

## Commentary — From the Margins *An Infallible Text* [Part Eleven]

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Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. (Gal 3:19–20)

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### 11.

If the Hagar story and a similar story (that of Keturah) is needful to establish a narrative frame for the miraculous birth of Isaac, the seed of promise, then an endtime people comparable to the natural sons of Israel is similarly needful to complete the “frame” of the birth of spiritual *Isaac*; for Abraham doesn’t quit having sons when Sarah dies. Tradition holds that the peoples of the Urals descend from sons of Keturah, placed in these regions by Abraham before his death so that they wouldn’t inherit the geographic region promised to Isaac. How accurate tradition is remains open to speculation, but the doctrine of the *Third Rome* that periodically surfaces among the Russian peoples holds as true the traditional *planting* of Abraham’s seed in Mother Russia. And as Stalin employed the doctrine of the *Third Rome* to rally the former Soviet Union against Nazi invaders during the darkest days of WWII, Vladimir Putin has silently preserved this tradition that’s mostly unknown to both progressive and conservative analysts in Western nations’ pundits.

The doctrine of the *Third Rome* holds that as the center of visible Christianity was originally in Rome, then moved to Byzantium, the center will move to Moscow at the end of the age, with this move foreshadowed by a shift in world politics that elevates the Russian people to center stage. And while President Obama doesn’t believe that Russia will become the focus of world attention, President Obama also doesn’t believe that Christ Jesus will really return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In a *Hebrew style* narrative, only one half—the spiritual half—needs to be true. The other half, the natural half, may be true or may be myth in a similar way to how a poem might or might not be true, but just “is” by virtue of its creation. Therefore, in a *Hebrew style* narrative, the doctrine of the *Third Rome* need not be true for descendants of Keturah to believe the doctrine and act on their belief just as earlier visible Christians acted on their beliefs when the Roman Church held center stage in world politics. And while the end of the spiritual *Isaac*

narrative is recorded in John's vision, the narrative frame is a *writerly text*, meaning that John's vision requires the reader to "write" the text by not simply assigning meaning to the symbols but by also establishing an authoritative timeline for the meanings assigned to the symbols.

Any narrative constructed in *Hebrew style*—any narrative based on chirality—becomes a *writerly text* that shifts *authority* away from the text's author and to the text's reader, thereby making the author the servant of the reader, which then circles back to scripturally have the greater serve the lesser, the author being greater than the reader while simultaneously serving the reader.

Both the Roman Church and the Church of England [English Catholicism] have made the Bible an idol that cannot be "read" in a way that rewrites long established traditions; both have shifted textual authority to a divine author that is not the Most High God, thus the shift is problematic and must be resisted, what both my 16<sup>th</sup>-Century maternal and paternal ancestors attempted to do. However, the Radical Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup>-Century became the quiet folk of the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century, such was the persecution they experienced. The work they attempted awaited accomplishing until the leveling of *the high* and *the low* neared completion in the democratization of knowledge via an electronic media, with most of my ancestors' seed having imposed upon themselves prohibitions against the leveling of knowledge.

Traditionally, the leveling of *the high* and *the low* occurs during carnival—and too often has been a physical leveling with masks still on but trousers around ankles. Thus, the piety of my ancestors prevented exploration into the democratization of knowledge. The false piety of the former Worldwide Church of God hindered exploration of knowledge. And the authoritative language of scholarship discourages the socially *low* from participation in cultural discussions of signs and signifiers, especially of photographs and video as significant signifiers.

But it is the Bible that is here under examination, and in particular the Hagar story that has been incompletely incorporated into canonical text ... the fact that the Hagar story does not smoothly flow into and out of the Abraham story but fits in a very uncomfortable way suggests the story is a late incorporation—in the Genesis chapter 21 account, Ishmael as a child small enough to be placed on Hagar's shoulder would seem to be younger than Isaac, who had been weaned and was symbolically receiving breeches (except for padded headgear, little boys traditionally wore gowns or modified dresses similar to what little girls wore even as late as immediately following WWII; little boys were dressed in pants when they were weaned, the significance of a "weaning" ceremony). And if Isaac were born first, was older than Ishmael (the reality of Isaac being weaned while Ishmael was still carried by his mother), the entirety of the Abraham story doesn't work; so for Paul to cite the very place where the Hagar story falls apart ["But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac'" — Gen 21:9–10] opens up questions about how Paul read Scripture, especially in light of Paul not

referencing the story of God testing Abraham's faith in the matter of sacrificing Isaac (Gen chap 22).

The above is not to say that Hagar wasn't a real person or that Ishmael was not Abraham's primogenitary heir: Ishmael was that firstborn heir, and the descendants of Ishmael have inherited all that the man Abraham physically possessed while living as a nomad under the oaks of the Amorite Mamre. What Ishmael was not entitled to inherit were promises made to the seed of Abraham; for this seed was not the man Abraham's physical offspring by either Hagar or Keturah, but seed planted in a long dead womb, that which was analogous to the Promised Land ... when the children of Israel crossed the River Jordan behind Joshua [in Greek, *'Iesou* or *Jesus*], they entered the Promised Land where they were to produce righteousness. Instead, they grew *idolatry* as their cash crop, thereby provoking the Lord until He brought against them Assyria as the representation of death and Babylon as the representation of heaven. Thus, the God of heaven and the God of earth brought heaven and earth against the children of Israel, who wept bitterly but refused to change their behavior, changing instead the words that were witnesses against them. The hole in Scripture that the Genesis chapter 21 story of Hagar represents discloses real tampering with the foundational story undergirding Christendom, but not the sort of tampering that should negate belief by spiritual Isaac.

Again, any narrative in *Hebrew style* is a *writerly text* that requires the reader to do real work, that of rereading the text; i.e., of assigning meaning to signifiers that already have differing meanings assigned to them. And all of this becomes important as Christendom again confronts Judaism and Islam and descendants of Hagar and Keturah, both categorized in Hebrew by their genitalia. (As an aside, the current flap over what Phil Robertson of *Duck Dynasty* said concerning homosexuality would be much ado about nothing if translators hadn't truly cleaned up the Hebrew expression used for Hagar, who wasn't a literal *gully*.)

Now to spiritual meat: if the patriarch Isaac is not the promised seed of Abraham, but is analogous to the "intermediary" who put into place the Law, notably the First Covenant, the covenant made when the Lord took the fathers of Israel by the hand to lead them out from Egypt—"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" (Heb 8:8-9)—then there shall be a new Passover Covenant made between God [the Father] and Israel [the nation circumcised of heart], with this New Covenant not having sin covered by the blood of the Passover lamb/Lamb but having sin remembered no more (*v.* 12), thereby removing sin [unbelief that results in transgression of the Law] as the basis for judgment of this new *Israel*. But—a huge caveat—who actually spoke the Commandments into existence as living words that when brought to life, sin devoured the people of Israel at Sinai? That killed the Apostle Paul (Rom 7:9-10) ... Paul didn't die physically when he became a bar mitzvah, but he recognized that he died spiritually as had all of Judaism before and since Paul became a *son of the covenant*.

Before a natural son of Israel becomes a bar mitzvah, this son of Israel is dead to the Law; this son of Israel has no responsibility to keep the Law; this son of Israel is circumcised, but he is under the covering of his father's righteousness. In essence, he has not been truly *weaned*, but is as Isaac was when in the household of women. He does not yet wear spiritual pants.

Christians who live as Gentiles live are not truly *weaned*; they do not wear long pants, but remain clothed in the spiritual garb of women: grace.

When a person is not spiritually or legally responsible for the person's behavior, the person must necessarily be under the authority of someone who is responsible. Hence a child is not prosecuted for civil misconduct as an adult would be prosecuted. Teenage vandalism is a real problem, but is legally treated differently than adult vandalism; for there exists the assumption that a person who has not yet reached his or her majority has a less developed sense of right and wrong than an adult has, an assumption that lacks the merit placed on it. Thus, since a person who has not reached his or her majority is legally under the custody of his or her parents, the legal systems of Western nations expect parents to pay restitution for damages their juvenile offspring do.

Grace is the garment of Christ Jesus' righteousness—and for a Christian to be under grace carries the spiritual assumption that the Christian is an infant and a juvenile son of God and therefore the Christian is not yet responsible for his transgressions of the Law that stem from unbelief. This Christian has not been spiritually weaned, but is as Isaac was when Ishmael as a young man worked along side his father, the patriarch Abraham. This Christian wears the garb of women and remains in the women's quarters and is only permitted in the temple's women's court. Hence, every Christian under grace has the glorified Christ Jesus bearing the sins of the Christian, who remains dead to the law and is as Paul was when Paul wrote of himself, "I was once alive apart from the law" (Rom 7:9) ... every outwardly circumcised Hebrew male is *once alive apart from the Law*, but when this male offspring becomes a bar mitzvah (again, *a son of the Commandment*), the ceremony of adulthood (analogous to Isaac being weaned) brings the Law to life and causes the male to spiritually die, what Paul described when he added, "but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me" (Rom 7:9–11).

For as long as an infant son of God remains a milk drinker [is not weaned], this son of God remains garmented in Christ's righteousness which hangs on this son of God as a dress hangs on a woman, an interesting analogy considering that disciples will become the Bride of Christ at the Wedding Super. However, Paul also wrote,

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for *those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.* And those whom He predestined He also

called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified. (Rom 8:28–30 emphasis added)

Christ Jesus was long ago breeched [weaned]. If predestined sons of God are to be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus, they too will be in britches, not dresses (dressing gowns). They will be spiritually weaned. They will no longer be milk drinkers. They will not be under grace, the garment of Christ's righteousness.

But what does Paul write to the Galatians:

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for *in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:22–28 emphasis added)

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*—in the women's quarters before Isaac was weaned, all wore the same garb; there would have been no male or female, no greater nor lesser.

Did Paul understand what he wrote? Permit me to assume that he did. Then for disciples there should be a weaning ceremony at which spiritual Isaac receives long pants and spiritual Ishmael is sent out to wander as a nomad—and what is found in Scripture at this very location:

And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation." Then God opened her

eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. (Gen 21:11–20)

Ishmael goes from being a teenager (14 when Isaac is born) to being a small child not able to come to his mother from where she placed him under a bush to die ... *come-on, now*: I was a junior in high school when 14, a freshman in college at 16 and soon to be declared an emancipated minor, out on my own without parents and responsible for my own actions. And you—Scripture—want me to believe that Ishmael couldn't with his bow do what I did with a .22 rifle, that is feed myself when I had no money, no means to purchase food. That is nonsensical. Of course Ishmael could do what I did, and probably a great deal more.

For a Christian, a son of God truly born of spirit, the weaning ceremony occurs when this son of God is old enough to move from being a milk drinker to eating a meat diet, with the first test of whether the son of God is ready for meat coming early in Scripture; coming when the Hagar story becomes nonsensical ... how are you, as a son of God, going to handle an obvious account that doesn't belong where it is placed in Scripture, and as a narrative, disagrees with Genesis chapter 16? Are you going to reject the validity of canonical Scripture? Are you going to swallow as factual what you inwardly know isn't factual? Or are you going to step over the hole that chapter 21 represents and get on with your business of producing righteousness even when knowing that Scripture is not the infallible word of God?

Most academics stepped in the hole and cannot get out: they will spiritually perish in this hole or in another hole (for there are many). They will, because of their training, never realize that the validity of every narrative composed in *Hebrew style* lies in the narrative's existence, not in what the narrative proposes to mimetically represent.

In reality, I write Scripture when I reread a canonical text—and that is what I was audibly called to do, reread prophecy.

It will be difficult for most who engage what I write to think in terms of Scripture being written—and that is as it should be. But as one Norwegian reader said, *If you are correct, then everyone else in the world has to be wrong, and I just can't go there*. I don't condemn him for holding that opinion: he is actually correct. If what I write is valid; if how I read a *writery text* is correct, then everyone else is wrong ...

Christ Jesus bears the sins of Israel as the reality of the *Azazel*. Grace includes the assumption that Christians are not yet spiritually weaned, but remain in the household of women and though Paul tells the spiritual infants [milk drinkers, hence not yet weaned] at Corinth that they are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17), the temple for which he laid the foundation (*vv.* 10–11), he elsewhere writes to these same holy ones,

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since ***I betrothed you to***

***one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.***

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Cor 11:1–14 double emphasis added)

It is a weaned son of God that is breeched; that wears britches; that is a younger sibling of Christ Jesus (again Rom 8:29); whereas a not-yet-weaned son of God remains in the women's quarters, still robed in the dressing gown of grace and still not able to ingest spiritual meat.

My youngest daughter choked on baby cereal before she was able to eat solid food, a scary moment when I was 25 years old. But she recovered. More milk was added to the baby cereal, and she did well ... spiritually, she choked on baby cereal and returned to an all milk diet, a disappointment.

The physical reveals the spiritual things of God ... if the Elect today are *Isaac*, then receiving a second breath of life—the breath of God [*pneuma Theou*] in the breath of Christ [*pneuma Christou*—represents “real” spiritual birth. Receiving the holy spirit [*pneuma 'agion*] causes a person to be born-from-above, or born-again, or born-of-spirit, euphemisms meaning that the inner self [*psuche*] of the person has been raised from death in a resurrection like that of Christ Jesus who was twice raised from death, once following John's baptism when the breath of God [*pneuma Theou*] in the bodily form of a dove entered into Jesus (Mark 1:10), thereby giving indwelling eternal life [that is, life from outside the Creation] to the man Jesus whose fleshly body remained mortal and thus able to die on the cross at Calvary, with His fleshly body then also resurrected from death after three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. A human person, every human person, consists of an inner self [*psuche*] and an outer self [*soma*], with the inner self that animates the fleshly body being born “dead” in a manner analogous to software of a word processor. This inner self, programmed to serve the Adversary so that the person is born a *son of disobedience*, is the “head” of the fleshly body as a husband is the head of his wife in marriage where two persons are one flesh—

Adam and Eve were one flesh (Gen 2:24) even though they were two individuals, the first created from the elements of this earth, the second created from the flesh and bone of the first. And so it is with human sons of God: the last Adam, a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45), is the Head of every born-of-spirit Christian, with every born-again Christian being inwardly a son of God (Gal 3:26). And when the inner self, inner person is a son of God, the flesh doesn't matter; thus, there is neither male nor female, Jew or Greek, slave or free born-again Christians (*v.* 28). And Christ Jesus is the Head of every son of God, not just the head of males (1 Cor 11:3).

The fleshly body of an uncircumcised Greek remains uncircumcised when this Greek is born of spirit as a son of God and has his heart circumcised ... penises

are characteristic of biological males, but hearts are possessed by both males and females. When the circumcision that matters was of penises, females were biologically prevented from being sons of God, but when the circumcision that matters is of the heart (Rom 2:25–29; Deut 10:16; 30:6), nothing prevents the biological female from being a son of God and having before God equal standing with other sons of God.

The physical difference that exists between male and female becomes the spiritual difference between weaned and not-yet-weaned, with the weaned son of God to be great in the resurrection of firstfruits and with the not-weaned son of God to be least, a different way to express what the author of Matthew's Gospel had his Jesus declare: "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19).

To relax a Commandment—not breaking the Commandment but just easing its constraints—discloses that the son of God is not yet weaned and thereby able to ingest solid food.

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