

A FAITH UNLIKE ABRAHAM'S: MATTHEW BATES ON SALVATION BY ALLEGIANCE ALONE

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Abstract: *In Salvation by Allegiance Alone, Matthew Bates seeks to help us “rethink the gospel, faith, and other matters pertaining to salvation” (p. 5). At the heart of SAA is a bold proposal, which involves interpreting pistis in salvation-oriented contexts, not as “faith,” or “trust,” but as “allegiance” to Jesus the reigning king. The following review article analyzes Bates’s arguments for understanding pistis as “allegiance,” paying close attention to the key lexical, theological, and exegetical aspects of his discussion. Major deficiencies are observed in each of these areas, and, as such, the proposal is judged untenable.*

Key words: *Matthew Bates, salvation, allegiance, faith, works, gospel, grace, Abraham*

In *Salvation by Allegiance Alone (SAA)*, Matthew Bates seeks to help us “rethink the gospel, faith, and other matters pertaining to salvation.”¹ Or, again, “to explain in a forthright fashion the central biblical teachings about salvation, faith, works, and the gospel” (p. 9). At the heart of *SAA* is an attempt to reconsider “precisely what we mean” by the concepts “faith” and “the gospel” (p. 2).

Bates proposes—in view of the meaning of *pistis* that he discerns in the NT and contemporaneous literature—both an “excision” and a “transplant.”² The excision involves the removal from Christian discourse of “‘faith’ and ‘belief,’ insofar as they serve as overarching terms to describe what brings about eternal salvation” (p. 3). The transplant is the replacement of this language with that of “fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus as king” (p. 5). It is a bold proposal which would, of course, involve significant changes to current English-language translations of the NT, to name but one of the far-reaching implications of Bates’s proposal.³ *SAA* is, in short, a book about NT soteriology, with a special focus on the meaning of *pistis*.

Bates’s argument involves not only a discussion of the meaning of *pistis* (chaps. 4–5) but also a reconsideration of what the NT gospel is (chaps. 2–3), and brief treatments of the character of the new creation (chap. 6), restored humanity (chap. 7), and justification (chap. 8). It finishes with a practical discussion on what

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¹ Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 5.

² In *SAA*, *pistis*, at least initially, functions as a transliteration of πίστις. However, it should be noted that there are times in *SAA* when *pistis* seems to refer to a *concept* of faith, without Bates signaling that he has changed his usage. When relating Bates’s own arguments, for the sake of accuracy, I will use *pistis* throughout. I will, however, speak of πίστις when I myself am referring to the Greek lexeme.

³ Some of Bates’s own translations of NT texts can be found on pp. 81–82 of *SAA*.

it means to practice allegiance (chap. 9), although several questions for reflection and application are also included at the end of each chapter. Bates writes for both scholars and a more general readership (p. 7) and hopes to contribute to the healing of the centuries-long wound between Catholics and Protestants (pp. 6, 182–91). To say that this book is ambitious would be something of an understatement, since it seeks to clarify complex, long-debated matters of soteriology in the NT while taking seriously issues of lexicography, biblical theology, eschatology, anthropology, and ecclesiology, and all in the space of just over 200 pages.

One of *SAA*'s strengths, which will be apparent from this initial summary, is that Bates always assumes the interconnectedness of ideas, being committed to the task of integrating exegesis, theology, and praxis. He also cares deeply about the health of the church, which is evident in his use of the excision/transplant analogy, his desire to communicate with a broad audience, the strong language he uses to caution his readers against other views of *pistis*,⁴ and his ecumenical vision. He claims that "the adoption of 'allegiance' language is pressing for the church" (p. 8), and "will reinvigorate the life and mission of the church today" (p. 9).

Bates's description of salvation as an embodied participation in a transformed creation (chap. 6), and as the restoration of the image of God in humanity (chap. 7), covers familiar and uncontroversial ground. The same cannot be said of the core argument of *SAA*, which focuses on the meaning of *pistis* in the NT. This is the most significant and original contribution of *SAA*, and is deserving of close consideration, especially since it concerns the crucial issue of how we become beneficiaries of God's salvation in Christ. I find myself in full agreement with Bates that the health of the church is at stake in how we understand the nature of faith. As such, in the rest of this article I undertake a critical evaluation of Bates's thesis concerning *pistis*. After closely observing both the structure and details of Bates's argument, I will conclude that there are major lexical, theological, and exegetical problems, which together make the thesis untenable.

I. FRAMING *PISTIS* AS ALLEGIANCE

SAA seeks to answer the question "What is saving 'faith'?" (p. 77), and the conclusion Bates reaches is that "when discussing salvation in generalized terms, *allegiance* is a better overarching English-language term for what Paul intends with his use of the *pistis* word group than the more customary *faith*, *belief*, and *trust*" (p. 78). This conclusion relies, to a significant extent, on how Bates frames the discussion in chapters 1–3. In these chapters, Bates presents both a negative and a positive framework for his argument concerning *pistis*.

1. *The negative framework: What faith is not.* The first chapter of *SAA*, "Faith is *Not*," presents the negative framework, by dealing with various popular misconceptions of faith. Two of these misconceptions are particularly important for the future direction and tone of *SAA*. The first of these is that faith is "Not the Opposite

⁴ For example, "Many contemporary understandings of 'faith' dangerously and illegitimately shade out the loyalty-demanding portion of *pistis*" (p. 122).

of Works” (pp. 20–22). Under this heading, Bates critiques a type of popular gospel presentation in which acceptance of the grace of God in Christ requires a renunciation of trying to earn salvation by good works. This inadequate view of faith says, “We must instead ever and always just trust, avoiding the seduction of seeking to earn God’s favor through moral and religious performance” (p. 21). At the end of this section Bates briefly signals his own alternative to this view, which is that if *pistis* in salvation-oriented contexts means “faithfulness, or fidelity, or allegiance,” then *pistis*, “by its very definition,” might include works (p. 22).

The other misconception of faith, which also functions as something of an ongoing foil in *SAA* for Bates’s own view of *pistis*, is the view that faith is “reducible to intellectual assent” (pp. 24–25). Bates especially associates this view with the “free-grace movement” (pp. 24–25), whose specter haunts the pages of *SAA*. The frequent corollary of this faulty view of faith—a truncated gospel which separates the saving work of Christ from his lordship (pp. 27–29)—is the backdrop to Bates’s portrayal of the “Full Gospel” in chapter 2, where he considers the apostle Paul’s presentation of the gospel. Then, in chapter 3, he looks at Jesus’s proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom.

2. *The positive framework: the gospel.* Chapters 2 and 3 together function as the positive framework into which Bates fits his definition of *pistis* as allegiance (chap. 4). This framework is a *reframing* exercise (pp. 15, 32, 77)—if popular misconceptions of faith are to be overturned, then inadequate views of the gospel must first be exposed. Hence, the structure of Bates’s argument anticipates one of the key points he makes about *pistis*: it derives its meaning from the meaning of the biblical gospel, and, in particular, from what is *central* to the gospel.

In chapter 2, Bates presents the gospel as “the power-releasing story of Jesus’s life, death for sins, resurrection, and installation as king,” which is the “good news about the enthronement of Jesus the atoning king” (p. 30). The backdrop to these definitions is, in part, Paul’s summary of the gospel in Rom 1:3–4, which Bates helpfully expounds in the context of the Davidic promises (pp. 31–34). Bates adds Phil 2:9–11 to Rom 1:3–4 to demonstrate that Jesus’s enthronement and sovereign rule, his “super-exalted status as cosmic Lord ... is at the very heart and center—the climax of the gospel” (p. 37). This emphasis on the kingship and exaltation of Christ as the Son of God is a welcome one, and Bates is surely correct in insisting that it is a critical dimension of the apostolic preaching that is neglected in many popular gospel presentations.

Strangely, however, Bates says with respect to the death of Christ for our sins that “it is imperative to realize that it is only a small but vital portion of the gospel as properly understood, not the whole gospel” (p. 39). The fact that it is not the whole gospel hardly makes it “small.” Bates uses the word in the context of expounding 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul says that “I passed on to you as of first importance (ἐν πρώτοις) what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (v. 3). Perhaps more significantly, since it forms part of a recurring pattern of argumentation in *SAA*, Bates here begins to stack the deck in favor of his *pistis*-as-allegiance thesis, by contrasting faith as belief/trust in a “forgiveness-of-sins process” or an “atonement system,” with faith as allegiance to

Jesus as Lord (pp. 39, 53, cf. p. 92). Thus, from quite early on in *SAA*, Bates's argument involves an excluded middle—*pistis* as *trust* in the *Lord* Jesus.

The way in which we tap into the saving power of the gospel is “by allegiance to Jesus as the Christ, when this allegiance is pledged and lived out through the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 43). It is by giving *pistis* unto Jesus as the king that we are declared righteous and come to participate in resurrection life. Our allegiance is patterned after Christ's pattern of faithful obedience (Christ's own *pistis*), with Bates interpreting *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν* (Rom 1:17) as, “by the fidelity of Jesus, for [our] fidelity to Jesus as king” (pp. 42–43). Both Jesus's allegiance to God and our own allegiance to Jesus are necessary for righteousness and the attainment of life (p. 43).

In chapter 3, Bates presents Jesus's gospel of the kingdom, showing that it dovetails nicely with Paul's apostolic proclamation. Bates covers a lot of ground in the Gospels, and manages to explain, succinctly and clearly, central ideas associated with Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom. He builds upon Dodd's categorization of the apostolic preaching,⁵ and emphasizes the importance of the enthronement of Christ as Lord at God's right hand, which he, once again, calls the “climax of the gospel” (p. 53). Bates looks, in turn, at (1) Christ's preexistence; (2) incarnation in fulfilment of Davidic promises; (3) death for sins; (4) burial; (5) resurrection; (6) appearances; (7) enthronement; and (8) return as judge.

In this account of the story of Christ, two things stand out. First, Bates summarizes the gospel as told by the Gospels in terms of “Jesus's career” (p. 51). The gospel is the eight-stage *story* of Jesus the Christ from his preexistence to his return as judge, a story that is cosmic in scope, and is contrasted with individualistic, “me”-centered accounts of sin and salvation (pp. 39, 77). Second, the ascension with its concomitant elements is “the most critical ... component of the gospel today,” Jesus's reign at the right hand of God “the most important part of the gospel” (pp. 67–68), since the present church age is defined by Christ's dynamic rule.

3. *Shifting the center.* The reason, according to Bates, that Jesus's reign is the most “critical” and the “most important” part of the gospel, is that it “corresponds to the *present* epoch of world history that we find ourselves in now” (p. 67). The first six stages of the gospel are in the past, but the seventh stage, which Bates entitles “Jesus Is Seated at the Right Hand of God as Lord,” corresponds to what Jesus is doing *now* (pp. 66–67). This argument is novel, but wholly unconvincing.

First, it fails to explain why the Gospels—written to those who inhabit the same epoch as us—give such prominence within their narratives to the death and resurrection of Christ,⁶ or why these are named as of first importance (*ἐν πρώτοις*, v. 3) in connection with the gospel that Paul received and passed on to the Corin-

⁵ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 17.

⁶ Whether one agrees with Martin Kähler's famous comment that Mark's Gospel is a “passion narrative with an extended introduction,” it is an unmissable feature of each of the Gospel narratives that they have an extended, climactic focus upon the death and resurrection of Christ (Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* [trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964], 80).

thians (1 Cor 15:1–11).⁷ Or again, why the apostles, who had just witnessed the ascension of Christ to his place of kingly power (Acts 1:9–11), seek, from among those who have been with them throughout the earthly career of Christ—from his baptism to his ascension—*another witness of the resurrection* (Acts 1:21–22). Not only do they single out the resurrection, but they do so, *having just witnessed the ascension*.

Second, at the heart of the apostolic proclamation is a declaration of what God has *done* in and through Christ to establish his kingdom. For example, Peter's movement through the gospel narrative on the day of Pentecost is not Bates's movement from a *past* event to a *present* reality, nor a movement from the agency of *God* to the agency of *Christ*. Rather, it is presented as a singular work of God in exalting Jesus, through resurrection and ascension, to his right hand (Acts 2:32–35), by which means "God has *made* this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Bates recognizes this, even stating with respect to Phil 2:9–11 that—unlike Christ's descent in Phil 2:6–8—in the story of the *exaltation* of Jesus "God (the Father) takes the initiative rather than Jesus" (p. 36). Nevertheless, contrary to his own evidence, when describing the seventh stage of the gospel, Bates shifts the gospel's center of gravity from what God has *done* in and through Christ, to what Christ *is now doing* as reigning king (p. 67). This shift is critical to his argument, since for Bates it is from this reality of the present reign of Christ that our response of *pistis* to the gospel takes its bearings.

Notably absent from Bates's analysis of the Gospels' portrayal of the gospel is any discussion of the actual NT terms *εὐαγγέλιον* and *εὐαγγελίζω* (the former prominent in Mark, and the latter in Luke), beyond initial references to Mark 1:14–15 and Luke 4:43 (p. 48), which he cites to show that the gospel is closely associated with the arrival of the kingdom. While Bates is conscious of the importance of distinguishing between "the gospel proper" and "the gospel's associative context" (p. 32), so as to ensure "precision" in understanding the gospel (pp. 32, 54), he does not root his own analysis of the gospel in a contextual study of the evangelists' gospel terminology. However, only such a grounding can give the necessary hermeneutical control to consistently maintain such a distinction and avoid either unnecessarily truncating the NT gospel (the problem Bates is critiquing), or unduly expanding it.

The purpose of Bates's gospel reframing exercise is to properly identify the climax of the gospel, so as to be in a stronger position to discuss what faith is: "the gospel reaches its zenith with Jesus's installation and sovereign rule as the Christ,

⁷ Bates deals with the evidence of 1 Corinthians 15, by observing that Paul "does go on in the chapter to link the resurrection to Jesus's reign at the right hand of God, saying emphatically, 'For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (15:25)" (p. 38). But Paul is not, in context, linking Jesus's resurrection to his reign; he is linking Jesus's reign (v. 25) to his final abolition of God's enemies at "the end" (v. 24). Paul alludes to Ps 100:1 and Ps 8:6 to underline the certainty of Christ's victory over all authorities and powers. See, e.g., Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 771–73. The fact remains that, unlike the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Christ (1 Cor 15:1–8), in 1 Corinthians 15 the present reign of Christ is not listed among the things of first importance (*ἐν πρώτοις*, v. 3), which marked the proclamation of all the apostolic witnesses (v. 11).

the king. As such, *faith* in Jesus is best described as *allegiance* to him as king” (p. 77).⁸ However, not only—as we have seen—does Bates fail to provide a biblical warrant for the premise of this statement, but also—as we are about to see—the inference that he draws does not even follow from the premise.

II. ARGUMENTS FOR *PISTIS* AS ALLEGIANCE

Having established the interpretive frame provided by the gospel, in chapter 4 Bates presents four arguments in favor of understanding *pistis* as allegiance when discussing salvation in generalized terms (p. 78). These are (1) “finding this exact meaning” in certain places in extrabiblical literature and the NT; (2) allegiance functioning as the logical corollary to Jesus being king/Lord; (3) the ability of *pistis*-as-allegiance to resolve “puzzling matters” in Paul; and (4) the cultural context of Greco-Roman imperial propaganda.

With regards to (1), Bates appeals to BDAG for a meaning “something akin to ‘faithfulness’” in a number of texts (pp. 78–79), and then references some instances from outside the NT where “*pistis* must carry the precise meaning of allegiance” (pp. 79–80).⁹ Next, after noting the generally accepted meaning “faithfulness” for *πίστις* in Rom 3:3, Bates asks (p. 81), “By what right, then, can we exclude this fidelity nuance the very next time we encounter *pistis* language in Romans, at verse 3:21 and following?” And so, on the basis of an apparently self-evident inference, Bates proceeds to translate Rom 3:21–25, as well as several other passages in Paul (Rom 5:1; Gal 2:16; 2:20; 5:4–6; Phil 3:8–11; 1 Cor 1:21; 1 Cor 15:1–2), by rendering *πίστις* as “allegiance” and *πιστεύω* as “to give allegiance.” Therefore, according to Bates, the meaning of *πίστις* in Rom 3:3—“faithfulness”—has a “fidelity nuance” which contextually constrains the meaning of *πίστις* in Rom 3:22 as “allegiance.” Bates’s translation of Rom 3:21–25 is as follows:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through the allegiance of Jesus the Christ [διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] for all who give allegiance [εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας]. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in the Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, through his allegiance [διὰ τῆς πίστεως] (p. 81).

In defense of interpreting *πίστις* and *πιστεύω* in this way, Bates notes that “the allegiance concept welds mental agreement, professed fealty, and embodied loyalty” (p. 82), and, as such, “foregrounding allegiance makes excellent contextual sense in all of these crucial passages” (p. 82).¹⁰ But why foregrounding allegiance makes excellent contextual sense is left unexplained, since the context of the pas-

⁸ Emphasis original.

⁹ The references are: 3 Macc 3:2–4; 5:31; Esth 13:3–4; and several from Josephus.

¹⁰ Bates’s brief explanation at this point of his “allegiance concept” anticipates his threefold definition of *pistis*. See further below.

sages is left unexplored. So, Bates's contextual argument at this point does not come about by analyzing various grammatical, syntactical, and contextual features of these passages, so as to precisely locate these instances of πίστις, but rather from simply asserting that there is a good fit between these texts and his concept of allegiance.

An initially more promising contextual reason for understanding *pistis* as allegiance is presented in argument (2), viz. since the Jesus to whom *pistis* is directed is the Christ, or the Lord, “contextually the most obvious and natural way to speak about the proper relationship between the king and his people is allegiance or loyalty” (p. 83). That is, since Jesus *Christ*, the enthroned king, is the object of faith, it is “contextually plausible” to understand *pistis* as allegiance, and so—at this point Bates takes a great logical leap—“the basic thesis of the book can be established” (p. 84).

In connection with argument (3), Bates deals with two Pauline “puzzling matters.” The first is the interpretation of the phrase ὑπακοή πίστεως (Rom 1:5; Rom 16:26), and the second is the νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal 6:2). I will return to how Bates deals with the first in the next section. As regards the second, if *pistis* is understood as allegiance to the Christ, “then it immediately becomes obvious why early Christians would have spoken of the ‘law of the Christ’ with esteem rather than with law-hating suspicion” (p. 87). I confess that this was not immediately obvious to me, but Bates proceeds to spell it out: “The rendering of *pistis* ... and submission to the law of Christ amount to nearly the same thing—to give *pistis* means to enact allegiance to the king by obeying his law” (p. 87).

Argument (4) is that imperial rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world “enhances the plausibility” of the *pistis*-as-allegiance interpretation. Bates shows the plausibility of such political overtones in Rev 2:13 and Acts 16:31, concluding that “not only does *pistis* (and cognates) probably shade toward the meaning of allegiance in relevant texts in the New Testament; this meaning ... makes excellent sense within the larger Greco-Roman world” (p. 89).

After a few pages (pp. 89–92) in which Bates deals with a potential problem to his thesis posed by Paul's presentation of Abraham's faith in Romans 4, he gives a three-fold definition of “saving allegiance.” That is, having given four arguments in support of *pistis* meaning allegiance, he defines precisely what this *pistis*/allegiance is. Allegiance has three basic dimensions: “mental affirmation that the gospel is true, professed fealty to Jesus alone as the cosmic Lord, and enacted loyalty through obedience to Jesus as the king” (p. 92). “In texts that refer to ultimate salvation,” *pistis* can include all of these three elements, although it won't in every instance (p. 93). As already noted, Bates implies that all three elements are present in the “crucial passages” relating to salvation (p. 82).

There is a discernible shift at this point towards treating *pistis* as a theological *idea*, rather than a distinct Greek *lexeme*. Bates's four arguments for why *pistis* means allegiance are arguments for why πίστις (the Greek *lexeme*) means allegiance. But Bates's three-fold definition of *pistis* is of an allegiance *concept*, which serves to clarify the elements of the human response to God's grace which are required for final salvation.

This problem is especially apparent in Bates's brief discussions of the second and third elements of his definition of *pistis*, viz. "professed fealty"/"confession of loyalty,"¹¹ and "embodied fidelity." Bates's main text for showing that one of the dimensions of *pistis* is a "confession of loyalty" is Rom 10:9–10 (pp. 96–98). But Bates himself acknowledges that the verb πιστεύω means "believe" here (p. 97). Confession (ὁμολογέω) is linked to πιστεύω in the context, but Bates recognizes that the sense of confession is not conveyed by the verb πιστεύω itself. How is "confession" a dimension of πιστεύω here, let alone of πίστις? Any discussion of lexical meaning has been left far behind. Bates's other examples of this second dimension of *pistis* (Luke 12:8; Acts 24:14) do not even make mention of either πίστις or πιστεύω (p. 98).

The argument for his third element consists of a reminder of the meaning of the phrase "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26), a reference to 1 Tim 6:12, interpreted as a call to Timothy to "actualize his confession of allegiance to Jesus ... through his enacted loyalty," and a quotation of Matt 7:21–23, in which Jesus warns against confessing his name without showing genuine obedience (pp. 98–99). In none of these passages is the concept of *embodiment* prominent, and Matt 7:21–23 makes no mention of πίστις at all. I was left wondering at the end of *SAA* what semantic value Bates intends by the phrase "*embodied pistis*/allegiance." If it is that πίστις has connotations of embodiment, then no evidence is forthcoming. If his point all along is that faith *manifests* itself in active, bodily obedience to Christ, then only a few readers would demur, and Bates is simply affirming a mainstream part of the Protestant tradition.

III. METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

I now note several deficiencies with Bates's *pistis*-as-allegiance thesis, the majority of which are methodological in nature.

1. *Insufficient evidence.* It is surely inadequate to assert that "allegiance" is the sense of πίστις that predominates in the NT within contexts of salvation without demonstrating, through weight of example, that it actually *does* so. In a work the size of *SAA*, aimed at a mixed audience, one cannot expect an exhaustive analysis of the NT's use of πίστις. However, one would expect a close study of *several* of the NT's 243 uses of πίστις,¹² so as to avoid the risk of selective bias. Bates affirms the meaning "faithfulness" in Rom 3:3 (p. 80), translates several passages (Rom 5:1; Gal 2:16; 2:20; 5:4–6; Phil 3:8–11; 1 Cor 1:21; 15:1–2) with a meaning established from 3 Macc 3:2–4 and Rom 3:3 (pp. 81–82)—simply asserting that such a translation "makes excellent contextual sense" in these other passages (p. 82)—and then references a few other texts for good measure (pp. 82, 84). Unfortunately, the NT

¹¹ Bates uses these labels interchangeably for his second dimension of *pistis*.

¹² This is the figure generated by Accordance 11 for NA²⁸, but other calculations are possible. For example, the forthcoming *Diccionario griego-español del Nuevo Testamento* (DGENT) calculates the number as 245 (Israel Muñoz Gallarte, "The Meaning of πίστις in the Framework of the *Diccionario griego-español del Nuevo Testamento*," in *Getting into the Text: New Testament Essays in Honor of David Alan Black* [ed. D. L. Akin and T. W. Hudgins; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017], 180).

texts which he more closely examines—Rom 1:5 and 4:18–25—do not support his thesis. Bates's clearest and most convincing demonstration that πίστις means allegiance comes from 3 Macc 3:2–4. If its meaning is demonstrably clear in *that* text, one wonders why it is not demonstrably clear in many NT passages as well. Perhaps it is, but it would have been helpful for Bates to relate such unambiguous examples.

2. *Lack of contextual control.* Bates recognizes the need for the meaning of πίστις to be contextually constrained, but the contextual constraint he gives is either lacking or inadequate. Only with respect to 3 Macc 3:2–4 does Bates establish the meaning “allegiance” through a careful analysis of the passage's context. With regard to the meaning of πίστις in Rom 3:21–26, the meaning of πίστις in Rom 3:3 is given the status of a contextual control, even though, as we will see, Bates acknowledges that πίστις has a different sense in Rom 4, a passage which has closer linguistic and thematic ties to 3:21–26.¹³

Bates does not base his conclusions on a study of the word's grammatical forms, or syntactical relationships, nor does he locate the word within a semantic domain discernible from the wider context. The potential, but limited, exception to this is Bates's second argument for why πίστις means allegiance.¹⁴ Noting that the Jesus towards which πίστις is directed is the Lord, or the Christ (which is an honorific designation), he argues that it is most natural to understand πίστις in these passages as allegiance or loyalty (p. 83). However, Bates's case hangs by the thinnest of threads, even though he says that he cannot overstate the importance of this point (p. 83).

First, only 3–4% of the NT's occurrences of πίστις and πιστεύω take either Χριστός or κύριος as a possible object, which is not even a significant proportion of the uses that relate to salvation.¹⁵

Second, a third of these (Acts 14:23, 20:21, 24:24, Gal 2:16, Phil 1:29, and Col 2:5) take the form πιστεύω/πίστις εἰς, without any apparent distinction in meaning between the verb and the noun form. But at no point does Bates offer any evidence that “to give allegiance to” is one of the verb's possible meanings. The same problem applies to Acts 9:42, 11:17, and 16:31, where the grammatical construction used is πιστεύω ἐπί, and to Acts 18:8, where it is the verb with a simple dative ob-

¹³ Linguistically, the connection is through 3:27–31, which functions as a bridging passage between 3:21–26 and 4:1–25. See, for example, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 373; and Simon J. Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:5,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 156–61. Thematically, the ties are clear: both passages concern justification by faith, the testifying function of the OT law, and the Christological foundation of justification. Romans 4 functions as a development and defense of Rom 3:21–31.

¹⁴ The second of his four arguments in favor of understanding πίστις as allegiance. See our discussion above of “Arguments for Pistis as Allegiance.”

¹⁵ Between 15 and 19 instances, depending on one's understanding of πίστις Χριστοῦ, and whether Gal 3:26 should be included: Acts 9:42; 11:17; 14:23; 16:31; 18:8; 20:21; 24:24; Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16 (x2); 3:22; 3:26 (?); Col 1:4; 2:5; Phil 1:29; 3:9; Eph 1:15; 2 Tim 3:15; James 2:1. Bates does not include Rom 3:22, Gal 2:16, and Phil 3:9 in this group, since he understands them as subjective genitives.

ject. In Gal 3:26, Eph 1:15, Col 1:4, and 2 Tim 3:15, it is πίστις ἐν. In the first of these, Gal 3:26, the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ probably modifies the verb.¹⁶ If not, it belongs with the other three examples in most likely denoting the sphere within which faith moves, rather than its object.¹⁷

None of Bates's test-case examples for *pistis* as allegiance (3 Macc 3:3; 5:31; Esth 13:3; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.47; 12.147; 12.396; *J.W.* 1.207; 2.341; pp. 78–80) use comparable Greek constructions. Only one of them has the verb πιστεύω, rather than the noun πίστις (*Ant.* 12.396). Bates cites this as an example of πίστις and πιστεύω being “used with reference to matters of sworn allegiance, loyal commitment, and treason in battle” (p. 80), omitting to note that the construction Josephus uses is πιστεύω αὐτόν, “to entrust oneself” (cf. John 2:24). The two texts which specify the object towards which loyalty or fidelity is expressed use πίστις πρὸς to convey this sense (*J.W.* 1.207; 2.341). Nowhere in *SA* does Bates adduce a single example of πιστεύω or πίστις, followed by εἰς or ἐπὶ or ἐν, with the meaning “to give allegiance to.” Bates needs to provide unambiguous examples of such if the reader is to avoid the conclusion that his proposal at this point is mere speculation, especially given that this is Bates's *key* argument for why πίστις means allegiance in salvation-oriented contexts.

Third, at the conceptual level Christ's exaltation as king to the Father's right hand entails his authority, his victory, and his supremacy. A person of exalted status or of unrivalled power and authority might well evoke trust in certain contexts.¹⁸ And so, even where Χριστός is the object, and even where Christ's sovereignty is implicit, it does not *thereby* entail that πίστις means allegiance. As we have already observed, Bates's argument involves an excluded middle—*trust* in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, even the meager contextual control afforded by Χριστός is lacking. For example, since in Rom 3:22 the enthroned Jesus Christ is, for Bates, the *subject*, not the *object*, of the verbal noun, in this instance Bates obviously cannot determine the meaning of πίστις from the idea of allegiance to Jesus implicit in the kingship of the Christ. Instead, he relies solely on the meaning of πίστις in Rom 3:3 to determine the meaning in 3:22. But since there is no rule of linguistics that says an author will intend the same meaning the next time he uses a particular word—which would imply every author was limited to a monosemous use of any given

¹⁶ As argued by Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to The Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 185–86; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to The Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 184; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 256.

¹⁷ See J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Revised Text with Introductions, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 1875), 199; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 80–81.

¹⁸ As implied by the way BDAG explain their second definitions of both πίστις and πιστεύω (“trust/entrust”). For πίστις: “In our lit. directed toward God and Christ, their revelations, teachings, promises, their power and readiness to aid.” For πιστεύω: “In our lit. God and Christ are objects of this type of faith that relies on their power and nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that their revelations or disclosures are true.”

word—we need to allow other contextual factors to bear upon our understanding of πίστις in 3:22.

First, there is the relationship to the noun phrase in 3:21, since διὰ πίστεως functions in relationship to χωρὶς νόμου, creating an implicit contrast between πίστις and νόμος.¹⁹ Second, there is the relationship between the implicit verbal action of πίστις and the qualifying genitive phrase Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which either functions as subject or object. Third, there is the fact that the first part of v. 22a is a verbless clause. Either we have an ellipsis, needing to “borrow” φανερώ from v. 21, with the phrase διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ giving the means by which the righteousness of God is being revealed,²⁰ or else—and more likely—the phrase gives, as Cranfield suggests, a “closer definition” of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, viz. “the righteousness of God (which is) διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.”²¹ Fourth, there is the relationship between the noun πίστις and the participle form of πιστεύω in the same verse. Fifth, there is the reoccurrence of the same noun phrase in verse 25—the two uses being apparently related—which is embedded in a clause, the syntax of which is notoriously tricky to decipher.

On the basis of the confluence of these various contextual factors, I think it is most likely that we, first, should read Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive, and, second, should understand πίστις as denoting “faith” or “trust,” giving the translation “faith in Jesus Christ.” Others will, no doubt, come to a different conclusion on the basis of the above factors, but the point to note is that the meaning is determined by *multiple* contextual factors (no doubt including several others), all of which have a bearing on our understanding of the word, and all of which are lacking in Bates’s argument.²² Some of these factors should be given greater weight than others, but Paul’s use of πίστις in Rom 3:3 is not one of them. Even if through the consideration of contextual factors we were to conclude that πίστις in Rom 3:22 referred to Christ’s faithfulness, this would, of course, by itself be insufficient grounds to conclude that *our* πίστις should be understood as allegiance.

3. *Neglect of πιστεύω.* Strangely, Bates almost entirely ignores the word πιστεύω in his discussion. When it appears in texts that he cites, he typically glosses

¹⁹ I suggest that this contrast is key to understanding the structure of Paul’s argument in 3:21–4:25. Note the subsequent expressions/reformulations of this contrast in 3:27–28 (πίστις vs. ἔργα νόμου), 4:1–5 (πίστις vs. ἔργα), and 4:13–16 (πίστις vs. νόμος). Chester speaks of the “interchangeable treatment of the law and its works by Paul in relation to justification” (Stephen J. Chester, *Reading Paul with the Reformers: Reconciling Old and New Perspectives* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017], 350).

²⁰ Assumed by Douglas A. Campbell, “The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Romans 3:22,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 67. Seemingly followed by Bates, p. 179 n. 24.

²¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1: *Romans 1–8* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 203. He correctly notes that it is the δέ which signals that Paul is providing a closer definition.

²² The apparent exception is that Bates notes that πίστις Χριστοῦ could be translated as “through allegiance to Jesus the Christ,” rather than “through the allegiance of Jesus the Christ,” showing recognition of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate (p. 81 n. 6). However, for Bates this grammatical question solely affects whose allegiance is in view, not the likelihood of πίστις meaning “allegiance,” which is determined by Rom 3:3.

it as “to give allegiance,” or as “to give *pistis* unto” (pp. 37, 41, 81, 82, 84, 97, 117, 126, 176, 179), importing the meaning which he finds in *πίστις* into the verb form. The only rationale given for this practice is that “in Greek the noun *pistis* has the same root as the verb *pisteuō*” (p. 37 n. 16). But this fails to account, among other things, for the fact that (1) the meaning of *πιστεύω* is not derived from *πίστις*; (2) although the semantic ranges of the two words overlap, they are not identical; (3) there are a number of instances where the meaning of the noun *πίστις* can be shown to be contextually constrained by the prior use of the verb *πιστεύω* in context.²³ Given this, it is incumbent on Bates to show that the semantic dependence works in the other direction for the examples that he cites.

4. *Confusion of word and concept.* Since the work of Barr, biblical scholars have been wary of the danger of confusing a particular *word* with a broadly associated *concept* or concepts.²⁴ Douglas Campbell has highlighted this danger in regard to “faith” language.²⁵ Unfortunately, this problem lies at the heart of *SAA*. It is evident in two different ways.

First, Bates allows the theological/conceptual content of an overarching gospel narrative, rather than specific grammatical objects, to function as the *de facto* object of *πίστις*. At the end of chapter 3 he asks, “If this eight-stage narrative about Jesus is the gospel, what does this suggest about the meaning of ‘faith’ with respect to Jesus and the gospel?” (p. 75). The answer is that it could suggest almost anything, but it actually implies very little, if by “the meaning of ‘faith’” Bates means the meaning of *πίστις* in the NT. In fact, only in Mark 1:15 is *εὐαγγέλιον* the grammatical object of either *πίστις* or *πιστεύω* (though cf. Acts 8:12; 1 Cor 15:2; Eph 1:13). As such, Bates’s lengthy discussion of the meaning of the NT gospel, valuable as it is in its own right, is a red herring as far as the meaning of *πίστις* is concerned.

Of course, at a more general *conceptual* level *πίστις* is related to the gospel, since *πίστις* and *πιστεύω* often appear in contexts of hearing or speech. But, as such, in Mark 1:15, the *sense* of *εὐαγγέλιον*, as the message proclaimed (*κηρύσσω*, v. 14) by Jesus, and not its *referent*—the dawning of the kingdom—fundamentally determines the meaning of *πιστεύω* here. And so, by spending so much time on stressing the link between *πίστις* and the gospel, Bates does little more than underline that a cognitive dimension forms an important part of the semantic domain within which *πίστις* operates.

²³ See, for example, Matt 9:28–29, where the *πίστις* of verse 29 derives its meaning from *πιστεύω* in verse 27. Similarly, Rom 4:5, where *πίστις* derives its meaning from *πιστεύω* used in opposition to *ἐργάζομαι*. In the latter example, the contrast is between the worker and the believer. See Gathercole, “Justified by Faith,” 157–59.

²⁴ Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). And for a summary see M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 17–32.

²⁵ In which respect he notes that a “theological *programme* can be unintentionally inserted into the presence of a single signifier in Paul because that word was later on used as the summary or slogan for that programme in the church tradition” (Douglas A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* [London: T&T Clark, 2005], 190).

Second, Bates limits the scope of his study to salvation-oriented passages in the NT (pp. 22, 67, 78, 82, 93, 101). He is arguing for a particular meaning of *pistis* within these contexts. If his interest is in lexical meaning, it is not clear why he restricts himself in the NT to these data. If his interest is in “what is required for salvation” (pp. 13, 93–95, 121, 128), or “what is demanded for salvation” (p. 122),²⁶ it is not clear why he limits his discussion of the human response to God’s salvation to a study to the word πίστις. Initially, Bates expresses an interest in *pistis qua πίστις*. He presents reasons for why *pistis* (i.e. πίστις) means “allegiance” in salvation-oriented passages. He then explains that this *pistis* is an “allegiance concept” with three dimensions—the three dimensions each being distinct meanings of πίστις—which he then reads back into various salvation-oriented texts which contain the word πίστις.

As the argument of *SAA* unfolds Bates’s real interest in *pistis qua* “what is required for salvation” becomes clear. In chapter 4, Bates’s argument for why *pistis* means allegiance centers on the meaning of πίστις in salvation-oriented passages. However, in chapter 5, where Bates defends this “allegiance alone” thesis, all the questions/objections which he raises for discussion are theological or conceptual in nature. Having started chapter 4 by constructing an argument for the meaning of the Greek lexeme πίστις, he spends chapter 5 defending a particular salvation theory.

5. *Misreading of “the obedience of faith.”* The phrase “the obedience of faith” in Rom 1:5 is a key part of Bates’s argument, since it is the first of two pieces of evidence in support of *pistis* meaning allegiance (pp. 85–86), and it is one of three texts cited in support of the critical third dimension of his definition of *pistis*, viz. “embodied fidelity” (pp. 98–99). When Bates first introduces discussion of the phrase ὑπακοή πίστεως he suggests that an interpretation that says obedience comes *after* faith is to read an *ordo salutis* into the context, an example of the use of “tidy contemporary systems ... [which] do not cohere sufficiently to the ancient thought structures on which such systems depend” (pp. 34–35).

A less pejorative suggestion and entirely plausible explanation, not offered by Bates, is that many interpreters read πίστεως as a genitive of source/production because they consider it the most likely, in context, of the various possibilities. When Bates returns to the phrase, he underlines his rejection of the genitive of source reading, with the suggestion that if such an understanding were Paul’s intent then “he was somewhat sloppy in safeguarding his ‘only trust’ aims” (p. 85). As a critique of *sola fide* readings of Paul, this reveals a serious misunderstanding, since historically only a tiny minority of interpreters have understood *sola fide* as ruling out obedience as the intended *goal* of salvation. Here, as elsewhere in *SAA*, Bates’s

²⁶ Bates is arguing for the meaning “allegiance” in “appropriate salvation-oriented contexts in the New Testament” (p. 22). Or, “Jesus’s reign as Lord of heaven and earth fundamentally determines the meaning of ‘faith’ (*pistis*) as ‘allegiance’ in relation to salvation” (p. 67). “When discussing salvation in generalized terms, *allegiance* is a better over-arching English language term for what Paul intends with his use of the *pistis* word group” (p. 78). He asks, “How likely is it that Paul had this allegiance dimension of *pistis* in mind in the salvation-oriented passages given above?” (p. 82).

bête noire—the teaching of the free-grace movement—is treated as representative of Reformed or evangelical thought.

Having cleared the ground of an “obedience *from* faith” interpretation, Bates presents his own reading. On the basis of understanding *pistis* as “predominantly allegiance,” he paraphrases ὑπακοή πίστεως as “obedient allegiance” (p. 86). But, the potential problem with this is that πίστις functions as the genitive modifier. If it is not a genitive of source, and functions qualitatively (as perhaps Bates’s own translation suggests), then the sense would be “believing obedience,” or (on Bates’s understanding of πίστις) “allegiant obedience,” the reverse of Bates’s own word order.

If the grammatical relationship is explicative/exegetical, the meaning would be “the obedience which is faith,” or “the obedience which is allegiance.” It is just possible that the latter is Bates’s understanding, with “obedient allegiance” functioning as a shorthand for it. But, if the genitive πίστεως is exegetical, then its meaning certainly cannot be inferred from the head noun, since the genitive modifier functions to clarify the meaning of the head noun, not vice versa. Nor can it be inferred from the reference in verse 4 to Christ as Lord: it is ὑπακοή which is conceptually linked to the lordship of Christ, and πίστις which, in some way, modifies the obedience. As such, the passage does not provide evidence for Bates’s understanding of πίστις—his understanding of πίστις is brought to the passage.

The irony here is that the very *opposite* of Bates’s point is a defensible line of interpretation. For example, Käsemann, who understands the phrase as exegetical, concludes that “the obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation.”²⁷

6. *Illegitimate totality transfer.* Bates claims (p. 93) that “in texts that refer to ultimate salvation, *pistis* can (but does not in every context or instantiation) include” each of the three dimensions of *pistis* as he has defined it, viz. “intellectual agreement,” “confession of loyalty,” and “embodied fidelity” (pp. 92–93). This is an example of illegitimate totality transfer.²⁸ The three “dimensions” of *pistis* as Bates defines it, are, in fact, Bates’s take on three distinct senses of πίστις.²⁹ The suggestion that *each* of these meanings is present in *any* of the NT’s 243 uses, let alone some of them, is fallacious. Bates does not refer the reader to a single example of such an occurrence.

7. *Semantic neutralization.* Bates acknowledges that in Romans 4—the passage in which Paul most fully describes the character of faith—πίστις “does mean something like ‘trust’” (p. 90). But he then proceeds with his proposed definition of *pistis* by subsuming the meaning of faith/trust under the “richer category” of allegiance (p. 90), as if it were encompassed by it. In what sense allegiance is a *richer* category than trust is not made clear. Bates often uses “allegiance” interchangeably with “faithfulness” (pp. 22, 42–44, 78), which is a meaning of πίστις *distinct* from

²⁷ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15.

²⁸ Barr, *Semantics*, 218; Silva, *Biblical Words*, 25–26.

²⁹ This is apparent upon a survey of the entries in the major Greek lexicons. See Gallarte, *Meaning of πίστις*, 180–83.

faith/trust, as Bates himself rightly assumes in his discussion of the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate (pp. 83–84). One can no more subsume “trust” under “allegiance” than one can subsume “faith” under “faithfulness.” “Trust” and “allegiance” are distinct meanings of πίστις.

8. *Treating the English words “faithfulness” and “allegiance” as synonyms.* At times Bates uses “allegiance,” “fidelity,” “loyalty,” and “faithfulness” interchangeably. This is especially apparent when he moves from the consensus understanding of πίστις in Rom 3:3 as “faithfulness,” to an argument concerning “allegiance.” But in English, the words are not always interchangeable. On the one hand, “allegiance” has connotations of loyalty to a superior that “faithfulness” does not. On the other hand, “faithfulness” has connotations of commitment over the long haul that “allegiance” does not. If, as Bates argues, the nuance of the meaning of πίστις present in Rom 3:3 is also present in 3:22, then Bates should translate the word as “faithfulness” in 3:22, since “faithfulness” and “allegiance” convey different nuances of meaning.

Of these several deficiencies, nos. 1–4 are arguably the most problematic. Any one of these four would pose serious questions about the viability of Bates’s proposal. When taken together, along with the other problems noted above, it becomes apparent that Bates’s *lexical* argument in *SAA* consists of little more than a pastiche of citation, inference, and assertion.

IV. GRACE, FAITH, AND WORKS

We turn now to consider how Bates conceptualizes grace, faith, and works, and their interrelationships.

1. *Bates’s problems with fiducia.* Bates’s threefold definition of *pistis* is offered as an alternative to the Reformation formulation of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia* (p. 92). He suggests that there are three problems with including *fiducia* (trust) within a definition of *pistis*. The first problem is that the content of what is to be believed (*notitia*) has been misidentified as forgiveness, rather than the kingship that leads to forgiveness. The second problem is that *fiducia* “imposes faulty dimensions of ‘interiority’ on *pistis*.” And the third problem is that *fiducia* “does not foreground the lived reality of *embodied fidelity* sufficiently” (p. 92).

It is not clear how the first problem is a problem in relation to *fiducia*, rather than the content of *notitia*. But perhaps Bates is suggesting that understanding *pistis* as trust presupposes a context where the content of what is to be believed is forgiveness, rather than the kingship of Jesus. But, as noted previously, this argument involves an excluded middle—*trust* in the *exalted* Christ. As for the misidentification of the content of what is to be believed, Bates does not identify the Reformers or post-Reformation theologians who are guilty of this error.

Bates’s second problem imposes a false dichotomy. Teresa Morgan, in contrast to Bates, concludes that a concept that is “dominantly relational” has “an interior aspect.”³⁰ This comes as no surprise, since “an exercise of trust” is, by nature,

³⁰ Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 471.

“relationship-forming.”³¹ Further, it is not clear why Bates considers that trust has dimensions of interiority that “mental affirmation”—which he includes in his definition of *pistis*—does not. Arguably, mental affirmation is more obviously interior than trust is.

In terms of Bates’s third problem with *fiducia*, his logic would dictate that the first two elements of his definition of *pistis*, viz. “mental affirmation” and “professed fealty,” share the same problem. Bates incorporates them into his definition of *pistis*, even though they also do not foreground embodied fidelity. Only the third part of Bates’s definition—“enacted loyalty”—does so. One wonders why *fiducia* should “foreground the lived reality of embodied fidelity.”

So, none of Bates’s objections to understanding *pistis* as *fiducia* is a *a priori* reason for not doing so. Nevertheless, Bates discards *fiducia* from his definition of *pistis* having just affirmed that Abraham’s faith—prototypical faith—is “something like ‘trust’” (pp. 89–93).

2. *Faith and works*. What becomes apparent later on in *SAA* is that the third component of Bates’s definition, “enacted loyalty” or “embodied fidelity,” is another way of speaking of works. Bates rejects the idea that faith and works are related as cause to effect, preferring to say that works are *part* of *pistis*, the two being “overlapping nested categories” (pp. 109–10): “works are part of *pistis* as embodied allegiance” (p. 109). But this is where a conceptual difficulty arises with Bates’s model. He insists that works are part of *pistis*, an essential part of the definition of *pistis*. But he also speaks of “the deeds that we perform in enacting *pistis*” (p. 112), with *pistis* still conceptualized—as in the model he rejects—as something existing independently of, and prior to, works.

For Bates, what *is* the *pistis* that is being embodied, if *pistis*, by *definition*, includes works? What does the body give expression to? By conceptualizing works as the *embodiment* of allegiance, Bates is conceptualizing *pistis*/allegiance with an implicit interiority. If *pistis* is *enacted* it exists as a prior, interior state or disposition, whatever you want to call it. The same issue applies to the second component of his definition. If the profession of fealty to Jesus alone as cosmic Lord is not spurious or deceptive in nature, then it is an expression of an allegiance that is not reducible to the verbal, public profession itself. That is, it is an *expression* of allegiance. In fact, it is not clear why “professed fealty” (dimension 2) is not itself an “enacted loyalty” (dimension 3), since it is both enacted and embodied.

So, on Bates’s definition of *pistis* we are left, on the one hand, with a mental affirmation of the truth of the gospel narrative, and, on the other hand, with two different conceptions of public, embodied allegiance. In other words, we are left with a cognitive, and behavioral definition of faith: certain things are believed, and a course of behavior is undertaken on the basis of those convictions. Even though Bates is seeking a relationally richer conception of faith, his definition ends up being rather thin relationally, since (1) the relationship is reduced to that of a king/Lord and his subjects; and (2) the relationship is shorn of the dimension of

³¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

trust, which, as Morgan notes, is what makes *pistis* relationship-forming. Bates speaks about allegiance bringing us into union with Christ (pp. 104, 121, 127), through which union we are enabled to produce the works needed for final salvation. But it is not clear, on his model, what it is about allegiance that effects such a powerful, relational union.

This highlights another problem with Bates's model of saving allegiance. He critiques the *ordo salutis* because it implies a "sequential progression" or "progressive order" in the outworking of salvation (pp. 172–75). But Bates's definition of *pistis* itself assumes a temporal progression. The three dimensions of his definition of *pistis* are distinguished, not only logically, but also temporally. Verbal confession (dimension two) comes after mental affirmation (dimension one), and bodily allegiance (dimension three) comes after both, since bodily allegiance comes about *after* union with Christ has been enacted *by* allegiance: "initial declared allegiance (*pistis*) to Jesus the king causes union with the king and his body, and the maintenance of this union is an embodied allegiance, a lived obedience" (p. 121).

So, for Bates, there is a pre-union (mental affirmation and confession of) allegiance and a post-union (embodied) allegiance. The third dimension of allegiance, unlike the first two, depends on union with Christ, and is subsequent to it. If so, it becomes even less likely that any particular occurrence of πίστις or πιστεύω includes *each* of Bates's three elements of *pistis* (p. 92). Not only does such a view involve illegitimate totality transfer, but it is not even supported by Bates's own temporally progressive view of *pistis*. There are 99 occurrences of πιστεύω in the aorist tense in the NT. Many of these are examples of an ingressive or punctiliar aorist,³² and, therefore, preclude Bates's third dimension of *pistis*. Rom 4:3 is certainly such an instance. A quick scan of these uses of πιστεύω reveals numerous other possible examples, e.g. John 2:11; 4:50; 8:30; Acts 4:4; 8:12; 11:17; 13:12; 16:31; 1 Cor 3:5; 15:2; Eph 1:13. All of these occurrences appear in contexts of salvation.

This creates a particular problem for Bates in relation to the Pauline antithesis between faith and the "works of the law." He understands this antithesis as a contrast not between two different principles of human action—believing *vs.* doing—but between a law-based system, on the one hand, and an allegiance based on grace, enacted through union with Christ, on the other (pp. 116–21). As we have just noted, on Bates's model such *pistis* involves a temporal progression between his three dimensions of *pistis*. But the type of faith that Paul is speaking about in his antithesis is a faith like Abraham's (Rom 3:27–4:5; Gal 3:5–14). In Rom 4:3, Paul quotes Gen 15:6: "Abraham *believed* (ἐπίστευσεν) God, and it was credited to him for righteousness." It is hard to see how Rom 4:3 allows for Bates's view of *pistis*, since ἐπίστευσεν is implicitly temporally bounded between God's word of promise (οὕτως ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου, Gen 15:5), and the reckoning of Abraham's faith as

³² Depending on whether πιστεύω is understood as stative or dynamic.

righteousness (ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην).³³ And so, whatever word you use to describe such faith, on Bates's model it is *initial pistis*, and, therefore, any subsequent works of embodied allegiance are not encompassed by it. Bates's understanding of the antithesis does not fit the evidence.

3. *Grace and faith.* Bates is emphatic that salvation is by grace: it is neither earned nor deserved (pp. 102, 104), and it is God who takes the initiative in salvation (p. 103). The relationship between God's grace and faith is a relationship between an anterior divine action, and a subsequent human one (p. 105): "most everyone would affirm that God requires us to perform at least one concrete action in response to God's grace, to respond 'in faith,' however we define it, to God's offer of salvation in Jesus" (p. 103). But, in speaking of faith in this way, Bates has already defined it, by making faith "a concrete action," "an enduringly experienced free choice," (p. 107), "the only contribution that *we make* to our salvation" (p. 122).³⁴

In defense of such soteriological synergism, Bates references Barclay's work on grace, and, in particular, his demonstration that ancient views of grace do not align with modern notions of the "pure gift" (p. 104). According to Barclay, grace is unconditioned, but not *unconditional*.³⁵ It is this latter emphasis in Barclay to which Bates is appealing. But the support Bates finds in Barclay is lacking, since in Barclay's reading of Paul πίστις aligns with the *unconditioned* nature of grace, not the unconditional: "to speak of πίστις or πιστεύω is to register a state of bankruptcy by every measure of symbolic capital."³⁶ For Barclay, πίστις is not the bodily obedience we render to God; obedience is.³⁷ Barclay's reading of Paul on grace and faith offers no support for Bates's soteriological synergism.

V. THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Bates recognizes that arguably the greatest *biblical* challenge posed to his thesis, in distinction from the lexical and theological problems already highlighted, is Paul's portrayal of Abraham's faith in Romans 4. This is Paul's "parade example," and "cannot be dismissed as merely marginal to the issue at hand" (p. 89). Bates deals with this potential problem in two ways. The first is by reconfiguring the character of Abraham's faith, and the second is by clarifying its object.

1. *The character of Abraham's faith.* With regards to the character of Abraham's faith, Bates says:

Paul's use of *pistis* here [Rom 4:19–21] shows that this word in and of itself does not map perfectly onto the English word allegiance; rather it can and does often refer to mental assent to a certain proposition and confidence in the reliability of

³³ This is particularly clear in Genesis 15, where verses 4–5 are themselves part of a temporal sequence of exchanges between God and Abraham.

³⁴ Emphasis original.

³⁵ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 562–63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 486. Cf. pp. 383–84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 494–508.

God's promise. Here for Paul *pistis* does mean something like "trust." But I submit that our English term allegiance is a larger category capable of subsuming the notion of mental assent to the reliability of God's testimony (belief) or of God's promises (trust), while also foregrounding the idea that genuine mental assent goes hand in hand with an allegiant or faithful (*pistis*-full) living out of that assent. In other words, yes, Paul and others do say that we must believe or trust, but these metaphors are best adjusted and subsumed within the richer category of allegiance. Consistent trust in situations of duress over a lengthy period of time is allegiance (p. 90).

This is special pleading. If we are going to allow Romans 4 to make its contribution to our understanding of πίστις in the NT, then the issue is how *Paul* presents Abraham's faith. And Paul construes Abraham's persistent faith/trust over a lengthy period of time not as *allegiance*, but as a hope against hope (v. 18), and as a full conviction (πληροφορέω) concerning God's ability to fulfil the promise (v. 21).

Three things are worth highlighting. The first is that both of these descriptions presuppose that Abraham's persistent faith remains oriented towards the promise of God. When Paul speaks of God being able (δυνατός, v. 21), he has in mind his unique capacity to give life to the dead and call into being non-existent things (v. 17). That is, he has in mind the powerful creator God. But this power is not portrayed as a rule or authority that demands Abraham's allegiance, but as an *ability* to accomplish what he has *promised* Abraham (v. 21). And, as such, knowledge of God's powerful rule gives to Abraham's faith the character of a full conviction (v. 21).

Second, both the phrase "hope against hope," and the depiction of Abraham's full conviction concerning God's ability, implicitly reference the *incapacity* and the *inability* of Abraham as one whose body is dead (vv. 18–19), and, therefore, as one who contributes the grand total of nothing to God's promised salvation.³⁸ As such, it is highly misleading to speak of *pistis* as a "concrete action" in response to grace (p. 103), or as a "contribution" to salvation (p. 122). The believing Abraham brings *nothing* to God; he receives everything. As we have seen, on Bates's model of *pistis*, long-term faith is embodied allegiance, his third dimension of *pistis*, viz. works. But this is the very thing that Abraham does *not* demonstrate over time in Romans 4. Arguably, Romans 4 is the one place in the NT where a description of the nature of faith is brought into direct alignment with the character of embodied existence. But Paul construes the relationship between πίστις and ὄμα in such a way as to make the very opposite point that Bates is making about embodied allegiance, viz. that, with respect to justification, faith excludes works.³⁹

This suggests that Paul's depiction of Abraham's faith in Romans 4 carries with it a polemical edge, being contrasted with the view that was common in Sec-

³⁸ See further Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the 'I' in Its Literary Context* (SNTSMS 170; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 182–85.

³⁹ The point Paul underlines in 4:4–5. Dunn correctly notes the link in Romans 4 between Abraham's bodily impotency and justification apart from "works of the law" (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* [WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988], 220).

ond Temple Judaism, which is that Abraham was exemplary for his faithfulness and obedience to God in the midst of trial.⁴⁰ In wanting to “adjust” and “subsume” Abraham’s persevering faith within “the richer category of allegiance,” Bates mutes what is most distinctive about Paul’s portrayal of Abraham’s faith within his first century context.

Third, in Rom 4:20, Paul provides an antonym of *πίστις*—*ἀπιστία*—correctly rendered in Bates’s translation as “unbelief” (p. 89). So, when Paul speaks of Abraham’s conviction in verse 21, he further elucidates the character of faith, already implicit in the use of *ἀπιστία* in opposition to *πίστις* in v. 20. Once again, we note that Paul himself is portraying the character of Abraham’s faith over time. As an exercise in determining the meaning of *pistis*, it is cavalier of Bates to override Paul’s depiction in favor of his own. In effect, he takes *πίστις* out of the semantic domain in which it operates in Rom 4, and places it into his own. This alters the meaning of *πίστις* in Romans 4.

2. *The object of Abraham’s faith.* In defense of his interpretive move with respect to Abraham’s faith, Bates underlines that Abraham’s *pistis* was not in the promises of God in general, but in a *specific* promise that found its fulfilment in Christ (pp. 90–92).

This, of course, is true, but it is hard to see its relevance to the point at hand. Abraham’s faith is defined in relation to the promise of God and the God of the promise. The fact that that promise finds its fulfilment in *Christ* brings Christian faith into close alignment with Abraham’s faith (vv. 22–25). It does not alter the character of Abraham’s faith. In fact, rather than suggesting that Abraham’s faith is like Bates’s allegiance version of Christian faith, it underlines that Christian faith is like Abraham’s faith, viz. it has the character of full conviction and of hope against hope. This indeed is the direction in which Paul’s argument then turns in Romans 5, where a depiction of justifying faith morphs into a celebration of the believer’s assured hope.

VI. CONCLUSION

In *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, Matthew Bates critiques an inadequate gospel that promises salvation without also, thereby, promoting transformation into the likeness of Christ. At various points in *SAA* one is left with the impression that this truncated gospel not only dominates the landscape of the contemporary church but is also the mainstream post-Reformation consensus. One does not have to be an expert in Reformed dogmatics to notice that there are frequent caricatures, as, for example, of *sola fide* (pp. 11–12, 85, 108–109, 122, 213), the *ordo salutis* (pp. 34–35, 175–76), and imputation (pp. 182–83). This is regrettable, given that *SAA* is aimed at unifying, rather than alienating, different groups within the church.

SAA is written in a breezy, accessible style, full of illustration, application, and anecdote, delivering on Bates’s promise of making *SAA* accessible to scholar and non-expert alike. It is a considerable achievement to cover so much ground in

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Sir 44:19–20, *Jub.* 19:8–9, 21:1–3, CD 3:2–4, 1 Macc 2:52.

such short compass, and to do so with rhetorical flair. But, unfortunately, as a work of biblical interpretation, *SAA* evidences major shortcomings. We have seen that it is neither lexically sound, nor theologically coherent, nor exegetically compelling. As such, Bates's *pistis*-as-allegiance thesis cannot, in its present form, be accepted, nor can it lead to the revitalization of the church.⁴¹

⁴¹ I am grateful to Lionel Windsor for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.