be, it led to a de-centralization of worship even after their return to the land.[59]

Despite this new development in theological thought, the re-built Temple in Jerusalem continued to play a central role in the thinking and religious life of Second Temple Jews. The temple unified society and acted as a power base for the ruling class. Paradoxically the erection of at least three other temples outside of Jerusalem during this period testifies to the importance of a central house of worship in the Jewish belief system.[60] At the same time however, the idea of *one* central temple, located in Jerusalem, was diminishing in theological significance. There were a number of pragmatic reasons why this was the case; with some Jews now living far away it was no longer practical for them to visit the Temple. The emergence of other temples was a response to the desire for a place of gathering for communal worship without the necessity of traveling all the way to Jerusalem. However, these other temples could never supplant the Jerusalem Temple as the true place of Israelite religion since the latter represented both the unity of God and the unity of the nation. Ancient authors affirm that most Jewish people supported the Jerusalem temple and its worship activities, even if they were not able to

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[59] For an in depth study of the development of the synagogue movement see Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue*. For insight into the development of the synagogue during the period under consideration here see in particular pp. 110–127.

[60] For an overview of these other Temples see Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 106–7.

attend its services on a regular basis. In the early first century CE Philo notes that

throughout the empire money was collected and sent to Jerusalem for sacred purposes

(*Embassy* 156). Josephus also writes, in the late first century CE, about Jews throughout

Mesopotamia making dedicatory offerings to the temple as well as paying an annual

temple tax of one-half shekel per year (*Ant.* 18.3.12). The New Testament seems to make

clear that this was indeed an expectation for Diaspora Jews (Matt 17:24).

Temple worship continued as a central tenet of Jewish religion throughout the

Second Temple period, as Shaye Cohen indicates,

> As the focal point of the religion, the temple was the central communal
> institution not just for the Jews of the land of Israel but also for those of
> the diaspora. The half shekel contribution annually by diaspora Jews
> and the pilgrimages undertaken for the festivals bound together the
> entire Jewish community. The ideology of the temple also served as a
> binding force: it represented monism and exclusivity. Only one place
> was suitable for God's home on earth, and that was the temple mount in
> Jerusalem.[61]

Even so, Second Temple expressions of religious practice were quite different

from those of pre-exilic times. The Second Temple lacked the authority, did not display

the same grandeur, nor inspire the kind of pilgrim visitation that Solomon's temple had.

Though it remained an important symbol for Second Temple Jews and they were loyal to

it, there no longer remained a clear theological conviction that a Temple in Jerusalem was

a necessary spiritual centre. Diaspora brought about a de-centreing of national cohesion

and as a result Second Temple Jews began to develop some new initiatives that aided the

practice of their faith in new foreign contexts. The building of new Temples away from

Jerusalem, and the initiation of synagogues led to an increasing orientation away from

nationalistic religious practice and toward a more local and even individualistic

understanding of relationship with Yahweh. At the same time, communal piety began to

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[61] Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah,* 106.

give way to personal piety and new expectations of a more personal relationship with
God.[62]

> The breakdown of the tribe into the clan, and the clan into the family,
> mirrors the breakdown of the belief in corporate responsibility and the
> emergence of a doctrine of theodicy based on the individual. The
> eschatological speculations and the religious doctrines of the period
> treated the individual not merely as a member of a family, clan, or
> nation, but as an independent being whose ultimate reward and
> punishment depended on his or her own deeds alone. New
> organizations were created to give the individual a place within society
> commensurate with his or her new importance.[63]

The Synagogue was an example of this shift within Jewish culture and became

the next step, beyond a non-Jerusalemite temple, that met the need for a place of

communal worship. It also embodied a theological move away from the idea that true

communal worship must be carried out solely in Jerusalem at the central Temple. The

synagogue movement was in competition with the Temple, albeit benignly so,

representing the emergence of an openness to new ways for Jews to practice their distinct

faith.[64] While the synagogue never ultimately overtook the temple in Jerusalem as the

centre of Jewish worship, it did become one of the key pillars of religious life for Jewish

Diaspora existence.[65]

The synagogue (in its Greek form συναγωγή; "congregation" or "assembly")

was a prayer house, school and study hall that served as a community centre for Jews

living away from the land. While there is speculation that synagogues began appearing

during the Babylonian exile, it is clear that during the Hellenistic period they became an

essential part of Jewish life.

> It is probably not a coincidence that the earliest Jewish "prayer-houses"
> are attested in the Diaspora. Far removed from the temple and its cult,

[62] Tomasino, *Judaism*, 71.
[63] Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 115–16.
[64] Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 24.
[65] See Sanders, *Judaism*, 48.

> Diaspora Jews needed an alternative means for regular communion
> with God. They did not want to build temples or offer sacrifices, so
> they created a new institution in which the community would gather for
> prayer.[66]

This innovation reflected new approaches to the practice of Jewish faith as a result of their exile. It demonstrated an effort to retain cohesiveness outside the land and was a major innovation as it shifted national identity away from a national religion of a holy land to that of a minority community in other nations. The synagogue proved to be a decisive factor in this transformation as it provided a form of social organization that allowed Jews to maintain an existence outside the land without giving up their cultural and religious heritage.[67] For those who had returned to the land their identity as Jews was also under threat as they now lived under the umbrella of Persian rule. The synagogue became a place where distinct Jewish identity could be preserved and cultivated, even in centres of population away from Jerusalem.

Thus, the synagogue emerged, based on Jewish theological reflection on their new circumstances and their fight for existence as a distinct people with a distinct identity and faith. Establishing a place where worship was accessible and their distinct identity as a people could be inculcated contributed to Israel's ability to keep their hope alive in exilic circumstances whether they lived close to the temple or far from it.

3. The Rise of Apocalyptic

Between 200 BCE and 100 CE a new kind of literature flourished in Judaism, of which many of the texts we have cited are prominent examples. This literature, while diverse in many respects, is essentially "apocalyptic." It is characterized by a writer who claimed to have received a special revelation from a heavenly visitor, who imparts to

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[66] Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 12.
[67] Scott, "Exile and the Self-Understanding of Diaspora Jews," 175–76.

them some kind of transcendent vision of things to come and unveils God's hidden purposes for Israel in particular and the cosmos as a whole. This vision then requires interpretation from some other supernatural being.[68]

In many ways apocalyptic was a natural development of the prophetic tradition, because it claimed to present a divine perspective on human affairs. Yet it became a genre all its own, incorporating elements of the Old Testament prophetic tradition with new dimensions of prophetic speech. As Frederick Murphy notes,

> Like prophecy, apocalypticism anticipates God's imminent intervention in history. However, prophecy does not expect the cosmic transformation typical of apocalypticism, nor does it speak of the transcendence of death. For the prophets, whether divine punishment will occur depends upon the people's reaction to the word of God. Repentance can avert disaster. But for apocalypticism the end is inevitable.[69]

Although the following features may not all occur in a given text this genre is characterized by an urgent expectation of the end of earthly conditions through a cosmic catastrophe, the division of history into determined periods, the activity of angels and demons, salvation in paradise, the manifestation of the kingdom of God, a mediator with royal functions, an emphasis on "glory," a dualistic worldview, and a final showdown between good and evil.[70]

Ultimately the emphasis in apocalyptic literature is on God's victory over the forces of evil whether in their historical or cosmic manifestation. The experience of exile provided an impetus to this genre of literature as exile caused the Jewish community to consider that perhaps their only way out of their present circumstances was through the

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[68] Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus,* 163–65. See also Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments,* for a good overview of the authorial characteristics of apocalyptic literature, 452–61.

[69] Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus,* 166.

[70] Murphy, *Early Judaism,* 131–33. See also, Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," 345–70.

dramatic and decisive intervention of God at the end of history. As Donald Gowan writes,

> Physical survival itself was often difficult during this period, national identity was frequently threatened, the religion of Yahweh was subject to ridicule from without and subversion within. Apocalyptic shows with peculiar effectiveness the desperateness of the problems which faced Jews who sought to maintain their faith and their identity under such trying circumstances, heightening both the darkness of the evil side and the brightness of the hope they affirmed to the point where there was no middle ground left.[71]

Thus, Second Temple apocalyptic stressed the ultimate victory of God and his presence (often through the intermediary beings) with his people.

Some examples of apocalyptic writing from this period include Daniel 7–12, The Assumption of Moses and 1 Enoch. These, along with other works, provided a particular worldview which sustained Israel throughout their exile. This literature is often known for its "pessimism" because of its many references to judgement and ultimate destruction. However, alongside this pessimistic tone stands a firm optimism that God will ultimately overcome and that those who are faithful to him will be vindicated.[72]

In this way apocalyptic literature functioned in a way similar to certain streams of messianic theology (which we will look at in our next section) that perceived the Messiah as an eschatological figure. Both offered Israel hope that God had not forgotten them in exile, he was still involved in their struggle and he would ultimately lead them to overcome it. If this victory did not come by re-establishing Israel in geo-political terms, then it would come by ushering in a new order of things that would see Israel as rightly restored to a place of prominence within God's new, eschatological kingdom.

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[71] Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments,* 456.
[72] Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments,* 456–57.

4. Messiah

The concept of Messiah or the messianic movement, which offers the hope of an "anointed" leader who will come from God as a deliverer to the people of Israel, is an expression of eschatological hope. However messianic anticipation during this period is more than simply eschatological in scope. In fact, perceptions and expectations concerning messiahs and messianic figures during the Second Temple period are diverse, to say the least. Attempting to synthesize these various perspectives is bound to lead to distortion; full and proper understanding requires dealing with the various sources in all of their individuality.[73] While such a study is well beyond the scope of this project, it is nonetheless the case that messiah figures and messianic expectations were a prominent motif in Second Temple literature. As Elliott observes,

> It is commonly held that hopes for a specially anointed ruler from the line of David were already emerging in the sixth century B.C. and perhaps earlier, and that the originally very mundane ideas associated with this person were gradually eschatologized and idealized during the period of the Second Temple.[74]

A brief review of Second Temple literature gives us some insight into the way messianism developed and was understood during this period.

The book of *Jubilees* documents one major component of Second Temple messianism when the author speaks about God coming down among humans in order to set in place a totally renovated cosmos:

> Until I (God) shall descend (to the earth) and dwell with them (the human beings) in all the ages of eternity...And the angel of the presence...took the tablets of the division of years from the time of the creation of the law and testimony according to their weeks, according to the jubilees, year by year throughout the full number of jubilees, from the day of the new creation when the heaven and earth and all of the creatures shall be renewed according to the sanctuary of the Lord is created in Jerusalem upon mount Zion. And all the lights will be

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[73] Nonetheless Grabbe attempts a brief but lucid synthesis, see *Judaic Religion*, 289–91.

[74] Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 469.

> renewed for healing and peace and blessing for all the elect of Israel
> and in order that it might be thus from that day and unto all the days of
> the earth *(Jub* 1.26, 29).

This conception of the work of the Messiah understood it to be so great that no human could perform it; thus the work of Messiah could only be carried out by God himself or by one who possessed both divine and human attributes.

As the previous quote from Elliott indicates, some streams of early messianic hope revolved around the person of King David and his line. While this may have been among the earliest forms of messianic hope, it seemed to experience a modest revival in the second century B.C.E. The *Testament of Judah* reflects this development in 21:7 and 22:1–3, as it describes the downfall of the Davidic kingdom as a result of "men of alien race," probably a reference to Babylonians, and perhaps also subsequent conquering empires. However, there is hope that God will preserve the power of the Davidic kingdom forever and that the rule of his line will never cease. Further, the *Psalms of Solomon* (early-mid first century B.C.E.) express the idea that the overwhelming power of the Romans can only be overcome by an exceptional leader. This leader is sent by God and fights in God's name (see *Pss Solomon 17)*. The author insists that this leader must be from the line of David and cannot be a Hasmonaean.[75]

Another dimension of expectation was the idea of "dual messianism" which postulated both an anointed priest and an anointed king. The fundamental purpose of this type of messianism is the clear distinction it makes between the civil and the religious functions of the Messiah. This concept is built on the pre-exilic model of the king and priest, possibly based on Zech 3, 6:9-15 and possibly also Zech 4:14.[76] These passages

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[75] Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period,* 402–03.

[76] See Evans,"The two sons of oil," for further exploration.

are built in turn on Jer 33 and express the hope that from the tribe of Levi a priest will arise and from Judah a king will arise. This thinking can be found in such Second Temple documents as the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (e.g. *T. Reuben* 6:8, *and T. Levi* 18:1–12).[77] The *Testament of Judah* makes this perspective most clear as Judah identifies himself as the delivering king and designates his brother Levi as the priest,

> And now, children, love Levi so that you may endure. Do not be arrogant toward him or you will be wholly destroyed. To me God has given the kingship and to him, the priesthood; and he has subjected the kingship to the priesthood. To me he has given the earthly matters and to Levi, the heavenly matters, (21:1–2).

A similar perspective can also be discerned in the *Testament of Naphtali* 8:2–3,

> Command your children that they be in unity with Levi and Judah, for through them will arise salvation for Israel, and through them Jacob will be blessed. Through their tribes God will appear (dwelling among men on the earth), to save the people of Israel, and to assemble the righteous from among the nations.

These are only two of the messianic hopes that emerged within Jewish religious thought of the Second Temple period. While the emergence of this doctrine can already be found in Old Testament (e.g. Zech 6:9-15; 9:9-17; and 12:10-14), as the concept evolved various specific expectations came to expression, each of them connected to the needs and religious perspectives of a particular group of Jews seeking to live piously in an exilic setting.[78]

This messianic hope flowed out of the desire for deliverance and restoration that was a natural instinct within a community of people living in exile. Each community seized upon the possibilities offered by scripture, expressing their own desire for divine deliverance in forms that went beyond the hopes of the past and the embryonic messianism of the Hebrew canon.

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[77] Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period,* 397–98.
[78] See Elliott for further insight, *The Survivors of Israel,* 513.

5. Resurrection and the Afterlife

A significant part of scripturally rooted optimism in the Second Temple period focused on life beyond this world. According to Grabbe, earlier material in the Hebrew Bible does not envisage an afterlife as such.[79] The ideal hope was for a long life and a peaceful death surrounded by one's family, including several succeeding generations (see Ps 128 and Isa 65:17–26). Some Jews seemed to conclude that belief in life after death had no place in Judaism. The book of Tobit gives no indication of a doctrine of the afterlife and Ben Sira echoes the old view that Sheol is the destiny of humanity and that life should thus be enjoyed while it lasts. However, this view changed during the Second Temple period. During the Babylonian captivity it appears that while living in Babylon a fear arose among some of Israel's religious leaders that their people could lapse into the Babylonian practice of ancestor worship and/or the worship of the spirits of the deceased.[80] Thus a theology of the afterlife began to emerge in the centuries after the Babylonian exile ended.[81]

Paolo Sacchi posits that by the third century B.C.E. the question of life after death was highly pertinent for the Jewish community, leading to the reformulation of existing assumptions,

> It (death) no longer appears, or at least not only as the conclusion of the
> vital process, but rather as a force extraneous to human nature, derived
> from a distortion of the cosmic order. Death came to be seen as against
> nature.[82]

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[79] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion* 258. This point is somewhat debatable, however there is little doubt that doctrines of the afterlife became much more fully developed in Second Temple and New Testament literature.

[80] Such practices were not exclusive to Babylon, but were certainly part of Babylonian religion.

[81] Tomasino, *Judaism,* 95.

[82] Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period,* 429.

This developing outlook, combined with an increasing sense that their exile was not going to end in the foreseeable future, encouraged the emergence of the doctrine of the resurrection. In certain ways it can be seen as a response to the disappointment that exile, and the lack of any meaningful restoration, had brought to the earthly lives of Israel's citizens. While the concept of the afterlife was partially rooted in later Old Testament thought (e.g. Isa 25:8; 26:19 and Dan 12:2), the hardships of exilic life inspired speculation regarding this originally minor element of Hebrew theology. Donald Gowan offers the view that the persecutions faced by the Jews under Antiochus IV (second century B.C.E.) played a role in the development of the doctrine of resurrection as hope for the afterlife took on new immediacy in light of terrible suffering and martyrdom at the hands of foreign rulers. At the same time, the aforementioned emergence of a more individualistic worldview may also have contributed to a more individualized doctrine of the afterlife.[83]

Paolo Sacchi notes that this doctrine can be somewhat confusing in Second Temple thinking as there are two distinct views at play in the literature of the period. One reflects the concept of the immortality of the soul, while the other demonstrates a belief in immortality through resurrection of the body. Sacchi comments that, "the two concepts were blended in Jewish culture more instinctively than rationally."[84]

A sampling of Second Temple literature demonstrates how the idea of resurrection began to emerge in the literature. A passage from *2 Maccabees* in which a mother witnesses the capture and martyrdom of her seven sons in the same day clearly

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[83] Gowan, *Bridge Between the Testaments,* 479–80.

[84] Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period,* 432.

reflects the development of belief in resurrection. The passage tells of how the mother

encouraged her children at their death with these words,

> Therefore the creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of
> humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give
> life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for
> the sake of his laws. (7:23)

The *Psalms of Solomon* demonstrated the appearance of the idea of resurrection within

Jewish thinking by the second century B.C.E.,

> The destruction of the sinner is forever, and he will not remember when
> (God) looks after the righteous...
> Those who fear the Lord shall rise up to eternal life and their life shall
> be the Lord's light, and it shall never end. (3:11–12)

Resurrection is often portrayed as being accompanied by judgement, as *1 Enoch*

demonstrates,

> Then I saw the army of the angels of punishment marching, holding
> nets of iron and bronze. And I asked the angel of peace, who was
> walking with me, saying to him, "To whom are they going? These who
> are holding the nets?" And he said to me, "They are going to their elect
> and beloved ones in order that they may be cast into the crevices of the
> abyss of the valley. Then the valley shall be filled with the elect and
> their beloved ones." (56:1–4)

In this briefest of samples we can see how the idea of resurrection as part of

life after death, which presented itself in only embryonic form in the Old Testament,

began to influence certain sectors of Jewish thought in the Second Temple period.

As can be seen from these passages, the exact nature of the resurrected state is

vague in Second Temple literature. While Greek, and before that Persian, culture and

religious ideas had some influence on the theological development of Judaism in the

Second Temple period, the idea of resurrection took on unique contours for the Jews.

This, along with the increase in apocalyptic literature, was a direct response to living in

exile for such an extended period. Hope of restoration increasingly was transferred

from this world into the life to come. Despite the many different forms these beliefs

took, there was agreement about the hope of a restored existence on the earth God had created and in a land that God had promised. Thus, apocalyptic theology and its musings on the life to come retained, for the most part, moorings to God's creation.

> As good creational monotheists, mainline Jews were not hoping to escape from the present universe into some Platonic realm of eternal bliss enjoyed by disembodied souls after the end of the space-time universe. If they died in the fight for the restoration of Israel, they hoped not 'to go to heaven,' or at least not permanently, but to be raised to new bodies when the kingdom came.[85]

V. Summary

These theological developments were central to Judaism's struggle for identity throughout the Second Temple period. While disparate in many respects, they reflect a striving for an identity that anchored them to their past and helped them function as God's people under Persian and then Roman rule. These theological ideas reflect the core conviction that Israel was bound by a theological and religious identity. Thus, scripture was central to the work of forming a distinctly Jewish identity. New and evolving trends helped inform the community as it struggled with its identity and shaped the direction it would take in the years to come. The emergence of apocalypticism, belief in life after death and resurrection all placed the return from exile in the life beyond the present age. These were responses to exile that are understandable given the fact that their exile showed no signs of ending and having their autonomy restored seemed a remote hope.

What is most important to note from this overview of the Second Temple period is how Israel continued to develop theological and social approaches to living in exile. The faith of the nation continued to be a sustaining centre for the people and this

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[85] Wright, *The New Testament*, 286, n. 20, cites the *Sib. Or.* 3:500–800 as an important text in which to discover "a firmly this-world eschatology, though still invested with glorious overtones,"

demanded reinterpretation in changing circumstances. While the categories changed, the people of the Second Temple period attempted to understand their God and his working in their circumstances in the same way that their ancestors had done in earlier days of exile. In this way they continued the work and the model of living as God's people in exile.

As exile continued under Roman rule a new movement emerged within Judaism that encompassed, in distinct ways, all of these emerging streams within Second Temple theological thought. This new movement would eventually be called Christianity.

VI. Exile in the Development of Christianity

As we have already considered, the Jewish culture into which Christianity was born retained a strong sense that being in exile was their continued identity. This self-understanding provides a working foundation for the exilic perspective that can be found in the documents of the New Testament, particularly if one accepts the idea that the first Christians understood themselves as Jews, a new and distinctive brand of Jews perhaps, but Jews nonetheless.[86] Indeed it would seem that Jesus' own self-conscious Jewish identity, which was at the heart of his ministry, would lead to an understanding that exile was one of the motifs that guided his work. Further, in the embryonic stages of its development the church also continued to understand itself as an exilic people, as its early documents indicate.

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[86] The scholarly discussion on this point in voluminous. For some introductory comments that support the perspective offered here, see Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism,* 15–18, and Murphy, *Early Judaism,* specifically chapters 9 and 11. Also, Paula Frederickson and her discussion of the term "conversion" in "Mandatory Retirement," 236–39.

1. Exile and the Ministry of Jesus

Exile plays a distinct role in the ministry of Jesus. Foremost, he is a model of exile in so far as he is depicted as one who is away from his true home (John 1:1–14; Phil 2: 3–8). Further, we can identify ways in which Jesus' ministry contains exilic overtones. Two scholars who have given much thought to this are N. T. Wright and Craig Evans.[87] Their writing offers a lucid argument that Jesus, as he is depicted in the gospels, saw himself as entering into an exilic situation and acting as the beginning of the end of his nation's exile, although not necessarily in the way that most of his fellow Jews would have expected. Evan's concludes his study by noting that the emphasis which Jesus places on the books of Daniel, Zechariah and Second Isaiah (all three of which reflect periods of exilic life in Israel's history) strongly suggests that,

> Jesus identified himself and his mission with an oppressed Israel in
> need of redemption and that he himself was the agent of
> redemption...Jesus understood his message and ministry as the
> beginning of the end of Israel's exile.[88]

Particularly in *Jesus and the Victory of God,* N.T. Wright asserts that Israel at the dawn of the first century C.E. understood itself to be in exile. Wright looks particularly at Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in his teaching and various aspects of Jesus' ministry that define his work as a response to exile and a harbinger of restoration. While Wright discusses these in great detail he summarizes how Jesus' ministry enacted them when he writes,

> Healing, forgiveness, renewal, the twelve, the new family and its new
> defining characteristics, open commensality, the promise of blessing
> for the Gentiles, feasts replacing fasts, the destruction and rebuilding of
> the Temple: all declared, in the powerful language of symbol, that
> Israel's exile was over, and that Jesus was himself in some way

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[87] Wright deals with this theme extensively throughout his *The New Testament and the People of God,* and *Jesus and the Victory of God.* This is also the focus of Evans' article, "Aspects of Exile."

[88] Evans, "Aspects of Exile," 328.

responsible for this new state of affairs, and that all that the Temple had
stood for was now available through Jesus and his movement.[89]

These were the foundations of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

For Jesus this was the remedy to exile. Exile would be overcome by the breaking in of

God's kingdom and Jesus understood his ministry as the beginning of this transition.

While it is true that Jesus is never portrayed as using the term exile by any of the

gospel writers this does not mean that the motif is not a legitimate one to apply to him.

Scott McKnight, while acknowledging Jesus' lack of explicit mention of exile, answers

by observing,

> It might be asked why, if it was so important to Jesus, he did not use
> "exile" terms. I would contend that he did. Kingdom language is "end
> of exile" language; it is the negative to the positive "kingdom."[90]

Ultimately it may be stated that it is his role as Messiah which ultimately secures

the promise of a return from exile for Israel, even if that return is not complete in this life.

The new exodus of Israel that will deliver them from exile is wrapped up in the

Messiahship of Jesus and his initiation of the victory of God. In fact in Wright's view,

the cross and resurrection decisively end exile and the formation of the early church as

characterized at Pentecost in Acts 2 signals the beginning of a new "act" in the unfolding

drama of God's story.[91]

Several scholars have questioned whether Wright's emphasis on exile is actually

an overemphasis.[92] Accordingly it may be better to see exile as only one of several

motifs that Jesus worked with in his earthly ministry. Further, while Wright's work

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[89] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 436.
[90] McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel,* 83, n.51.
[91] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 218–19.
[92] For a constructive, but critical engagement see Snodgrass, "Reading and Overreading the Parables," 61–76. For another perspective, sympathetic to Wright's but original in its approach, see McComisky, *Exile and the Purpose of Jesus' Parables.* Also, Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the end of Exile,* engages Wright's perspectives, often critically.

illuminates the critical role that an exilic theology plays in the ministry of Jesus, it must

be acknowledge that return from exile is still an outstanding issue in Acts 2 as the Day of

Pentecost dawns. Although Wright sees "repentance" in the gospels as key to preparation

for imminent restoration, repentance remains prominent in the proclamation of the early

church, revealing that restoration is as yet incomplete. Thus, for the church today,

deliverance from exile remains similarly incomplete.[93] Precisely because of their

existence as a marginalized people not yet in complete possession of their promised

inheritance, the theme of exile from Jesus' life and ministry resonated with the early

church as a motif that helped to define their identity as God's people living in the light of

Jesus' death and resurrection.

2. Exile in the Epistles

The motif of exile continues both explicitly and implicitly in the New Testament

beyond the ministry of Jesus. For the first church there was an understanding that the

spiritual consequences of exile had ended and they were now citizens of a new kingdom

in which their citizenship was ultimately not located in a particular earthly place. This

meant that they were not banished from "the land," yet for many believers in the early

church their place in society shifted as a result of their embrace of Christianity. Some

became marginalized; others who were already marginalized found their lot in life

worsened; for some, persecution ensued. As a result exile continued to be a fruitful motif

for the church to employ for self-identification. Both the epistles of James and 1 Peter

explicitly utilize the motif of exile as a way for them to address their audience. In Jas

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[93] Ultimately this is only an adjunct to the work of this study since the relevance of the exilic motif for the Canadian church, while it may be helped by Wrights work, does not hinge on his particular theological position.

1:1, the author writes to the "twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (NRSV). While there is

debate over exactly how this term should be understood,[94] it leaves little doubt that in the

early church, believers were still operating out of a view that they were living away from

home.

At first glance the term "twelve tribes of the Diaspora" appears to be a reference

to Jewish people who are still living away from the land of Israel. However, this term

had begun to take on a new meaning in certain theological streams of the Second Temple

period, and came to designate the true people of God in the last days, whether Jew or

Gentile, as early Christians came to understand that God's eschatological people included

people from all nations.[95] The point is clear, regardless of whom the term is applied to,

that the authors of these epistles saw their audience as continuing to live in a state of

exile.

For James it is likely that the term is used to describe Jews living outside the

confines of Israel. This is possible because of the highly Jewish character and probable

early date of the epistle.[96] His reference to his audience as belonging to the twelve tribes

of Israel (1:1) hints at a view that the nation is experiencing a restoration, albeit

ultimately an eschatological one, in line with what we have already considered regarding

the ministry of Jesus and his choosing of the twelve as a sign of his reconstituting of the

new Israel.[97] James' use of the term, which in its context likely has high ethnic (Jewish)

connotations, recognizes that all of those who were once exiled from their homeland are

still not at home even as they continue their journey as those who are now followers of

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[94] For concise, but representative discussions see Perkins, *First and Second Peter,* 85–6. Also, Moo, *The Letter of James,* 23–4.
[95] Moo, 23–4.
[96] Moo, 50. See also Chester, *New Testament Theology,* 11–15.
[97] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory,* 330.

Christ and members of the church.[98] However, the point should not be lost that the

author continues to see exile as an appropriate description for his audience, even in light

of the fact that they are recipients of Christ's liberating work.

The epistle of 1 Peter, which we will explore in an in-depth way later in this

chapter, because of the central role it will play in the next chapter, is clearly addressed to

"exiles" (1:1; TNIV). This, on the surface, seems to cohere with James' vision of the

church in its first century setting. However, Peter's audience is likely a collection of both

Gentiles and Jews as 1:4, 18; 2:9–10, 25; 3:6; and 4:3–4 show.[99] Despite the fact that

Peter is known as the apostle with the mission to the Jews (Gal. 2:6–10) it seems that he

has a mixed church and that what he has in view here is the idea that those who have

aligned themselves with the person and mission of Jesus are now a part of the true people

of God, and are, thus properly understood as exiles among the nations. This is a reminder

of the "now, but not yet" quality of their deliverance as a result of Jesus' work. On the

one hand they are participants in the deliverance that Jesus provided from exile through

his death and resurrection and are, thus, included in the "people of God." Yet, on the

other hand, they are now a part of his people who sojourn in a world that is not ultimately

their home while awaiting a final deliverance that will come in the eschaton. As noted, in

this epistle the author transfers some of the titles of Israel to the church: "People of God,"

"Royal Priesthood," and "Holy Nation" (2:9). This places the church solidly in the

plotline of scripture; in fact, 1 Pet 2:4–9 contains a clear allusion to Exod 19:5-6, where

Israel is declared to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Thus, the church is

aligned with Israel and is of the same nature as Israel in that it had a special communal

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[98] Baukham, *James,* 25–8.
[99] Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter,* 8.

bond with God who has acted to rescue them and has entered into covenant with them just as he did with Israel.[100] It is thus not surprising that the author of 1 Peter would also transfer to them the perspective that had defined Israel as a people for so long, that of exiles.

Beyond the reference in 1:1, Peter calls his audience "foreigners" in 1:17 and "foreigners and exiles" in 2:11 (TNIV). As Joel Green states, "In varying ways each of these descriptions points to an essential characteristic of Peter's audience: they are not at home."[101] This does not mean that they are physically away from their home soil, instead it means that now as members of God's people they are those who now participate in the socio-theological reality of the exile. As followers of Jesus they were not fully at home in this world and were indeed living away from their ultimate eschatological home (cf. 1:4–5; 4:13; 5:4). This use of exilic terminology demonstrates how the early church continued to see itself as those who lived in exile.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews reflects the reality of the early church's experience as an eschatological community when he acknowledges that while God has subjected all things to his angels, "at the present we do not see everything subject to them (or him)" (2:8, TNIV). Further, he reminds his readers that, although Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, that was not the ultimate place of rest for God's people. A Sabbath rest still awaits the people of God, including those under God's new covenant (4:8-9). F. F. Bruce comments that the recipients of the letter were obviously not currently experiencing this rest. However, it does belong to them as a heritage, and "by

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[100] Green, *1 Peter,* 55, 62.
[101] Green, *1 Peter,* 195.

faith they may live in the good of it here and now."[102] This was the experience of the early church (and contemporary church), many of the promises that were part of Jesus' delivering work carried a future hope of ultimate fulfillment mingled with a current glimpse of what that future may look and feel like. The church would be the place where the liberty of release from exile could be anticipated through Christ's work as saviour in its embryonic form through their life together as a believing community. However, functionally they continued to live as a people who were away from home.

This view is apparent (if not explicitly, at least implicitly) within other New Testament epistles through their emphasis upon the church living in ways that counter the culture in which it is immersed. An emphasis in many of the epistles is to help the church or churches that receive the letter to forge a distinctly different Christian identity against their context within the Roman Empire. To fit in with the Roman Empire meant participating in the Imperial cult and other forms of civic worship that from a Christian or Jewish perspective would be nothing less than idolatry.[103] Green notes how Christians living in the Roman Empire could easily have felt like exiles, and maintaining a separate Christian identity was of paramount concern to church leaders. Just as Israel needed its literature to help it define itself as a distinct people in exile, Green makes the point that the literature of the church helped it forge an identity within a sociologically foreign context. He writes,

> People living in this reality face certain challenges and temptations. Identity and boundary maintenance are pivotal: Who are we in relation to them? What is the basis of our constitution as a community? What are our characteristic practices? By what strategies are these maintained?[104]

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[102] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 110.
[103] Green, *1 Peter*, 194.
[104] Green, *1 Peter*, 197.

Clearly the epistles of the New Testament are concerned with these very questions. This is a continuation of exilic theology, which saw itself against a larger and more powerful empire and thus had to figure out ways to express itself in this context. Thus, for example, in the view of Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, the epistle to the Colossians is designed to lead Christians to faithful living as exiles against the backdrop of an invasive Roman empire. For Walsh and Keesmaat Colossians is one example of how the New Testament reflects a call to Jesus' followers to see themselves as not at home in the Empire, but as exiles. Characteristic of their approach they write,

> For Paul, rather than "flying the flag of empire," the church is a community in refusal of the empire which bears the image of another Lord in its daily life. The church reimagines the world in the image of the invisible God. Because this is a body (*soma*) subject to a head (*kephale*) whose lordship overrules Caesar's, the church replaces the body politic of the empire.[105]

Such an approach can be discerned throughout the New Testament documents, where the writers help the church to understand its distinct identity and what the implications of that identity are. In general terms the New Testament authors, not unlike the authors of the Old Testament and Second Temple literature, do the work that is necessary for a people in exile by helping them imagine themselves as God's people in conditions that are tolerant at best and hostile at worst. In sum, the church is called to re-enact the life and ministry of Jesus and participate in the in-breaking of God's kingdom. Indeed, the remedy to exile, the kingdom of God, is an emerging, ongoing experience. It reflects the eschatological reality of being both "now," but "not yet." For, while the end of exile has begun, and is surely coming, it still continues as the living experience of the church even after Jesus has departed.

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[105] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 95.

What does this mean then as we consider the ways in which Second Temple Jews and early Christians share in the motif of exile? There are at least three ways that we can link the two. First, both share a sense of social or political marginalization; of being dominated by powers that compete with the just reign of the one true God. Second, both share a sense of eschatological hope, acknowledging that the return from exile will not quickly be completed in this present life. And also, both have a lively (even competing) sense of themselves as the true people of God, those through whom God is even now working out his purpose in the world. The critical distinction between the two is the assurance of deliverance that the coming of the Messiah has secured.

This view embraces the theological perspective of N. T. Wright that Jesus decisively inaugurates an end to exile through his death and resurrection. However, it also acknowledges that functionally the experience of exile, that of "living away from home" continued for the church in the first century as it does today. This is why the New Testament deals with the praxis and self-identification of the church. As a body it is not at home, but must continue to determine how to live as a minority people, under the shadow of a more powerful ruling empire/hegemony. This is an ongoing experience for the church and is one that resonates with Canadian Christians in the twenty-first century.

As already mentioned, a significant voice that informs this experience, and will play a central role in the next chapter, is the epistle of 1 Peter. First Peter is offered as a template for contemporary exilic thinking primarily because it is a self-consciously exilic letter. The author is clearly interested in helping his audience engage their culture as those who live on the margins of it. As we will see, 1 Peter reflects an exilic theology that fits well with themes that emerge from the exilic theology of the Old Testament and

Second Temple literature, but applies themes such as holiness, mission, and eschatology to the experience of its audience. In this way 1 Peter is a suggestive guide for contemporary application too because the author demonstrates how exilic theology can continue to be utilized in new contexts.

VII. Why 1 Peter?

That First Peter was interested in the question of how the church can engage its culture from the margins was not a primary exegetical perspective for interpreters in the days when Christendom prevailed. For many years 1 Peter lingered on the periphery of popular New Testament exposition and from the Reformation period onward 1 Peter was largely seen as an epistle that had marginal application except where persecution was common for the church. At best it was a letter that addressed beleaguered Christians who needed to be reminded of their heavenly hope.[106] Representative of this view are the words of John Calvin in his commentary of 1551:

> Peter's purpose in this epistle is to exhort the faithful to a denial and
> contempt for the world, so that they may be free from carnal affections
> and all earthly hindrances, and aspire with their whole soul after the
> celestial kingdom of Christ.[107]

Even in our contemporary culture many will find quite a few of Peter's ideas so offensive that it is hard to see how they are helpful. Concepts like submission to every human authority (2:13), wives submitting to their husbands as the weaker partner (3:1-7), embracing suffering (3:14, 17; 4:12-16) and humility (5:6) are not "normal" ways of functioning or thinking today.[108] However, emerging scholarship rejects such one dimensional interpretations and sees the significant interaction between Peter and the

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[106] See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 152. For an exploration of 1 Peter's neglect see Horrell, *1 Peter*, 1–3.

[107] John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of Saint Peter*, (1963, 227), as cited by John Elliot, *1 Peter*, 152.

[108] Kolden, *Are you Serious?*, 421.

cultural setting of his audience as providing highly suggestive insights for the church in a variety of cultural settings where upholding the distinctiveness of Christian identity is a challenge. For any such group of believers there is a constant temptation to assimilation, on the one hand, and to radical divorce, on the other. Peter counsels his audience that neither of these options should be embraced. Instead, the author seeks to address the realities of Christian identity and boundary maintenance directly by helping his churches answer questions regarding who they are in relation to Roman norms. Peter reflects on questions like: What are characteristic practices of a faithful Christian community? What strategies will help us to maintain them? If the Roman narrative is not the one to be embraced which one is and by what hermeneutic can we make sense of it so that it can be applied to our daily lives?[109]

As noted earlier, 1 Peter is written to "exiles and foreigners" (1:1; 2:11) scattered throughout the region that comprised the Roman provinces of northwest Asia Minor. His letter to the churches in this area is one of Christianity's earliest recorded attempts to address how Christians should live in a society that was often antithetical, and even hostile, to their faith. While we will explore several key themes in 1 Peter in the pages to come it is clear that what the author has in mind is to inculcate a true Christian identity in his audience. This has been an ongoing need in the church throughout its history and is crucial in the Canadian church today. As Scot McKnight observes;

> Peter's letter is a window into a situation that even throws light on our
> world; his letter is one of the first struggles in the church with society.
> It formed some of the conversation that continues to this day, and in
> our examination of it we will reap a great reward.[110]

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[109] Green, *1Peter*, 194.
[110] McKnight, *1 Peter,* 37. McKnight offers a good introduction to 1 Peter, see pp. 17–37.

There are at least two important ways in which 1 Peter is the ideal guide to contemporary thinking about the motif of exile and its application to today's Canadian church.

1. 1 Peter as Contextual-Universal Theology

There is no doubt that 1 Peter is a work of contextual theology in that it attempts to bring Christian theological concepts to bear on the situation of a particular audience in a pastoral way. What is of further significance for 1 Peter is that the author is creatively connecting ancient theological themes to a current context in a way that also speaks to situations apart from the one that he is directly addressing. That the author of 1 Peter sees his work as having application beyond the churches in Asia Minor that he specifically addresses is clear in 5:9 when he asserts that believers "throughout the world" are suffering the same kind of trials as his audience. In this way he not only encourages his current audience by joining them with common Christian experience, but he also consciously expands the message of his epistle to include any congregation that is dealing with life under the shadow of a cultural hegemony that wages an assault on the values and practices of gospel fidelity. As Joel Green writes;

> If Peter addresses his message to those living in Anatolia who suffer
> as Christians, then asserts that "the same kind of sufferings are being
> accomplished in the case of your family of believers throughout the
> world," then his message can hardly be constrained by Anatolian
> borders. And if he militates against the socioreligious conventions
> that govern everyday life among his audience, then, again, his
> message overflows the banks of a life determined by Roman order.[111]

This attempt to consciously address what Christian life is designed to be in the face of the powerful Roman Empire gives the letter a universal dimension that has long been acknowledged by scholars. John H. Elliott expresses the significance of Peter's

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[111] Green, *1 Peter*, 191.

contextual-universal theology as he observes that the specific context of the letter comes

out of a situation where the recipients were being discriminated against by the state

because of their religious convictions. He writes:

> This situation differentiates 1 Peter from the writings of Paul. It
> reflects the tension and conflict of the messianic movement not with
> mainstream Israel, as was the case with Paul, but with society at large
> and locates this letter in a new epoch in the history of the primitive
> church.[112]

The result is that while 1 Peter's insights contain highly pertinent information for their

original audience, they also begin to address what will be an ongoing challenge for the

church, that of responding to a culture that is increasingly noticing the church's presence

and is displaying certain displeasure about it. While it may not always be the case that

Christians will experience the same level of suffering for their faith as was Peter's

audience, there is certainly an increasing contemporary relevance for the Western church

which finds itself on the margins of Western and, therefore, clear points of connection.

First Peter is a "strikingly original" letter in that it presents a challenging discussion of

sociopolitical thought as it addresses the issues of Christians in a non-Christian society.[113]

Karen Jobes concurs when she writes concerning the universal appeal of Peter's

theme of living as Christians in a non-Christian society throughout church history:

> Many Christians around the world throughout these last two thousand
> years have experienced a similar negative reaction to their faith by the
> societies in which they live. Even today there are those who live in
> peril because of their faith in Christ. For them, the words of the apostle
> speak directly to their situation, providing consolation, encouragement
> and guidance.[114]

While some have tended to accentuate the difference between the cultural context

of Peter's first century audience and that of the twenty-first century western

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[112] Elliot, *1 Peter,* 103.
[113] Richard, "Honorable Conduct," 412.
[114] Jobes, *1 Peter,* 1.

experience,[115] the key to its renewal as a primary guide to Christian living in the West in general and Canada in particular is the demise of any kind of Christian consensus in the postmodern, post-Christian society that is the contemporary Western world.[116] This re-energizes the contextual possibilities for 1 Peter today as it invites investigation into the epistles' use of ancient theological wisdom for its day and the potential for its universal message to find fresh application as a guide to faithfulness in our own.

2. 1 Peter's Situation and Overall Aim

One of the critical questions regarding the epistle of 1 Peter is its authorship. Much debate has centreed on the likelihood of the letter having actually been written by the apostle Peter himself. While the question is an important one, the answer to it has no effect on the purpose of this study, which is to mine the wisdom offered in the epistle regardless of its author. In this study we will simply refer to the author as Peter and leave the particulars of the debate for other writers to explore.[117] Of greater significance for our own purposes is an understanding of Peter's audience and his intended aim for writing to them, because it is here that we can discover the relevance of Peter's writing in the first century and the situation in which Canadian Christians currently find themselves.

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[115] See Elliott, *The church as Counter-culture*, 179. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 18. Even Jobes expresses reservations about how 1 Peter may apply to Western Christianity, *1 Peter*, 2.

[116] Jobes' reservations about how 1 Peter applies to a culture where overt suffering as a result of one's faith is not a primary concern seem to resolve themselves inadvertently when she notes that the difference between ancient Rome and our day is that Roman culture was not founded on Judeo-Christian ethics. While it is true that contemporary Western culture was founded on these ethics they are quickly eroding and thus call for the kind of response 1 Peter offers. Later she explicitly acknowledges that the contextual theology of 1 Peter has contemporary relevance for even the West when she writes that, "the 'foreignness' of Christians increases as modern society accepts values and legalizes principles that are inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ." Jobes, *1 Peter*, 5.

[117] For a thorough overview of this discussion see Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 1–43. For a concise presentation of various views see Harner, *What are they Saying*, 29–33.

First Peter is addressed to a number of churches in Asia Minor (Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia and Bithynia). As with the authorship of the epistle, there is debate about the composition of Peter's audience. There is evidence that Peter wrote to a largely Jewish audience living in the region of Asia Minor. That Peter uses numerous references to the Old Testament (citing Leviticus, Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah—all on more than one occasion) and that his writing is thoroughly laced with Jewish scriptural language leads one to conclude that the communities he is addressing are populated by a number of Jewish converts. However, there is evidence that the audience that Peter has in mind also includes Gentiles, as his language refers to their former lifestyle (1:14, 18; 2:10; 4:3–4). It is highly unlikely that the behaviour described in these verses could be attributed to a Jewish audience and is therefore better understood as applying to people who are coming from a pagan background.[118]

What is clear from the text itself is that Peter's audience is somehow marginalized in relation to the overall culture in which they reside. While Karen Jobes has described this audience as a group of people who had been sent from Rome as colonists to help urbanize rural areas of the empire, and were thus both literal, physical exiles as well as spiritual ones, the reality is that we do not know exactly the makeup of 1 Peter's audience.[119] John Elliot sees Peter's audience as those who were by nature a marginalized people, but he describes them as likely a mixed group. Elliot writes:

> On the whole, the letter's content, its combination of Israelite and
> Hellenistic traditions, and mode of argumentation indicate that the
> author reckoned with a mixed audience—some of Israelite roots and
> some of pagan origin. This mixed ethnic composition would be
> consistent with the heterogeneity of the populations of Asia Minor in

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[118] For a full discussion of these options see Horrell, *1 Peter*, 47–48.

[119] For a description of Jobes' theory see her commentary, *1 Peter*, 28–41. For another perspective that offers a more literal understanding of the term "exile" in 1 Peter see McKnight, *Aliens and Exiles*, 381–83.

general and with the constituencies of the Christian communities
described throughout the NT.[120]

While the exact ethnic and religious nature of Peter's audience is an important

interpretative issue, as with the question of authorship, it is not essential for the purposes

of this study that we come to a firm decision on this question. It is enough for us that

their situation is painted as one that has them living on the fringes of their culture. It is

this connection that we need to explore further so that we can connect the situation of 1

Peter's recipients with our own.

Andrew Mbuvi has surveyed the way in which the motif of exile in 1 Peter has

been understood by scholars over the years.[121] While there is a divergence of opinion on

particulars there is consensus on the fact that exile is a key theme in the epistle. For many

commentators it is the controlling theme. The phrase employed by the writer to describe

the recipients is παροίκοι κάι παραπιδέμοι (aliens and exiles; 1:1; 2:11). As already

noted, the full implications of this terminology are open for exploration, but at the very

least it explicitly designates the recipients of the letter as those who are somehow on the

margins of their culture. Traditionally such language has been understood as carrying a

deeply spiritual connotation as it describes a people whose home is ultimately in heaven

but who dwell away from that home while in this world.[122] This dimension would

certainly seem to be in play for the author of 1 Peter with his obvious interest in

eschatological themes (1:4, 23; 4:7, 13; 5:4). There is also a clear spiritual connection

being made between Peter's audience and the people of Israel in terms of Israel's exilic

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[120] Elliott, *1 Peter*, 96–97. For further corroboration of this verdict see David Horrell, *1 Peter*, 48, who writes that knowing the exact make-up of these churches in beyond our ability to know for sure. However, there is evidence that indicates that it was a mix of Jewish converts and Gentile 'God Fearers.' For a full description of Elliott's sociological view of 1 Peter's audience see his *Home for the Homeless*.

[121] Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity*, 23–28.

[122] See Horell, *1 Peter*, 50–52 for an overview of the use of these terms.

experience (note also the use of the term "chosen" to describe Peter's readers, and the use

of "Babylon" in 5:13 as an inclusio to the exilic framing of the letter in 1:1).[123] However,

there is also a sociological dimension to the experience of exile in 1 Peter. What we can

deduce from the text itself is that the use of the terms παροίκοι κάι παραπιδέμοι reflects a

decided distance between the ideals of Peter's ecclesiastical community and those of the

dominant culture. As Elliot and Jobes have argued, it may be that members of Peter's

audience were already marginalized before they became Christians; however, what the

text makes absolutely clear is that it is in their becoming Christians that Peter's audience

has been drawn into an even deeper experience of marginalization and persecution. Thus

as Miroslav Volf notes, "Religious distance from the world is therefore always social

distance."[124] This is the crux of Peter's application of the exilic motif to his readers; they

are a people who are on the fringe of their society primarily because they have chosen to

follow Christ.

This decision will naturally put them at odds with Roman society, for as Joel

Green writes,

> Identity, corporate and personal, was formed in terms of the cultural
> narrative provided by Rome, with its twin emphasis on imperialism and
> colonization on the one hand and "peace" through "order" on the other.
> The narrative provided by Rome was totalizing: it absorbed all other
> cultural narratives, placed itself as the pinnacle of all histories, and
> harbored no competitors.[125]

By choosing to become disciples of Jesus, the people who made up Peter's

readership had chosen against the narrative of Rome and thus, for Peter, this made them

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[123] See Jobes, *1 Peter,* 14. Jobes notes that this connection served to remind readers that just as Babylonian exile marginalized the religion of Israel so too does the dominant society of Rome marginalize the religion of Peter's audience in their day.

[124] Volf, *Soft Difference,* 18. It should be noted that it is plain in 4:3 that at one time at least some members of 1 Peter's audience fit in with cultural norms quiet well.

[125] Green, *1 Peter,* 194.

exiles. Their primary identity as Christians placed them on the margins of society as a sociological group and also now included them in the company of those whose home would never be found in this world but was, rather, in the world to come. The term that may best capture Peter's church, and by way of application to today's Canadian church as well, is *sociospiritual exiles.*[126] Thus "exile" defines both the sociological and the spiritual experience of Peter's and today's Canadian church audience, and, allows for connections to be made between the canonical wisdom of 1 Peter and questions of faithful Christian living in Canada.

Thus, 1 Peter, along with the other biblical sources that we have cited, offer a biblical theology of exile that can guide those of us who, as Canadian Christians, are interested in working toward a renaissance in the Canadian church so that we can lead the church through its exile. This biblical theology can be further informed by the example of Second Temple Jews who modeled how to adapt their faith and preserve their identity through changing circumstances, all of which continued to leave them on the margins of the culture in which they dwelled.

The result is that 1 Peter offers a clear, though not comprehensive, strategy for ecclesiastical cultural engagement in exilic situations. As we will discover, the writer calls his readers to live culturally engaged, holy, missional lives within the context of a church that functions like an extended family. Simply put, Peter offers what Horrell calls "polite resistance." That is, he calls for good behavior that will draw the least amount of hostility and unwarranted persecution from those outside the church while at the same time allowing the church to draw clear limits around the degree of loyalty that it can offer

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[126] This term is employed by Jobes, *1 Peter,* 38.

to Rome.[127] In particular the household code (2:11—3:12) is designed to provide advice

to Christians for their daily lives. Peter's tone here, as throughout the epistle, is highly

positive and exhibits a constructive, rather than condemnatory attitude toward Roman

culture. It calls Christians to live distinctly but in a quiet, redemptive way that is not

concerned with overt opposition to Roman culture. As Richard puts it,

> The letter, more generally, insists that Christian life in a social context,
> despite innocent suffering, demands holy conduct, reverent fear, duty to
> society, to others, and especially to fellow believers (1:15–16; 2:11–
> 17), as they face what the author calls a test of the genuineness of their
> faith.[128]

There seems to be no desire in 1 Peter to call societal order into question, but this

takes place through quiet, counter-cultural living. There is, as we shall see, a deeply

embedded missional vision in Peter's theology of cultural engagement, however this

vision is accomplished through quiet acts of subversive piety joined with an overarching

participation in the general contours of the broader culture. Why is this? Miroslav Volf,

who characterizes Peter's approach to church-culture relations as a "soft difference,"

speculates;

> Is it because of the minority status of the first Christians? (How could
> we change anything?) Is it because of the expectation of Jesus'
> imminent coming? (4:7)? (why should we bother, when God's new
> creation is around the corner!) Is it because of a premodern
> understanding of social realities? (this is how things always were and
> how they always will be!) Possibly all three factors are relevant. In
> any case it seems clear 1 Peter accommodates to the existing social
> realities as well as calling them into question.[129]

Reflecting on 1 Peter's disinterest in adopting a theology that strives to bring the

heavenly Jerusalem to earth Volf captures the essence of Petrine thinking when he writes;

> It did not wish to impose itself or the Kingdom of God on the world,
> but to live in faithfulness to God and to the values of God's Kingdom,
> inviting others to do the same. It had no desire to do for others what

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[127] Horrell, *1 Peter,* 113.

[128] Richard, "Honorable Conduct," 419.

[129] Volf, "Soft Difference," 23.

> they did not want done for them. They had no covert totalitarian
> agenda. Rather, the community was to live an alternative way of life in
> the present social setting, transforming it, as it could from within. In
> any case, the community did not seek to exert social or political
> pressure, but to give public witness to a new way of life.[130]

As a result the strategy offered by Peter to his churches becomes a promising one

for the church in Canada today, just as it has been for churches in other similar contexts

throughout history. As John Elliott writes of 1 Peter's ability to resonate with churches in

challenging circumstances;

> It accounts for the regard in which this letter has been held, especially
> at moments in Christian history when the evangelical witness of the
> church and culture was sorely tested and when the clash between
> church and culture was particularly severe. It is thus not surprising that
> the letter has held a particular significance for "Diaspora Christian
> Communities" of all ages.[131]

The epistle of First Peter represents a conscious act of contextualization that can

speak to the church in Canada today because it so clearly articulates a theology of

cultural engagement for a marginalized church. Some of the ways the epistle does this is

reflective of exilic themes that we have already seen in the Old Testament in particular

and Second Temple Judaism as well. A brief survey of these categories and how 1 Peter

employs them will lay the foundation for our use of them in the next chapter.

3. Creative Theological Reflection

The epistle of 1 Peter follows in the tradition of the Old Testament and Second

Temple authors who were thoroughly engaged in the task of interpreting the faith for

their particular epoch in time. This work of interpretation was a necessary task in each

instance as the changing context demanded a new understanding of how the faith should

be practiced and also in some cases what it now meant. This was, of course, a significant

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[130] Volf, "Soft Difference," 20.
[131] Elliott, *1 Peter,* 152.

issue for the early church, who now interpreted Old Testament texts and their new religious experience through a Christological lens. For Peter, who consciously understood his audience's current life setting as in exile, re-interpreting former ways of understanding was part of what would sustain the community in its exilic life.

It is telling that there are eleven specific Old Testament references in 1 Peter, and several other potential allusions to Old Testament texts. This is a significant number in comparison with other New Testament epistles of similar length.[132] This demonstrates the author's interest in working with the traditions out of which the church was born. Thus, 1 Peter presents us with a template for the ongoing work of creative theological reflection that the current church in exile must engage in if it is to properly practice and understand the faith with which it has been entrusted with. This is an activity that must always be done with a certain amount of care, but it is an activity that defines exilic existence for God's people and, for that reason, is necessary. We can see several places in 1 Peter where its author is clearly engaging in fresh thinking about the faith of his church. The following examples are not meant to be prescriptive for contemporary circumstances, as we have our own issues that need to be addressed; rather, these are illustrative of how 1 Peter engages his culture theologically.

i. The Church and Israel

In 1:10–12 Peter makes it clear that scripture must be read christologically when he writes that the prophets were ultimately pointing to Christ and the time of the church when they wrote about the sufferings of Christ long ago. Having establishing this perspective, Peter then demonstrates how such a reading informs the identity of the

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[132] For instance in Ephesians there are four, Philippians contains one, Colossians and 1 John none. Of the shorter epistles only Galatians surpasses 1 Peter with fourteen.

church, namely that, the church is directly in the plotline of scripture and it is the Holy

Spirit who guided the prophets and the formation of the church. This is confirmed in

2:4–10 when Peter identifies Jesus ("the living stone"), who is specially chosen by God

as the foundation of the church who "also, like living stones" (v. 5) are "being built into a

spiritual house" (v. 5). Peter's vision of the biblical story thus consists of three

movements: Israel, Jesus, church. The church is now the place/people where God's work

is being done most specifically as it continues the legacy of Israel and Christ. In 2:9

Peter employs language that is intentionally reminiscent of Exod 19, where God re-

establishes Israel as his particular people. There God declares to Israel, "out of all

nations you will be my treasured possession…you will be for me a kingdom of priests

and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). In 1 Pet 2:9 the writer declares the church to be, "a

chosen people, a holy nation, God's special possession…" The church is of the same

nature as Israel, it receives God's affection, and demonstrates his purposes in the same

way that Israel did/does. Further, the paradoxical description of his audience as chosen

and exiled (1:1) offers a strong linkage between the church, Israel and Jesus for this

seeming dichotomy of being chosen and yet exiled re-occurs in the stories of all three.

As Joel Green notes; "this is the story of Israel. This is the story of Jesus. And, we now

discover, this is the ongoing story of God's people."[133] Peter's theological construction

of the church as a continuation of Israel is not unique to this author, for it was an integral

part of the theological reflection that was taking place throughout the early church (Eph

2:21–22; 1 Cor 3:16; John 20:21–23). However, just because it is not original to 1 Peter

does not lessen the importance of our recognizing that Peter is making a bold theological

move that caused a great deal of controversy in the early church (see Acts 10–11 and 15).

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[133] Green, "Living as Exiles," 317.

Yet, this radical act of theological innovation gave the church an identity that legitimately rooted it in God's ongoing story of activity in the world. Further, it implied to its audience that by looking back to its ancestry the church could move forward in its participation in the ongoing work of God in the world. This would mean that it is an intrinsic truth that a significant part of that story was the story of exile and that the church's experience of exile gave them a common bond with their spiritual ancestors.

ii. Establishing a Separate Ecclesiastical identity

As we have seen in a previous section the authors of the Old Testament worked with characters and events in Israel's past, infusing them with meaning by placing them against the backdrop of a foreign empire and demonstrating their heroism and piety by juxtaposing them with the mores of the pagan culture in which they found themselves. Their success as Jews living in a foreign land was intended to have an identity shaping effect on the recipients of their story. Peter follows suit by seeking to establish the identity of his church on distinctly non-Roman terms, and by casting a vision that tells his audience that faithfulness to Christ is always more important than following the behaviour of their cultural hosts.

Joel Green summarizes the worldview of the Roman Empire when he writes,

> The ideology of the empire was carried through its armies and inculcated through its religion. Caesar was savior of the world, the epoch of the empire was the age of salvation, and the life record of the emperor was good news. Caesar owed his own rule to the beneficence of the gods. The glue of the Roman empire was worship-worship of the Roman emperor as at least son of god if not as god and of *Roma,* the goddess of Rome; and the matrices of honor and obligation that threaded their way down from the gods though the emperor to the elite and eventually, to the lowest echelons of society.[134]

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[134] Green, *1 Peter,* 285.

Peter's audience is encouraged not to identify themselves with Rome, but with Christ, and even further back with Israel. They are not citizens of Rome, but citizens of the kingdom, who are called to present themselves as an alternative society. In fact they are not really citizens of this world at all, they are exiles and foreigners (2:11), and so have a very different approach to life in the empire. Their identity is shaped by rejecting the ways of the empire, which at one time were the ways that they adopted for themselves (4:3–4), and embracing their identity as being in Christ (4:1–2). This is in no way intended to segregate Christians from the world any more than Daniel or Esther segregated themselves from the empires of their day, or how Jonah reminds us that segregation is not God's ideal at all. Instead it is to draw firm boundaries between what it meant to live a life centreed in Christ, versus what it meant to affiliate with Rome.

Further, Peter seeks to inculcate in his audience a view that faithful living according to God's principles will lead to "success." He posits that if they live good lives before the pagans, the pagans will ultimately recognize their good deeds and glorify God (2:12), unbelieving husbands will come to faith (3:1–2), and those who speak maliciously against their good behaviour will be ashamed of their slander (3:16). This offers the Diasporic advice that as the church establishes its identity and faithfully lives out God's intentions they will ultimately win out over pagan practices. This kind of bold assertion offers a creative re-visioning of ancient theological perspectives for Peter's contemporary audience, and echoes the wisdom of Daniel and Esther, who acted faithfully and were rewarded for their behaviour.

iii. Marriage

Another concrete area of life with which Peter engages with is the marriage relationship. Here Peter works subversively with a foundational institution of Roman society in order to demonstrate how the Christian gospel affected traditional understandings, and demanded a fresh interpretation within the context in which his church found itself.

Peter's instruction on marriage is set in the context of his section on the household code and the epistle's overall call for submission in human relationships. For Peter, self-subordination is an act of obedience to God, holiness, and witness. It is also a "free" expression offered volitionally in response to Christ (2:16–17). Thus, a wife's submission to her husband, while certainly culturally conditioned, is a proper act of Christian belief in the human relationship of marriage (the phrase "in the same way" [3:1] serves as a transitional clause). However, from here Peter gently subverts the traditional view of marriage in a number of ways.

First, in the Roman world the husband's religion was the household religion and a wife was to adopt that religion if it was different from the one of the home that she came from.[135] Contrary to this, Peter certainly does not encourage wives to follow their husband's religion, for it is clearly implied that they will remain Christians, and live as Christians before their unbelieving husband. This is a clear encouragement to independence, with the further encouragement that through their free act of submission they may even be able to win their husbands to Christianity. This makes their submission a highly subversive act that has the potential for the wife to lead the husband in religious

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[135] For an overview of first century views on women and wives see Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive*, 95–109, and Brown, "Silent Wives," 399–401.

choice rather than the other way around.[136] To put an even finer point on it, Peter, once again using the transitional clause "in the same way" calls husbands to treat their wives with consideration and respect and as co-heirs in the "gracious gift of life" (3:7). In the first century context such honour was typically mono-directional, flowing from those with lower status to those with higher status. Given this reality, the call for a husband to honour his wife would have struck a counter-cultural chord. Such behaviour on the part of a husband toward his wife would have questioned the status systems that were assumed and defended in first century Greco-Roman culture.[137] Even further, the author states that for husbands to neglect this kind of behaviour is to run the risk of their prayers being hindered (3:7). This reflects the overall theology of 1 Peter that the "weak" are the ones who are chosen by God. Therefore Christian husbands should be mindful of such an eventuality and treat their wives in the same way that God treats the church.

This is a further example of how Peter seeks to reflect creatively on how the theology of the gospel can function in the Roman society that his church resides in as exiles. Peter's reflections offer us insight into how the church constantly must be doing this kind of work and employing a progressive hermeneutic that allows the tenets of the gospel to find fresh ways of expression. This means that we approach scripture not as a series of facts that only need to be applied correctly, with as little flexibility as possible so as not to violate the "true meaning" of the text. Rather, we must see that the text of

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[136] Both Brown, "Silent Wives," 400, and Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive*, 109, surmise that it is quite likely that believing wives may have been facing coercion and even persecution from their unbelieving husbands. Brown writes, "The reassurance not to be alarmed by such intimidation, coupled with the missional thrust of the wives submission, would have provided a subversive element to the otherwise traditional contours to this part of the household code," Brown, "Silent Wives," 400.

[137] Brown, "Silent Wives," 400–401.

scripture can be read differently in different contexts, and that the spirit of the text has human transformation, and not just information, as an ultimate goal.

4. Holiness

Just as holiness became a central response for Israel to their exile, in the same way it plays a central role in Peter's letter. As with ancient Israel, holiness is an identity issue for the first century churches to which Peter writes. The lives they live are to be distinct from the broader culture and will define them as those who are attached to Christ.

Holiness in 1 Peter is a call for the church to live out their salvation identity. That is, as those who now are in Christ and are designated as God's people (2:9) the epitome of their human vocation is to be holy as God is holy (1:15–16). This occurs as Peter's audience no longer "conforms to the evil desires they had when they lived in ignorance" (1:14). This connects deeply with the same call issued to Israel and represents the fundamental calling of God's people in all times, to represent him in the world by portraying his "otherness" to those around them. While this call to holiness included individual dimensions, its real potency is manifest in its communal expression.[138]

As Joel Green observes, the primary text that Peter seems to have in mind is Lev 19, which is a thorough exposition of communal holiness that encompasses a vast array of relational and life settings. One can see in the call to holiness in Lev 19 a correlation with Peter's call to be holy in "all you do" (1:15). The chapter in Leviticus covers topics such as family life (vv. 3, 32), religious loyalty (vv. 3, 4, 8, 12, 26–31), care for the poor (vv. 9–10), worker's rights (v. 13), social compassion (v. 14), integrity in justice (v. 15), neighbourliness (vv. 16–18), sexual integrity (vv. 20–22, 29), racial equality (vv. 33–34),

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[138] Green, "Living as Exiles," 322–24.

and business ethics (vv. 35–36).[139]   God's purpose in the world is not the creation of

holy individuals so much as a holy community, a people whose very existence in the

world is a testimony to his rule. First Peter implies that this is the foundation for the way

in which the church will demonstrate the distinctiveness of its God to its surrounding

culture.

Tied directly to this premise is Peter's understanding of the church as a creation of

the Holy Spirit and its ongoing life as remaining dependent on the Spirit's work. This is

especially true in terms of its development as a holy community. In 1 Pet 1:2 he is clear

that the church is formed through the "sanctifying work of the Spirit." Further, the

church is formed by the preaching of the gospel which is empowered by the Holy Spirit

(1:12). When Christians are insulted for the name of Christ, he writes, the "Spirit of

glory and of God" rests on them (4:14). Thus, the Spirit is the agent of church formation

and as its members yield to the Spirit his work in them continues.[140]

i. Holiness as engagement

The foundational call to be holy as God is holy is all inclusive. Peter adds the

words "in all you do" (1:15) to indicate that the holiness he has in mind is a holiness of

engagement with all aspects of life. Peter does not counsel withdrawal from the world as

if holiness cannot stand the pressures of secular life. First Peter positions its overarching

call to holiness in 1:15 on the practicality of ongoing life choices such as, submission to

every human authority (2:13), slaves submitting to masters (2:18), wives submitting to

husbands (3:1), husbands honouring their wives (3:7), not repaying evil with evil or insult

with insult, rather repaying evil with blessing (3:9), offering hospitality to one another

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[139] Green, *1 Peter,* 44.

[140] Green, "Living as Exiles," 320–21.

(4:9), and elders shepherding the flock (5:2). Each of these ideals assumes that the church will remain engaged with the mainstream of their culture. First Peter's vision is that holiness is to be worked out in the realities of this world.

ii. Holiness as Missional

Peter's vision of holiness has an explicitly missional quality to it. In 2:12 the audience is instructed to "live such good lives among the pagans that though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Later he instructs wives to submit to their husbands so that those with unbelieving husbands will be won over through the quality of their wife's life (3:2). Thus, for Peter the call to holiness is an essential part of the churches witness to the gospel and their evangelistic potency in their cultural setting.

iii. Holiness as relational

The relational aspect of Christian holiness is a consistent theme throughout the New Testament and it is emphasized in 1 Peter as much as anywhere else. At its core, 1 Peter emphasizes love as the centre of relational life (1:22; 3:8; and 4:8). Further, 4:7–11 emphasizes specific behaviours such as hospitality and serving others as reflections of holiness. Each of these is intrinsically linked to relationships within the body of Christ. Also, submission to others is a central aspect of the relational holiness that Peter espouses. As we have seen Peter provides specific applications of this principle to particular relationships, but ultimately his audience is instructed to submit "to everyone" (2:17). For Peter, holiness is established and demonstrated in human relationships.

Further to this, the key concept that Peter espouses, is that holiness is an embodiment of the community's life in Christ and as God's peculiar people. In this sense holiness is not offered in a way that negatively condemns that which is not in keeping with God's intentions, rather, Peter's vision of holiness is positive in that it is offered as an act of identification with Jesus and faithfulness in following his ways (2:21). For Peter the church is not against the world, in that it does not express holiness by reciprocating the world's animosity toward it, nor does the church demonstrate holiness by condemning the ways of the world with self righteous living and rhetoric. Instead it is to be different because the church is in a relationship with a God who is different, and they are simply trying to stay in step with his ways in the world.

5. Mission

First Peter offers a template for exilic living as it exhibits a thoroughly missional perspective to its audience in terms of how they are to function as the church in their particular cultural circumstances. Just as Israel needed to see that despite its exile God was still calling the people to be his witnesses. The recipients of 1 Peter are also invited to see that their social marginalization in no way negates their calling to fulfill the commission that Jesus gave to the church to be his witnesses.

i. Mission and the identity of the Church

In 2:4–10, Peter applies Israel's identity to the church and with that comes Israel's vocation to mediate the presence and purpose of God. In 2:9 Peter is concerned with the priestly function of the church and equates their "chosenness" with their vocation as a people who are chosen to proclaim the praises of God to the dark world that they have been called out of. This vision of the church functioning in a priestly way implies that

just as the priests of the sacrificial system acted as mediators who helped the people come to God, so now the church functions in a similar way on behalf of the people outside of the church. This vision, as we have seen in earlier sections, is in keeping with the scriptural and exilic identity of God's people. They are a people who have been established by God to be a "blessing to all nations" (Gen. 12:3) and whose core identity is as a community of peace for the world to see.

First Peter does not present a vision for great social change. Instead, in keeping with the Old Testament writers, it envisions an alternative community that offers a witness to the world through its collective life.[141] First Peter's modest, yet powerful approach is epitomized in 2:12 when Peter writes, "Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." For Peter the church is not called to overthrow the culture and its norms, but instead to subvert them. The church functions as a witness by living lives that reflect integrity and righteousness so that even if they draw derision from some, eventually their lives will have an effect that brings even their critics to see God through their actions. This is a work of subversion that does not seek to conquer culture but rather seeks to live differently within it.[142]

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[141] See Seland, "Resident Aliens in Mission," 588–89. In his study of 1 Peter as an epistle that can be characterized as "missional" Seland concludes that Peter's vision is for "a church representing God and his gospel in daily life, thus participating in the works of God in this world" "Resident Aliens in Mission," 589.

[142] Scot McKnight in his study of Jewish mission in the Second Temple period would suggest that First Peter's approach to cultural subversion continues established patterns of cultural engagement. He notes that "Gentiles converted to Judaism through a variety of means, especially through the good deeds of Jews," McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles,* 117. McKnight's comments demonstrate that missional identity was rooted in a commitment to live faithfully as God's distinct people.

ii. Mission through Relationships

The missional identity of the church as described in 1 Peter is played out primarily in the context of social relationships characterized by mutual submission. Again, as we have already considered, this specifically includes submission to "every human authority" (2:13), slaves to masters (2:18), and wives to husbands (3:1), but it is also manifest in the tone of other instructions that Peter offers to his audience. They are to "show proper respect to everyone" (2:17), implying that while respect for Caesar and other authorities is expected, it is also expected that a Christian believer will show respect in reverse order as well (i.e. one with authority will respect one without authority). Husbands are to treat wives as co-heirs of God's grace (3:7). Relationships are to be characterized by love, humility, compassion (3:8) and mutual service (4:10). In his instructions to church elders, Peter appeals to them on the basis of his place as "a fellow elder" rather than as an apostle (5:1), indicating an egalitarian view of congregational life. These behaviours are designed to embody a quality of relational life that reflects the distinctive character of the church. This continues to reflect the overall philosophy of the epistle that by living holy lives people will be influenced for Christ (2:12).

This emphasis on submission and its missional potency is grounded in the submissiveness of Jesus, who acted in submission and suffered as a result, but whose actions result in salvation for the world (2:20–25). The church's submission therefore resembles that of Christ's and holds the same redemptive potential that his did.

iii. Mission Through Proclamation

While the primary evangelistic strategy offered by Peter involves non-verbal

action, in 3:15 he counsels the use of words. His readers are to give

> an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the
> hope that you have in you. But do this with gentleness and
> respect. Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak
> maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be
> ashamed of their slander. (3:15b–16)

Here Peter continues to encourage a subversive missional engagement that

employs testimony, rooted in personal piety and offered in the (fairly submissive) form of

answering an enquirer's questions with gentleness and respect. Nonetheless, it further

demonstrates the seriousness with which Peter takes mission for his church of exiles.

Despite their position as a marginalized minority, they are still called to declare their faith

when given the opportunity.

6. Eschatology

The eschatological orientation of 1 Peter is evident from the opening section,

where Peter encourages his readers by reminding them that they have been born into an

"inheritance that can never perish…(and is) kept in heaven for you" (1:4). Later in

chapter 1, Peter instructs his audience to keep their minds and hope fixed on the grace

that will come to them "when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming" (1:13). In 4:3–5

Peter reminds his audience that those who live counter to the gospel will have to give an

account for their actions to the one "who is ready to judge the living and the dead." In

4:7 he reminds his audience that "the end is near." Also, he calls them to endure

suffering as a way of identifying with Christ so that "you may be overjoyed when his

glory is revealed" (4:13). In 5:4 the churches are encouraged by Peter's assurance that

they will receive a "crown of glory" when the "chief shepherd appears." Finally, as the

epistle closes, Peter offers words that speak explicitly of the eternal quality of his audience's participation with Christ and point to the hope of a coming, eschatological restoration.

> And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory
> in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself
> restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. (5:10)

Peter uses both spatial (heaven) and temporal (end of time) metaphors to express his eschatological views. New Testament writers use a number of metaphors to express the mystery of eschatological hope. Along with the idea of "heaven" as a distinct dwelling place, the concept of a "new earth" signals hope for the redemption (or renovation) of the existing creation. All of these are valid New Testament concepts, each of which captures the classic New Testament tension between "now" and "not yet." In the "now," his audience is experiences the reality of being God's people who are called to live as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, experiencing a taste of it in their life together. However, living in the "now" also means that they face the distress of trials, the reality of marginalization, and the challenge of engaging in the necessity of mission. But there is a 'not yet" that is to come when Christ returns and provides his church with an eternal inheritance, a full salvation and ultimate vindication from the scorn of the world. Now is a time of perseverance, but when the church receives its eternal reward, everything that first appeared hard and harsh will then appear brief and light. This perspective is one that Peter seeks to engender in his churches. For Peter, this should not be understood as just plodding along until Christ sets us free from the dreariness of this world. Rather, it is offered as a backdrop against which to live life in this world. Thus, eschatological hope encourages the pursuit of holiness, mission and continued contextualization of the faith

because they are things that help to keep us in tune with the God of eternity and give meaning to our current "not yet" existence.

In many ways this was a theological continuation of Second Temple ideology that, as we have seen, also emphasized a future hope for release from exile. It also legitimizes the motif for today in the sense that it reminds us that as God's people the ultimate end of exile is always eschatological, and until then we live in a time where we are never fully "at home." However, for the suffering church in Peter's day it is not hard to understand how his emphasis on living with an eschatological vision would have been highly relevant to his readers, acting as an encouragement to help them persevere in the midst of their exilic experience.

VII. Conclusion

In this section we have sought to establish that the concept of exile was decisive in shaping the character of Judaism in the Second Temple period. An exilic perspective can be identified within a significant segment of the religious literature of this period, as well as in terms of its effect on the development of Israel's religious doctrine and practices.

Further we have considered how an exilic outlook influenced the ministry of Jesus and, thus, that of the early church. We have briefly considered the evidence that the early church continued to appropriate the motif of exile and thus saw itself as a people who were still living in exile. They recognized that the deliverance of Jesus was something for them to engage in and enjoy now, but it would not be fully experienced until God acted in final judgement and ushered in a new age. Finally we have explored

the particular relevance of First Peter to churches, such as those in Canada that find themselves on the margins of society.

If it is true that the Christian church of the first century continued to see itself as continuing in exile, then it is appropriate for the contemporary church to share in this perspective. Certainly, the way in which the Jewish people of the Second Temple period theologized and adapted their faith to the circumstances of living under the influence of foreign conquerors is informative for any people who are in a position that, while sociologically distinct, is not theologically dissimilar. In the context of a North American culture dominated by consumerism, materialism, affluence and a growing agnosticism the church needs models and resources to inform its existence as a marginalized people. The example and resources of ancient Israel, Second Temple Jews and the early church provide these very things for us. Just as Israel survived life under a regime that was unfriendly to their faith so too do we have to find ways to survive in a culture whose perspectives and practices are not congruent with those of fidelity to the gospel of the kingdom. Learning from and adopting some of their approaches may in fact provide the contemporary church with resources that will aid in its own exilic existence.

Rather than succumbing to the challenges of our own exile, we can choose to take another approach altogether and seek the road of a Canadian church *renaissance* and attempt to bring renewal to the church. Bringing this about may in fact be aided by our current cultural reality of living on the social margins just like Second Temple Jews and first century Christians did. Being moved to the margins by more powerful forces has a way of shaking people's perspective on what they are doing and why. It causes a re-evaluation of belief and practice that potentially can bring about appropriate changes.

Accordingly we may draw on the insights of Old Testament, Second Temple, and New Testament literature in order to understand the nature of theological hope, and in order to formulate strategies of resistance, even while we acknowledge the difference in theological perspectives occasioned by the Messiah's having delivered creation from divine judgment and inaugurated the reign of God. Perhaps many of the struggles and the perspectives that developed in the time of our ancestors in the faith can still serve as foundational principles for us to follow. Further their wrestling with issues of interpretation, their willingness to respond to their circumstances with new ways of understanding and practicing their faith, their contextualization of ancient Judaism in new environs, could provide us with the liberty and courage that we need to do the same in our exilic context here in North America.

Exile as a lens for understanding Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Christianity is not only an appropriate way of perceiving the historic situation; it is also a potent resource for helping us to understand our own. The implications of a perspective like this are the concern of our next section.

Chapter Four

The Need for a Canadian Practical Theology of Exile

I. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the cumulative wisdom of the material

that we have surveyed in the first three chapters and offer ideas as to how it can be

applied. Ultimately this chapter will provide a broad theological framework that will

help us to think theologically about our social situation and offer some practical

proposals as to how we can apply these theological perspectives to the life and work of

the church in Canada today. In order to do this effectively we must once again clarify

some aspects of the methodology that is being used and further define how we are to

understand our own exile. As we have acknowledged throughout, there are important

differences in how exile is presented in the three time periods that we have examined.

In the Old Testament, exile was primarily understood as punishment for Israel's

unfaithfulness as covenant partner with Yahweh. But, while the blessing-curse theology

of sin and punishment was the primary way that Israel interpreted its exile, it was not the

only interpretation. Theological reflection on their plight also included hope of

restoration, which led to consideration of Israel's call to holiness, as a witness to other

nations. In the Second Temple period, as the experience of living under foreign rule

became the norm, new theological ideas begin to emerge that place less emphasis on

punishment and instead focus on ways to understand exile as an ongoing reality that will

only be remedied in an eschatological age yet to come. In the New Testament the

understanding of exile continues to evolve and is presented as the church's natural

identity. That is, the church is by nature a people living away from their ultimate

eschatological home. The Old Testament ideas of sin and punishment are gone, as Christ's delivering work has brought them to an end. Nonetheless, the church is an alien people in this world who live as exiles until their final, eschatological deliverance takes place. While developmentally related, these three interpretations of exile as punishment, exile as provisional discipline, and exile as eschatological hope need to be distinguished in terms of their potential relevance for our day.

Into this three-way conversation we now bring a fourth partner, the Canadian church. This voice acts as an interlocutor, asking questions about what the other three participants in the conversation have to offer that might be helpful. There are ways in which the exilic experience of each of these groups is distinct and yet there are also ways, as we will see, in which they intersect or overlap. The particular location and circumstances of the fourth partner cannot be overlooked, but its goal is to find ways in which the experience of exile articulated by the other three conversation partners may converge with its own and thus offer direction to it.

This is the work of Biblical Theology in concert with Practical/Pastoral theology which, as pointed out in the introduction, is the overall intention of this study. In order to do this we must properly discern how to work with these various voices so as to bring them into conversation responsibly and with maximum effectiveness. As we now come to apply the voices of Scripture, also considering what Second Temple literature can add, we are inevitably led to recognize that while each voice has a contribution to make, their roles are not necessarily equal. As this dissertation is a work of Biblical Theology, canonical voices will be given a larger role to play than the voice of Second Temple literature. They will provide the discussion with its overall framework and act as primary

witnesses. The Second Temple material will help to inform our conversation where possible, but will not occupy the same place as the Old and New Testament voices do. As noted in chapter three, the primary way that the Second Temple materials are used here is to illustrate the ongoing exilic identity with which the Jewish people lived, and how it guided their theological reflection on their faith. While this is certainly informative, it is not authoritative in the same way as the canonical witness.

Further, in doing Biblical Theology, we must recognize the diversity of scripture and its "untamed witness."[1] As already noted in the introduction, hearing and trying to synthesize various texts is a challenging, but legitimate approach to the discipline of Biblical Theology.[2] Further, as Christian interpreters, we must be careful to note that our understanding of Old Testament, and Second Temple, documents emerges only in relation to the person of Jesus and the theology of the New Testament. This means that we hear the conversation through ears that are intentionally attuned to the interpretive perspective provided by New Testament texts. While this does not de-legitimize the distinct voice of other texts, it must influence our appropriation of them. Mark Boda, reflecting on Biblical Theology and the challenge of applying the Old Testament in light of the work of Christ and the Spirit, writes,

> Any Old Testament redemptive act or revelatory insight will
> contribute towards and/or receive greater clarity in and
> through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. After the Christian
> interpreter has discerned the theological significance of an Old
> Testament passage and/or an Old Testament theological
> theme, she or he must reflect on the significance the Christ-
> event makes for this passage and/or theme.[3]

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[1] Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 107.
[2] For more insight into this topic see Boda, *A Severe Mercy*, 10.
[3] Boda, "Biblical Theology and the Old Testament," forthcoming.

This means that as we enter into the conversation depicted above, we enter into a genuine dialogue that allows each voice to speak, but we ultimately integrate the wisdom that is discovered as Christian interpreters who process exilic themes through a Christotelic lens.[4]

As we proceed, we need to consider more closely the way that we understand exile as it applies to our current context. In particular, we need to acknowledge that whatever its social context, the Church's experience of "exile" will include both socio-political and theological dimensions, and that far from being identical, these two perspectives exist in tension with one another. To begin with, we must embrace the New Testament idea that the Church is by nature a community in theological exile, a colony of spiritual exiles whose "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). As the writer to the Hebrews explains, "they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16). The Church, if it is faithful to its true calling, will always be somewhat of a stranger and an alien in this world (cf. Eph 2:19). On these grounds, however, we must conclude that the experience of the Church (whether in Canada or elsewhere) differs significantly from that of Israel, who interpreted their exile as the result of divine punishment. The Christian Church derives its own theological identity from the claim that in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins" (Eph 1:7), and thus concludes that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

However, the fact that Jesus assures his followers that their transgressions are forgiven does not exclude the possibility that he may nonetheless impose a measure of

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[4] This term is used by Boda in "Biblical Theology and the Old Testament," forthcoming. Also, Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Inspiration,* esp. ch. 4.

discipline on them. In the New Testament, Heb 12:5–6 reminds us that God disciplines those whom he loves. Further, the author calls the Church to "endure hardship as discipline" (12:7), and later he says that discipline, "produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11). The book of James alludes to the idea that God allows trials as a way of refining his people. Jas 1:2–4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." First Peter begins by offering its exilic audience a similar perspective: although they are shielded by God's power they currently "have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:6–7). If God's power is shielding his people it must be that the trials of exile are something that he is allowing so that the Church might be refined and grow in its faith.

In this sense, then, the Canadian Church has much in common theologically with both Jews and Christians of the Second Temple period, both of whom interpreted their social and political situations in terms of divine testing and discipline. However, these sociological dimensions need to be spelled out more carefully. A primarily theological (and specifically eschatological) sense of exile will obviously have important social and political implications. It will mean that the church cannot give ultimate allegiance to the social and political institutions of its day. As stated in the introduction, ours is in some measure necessarily a social "exile," an experience of being sociologically de-centred for

theological reasons, located on the margins of our social context by virtue of a distinctive Christological identity. It is at this juncture that the tension between social and theological definitions of exile becomes especially important for understanding the situation of the Canadian church. By failing to appreciate the *theological* imperative of exile, Canadian churches have (as we saw in chapter 1), failed to maintain a sufficiently distinctive *social* identity. As we consider some of the realities of contemporary culture as presented in chapter one, we can see that in many cases Christians have been just as guilty of over-consuming, or participating in oppressive economic policies, as anyone else in our day. We have voted for governments whose agenda was the preservation of a capitalist system that paid little attention to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised. We have lost a distinctive voice for justice because our habits have been little different from those of other Canadians. Just like other Canadian institutions, the Church has been rife with sex scandals, financial indiscretions, and policies that reflected colonial attitudes. The Church has sometimes assumed that its voice should have pride of place in the ethnically and spiritually changing landscape of Canadian culture and that new Canadians should have to adapt their ways to traditionally Canadian (Christian) views. The Church has often lacked a missional vision that pushes it outside its own comfort zone and into genuine engagement with those currently outside the fold. Indeed, by striving to be at the centre of Canadian culture, we conformed to culture in a way that ultimately denied our true identity as a people who are not at home in this world because they belong to God.

If, then, a forgetfulness or denial of our theological identity as exiles has led us to avoid any sense of social distinctiveness (even if this was motivated by a desire to build a

"Christian" society), a renewed awareness of social dislocation and marginalization can lead to a renewed understanding of theological exile. As we have seen, our culture has in many ways deliberately rejected the Christian gospel and moved toward a secular vision of life. And the Canadian church may be correct to interpret this experience of social dislocation in terms of divine discipline. Whether viewed as an active disciplinary measure, or as God passively allowing us to reap what we have sown, this more recent social "exile" appears, theologically, as a form of divine discipline for our failure to live as a distinct people.

There are thus elements of continuity, though not necessarily exact correlations, between God's manner of working in the past with Israel, his ongoing work with the Church in the first century, and the situation of the Canadian Church today. The social or political experience of exile serves a source of theological re-orientation: however distinctive their respective situations, this is an important connecting point for all four partners. Again, each voice in this conversation is unique, each era is different, and the theological perspective of each partner is distinct, yet all four are called to embrace their exile as a time of refinement and re-orientation. In each case exile causes them to consider the imperative of spiritual fidelity which is at the core of the call to be God's people in every age. Therein lies the hope of exile. Exile calls for a renewal of identity and practice and God's gracious patience invites his people to discern the way in which they are to respond to exile so that they might be restored to a more faithful expression in their relationship with him.

In sum, exile offers a rich and nuanced perspective from which to interpret our historical experience as the Church in Canada. It informs our social reality as a

marginalized people, our theological identity as the church and our spiritual experience of God's re-orienting work among us.

In this chapter we will make a number of thematic connections between the exilic experience of God's people in the past and our own experience as God's people in the present. These themes are what help us to define what faithfulness in exile has looked like in previous ages and now help to define what it looks like today. We will look at some aspects of the prayer language of the Old Testament and consider its application in today's context. We will consider how in the Old Testament, Second Temple and New Testament periods exile brought the community into theological reflection on their faith and its practices and how our exile calls for a similar kind of reflection. We will look at how for Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament, exile called for a renewal of identity through holiness and mission and how those ideas are key for the Church in Canada today as well. Finally, we will consider how hope in exile is sustained and restoration will ultimately come through God's promise of a future age when he will finally restore all things. This was the hope of Second Temple Jews and New Testament Christians.

These themes represent the significant contours of the intersection that takes place within the conversation that this chapter seeks to capture. As we, the Church in Canada, ask the questions, our ancestors in the faith offer their wisdom to us so that we might not only survive our exile, but be renewed by it.

II. Exilic Speech: Speaking the Language of Exile

Can the prayer language of Babylonian exile be employed in the current context of the Canadian church? As Israel sensed God's absence in their particular

circumstances, Christian experience in a postmodern Canada sometimes causes us to wonder where God is and what he is up to in our time. Although the genesis and theological character of our own cultural dislocation has distinctions from that of ancient Israel, that nation's practical circumstances and ways of responding may prove instructive for our day. As a first step, the language of exile may offer direction and nurture to sustain Canadian faith just as it did in Israel. Brueggemann offers this hopeful insight:

> It is my thought, then, that the *traditions of exile* in the Old Testament— remarkably rich, generative, and imaginative—might be a resource and indeed perhaps the only resource of speech and imagination that can move us *under denial to reality* and *beyond despair into possibility.*[5]

Specifically, the contours of lament, penitence, and hope provide resources that help us to begin forging a response to exile today.

1. Employing Lament

Lament as a spiritual practice, particularly corporate lament, is not regularly practiced in many sectors of today's church. We have become accustomed to sanding down the rough edges of our faith. Whether it is an embrace of a triumphalistic theology that refuses to acknowledge defeat or accept weakness, our therapeutic and instant culture that wants to have pain taken away as quickly as possible, or a fear of confronting the idea of God's absence (or even anger), we do not generally do lament well. Thus, we are faced with many questions when it comes to any thought of engaging real lamentation. How does one lament? What do we have to lament? Do we really have much to feel sad about? Is there any way that the prayer language of lament could be utilized for our mutual benefit in our current context?

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[5] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory,* 61 (italics original).

Where, then, are the lines of continuity between 587 BCE and 2010 CE? Several suggestions may be offered. The first is in the area of *lament as giving voice to truth*. There is in many Canadian congregations, and the West as a whole, a sense of loss and sorrow that must be given voice. It comes out in church board meetings, informal conversations, and seminary classrooms. The sorrow arises from an awareness that the Christian faith holds less and less influence over the culture. Old institutions like the church that once seemed central to the culture are eroding and are less attractive to new generations, the church struggles (sometimes unsuccessfully) to hold its membership, and finances are scarce.[6] These sorrow-producing realities are *lamentable* and must therefore be named. To appropriate the resources of exilic spirituality properly the congregation should find ways to lament such changes and describe the reality of their situation. To become a congregation that can face its exile effectively is to do the work of defying a culture of denial. It is to refuse to whitewash our marginalization with platitudes or empty complaint. In giving voice to truth and describing the reality in which we find ourselves the church will gain a voice that is honest and realistic, just as the voice of the psalmist and the author of Lamentations were. Giving voice to this sadness is a pastoral task in the contemporary church. Brueggemann agrees when he writes,

> My suggestion, insofar as our current Western dismay is a parallel to this ancient travesty, is that a primary pastoral task is to voice the felt loss, indignation, and bewilderment that are among us.[7]

To do this requires great courage from modern church leaders who are taught that "creating a positive atmosphere" is the way good leaders function. Yet the exilic context

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[6] Brueggemann, *Deep Memory*, 59.
[7] Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 17.

calls for the voice of lament if the spiritual life of the church is to be robust enough to sustain itself.

A second line of continuity between ancient Israel's response to exile and our own that calls for lament is the need to see the corruption of our host culture and protest against it through prayers of lament that express our sorrow at its idolatry and our refusal to be co-opted by it. This is *lament at corruption*. Just as the gods of Babylon may have seemed powerful to Israel (they had "won," after all) and the opulence of the city may have been alluring, the faithful used lament as a means to repudiate both. Thus, lament constituted a form of subversive speech, rejecting both the idols of Babylon and their seductive powers. We need to speak in a similar voice, naming the prevailing secularism and materialism of contemporary culture as false gods and sexual immorality and self-indulgence as idols that have been created by human hands (or minds), yet fail to provide the sustenance, security, or sense of meaning that they promise. Lament offers a form of protest speech that allows us to clearly state our opposition to these ways of being.

Finally, lament in our day must look at the failure of the church to be what God has designed it to be. This is *lament at our failure*. Perhaps the reason for the church's loss of ground and spiritual anaemia is to be found in its neglect of theology, its lack of passion for mission, its "buy-in" to a consumerist culture, individualism, and ignoring of the poor. The lament of our failures calls us to take stock and begin to enact those behaviors and practices that through either negligence or willful ignorance have led to our cultural and spiritual impoverishment.

i. Teaching

As with any practice that one hopes will be adopted and integrated into the life of

the local church, lament must be taught both as a theological concept and as a necessary

part of the church's prayer language. This will require sermons that teach the lament

tradition in scripture and history as a significant aspect of biblical and Christian

spirituality. In fact, giving both the congregation and individual congregants permission

to lament, and helping them learn how to lament, are key homiletical duties. It is the

preacher's and teacher's responsibility to help their people engage God in conversation.

This conversation must reflect all of the various components of theological reflection on

our life experience, which is not always either pleasant or encouraging. So as Michael

Knowles observes regarding the preacher's role,

> As partners in and witness to a larger theological dialogue,
> preachers urge their hearers to engage *God* in conversation,
> even (or especially) if that conversation is likely to be angry,
> outraged, or uncomprehending – if, in short, that conversation
> is likely to take the thoroughly biblical form of lament.[8]

Teaching lament can also take place in other educational contexts whether in

small groups, Sunday School classes, or seminars. For without robust teaching, and the

development of a practical theology, and encouragement of its actual practice in the life

of the church, lament will never be embraced or seen as a genuine priority for twenty-first

century Canadian Christians.

ii. Pastoral Prayer

Along with teaching, modeling is a potent pedagogical device. Here the church's

practice of the pastoral prayer can be a context in which lament, in its three movements

outlined above, can be practiced. Those leading corporate prayer can include in their

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[8] Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves,* 65 (emphasis original).

prayer portions which honestly name some of the sense of cultural loss, where the church's opposition to ungodly cultural practices is articulated and where the church's complicity in them is lamented. It may not be necessary to include all three on every occasion, or even to use lament every time we pray publicly, but regularly employing this practice will further teach the value of lament and introduce a proper practice of it to the life of the congregation. Including lament in the pastoral prayer is significant because it performs an important pastoral act by helping the church to honestly express its convictions about its place in Canadian culture, its discomfort with Canadian ideology, and its own sense of failure. Furthermore, employing lament in pastoral prayer demonstrates how to lament, inviting the congregation into the experience of lament themselves. In doing this, pastoral leaders also give their people license to lament not only the corporate dimensions of exile, but its personal realities as well.

iii. Forms and Formats for Lamentation

A further step of congregational inclusion in the experience of lament is to invite practical participation in it through various forms of participatory prayer, such as litany. In many non-liturgical churches this is not a traditional form of congregational prayer. However, its use can provide a creative way to engage the congregation in lament. This form of prayer is led by a prayer leader, but invites the congregation to respond to the leader's prayers with a prayer of their own, usually in a prepared sentence or two.

One way to do this is to directly employ the scriptures themselves. Various biblical passages can be used for congregational prayer, for example Lam 3:40–45. A brief excerpt from the text (vv.43–44) can serve as an example:

Leader: Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven and say:

People: We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven

Leader: You have covered yourself with anger and pursued us;

People: You have slain without pity.

Another way to do this is to develop original prayers of lament. A brief example of this would be as follows:

Leader: Lord, why have you allowed your church to grow so weak in such spiritually needy times?

People: Why will you not move in power Lord?

Leader: Lord, why do you allow your people and your name to be mocked and ridiculed so that unbelief grows?

People: How long will you stay silent Lord?

The use of litany not only allows congregational participation in lament but also further educates people in how lament functions as a legitimate expression of Christian spirituality.

iv. Lament in Small Groups

Prayers of lament can be incorporated into a variety of small group settings such as church board meetings, pastoral team meetings, home groups and Sunday School classes. In these settings, as lament is introduced and taught, more open expressions of lament can be initiated. Time can be spent praying together using the three movements of lament discussed above, or focusing on one in particular. Lament can take place in these kinds of groups simply by inviting discussion around questions pertaining to our loss, frustration, and failure with the church and society today.

Each of these practices makes the practice of lament available to Canadian churches and creates the potential for its power to be unleashed in congregational life. The lament is a vehicle for truth-telling, for naming our experience. Just as this was a key discipline for Israel in their exile, as a starting point for interpreting their situation, so can this discipline function similarly in the Canadian congregation today. By incorporating lament into the spirituality of the church, leaders will help their congregations orient themselves to the cultural realities that the church faces today. This holds great promise for leading us to the next movement in the formation of a modern exilic spirituality.

2. Employing Penitence

Just as lament is sidelined in much ecclesiological practice these days, so too, at least within non-liturgical traditions, is the practice of public repentance. In many church traditions individual sin is emphasized and individual repentance for those sins is encouraged. In other traditions individual sin is acknowledged and public repentance is expressed by means of a collective liturgy. However, the confession of corporate sin and thus, corporate penitence, is not nearly so easy. Just as this voice in the biblical literature is rather thin in the early exilic tradition, so too we can be guilty of denying our complicity in our situation, and of blaming God or others for our demise and powerlessness. Yet lament must be followed by personal and corporate penitence if it is to give way to the hope of renewal.

How does the church go about practicing corporate penitence? Further, of what do we need to repent? In 1971, as the Vietnam War dragged on, the editors of *The*

Christian Century issued a call to American Christians to lament their attitudes toward

the war. They wrote,

> But in this second decade of war in Vietnam we are convinced
> that the American church has been too patient–not too
> polemical–toward national leaders. We Christians have been
> too tolerant of American men of power, too forgetful of foreign
> victims of such power. Too often we have been manipulated
> into ineffectiveness by a sophisticated political machinery.[9]

They then listed several accusations against the governmental leaders and their

handling of the Vietnam crisis in particular. Based on this lament they pressed further

and called for genuine repentance during Holy Week of that year. They wrote,

> Therefore we call upon our fellow Christians to make this Holy
> Week a season of penitence and commitment where faithful
> believers seize these opportunities...[10]

Following this, five statements called for action and changed behavior on the

part of the church in response to the war.

This example of a call to corporate repentance reminds us of the proper place of

such an activity. This is a profound act of spirituality that sustains corporate life in the

midst of exile. There is much that we need to take responsibility for as a faith community

and that can provoke penitential prayer in on our part.

In *Colossians Remixed,* Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat reflect on the sins of

Israel that provoked God's judgment, and thus their exile:

> The covenant people do not care for aliens, widows and orphans,
> or the weak and injured. Failing to practice mercy and justice,
> Israel ground down the poor and needy. The people have been
> engaged in the consumptive practices of the empire, filling their
> land with silver and gold, horses and chariots, buying up
> neighbors' fields until nothing is left but industrial farms-as-
> businesses that kill community. Moreover, they consistently
> engage in business deals that exploit the poor.

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[9] Editors, *The Christian Century,* 419.
[10] Editors, *The Christian Century,* 420.

> Exile is God's answer to Israel's imperial ways. If Israel is
> going to live out of an imperial imagination, then it may as well
> be taken into captivity by the empire.[11]

Is it possible that some (if not all) of these same sins are present in the church today? If so, then do we not need to repent every bit as much as they did? If these sins are present in the church then we must take responsibility for these behaviours and together find ways to honestly repent of them.

Penitence is the crucial move from naming what is wrong to taking responsibility. It is reflective of a maturity that refuses to be self-deceived about one's circumstances. It also marks an attitude of humility that rejects any sense of elitism and instead portrays a message of broken solidarity with the low and needy.

> Penitential prayer encourages an honest encounter with the
> God of grace and justice. If one is looking for psychological
> authenticity on a communal level, penitential prayer displays a
> community's mature self-knowledge.[12]

In this Post-Christian age such self-knowledge and meekness is very necessary for the church of Christ if it is to become a text that the world can read in order to discover Christ.[13] In light of its many public sins the world expects the church to be cognizant of its failures and duly humble about itself in light of them.

How can leaders direct their churches in the activity of penitential prayer in a way that both leads to a sincere confession of sin but also to a renewed hope for the future?

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[11] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, 87. The authors provide extensive scriptural references for the behaviors listed here.

[12] Boda, "The Priceless Gain," 72.

[13] In referring to the church as "a text" I mean that it functions as a vehicle of testimony to the person of Christ in a way that allows people to be exposed to the teachings and ideals that Jesus espoused. I do not mean to imply that the church supersedes the bible as the primary text that reveals Christ, only that it serves as another (though less authoritative) source of revelation.

i. Pastoral Prayer

Activities similar to the ones used in lament continue to function as essential vehicles for penitential prayer and the teaching component should not necessarily be bypassed. However, for many Christians repentance is already a natural part of the Christian life, although the need for corporate repentance may require a deeper explanation. That having been said, the pastoral prayer is a primary place for the discipline of corporate repentance to begin. Including corporate sins in pastoral prayer is a regular practice in many churches; however, in some sectors of the church it is undervalued and underpracticed. Making repentance and confession for the corporate sins of the church, both local and universal, a regular part of pastoral prayer allows a church to take ownership of its complicity in its marginalization. This can be a risky leadership move as inevitably it will call leaders to name some of the things that are part of our culture (as we saw in Chapter One) but that some may not see as sin, such as overconsumption, neglect of others, and materialism to name but a few. Yet, this also makes the pastoral prayer a time for teaching and leading a church to come to terms with the fact that they are guilty of being too closely tied to the host empire. This is a public way of acknowledging that everything is NOT alright and that change must occur if the church is going to move forward.

ii. Liturgy

As a way of inviting congregational participation in penitential prayer the use of liturgy that includes prayers of repentance and confession becomes a way for people to personalize their participation in the sins of the church that have contributed to its marginalization. The bible itself contains prayers of repentance that can be directly

employed as liturgy. For example, Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 9, Daniels prayer in Dan 9, and the aforementioned passage in Lam 3 which mingles the language of lament with the language of penitence, all can serve as liturgical language for today's church. Alternatively, a liturgy can be tailored to include specific sins that connect to the particular exilic issues that are germane to the church's failures in previous and current generations. This aids the church in becoming a repentant church and in understanding its participation in the sins that have contributed to the church's demise as a distinctive voice in society. A liturgy like this can have particular meaning when used in conjunction with the Lord's Table as it moves immediately from contrition for sin into the hope that comes through the assurance of forgiveness that is symbolized in the holy meal.

iii. Silent Confession of Corporate Sin

Silent confession can allow congregational participation in confession in a less overt, but still meaningful way. Whether it is by leading the congregation in a time of guided silent confession, by offering a series of possible sins for confession, or by simply leaving time for silent corporate confession, inviting people into such a time can be a way of leading the church in penitential prayer that allows it to take ownership for its failings. The key is to introduce the idea that as a people we have contributed to our demise through negligence or willful participation in the sins of the empire and, thus, we need to agree with God that the church is where it is, at least in part, because it has not always acted faithfully.

iv. Small Groups

When leading a church in developing penitential prayer as a congregational discipline beginning in small groups can be a wise move. As with lament, leadership teams, home groups and specific smaller gatherings can be places that allow for a time of teaching and prayer to take place that leads people intelligently and effectively into confession and repentance. Guided confession allows people to participate and is a catalyst for penitential prayer becoming a part of the broader church culture.

v. Church-Wide Initiatives

Beyond the smaller gatherings and prayers during worship services, corporate repentance can be enacted by gathering regularly for times of "solemn assembly," when the church focuses on corporate repentance and intercession for itself, its members, community and the world. Such gatherings can be based on the pattern laid out in Neh 8–9, where Israel gathered to hear God's law read and to respond in repentance and recommitment.[14]

Also, at certain times of the year a prayer of repentance could be posted on the church web-site as an act of public contrition and as a sign of the church's acknowledgement of its own shortcomings and those of the larger body of Christ.

The practice of penitential prayer was essential in ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism's acceptance of its exilic fate. It was a spiritual and theological response to God's justice in exiling them that offered a way forward. By acknowledging our sins and their impact we begin to take ownership of the ways in which we have fallen short and gain the humility to look for a new way forward.

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[14] At least one church in Canada, Rexdale Alliance in Etobicoke, Ontario, engages in this kind of assembly on a regular basis as part of the rhythm of their congregational life.

3. Employing Hope

One goal of ministry in exilic times is to engender hope. This is not a feeling of optimism or an assurance that things will get better, but rather a generative hope that both sustains faith and inspires new initiatives that allow faith to be expressed in ways that facilitate the ongoing mission of God in the midst of exile. In many ways exilic hope is cultivated as we embrace our exile as an opportunity for renewal. Just as exile did not sideline God's missional intentions through Israel, neither will our exile-like circumstances thwart God's missional intentions in Canada today. The changed cultural situation in which the church finds itself is an opportunity for translating the faith in new, inventive ways.

Prophetic imagination also equips the church for its calling to be God's people in the place where they currently find themselves. In the same way that Isaiah provided hope with his inspiring vision of Yahweh as the supreme God, even when his people were in exile, and Nehemiah provided hope with the practical action of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, contemporary leadership must supply the church with prophetic imagination. This kind of language that infuses the church with the kind of hope that is necessary for it to take risks and trust God for a new future. Thus, church leadership in our day must employ the hopeful voice and activity of prophetic imagination in order to lead the church in its ongoing existence as an exiled people. How can this be done?

i. Leading with a Vision for the Ongoing Mission of God in an Exilic Age

Just like Isaiah in Babylon, faithful leadership in today's Canadian church will look for ways to creatively express prophetic imagination that casts a hopeful vision for

the life and future of the church. This means that leaders must present an alternative view of things. In practice this will mean casting exile in terms that stress how exile is a time to reconsider Christian identity and practice. One of the key leadership practices involved in accomplishing this is helping the church to understand the times in which it lives. In order to see both the reality and potential of exile, Canadian Christians must be helped to grasp exactly what has and is happening in Canadian culture that contributes to the church's exile. Doing this means outlining the significant shifts that are taking place in our culture, the philosophical realities of postmodernism, and the way that they affect how the church is perceived and how it does ministry in Canada today. Unless the church is educated so that it can fully comprehend the reality of its situation people will not sense the urgency for change, or the need to embrace the motif of exile as a time for renaissance. Leaders must understand their times and help their people understand them as well.

Further, exile is a time to discuss how we can jettison those traditions and practices that no longer function effectively as ways of doing ministry or articulating faith. Also, leadership can convene discussions that reflect on what the church can be, and needs to be in this and coming generations. Traditional churches can encourage new, entrepreneurial leaders by empowering their voices in these discussions and then supporting them with financial and spiritual resources that enable them to embark on innovative, even experimental, ministry projects.

This has been done denominationally where a church like the Meeting House in Oakville, Ontario has been empowered by its denomination, The Brethren in Christ, to develop as a self-described, "church for those who are not into church." Further, the

denomination has helped them extend their ministry in non-traditional ways by

establishing congregations across Ontario that meet in a series of movie theatres. Each

site has its own pastoral staff and programs but is connected to the Oakville site

organizationally, relationally, and through the teaching of its pastor, Bruxy Cavey whose

weekly sermon is delivered in the non-Oakville sites via videocast.[15] This initiative is

using non-traditional means to spread the Gospel message, the ethos of the Meeting

House, and Cavey's own ministry as a gifted teacher far from the original site in

Oakville.

Another such example is the Salvation Army, who have sponsored a number of

unique church plants, such as the "The Freeway" in Hamilton, Ontario. The Freeway is a

church plant/coffee shop that describes itself in the following way,

> The Freeway is a holistic Christian community in Hamilton, Ontario
> that was started in 2002. Quite simply, we are a community of people
> who are committed to making the Kingdom of God tangible in our
> neighbourhood. We believe that people should be able to touch it, taste
> it, see it, sense it. We want to live the "Good News" wherever it is we
> find ourselves throughout the week. We seek to be part of the rhythms
> of our city, to be good neighbours, good friends, and good servants.[16]

Throughout the week the church's store front building functions as a place of

business, that is a coffee shop. It is designed to be a place of hospitality and connection

for people in the community. It also hosts art shows and small concerts and can be rented

for small social gatherings. Throughout the week those who call The Freeway their

church also use the site as a place for small group Bible study, fellowship, and on Sunday

evening, a worship service. As the above statement indicates, the overall goal is to

engage relationally with its community and help its members learn how to live

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[15] For an overview of the Meeting House see www.themeetinghouse.ca
[16] See http://www.frwy.ca/church/

missionally in their everyday lives. As a coffee shop/church it engages its community seven days a week in ways that very few traditional churches do.

Both of these demonstrate the potential of new initiatives when an established denomination is willing to look "outside the box" and support new ideas of how the church can configure itself in the postmodern, post-Christian culture.

A somewhat more mainstream initiative is found in traditional churches that develop "a church, within a church." This means that a new congregation is begun from within an established church. The new congregation still employs the resources of the "mother" church but is given a significant amount of autonomy to develop its ministry in unique, contextually relevant ways. On one hand it remains connected to the mother church, but on the other it develops as a separate entity. The mother church provides financial, staff, and spiritual support to the new initiative with the realization that it will develop fresh expressions of ministry for people the mother church may never be able to reach itself. This can be a risk for the mother church as the new initiative may be more of a drain on its resources than a contributor to them. However, visionary leaders realize that left on its own the established congregation will likely die as it is unable to change in ways that meet the challenges of contemporary ministry. However, these leaders are committed to seeing that the mother will give birth to a new baby before her demise. In this way assuring that her witness to the gospel lives on for future generations.

While many traditional churches will never be able to make some of the radical shifts that are necessary to thrive in the new realities of Canada, they can participate in the renewal of the church by supporting these kinds of new initiatives. This kind of collaborative interaction moves us past the lament of loss and the confession of failure

and into the hope of new formulations of the faith and its practice. In keeping with this, leaders must emphasize new ways of thinking that help the church to imagine what it can do to respond to exilic realities, energizing the spirit of the church with vision for what it can be in its current and future circumstances.[17] This is as vital a work for God's people today as it was for Israel in the sixth century B.C.E., for it not only inspires today's exiles, it also empowers those who will lead the church in its exilic life for generations to come. Just as Isaiah shared God's imaginings for his people, so too are the hopeful visions cast today vital to the generations that will follow.

ii. Leading in Creative Missional Activities

Prophetic imagination, as we have seen, ranges beyond inspirational images and stimulating discussion. Exilic leadership also takes action in ways that reflect the prophetic imagination at work. Just as Nehemiah's imagination of what could be done in Jerusalem led him to the risk of asking for Persian blessing on the project, so too does exilic leadership in today's church call for risky ventures of faith that demonstrate that fruitful ministry is still possible. The task of church leadership in Canada today is to faithfully imagine what forms and practices the church needs to adopt in order to properly be the church in exile. This is just as much a work of the imagination as it demands not only the ability to discern new patterns of faithfulness but also the blood, sweat, and tears that are necessary for implementation of these visions. For ancient Israel there may have been some who could not envision that Jerusalem would ever be rebuilt or that worship in the temple would ever occur again in their lifetime. Yet through Nehemiah—and those who came around him—it happened. These would have been faith-inspiring events, as in

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[17] Some of the particulars of what this might look like will be explored in the material below.

fact the books of Nehemiah and Ezra demonstrate them to have been. They reminded the ancient people that God was still alive, that he was with them and that they had a future.

In a similar way, the initiatives inspired by prophetic imagination that come to fruition today will provide vitality to the church and benefit to communities. They will speak eloquently about God's continued existence and interest in his work in Canada. In some cases they will be ministries of revitalization that undertake the difficult task of re-engineering established congregations so as to lead them into new ways of doing ministry that fit the changed Canadian context. In other cases spiritual entrepreneurs will rise up and imagine how the church can be different from what it has been and how new ecclesial initiatives can respond to the realities of a postmodern, post-Christian Canada where the church can no longer function as chaplain to the state. The new cultural identity of the church in Canada is that of missionary.

The future hope of the church begins with theological reflection on this contextual reality as it will require a "conversion" of the church.[18] This means that local churches will need to undergo a conversion-like experience that brings a complete change of self-perception, from one that sees the church itself as the primary focus of attention, to the community (or world) as the focus. Further, it will call for local churches to learn how to "read" their context and, like cross-cultural missionaries, determine how they can engage that context in a way that is evangelistically effective.[19]

A practical outworking of this new orientation will be in the form the Canadian church can potentially take as missionary to the nation. Can a church be a group of people that incarnates itself as a coffee shop of that meets in movie theatres? Can a

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[18] This is Darrell Guder's language, see *The Continuing Conversion of the church,* esp. chp 7.
[19] For an exploration of this concept see Frederickson, "The Missional Congregation in Context."

church meet in a house? Or be a network of house churches? Can it meet in the board room of a Bay street law firm on a Tuesday afternoon? Does a church need a building, bylaws, denominational affiliation? Can a church be a group of people who meet weekly for supper, Bible study, prayer, and then go and serve the poor in a neighbourhood shelter? What does it mean to be an incarnational community?

The answers to these questions will affect some areas of the church in significant ways. In some sectors of the church, congregations define themselves by their building. They spend large amounts of money to manage them and restore them as they get old. The building is not only a source of ecclesiastical pride, but also the only place for real ministry to take place. In many of these cases congregations have lost all influence in their communities and are barely managing to hang on in terms of members, yet the building is maintained at all costs. Exile will kill these churches. They will die within a generation (or less) and the buildings will be sold, probably at a bargain price.

While some may see this as a tragic loss, the truth is that exile can inspire new innovation if a congregation is willing to enter into the experience of a new birth by abandoning old ideas, and maybe even structures, that no longer give life, and embark on new ventures of faith that incarnate Christ's ministry in new ways and in new places.

It may be that the hope of the future for the church in Canada is found in new initiatives that drastically break with traditional models of church life. Determining the shape of new models will take creative theological reflection that tackles ideas about the church's very identity. They are key questions, however, because traditional models are struggling in many (most) places and the hope of the future flows out of a missional identity that finds new shapes for the church and allows it to form in unique, Spirit

directed ways. This will take an openness to be creative and innovative in our theological thinking about the nature of the church. It will mean that we will have to be theologically responsive to our context of ministry so as to generate a renaissance in contextualization that facilitates a missionary engagement with that context.

In these exilic times the language of Babylonian captivity provides us with an indispensable theological literature and perhaps more importantly a vocabulary of resistance. It is indispensable for constructing a spirituality that will nourish the faith of a distinct and effective exilic community. For

- ❖ *Lament produces truthfulness which creates the potential for penitence.*
- ❖ *Penitence produces change which creates the potential for hope.*
- ❖ *Hope produces mission which creates the potential for restoration.*

III. Exilic Residence: Making Exile "Home"

One of the things that we have clearly seen in our examination of Old Testament, Second Temple and New Testament responses to exile is the people's attempt to learn how to live faithfully but productively in a new context. Learning how to make exile "home" by engaging the culture in which God's people find themselves is a hallmark of their identity and continued existence. Jonah reminds us that we cannot run away from cultural engagement; the positive examples of 1 Peter, Esther and Daniel further demonstrate this priority. For the Canadian church to thrive in its current exile it will require new insight into how it must respond to its changed circumstances and what kind of outlook will be required. The biblical resources reply directly to this question. The following proposals offer suggestions for how to forge such a response.

1. A Responsive Theology

Being in exile requires the Canadian church to develop a theology that responds to its culture in a way that embodies the ideals demonstrated in the scriptural texts under examination in this study, those ideals include *accommodation* without *compromise.* These twin ideals are represented in the stories of Esther and Daniel, and are clearly sketched out in 1 Peter. So too the contemporary church must define its core identity effectively so that it can accommodate itself to its culture without compromising those things that are intrinsic to its very nature.

The current Canadian church desperately needs to recover its distinct identity and catch the vision of Jesus who made himself at home as an exile, that is as one who was not really "at home." Similarly, the church must find ways to live "in the world" without being "of the world." Jesus did this without compromising his core identity as Son of God, and the church needs to do this without falling into some of the perspectives and behaviours that have accommodated it to the host culture. A responsive theology is a theology that seeks to help the church find the appropriate response to the culture in which it finds itself. Responsive Christian theology recognizes that if the church is going to be relevant to its surroundings it must find a way to practice its beliefs in a way that allows it to integrate, as much as possible, into the life of the dominant culture. Further, it also recognizes that interaction with that culture may in fact help the church to understand its theology more fully.[20]

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[20] This is a key part of cultural engagement, that the church can actually have its own understanding and practice of the gospel enhanced by engaging with the culture around it. For a further exploration of this see Van Gelder, "How Missiology can Help Inform the Conversation about the Missional church in Context," 39–40.

We have seen how Israel responded theologically to its new surroundings in Babylon and also in Persia and how Second Temple Jews also continued to shape traditional beliefs in light of new cultural settings.[21] An example of this is how the early church employed a responsive theology (although perhaps in an unconscious way) as it emerged within first century culture is Acts 10–11. This passage demonstrates this as Peter is summoned by God to bring the gospel to a Gentile context. The story begins with a God-fearing Roman centurion named Cornelius who has a vision from God that he is to locate Peter and bring him to his home. Peter also has a vision that calls him to rethink his ideas of what is religiously clean and unclean. Messengers from Cornelius's house bring Peter to Cornelius. Finding a large group gathered at Cornelius's house, Peter says to him, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with Gentiles or visit them" (Acts 10:28). Despite this, in response to the vision God gave him Peter enters Cornelius's house and addresses the crowd, saying, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10: 34-35). Peter then announces the good news of Jesus and watches as the Holy Spirit falls powerfully on the assembly. Those "circumcised believers" who had accompanied Peter are astonished that "the gift of God had been poured out even on Gentiles" (Acts 10:45).

This story is perplexing in certain ways as it would seem that after working so closely with Jesus and watching him cross many boundaries in order to reach out to a variety of people, including Gentiles, Peter should well know that God does not show

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[21] This can be seen in the development of certain doctrines during the Second Temple period, notably those discussed in chapter 3. Tomassino writes regarding Judaisms interaction with Zoroastrianism, the religion of Persia, "through interaction with priests and scholars of different faiths, the Jews undoubtedly learned a thing or two about their own God." *Judaism Before Jesus,* 74.

favoritism. However, it seems the message had not fully penetrated Peter's thinking and his theology still needed to grow and respond to what God was doing. As the story continues we see that Peter was not the only one in this position.

Immediately following the scene at Cornelius's house we read that the church leaders in Jerusalem hear that the Gentiles have received the word of God (Acts 11:1), so when Peter goes up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter, the circumcised believers, we are told, "criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of the uncircumcised and ate with them'" (Acts 11:2–3). Then Peter carefully explains what had taken place at Cornelius's house. The leaders in Jerusalem are forced to cease their objections and praise God, saying, "So then, even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).

Here again it is somewhat hard to understand why the early church struggled with this issue in light of their experience with Jesus, but on the other hand it demonstrates how deeply cultural and theological traditions can run. For our purposes, the primary lesson embedded in this story is one of Jesus' disciples responding theologically to what God is doing, even in a cross-cultural or counter-cultural context. They are learning how to accommodate themselves to the cultural demands of contextualization, while at the same time remaining uncompromised in their embodiment of the gospel. It is not that their theology had to change as much as it had to grow in response to God's new working. This meant that their understanding of the gospel had to grow so that they could continue to embody Jesus' ministry in their new circumstances. The same approach to doing theology in Canada today will enable the church to contextualize itself

in a way that accommodates itself to its exilic circumstances without compromising its core theological identity.

Thus a vital pastoral act in the current Canadian context will be to help the church understand its identity as God's people in exile. Understanding one's identity is a significant part of self-perception that leads to a deeper maturity and transformation. In Canada today, because of the church's experience of being de-centreed and the overall fragmented nature of postmodern culture the church is struggling to recover its identity. Every local church has to grapple with their particular identity in a way that enables a broad appreciation of what it means to be the church within the current Canadian context, on the one hand, as well as their unique role as a local congregation, on the other. This work of self-discovery contributes to the church's ability to accommodate itself to culture without compromise.

In order to aid in this work a key activity of church leadership needs to be leading their church in sound theological reflection. This means inviting reflection on the full meaning of the gospel and its interaction with Canadian culture today. The art of theological reflection is often lacking in Christian leadership and must be revitalized if a responsible responsive theology is to be developed within the life of Canadian congregations. As Pinnock and Brow rightly observe;

> Theology is the never finished task of trying to improve upon
> our interpretation of the word of God. When the vision gets
> blurred and the message ceases to attract, it is time to refocus.[22]

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[22] Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love*, 7. For full explorations of the art of theological reflection see Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, and Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*. For a concise overview see Don Payne, "Field Education and Theological Reflection in an Evangelical Tradition."

A responsive theology will incorporate new insights into the gospel that are gained from the cultural circumstances that the church finds itself in and thus help the church to be more faithful to its core identity and message.

2. A Theology of Practice

The work of contextualization is ultimately a work of ministry practice. This is why an emphasis on practice over doctrine needs to become the key identifying factor in determining authentic expressions of church and faith. This does not mean a neglect of the content of Christian faith, but it does mean that a focus on the practice of the faith must become central to theological leadership more than the constructing of "correct" doctrine. In previous generations it has been assumed that proper belief should be given pride of place in determining faithful Christianity, whereas in times of exile praxis must be given priority.

First Peter is deeply concerned with practice as the defining mark of faithfulness. The central command in the epistle is "be holy in all you do" (1:15), which colors everything else about the letter. A central feature of the epistle is the household code (2:11–3:7) which expounds faithful behaviour as a sign of genuine belief. This is not to deny that Peter is also concerned with the theological identity of his churches, in fact, the practice of the church flows out of its theological identity. However, for Peter it is the practice of faith that ultimately demonstrates the faithfulness of the church.

Similarly in the Old Testament stories that we have been considering, faithful practice is what makes Daniel and Esther heroes. Esther is a model worthy of canonization because despite some "non-kosher" behaviour she acts faithfully for her people. Her heroism is not in her theological fidelity— the book does not even name

God—rather it is in her sacrificial behaviour toward her people. Daniel may have been theologically pure, but it is his actions as a faithful Jew that win him favour with his captors and demonstrate the potential results that can come through faithful behaviour in captivity.

Exile calls for action and a theology of practice is necessary. While Christianity in general and evangelicalism in particular have always emphasized piety, correct belief has most often been seen as the essence of true Christianity.[23] Orthodoxy is treated as a series of propositional truths that are to be believed in order to entitle one to the mantle of "Christian." In Christendom, intramural arguments about doctrine could be joined and understood by large swaths of the church, and even much of the non-church population. Doctrine united and separated various Christians.

In our fragmented, post-Christian culture, by contrast, what is demanded is a theology of orthopraxy, more than orthodoxy. Again, this is not to dispense with the need for orthodoxy as a foundation for faith. It is, however, to make the practice of the Christian faith the ultimate concern of theology. What really matters now is how the church is able to articulate and demonstrate a transformative spirituality. If people are going to consider Christianity as a religion, the first text that the world may read is not the Bible, but the church. What the church needs in order to be a text that is fit to be read is a theology that emphasizes practice as the primary indicator of genuine faith as opposed to a content-centred faith that prioritizes adherence to certain doctrines.[24]

This observation brings together the strands of identity, mission, and theology that we are considering in this section. These are all crucial to the church in exile. The three

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[23] Roger Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming,* 23.
[24] See Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming,* 73-79 for further discussion on the need for this kind of theological emphasis.

must remain in conversation with each other in order for a full-orbed understanding of Christianity to emerge in these unique days of "exile." They each find their ultimate expression in the praxis of the church; this is why a theology of practice is crucial for the church in Canada today.[25]

The emphasis on practice is showing up in new expressions of communal living such as those characterized by the "new monastic movement." These are small communities of Christian people who move into needy neighbourhoods, live communally, and seek to bring the presence of Christ to these communities by serving the people of the neighbourhood in any way that they can. They reflect a deep commitment to reproducing the ministry of Jesus and are an attempt to take seriously what it means to put Christ's teachings into practice. While in many cases these communities are grounded in a classical, orthodox, even evangelical theology the primary characteristic that unites and defines them is their emphasis on practicing the faith among the poor.[26]

Another example is found in a downtown Toronto church where a regular "coffee house" takes place and artists from the community are invited to come and share their work. Each artist is invited to talk about their work and what inspired it, whether it is a painting, sculpture, song, poem, or other type of artistic expression. In many cases the artists who present their work are not Christians, and their explanations often do not reflect anything close to an orthodox theological view of the world. However, the church

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[25] See Anderson, *Emergent Theology for Emerging churches,* especially chp. 6. Anderson posits that theology in the current era must emerge out of the ministry practice of congregations. Discerning the work of the spirit through the work of the church as illuminated by the word of God becomes the key shaper of theological thought in the post-Christian era. This approach places the emphasis for theology on how the faith is practiced.

[26] For an explanation of these communities see Bessenecker, *The New Friars* and Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution.*

engages in this activity as a way of showing hospitality to its community and supporting its artists. They are committed to developing friendships and showing God's openness. However they take a risk of being perceived as theologically compromised because of their willingness to allow unorthodox ideas to be shared under the auspices of a church sponsored event. This congregation is more committed to practicing God's love and acceptance amongst its neighbours than it is to being perceived as "doctrinally pure."[27]

In a slightly different vein, churches need to take non-Christians seriously as full participants in the life of the church. Traditionally, non-Christians are just observers in the church until they become believers themselves. Their opinion carries little official weight, and their ability to serve in the church is limited to tasks like, helping at a church clean up day, or volunteering in the nursery. Deep engagement with the life of the body is largely withheld from them because they are not seen as spiritually ready (or able) to be too involved. There is an unspoken mantra that to become a member of the church one must follow a particular progression of experience that looked something like the following,

<div align="center">Believe — Behave — Belong</div>

This assumes that before one could "belong" to the church, they have to first believe the right things, then demonstrate a degree of genuine Christian behaviour (as defined by the local church). Then they can be accepted as someone who belongs to the body and can be trusted with ministry responsibility.

Increasingly the order of conversion is changing. In this postmodern, post-Christendom era the order can often look more like the following,

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[27] The church is Toronto Alliance church, and it is highly committed to an orthodox, evangelical faith, but less concerned about whether or not they are perceived that way by the evangelical constituency.

Belong — Behave — Believe

For some people conversion occurs only after they have had the chance to belong
to a church community that truly invites them to be a part of its inner life and allows them
to participate in a genuine way. Slowly they begin to adopt the lifestyle and ideals of the
community until they realize that they have become a true convert to what the church
believes.[28]

A theology of practice is committed to offering people patience and space so that
they can seek and explore Christian faith in a way that does not keep them at arm's
length, but welcomes them to enter into the life of the church as they continue on their
journey toward God.

3. A Theology of the Spirit's Activity in Culture

A final proposal toward a renaissance in contextualization requires that we fully
embrace a theological perspective that perceives God's Spirit to be active in our culture,
that is, secular culture. The church has had a mixed record on this particular issue. In
some quarters of the church there is a deep resistance to the idea that God may dwell, or
even work in certain sectors of society. In some realms of church life the "world" is a
place to be avoided because associating too closely with popular culture and the people
who enthusiastically participate in "the world," will have a corrupting influence on the
Christian's spiritual life. In this view because culture is largely godless, involvement
with it should be for the purpose of evangelistic engagement only. This view is
epitomized in the writings of Oswald Chambers, whose devotional book *My Utmost for
His Highest*— while written in a bygone era (1935)— has nonetheless influenced many

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[28] The concept of believe, behave, belong; belong, behave, believe, is not original to me.
However, I do not recall where I was first introduced to it.

with a form of piety that emphasizes personal experience with God over incarnational

ministry in society. Chambers writes, "The central point of the kingdom of Jesus Christ

is personal relationship with him, not public usefulness to men."[29] Such attitudes dismiss

the world as a place where God can be found.[30]

Others in the contemporary church take a slightly less cynical approach,

believing that culture can be co-opted and used for sanctified purposes; a Christian (often

evangelical) subculture has been created that offers music, movies, books and video

games for Christian entertainment. This allows for Christians to enjoy the same kind of

activities that are offered through popular culture, but in a way that keeps the world at

arm's length and still— subtly— sends a theological message that the Spirit is more

likely to be present in a song produced by a Christian artist than one produced by an artist

who is not a Christian.[31]

There are, of course, other models which equate Christ with culture in such a

way that he is so watered down that any form of cultural expression is considered

appropriate. Yet, to live in exile is to appreciate the fact that God is present in the host

culture in ways that transcend our Christendom-shaped views and ideals. The story from

Acts 10–11 reminds us of the Spirit's working in a cultural setting that some like Peter

and the Jerusalem leaders previously thought unthinkable. Yet when Peter shows up at

Cornelius's house he clearly senses, from his vision and initial engagement with

Cornelius, that the Spirit is at work and so he crosses the threshold of Cornelius's front

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[29] Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 293. This reference came to my attention in a quote from Doug Pagitt in the book *The Post Evangelical*, 123. This is not to completely devalue Chambers contribution to Christian spirituality, rather it is to point out an inherent flaw in the approach that Chambers represents.

[30] For interaction around the plausibility of God being active in popular culture see Detweiler, *Into the Dark*, 29– 32. Detweiler's focus is on movies but his comments in this section argue for a broad appreciation of the possibility that God can appear in and work through various forms of popular culture.

[31] Thomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, 124.

entrance and enters the home of a Gentile. God had, of course, been there long before. If one is willing to read the book of Esther from the vantage point of faith and look for the activity of God in the story, one may discern the signals that God is already at work even before Esther arrives on the scene. Mordecai's words that Esther has come to her position "for such a time as this" (4:14), signal the prior working of God, as do the various reversals and "coincidences" (see chapter 2) that are spread throughout the story. God's concluding, open-ended question at the end of the book of Jonah, "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh...?" (4:11), is a haunting reminder that the reason God called Jonah in the first place was because he is present in Nineveh, concerned about their behavior and wanting them to repent. Unlike Jonah (Israel) he had no intention of staying separate from the people for which he was concerned.[32]

In exilic conditions we can expect that God is also there in the midst of the culture in which we find ourselves. He will be working in places we may have previously thought unlikely. His grace is active in the lives of people whether they know it or not. Some are already actively seeking grace even though they may not know exactly what they are seeking for (Cornelius), others are not obviously seeking but that does not mean that God is not seeking them (Nineveh). A responsive theology embraces this reality and emboldens the work of active cultural contextualization because it assures us that God is at work in that context.

Art is one example; movies, television, literature, music, painting, and sculpture are all mediums where people engage the mysteries of life and seek to understand or express truth. God is often an explicit or implicit topic in these forms of expression and it

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[32] Wright, *The Mission of God,* 461. For other biblical examples of ways that God works in culture, and through non-traditional means see Detweiler, *Into the Dark,* 15–16.

should not surprise us to find that God's Spirit is in them, drawing us to himself. We should embrace and not dismiss the spiritual conversation that often takes place in art and the testimonies that some people offer regarding the connections with the divine that they have made through various forms of art, even when the particular piece of art may not explicitly honour him.[33]

In a positive way, Christians can acknowledge God's work by participating in it as artists. It may be that the arts can become an increasingly viable way for Christians to express themselves and their faith to the world. The arts, whether graphic, literary or dramatic can both facilitate an engagement with culture so that the gospel can be proclaimed, and be a vehicle for Christians to express the realities of their exilic experience. The various forms of artistic expression that both dialogue with culture and provide encouragement for Christians resemble the Diasporic Advice Tale in its own address to the theological and historical circumstances of its original audience. Perhaps Christian artists can create similar narratives whether through writing novels, composing music, or making movies that tell hopeful stories of Canadian Christian exilic life that can serve the church in the same way that the stories of Esther, Daniel and Jonah served Israel.

On another front, certain places once thought to be venues that God avoided, like bars, rock concerts, and tattoo parlours can be gathering places that provide opportunities for shared expression, experience and relationship. They can facilitate the

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[33] As an example of this Detweiler, *Into the Dark,* 15, points to the R-rated movie Raging Bull as the catalyst to his Christian conversion.

Spirit's work in culture and human life and remind people that moments of transcendence occur in the everyday events of our lives.[34]

Also, religion and people's own personal experiences, even ones that do not explicitly honor Christ, can be places where the Spirit is at work. Our theology must accommodate the fact that God may choose to work in people's non-Christian religious experience and even the most unusual of their life's circumstances. To dismiss the hints of divine life that people identify in their own stories is to miss the potential for the expanse of God's work in a culture that is increasingly distant from him. It is also to forgo the potential for dialogue that may help to produce greater clarity and truth.[35]

When the dominant culture all around us can appear to be disengaged from our God, as is the case in Canada, and we perceive a declining openness to explicitly Christian faith, as recent polls indicate (see Chapter One) the theology demonstrated in the stories of previous exiles is important to recover. It calls us to look for God's work even in places that we may have previously thought were not the domain of God's presence. It reminds us that the Spirit is ever present and he "can foster transforming friendship with God anywhere and everywhere."[36]

IV. Exilic Identity: Living as God's People in Exile

We have already touched on aspects of identity for the church in exile but more must be said about this topic because it is a defining issue for exiles of all kinds— whether political, religious or socio-theological.

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[34] For an exploration of tattooing as a source of religious meaning see Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith,* 77-78. Further, I can give personal testimony to a profound encounter with the Holy Spirit at a Bruce Springsteen concert.

[35] Pinnock agrees when he writes that the Spirit's work is, "guiding, luring, wooing, influencing, drawing all humanity, not just the church." *Flame of Love,* 216.

[36] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 186–87.

Intrinsic to the issue of identity for the people of God is the idea that they are called to be holy. As we have seen, the impetus to holiness became a central response for Israel to their exile, in the same way that it plays a central role in Peter's first letter. Holiness is an identity issue for the people of God at all times, however, in times of exile it becomes the category under which boundary maintenance is explored and it is the place where distinct behaviors are described and defined.

In the Old Testament, Israel renewed its commitment to the Holiness Code as a way of boundary maintenance and cultural distinctiveness and in Ezra-Nehemiah we read about the radical approaches to maintaining communal purity that they prescribe in order to preserve Israelite identity. In the first century churches to which Peter writes, the life his audience was to live must be distinct from that of the broader culture and would define them as those who are attached to Christ. In the Canadian church a renewed idea of what it means to be holy as God's people today is necessary for effectiveness in these days of exilic existence.

Holiness in 1 Peter constitutes a means for the church to live out their salvific identity. That is, as those who now are in Christ and are designated as God's people (2:9) and their calling is to be holy as God is holy (1:15–16). As a holy community God's people are called to lives of engagement, not retreat from the world. The following proposals offer some ideas as to how the Canadian church can put this conviction into practice.

1. Developing a Holiness of Engaged Non-Conformity

Exilic holiness is fully engaged with culture while not fully conforming to it. Living as a Christian exile in Canada calls the church to live its life constructively

embedded within society while not being enslaved to all of its norms and ideals. Sometimes holiness has a personal cost and demands taking a stand that draws attention to oneself. At other times holiness is not defined by dramatic action, but by the day-day choices that we make. This is not a new idea, for that is what the church has always been called to. However, the exilic situation is always ambiguous for those placed within it. When you have autonomy and the power to make the rules, life is slightly less complex. When you are the one who determines what is "right" it is much easier to do what is right. Exile takes away such power and leaves you in a situation where what you think is right may be different from what the prevailing culture thinks is right. In such circumstances decisions must be made about how to do right and what formerly held beliefs and practices can be reshaped so as to fit a new context. For Canadian Christians holiness will entail trying to live a biblically directed life in a continually shifting moral climate. Once more, this is not new, however as the culture of Christendom continues to recede, the challenge of holiness increases. The work of leadership is to help the church learn how to engage culture effectively and build discernment so as to decide when and how it must disengage from cultural ideals so as not to conform to them in inappropriate ways.

Esther's sense of proportion is crucial to helping the Canadian church understand our own engagement with our culture. Proportionality requires that cultural participation occur not mindlessly but with discernment and a sense of morality that flows from an appreciation of a biblically informed identity as Christ's church. While many Christians will choose to participate in the mainstream culture of materialistic consumerism, our participation is best marked by a proportionality that reflects a commitment to things

beyond material acquisition. Spending will be balanced by joyful giving in ways that benefit the work of the church and the needs of the surrounding community. In a consumer culture, consistent, generous giving is a counter-cultural practice that can demonstrate proportionality in our citizenship.[37] Further, many Canadian Christians will choose to participate in the political process by critiquing, even protesting important social and political issues. Such involvement is appropriate, yet also demands proportionality. This means that not only will our discourse be respectful and modest, but will also refrain from the inflammatory, uncharitable and unfair rhetoric that often marks current civic discourse around controversial issues. Just as Esther worked within the system and lobbied for her preferred positions, when given opportunity she spoke and acted with decency and proportion.[38]

Engaging the process even further, some will choose to run for public office and participate in municipal, provincial or federal governments. Daniel's example legitimates this response to exile and provides a model for those in power to follow. His entering fully into the corridors of power reminds us that just because one is in exile does not mean that one should not take advantage of the possibilities of influence that come as a result of participation in the power structures of society. Serving in government offers Christians an exilic strategy that should not be neglected as long as it remains an option.

Esther modeled a positive cultural engagement, but she also took a non-conformist stand when the future of her nation was at stake. She acted on behalf of her

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[37] According to a recent (2007) comprehensive study done under the auspices of Statistics Canada, 84% of Canadians 15 and older reportedly give to charitable organizations. However the top 10% of givers, defined as those who give over $1,002 per year, give almost 2/3's (62%) of total donations. See "The Canadian Survey of Giving Participating and Volunteering," accessed on line at http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca /files/ giving/en /csgvp _highlights_2007.pdf, Dec. 1, 2009.

[38] Carol Bechtel makes the point that even when Esther asks for a counter-edict from the king that will see the slaughter of many Persians within the city of Susa her request is not out of proportion to the degree of hatred that still prevailed against the Jews there (9:13–15). See Bechtel, *Esther*, 9.

people even though her own life was at risk.[39] Daniel, who also embodies full cultural engagement, clearly demonstrates holiness as a cultural act of non-conformity in a number of his actions. Whether regarding his refusal to not eat non-kosher food (1:8), his friends' refusal to bow to the king's idol (ch. 3), or Daniel's own commitment to praying to Yahweh in the face of a royal edict that no such prayers should be offered in Babylon (ch. 6), there are times when engagement with culture is trumped by faithfulness to holiness as defined by God's standards. At times like these, holiness becomes a form of non-violent protest against the ways of the host culture. It is not simply a negative rejection of certain cultural practices but a positive affirmation of our own beliefs as the people of God. As we noted in Chapter Two, we see in Daniel how the conscientious practice of Jewish religion could even be used as an opportunity for persecution.

First Peter positions its overarching call to holiness in 1:15 on the practicality of ongoing life choices which would have allowed for the church to remain engaged with the mainstream of their culture. However, we also know that in the early years of the church Christians were known for their repudiation of some of the mainstream cultural "pleasures" for which the Roman world was famous, such as the theatre, pagan religion, gladiatorial contests, and races. Rejection of these cultural icons sometimes brought persecution.[40] This may have been the case for some in 1 Peter's audience who were being persecuted as a result of their commitment to Christ (2:20; 3:16). This persecution may be inevitable when one seeks to live a holy life in an exilic situation; at times it will draw attention and on some occasions that attention may come at a high price.

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[39] In addition to noting that the example of Esther is problematic even in her own day, this continues to be the case in light of Christian ethics and the cultural values of our own era. Accordingly Esther's example raises' difficult questions about how we apply scriptural examples—questions that we cannot fully explore here.

[40] Carson, *1 Peter*, 1032–33.

If the church is to remain faithful to God in a time of exile it will have to practice holiness in the everyday living by making proper moral choices on things like being honest in the workplace, faithful in our marriage, kind to our neighbours, and willing to serve in our communities. At other times outright rejection of cultural norms will be necessary. This will inevitably be the case for young people and single adults who reject the cultural norm of sexual activity outside of marriage. Such a stance may draw ridicule of one type or another but acts as both a critique of the hegemonic culture and as an affirmation of God's ideals. In other circumstances the church's attempt to adhere to doctrinal purity may bring it into conflict with the mainstream of current cultural thought. It may mean being featured unfavourably in the media for being unwilling to perform same sex marriages or for refusing to let a Hindu group advertise its meditation classes for young people in our church bulletin. A stand for the uniqueness, even exclusivity of Jesus, can bring charges of intolerance and bigotry; expressing the faith with integrity will mean that sometimes such a stance will be required. Exile inevitably brings those affected by it into conflict with the powers that make exile a reality. For church leaders, developing a doctrine of holiness that reflects an engaged non-conformity will not only allow the church to be effective in the world but will also remind it that at times it must protest the ways of the world by refusing to conform. The next proposal is central to directing that effort.

2. Cultivating Holiness through the Word, Spirit and Church

Helping the church develop discernment so that it can effectively live in a way that reflects an engaged non-conformity necessitates a re-emphasis on historic approaches to engendering holiness in the life of the church.

The church's life together is designed to be a text that tells an alternative story to the world; specifically God's story.[41] This is reflected in 1 Pet 2:5 where Peter describes the church as being "living stones," connected to the "living stone," Jesus himself. Thus, they are "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God." This language unambiguously connects Peter's church with the Temple of old, the place where God dwelled. Now, however, the presence of God is not primarily in a place but it is in a people and that people is Peter's audience and by extension the church wherever it is found.[42]

This being the case, the church must be familiar with the story it is supposed to tell through its life together. Put another way, the church must be able to answer the question, what is it that marks the church as "alternative"? As we have seen 1 Peter suggests that it is the church's being formed into a community that reflects God holiness as described in the law of Israel in general and Leviticus 19 in particular. In this sense Peter's call to his audience is that they continue to exist as a people in the world in the same way Israel was constituted to function as an embodiment of divine life for the entire world to see. Accordingly, the contents of a text like Lev 19 still retain their formational power for contemporary congregations who face similar challenges to personal and communal holiness much as ancient exiles did. A text such as Lev 19—as mediated via 1 Pet 1:15—is highly suggestive for the church in contemporary Canada and can serve as a resource for an unfolding dialogue on communal life.

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[41] To clarify once again, my use of the concept of the church as a "text" is not to imply that the bible is insufficient as a text or that the church supersedes the bible as a text. It is to acknowledge the important role that the church plays as a testimony to the truth of God and his word.

[42] As we noted in chapter two this theological proposal, that God's presence dwells with a people more than in a place, begins to appear, albeit indirectly, in the book of Esther.

A New Testament text that continues the textual tradition of Leviticus and offers

further aid in this important pastoral work of defining the exilic identity of the church in

Canada today is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Here we find the clearest, most

concise exploration of Jesus' vision for his community. Embodied in this text is a

blueprint for a community that looks drastically different from what is normally found in

the world of our common experience. Beginning with the Beatitudes (5:3–12), and

covering topics such as marriage (5:27–32), dealing with enemies (5:43–48), care for the

needy (6:1–4), financial stewardship (6:19–24), and judging others (7:1–6), this text

sketches a defining picture of what a holy community looks like. Forming communities

of engaged non-conformity will require understanding this text in a way that informs the

daily choices of its members.[43]

Leadership in exile helps the church define its story and understand how to live

out that story so that it can establish itself as a community that, through its life together,

both critiques the establishment principles of the empire in which it finds itself and also

offers another way of living that is demonstrated by the life of the church itself.

In these exilic times it may be that an especially faithful act of pastoral

leadership would be to lead our congregation in a protracted study of Lev 19 and Matt 5–

7 with thoughtful consideration given to the implication of these words upon communal

life. In the various venues in which preaching and teaching take place, texts become

foundational for the casting and exploring of God's vision for his people as distinct from

their culture. This is not only an act of community building, but also an act that is

infused with missional possibility. For as the church lives out the communal vision

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[43] For further consideration of the Sermon on the Mount as having formative power for shaping the church into the "hermeneutic of the Gospel" see Branson, *Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional church,* 96–101.

offered in scripture, it will become a place that increasingly has something truly different to offer to the world around it.

A further act of pastoral faithfulness in exile is to lead the church in prayer for a fresh anointing of the Spirit upon its life together as God's people in this world. As 1 Peter conceives of its audience as a people formed by the Spirit, the contemporary church needs to ask God for new power from his Spirit, as it currently functions from a place of genuine weakness within a culture where the power resides in the secularizing forces that are active in shaping it. The Scriptures provide the right knowledge for the church to develop as a counter-cultural community, but the Spirit is necessary to empower obedience. In exile, public declarations of dependence on God are necessary for both the formation of the church and the appropriation of the Spirit's empowering in the life of the church. The act of leading the church in prayer for the Spirit's renewal places the locus of hope directly in God's hands and recognizes that without the formational work of the Spirit the church can never be what God has designed it to be.

The centrality of the scriptures and the Spirit are certainly not new ideas in the church or for approaching exile. Certainly Second Temple Jews understood the need for a written record that would guide and inform their lives, and thus, as we have already considered, in exile the Hebrew Scriptures took definitive shape. Scripture must be emphasized if the church is to grow into its identity as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation," who "declare the praises of him" to the world (1 Pet 2:9). The biblical word is always central to guiding the church into obedience. Faithfulness to the word directs the creation of an alternative community. At the same time the church must rely on the work of the

Spirit who enables its obedience and guides its life as an engaged, non-conformed community.

3. A Theology of Grace for the Church Community

Churches rarely err on the side of being too gracious. Sometimes within church circles one encounters people who are wary that the church may be guilty of offering too much grace to people in and outside of the church. The idea is that if too much grace is offered people will abuse it. They will live in ways that are not faithfully Christian and if the church "lets them get away with it" not only will the grace-abusing sinner be lost, but the church will also be on the hook before an unhappy God. While it is certainly possible to abuse grace, and thus cheapen it by not emphasizing our obligation to be obedient to God as a response to his grace, rarely can the church be accused of being too gracious. When one considers the lavishness of God's grace depicted in Scripture and as experienced by humans, it is not hard to conclude that the church can still do better when it comes to extending God's grace to others.

As we touched upon in Chapter Two, one of the themes running through Jonah is his refusal (or lack of desire) to believe that God would extend the same grace to the Assyrians as he does to Israel. Jonah reminds us of how we can become hostile to those who are antagonistic toward us and forget that God longs for them to experience his grace too, and that he has chosen his people to share that grace with them. First Peter's emphasis on love (1:22; 3:8; 4:8) intrinsically emphasizes grace as necessary among the members of his exilic community.

If the church is to be a community of holiness then it will also need to be a community with a robust doctrine of grace. There are at least two reasons for this; first,

in order to pursue holiness we need a doctrine of grace that will allow room in our lives for inevitable failure. This occurs personally when we fall short of being the persons we know Christ wants us to be. Without a good theology of grace we can easily become discouraged and live a life of defeat, or just give up entirely on our pursuit of living life for Jesus. Communally the same dynamics are in play when those in the church fail and fall short. We can easily become discouraged by a lack of holiness in our congregational life. Without a firm grasp of how God's grace functions we can become judgmental, which leads to the possibility of an overly harsh response, or we can be tempted to give up and scrap the whole endeavour because it clearly does not seem to work in practice. In this way grace functions to help us cope with the personal and communal shortcomings that are inevitable in the lives of human beings trying to represent something divine.

Second, and more positively, a proper doctrine of grace can act as a motivation toward holiness. Grace allows us to make room for the reality of sin and offers the hope of forgiveness and a new beginning. As this happens in the life of a congregation a culture is created that acknowledges that sin is going to happen, but when it does the church is a place of grace that offers many chances to try again. This motivates us to keep going and to remain open to God's word operating through his Spirit, forming the church and bearing with it as it struggles toward the fulfillment of its calling. This does not eliminate the call to obedience, but it enhances it by reminding the church that when failure occurs and we do not behave as God's holy people, we will learn to forgive and start again. In no way does this deny the need for the possibility of church discipline in certain circumstances, as this too can be an expression of grace and must function

appropriately in the body. However, what is needed for a church to become holy is a theology of grace that allows for failures to occur in a way that nonetheless empowers the continued pursuit of a more perfect holiness.

While the failures of the church often compromise its witness to society, what we need is to not be more condemning of those who fail, but more gracious in the same way that God is gracious. This will enable the exilic church to more fully reflect the true nature of God and, perhaps, offer to the world a community of holy grace that truly is an "alternative" to the ways of the world.

In order to accomplish this church leaders must develop a biblical theology of grace and seek to model in their leadership and through authentic living in order to help the church become such a community.

V. Exilic Mission: Engaging the Culture as Exiles

For Israel, exile brought about a rediscovery of its missional nature and reminded it that it was still commissioned to be a "light for the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6). In the same way the marginalization of the church in the Western world in general and Canada in particular is awakening a new missional focus that is both a response to the new relationship between church and culture and a rediscovery of the church's true nature.[44] Once again the theologies of the biblical resources we have been employing offer a template for exilic living as they provide a missional perspective for their audience. First Peter in particular is relevant in terms of how the church is to function in a cultural situation of exile. Just as Israel needed to see that despite its exile God still was calling

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[44] For representative literature that reflects the contours of this discussion see Guder, *Missional church,* and *The Continuing Conversion of the church;* Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional church,* and Frost, *Exiles.* Many of these authors see the loss of a missional identity in the church as the core reason for the decline of Christendom.

the people to be his witnesses, the recipients of 1 Peter are also invited to see that their social marginalization in no way negates their calling to fulfill the commission that Jesus gave to the church to be his witnesses. In Canada today it is ironic that the de-centreing of the church and the challenges of a post-Christian culture provide an impetus for the church to rediscover its true identity and re-think how it can fulfill its mandate to mission. There is a "severe mercy" in the fact that our loss of social status and power could ultimately be our great gain.[45]

1. Mission through Relationships

As we have seen in Chapter Three the missional identity of the church as described in 1 Peter is played out primarily in the context of social relationships, particularly as they are characterized by mutual submission, one to another. What does this mean in a 21st century context?

First, it means that the church is intentional in forging relationships with its community. This requires the church to find ways to engage its community in ways that allows it to build a relationship with it. This calls the church to truly be present in the community, to live with the people it is called to serve. Practically speaking it means that a local congregation must determine where it can connect with the needs of the community so as to help meet those needs and build relationships. In one place that might mean providing affordable daycare, in another it might mean an afterschool program for children, in another place it could be a regular Saturday night dance (with a cash bar) that allows people to connect socially and build relationships.

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[45]Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism,* 27.

Of even greater importance is how these relationships function. 1 Peter teaches the importance of submission in relational life, which will mean that the church seeks to live in an unselfish way, giving preference to the needs of others and not insisting on getting our own way. This is a perennial problem within the church and often leads to church fights and splits. It diminishes the witness of the collective body in the world. In a post-Christian culture transformed relationships are necessary to facilitate the testimony of the church. Missional relationships will call us to be listeners and caregivers in a way that embodies the care and compassion of God himself. It asks us to, like Jesus, be willing to be found with the "sinners" and the unlovely so that the relational priorities of God are found in our lives too. In extreme circumstances it may mean not seeking retribution on those who persecute us, but giving up our right to justice. This kind of humility offers a testimony to our affiliation with Christ and his power to transform not only individual lives but also culture when his model is sincerely followed.

Further this kind of relational evangelism will mean that the church itself will have to function as a place that demonstrates the power of Christ to transform human relationships. This will require the development of many practical habits, such as learning how to share our resources with each other, learning how to open up our hearts and lives so that we live authentically with each other, remaining committed to each other in the midst of relational struggles and communal strife, and even learning how to open up the life of our immediate family so that newcomers and "strangers" can be included.[46] This kind of counter-cultural community is what identifies the church as God's people, confirms his work among us and helps to give the church its evangelistic potency.

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[46] For an extended exploration of these ideas and the concept of the church as a family see Hellerman, *When the church was a Family,* especially chapter 6.

2. Mission and Proclamation

In the story of Jonah we are challenged in regard to our desire to avoid missional engagement with a culture that we may not particularly like. The story clearly implies that God's people must be willing to engage ("go into," Matt 28:19–20) the world and offer the good news that God has for all people. Even more importantly Jonah's story confronts us with the reality of God's great concern for all people (4:11). This challenge makes remaining aloof from people outside of the church a non-option for those who are a part of the church.

While the primary evangelistic strategy offered by Peter involves non-verbal action, in 3:15 he councils the use of words by offering a "reason for the hope that you have in you."

In this way mission necessitates living in a way that not only demonstrates faith in Christ, but also proclaims that faith to those whom God loves and desires to respond to him. While exile raises unique challenges for mission it calls for a renewed appreciation of the fact that mission is intrinsic to the church's identity and requires a renewed commitment both to holiness of life and to verbal proclamation. Thus in Canada today as the church is increasingly marginalized its call to mission does not change in its essence; it only changes in its approach. This leads us to consider two specific applications of ancient exilic missional thinking in the postmodern Canadian context.

i. Church-based, Community-Centred Evangelism

Appropriating the wisdom of 1 Peter, and the exilic models of Esther, Daniel and Jonah, requires adopting a dual focus in our approach to mission which can appear contradictory on the surface. On the one hand, mission is exemplified in these models

(discounting Jonah for the moment) by a quiet, non-intrusive engagement with the broader culture. On the other hand the New Testament command for the church to "go into the world" (and here we can re-engage Jonah) requires some kind of outward orientation to the church's life. In the models we are employing as our exilic advisors we can see the importance of a particular distinctiveness of life as central to the effectiveness of one's witness. Esther behaves with loyalty; Daniel remains faithful to the laws of his faith; Peter calls for holiness in his churches as a sign of their commitment to Christ. This reminds us of the importance of the inner life of the community in mission.[47] Yet we also see how there is an outward orientation in these books. Esther depicts the conversion of many Persians to Judaism; Daniel depicts the foreign kingdoms in which Daniel serves as coming to recognize Yahweh as the true God; 1 Peter casts a vision to his community that their goal for living faithfully is the conversion of their oppressors; and Jonah clearly calls for its readers to have a missional vision for all people. This reminds us that our vision can never be internal alone nor exclude an outward impulse.

The proposal being offered here is that mission must be rooted in the life of the church but also include an outward thrust that takes seriously the missional nature of God's people and Christ's call for his church to be a people who go into the world. This is not a new idea, but is in fact ancient. However, in the culture in which we now find ourselves, how we express such an approach is changing.

Evangelistic methodologies employed in Christendom have largely been based on what is commonly called an 'attractional' model of evangelism. In this model

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[47] As discussed in chapter two, in taking Esther, Daniel and Jonah as "advice tales" we are assuming that as characters they in some way are designed to embody the life of Israel as a nation. Therefore what they do, or don't do, is instructive to the nation as a whole. Thus, we can rightly apply their model to the "community" as a whole.

evangelism was often centreed around a program or an event that was potentially attractive for people to attend. As an example, perhaps one of the most outwardly successful evangelistic methods for many years was the evangelistic crusade, epitomized by Billy Graham's ministry. These evangelistic events were often large spectacles that met in a hockey arena, football stadium or large tent. They employed contemporary music, multi-media presentations, and interviews with famous celebrities who testified about their faith in Christ, and featured a "famous" preacher like Dr. Graham. While Billy Graham's organization, like those of many other evangelists, sought to work with local churches in order to promote the crusade and follow up on new converts, they were nonetheless largely independent endeavors. Their success was to a large degree predicated on the name of the preacher, the size of the event, and the quality of the program offered. The crusade was result-oriented, with its success measured largely in terms of how many people "made decisions" for Christ. This was usually indicated by people responding to an altar call. Evangelism was usually centreed around the event itself. While relationships may have been important in terms of Christians inviting their non-Christian friends, the "real" evangelism would have been perceived as happening at the crusade meeting itself.

Another example of an approach to evangelism reflective of Christendom was the local church outreach program in which churches offered a program designed specifically for non-believers. It might be a children's vacation bible school program, a concert featuring a Christian artist, or an Alpha program, all of which contained a message of Christian truth and offered an invitation to believe the message. These programs were usually highly utilitarian in that they were designed to be useful, relevant, and ultimately

helpful to everyday life. Whether they provided a fresh, simple approach to Christianity, a night of entertainment (with a message), or an inexpensive program for children (and maybe a break for busy suburban parents), they were depicted as something that would have practical value for the user, but would also serve as a venue for the church to reach out to people with the gospel message.

These methods served a purpose and led many people to a genuine relationship with Jesus. However, they are reflective of approaches that worked in a culture that had some predisposition toward Christianity and even to the church itself. To test this theory one only has to ask how these methods would have worked in a different age—1 Peter's for example. Just as these were not options for Peter's church so they are increasingly less appropriate options for a marginalized church in Canada today.

What is Peter's strategy for mission? It is for the church to act as a witness to the surrounding community through the quality of its life together, then go outside of the church and live in a way that continues to bear witness to the people that they encounter in their everyday lives. This was the foundation of the church's mission: the church as a witness through its common life and Christians as witnesses as they proceed into their world to live out their faith. Bryan Stone reflects the New Testament idea of church as witness when he writes, "Baptism was far more than a symbolic nod to tradition or a quick initiatory rite, but rather one's commissioning into a missionary existence."[48]

The temptation and often the pressure on church leaders is always to be devising a new evangelistic strategy or promoting the latest program that is working in other settings. This is not wrong in itself; in fact evangelistic strategy can be part of missional effectiveness. However, it is not the core idea of mission in 1 Peter (or the New

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[48] Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom,* 104.

Testament as a whole). Peter's instruction to the exilic church is that faithful evangelistic witness comes in the form of the simple, daily obedience of Christian people living together in authentic New Testament community and going into their world as ambassadors for Christ.

Such a "strategy" encounters resistance in the church because it may be perceived as insufficiently direct or aggressive, particularly so in a consumer culture that is nurtured on products being marketed strategically. Also, such an approach may not appear to some to be sufficiently "result" oriented. In a culture that likes to quantify things so as to measure their efficiency, an approach that places the emphasis on community formation and mission through simply being intentional about being involvement in the wider society may not deliver easily measurable results. However, while crusade evangelism and user-friendly programs may have been highly viable forms of public witness in a culture of Christendom, in exile they are far less effective. While they may still have a marginal place in the overall mission of the Western church as Christendom wanes, it is the life of an alternative community, demonstrating a distinct quality of life that is ready to give an answer about that life when asked that will prove most evangelistically effective in the current cultural reality.

As we will see, this calls the church to become a community that is intrinsically missional as opposed to being one that "does" mission. The difference between the two may be subtle, and it does not eliminate the possibility that a church might decide to develop a strategy for mission or organize a mission project, but a truly missional church

may be described using the following four characteristics that are adapted from the work of Michael Frost,[49]

1. A missional church understands that we, in the West, live in a Post-Christian culture and that the church now functions from the margins as opposed to being at the centre.

Many of the influential church models of recent decades come from the *Field of Dreams* model; they operate on the principle of "Build it and they will come." Whether the emphasis was on contemporary worship, charismatic manifestations, seeker services or Bible teaching, the idea was consistently that people would come to the church if we provided them with something that related to them and met their needs.

The missional church understands that the church has lost its place in Western culture and now finds itself on the margins of culture, with declining attendance and diminished influence.

2. A missional church takes seriously the call to "go" and make disciples.

The missional church understands that it can no longer run programs and expect people to respond. The church must go to the people and seek ways to demonstrate the gospel through actions and words outside the confines the church building and community. This, as we have discussed is intrinsic to the church's identity and does not negate the undergirding need for community formation in the church and for our "going" to be culturally appropriate in the forms of mission that are undertaken. However, any church that takes its missional identity seriously realizes that engaging with "the world" is a necessity.

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[49] Frost, *Exiles,* 55.

3. *A missional church is organized around mission as opposed to being a church that does mission.*

Missional churches start with mission. Missional churches are driven by a theology that believes that God is by nature a missional God. The church is itself an expression of God's mission *(missio Dei)*. Some churches "do" mission. They include mission in their list of church activities, but it is not necessarily at the heart of what they do. Rather, "building up the body" is given priority as the purpose for the church. Missional churches by contrast see mission as the core of their identity and live out this identity in all they do. Put another way, missional churches primarily understand themselves as being sent (like missionaries) into the world for the sake of those who do not currently know Christ. The work of building the body is crucial, but only to the extent that it serves the purpose of mission.

4. *A missional church sees itself and its ministry as an expression of the incarnation of Christ.*

The incarnation of Christ informs the theology of the missional church. Missional churches believe that as God entered the world in human form, adherents enter (individually and communally) into the context of the culture and society around them, aiming to transform that culture through local involvement in it. This holistic involvement may take many forms, including social activism, hospitality, and individual acts of kindness, as well as verbally proclaiming the message of Christ's saving work. Missional living makes the church part of the culture while still acknowledging that it is an outsider who ultimately lives on the margins. Missional churches take seriously the idea that God is at work in this world and the church is called to participate in that

work.[50] This approach is reflective of the models we have been considering in this study (Esther, Daniel, 1 Peter). In each case there are high levels of integration with the broader culture, combined with deep commitments to the distinctiveness of their identity as God's people. This reflects the goal of the "gospel," to enhance and enlarge the kingdom of God by reaching out to others and seeking to touch their lives regardless of their lifestyles or beliefs.[51]

Church leaders in post-Christian Canada will need to help orient their churches to a missional way of being if they are to engage the culture in meaningful evangelism. Ironically the way to engender such an orientation is by helping churches actually get involved in mission. Missional communities will not develop out of doing more Bible study and adding more prayer meetings; they will develop out of actually doing mission together. This does not contradict the fact that a distinction can be drawn between churches that only include mission as a part of their overall program and truly "missional" churches. Missional churches prioritize mission at their core and then get busy actually "doing" mission because they know that to be a missional church means a vigorous engagement in activities that accomplish mission.

This does not mean that ongoing Bible study and prayer are not essential parts of community formation, discipleship and mission, or that theological reflection on mission is not necessary. It is to say, however, that missional passion comes out of doing mission more than it comes out of studying passages about mission or praying for it. Leaders who understand the need for missional community will create that community

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[50] Seland, "Resident Aliens in Mission," 568.
[51] For further thoughts on what defines a church as being missional see Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come,* in particular chapters 2-4. Also, Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional church,* especially chapter 4.

most effectively by simultaneously teaching about alternative community while helping

the church to engage in practical missional endeavors. This primarily means helping the

people in the church see the missional potential of their own lives and encouraging them

to seek to engage their own world missionally in creative ways. It also means seeing

ways that the church as a whole can potentially engage its broader community with

initiatives that can bring blessing to it. As people participate in mission, in all its forms,

the church community will be formed in a healthy, biblical way.[52]

Ray Anderson differentiates between "ministry," things done within the body of

Christ, and "mission," things done for the sake of those outside the body, and explicitly

identifies mission as having a particular potency to form the church,

> If the mission of Christ through the presence and power of the
> Spirit determines the nature and ministry of the church, then we
> should expect that mission itself becomes the source of the
> renewed vision and life of the church. This is why mission,
> rather than ministry, expands God's kingdom and renews the
> spiritual life of the church.[53]

Michael Frost borrows the term *communitas* to describe the radical dimensions of

belonging and social togetherness that should define the life of the church. He writes

about the need for a group of people to have an experience of *liminality* in order for true

communitas to be experienced. This means that people need to have a shared experience

of being pushed to their limits or out of their normal comfort zones so that they are tested

in a meaningful way. The result will be a shared bond that transcends the bonds

experienced in most human relationships. This kind of experience often occurs, for

example, when people share in a short term mission trip and are forced to deal with a new

culture, less than ideal conditions, and a challenging work project that they undertake

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[52] For further exploration on how engaging in mission is central to forming missional, disciplemaking congregations see Jones, *Traveling Together,* 89–92.

[53] Anderson, *An Emergent Theology,* 186.

together. Such an experience pushes people beyond what they are normally comfortable with, and when done with others, forms communal bonds that year's worth of small group Bible study will not. Frost proposes quite rightly that the experience of belonging to the majority of suburban churches is hardly "liminal." He suggests that only by engaging in challenging, missional living can a group of people truly become the kind of church that is missional in its orientation and is a reflection of the kind of church that Christ had in mind. This church is one that is radically devoted to one another and radically oriented to the world in terms of its commitment to mission.[54]

As individual Christians increasingly understand that their life in Christ is designed to be missional, a heightened need for Christian community will develop in their lives as the church now becomes a necessary support network for missional living. This means that Canadian churches will need to read their context effectively and decide what they can do to go into their community with a vision for serving it and bearing witness to the person of Jesus Christ. In some contexts it will mean getting involved with new immigrants by hosting English as a second language classes and helping to prepare job resumes. In other contexts it will mean providing meals, shelter, clothing and simple health care for the poor. Others will offer counseling services for individuals, couples and families that are in trouble. Still others will recognize the need to begin something radically different as a new expression of church in their community; perhaps initiating a weekly gathering in a local bar, opening a coffee shop as a place of hospitality and relationship building, or developing a collective for artists in the community for mutual creative stimulation, conversation and support. Each local church has to identify its own unique gifts and

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[54] For Frost's exploration of *Communitas* and *liminality* see *Exiles,* 103–129.

calling, but actually getting involved in mission outside of the walls of the church is critical to the formation of authentic, missional community.

While the missional potential of the church is rooted in the life of the church and the church "being" the church, that life cannot become what it is intended to become without actual missional engagement. churches that only focus on their internal life become inward focused and ultimately inert. The church is designed to be missional by nature and thus can never opt for an orientation that lacks an outward focus.

ii.   A Dialogical Proclamation

The prescription for proclamation in 1 Pet 3:15 offers the same kind of wisdom to the contemporary church as it did for our first century counterparts. While 1 Peter's wisdom is not the only New Testament approach to evangelism, in a culture that rejects the idea that one person alone can know the truth and that is averse to those who would try and preach to them in a way that seems to force faith upon them, former methods of witness must be replaced by more dialogical approaches. This is where the approach that 1 Peter offers to its readers can help contemporary congregations learn how to engage in approaches to proclamation that include the following characteristics.

a. Listening vs. Telling

Can listening be evangelism? Evangelism is generally perceived as a form of telling or sharing of the gospel message from one human being to another. While the proclamational aspect of evangelism can never be lost, in the current age listening itself needs to be understood as a highly evangelistic act. Evangelism in exile begins not with our mouth but with our ears. We begin by listening to people's stories and seeking to understand their lives. In an age of detachment, individuality, and post-modern

homelessness, it is in the act of listening that evangelism truly begins to happen. Listening is not simply a pre-evangelistic act of relationship building, not something that we must do in order to gain credibility so that we can get to the real business of telling them what we know they need to hear. We listen in order hear people's stories, understand their lives, identify where God is already at work, and discern signs of spiritual hunger. Listening is the place where authentic relationship is forged.

Listening is the evangelistic act of genuine presence and authentic relationship that mirrors the incarnational activity of Christ and is the essence of mission. If proclamation does take place in a way that offers an "answer with gentleness and respect" (to paraphrase Peter) it flows out of a deep, genuine listening.[55]

b. *An Offering Apologetic vs. an Apologetic of Certainty*

At one time a particularly popular type of apologetics was largely "proof" oriented in its content and approach. For instance, certain lines of traditional apologetic thought offer "five arguments for the existence of God," or "four reasons why we can believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead."[56] This kind of approach, as helpful as it can be, when delivered with a strong dose of certainty, is rooted in a modernistic and Christendom mindset that believes in rationality above all and often assumes a certain amount of predisposition to theism in general and Christianity in particular on the part of the listener.

Instead of providing four reasons for why one should believe the resurrection to be true, an offering apologetic will engage in a mutual exploration of ideas that offers

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[55] For further exploration of listening as an evangelistic activity see Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come,* 97–99.

[56] A classic example of this kind of apologetic approach is found in Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life publishers, 1979).

some reasons why we personally—and Christians generally—believe the resurrection to

be true. While the content may be similar, the tone is drastically different. Rather than

presenting a case, we are inviting a dialogue that explores the mystery of Christian faith

and offers to our conversation partners our own testimony of belief as the foundation for

further exploration, rather than appealing to a (supposedly) rational theory. This does not

mean that cogent thinking and well-articulated arguments are not important, however,

postmodern uncertainty calls for this kind of humble offering as opposed to an overly-

confident telling. A central characteristic of this apologetic is a focus on Jesus as the

content of faith. Evidence points to the fact that people like Jesus, they just don't like

Christianity.[57] In light of this, our proclamation of the gospel should seek to focus on

discussions around the person of Jesus rather than our views of creation, the afterlife, or

even the viability of the resurrection as an historical event. While these important ideas

cannot be bypassed, they are generally not the most germane issues that people are

working through in their respective spiritual quests. Perhaps what people need is to be

brought into contact with the person of Jesus, the Jesus of the gospels, as much as we are

able to describe him—the Jesus who played with children, ate with sinners, touched

lepers, walked the dusty roads of Palestine and embraced the cross. This is the Jesus

whose story compels people and needs to be told. Therefore the power of exilic

apologetics rests in making the person of Jesus the focus of our faith-sharing

conversations.

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[57] As an anecdotal illustration of this Seattle pastor, Karen Ward reports that in a survey done in their Pacific Northwest Community 95% of respondents affirmed their appreciation for the person of Jesus. Their appreciation of the church however was far less overwhelming. See Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging churches,* 48.

c. *Pastor-Teacher Evangelism vs. Evangelist-Preacher Evangelism*

The model of the evangelist-preacher is not used here necessarily to describe someone who stands in front of a group of people and preaches an evangelistic message. It is chosen to depict an approach to evangelism that emphasizes the need to deliver a message to a person or group of people. It conveys the idea that evangelism gets the message out and that "getting the message out" is ultimately what is important, even if it has to be forced and offends. What matters is that people hear the gospel one way or another. Again, while there is tremendous importance in delivering the message of salvation so that people can understand it, consider it and respond to it, the evangelist-preacher model assumes many of the same things (a predisposition to belief and a basic familiarity with the message) that are resident in a Christendom culture but are not characteristic of a post-Christendom culture. These new cultural realities make the goal of "getting the message out" much more difficult and complex.

The pastor-teacher model reflects more of a shepherding style of evangelism that takes the long view and seeks to journey with people on their road toward Christ, or on their road away from Christ as it may be. Pastor-teachers are those who stick with a congregation for the long haul, who speak truth but also build relationships, who befriend, care, counsel and preach, but always with a view to having an arm around the shoulder of the one they are serving. In exilic contexts evangelism is much more like shepherding than delivering a message because in a post-Christian age evangelism takes a long time. Increasingly people are coming to the gospel from a long way away. The lack of a basic understanding of the Christian message, latent unbelief and a cultural milieu that does not help develop Christian disciples any more mean that mission is a long term

process in most cases. While proclamation of the message is always a primary goal, successful evangelism should be measured by our ability to walk with people on their journey; listening, answering questions and staying the course. The church needs to embrace these ideals for evangelism if it is to be effective in its mission in exile. Church leadership is charged with the responsibility of helping a church embrace such a vision.

The preceding proposals are necessary for missional engagement in exilic circumstances and will allow the church to remain in dialogue with an increasingly secular society. However, the challenges of cultural engagement can also serve to remind us that exile is not meant to be our permanent state.

VI. Exilic Future: A True Home for Exiles

In many ways the eschatological hope of the early church, as represented in 1 Peter, was a theological continuation of Second Temple ideology that, as we have seen, also emphasized a future hope for release from exile. It also legitimizes the motif for today in the sense that it reminds us that as God's people the ultimate end of exile is always eschatological, and until then we live in a time where we are never fully "at home." On the surface this kind of encouragement may not seem necessary for the church in Canada. Perhaps it is here that the drastic difference between the exilic experience of the first church and our own becomes clear. As Canadian Christians, for the most part, life is not full of trials in the same way that it was for our early ancestors in the faith. In trying to apply First Peter's eschatological emphasis to our day there is built-in resistance to such views on the part of the cultural context in which postmoderns have been nurtured. We live in a culture that is not given to deferred gratification any more than it is interested in heavenly glory and, thus, a teaching that calls us to focus on reward

that will not come in this life does not seem overly relevant. Our culture expects that immediate personal fulfillment and improvement will be a byproduct of (if not the very reason for) any commitment that we make. We feel entitled to this, so if we make a commitment to something the benefit should come to us quickly, not after we die or in some long-awaited return of Christ. Finally, we live in a culture that seeks to avoid pain and suffering at all costs. We use medication, therapy, giving up or whatever other means available to alleviate any suffering that we may experience. So when Peter encourages us to embrace suffering and persevere under it so as to identify with Christ in his sufferings until he returns—we do not embrace such a message too readily. These culturally conditioned responses make Peter's message a tough sell in today's church, let alone in the broader culture.

Yet, if we truly live as an alternative community, embracing the counter-cultural norms of the gospel in an ever growing pluralism it may be that Peter's message of future hope and perseverance will become ever more relevant to the exilic experience of the church in Canada. Such a message is one that can buoy God's people with hope when faced with occasions when the cost of practicing our faith is high. If the church in exilic times embraces a full-orbed exilic strategy it will indeed need an eschatological component to strengthen it against the forces of the world that continually come against it in both subtle and aggressive ways. Author John Drane observes correctly that "no Christian tradition seems to have any sort of serviceable eschatology for the twenty-first century world in which we live."[58] He further comments that we need to overcome any embarrassment that we may feel about this doctrinal component of Christian faith and work on developing a meaningful eschatology for our time. First Peter's eschatological

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[58] John Drane, *After McDonaldization*, 27.

hope can contribute to such a conversation and provide a key piece of exilic theology for Canada's church as well.

First Peter's eschatology makes relevant connections with today because it is a hope-based vision that includes both future and present dimensions.[59] As we have noted, there is a clear vision for the world to come that offers a place of rest from whatever struggles this life presents. However, this is coupled with a current mission that makes our lives in this world meaningful as we seek to live out the ways of the kingdom so as to attract others to it. This mission and the suffering that is potentially part of the faith journey are sustained by the abiding presence of Christ with whom we identify, and whose presence we experience not just as a future hope but as a current reality through the abiding presence of his Spirit (1:3–5). Therefore First Peter's eschatological theology includes both present and future dimensions, both of which are highly relevant to the life of the church.

Accordingly, the following proposals offer some ideas on helping lead a renaissance in eschatological hope.

1. Forming an Eschatological Identity in the Church

We have already considered how an eschatological perspective on life is not necessarily one that will be most easily embraced by those living as Western people in the twenty-first century. This is not to imply that the church does not need to be formed in a way that also emphasizes the current hope and meaning that the gospel provides and that kingdom living engenders. Such a perspective is of course foundational and also

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[59] As was noted in chapter 3, 1 Peter uses more than one metaphor to articulate the nature of eschatological hope. This is in keeping with the New Testament as a whole, which offers several different ways of thinking about ultimate eschatological hope. Eschatological hope thus includes both temporal (end of time as we now experience it) and spatial (new heaven and new earth) dimensions. Further reflections on these distinctions is beyond the scope of this study.

vital for the church in exile. However, the eschatological identity that 1 Peter seeks to engender is not only a vital backdrop for exilic living, it also reflects a broader New Testament perspective that can at times be lost in a cultural context like that of Western society.

This perspective is also where exile becomes particularly potent as a way of understanding the church in today's culture, as it is from an eschatological perspective that the church can most vividly see its life as a matter of living "away from home," indeed far from the ultimate home that we are created and destined for.

It is here that the pastoral use of prophetic imagination comes into play once again. Leadership must help the church to see how its life in its immediate social context is designed to be a foreshadowing of the age to come. This means that leaders must teach the church that the immediate work of building an alternative community has ramifications that go beyond simply the building of a better world, for they speak to the kind of world that is ultimately to come. As the church we are pointing beyond our flawed experience in this world to a better one to come, so that ultimately the church is not just a group of "resident aliens," but also conveys a foretaste of heaven. Thus, the church must be called to imagine what God has in mind for the future by participating in its emergence today, all the while anticipating that our experience now is only a foretaste of the future. Further, this vision can be cast in highly counter-cultural terms, since the church is a place where the immediate is not the only reality to be pursued. This can become a highly subversive act of alternative community as the church rejects the common view that immediate gratification is what one should expect from life and offers

an alternative view that lives with a vision for a renewed creation as our inheritance to come.

Finally, this eternal perspective is crucial to sustaining faith and hope in the face of a culture disinterested in the Christian message. Since living as a Christian potentially causes one to feel less and less at home in this world; or having increasingly to eschew particular behaviours, beliefs and practices that are considered "common" to the majority of people, the hope of a future world where we will once again "be at home" becomes a faith-sustaining vision that the church must hold onto and promote as an aspect of its core ethos, just as Peter did, in exilic times. It must come out in our preaching and teaching regularly. Our public prayers should regularly express the language of eschatological hope. The idea of this eternal hope needs to be written into our mission statements and church values. Also, this language of eschatological hope should be part of the evangelistic proclamation of the church. In a world where, despite the material comforts, many in our culture struggle with personal pain and despair, a message of hope that responds directly to the falleness of this world with the promises of a renewed creation can offer hope to those in need of it. Finally it must flavor our discourse as we encourage one another with reminders that our faithfulness to Christ and perseverance under the various trials that do surface in our lives will ultimately be rewarded.

2. Dealing Honestly with Doubt

Exile is a doubt-producing experience; it leads us to wonder why we should stick with the identity that led us into exile, and if there is an option, whether it may not be better to choose another identity to live by. For ancient Israel, doubt that Yahweh was the true God was addressed by the prophets and Psalmists not as an abstract theory but as

an act of pastoral theology. In Asia Minor, First Peter's audience was experiencing

marginalization and trials due to their faith, which led some to doubt. As Karen Jobes

comments,

> When one's Christian faith is criticized and even mocked, it is
> natural that one may begin to doubt the truth of the gospel of
> Jesus Christ. It is, after all, extraordinary to believe that the
> body of a dead man was raised to some kind of eternal state of
> being. Ancient people no less than modern might
> understandably find that claim outrageous....Therefore
> assuaging the doubt of his readers concerning their faith in
> Christ in light of society's response is one clear purpose of the
> letter. [60]

For Canadian Christians, exile in a post-Christian era can definitely create a

(high) degree of doubt regarding their faith. Exile calls core beliefs into question because

they are no longer commonly held and, as with Israel of old, it appears as if other "gods"

have overcome the power of Yahweh, pulling back the curtain and exposing his weakness

as a deity.

Like the Psalmist, today's Canadian exiles can say, "Awake Lord, why do you

sleep?" (Ps 44:23) and "Why do you hide your face?" (Ps 44:24) Indication that doubt is

a reality in the psyche of the culture and among Christians today is found in both

statistical data and on bestseller lists.[61] Doubt is an inevitable reality of exile and is a

genuine experience within the Canadian church today. Thus, pastoral leadership in

Canada today has to address the reality of doubt in the church through three key

movements:

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[60] Jobes, *1 Peter*, 42.
[61] The statistics presented by Reginald Bibby, cited in the first chapter, that present 32% of 15-19 year old Canadians as having "no faith" in 2008, up from 13% in 1984, indicates this, as does the significant drop in those declaring themselves to be Catholic or Protestant. Further, the popularity of books like Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion,* and Christopher Hitchens' *God is Not Good* demonstrate openness to religious doubt.

i. Admit Doubt

Pastoral honesty about the reality of exilic doubt is the beginning point. Just as Peter directly confronts the reality of first century suffering, church leadership must name the reality of how exile produces doubt and admit that it is in fact a common experience. This is the beginning of being able to disable its persuasive power in personal and congregational life. Doubt should be acknowledged in exilic times. It is here that the power of lament can be experienced, as it offers the proper liturgical vehicle through which to express the doubt that we feel as an exiled community. When we name it honestly and specifically we can begin to work with it and constructively address it not as a faith-disabling reality, but as a faith building possibility.

ii. Offer the Community of Faith as a Place of Sustaining Faith

The church functions, in sociological terms, as a plausibility structure. That is, it is a place where people with common beliefs come together to support one another and reinforce their shared commitments. The group is structured to help its members continue in their beliefs by making them plausible, even when others outside the group tell them that they are wrong.[62] This function becomes even more vital when the culture at large plays less and less of a role in reinforcing core Christian beliefs. Because of this the church community must play an even more central role in the believer's life as it reminds us that we "are not crazy" to pursue faith in Jesus and invest our lives in God's kingdom. Thus, the ongoing cultivation of biblical community and an ongoing emphasis on the believer's need to participate in it becomes central to pastoral work.

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[62] For further insight into the role that plausibility structures play in religion, see, e.g., Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 47–51; Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief* and *Habits of the Heart* (*passim*).

iii. *Present the Hope of Future Glory*

As we have explored above the nature of this community is shaped by an eschatological perspective that calls its members to believe that their faith will ultimately be vindicated in an age that is to come. Pastoral leadership in exile responds to the latent temptation to doubt by constantly reminding its members of this fact. This is not to imply that we should just hang on and hope that someday it will all work out; rather it is to consistently root the faith of the church in the core teaching of Jesus and the apostles that this life is not all that there is and that faith is the act of believing that this assertion is true. In exile people need the encouragement that a future hope provides, not to keep them "hanging in there," but to remind them of the true nature of Christian faith both within this world and beyond it. Perseverance in exile calls for leaders constantly to stimulate this hope so as to combat the temptation congregations experience to give in to the kind of doubt that leads to the abandonment of faith.

The eschatological hope of the gospel reminds us that exile is not our permanent state. There is a future home that offers to us that long-awaited experience of restoration which is always the hope of exiles. Nurturing this hope supplies the church with a key resource for remaining faithful in the midst of the impermanent experience of being away from our true home.

VII. Conclusion

The disciplines of ancient exile, which sustained faith communities in previous times, can continue to direct contemporary communities in exile, including the church in Canada today. The Canadian church has rich resources at its disposal in the prayer language of ancient Israel, the stories of Hebrew exiles, the example of Jews in the

Second Temple period and the wisdom of First Peter. We have seen how giving attention

to these voices and discerning the appropriate ways to apply their witness will provide us

with ample insight to negotiate our way through this period of increasing marginalization

and live with the hope that just as Israel survived its extended period of exile and the

early church flourished while living on the margins, so too can the church in the West

today.

As we employ the language of lament and penitence we can come to terms with

the reality of our situation and press forward into the language of hope and all that it

offers us in terms of helping us develop a responsive theology, form our identity as God's

people, return to our mission and remember our ultimate eschatological home.[63]

While exile was devastating for Israelite life and faith and the life of the early

church was a continual challenge, their circumstances proved to be a time of development

that generated a better future for both. As Ephraim Radner eloquently states regarding

Israel's exile, "exile is also a movement by which our Lord delineated deliverance. As

such, it can hardly be a cause for fear."[64] This can also be the case for Canada's church

in the twenty-first century if we are willing to learn from the wisdom of our ancestors in

the faith.

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[63] See Christiaan Beker, *Suffering and Hope,* for an articulate reflection on the biblical theology of hope. See also Donald Capps, *Agents of Hope,* on the difference between eschatological and apocalyptic hope.

[64] Radner, *From Liberation to Exile,* 934.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Converting the Church

The Trouble ..., is not moving mountains,
But digging the ground that you're on.

- Jakob Dylan
From the Song "Something Good this way Comes"

Miracles of deliverance must be wonderful things to experience. Unfortunately,

for most of us, and by their very nature, miracles are rare and deliverance usually comes

as a result of hard work and everyday routines. These routines flow out of patterns that

develop consciously and unconsciously and become ways for individuals and

communities to function effectively in the particular circumstances in which they find

themselves.

For Israel, a miracle of restoration would have been a nice resolution to

Babylonian exile but it did not come. Instead the nation developed new ways of living as

God's people under foreign rule. These new patterns of life and faith enabled them to

survive their various captivities and emerge, intact, as a people. Similarly, the early

church—while the recipient of more than a few miracles—did not enjoy a place of power

in the world. The early church also had to develop patterns and habits that enabled them

to fulfill their calling as a distinct people in the Roman world. In both cases, God called

his people to do the theological work that was necessary for them to contextualize their

faith and serve his purposes in the midst of their exilic circumstances.

This dissertation has largely been devoted to considering the patterns and habits

that are necessary for the church in Canada to live by that will enable us to faithfully

follow in our ancestors' footsteps and serve God's purposes in our own exile. While a

miracle of deliverance might be welcome, it is more likely that God is also calling us, in

the aforementioned words of Jakob Dylan, to "dig the ground that we are on" and

determine what it means to be his people in our particular context. The preceding study

of exilic resources and their potential application to the church in Canada is intended to

aid the ongoing conversation about what that might look like. Going even further, it calls

for a conversion of the church. It invites the church in Canada (and even the Western

world for that matter) to see itself as in exile so that the specific resources of an exilic

theology can be applied in ways that will enable it to thrive in generations to come.

Employing the motif of exile could be a tremendously helpful move for the

Canadian church. It will potentially enable the church to understand more clearly the

reality of its cultural circumstances and provide resources to help the church not to be

overwhelmed by those circumstances. Brueggemann notes the potential of the exilic

motif to accomplish this when he writes that accepting an exilic identity "is an act of

polemical theological imagination that guards against cultural assimilation."[1] Exile, as we

have seen, calls for a definition of identity that engages new cultural realities, but also

acknowledges that we have an identity that is distinct from them.

Further, exile also offers the potential for the church as it rediscovers its true

identity, as Elaine Heath writes,

> Contrary to being a disaster, the exilic experience of loss and
> marginalization are what are needed to restore the church to its
> evangelistic place. On the margins of society the church will
> once again find its God-given voice to speak to the dominant
> culture in subversive ways, resisting the powers and
> principalities, standing against the seduction of the status quo.[2]

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[1] Brueggemann, Hopeful Imagination, 111.
[2] Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism,* 26.

The potential of exile as a motif that enables the rediscovery of true identity, as well as renewed effectiveness, commends it as good news for the church to be "converted" by.

The biblical and Second Temple materials that we have explored are resources that can inform and nurture this conversion so that it becomes a robust vision to guide the Canadian church in its current milieu.[3] As we have seen, the church in Canada developed in a context that welcomed its participation in the shaping of the nation's culture. In certain ways the Canadian church's influence in nation building is unique in the Western world, providing the church with a sense of privilege that shaped its identity in Canadian society. As the culture began to shift and the process of secularization began, the church slowly lost its place at the centre of national life. This shift was exacerbated by the postmodern fracturing of culture that has continued to unfold in the past forty-five years. The immense change that has resulted from this ongoing shift has left the church on the margins of Canadian culture. On the whole the church has been slow to adapt to the new cultural situation in which it finds itself. While few Christian leaders in Canada labor under the old paradigm of Christendom, many have not grasped how drastic the implications of the cultural changes are on the ministry of the church.

Our experience of displacement as Canadian Christians is not completely unlike that of ancient Israel in its sociological realities. In both cases the people involved experienced a move from the centre to the margins, in both cases those who understood/understand the implications of this shift had/have to enter into creative theological reflection on how to translate the faith into these new circumstances. The

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[3] An example of how a biblically informed motif of exile can be applied to a people group so as to help it thrive in adverse circumstances can be found in Gregory Lee Cuéllar's work on Mexican Immigrants, *Voices of Marginality*.

efforts of our Old Testament ancestors provide a template for our own reflections; as this dissertation demonstrates their response can continue to direct us as Canadian Christian exiles. In particular the language of lament, repentance and hope provide clear categories for us to employ in our response to contemporary exile. The specific aspects of hope found in a responsive theology, a renewed identity as God's holy people, and a reawakening to our call to be God's missional people give clear direction to the life of the church today, just as they informed Israel in the past.

The example of Second Temple Jews, who continued to reflect theologically on how their faith functioned in their culturally changing circumstances demonstrate to us how the ongoing challenges of exile can be met as the cultural setting continues to be reshaped.

Finally, the New Testament church, particularly as it is epitomized in 1 Peter, offers further direction for the Canadian church today as it continues to embody the exilic ideals of the Old Testament by continuing to apply them in a new context. The first century church also built on the Second Temple idea that deliverance from exile would be an eschatological experience and their vision of ultimate exilic hope can continue to inform our exile as Canadian Christians.

This exilic heritage offers an orienting perspective to the church in Canada if it is willing to agree that its marginalization is ultimately an exilic experience that demands an exilic theology in response. As we adopt this perspective, the church can embrace all of the hope that an exilic theology naturally delivers, because we will then be walking in the same steps as ancient Israel and the first century church who each found their way through exile in ways that allowed them to flourish.

Embracing such a paradigm will not be easy because it will ask us to break with some standard theological conventions and traditional views of ministry. This challenges the ways of Christendom and its long-standing norms. As the late theologian Stanley Grenz wrote regarding the propensity of evangelical theology to be fearful of exploring new ground, it may be accurate, to say that the guiding dictum has been (parodying Star Trek) "to cautiously go where everyone else has gone before."[4] However, exile challenges such conservatism because it pronounces judgment on it. It tells us that everything is not okay, the old ways of doing things no longer work and sticking with them is not an option. Things have changed and, by, once again allowing his people to experience exile, God is placing a fresh call on the church to rediscover its true identity and be renewed by it.

This in fact, may put the church in Canada into a unique position as a global leader in theological reflection on what it means to be the church in exile. Of course the church in certain parts of the world is subjected to persecution and exile in ways quite different from the Canadian experience. To imply that our exile can inform theirs would be inappropriate, even arrogant to offer. However, particularly in the Western world where Christianity has played such a central role, perhaps the Canadian church experience of being de-centred can be a catalyst to theological thought for other nations as well.

As a relatively young country whose traditions are not established as deeply as in some other countries, it is likely that Canadians are more able to respond creatively to new circumstances. Establishment Christianity, while influential, does not run as deeply in Canada as it would in a country that has experienced Christendom for hundreds, or

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[4] Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Centre,* 7.

even more than a thousand years (i.e. Great Britain, Germany, France, certain Latin American nations). This allows the Canadian church to reflect on, and respond to exile in a way that is more unfettered. Christendom perspectives in Canada grew quickly with the emergence of the new confederation, but have also passed quickly with the rise of a secular worldview. This fluidity may allow the Canadian church to respond to its own in a manner that can provide a model for other national churches. Further, as we considered in the first chapter, the development of postmodern culture is already well advanced in Canada. Many other countries are not as far along in their cultural experience of postmodernism as is Canada, but demonstrate that they are on a similar trajectory (i.e. the United States). In this way the Canadian church's work with an exilic motif may prove helpful to other national churches that will soon have to consider a similar motif for their own cultural existence.

The motif of exile is necessary for the Canadian church today in order to help it fully understand and honestly name its true cultural circumstances. Only then can it begin to respond to them in a way that will enable it to reject assimilation and instead recapture its true identity as God's distinct people in this world. Brueggemann reflects the need for exiles to be "converted" to the true nature of their cultural reality when he comments on the ministry of Second Isaiah to Israel,

> The central task of 2 Isaiah is to invite people home, to create a sense of that prospect and hope. But in order to do that, the poet had to *convert* Babylonian Jews into exiles, to persuade displaced people that after two generations, this is still not home.[5]

It is the intent of this present work that it might present the vision of a hopeful demise. That as the Canadian church embraces its true circumstances in contemporary

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[5] Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination,* 111. (Italics added)

Canadian culture as a de-centreed people now on the margins, it will see that exile is the motif that offers the most hopeful resources for it to draw from in order to resist cultural assimilation. Further it will strengthen the church's determination to be what God has called it to be: an alternative community which proclaims the good news of God to a world that desperately needs to see and hear it. Then, just as personal conversion brings the indwelling of God's Spirit into our lives so that we are transformed and empowered by him to live as followers of Christ, so too will the Spirit of God empower us collectively to be transformed by his grace and enabled to be Christ's exilic people in Canada today.[6]

> *I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;*
> *I will take hold of your hand.*
> *I will keep you and will make you*
> *To be a covenant for the people*
> *And a light for the Gentiles,*
> *To open eyes that are blind,*
> *To free captives from prison*
> *And to release from the dungeon*
> *those who sit in prison.*

Isa 52:6–7

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[6] See Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice,* for further reflection and development of the themes raised here.

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