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Mark Proctor

Faith, Works, and the Christian Religion in James 2:14-26

Mr Proctor is a postgraduate student at Baylor University; his detailed study of James 2 argues that its purpose is essentially practical rather than polemical.

James argues throughout his letter that the Christian faith should express itself through charitable acts of hospitality. True religion, says James, consists of ministering to the needs of the disenfranchised and impoverished members of society, while refusing to allow 'the world's' hypocrisies and false doctrines to corrupt one's life (Jas. 1:27). A primary way members of the believing community might avoid the latter, James would no doubt agree, is by busying themselves with the former. For James, the Christian lifestyle should be one that aims at ameliorating social pain and marginality: to be holy is to be hospitable, to be pious is to be pragmatic. James' thesis is that since an uncaring and inactive religion is not efficacious, those who wish to be a part of the believing community must practice acts of kindness and charity.

Nowhere in the letter does James make this point more emphatically than in Jas. 2:14-26. This passage grows out of 1:27 and serves to warn James' readers to be merciful in attending the needs of the disenfranchised. Within this pivotal section, James confronts a misconception that threatens his community's well-being. James worries that some of his readers may not acknowledge their responsibility to give aid to the less fortunate, a duty that he considers incumbent upon all believers. Thus, the intent of Jas. 2:14-26 is to establish the nature of the one true Faith. Within these verses, James argues 'against a dead orthodoxy, against a self-satisfied attitude that would presume upon divine grace, against an intellectual profession that carries with it no ethical compulsion.'¹ Since a strictly propositional religion remains ineffective, James asserts that orthodoxy must spill over into orthopraxy. In order for the Christian Faith to find favor with God, it must not fail to clothe the naked and feed the hungry; for without good works the Faith is incomplete, worthless, and dead.

¹ R. Longenecker, "The 'Faith of Abraham' Theme in Paul, James and Hebrews", *JETS* 20, 1977, 207.

The Context, Genre, and Shape of Jas 2:14-26

James 1 closes with the following statement: 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficult circumstances, and to keep oneself without blemish from the world.' Having thus defined ideal religion, James proceeds to exhort his readers in the first verse of chap. 2 to 'show no partiality as you keep the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.' In the next twelve verses, James provides a negative example illustrating why the church should avoid showing favoritism (vv. 2-7), before moving on to present the 'law of liberty' as the standard for Christian conduct in vv. 8-13. The final verse of this section warns James' readers to pay attention to his teachings on compassion and favoritism: 'For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment' (v. 13). If the point of Jas. 1:27 is that the Christian religion should minister to the socially and economically impoverished, then the connection Jas. 2:1-13 shares with this verse is clear. The opening verses of chap. 2 provide a hypothetical example of the Church in action, and make the point that not only must Christians attend to the needs of the disadvantaged, but they must also avoid showing favoritism in the process. Failure to do so will result in (God's) merciless judgment.

Jas. 2:14-26 resonates with the content of Jas. 2:1-13. The passage begins with a pair of questions for James' readers (v. 14). A negative example concerning the church's treatment of the poor follows (vv. 15-16), and this in turn gives way to a defense (vv. 18-26) of the idea that 'the Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself' (v. 17). Whereas James argues in 2:1-13 that a church which shows favoritism fails to practice 'pure and undefiled religion,' his purpose in vv. 14-26 is to demonstrate why a church that looks after the physical needs of its members satisfies God's requirements for *thr̄skeia kathara kai amiantos*. Unlike a church that would pride itself on doctrine alone, the community that provides for the physical requirements of its members in addition to teaching the principles of the orthodox Faith will escape God's judgment. Jas. 2:14-26 thus constitutes 'the climax of James' plea for a "pure religion" that vindicates itself in action.'² The cumulative effect of Jas. 1:27-2:26 is clear: the only type of church that God considers adequate is one which refuses to show favoritism, and which supplements its orthodox teaching with charitable acts. One might suggest, therefore, that the meaning of Jas. 2:14-26 is to some extent determined by its context. This context is one that deals with the nature of true religion.

² D. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, 1985), 99.

The best way to illustrate the genre of Jas. 2:14-26 is by comparing the content of these verses with hellenistic diatribes. Diatribes involve a conversation between a writer and a hypothetical interlocutor. The interlocutor plays the part of a literary foil, whom the author uses in order to demonstrate the veracity of his or her truth claims. This conversation partner usually functions as the author's opponent, and often interrupts the flow of exposition with a statement in direct address that challenges the writer's thesis. The writer fends off the interlocutor's attack by buttressing his or her proposition with additional evidence that renders the interlocutor's view untenable. Finally, the interlocutor is typically 'thought of as an *idiōtēs*, a representative of the *communis opinio*.'³ In 2:14-26, James first introduces the interlocutor via indirect discourse in v. 14. Here, James identifies the interlocutor as one who 'says he or she has faith but does not have works.' James quotes the interlocutor two other times in the passage (vv. 18a, 19a), and replies to these statements in the verses that follow. Finally, James characterizes his dialogue partner as a 'foolish man' in v. 20.⁴

In addition to dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, diatribes make frequent use of imperative verbs, vocative nouns, brief questions, stereotyped phrases, examples from famous individuals, quotations from authoritative sources, and analogies or comparisons. Imperatives in Jas. 2:14-26 include (1) 'show' in v. 18, and (2) 'see' in v. 24. The lone vocative in this passage occurs in v. 20: 'O foolish man'.⁵ James' use of a question to provide transition in v. 14 is typical of the diatribal style, as is his utilization of rhetorical questions in vv. 14, 16, 21, and 25.⁶ The expressions 'What good is it?' in vv. 14 and 16, 'But someone will say' in v. 18, and 'Do you wish to know?' in v. 20 are all expressions that appear frequently in diatribes. Furthermore, ancient writers often use *exempla* in their diatribes to facilitate rebuttals of objections and/or false conclusions. James' use of the Abraham and Rahab traditions in vv. 21-25 provides a good example of this rhetorical technique. Analogies or comparisons such as the one in v. 26 also play an important role in a writer's response to diatribal objections. Finally, 'quotations from

³ 'Thus, he sometimes opposes the philosopher with popular sayings or familiar quotations' (S. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* [Chico, 1981], 20). See Jas. 2:19a, 20.

⁴ Such harsh address is common in diatribes. 'The habit of scolding the audience and the world at large and of ridicule and abuse in general was a peculiarly vivid and permanent trait of the Cynic diatribe' (J. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* [New York, 1916], 15-16).

⁵ Stowers points out that ancient writers typically address the interlocutor with a vocative, and *ō anthrōpō* and *ō kene* are two of the most common forms of address in such passages (85).

⁶ Questions that imply a lack of perception on the part of an interlocutor by employing a verb of thinking (see *gnōnai* in Jas. 2:20) are common (Stowers, 89).

and allusions to the poets, dramatists and philosophers were used in answering objections and false conclusions.⁷ In v. 23, James cites Gn. 15:6 in support of his argument. Although this is not a quote from Homer, it comes from a source that James doubtless considered authoritative. When one considers that all of these formal elements occur within the span of a mere thirteen verses, the conclusion that Jas. 2:14-26 is a diatribe seems unavoidable.

In the words of W. Nicol, Jas. 2:14-26 'builds up from illustration through argument to proof.'⁸ James here uses deliberative rhetoric in an attempt to modify his readers' future behavior by arguing on the basis of past examples and by emphasizing the advantages of heeding his advice. Following the proem ('What good is it, my brothers?'), James states his proposition in the form of a pair of rhetorical questions (v. 14). He reiterates his thesis in v. 17 by means of a categorical declarative statement: 'And so the Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself.' The intervening verses are a rhetorical narration that provide a basic starting point or *ratio* on which James builds his argument in favor of pragmatic religion. What follows this opening illustration is the proof of James' proposition in vv. 18-25. This proof contains a refutation of an opposing view, which finds support in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish exegetical traditions. Finally, James closes this portion of the letter with a sharp, antithetical epilogue that both summarizes and concludes the foregoing argument by means of a comparison. Hence, Jas. 2:14-26 is a complete rhetorical unit that introduces a problem and proceeds to solve it *via* colorful inductive reasoning.

James' Argument Against Inactive Religion

James begins the second half of chap. 2 with a pair of rhetorical questions, both of which anticipate a negative answer: 'What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but does not have any works? Is his faith able to save him?' According to N. Turner, the present subjunctive verbs in v. 14a denote 'a hypothesis which can occur over and over again.'⁹ In other words, the type of person James has in mind is one who continually speaks of his or her theological convictions, yet never performs a single good work. v. 19 indicates that what James here means by 'faith' is one's affirmation of a set of theological claims.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸ Nicol, 'Faith and Works in the Letter of James', *Neot* 9, 1975, 10.

⁹ Turner, *Syntax* (Edinburgh, 1963), 114.

¹⁰ Hence, Longenecker argues that in Jas. 2:14-26 the author equates faith with 'the bare assertion of monotheism, devoid of the soteriological nuances the word usually carries in the rest of the New Testament' (206). 'For James "faith" means primarily an intellectual acceptance of a proposition about God' (B. Metzger, *The New Testament* [New York, 1965], 254).

Hence, those who 'have' faith are those who affirm the church's orthodox teachings about the nature of God. The meaning of *erga* is also certain: for James, 'works' are acts of charity or hospitality.¹¹ Some suggest that the article *hē* in v. 14b is an article of previous reference (i.e., 'that faith'). However, when one takes into account that James twice uses the article with *pistis* in v. 22 to refer specifically to Abraham's faith, it seems better to read *hē* in v. 14b as a substitute for the possessive pronoun (i.e., 'his or her faith'). The aorist infinitive *sōsai* implies that James has the eschatological judgment in mind, since with the possible exception of 5:15 '*sōzein* is always used in the letter in the soteriological-eschatological sense.'¹² Hence, v. 14b may be paraphrased as follows: 'Will this person's faith by itself be enough to insure God's favorable judgment in the eschaton?' For James, belief without corresponding action is insufficient, for in the end it will not save. He therefore opposes the notion that Christianity 'can be a passive, fruitless, intellectual exercise and still save.'¹³

Illustration and Thesis: James' Plea for an Active Community (vv. 15–17)

The illustration in vv. 15–16 brings James' concern into focus. He describes a situation in which a member of the community who is poorly dressed and hungry comes into the assembly only to be dismissed with the words 'Go home in peace! Keep warm and be satisfied!'

¹¹ Longenecker sees the works of Jas. 2:14 as those that fulfill the perfect law of liberty: they are 'acts of love that have the practical effect of feeding, clothing and housing the needy' (207). S. McKnight states that 'the context, in particular the hospitality of 2:15–16, makes it quite clear which *erga* are in view' ('James 2:18a', *WTJ* 52, 1990, 357). In addition to the illustration of vv. 15–16, James' use of the Abraham and Rahab traditions in vv. 21–25 demonstrates that for him 'works' are acts of hospitality or charity. Ropes interprets the word more loosely, referring to the *erga* of v. 14 with the generic 'good deeds' (204). Moo goes even further by saying that works for James are 'anything done that is in obedience to God and in the service of God' (102). For the sake of precision, however, it is best to think of 'works' in Jas 2:14–26 as charitable acts performed on behalf of the less fortunate.

¹² F. Vouga, *L'Épître de s. Jacques* (Geneva, 1984), 86. 'What James is asking is whether a certain faith will help one in the final judgment' (P. Davids, *The Epistle of James* [Grand Rapids, 1982], 120). Hence, according to G. Heide, James' use of the verb 'to save' in 2:14 'must have eternal salvation as its main referent with any other quality of meaning being rather small' ('The Soteriology of James 2:14', *1Grace Theological Journal* 12, 1992, 83). The implication, therefore, is that James does not make a soteriological argument in Jas 2:14–26. Rather, in these verses James attempts to demonstrate how those who have already been incorporated into the believing community might preserve or insure their good standing with God.

¹³ MacArthur, 24.

(v. 16b-c).¹⁴ It is not so much what the token Christian ('one of you') says to the needy persons that concerns James, but what he or she fails to do on their behalf. There is nothing intrinsically offensive or harsh about the statement. Indeed, it expresses a genuine desire for the prolonged health of the individuals in question. However, the circumstances under which the community member makes the statement reveal it as calloused and insensitive. 'Confronted with a need among his own brothers and sisters, this "believer" does nothing but express his good wishes.'¹⁵ The irony of the situation is clear: the health wish of v. 16b, though sincere, is completely inadequate, since this is precisely what the needy persons are unable to do without help from someone else. The people described in Jas 2:15 need more than a wish from the church. They need an action that will provide them with adequate clothing and sufficient food. The point of James' illustration is obvious: as long as the church fails to provide the needy with the 'necessary things,' nothing good has been done.

James states his proposition in v. 17: 'And so the Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself.' According to P. Davids, *houtōs kai* is 'James' regular way of applying a metaphor or example.'¹⁶ In v. 17 James 'applies' the illustration of the preceding verses via a categorical statement about *hē pistis*. The way these two words function is crucial, both for the meaning of the verse by itself and for the meaning of the passage as a whole. Many think the word *pistis* in Jas. 2:17 means 'commitment' or 'trust,' but this notion is problematic. If *pistis* here means 'commitment' or 'trust,' how can James describe faith as 'having' works and avoid equivocation?¹⁷ James does not say that if a person's 'trust in God' is 'unaccompanied by' or 'not supplemented with' works it is dead. Rather, he simply warns that if faith does not have works, it is dead.¹⁸ Put simply, faith as 'trust' or 'commitment'

¹⁴ The phrase *ta epitēdeia tou sōmatos* in v. 16 suggests that these individuals are in dire need. 'The plural substantive [*epitēdeia*] here . . . [means] the things necessary for the body, that is, the minimal covering and food to sustain life' (L. Johnson, *The Letter of James* [New York, 1995], 239). Furthermore, C. Cutter says the following about the participle *leipomenoi* in v. 15: 'the durative tense in this context suggests that the lack of daily food was a persistent lack, thus aiding in picturing the dire poverty of the hypothetical Christians' ('The Aktionsart of the Verb in the Epistle of James' [Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959], 79).

¹⁵ Moo, 103.

¹⁶ Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, 1982), 122. See Jas. 1:11 and 3:5.

¹⁷ Ropes recognizes this problem when he writes that in Jas. 2:17 'faith is said to "have" works, perhaps in the sense of "attendance or companionship"' (Ropes, 207).

¹⁸ BAGD lists the following meanings for *echō*: (1) 'to have' or 'to hold,' (2) 'to have as one's own' or 'to possess,' (3) 'to have' or 'to include in itself' (they place Jas. 2:17 under this heading along with Jas. 1:4; 1 Jn. 4:18; Heb. 10:35), and (4) 'to consider' or 'look upon' or 'view' (BAGD, 2nd ed., 1979, s.v.).

involves a movement of the mind alone, and this leaves no room for bodily actions or *erga* of any sort. Hence, James cannot speak of faith having works in Jas. 2:17 without significantly altering the meaning of *pistis*. However, if what James means by *hē pistis* in this verse is 'the Faith' (in the sense of 'the Christian religion' or 'the Christian Church'), then his meaning is straightforward and unambiguous. What James hopes to communicate in v. 17 is the idea that an inactive and apathetic church is a dead church, and as such is not a 'church' at all.

For James to use this word in such a manner is not unusual, because '*hē pistis* as a title for Christianity is a concept at home in the Patristic writings, the New Testament, and even the rest of James. In his lexicon, G. Lampe notes that the Patristic writers sometimes use *pistis* in a technical sense as the 'equivalent of Christian religion.'¹⁹ In a letter composed during the mid to late fourth century, St. Basil writes of those who 'betrayed the Faith unto God (*ἔθεν εἰς τὸν Θεὸν πίστιν*), and have touched the table of the demons, and have sworn Hellenic oaths' (Bas. *ep.* 217 *can.* 81). Writing slightly earlier than Basil, Eusebius of Caesarea (*ob.* 339 C.E.) spoke of a time when 'the Faith was increasing and our doctrine was boldly proclaimed in the ears of all' (Eus. *h.e.* 6.36.1).²⁰ Canon 2 of the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) refers to the Christian religion as 'the Faith,' and Origen (*ob.* ca. 254 C.E.) wrote in his treatise against Celsus about 'the doctrines of the Faith (*hoi logoi tēs pisteōs*)' (*Cels.* 2.1), about 'those who are alien to the Faith (*hoi allotrioi tēs pisteōs*)' (*Cels.* 8.73), and about those 'outside the Faith (*oi exō tē pisteōs*)' (*Cels.* 7.46).²¹ Finally, Clement of Alexandria (*ob.* ante 215 C.E.) frequently uses 'the Faith' as a title for the Christian religion in his *Stromata*.²² Hence, 'the Faith' was a well-known title for Christianity from at least the late second century up through the late fourth century and beyond.

There are also several places in the NT where 'the Faith' refers to either 'the Christian religion' or simply 'the Church.' For example, in Acts 6:7 Luke informs his readers that 'the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the Faith.'²³ Paul also uses the term in this manner: 'So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for the members of

¹⁹ *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1961 ed., s.v. BAGD has a similar listing: *pistis* without an object sometimes means "true piety, [or] genuine religion..., which for our lit. means being a Christian" (BAGD, s.v.).

²⁰ See also *h.e.* 4.26.1; 6.3.13.

²¹ See also *Cels.* 3.18; *mart.* 10.

²² See *str.* 2.13; 4.7; 7.14, 16.

²³ See also Acts 13:8; 14:22; 16:5.

the household of the Faith' (Gal. 6:10).²⁴ James uses it as a title for the Christian religion. Jas. 1:27–2:1 reads as follows:

Religion (*thrēskeia*) that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their difficult circumstances, and to keep oneself without blemish from the world. My brothers, do not hold the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in partiality.

Having described ideal religion in 1:27, James narrows his focus onto the Christian community in 2:1. The 'pure and undefiled religion' about which James speaks is none other than 'the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.'²⁵ Hence, the first verse of chap. 2 gives a specific name to the religion James describes as pure and undefiled in the last verse of chap. 1. This religion has the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, as its foundation, subject, and object.

The words *kath' heautēn* help James describe just how dead his audience's congregation would be if it did not have works. According to BAGD, *kata* sometimes means 'with respect to' or 'in relation to.'²⁶

²⁴ See also 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:24; 13:5; Phil. 1:25, 27. See also Eph. 4:5, 13.

²⁵ Davids argues that there are three different meanings for *pistis* in James: (1) 'commitment' or 'trust,' (2) 'intellectual belief,' and (3) 'religion.' He bases the third definition on Jas. 2:1 ('The Epistle of James in Modern Discussion', *ANRW* 2, 1988, 3643). M. Dibelius comes close to this view when he says that *pistis* in Jas. 2:1 refers to a 'spiritual allegiance to a confession and membership in the community of that confession' (*A Commentary on the Epistle of James* [Philadelphia, 1981], 178). There are two other places in James outside of the context of 2:14–26 where the word might also carry this meaning: 1:3 and 5:15. In 1:3, James informs his readers that 'the trying of your faith produces patience.' If James intended to refer to the testing of each individual Christian's confidence in God, one might expect him to have used either the genitive plural *ton pisteōn*, or else to have inserted a distributive qualifier ('to each one's faith'). However, given the plural subject 'my brothers' of 1:2 as well as the community emphasis of chap. 1 as a whole, perhaps it is better to think of *tes pisteōs* in 1:3 as a reference to the Christian community. On such a reading, the patience of the Church body as a group rather than the patience of individual Church members becomes the subject under discussion. Jas. 5:14 advises that if anyone becomes sick, they should 'call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.' The results one might expect from following James' instructions constitute the subject matter of v. 15: 'And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.' Most modern translations treat *tes pisteōs* in v. 15 as either a genitive of description ('the prayer of faith') or as a subjective genitive ('the prayer offered in faith'). However, since James uses *he pistis* elsewhere as a title for the Christian church, a third possibility remains. Since Jas. 5:15 is in a section of the letter dealing with matters of church order and liturgical practice, the words *tes pisteōs* may point to a Christian liturgical prayer given by the church elders on behalf of ailing community members. The *euchē tes pisteōs* is the 'prayer of the Faith.'

²⁶ BAGD, s.v. The NT examples BAGD lists include Acts 17:22; 24:22; 25:14; Rom. 1:3, 4; 4:1; 7:22; 9:3, 5; 11:28; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 1:12; 3:5, 6b; Col. 3:20, 22a; 4:7; Heb. 2:17; 4:15a; 9:9b.

If *kath'* in Jas 2:17 shares this particular definition, then James is saying that the Faith is dead 'in itself' or 'inwardly dead' if it does not take care of the needy.²⁷ For James, Christianity attains its true goal 'only as it is accompanied by and expressed in acts of kindness and mercy,'²⁸ and for this reason he insists that his readers practice charity. One gets the impression from v. 17 that unless the Faith performs acts like feeding the hungry and clothing the naked it does not qualify as 'Christian' for James. If the Church is not altruistic, then it is both incomplete and dead, and as a result its members will not be saved.

James' Debate with the Interlocutor Begins (vv. 18-19)

James switches from a negative argument against apathetic Christianity to a positive argument in favor of pragmatic religion in v. 18, and uses the objection of a hypothetical interlocutor to facilitate this transition. Critical readers have long debated the nature and extent of the quote in v. 18. Although the diatribal formula *All' erei tis* ('But someone will say') almost always introduces an objection, some maintain that such is not the case in Jas. 2:18. Since *alla* can mean 'indeed' and since the content of the quote is something that James would undoubtedly agree with, they understand the reference of *tis* to be to an ally rather than an opponent.²⁹ According to this line of thought, the personal pronouns in v. 18a indicate that the speaker is an advocate of James' position. James' combination of *su* with *pistin* and *kagō* with *erga* clearly implies that the speaker is on his side, since both James and the person he quotes stress the importance of works. Hence, in Jas. 2:18 'the writer, with his usual modesty, puts himself in the background, does not claim to be the representative of perfect working faith, but supposes another to speak.'³⁰

The foregoing argument, though lexically and thematically possible, remains unsatisfactory because it does not adequately account for important aspects of the passage's literary genre. 'The best solution here is to recognize the diatribal character of this section and see the interlocutor as the imaginary conversation partner who poses an objection that is used by the primary speaker to advance the argument.'³¹ One of the most common elements of hellenistic diatribes is their use of objections. Such objections are 'often introduced by short

²⁷ Johnson therefore points out that the phrase *kath' heauten* 'is not simply reporting "if it has no deeds" but rather points to the essential deadness of a faith that does not yield fruit' (239).

²⁸ R. Martin, *James* (Waco, 1988), 79.

²⁹ See in particular J. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, 1976), 136-37.

³⁰ J. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (Grand Rapids, 1954), 99.

³¹ Johnson, 239.

exclamations or characteristic connecting particles and other introductory formulae.³² The connective ancient writers use most frequently to introduce objections is *alla*. Furthermore, the introductory formulae for objections 'use words of saying such as *phēsi* ... although the objector's presence or reality may be stated hypothetically, as when expressions such as *phaĩē tis an* and *an tis eĩpoi* are employed.'³³ Finally, objections usually occur at a turn in the discourse or at the beginning of a new section of the argument. Jas. 2:18a exhibits each of these characteristics: (1) the connective *alla* occurs, (2) there is a verb of saying (*erei*), (3) James does not precisely identify the speaker, and (4) the statement immediately follows James' concluding proposition in v. 17. Hence, when one attempts to establish the tone of the quote in v. 18 by comparing its introductory formula with rhetorical characteristics of the diatribe, the conclusion that the quotation is an objection seems unavoidable. The words following *all' erei tis* in v. 18a object to the statements or concepts that precede them.³⁴

Reading the quote in v. 18a as an objection to v. 17 is tenable on a thematic level as well; for the pronouns 'you' and 'I' need not refer to James and the objector, but can function as the equivalents of 'the one' and 'the other.'³⁵ The interlocutor objects to James' proposition with a clever retort that plays on a weakness of the preceding argument: 'One has faith, and another has works' (v. 18a). What the interlocutor realizes is that although Jas 2:15-17 succeeds in demonstrating the necessity of good works on the corporate level, it fails to do the same on the individual level.³⁶ The interlocutor uses this subtle aspect of the preceding argument to undermine James' position. If 'the faith' that God requires of the Church in v. 17 is simply group involvement in both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the possibility for individual speciali-

³² Stowers, 125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁴ Dibelius says that 'the phrase . . . is a formula which conforms to the dialogic style of diatribe, and it serves to introduce the "mute mask" (*kōphon prosōpon*) of an unnamed opponent. . . . [Hence] we must at least try out the understanding of this schema which would be evident as a matter-of-course to every reader of that time' (150). F. Hort adds that 'not only the most natural but the only natural way to understand *all' erei tis* is as introducing an objector' (*The Epistle of St. James* [Minneapolis, 1909], 60).

³⁵ In an effort to support this idea, Ropes cites a text from *Bion of the Cynic Teles* that idealizes the second person singular pronoun. He then adds that 'with any other mode of interpretation it seems impossible to gain a satisfactory sense from the passage' (211). Even Mayor, who supports the 'ally' hypothesis, admits that the two pronouns 'may be a more vivid expression for *ho men* and *ho de*' (100).

³⁶ James makes no explicit argument about the need for orthodox belief, but given his approval of the statement 'God is one' in v. 19 he doubtless approves of both. Within the context of Jas. 2:14-26 James assumes the need for orthodox belief, while he engages the interlocutor in debate over the issue of the necessity of good works.

zation in either area still exists. Contrary to what James contends in v. 14b, one's theological prowess can by itself secure God's favorable eschatological judgment as long as 'one has faith, and another has works' within the church body.³⁷ Hence, James' opponent in v. 18a suggests the viability of separating faith and works on the individual level as a means of denying James' initial observations in v. 14. James' cunning foe realizes that he can grant the proposition in v. 17, yet still reject v. 14b as an overstatement.

James' response to the interlocutor's objection begins in 2:18b: 'Show me this "Faith of yours" which has no works, and I will show the Faith to you on the basis of my works.'³⁸ Several things suggest that the interlocutor's quote extends no farther than v. 18a. First, James has 'taken the anvil' at least by v. 19, and one can hardly differentiate the speaker in v. 19 from the speaker in v. 18b.³⁹ Second, responses to objections in diatribes frequently begin with imperatives, and perhaps this is the reason 'show' occurs in v. 18b. Third, it is fitting that James cuts short his dialogue partner's response; for 'the address to the interlocutor with a command is characteristically a short, snappy turning toward or retort to the interlocutor.'⁴⁰

Hence, in v. 18b James challenges those who suggest that works play no necessary role in the lives of individual Christians to defend their

³⁷ The same would be true for those having only works. Furthermore, contrary to the stipulations of the 'ally' hypothesis, James would not be sympathetic with the statement in v. 18a regardless of who the pronouns refer to. James point is that although faith and works are two distinct and important elements in the life of the individual Christian and the religious community of which he or she is a part, God's standard of righteousness will only be satisfied when both are present. Although believing in the one God is necessary (see v. 19a), this belief by itself is incapable of securing one's future salvation. Christians must back up their beliefs with good works in order to be 'saved.' 'In true religion, which is acceptable to God, one cannot choose between believing and doing; they are both necessary components of one and the same religion' (E. Pretorius, 'Coherency in James', *Neot* 28, 1994, 549).

³⁸ H. Schlier mentions two basic meanings for *deiknumi*: (1) 'to show' in the sense of 'to point to something' or 'to demonstrate' and thereby draw attention to it, and (2) 'to show' in the sense of 'to indicate something verbally' and thereby 'teach' or 'explain' (*TDNT* 2, 1964, 25-26). Johnson argues that Jas. 2:18 plays on these two related meanings of the word: 'James asks him [the interlocutor] to "show/reveal" what faith without deeds is like ... whereas he will "prove/demonstrate" faith on the basis of his deeds' (240). The most likely meaning for *ek* in v. 18 as well as the rest of the passage is 'on the basis of'. See Ant. 6.296; Cyr. 2, 2, 21 [*ek tōn ergōn krinesthai*]; 1 Macc. 8:30; Wis. 2:20; Sus. 61; Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22; Rom. 9:12; 2 Cor. 8:11, 13; Rev. 20:12. Finally, the words *ten pistin sou* refer to the interlocutor's own particular conception of Christianity, while *ten pistin* at the end of the verse constitutes another reference to 'Christian Religion' or the 'Church' as in v. 17. James hopes to prove that the first is a pseudo-Faith; i.e., it is not 'Christian' at all.

³⁹ Ropes, 360.

⁴⁰ Stowers, 88.

position. The conflict is clear: James' pits his pragmatic understanding of Christianity against the interlocutor's view in order to demonstrate the incompetence of those 'Christians' who lack works.⁴¹

James instructs his opponent to point to something which validates his own particular understanding of Christianity. Having done so, James will proceed to demonstrate the worth of the one true Faith on the basis of his actions.⁴² From a practical standpoint, James has a clear and decisive advantage. Those who deny the need for works in their religious lives can do nothing but recite the doctrinal propositions to which they give cognitive assent. James, on the other hand, can bring forth witnesses to verify the worth of his community. One witness will tell of how 'James took me in when my parents died,' while another will testify about the time 'James' church took care of my needs when my spouse passed away' (Jas. 1:27). A third witness will tell of how 'I was hungry and James' fed me,' while a fourth will affirm that 'I was poorly dressed and James' community gave me something to wear' (Jas. 2:15-16). Put simply, James and all other Christians who affirm the Church's teaching as well as do good works can 'show,' while their opponents can only 'talk.'

In v. 19 James reveals the inadequacy of his opponent's understanding of what it means to be a legitimate member of the Faith: 'You do well in believing that "God is One." Yet even the demons believe this, and they shudder from fear.' In response to James' challenge in v. 18b, the dialogue partner appeals to his or her belief in God's unity. James affirms his dialogue partner's understanding of the nature of the deity ('you do well'), but insists that this is not enough to qualify the interlocutor's pseudo-Faith as 'true religion.' In the words of T. Lorenzin, 'if faith is merely an inner movement of the soul, or an intellectual and a dogmatic confession, then it lacks something decisive which makes it real before God and men.'⁴³ A Christian's

⁴¹ James' arrangement of the words in v. 18b is telling. The first part of James' response directs the interlocutor to validate *ten pistin sou*; i.e., he or she must defend his or her own particular conception of what it means to be a Christian by producing evidence of its worth. What James will do in return is show *ek ton ergon mou ten pistin*. By ordering the last half of v. 18b in this manner, James suggests to his readers that what he will demonstrate is the viability of Christianity as a whole rather than his worth as an individual believer. Otherwise, the last half of v. 18b would read *ek ton ergon ten pistin mou*.

⁴² As previously noted, *deiknumi* can mean either 'to explain verbally' or 'to prove or show by pointing to or at'. The first occurrence of this verb in v. 18 must carry the nuance of 'to explain verbally,' since those who claim their theological propositions alone suffice for true religion necessarily limit themselves to verbal or cognitive argumentation. James, on the other hand, states that he 'will show' the Faith on the basis of his works. In contrast to the interlocutor, James is able to point to something tangible rather than resorting to mere verbal argumentation.

⁴³ Lorenzin, 'Faith without Works does not count before God', *ExpTim* 89, 1978, 232.

affirmation of theological propositions such as 'God is One' is necessary and good; but unless he or she supplements orthodox belief with actions, Christianity remains inert and ineffective. In fact, 'James implies that demonic faith is greater than the fraudulent faith of a false professor, for demonic faith produces fear.'⁴⁴ Whereas the interlocutor does nothing, the demons' 'shudder from fear'. Belief requires response, says James, and where there is no response, belief by itself is ineffective.

James' Theological Argument for the Necessity of Works (vv. 20-26)

James expands his attack on the interlocutor's position in v. 20: 'Do you wish to know, O foolish man, that the Faith is ineffective without works?' This verse does three things. First, it censures the interlocutor for his lack of perception, characterizing him as 'foolish,' 'senseless,' or 'empty' (*kene*). Second, it adds clarity to James proposition by further describing the form of Christianity that has no works as *argē*. Adamson lists a variety of English equivalents for this adjective: (1) 'workless,' (2) 'not at work,' (3) 'idle,' (4) 'inactive,' (5) 'ineffective,' (6) 'untilled,' (7) 'fallow,' and (8) 'unproductive.'⁴⁵ Given the range of viable English meanings for this term, one should not overlook the fact that the Greek text of Jas. 2:20 involves an obvious play on words: *a + ergōn = argē* Third, James here decides to use the interlocutor's own best weapon against him. Jas. 2:14, 18a, and 19 portray the interlocutor as a specialist in theological modes of argumentation. The way in which James chooses to deal with his dialogical adversary in v. 18b is by pointing to his own works. Beginning with v. 20, however, James changes his *modus operandi* and begins to engage the interlocutor in a theological argument. Not only can James 'show' his opponent that ideal Christianity is active (v. 18b), he can also 'explain' its superiority to him.

Hence, in order to substantiate his claim that Christianity should be a working religion and thereby prove that 'the Faith is useless without works' (v. 20), James turns to Jewish biblical and extra-biblical traditions about Abraham and Rahab in vv. 21-25. As far as James' exegetical method is concerned, he neither allegorizes nor uses typology, he cites both the biblical narrative and the wider collection of traditional embellishments and theological reflection, and he is aware of the Jewish haggadic tradition.⁴⁶ Although the letter's original audience

⁴⁴ MacArthur, 25. S. Laws adds that 'the demons' assent is by no means merely intellectual: in believing that God is one they believe something about him that evokes a response' (*A Commentary on the Epistle of James* [San Francisco, 1980], 126).

⁴⁵ Adamson, 127.

⁴⁶ Davids, 'Tradition and Citation in the Epistle of James', *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, 1978), 113.

would probably not have required any assistance to follow James' argument, modern readers must reconstruct the content of early Jewish traditions about Abraham and Rahab in order fully to understand vv. 21–25.⁴⁷ Unless contemporary readers first discover what James' original readers already knew, the full power of the argument in Jas. 2:21–25 will escape their apprehension. The tradition that stands behind Jas. 2:21–25 regards Abraham and Rahab as persons judged righteous on the basis of their good deeds. Unlike those who merely give mental assent to the idea that 'God is one' (v. 19), Abraham and Rahab acted on their convictions. Their faith-based actions, moreover, led to their vindication.

Abraham (vv. 21–23)

Jas. 2:21–23 recounts the story of how God found Abraham righteous when he offered Isaac on the altar:

Was not our father Abraham found righteous on the basis of works when he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that his faith worked in conjunction with his works, and on the basis of his works his faith was made perfect. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God.

Several details in these three verses demonstrate that James' argument involves more than a simple retelling of Genesis 22. First, James uses plural rather than singular forms of *ergon* in vv. 21 and 22. If the author understood the offering as an example of a single deed that resulted in God's recognition of Abraham's righteousness, one might expect singular forms rather than plurals.⁴⁸ Second, the imperfect

⁴⁷ According to R. Ward, 'when the author of James employs OT persons as examples, he sometimes elaborates his example explicitly, but sometimes he presupposes his readers will know the reference' ('The Works of Abraham', *HTR* 61, 1968, 287). I. Jacobs says that 'the absence of any explanatory comment in the text [of Jas. 2:21–25] suggests that the author expected his readers to be fully conversant with his background material' ('The Midrashic Background for James II.21–23', *NTS* 22, 1976, 458). The use of the words 'religious tradition' rather than 'scripture' is an important distinction. James does not simply proof-text the Hebrew Bible in vv. 21–25, but invokes an exegetical tradition that sees Abraham and Rahab as examples of those who both believe in God and perform acts of hospitality.

⁴⁸ R. Rakestraw tries to account for the occurrence of the plural forms of *ergon* in these verses by stating that 'throughout the paragraph "works" are repeatedly discussed alongside of faith . . . and for James to switch to the singular "work" would interrupt the flow of the argument and distract the reader' ('James 2:14–26', *CTR* 1, 1986, 39). In contrast to this explanation, D. Watson suggests that 'James is probably using this example not for the binding of Isaac *per se*, but because it was at this point in his life that Abraham was declared righteous for this and his previous acts of hospitality and

synergei in v. 22 implies the coexistence of faith and works in Abraham over a long period and not just at the time of the *Akedah*.⁴⁹ Third, James statements in v. 23 are foreign to the content of Genesis 22. V. 23b comes from Gn. 15:6, while v. 23c expresses a sentiment that the authors of 2 Ch. 20:7 and Is. 41:8 embraced. These observations give rise to a series of questions. First, what are the 'deeds' of Abraham to which James refers in vv. 21-22? Second, what is the link between the *Akedah* and Abraham's status as the friend of God? Third, what is the connection James sees between the *Akedah* and Gn. 15:6?

⁴⁸ *continued* charity This would underlie James' reference to Abraham's "works" in the plural' ('James 2 in Light of Greco-Roman Schemes of Argumentation', *NTS* 39, 1993, 114-15). Ward is correct that Jas. 2:22 'is somewhat awkward if the author understood the offering as an example of erga. We might rather have expected this sentence to read, *blepetai hoti to ergon... sunergei tei pistei autou* (286). James has more than the *Akedah* in mind within this context. Furthermore, most scholars are of the opinion that James uses the verb *dikaioō* ('to justify, vindicate, acquit') throughout the context of Jas. 2:21-25 in a judicial/forensic sense. 'The *edikaiothe* [of v. 21] refers not to a forensic act in which a sinner is declared acquitted ..., but to a declaration by God that a person is righteous' (Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 127). Adamson adds that in the LXX the meaning of *dikaioō* is not 'to make righteous,' but 'to declare righteous,' and this is the manner in which James uses the term as well (132). Hence, 'the justification of Abraham by God [in Jas. 2:21-23] rests on God's recognition of something proven' (Laws, 133). Finally, Rakestraw points out that 'the plain sense of the text [of vv. 21-25] argues for some kind of justification during the lifetimes of Abraham and Rahab, concomitant with a specific action or actions of each' (41). Hence, *edikaiothe* in v. 21 'means approval by God which Abraham received not merely at the final judgment but already during his lifetime' (*Ibid.*, 42). The fact that the examples of vv. 21-25 concern moments during the lives of Abraham and Rahab in which they were found righteous on account of their works does not override the eschatological focus of Jas 2:14-26. If James is to use 'examples' at all, they must involve a judgment that has already taken place. James merely intends to draw an analogy between moments in the lives of Abraham and Rahab, and the future judgment of all believers in the eschaton.

⁴⁹ See J. Lodge, 'James and Paul at Cross-Purposes?', *Bib* 62, 1981, 199, and Martin, 93. Cutter notes that this is the first example of James using an imperfect verb of action, and 'the significance of this tense is to show continuous action in past time' (84). J. Brooks and C. Winbery refer to this use of the imperfect as the durative or progressive imperfect: 'an act which began in the past is depicted as having continued over a long period of time up to some undefined point' (*Syntax of New Testament Greek* [Lanham, 1979], 92-93). G. Bertram states that in the NT *sunergeō* refers to 'a work or achievement which is more or less equally divided among fellow-workers' (TDNT 7, 1977, 872). Hence, Jas. 2:22 suggests that Abraham's faith as well as his works played a role in helping him accrue God's favorable judgment on Mount Moriah. Neither faith nor works alone would have been sufficient to secure Isaac's release. The second half of v. 22 helps make this point: 'and on the basis of Abraham's works his faith was perfected.' Finally, the best way to translate the articles *hē* and *ton* is as possessive pronouns that refer specifically to Abraham's faith and works. The presence of *autou* after *tois ergois* as well as the insertion of the pronoun *autou* after *ergōn* by the copyists of 614, 630, 1505, 1852, 2495, some others, and vg^{ms} supports this interpretation.

Both the biblical and extra-biblical traditions about Abraham depict him as a charitable person. Therefore, 'in the Jewish and early Christian tradition, the "works" of Abraham are preeminently his acts of mercy, especially his hospitality.'⁵⁰ For instance, in Genesis 18 Abraham receives three heavenly guests, washes their feet, and provides them with food and rest (Gn. 18:1-8). As a result of Abraham's kindness to these strangers, God promises Abraham and Sarah a son (Gn. 18:9-10). The author of 1 Clement picks up on this notion and states that it is 'because of Abraham's faith and hospitality that a son was given to him in his old age' (1 *Clem* 10:7). Hence, through 'that splendid and magnificent exchange of hospitality, . . . the host who seemed to give the feast was himself the feasted' (Philo, *Abr* 167). Josephus contends that Lot followed Abraham's example when the angels came to visit Lot in Sodom. According to Josephus, Lot was 'very kindly to strangers and had learnt the lesson of Abraham's liberality' (*Ant.* 1.200). R. Eliezer says in turn of Lot that he 'walked with our father Abraham and learned of his good deeds and ways' (*Pirqe R. El.* 25). *Abot R. Nat* I, ch. 7 contends that Abraham surpassed even Job in showing hospitality to the poor, and *Midr. Ps* 37:1 says 'Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, that is, he gave food, drink, and escort to all the sons of men.'⁵¹ Likewise, *Yashar, wa-yera* maintains that

If one was hungry, and he came to Abraham, he would give him what he needed, so that he might eat and drink and be satisfied; and if one was naked, and he came to Abraham, he would clothe him with the garments of the poor man's choice, and give him silver and gold, and make known to him the Lord, who had created him and set him on earth.

The author of the *Testament of Abraham* has God affirm that 'more than all men ... he [Abraham] has been righteous in all goodness, hospitable and loving to the end of his life' (*T. Ab.* 1).⁵² Finally, Luke invokes a tradition that sees Abraham as one who provides for the needy in his story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Upon his death, angels carry poor Lazarus away to Abraham's bosom (v. 22), where he is comforted (v. 25). Hence, Ward's contention that James

⁵⁰ Ward, 287-88.

⁵¹ *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 21:33 is similar: 'Abraham planted an orchard at "The Well-of-the-Seven-Ewe-Lambs," and in it he prepared food and drink for those who went and came. And he used to proclaim to them there, "Give thanks, and believe in the name of the Memra of the Lord, the God of the world."'

⁵² This work describes Abraham as 'extremely hospitable;' for 'having pitched his tent at the crossroads of the oak of Mamre, he welcomed all, rich and poor, kings and rulers, cripples and helpless, friends and strangers, neighbors and travelers all alike did the devout, all-holy, righteous, hospitable Abraham welcome' (*T. Ab.* 1).

uses Abraham as a well-known example of hospitality in Jas. 2:21–23 without explicitly referring to the story of Abraham's reception of the three travellers (Genesis 18) or any of the other lore based on this incident is accurate.⁵³ The Abraham of the Jewish exegetical tradition was a person who fulfilled in every way James' 'royal law of liberty.' Since Abraham's charitable acts had the practical effect of feeding, clothing and housing the needy, he provided James with a good example of what it means to practice pure and undefiled religion.

Abraham's hospitality, which flowed from his love for Yahweh, contributed significantly to his status as the 'friend of God.'⁵⁴ In Gn. 22:12 the angel of the LORD says 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' In *Sota* 31a, R. Meir says 'It is declared of Job "one that feared God," and it is declared of Abraham "thou fearest God;" just as "fearing God" with Abraham indicates from love, so "fearing God" with Job indicates from love.' R. Meir bases his affirmation of Abraham's love for Yahweh on Is. 41:8, which he quotes as saying 'The seed of Abraham who loved me' (*Sota* 31a). Hence, the rabbinic tradition interprets Abraham's fear in Gn. 22:12 as an expression of his love for Yahweh.⁵⁵ Philo also introduces the notion of Abraham's love for God into the *Akedah* by implying that Abraham's attitude in serving God in this manner was a synthesis of both love and fear (*Quis Haeres Sit* 6.19ff). Jewish interpreters understood Abraham's love for God as the motivating factor behind his obedience, which in turn provided a strong basis for Yahweh's friendship with him. 'Abraham was designated a friend of God because of his obedience to Divine commands, rather than to the dictates of his own "spirit."⁵⁶ 1 *Clem.* 10:1–7 says that 'Abraham, who was called "the Friend," was found faithful in his obedience to the words of God. . .

⁵³ Ward maintains that the content of the illustration in vv. 15–16 renders it unnecessary for James to mention explicitly the type of works he has in mind for Abraham in vv. 21–22 (288).

⁵⁴ The Testament of Abraham brings Abraham's hospitality and his friendship with God close together. After describing Abraham as the most righteous, hospitable, and loving of all humans, God instructs the archangel Michael to go to Abraham 'my beloved friend' and inform him of his impending death (*T. Ab.* 1). Ward infers from this that 'the title "friend" appears to be given Abraham especially because of his hospitality' (286).

⁵⁵ Another unknown aggadist renders the phrase in question from Gn. 22:12 in the following manner: 'Now I have made known to all that you love me!' (*Gen. Rab.* 56:7). Jacobs says that although the date of this saying cannot be determined, it may be very early since it echoes Jubilees 18:16: 'And I have shown to all that thou art mindful of me' (see Jacobs, 459 n.3).

⁵⁶ Jacobs, 461. Lodge adds that 'in early Christian literature, faith and obedience, faith and hospitality, and seeking after God were assumed as bases for Abraham's friendship with God' (209).

and in his obedience he offered him [Isaac] as a sacrifice to God on the mountain which he showed him.' In a later chapter, the author of 1 Clement answers a question about the reason for Abraham's blessing with the words 'Was it not because he wrought righteousness and truth through faith?' (1 *Clem.* 13:2). *Gen. Rab.* 41:8D links Pr. 22:11 ('Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech will have the king as a friend') with Gn. 13:14–15, a context in which Abraham is promised a great expanse of land for his progeny. From this data it can be seen how the biblical and extra-biblical traditions connect Abraham's hospitality to his love for God, how they introduce this notion of love into the *Akedah* story *via* the reference to Abraham's fear in Gn. 22:12, and how they see Abraham's charitable character as one basis for his friendship with Yahweh.

James sees Abraham's obedient and altruistic lifestyle as a primary reason why he did not have to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah; since Abraham had been consistently charitable to others throughout his many years, God was charitable to him in deeming Isaac's sacrifice unnecessary. The rabbinic haggadic tradition gives this interpretation to the *Akedah* as well: the reason Abraham is allowed not to carry out the action of sacrificing Isaac is his merits, particularly his acts of hospitality.⁵⁷ This understanding of Genesis 22 is also in Josephus, who says that because God opposed it, the deed (*to ergon*) was not done (*Ant.* 1.233). Hence, 'the fact that Isaac is bound and then released is seen as evidence not only of Abraham's obedience to God, but also of the value of his previous acts of mercy, of charity.'⁵⁸ For both James and his first-century audience, Abraham was a person whom God considered just on account of both his faith and his works.

James' use of Gn. 15:6 in v. 23 reflects his concern for the necessity of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the religious lives of individual Christians. James uses Abraham's life to illustrate this principle. In Gn. 15:1–6, Yahweh appears and promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Abraham responds with belief, and as a result 'the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness' (Gn. 15:6). Thus, Genesis 15:6 establishes Abraham as a believer by stating that he accepts what God tells him as the true or trustworthy. James sees this as a necessary factor in Abraham's religious life, but realizes that this 'belief' by itself would have been insufficient to secure Isaac's release. As Jas. 2:22–23 makes clear, it was Abraham's decision to supplement his belief in God's promises with complementary deeds of kindness

⁵⁷ See in particular *Gen. Rab.* 40:4, 41:5.

⁵⁸ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 127. Hence, the release of Isaac constitutes God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness, and James sees the successful outcome of this event as a reward for Abraham's faith and his previous deeds of charity.

that perfected his walk with Yahweh and gave his statement in Gn. 15:6 its ultimate significance.⁵⁹ If Abraham would not have followed up on his convictions by actively serving God through his hospitality to others, Isaac's fate would have been at the least uncertain.

Understanding Abraham as a paradigm of hospitality and vibrant faith resonates well with the proposition of Jas. 2:17, and helps unify the passage as a whole. Since Abraham both believed in Yahweh's promises and acted in a hospitable manner, God acquitted him on Mount Moriah and spared Isaac's life. Christians, says James, should follow Abraham's model as an exemplar of true religion by supplementing their orthodox theology with charitable acts.

Restating the Thesis (v. 24)

Jas. 2:24 restates James' proposition in individual (as opposed to corporate) terms: 'You all must perceive this: a man is vindicated on the basis of works and not on the basis of faith alone.' The imperative *horāte* deserves comment for two reasons. First, imperatival expressions with "" are common in diatribes. Second, James here switches from second person singular to second person plural address (while at the same time making a point about the lives of individual Christians). It is not uncommon for writers who use the diatribe to move back and forth between discussion with the interlocutor and direct address to the audience. In fact, Stowers sees both (1) a calculated ambiguity about the object of address in diatribes, and (2) a lack of concern for maintaining the fiction of the interlocutor on a consistent level.⁶⁰ Hence, one need not agree with Davids that 'the shift to the second plural [in v. 24] shows that the argument with the imaginary interlocutor

⁵⁹ James' use of *plerōō* ('fill, to make full') in v. 23 implies that Abraham brought his initial religious experience with Yahweh to 'full' completion by performing acts of hospitality. James does not contest the notion that Abraham's relationship with God began as a result of his trust in God's promises, but merely says that his works were the fruit and outward evidence of his faith. The argument does not concern the Pauline notion of whether or not Abraham was 'saved by faith,' but instead suggests that if Abraham had not performed works of charity, he would not have met God's requirements for pure and undefiled religion. Works are the natural complement to trust in God, and together the two form the basis of pure religion. In fact, says C. Cranfield, 'the absence of works would have meant that he [Abraham] had no real faith' ('The Message of James', SJT 18, 1965, 340). Furthermore, one need not understand the verb *eplothe* in the sense of a prediction-fulfillment for it 'focuses Gen 15,6 first (and unambiguously) on faith, not on a dual fulfillment of scripture by Abraham's faith on the one hand and his works on the other' (Lodge, 202). Hence, there is no need to agree with Dibelius that 'there must be an allusion to works' in *elogisthe*' (164).

⁶⁰ Stowers, 75, 129.

has been dropped.⁶¹ One should not regard the switch to plural address in v. 24 as an interruption or temporary postponement of James' debate with the interlocutor; for this fictional opponent is simply a rhetorical device that James uses to involve his readers with the text of the letter. Put simply, James centers his attention from the beginning of v. 14 to the end of v. 26 on the needs of his readers. His desire is to instruct his community on the nature of true religion, not to refute some imaginary (or real) opponent. The interlocutor is nothing more than an instructional aid, a heuristic device.

The absence of the definite article before *ergōn* and *pisteōs* in v. 24 is important. One way of accounting for the absence of the definite article before these nouns is to point out that both follow the preposition " ('on the basis of'). Robertson suggests that ancient writers often considered prepositional phrases definite enough without the article,⁶² and R. Funk adds that Greek nouns frequently occur without the article when attached to prepositions.⁶³ However, the phrases in vv. 18, 20, and 22 all demonstrate that James does not purposefully avoid using definite articles with nouns in prepositional phrases.⁶⁴ So what reason, if any, can one give for the absence of the article before the two nouns in v. 24?⁶⁵ The way James uses the noun *pistis* in the preceding verses may provide a clue. *pistis* occurs a total of nine times in Jas. 2:14–23. Where there is no article before it, it means 'belief of the theological or propositional sort' (vv. 14a, 18a). Where the article does occur with it, one of three things happens: (1) the article functions as a possessive pronoun and thereby designates the 'belief' of a particular individual (vv. 14b, 22), (2) the noun functions as a title for the Christian religion (vv. 17, 18b [*tēn pistin*], 20), or (3) the article serves a particularizing or individualizing function (v. 18b [*tēn pistin sou*]). Hence, neither noun requires the definite article in v. 24; for

⁶¹ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 130. Indeed, James seems to resume his argument with the interlocutor in vv. 25–26, since these verses apparently pick up where v. 23 left off.

⁶² Robertson, 791.

⁶³ Funk, 'The Syntax of the Greek Article' (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1953), 64. T. Middleton adds that the absence of the article with words preceded by prepositions 'affords no presumption, that the Nouns are used indefinitely. Their definiteness or indefiniteness, when they are governed by Prepositions, must be determined on other grounds' (*The Doctrine of the Greek Article Applied to the Criticism and Illustration of the New Testament*, new ed. [London, 1855], 99).

⁶⁴ See also Jas. 1:1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, 27; 2:3, 9; 3:3, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14; 4:1, 3, 13, 16; 5:1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 17, 19.

⁶⁵ R. Poss notes that 'the absence of the article is not treated by the grammarians as intensively as the use of the article, but they admit the article is left out for a reason and the absence of the article needs constant attention' ('The Articular and Anarthrous Constructions in the Epistle of James' [Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948], 8).

the subject of the sentence is merely 'a man', and *pistis* here means 'belief' (and not 'the Christian religion').

The point of Jas. 2:24 is that trust in God (which at times involves giving one's mental assent to theological maxims) and charitable acts are both essential for individual vindication before God. This interpretation is supported by the presence of *monon* ('alone') at the end of v. 24. Although some might be tempted to see a devaluing of 'faith' on the part of James in v. 24, the inclusion of 'alone' attests to James' affirmation of the necessity of 'faith.' Furthermore, James here as elsewhere uses *dikaiōō* in a demonstrative sense, and his focus is on the eschatological judgment of all believers. God will recognize the righteous 'on the basis of works' and 'on the basis of faith' when the time of the last judgment arrives. 'James uses the term [*dikaïoutai*] to denote God's eschatological pronouncement on one who is shown to be righteous . . . it is part of James' "apocalyptic paraenesis."'⁶⁶ Thus, *dikaiōō* here refers to God's recognition of an existing goodness, not to God's gracious conferral of righteousness on the undeserving sinner.

Rahab (v. 25)

In Jas. 2:25, the author draws his readers' attention to a second example of a person recognized as righteous on the basis of both faith and works: 'Was not Rahab, the prostitute who welcomed the messengers and sent them away on another path, likewise found righteous on the basis of works?'⁶⁷ Both Jewish and early Christian traditions portray Rahab as a woman who believed in God and practiced hospitality. In addition to describing Rahab as a beautiful reformed profligate who married Joshua and became a prophetess and the mother of several prophets, ancient writers speak of Rahab as one who displayed both true belief and good works.⁶⁸ 1 Clem 12:2-4 provides an interesting example of this exegetical tradition at work:

⁶⁶ Martin, 91. MacArthur makes a statement to the same effect: "Works have no part in bringing about salvation...but they show that salvation is indeed present" (17).

⁶⁷ The words *he pornē hypodexamēnē tous aggelous kai heterai hodoi ekbalousa* comprise a relative clause ('who') that describes the name *Raab* rather than a temporal clause ('when') that introduces the moment of Rahab's vindication. The reason for translating these words in this manner has to do with the details of the Rahab story in Joshua: Rahab and her family are not 'saved' from destruction until well after the departure of the messengers. Rahab acts on behalf of the spies in Joshua 2, but does not receive her reward (i.e., her 'salvation') until Joshua 6. Rahab's 'works' and the moment of her 'salvation' are two different events.

⁶⁸ A. Hanson, 'Rahab the Harlot in Early Christian Tradition', JSNT 1, 1978, 58. Hanson lists the early Christian and Jewish representatives of this tradition in 'Seminar Report', NTS 25, 1979, 526-27. See in particular *Pesikta Rabbati*, *Piska* 40.3-4, *Zebahim* 116a-b, *Jos. Ant.* 5.5-15, *Meg.* 14b-15a, and *Mt.* 1.5.

For her faith and hospitality Rahab the harlot was saved. For when the spies were sent to Jericho by Joshua the son of Nun, the King of the land knew that they had come to spy out his country, and sent men to take them, that they might be captured and put to death. So the hospitable Rahab took them in, and hid them in the upper room under the stalks of flax. And when the king's men came and said, 'The spies of our land came in to thee, bring them out, for the king orders thus,' she answered, 'The men whom ye seek did indeed come to me, but they went away forthwith, and are proceeding on their journey,' and pointed in the wrong direction.⁶⁹

James explicitly mentions two of Rahab's 'hospitable' deeds: (1) her reception of the messengers, and (2) her decision to send them away on another path. Jos. 6:25 speaks of Rahab's reward for these actions: 'But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.' Joshua's decision to spare Rahab and her family is certainly the referent of the verb *edikaiōthē* in Jas. 2:25. Rahab's display of hospitality to the messengers not only resulted in her own 'justification,' but that of her family as well.

But what about Rahab's 'faith' in Jas. 2:25? Dibelius is of the opinion that James omission of 'any reference to Rahab's faith, although the Old Testament confirms it and ... Jewish tradition would also have mentioned it, must be regarded as remarkable.'⁷⁰ However, since within the context of Jas. 2:14–26 James only attempts to prove the necessity of good works in addition to faith, his decision to leave out any explicit reference to Rahab's 'belief' is understandable. The necessity of orthodox belief is the implicit assumption of this passage as a whole, and as a result James need not discuss Rahab's faith explicitly. Within the context of Jas. 2:14–26, the existence of Rahab's faith can be taken for granted.⁷¹ Since James' audience recognized Rahab as a woman of faith, her hospitality to the spies and its consequences helps support James' notion about the necessity of both faith and works in the life of the individual believer. She, as well as Abraham, exemplified what it means to be truly religious.

⁶⁹ Within this same context the author of 1 Clement lists Abraham as an example of hospitality. This points to a traditional use of Rahab and Abraham together as examples of hospitality. Furthermore, hospitality in Israel was regarded as a form of charity (Davids, 'Tradition and Citation', 124).

⁷⁰ Dibelius, 166.

⁷¹ Those who attempt to describe the content of Rahab's faith usually point to her statement in Jos. 2:11b and other details of the surrounding context. Hence, J. Polhill writes that 'it was her faith in the God of Israel and the certainty of his victories that led her to protect the Jewish spies' ('Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith', *RevExp* 83, 1986, 402).

A Concluding Analogy (v. 26)

James concludes this section of the letter with a comparison: 'As the body is dead without the spirit, so the Faith is dead without works' (v. 26). Some think this analogy fails because 'whereas the death of the body is caused by the departure of the spirit, the deadness of faith is not caused, but only recognized, by its failure to produce works.'⁷² Such evaluations of v. 26 understand *hē pistis* as 'belief' or 'trust.' However, if James here uses 'the Faith' as a title for 'the Christian religion' (as in Jas. 2:1, 17, 18b, 20) then his analogy works quite well. The point of Jas. 2:14-26 is that the Christian religion is empty so long as it fails to complement its orthodox teachings with charitable acts. 'The Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself' (v. 17). Works as well as faith must be present in order for the members of 'the Faith' to avoid judgment. Hence, the meaning of Jas. 2:26 is not that works are to faith as the spirit is to the body, but that an unproductive and apathetic religion (*hē pistis*) is as dead as a 'body' that has no 'spirit'.⁷³ James thus pronounces a final judgment on the pseudo-Faith of the interlocutor by stating that the religion to which he adheres is like a corpse. 'Dead orthodoxy has absolutely no power to save and may in fact even hinder the person from coming to [the] living faith, a faith enlivened by works of charity.'⁷⁴ James' argument has succeeded in doing two things: (1) it has further characterized the nature of true religion by insisting on the need for religious conviction and charitable works on both the corporate and individual levels, and (2) it has revealed the inherent flaws of inactive Christianity. If the Faith is truly to be religious, its members must allow their orthodoxy to issue forth into orthopraxy.

The Practical Intent of Jas 2:14-26: Paraenesis Rather than Polemic

For the author of James, Christianity is more than just confession: 'It is the force behind one's lifestyle.'⁷⁵ L. Perdue classifies James as a paraenetic letter, and says 'the paraenesis of James exhorts the audience to reflect upon their initial entrance into the community, to continue to dissociate themselves from the world, and to engage in

⁷² Ropes, 225.

⁷³ But what constitutes a *sōma* for James? James uses three other anthropological terms in the letter: (1) *sarx* (5:3), (2) *pneuma* (2:26; 4:5), and (3) *psychē* (5:20). If one assumes that James considers the words *pneuma* and *psychē* to be synonymous (which seems likely given the large number of synonymous words and expressions in the letter), then perhaps a *sōma* or 'living person' results from the commingling of human 'flesh' with a 'soul' or 'spirit.' For James, *sarx + pneuma/psychē = sōma*, and death results from the absence of either part.

⁷⁴ Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 134.

⁷⁵ Polhill, 401.

more committed efforts to strive towards a higher level of virtue and perfection.⁷⁶ Jas. 2:14–26 addresses the third objective; for within these verses the author urges his readers to become more virtuous by performing good deeds such as clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. James accomplishes this task by revealing the interlocutor's conception of Christianity as empty, dead, and incapable of attaining God's favorable judgment in the eschaton. True Christians, says James, follow the example of people like Abraham and Rahab, who acted on the basis of their conviction and as a result received their just reward. James' 'intention is not dogmatically oriented, but practically oriented: he wishes to admonish the Christians to practice their faith, i.e. their Christianity, by works.'⁷⁷

Given the practical focus of Jas. 2:14–26, it seems somewhat ironic that many choose to read Jas. 2:14–26 against the background of a theological aspect of Pauline Christianity: 'For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law' (Rom. 3:28).⁷⁸ Several important reasons exist for doubting whether any historical relationship exists between these two texts. For instance, the term *erga* means two different things in James and Romans. As has been shown above, 'works' for James are the product or fruit of the religious lives of Christians. Paul, on the other hand, tends to use the term in the sense of acts performed in order to earn God's initial acceptance or approval. Thus, in Romans Paul almost always qualifies 'works' with the phrase 'of the Law'. Hence, 'it is significant that James never uses Paul's typical phrase "works of the law", which he could hardly have avoided doing if he had Paul's arguments in mind.'⁷⁹

A second difference between Rom. 3:28 and Jas. 2:14–26 has to do with the nature of their arguments. Paul makes a soteriological argument, while James worries about the religious practices of his readers. Their respective uses of *dikaioō* and *pistis* highlight this difference. Paul uses *dikaioō* synthetically to denote either a present or past event in which God gives something to the ungodly: as a result of divine grace, God bestows righteousness upon unrighteous people in response to

⁷⁶ Perdue, 'Paraenesis and the Epistle of James', *ZNW* 72, 1981, 250–51.

⁷⁷ Dibelius, 178.

⁷⁸ For instance, J. Sanders thinks that Jas. 2:24 'appears to be a conscious attempt to reverse the Pauline language of Rom. 3:28, whereby language from Rom. 4:16 is also brought in' (*Ethics in the New Testament* [Philadelphia, 1975], 120–21). Sanders argues that the language about faith in the context of the Abraham example in James parallels but reverses the language about faith in the context of the Abraham example in Romans. James uses *monon* with *pistis* in Jas. 2:24 in order to reverse Paul's phrase in Rom. 4:16: *ou tōi ek tou nomou monon* (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁹ C. Powell, 'Faith' in James and its Bearings on the Problem of the Date of the Epistle', *ExpTim* 62, 1951, 312.

their faith. James, on the other hand, uses this verb to speak about the future eschatological judgment in which God will recognize the fact of an existing righteousness. James confronts a dead orthodoxy, while Paul attempts to establish a soteriological doctrine. 'Paul denies the need for "pre-conversion works" and James emphasizes the "absolute necessity of post-conversion works."' ⁸⁰ Furthermore, faith in James is 'faith which the Christian has, never the faith of the sinner which first brings him [or her] to God.' ⁸¹

This evidence calls for a new understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* of Jas. 2:14-26. James did not direct these verses against a *sola fideist* branch of Paulinism, but rather attempted to encourage his readers to perform good works in the absence of their apostolic leader. James is not concerned with soteriological issues, but with the 'necessity of faith effecting works in the life of the believer.' ⁸² In Jas. 2:14-26 the author argues in favor of the idea that the only true religion is both 'faithful' and 'effectual.' He directs his venom not against Pauline theology, but against the arguments of his hypothetical interlocutor. James employs this rhetorical device for the sake of making a paraenetic point: in order for the Christian Faith to attain perfection, its members must engage in altruistic acts of charity. 'The Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself' (Jas. 2:17).

Abstract

In Jas. 2:14-26, James argues that in order for Christianity to find favor with God, its members must supplement their orthodox beliefs with acts of charity. James' states his thesis in v. 17: 'The Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself.' In the process of explicating his thesis, James overcomes the challenge of a hypothetical interlocutor (who suggests that although 'works' may be necessary on the corporate level, believers may focus their individual energies in either practical or theological directions). In order to demonstrate that God requires 'works' of every Christian believer, James offers the examples of Abraham and Rahab. Both of these persons, says James, were found righteous on the basis of both their 'faith' and their 'works.' Hence, James can state with confidence that 'a person is vindicated on the basis of works and not on the basis of faith alone' (v. 24).

⁸⁰ Martin, 81.

⁸¹ Dibelius, 178.

⁸² McKnight, 357-58.