

“A death like his”: Saul’s Privation and Restoration of Sight as Prophetic
Formation in Acts 9.

At the start of Acts 9, Saul is a vigorous promoter of violence against followers of “the Way.” By the end of the chapter, he is powerful prophet proclaiming Jesus as Lord. This transformation is presented in part through a narrative centered on Saul’s temporarily disabled body: his embodied experience of the privation and subsequent restoration of his sight. This paper argues that Luke’s narrative begins by invoking a standard trope of divine protection through the temporary privation of a potential assailant’s sight. However, even as the narrator’s gaze seems to turn away from Saul, it surprisingly returns to him. Saul’s privation and subsequent restoration experience is presented as akin to Jesus’ death and resurrection, refiguring a culturally available association between sightlessness and deathliness. Saul’s resulting new life is the life of a prophet. Through an embodied imitation of Jesus’ death and resurrection, he has been made “like his teacher” (Luke 6:40), encountering what the historical Paul called a “death like his” (Rom 6:5).

Two methodological notes are in order. Firstly, the text of Acts 9 never actually labels Saul as “blind” (using a word such as τυφλος), but rather describes him as unable to see (v. 8) and “not seeing” (v. 9). Sightlessness is a neutral medical term, whereas blindness is a cultural term (see, eg., Lawrence, 2013, p. 31). Hence, this paper will attempt to stick to Luke’s way of presenting Saul’s state and not describe him as blind. When comparanda in Ancient Literature are consulted, it will be such functional descriptions of sightlessness that principally concern us. However, it is worth noting that in Acts 13:11, when Saul himself employs temporary defensive privation of sight to prevent Elymas from causing spiritual harm to Sergius Paulus, Luke has him describe the state Elymas enters into as “blind not seeing the sun for a while” (τυφλὸς μὴ βλέπων

τὸν ἥλιον ἄχρι καιροῦ). As Luke can describe a state much like Saul's as blindness, we may secondarily compare how an audience might be meant to see Saul during his privation experience with how other authors present characters they call blind.

On the subject of comparanda, my second methodological note is that while some comparanda that can reliably be identified as sources will be consulted (such as the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint), other texts are less likely to be known by Luke and a few are certainly not due to chronology (such as Genesis Rabbah). This paper certainly seeks to avoid any assumption that all "Ancient" or "Judeo-Christian" texts can be read as an ideological homogeneity. However, a diverse range of sources are consulted to investigate what resources may have been culturally available to Luke (including resources witnessed to by independent or later texts), and identify notions he may have suspected some of his audience held, that he may have wanted to destabilize.

Protective privation of sight

Daniel Marguerat identifies one of the two themes of Acts 9 as "the protection of the church, which goes from deadly threat to peaceful life, passing through misunderstanding" (2007, p. 319). While it is an exaggeration to say that the church, which by the end of Acts 9 includes Saul, subsequently knows anything that could be accurately termed a "peaceful life" in Luke's narrative, it is certainly true that through the intervention of the risen Christ, one particular deadly threat is neutralized. In this section, I will discuss the type of threat Saul poses, and argue that Luke's portrayal of Christ's intervention participates in a recognizable literary trope, of a deity or divine agent protecting a group of people by inhibiting the sight of a potential assailant. While I will subsequently show that certain ideological presuppositions of these

narratives are undermined and subverted by Luke, it will be important to first see how they are brought into play.

Saul as a potent violent man

The chapter starts by reintroducing the reader to Saul (vv. 1-2). In contrast to the lamb of the previous chapter, who was led to slaughter (8:32), Saul is seeking to lead others to slaughter. His letters are his weapons, a detail which, if Luke knows of Paul's epistolary corpus,¹ may be a touch of irony. Saul is "breathing threats and murder" (*ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου*; v. 1), which Barrett (2004, p. 445) warns may be best read not as hendiadys. While that reading is possible (that Saul is threatening people with death if they don't renounce Christ), the phrasing is open to the possibility that both threatening and actually murdering have become as central to Saul's life as his breath.

Prior to Christ's intervention, Saul is dangerous. Commentators often identify a character flaw such as "failure to check one's temper" here (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 240). Indeed the Lukan Paul will narrativize his own experience this way in subsequent dialogue when he describes his anger using madness language (*ἐμμαινόμεαι*, Acts 26:11). But, this should not mislead us into thinking that Luke's audience would have perceived the successful violent universally negatively. Saul's zeal is dangerously misdirected, but he could still be understood by many of Luke's early readers as an impressively powerful man. Many of Luke's audience would not have seen Saul's character as flawed before Christ's intervention, but, as will be explained below, after it.

"Breathing threats" may not be in and of itself a character flaw, when God is portrayed as "breathing anger" (*ἐμπνεύσεως πνεύματος ὀργῆς σου*) in LXX-Psa 17:16. Violence was a strength of some of Israel's prophets, including Elijah (1 Kings 18:4). Manly men exercised power and

“both Greek and Roman authors connected physical prowess and courage in battle with manliness” (Wilson, 2015, p. 63). Septuagintal literature made similar evaluations. In Wis 8:10-15, the author presents his hero Solomon boasting not just of his skill in public speaking, but also of his military prowess (a topic hardly grounded in the Hebrew Bible’s portrayal of him). When Maccabean literature is consulted in connection with Acts 9, it is normally to connect Saul with the villainous Apollonius of 4 Macc 4:1-14.² A parallel that may be being missed, though, is to Mattatheus, one of the heroes, who is so valorized as to be mourned by “all Israel” (1 Macc 2:70) and is led by zeal to many violent acts, including “hunting the arrogant” (1 Macc 2:47).

As we move to v. 3a, the tension in the narrative increases: this impressively and (to a Christian) terrifyingly dangerous violent man is coming close to Christ’s adherents in Damascus. It is at this point that Luke, the proficient dramatist, introduces the surprise celestial irruption. With a suddenness indicated by the temporal marker *ἐξαίφνης*, the narrative takes a sharp turn away from the audience’s frightening expectations. By verse 8, we learn that this irruption has resulted in the privation of Saul’s sight. This turn of events, divine intervention which neutralizes a violent threat by taking away a would-be assailant’s sight, is a trope that would be well known to Luke’s audience. It is to examples of this in the context literature to which I now turn.

Protective privation of sight in relevant context literature

This trope appears in the first book of the Torah, at least as it was interpreted by many influential Hellenistic Jewish interpreters. In Gen 19:1-13, Lot entertains two angels in his home. They attract a mob intent on committing sexual violence. The angelic visitors pull Lot to safety, behind the door, and prevent the visitors from opening the door by smiting them with סנורים (Gen. 19:11). This word is rare in Biblical Hebrew, appearing only here and in 2 Kings 6:18 (to be discussed below). The important Biblical Hebrew lexicon BDB (p. 705, s.v.) does not commit

itself to a root, but entertains the possibility that is derived from סַנַר “to cover with a skin.” The standard English translations and lexica render the word as “blindness,” but it is important to note that this is not the usual term for blindness used in the Hebrew Bible, which more usually employs some word derived from the root עוּר (see discussion in Just, 1997, pp. 30-35). Whether or not this translation is appropriate, the key element in the trope I am trying to establish is that the potential assailant’s capacity for sight is impeded, whether or not this leads to the person entering a socially constructed class of “the blind.”

Several things suggest that this is the case here. Firstly, the result (v. 19b) is that the men are unable to find the door. The angels have done nothing to the door except close it; yet somehow the men’s ability to find it has been eroded. If the angels are to be understood as having impeded the sight of the men of Sodom, this would make good narrative sense. Secondly, we may examine translations and retellings closer to Luke’s milieu. The Septuagint uses the Greek term ἀόρασία to specify the type of smiting that takes place. This is an *alpha*-privative denoting a lack of sight. Felix Just surveys a broad range of Greek literature to suggest that the word generally refers to a temporary inability to see (Just, 1997, pp. 50-52). This fits the context well, as Lot is worried about the men returning (v. 14), after what Rebecca Raphael terms the angels’ “temporary and tactical” (2008, p. 63) assault. This same Greek word is used in the Wisdom of Solomon when this story is recalled (19:17), where the men are also described as being “clothed in darkness” (περιβληθέντες σκότει). In Josephus’ *Antiquities* (1:202), God is the agent of the intervention, rather than the angels, and Josephus employs the verb ἀμαυρόω, a causative verb meaning to make dim or dark, with the men of Sodom as the object. The common Hellenistic Jewish understanding of this story seems to be that some divine agent impeded the vision of the would-be assailants, thus temporarily protecting Lot and his guests. There may not

be any sense of the instrumentality of a blinding light (as some translators, eg. NAB, understand the Hebrew), but the intervention does appear to be sudden.

The language of Gen 19 recurs in 2 Kings 6. In verse 18, Elisha prays that God would protect the Israelites by smiting some hostile Arameans with סנוריים. The deity dutifully complies. The consequence of this action is that in verse 19, Elisha can persuade them that they are going the wrong way and lead them to Samaria instead of to their intended destination. In verse 20, Elisha asks God to open their eyes. When God does this, the result is that they can now see where they are. Again, examining the narrative flow, the effect of being struck with סנוריים seems to be a privation of sight. The Septuagint again uses the *alpha*-privative term ἀόρασία to describe their state. Josephus, possibly understanding a connection between this story and the angelic intervention in Sodom, again uses the verb ἀμαυρόω, to describe God's action (*Ant.* 9.56). This time, he adds a mechanism by which God impedes the Arameans' sight: a mist (ἀχλύς). We will see below that Homer uses this same word for divine protective privations of sight. While we should again note the lack of sudden light, the pattern is the same as in Genesis 19: a divine figure protects by impeding the vision of a potential assailant.

The ongoing appeal of this trope is shown by its reoccurrence in 2 Macc. 10:30, where two angels use thunderbolts to protect Judas and help his army slaughter Greeks who were engaged in fierce battle with them. The result of this is once again ἀόρασία (privation of sight) for the Greek soldiers. In this story, we can't tell how temporary the effect would have been, as the soldiers are shortly thereafter "cut to pieces" (διεκόπτοντο). An additional parallel with the text of Acts is that thunderbolts (κεραυνούς) are understood as giving off bright light, as can be seen for instance in Aristophanes' *Clouds* where they are described as "burning like fire" (l. 395).

This trope was not only employed by Jewish authors. In Homer's *Iliad*, Poseidon casts a "mist" (ἀχλύς) over Achilles' eyes to protect Aeneas. Once Aeneas is out of harm's way, the mist is scattered (σκεδάννυμι; *Il.* 20.321-41). This language of scattering sustains the mist imagery, that Poseidon has physically blocked Achilles' sight over these twenty verses. Mist imagery is also used in *Il.* 5.127 and 15.653 as something which already adheres to human eyes, and must be divinely removed to allow adequate sight for battle. There is no explicit sightlessness or blindness terminology applied to Achilles, but the result of the scattering demonstrates what the effect of the mist had been: once the mist is scattered, the next verb the reader encounters is a verb of visual perception with Achilles as the subject (ἔξιδεν) and Achilles then comments in speech to himself about what he only now sees (ὀρῶμαι) – he sees his spear and is puzzled by the absence of the man at whom he threw it; he can't have seen Poseidon's rescue of Aeneas, despite not having turned away from his target (*Il.* 20:342-49).

Christ's intervention in Saul's plans fits the basic structure of this trope. Intent on violence, people are protected by a divine figure impeding Saul's sight. This privation is temporary. A diverse range of modes of privation are employed in this trope, and Luke's choice of a bright light fits into the range attested. If Luke understands סגוריים as meaning "covered with a skin," the epithelial debris³ (λεπίδες; 9:18) that falls from Saul's eyes when his sight is restored may also recall this image. Like the other frustrated assailants, Saul is not described as blind in the conventional sense, but the narrative makes clear his inability to see, both when the character first realizes it (v. 8) and when the privation is removed (v. 18).

Implicit ideological commitments of these narratives

There is likely no genetic literary relationship between the authors of Genesis 19 and the *Iliad*. The recurrence of this trope in such diverse literature is better explained by appeal to a

common logic. One claim that could serve to undergird the logic of these narratives is: sightless people are less likely to succeed in any aspirations to violence they may have. It should be noted that this claim is much more narrowly framed than a generic ‘the blind are weak / powerless.’ Kerry Wynn (2007) has recently critiqued scholarly over-readiness to “[interpret] blindness as a state of weakness and ignorance,” (p. 93) and has shown convincingly that this equation is contradicted by several Biblical texts, including Isaac’s blessing (Gen 27:1-45). Her work raises at least three cautions of which anyone working on blindness (or sightlessness more generally) in Ancient texts must be aware. The first, and most basic, is to recognize that it is not a bare ‘fact about the world’ that blind people are weak. That some people figure the blind as weak does not make it so. Secondly, as an extension of this, the readings she critiques assume too simple an analysis of weakness. ‘Power’ and ‘weakness’ *simpliciter* are not natural, univocal, uncontested categories which objectively describe the potency of agents; power is multi-dimensional reality, a lack of some particular power does not automatically imply a lack of some other. Which potencies an evaluator prioritizes and assumes to be correlated is highly variable – we cannot assume an author prioritizes and correlates as we do. Thirdly, as a consequence of this, we can’t assume that Luke ascribes any particular weakness to the sightless without arguing for it and, if we do succeed in arguing for it, we have discovered not a fact about the world but a facet of how this author perceives, organizes and figures his world.

To motivate this problematic, it should be noted that there were a variety of people in culturally contexts salient to Luke who were both sightless and exercised considerable power in some other respect. Isaac, for instance, is a valorized patriarch with poor vision, possibly throughout his life,⁴ as is Jacob, at least as he’s portrayed as an elderly man in Gen 48:10.

Another Hebrew Bible example of interest is Samson, who receives a detailed exposition in Hull

(2001, pp. 10-18). As Hull puts it, “The Philistines probably think that he is harmless now that he is blind... they exaggerate the impact of his blindness” (pp. 16-17). Here is an example of the Deuteronomistic Historian forging a character who assumes a generalized weakness in sightless Samson, and proving that character wrong. Blind people were often praised for their rhetorical or literary prowess. Just (1997) draws our attention to the widespread praise, including from Cicero, for Appius Claudius Caecus’ speech, delivered “long after he became totally blind, convincing the Romans not to conclude the proposed peace treaty with... Pyrrhus” (p. 130).⁵ A connection was also drawn between blindness and excellence in philosophy, as can be seen when Plutarch appears to feel the need to refute the commonly told story that Democritus had blinded himself (*Moral.*, 521d.). There is a Homeric hymn which mentions an excellent blind poet from Chios which was taken as a ‘pen’-sketch of the author (Graziosi, 2002, p. 126), along with the blind bard Demodocus from *Od.* 8. Of both Homer and Demodocus alike, a scholiast can say that the muses “deprived him of his eyes and granted him song instead” (Scholia E *ad Odysey* 8.63; cited in Graziosi, p. 139). In an ancient Near Eastern context, the association of blindness with song is also attested in the myth of Enki and Ninmah (see Walls, 2007, p. 17). To Teiresias, “the blind seer par excellence,” as Bernidaki-Aldous calls him (1990, p. 77), may be added other representatives of this tradition including Phineas, the blind seer who prophesies to the Argonauts, and Evenius, who was given the gift of prophecy by Zeus after having been unjustly blinded and further mistreated by his compatriots (Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.92-94).⁶ Closer to Luke’s own time, we might point to Lucius Valerius Catullus Messalinus, a Roman senator and powerful ally of Domitian, who was blind (see discussion in Jones, 1993, p. 57).

Given this multitude of examples of sightless men (the intersection with gender is notable here) exercising power and having high status, it may seem surprising that any ancient author

assumed that sightlessness correlated with any other weakness. But, examples of this assumption could be multiplied too. Sometimes, the weakness assumed is taken to be quite general, or at least sufficiently general as to include the power to do those things which really count as worthwhile actions for manly men (who generally comprise the class under consideration, whether this is acknowledged or not). The *Physiognomics* of Pseudo-Aristotle claimed that those with weak eyes suffered from “softness (τὸ μαλακὸν) and effeminacy (τὸ θῆλυ)” (*Physiogn.* III, 808a:10-11)⁷ and Plato claims that “the weak (including the blind) are more likely to *do less* and thus are less likely to do harm” (Bernidaki-Aldous, 1990, pp. 123-24; paraphrasing *Euthyd.* 281b-e). Summarizing studies on ancient theories of vision, Wilson describes the eye as “an active agent, rather than a passive recipient” (2014, p. 375), and this may motivate a tendency in some authors to take the potency of one’s vision as an index for one’s overall power. We may see such a tendency in the Latin linguist Varro, who asserts, “I see from sight, that is, from *vis*, ‘force,’ since it is the strongest of the five senses” (*De Lingua Lat.* 6.80; cited in Wilson, 2014, p. 375). A more specific dimension of power which is often assumed to correlate with sight is the power to travel unassisted. Once Tobit had been healed from his blindness, he walked into town with no-one “leading him by the hand,” and the Ninevites are amazed (Tob. 11:16);⁸ being ‘led by the hand’ is presented as necessary for the blind, who could not walk unaided. Josephus also assumes that the blind cannot make journeys when arguing against Apion who claimed that the exodus generation were blind (*Con. Ap.* 2.2.23). Similarly, rabbinic legislation would exempt the blind from pilgrimage obligation (*m. Hag.* 1.1).

Luke certainly did not know all of the examples adduced above (some of which even post-date him). But, taken together, they illustrate something of the context in which he was working. Various examples of powerful, high status sightless men were available to him, yet at

the same time, the assumption that sightlessness meant weakness more generally was also culturally available. In his gospel, he portrays the world as one in which sightlessness does render one more generally impotent. In Luke 6:39, the Lukan Jesus assumes that his audience believe blind people are incapable of guiding each other without falling into pits. Luke 14:12-15 illustrates a so-called 'benevolent paternalism' towards the blind. Jesus tells his hearers to invite the blind (among others) to their feasts precisely because the blind will be unable to repay them. John Hull comments that this passage provides "one of the few examples of inclusion rather than healing... in the Gospels," whilst also making it evident that "Jesus does not think that the poor and disabled have anything to contribute to the feast" (2001, p. 162). This thought was as false in the first Century as it is today; Lucius Valerius Catullus Messalinus would have been able to repay the most lavish feast both financially and in terms of increasing one's clout in the Emperor's court. This makes it all the more striking that Luke portrays that as being how the world works: that the blind are utterly lacking in the kind of social capital traded in these dinner invitations, and which can serve as a socially-sensitive index of power, ie. an index that tracks the kind of power that is taken to matter by the culture in which the invites are occurring.

If the story were to end here, at verse 8, or verse 9, where to Saul's privation of sight and autonomy (he is led by his companions) is joined privation of food and drink, we would simply have a set piece here, a temporary privation of the sight of would-be assailant by a divine figure, undergirded by an apparent belief in the general powerlessness of the sightless, that affirms God's protection of the church. Barrett's language would prove helpful to encapsulate the literary function of the privation of sight: "the blindness is not a punishment but a mark of the powerlessness of the hitherto powerful persecutor" (2004, p. 452). Saul at this point lacks vision,

autonomy, knowledge of his future (the heavenly voice has told him to go to the city to await further instructions; v. 6), food and drink. He is characterized by inaction.

But, this is not where the story ends. Luke has introduced this trope in order to subvert it. In his gospel, he painted a picture of the world as one in which the sightless are rendered impotent. But, this was the world in which Satan held authority over all the kingdoms of the world (cf. Luke 4:6). Now, the world is being turned upside down (cf. Acts 17:6), and the values of the old world can no longer claim hegemony. As the narrative appears to move away from Saul, it will actually return to him via a vision, and we will see that his experience of privation of sight has a fundamentally new valence.

Participation in Death and Resurrection

The central claim of this section is that Saul's experience of privation and subsequent restoration of his sight constitutes a real (that is, embodied and en-socialized) participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. First, we will survey a broad array of literary parallels Luke has forged between his Passion narrative and Acts 9, in the order in which the third evangelist introduces them. Then, we will look at cultural resources Luke had at his disposal for drawing connections between sightlessness and death. Many of these parallels would be unimpressive in isolation; the argument is cumulative. The claim also functions as a bridge that seeks to account for how a preventative privation of sight story ends up turning into a prophetic formation story. How, when Luke has established in his gospel that he views the world under Satan as one in which the sightless are impotent, can privation of sight now empower for powerful speech? One way of explaining this sea change is that Saul's experience constitutes participation in Christ's

death, which has succeeded in refiguring deathliness, and all that is linked to it, as something life-giving.

Parallels to Luke's Passion and Resurrection narrative

The first parallel is Paul falling (πεσῶν; Acts 9:4). This is often explained as reverence (Pervo 2008, p. 241; Barrett 2004, p. 450) or shock (Eckey 2000, p. 214). While shock would make good narrative sense, reverence is difficult. As Pervo himself points out the usual response to a theophany is “Here I am” (2008, p. 241; Ananias demonstrates this later in the same chapter in verse 10), but Saul responds to the voice by asking who is speaking; he doesn't understand what's going on. While Luke presumably has in mind an explanation within the story-world for Saul's falling, it's certainly not a necessary detail to make the story work. That may encourage us to search for an allusion motivating the insertion of this detail. While the word πίπτω in Luke-Acts is sometimes associated with reverence (Luke 8:41, 17:16; Acts 10:25), it is also often associated with death, as in “they will fall (πεσοῦνται) by the edge of the sword,” meaning die (Luke 21:24; see also Luke 20:18; Acts 5:5,10, 20:9). In Revelation 1:17, John the seer describes his (reverential) falling as “like the dead;” to fall is death-like.

As well as the falling, the rising must be attended to (as Simeon reminded us in Luke 2:34). Saul rises twice: in verse 8, immediately after the heavenly voice finishes speaking, he is raised (ἠγέρθη); in verse 18, after his sight is restored, he gets up (ἀναστὰς). Both of these words are used in Luke and Acts for the resurrection of Jesus, for characters who are the recipients of resuscitations, and for general or universal resurrection.⁹ If these are to be resurrection allusions, it is notable that the first appears before the restoration of sight. This troubles an easy equation of sightlessness and death, and suggests that the work of resurrection does not wait for Ananias's work of curing. While the sightlessness is not eliminable from the narrative (and will be explored

more fully below), what resurrection means in Saul's life is not easily identifiable with physical power, including the power to see. Before Ananias' visit, Saul embraces obedience to Jesus' word, fasts, prays and receives a vision from God that gives him extraordinary knowledge of the future.

While other literature linking sightlessness and death will be discussed below, Saul's sightlessness does connect directly to two details from Luke's Passion narrative. While it is a much shorter experience of sightlessness, Jesus is blind-folded during his Passion (Luke 22:63-65). Lawrence, while noting that this is "not the same as blindness," notes that it is "nevertheless an experience that renders him temporarily sightless and brings some solidarity with this state" (Lawrence, 2013, p. 44). Saul's sightlessness lasts for three days. In view of the frequent notices in Luke-Acts that Jesus must be raised "on the third day" (Luke 9:22; 13:32?; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40), this too may be taken as a parallel. Right before his death, Jesus becomes (at least partially) sightless for a completely different reason: the sun's light fails and the whole land is covered in darkness (Luke 23:44-45).

Saul's abstention from food and drink could also be seen as a parallel. This has variously been seen as penance, preparation for further revelation (Johnson, 1992, p. 164), preparation for baptism (Conzelmann, 1987, p. 72), "an ordinary Jewish [act] of piety" (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 428), or even "the result of shock" (Bruce, 1988, p. 185). It could also be seen as complying with much ancient medical advice for preparing for healing (Nutton, 2004, p. 96). However, in Luke 22:15-18, in a passage without direct parallel in the other Last Supper accounts, Jesus forswears eating and drinking until "the Kingdom of God comes." Whatever this means, it does not preclude him eating with the disciples post-Resurrection. The formula concerning the bread may just concern eating a Passover meal, but the formula concerning the wine seems quite general,

and we may be meant to understand this generality as applying to the bread as well. Whatever Jesus forswears, it seems unlikely Luke envisages Jesus as being given food or drink during his arrest, trial or execution. Luke has deleted even the offer of wine in Mark 15:23, and has not included Matthew's comment in Matt 27:34 that he tasted it (while Luke may or may not have known this tradition, it was at least an option in early Christian Passion narratives that Luke could have taken, but did not). Saul's three-day fast then, can be seen as conformity with Christ's Passion and death.

Also, Saul prays while sightless (Acts 9:11). Holladay assumes Saul is praying for a cure (2016, p. 197), but there is no direct evidence for this in the text. We simply don't know the content of Saul's prayer and assuming he is praying for a return of his physical sight is an unwarranted piece of 'normate hermeneutics.' While Jesus prays frequently in the third gospel, there is a concentration of prayer in Passion narrative as a whole, and during the crucifixion in particular (eg. Luke 22:41; 23:34, 46).

After Saul's sight is restored, he is baptized. The historical Paul understood baptism as participation in Christ's death and resurrection (eg. Rom 6:4). While Luke does not develop this idea elsewhere, if he does know the epistolary corpus or knows this understanding of baptism from some other source, this may also reinforce the parallel.

Finally, after the restoration of his sight, Saul eats, just as the resurrected Christ does in Luke 24:42-43. This series of internal parallels show that simply looking within Luke-Acts, Saul's experience of privation and restoration is presented as in many ways like Jesus' death and resurrection, though resurrection may be a gradual thing for Saul, and cannot easily be identified with the sudden restoration (εὐθέρως; 9:18) of his physical sight.

A closer examination of sightlessness as death-like

In this section, I argue that Luke takes advantage of a culturally available association between sightlessness and death in presenting Saul's participation in Christ's death and resurrection via a narrative concerning the privation and restoration of his sight. In claiming such an association, there are many scholars of the Hebrew Bible whose work I can draw upon. For instance, Susan Niditch posits a parallelism between Isaac's blindness, old age and death in Gen 27:1-2 (1987, p. 83) and Yael Avrahami describes the presentation of the sensory disabled in general as "betwixt and between, part person, part non-person, between life and death, between society and the outside" (2012, p. 221).

However, both of these books have received recent serious critiques, which problematize any attempt to facilely claim that a text which draws on the Hebrew Bible operates with sightlessness or death as simple ciphers for one another. Wynn's (2007) treatment of Isaac's blessing, and her persuasive argument that Isaac is portrayed as powerful, not weak, there, includes a critique of Niditch's book. She reminds us that "blindness and death are separate issues in these verses" (p. 94). Old age stands as a common cause to both. Louise Lawrence (2013), while finding much helpful in Avrahami's work, critiques her study's tendency

to stigmatize and alienate such individuals, attributing them with little or no agency and not attempting to flesh out their alternative sensory models and 'ways of making sense'. Thus, the subversive social powers that these other sensory experiences may provide are also bypassed. (p. 16)

My project seeks to take such critiques seriously. Hence, this section will first survey some relevant texts that do draw parallels between sightlessness and death, without claiming that all texts do. But, for Luke, death has taken on a new meaning in the wake of the death and resurrection of Christ. I argue that Luke promotes and perpetuates a sightlessness / death association, but refigures death. For Saul to participate in deathliness is precisely not to be figured as a non-person, but as a person to be resurrected, a person being transformed. This

affords sightlessness the ‘subversive social power’ that Lawrence reminds us to be open to, the power to form a prophet.

To now turn to the data which illustrate the availability of this association to Luke, one of the clearest pieces of evidence comes from the rabbinic midrash *Genesis Rabbah*: “R. Samuel said: Four are regarded as dead (כמתים): the leper, the blind (אסוח),¹⁰ he who is childless, and he who has become impoverished” (71.6). Now, while the traditions in *Genesis Rabbah* are hard to date, it is likely that this list of parallels post-dates Luke by a matter of centuries. However, our rabbinic author gives a scriptural warrant for each of the identifications. In the case of the “blind,” the reference is to Lam 3:6, “he has sat me in the dark places (במחשכים; ἐν σκοτεινοῖς)¹¹ like the dead (כמתים; ὡς νεκροῦς) of long ago.” Independently of the rabbinic use of this verse, Louise Lawrence (2013) gives this verse as an example of a “Jewish tradition... [in which] the blind also came to be ideologically associated with the dead” (p. 33). That the authors of *Genesis Rabbah* and Louise Lawrence, a scholar who has set out to avoid facile identifications of sightlessness and non-personhood or death, read this the same way, can give us some reason to suspect that Luke may have made the same interpretative mood (or at least relied on some his audience to have done so).

Lam 3:6 (=Psa 143:3b), was not the only text making this association. Commenting on the bronze serpent narrative (Num 21:8-9), John Hull (2001) asks: “Everyone who looks upon the bronze snake lives. But what do the blind people do?” (p.80). This is a mirror image of a sightlessness / death association: in this Biblical text, sight is an means of returning the sick to life; the sightless, presumably, receive no such saving help. In Isa 59:9-10, the “confessing community”¹² are in parallel said to be “in darkness” (חשך; the root of מחשכים above), “like the blind” (כעורים) and “like the dead” (כמתים).

Some Hellenistic Jewish texts perpetuate this association. The book of Tobit makes a similar identification, having its titular character while blinded complain of his inability to “see the light of heaven, but lie in darkness (σκότει) like the dead (νεκροί)” (Tob. 5:10).¹³ For Philo, eyes which do not see are themselves dead (*Spec. Leg.* 4.202), and death is a “lighter ill than having maimed eyes” (*Sobr.* 4). Early rabbinic law would prohibit closing the eyes of the dying (making a non-blind person sightless), comparing this to murder (*m.Shabb.* 23.4-5).

A similar association was sometimes drawn by Greek and Roman tragedians. Seneca has Oedipus refer to blindness as a “lasting death” (*Oed. Rex*, 949). In her study, Bernidaki-Aldous (1990), a scholar who is herself blind, summarizes the classical Greek attitude as being that “‘to live’ is synonymous with ‘to see the light’ and ‘to die’ equals ‘to go to Hades, i.e., Darkness’” (p. 3), documenting the almost ubiquitous farewell to light which is part of characters’ death speeches in Greek tragedies.

We must certainly be careful not to import an association of deathliness to every Judeo-Christian text about sightlessness, as such an association may be quite foreign to it. However, sightlessness was quite often analogized to death, and vice versa. In concert with a constellation of other connections (such as we have in Acts 9), sightlessness can be joined to them as yet another way in which an author evokes death.

The Passion of Saul

At least one commentator has previously remarked on Saul’s proximity to death in Acts 9. Mikael Parsons (2008) claims that, “at least at some level, Luke’s audience will understand that Saul’s passivity, fasting, and blindness represent Saul’s... symbolic death” (p. 128). The various parallels between Acts 9 and Jesus’ death and resurrection may be somewhat intermingled, but Parsons’ attention to passivity, the negation of agency, may provide a helpful

structure. The narrative flow of Saul's post-audition action and inaction can be plotted out as follows: verse 8, not seeing, being led (v. 8); verse 9, not seeing, not eating, not drinking; verse 11, praying; verse 12, seeing (in a vision).¹⁴ This is followed in vv. 18-19 with his reception of hand-laying, regaining his (physical) sight, being baptized, taking food, and becoming strong. Looked at this way, while this distinction should not be pressed, the physical lags behind the spiritual. The privation of Saul's physical sight, and attendant passivity and fast begins a participation in Jesus' death. His obedience, prayer and reception of a supernatural vision is a real participation in resurrection, the end of this death-like passivity, although his body is still weak in food and in sight. Ananias must come and provide these things, with the baptism that recapitulates up the whole process.

A prophet like Jesus

In the previous section, it was argued that Saul's privation and restoration experience could be regarded as participation in Jesus' death and resurrection. This provides a way of explaining how an experience of sightlessness (which could be connected with deathliness) is formative for prophetic ministry; Jesus' bringing of life out of death creates new possibilities to bring newness out of bodily states that might be figured as deathly. In this section, we will examine the character of the post-restoration Saul and then provide further thoughts on why this experience could prove formative.

Who is the healed Saul?

The first aspect of Saul's character we notice, immediately after the audition is ended, is his ready obedience. The heavenly voice has told him to get up and go to the city (v. 6), and he does (v. 8). Acts 16:6-7 shows how Saul's movements continue to evidence complete obedience

to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Here, Saul is showing himself to be well formed in a virtue the Lukan Jesus praises, for instance in Luke 11:28. In recent work, Holly Beers (2015) has argued for ‘Servant’ as a key image for Jesus and his disciples in Luke-Acts, and obedience is an important quality for such a servant to demonstrate. The high quality of his obedience is made more readily apparent in contrast to Ananias, who Luke will still call a “disciple” (Acts 9:10) and Saul will later call a “man devout according to the law” (22:12). Although Ananias does eventually obey, (not untypically for a divine commission) he first raises an objection to his commission (9:13).

Saul has special, divinely given knowledge of the future, both of knowledge of what others will do and of what he should. The vision referred to in Acts 9:12 is the first instance of this, but continues throughout the rest of Luke’s narrative, for instance in Acts 23:11. He is not the only person in Acts with extraordinary knowledge of the future; Agabus is another (who foretells a coming famine in 11:27-30), and he is referred to as a prophet. As a prophet, Saul is powerful in speech.¹⁵ In 9:20, Saul starts preaching. Throughout his career, he demonstrates great rhetorical power, attracting many to ‘the Way,’ including elites such as Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:12). In 9:19, we read that Saul “strengthened.” Barrett (2004, p. 458) points out that this translational word choice is odd, but not wrong, in English, and has the advantage of making clear that the Greek ἐνίσκουσεν does not mean “recovered his strength” (NAB) or “regained his strength” (NRSV). He could be becoming strong in a way which is not a recovery of something he had before. Eckey (2000, p. 219) has a suggestion for what this dimension of strength might be: rhetorical prowess. As well as persuading people, Paul’s word is also miraculously effect. He can heal people (eg. Acts 14:10), even from death (20:9-10), and has power over other people’s

vision (13:10). Saul's prophetic strength is something new which has come to birth through his privation experience.

If he has developed one new form of strength, he also has a new form a weakness: his life is to be characterized by suffering (9:16). Marguerat (2017, p. 335) has commented on how this announcement by the risen Christ is patterned by the earthly Jesus' predictions of his own suffering. This life of suffering is part of how he is conformed to Christ. God will show him this suffering, that is, cause him to see it. While Saul's vision will be (at least partially, see below) restored, it is restored with God taking charge over what Saul sees. As soon as verse 33, Saul's preaching is to result in a plot against his life. Throughout the rest of the book, he will be imprisoned, beaten (eg. Acts 16:16-40), left for dead (Acts 14:19), and shipwrecked (Acts 27:41). Proximity to death will remain part of Saul's life. Richard Pervo (2008), commenting on 9:15, puts it provocatively: "The missionary is a casket for the presentation of the name of Christ" (p. 243).

Saul is also now integrated into the Christian community. While commentators are divided on whether Ananias' use of the term "brother" in verse 17 represents Christian fraternity (eg. Barrett, 2004, p. PP) or their shared Jewishness (eg. Holladay, 2016, p. 198), it is certainly an expression of (fictive) kinship. His welcome into the community is expressed through touch, the use of the title 'brother' and ultimately baptism.

Finally, it may well be that Saul's sight is never fully restored. The claim that Saul was partially-sighted has been argued by John Hull (2001, p. 84-91). Two pieces of evidence he gives from Acts may at least suggest that this may have been Luke's view. One is the viper that Saul picks up by accident when gathering firewood (Acts 28:3), but this could also be explained as a well-camouflaged snake. The better piece of evidence in Saul's failure to recognize the high

priest in Acts 23:4-5. Despite “looking intently” (ἀτενίσας), Saul does not recognize the High Priest, despite his distinctive regalia. Pervo (2008, p. 573) concurs on the regalia, and claims that Saul’s statement is inconsistent with the narrative. However, the statement is only inconsistent if Saul is assumed to have unimpaired sight.

To sum up, it is hard to describe the results of Saul’s experience of privation as either empowerment or weakening *simpliciter*. Rather, the shape of Saul’s power has been altered. Some dimensions (eg. rhetorical, prophetic) have increased, while others (physical force, integrity and possibly vision) have been diminished. Understanding power as a multi-faceted reality, Saul’s has been reformed, conformed to Christ the prophet.

Why does this process produce a prophet?

All of this leaves the question, why would Luke choose a narrative centered around the privation and restoration of sight to present the formation of a prophet? One possibility may be a riff on a recurring Greco-Roman poetic motif of a god giving prophetic power as a compensation for sight lost. Teiresias provides one example of this. There existed various explanations for how he lost his sight, but they agree that it was a divine punishment.¹⁶ In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Zeus cannot undo the blinding Hera has inflicted, so “gave him to know the future in place of snatched-away light” (*Metam.* 3.335-36). Herodotus also mentions Evenius, who was given the gift of prophecy by Zeus after having been unjustly blinded and further mistreated by his compatriots (*Hist.* 9.92-94).¹⁷ One aspect of the Acts narrative might be to portray the God of Israel as more gracious or more powerful than pagan deities.

But, we might also see this narrative as an instance of a more general Lukan belief in the formative, even curative, power of privation. This seems to be Hull’s understanding when he remarks that “it is often sighted people who are needy and many of them could do with a *good*

dose of blindness, like Tobit or St Paul in the Bible” (p. 48, my emphasis). In the first chapter of the gospel, Zechariah is formed for obedience, and powerful speech (in fact, song), by privation of his capacity for speech.¹⁸ In the second chapter, Anna is prepared by fasting to talk about Jesus; privation of food forms her for prophetic speech. Even though he does not appear to be deliberately fasting, Peter is hungry when he receives his important vision in Acts 10:10. In Luke 9 and 10, Jesus requires those he sends out on mission to go out with a privation of material support. When they return, they report a new found power in their words (Luke 10:17). In Luke 22:36, Jesus tells the apostles that their experience of privation of material support was temporary; it has played its role.

There is precedent in the Hebrew Bible for seeing formative potential in the privation of sight, especially in the Deuteronomic literature. Summarizing Weitzman’s work (2005), Lawrence (2013) draws our attention to the way in which in the training of the senses in Deuteronomy, “sight is particularly policed in order that the memory of God’s work may be cultivated and visible idols may be rejected” (p. 13). George Savran (2009) has given Deuteronomy a similar reading, claiming that,

hearing is to be the primary mode of perceiving the divine, as reflected most clearly in the Deuteronomic retelling of the Sinai theophany, and especially in Deut. 4. In this text, which represents a later stage in the give and take between the audial and the visual, seeing is actually negated in favor of hearing in order to combat the very possibility of idolatry. (pp. 327-28)

The ‘give and take’ Savran refers to is analyzed in more detail by Rebecca Raphael (2008), who points out that while there are texts that prioritize vision over hearing in the Pentateuch, such as “the Priestly literature [which] emphasizes the visual-spatial sensorium... Leviticus, for instance, lacks Deuteronomy’s tendency to engage in polemics against the less-valued sense” (pp. 30-31). Hector Avalos (2007) has extended these results from Deuteronomy to the Deuteronomistic

History more broadly, giving examples of how “DtrH... shows repeatedly how wrong conclusions based on mere use of sight can be” (p. 51), such as Eli’s wrong conclusions about Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and about his sons in the next chapter, and Samuel’s error in choosing someone to anoint based on visual appearances in 1 Sam 16:7. A mirror image is present in the character of Abijah (1 Kings 14:2-6), a sightless prophet who is not misled by visual disguise, but recognizes the queen’s wife by her footsteps.

This audio-centricity, and still less the polemic against sight Raphael comments on, does not hold true for the whole Hebrew Bible. Avalos’s chapter is helpful in contrasting DtrH with the visiocentricity of Job, which is encapsulated by Job’s closing statement: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen you” (Job 42:5). As Avalos puts it: “Job regards this as an advance over what he had experienced before” (p. 55). Job eagerly desires vision of God, and this vision proves powerful. It is possible to attempt a canonical reading of these two sets of texts together. DtrH tells of the danger of vision, and carefully polices its use amongst typical members of the community. Job tells of the power of vision, one person’s desire for it and God’s indulgence of that desire. There is an internal consistency here; more powerful things are often more tightly policed.

Does Luke show evidence elsewhere in his work of having understood texts this way? Often, seeing and hearing are paired in Luke-Acts without any sense of a hierarchy. In Acts 4:19-20, Peter and John refuse to stop speaking about what they have “seen and heard.” However, Luke does return to the theme of the potential of sight to mislead. Parsons’ (2011) work on Lukan critique of physiognomy is an extended study of this. One might note, for instance, his treatment of the woman who is physically “crooked” but valorized as a disciple by Jesus in Luke 10:13-17 (pp. 83-96). In a section that commentators have titled “the need for authentic hearing”

(Green, 1997, pp. 321-29), the Lukan Jesus identifies his kin as those who “hear (*ἀκούω*) the word of God and do it,” in contrast to his biological kin who “desired to see (*ὄρᾶω*) [him]” (Luke 8:20-21). Even if François Bovon’s exegesis (2002) may seem a step too far, he is certainly moving in the right direction when he comments:

The first [attitude] contents itself with the visible figure of the man Jesus on the level of human kinship, and the second recognizes, in the figure of Jesus, a God (or the Word of God) who has graciously approached humankind. (p. 316).

Just like speech, possessions and food, sight is a form of power, a form that can be improperly used and can be dangerous. Looked at in this way, Saul’s experience of the privation and restoration of his sight can function as a form of prophetic(-apostolic) formation which is continuous to that which Jesus offered the Twelve and the Seventy(-two).

Conclusion and Pastoral Postlude

To conclude, the narrative of Acts 9 takes the reader on a journey. Firstly, it affirms that Jesus protects his church. As in the parable of the house built on rock (Luke 6:48), the church certainly knows storms, but Jesus does intervene to prevent total destruction. He does this in a way which is in continuity with a way divine agents have protected Israel in Jewish scriptural memory. But, as the narrative appears to be moving away from Saul, it returns to him via a vision. Saul’s experience is compared not just to death in general, but specifically to Jesus’ Passion. This event, which turned the world upside down, has totally refigured what it means to call an embodied state death-like. The event now points to a form of resurrection. The (partial) restoration of Saul’s sight is an ineliminable part of that, but new life is not easily identified with physical sight, as the (partial) cure is but one moment (neither the beginning nor the end) of his healing and renewal. Saul’s resurrected life forms him for prophetic ministry, which he carries

out despite not being as violently potent, autonomous or (possibly) strong in sight as he was before, frequently becoming the object of violence. His powerful speech and access to divine will stand in stark contrast to his ongoing physical weakness. He lives his life in a way which continues to be proximate to death, and hence, in Christ, to resurrection.

This reading of this narrative has pastoral ramifications. John Hull (2001, pp. 51-52), a scholar who is blind, tells a story of a taxi driver who once asked him “What did you do that God made you blind?” When Hull told him, “Well, nothing more than what most people do, who don’t become blind,” the taxi driver responded, “Well, maybe you were going to do something bad.” Hull comments, “I don’t particularly remember planning a bank robbery or anything like that.” This taxi driver had a conception of preventative blinding as a live possibility for God’s action in the world today. He appears to have missed that this is temporary in every account surveyed in this paper. A danger of Acts 9 is that it can reinscribe the taxi driver’s view that blindness, if it is not a punishment for completed act, is a preventative measure for some sinful intention. The narrative should, however, challenge anyone who holds this view to contemplate the possibility that prophetic-apostolic formation has been effected by this mode of prevention. Luke doesn’t seek to deny that privation of sight can occur to prevent sin (but neither does he claim this as a universal, or even common, explanation), and we may need other resources to do that, but he does offer the lesson that this is not the end of the story.

This reading of Acts 9 also has the power to challenge another presupposition that may be more widely held: that blind people shouldn’t serve in positions of Christian leadership. John Hull (2001) summarizes survey data of people who sought ordination in the Church of England. All reported hearing some variant of the same objection: “A priest or minister is meant to care for others, but a blind person needs caring for. How can you care for others when you yourself

need care?” (p. 72). In the Roman Catholic Church, while dispensations were often granted,¹⁹ the prohibition on ordination of the blind was not removed from the Code of Canon Law until 1983.²⁰ Saul is not blind throughout his missionary career, and Acts 9 never explicitly describes him as blind (as opposed to sightless) at any point in the narrative. However, I propose that my reading of Acts 9 can still trouble the idea that the power to be self-sufficient is necessary, or even important, for Christian ministry.

Saul is formed for his ministry by an experience of privation. That experience can be understood as continuous with the formative experiences of many other characters in Luke-Acts, including the Twelve. Saul’s experience does involve a measure of cure, although that may well not be total. But, along with the (possibly partial) restoration of his sight, Saul’s experience of healing also involves integration into community, being welcomed through touch and the title “brother.” He never regains his valorized potency for violence, and often becomes the object of violence. He needs the care of the community (eg. 14:20) and only thereby is he able to care for others.

While there are Biblical passages which describe God’s gracious acts in terms of giving sight to the blind (such as the passage in Isa 42:6-7 that Luke applies to Jesus in Luke 4:18-21), there are also passages which instead envisage the full inclusion and accompaniment of the blind without cure, such as Isa 42:16 and Luke 14:13. By working for justice, and seeking to work with people with disabilities to build a society which practices full inclusion, the church can today welcome people with disabilities not just as objects of benevolent paternalism, but as people some of whom are called to prophetic-apostolic service. The Lukan emphasis on privation (and social stigmatization) as formative for ministry also offers a challenge to those seeking to

minister in the church's name who do not know socially-marked bodily privations in their bones. How can a solidarity with teeth be formed?

Jesuit priest Michael Buckley once gave a famous address to seminarians entitled, "Is this man weak enough to be a priest?" (1972).²¹ The scriptures he mined for his reflections were Hebrews and 2 Corinthians, but I suggest he could just as well have used Acts 9. I cherish the challenge this text offers when it is read as proclaiming that embodied experiences of dependency and impairment, and the social experience of being figured as deathly, can form us to reject the allure of valorized violence and equip us for powerful prophetic speech.

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Notes

¹ As Richard Pervo argues (2008; the argument begins on p. 6 and is often appealed to, eg. at p. 231 et passim.) While the argument of this paper does not depend on accepting Pervo's conclusion, the strength of his argument recommends considering how Lukan knowledge of Paul's epistles (or knowledge of certain things we only know from the letters, that Luke might know in some other way) might have shaped Luke's portrayal of Paul.

² Eg. Johnson, 1992, p. 162. Marguerat (2007, 323) traces the raising of this parallel back to Windisch 1932. Both are associated with threats (*ἀπειλή*; 4 Macc. 4:8; Acts 9:1) which are thwarted by divine power (via angels in 4 Maccabees).

³ For this translation, see *LSJ*, s.v. It is attested in Hippocrates, *Aphorisms*, 4:21.

⁴ Rebecca Raphael, by asking the question "When does Isaac see?" instead of the commonplace "when does Isaac stop seeing?" argues convincingly that Isaac is portrayed as visually impaired throughout his cycle of stories, even if the impairment may grow more severe with age. See (Raphael, 2008, pp. 64-73).

⁵ Citing "esp. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 19.1; Cic. *Brut.* 61; Tac. *Dial.* 18; App. *Sam* 10.4-6; Val. Max. 8.13.15" (see n. 160).

⁶ See discussion in (Esser, 1961, pp. 100-01), and in (Beavis, 1998).

⁷ Having weak, or broken, eyes (*κεκλασμένα τῶν ὀμμάτων*) may be a broader category than being blind, but surely includes this case.

⁸ The longer text of Codex Sinaiticus.

⁹ Ἐγείρω has this sense in Luke 7:14, 22; 8:54; 9:7, 22; 20:37; 24:6, 34; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 37; 20:8. Ἀνίστημι has it in Luke 8:55; 9:8, 19; 10:31; 18:33; 24:7, 46; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:26; 9:40, 41; 10:41; 13:33, 34; 17:3, 31.

¹⁰ This term, (אָמאָ), does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but is a reasonably common term in rabbinic (and modern) Hebrew, being glossed in Jastrow's lexicon as "blind."

¹¹ The Hebrew term מַחֲשָׁכִים can simply be used as a metonymy for the grave (or possibly She'ol), as in Psalm 88:19. But, in other HB texts, the word is used to mean dark places of the earth (above ground), such as Psalm 74:20 where מַחֲשָׁכֵי־אֶרֶץ ("dark places of the land") are the locations of violence and Isa 29:15 where the wicked perform acts in dark places with the stated aim of inhibiting others' ability to see them; darkness renders the non-blind functionally sightless (with respect to the deeds under consideration). Isa 42:15 uses the imagery of turning "dark places" into light as a way in which God will guide the blind (עוֹרִים). These examples show that the connection between מַחֲשָׁכִים and the places of the dead has not flattened out into a quasi-synonymous equation. The Greek translation in Lam 3:6 confirms that an important stream of Hellenistic Jewish interpretation understood מַחֲשָׁכִים as "dark places," and we recall from the Wisdom of Solomon that σκοτος* was used to describe sightlessness.

¹² To use Childs's phrase (2001, p. 488).

¹³ Reading the longer text in Codex Sinaiticus.

¹⁴ The words "in a vision" only appear in a few late manuscripts, and probably represent an explanatory gloss. However, they probably represent accurately the sense of the verse.

¹⁵ For Paul's self-presentation as a prophet in the epistolary corpus, see Eastman (2007, pp. 63-88).

¹⁶ Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.6.7) gives two versions, both of which are attested separately in other authors: that he saw Athena bathing naked, and that he saw snakes copulate.

¹⁷ See discussion in (Esser, 1961, pp. 100-01).

¹⁸ See discussion in Wilson (2015, pp. 79-112).

¹⁹ See an anonymous article, “Blind Jesuit to be Ordained,” *The Sacred Heart Review*, 58(24), 24 November 1917. Archived at <http://newspapers.bc.edu/cgi-bin/bostonsh?a=d&d=BOSTONSH19171124-01.2.10>. Accessed 8/25/2017.

²⁰ See Salamone (2017) for discussion of blind Catholic priests serving today.

²¹ This talk is widely distributed, often without the formal structures of official publication, and renamed in the process. A more readily accessible copy is available at <http://atlantadiaconateformation.com/weakenough.pdf> (accessed Sept. 2017), with the alternative title “Because Beset by Weakness.”