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# Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews reflecting  
global evangelical theology for the purpose  
of discerning the obedience of faith*



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# Editorial: Cross, Christ and History

IN this the final issue for our thirtieth volume, we commence by reflecting again on the important topic of the Cross, with a thoughtful response by James Merrick to an article published in our January 2005 number, followed by a rejoinder from the original author, Don McLellan; this interchange focuses our attention especially on forgiveness, reconciliation and justice. Both of these writers (and Terry Larm) also contribute reviews of books on the topic of the Atonement, reflecting its deep and abiding significance for our faith.

Then we turn to the past (the Reformation period) to gain wisdom on how to deal with current matters. George Harper looks at Protestant-Catholic relationships, raising the idea that an effort which nearly succeeded in reconciling divided parties then may provide a pattern for the present, while Carlos Bovell focuses on handling differences within the family of believers by comparing earlier controversies over the eucharist with contemporary concerns about Scripture. While there are useful insights to be gained from these excursions into history, it is clear that there are no easy answers to be plucked from the shelves, leaving us the task of working through our con-

temporary situation with care and commitment.

As important as these family concerns are for the life and mission of the church, we also need to realize that we live in a world of complex and sometimes difficult relationships with others. So we welcome Anthony McRoy and his illuminating article on 'the Christ of Shia Islam', reflecting as it does his intimate firsthand knowledge of both aspects of the topic. This is complemented by a contribution from TC Executive Chair, Rolf Hille, which highlights the difficulties emerging in the political and legal situation in Europe regarding human rights, especially in the wake of the conversion of an Afghani to Christianity while living in Germany. Both of these articles give us informative material and highlight the need for accurate and discerning understanding of our context.

So we can turn with even more purpose to our final article, a Bible study by James Danaher, which points us to some keys for authentic prayer, and brings us back to the Cross and the importance of forgiveness. As Danaher concludes, 'If we are to be like Jesus and forgive as he forgave, we must live a life of prayer.'

**David Parker, Editor**

# Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: The Reconciliatory Cross as Forgiving Justice

## A Response to Don McLellan

James R. A. Merrick

**KEYWORDS:** *Forgiveness, grace, atonement, reconciliation, substitution, justice, retribution, punishment, suffering, and mercy.*

I am grateful<sup>1</sup> for the opportunity to respond to the fine essay by Don McLellan, 'Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Essential Elements in Atonement Theology'.<sup>2</sup> I share his concern for integrating these three elements in atonement theology and agree that if one is undermined and/or misunderstood, our grasp of Jesus'

death is confounded. At certain points, however, I believe that greater clarity is needed. The aim of this response is not to proffer an analysis of McLellan's essay, but rather to move toward more robust conceptions of justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation by using his paper as a starting point.

### 1. Summary of McLellan's Article

At the heart of McLellan's proposal is the conviction that 'justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation are three indispensable elements in good human relationships and in the production of a peaceful society' and therefore are 'essential elements in atonement theology' (p. 15; cf. p. 5). He suggests that 'justice without forgiveness cannot produce reconciliation' while forgiveness without justice compromises 'the

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<sup>1</sup> I am also indebted to Bob Fischer for numerous suggestions and to Don McLellan for his original article, continued charitable discussion, and friendship.

<sup>2</sup> *ERT* 29 (2005): pp. 4-15.

whole concept of forgiveness' (p. 5). For justice to be effected, sin must be punished: 'A frown, a word of disapproval is scarcely enough. Unless the ambient community does something to the perpetrator that reflects its disapproval *and inflicts pain*, mere disapproval does nothing to reinforce the importance of the law' (p. 9, italics original). Justice, on this view, is essentially retributive punishment; it is repaying the wrongdoer in proportion to his/her crime. As McLellan observes, 'there is a natural inclination to regard *lex talionis* as the epitome of justice' (p. 9).

Yet McLellan's notion of justice appears to be in tension with his definition of forgiveness: 'To forgive is to waive the right to see the offender punished' and its effect 'is to waive the penalties' (p. 11). Forgiveness, as a removal of penalties, and justice, as an enforcing of said penalties, conflict. Seemingly aware of this tension, he states that there are 'a number of quite serious ethical problems' with forgiveness (p. 11), arguing that forgiveness 'must be a very careful process' and is 'not to be dispensed mindlessly, lest the offence actually become trivialised' (p. 12). While he does not concentrate on how both can operate in the cross, he is at pains to preserve his sense of justice, safeguarding forgiveness from becoming a process that dismisses the necessity of retribution.

Like many,<sup>3</sup> McLellan concludes

that in the atonement Jesus 'absorbs the wickedness of his tormentors without any demand for retribution' and suffers 'the wrath of God which would have been expected in retribution' (p. 15). Jesus suffers the punishment due as a result of sin and therefore justice is upheld. This enables God to remove the penalties (forgive) from those who accept this offer and are thereby reconciled to God through Christ. If God simply forgave sin without requiring retribution, his law would be trivialized and justice would remain unsatisfied. Since we can assume that this would be unacceptable in any society, there is good reason to believe that it is unacceptable for God as well. Therefore the cross is a demonstration not only of God's forgiveness, but also of how serious God takes the law and justice. For atonement to be real it must include both justice and forgiveness, both punishment and pardon, without which reconciliation cannot be accomplished.

Justice on the above view is basically *lex talionis*. As McLellan notes, just penalties 'would appear to require that some effort be made by the perpetrator of the offence to compensate the injured party' (p. 9) and 'appear to require... that in some way the

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*Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002); Simon Gathercole, 'The Cross and Substitutionary Atonement', *SBET* 21 (2003): pp. 152-165; and Hans Boersma in both his 'Eschatological Justice and the Cross: Violence and Penal Substitution', *Theology Today* 60 (2003): pp. 186-99; and his recent book, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

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3 Notably, J. I. Packer, 'What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution', *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): pp. 3-45; John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986); David Peterson ed.,

offender experience what the victim experienced' (p. 10). Indeed, 'whatever the penalties, justice *requires* that they be carried out' (p. 10, italics added). Thus, in the cross, Christ must suffer the divine retribution so that forgiveness can be offered. Without this, the atonement is unjust.

## 2. Areas of Concern

While, as will be apparent below, I am in full agreement with McLellan that Jesus bears sin in his person without demanding retribution and thus offers forgiveness, I am hesitant to accept his account. There are three concerns I have with his essay. First, by trading heavily on the idea of retributive punishment, McLellan skews divine justice into merely a principle of punishment. This reduction forces forgiveness outside the scope of God's justice.

Understanding forgiveness as separated from and subsequent to justice causes the second complaint: by construing justice as simply a matter of retribution, McLellan makes God's mercy hostage to his justice.<sup>4</sup> In other words, there is an assumption that God's justice must be satisfied *prior* to God's bestowal of forgiveness. As Kevin Vanhoozer admits, 'the penal substitutionary model of atonement presupposes a divine "economy" in which God distributes a particular resource (forgiveness) only after the

appropriate payment (Jesus' death).'<sup>5</sup> This makes God's justice primary and something to which his love/mercy is subordinate.

Finally, the logic of retribution is incompatible with the logic of substitution. Retributive punishment holds that the *offender* must suffer the same amount of pain/burden s/he inflicted upon the victim. As Mark Tebbit explains, 'the core concept of... retribution is that of desert, indicating the principle that punishment should be given to people according to what they justly deserve, rather than to what we may feel is necessary for purposes of deterrence or rehabilitation.'<sup>6</sup> Robert Nozick makes clear the utilitarian nature of this view: 'According to the retributive theory, the punishment deserved is  $r X H$ , where  $H$  is the amount of harm (done or intended) and  $r$  is the person's degree of responsibility for bringing about  $H$ .'<sup>7</sup> And as McLellan himself says, 'offenders must somehow feel the pain of their crimes and misdemeanors in their own persons' (p. 10).

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5 'The Atonement in Postmodernity: Guilt, Goats, and Gifts', pp. 367-404 in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), p. 372.

6 *Philosophy of Law: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 166.

7 *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 62. Retributive punishment is not simply 'withdrawal of certain rights and/or privileges from a wrongdoer' as Steven L. Porter, 'Swinburnian Atonement and the Doctrine of Penal Substitution', *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): pp. 228-241, p. 234 suggests.

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4 Note Boersma, 'Eschatological Justice', p. 189: 'If justice always means strict retribution... then little room is left for mercy and forgiveness.'

Indeed, the purpose of punishment is to force the offender to suffer for his/her wrongdoing.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even if Jesus suffers the proper punishment on behalf of sinners, justice still goes on unsatisfied since the *offenders* have not experienced the pain of their offence (cf. p. 10). In fact, substitution only seems to *exacerbate* justice in the retributive sense since the victim is bearing the offence twice while the offender is absolved from suffering his/her due punishment. Thus, justice, in the retributive sense, appears to be absent when an innocent substitute suffers on behalf of the guilty.

In light of these difficulties, I want to step back and reconsider whether or not justice might be broad enough to include the act of forgiveness. Following McLellan's methodology, I will examine the function of justice in society by highlighting contemporary legal and political philosophy. I will then suggest that forgiveness can legitimately be understood as an act of justice. As a just act, forgiveness is ade-

quate for appropriately dealing with both sin and sinners, yet it does so redemptively, not retributively. Ultimately, sinners are dealt with within the context of reconciliation in which forgiveness is appropriated and sinners are transformed into saints.

### 3. Justice: Right Relationships

Obviously this is not the place to conduct a full-orbed analysis of justice as a concept. Instead, I will call attention to a few major theorists, suggesting that their common intuition is that justice is a principle for maintaining right relationships between persons. Having suggested that 'right relationships' is the common characteristic, it becomes plausible to view forgiveness, as an act that restores right relationships, as an act of justice.

Justice is at the core of any properly functioning society, being fundamental to its health and governance. No society can exist without some concept of what are ethically acceptable interactions between its members. Being integral to the peace and well-being of society, when justice is breached the community is disrupted and becomes anxious for restoration. Frequently thought of as a basic principle that determines ethics and right relationships between members of society, simply put, justice could be defined as 'each getting what he or she is due'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Jensen, 'Forgiveness and Atonement', *SJT* 46 (1993): pp. 141-59 suggests, poorly in my view, that punishment does not necessarily entail that the offender suffer the punishment. Leaving aside the question about whether this is the case, I ask *what does punishment accomplish if it is not leveled against the offender?* It would seem to make satisfaction arbitrary since it does not matter that the actual offender suffers punishment. On the other hand, Jerome Hall, 'Biblical Atonement and Modern Criminal Law,' *Journal of Law and Religion* 1 (1983): pp. 279-295 points out that there are notions of 'collective responsibility' in both ancient and modern law. Yet, all the cited examples are ones in which the person sentenced is actually connected to and/or responsible for the wrongdoing.

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<sup>9</sup> Brad W. Hooker, 'Justice', pp. 456-57 in Robert Audi ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 456.

However, justice is much more than this. Plato, for example, who understands justice to be the core virtue, contends that when each member of society performs that for which they are properly suited (i.e. what they have the skill to do), society will function in harmony and the values of communal life will be actualized. This harmony amidst virtuous societal relationships is for Plato, justice. Aristotle, in similar vein, sees this harmony expressed in law and civic duty. “The just”... means that which is lawful and which is equal or fair, and “the unjust” means that which is illegal and that which is unequal or unfair.<sup>10</sup> Justice is the pinnacle virtue in that it is exhibited *in relation to others and for their well-being*.

Following Aristotle somewhat, Paul Ricoeur posits that justice ‘is based on a relation of distance from the other, just as originary as the relation of proximity to the other person offered through his face and voice’.<sup>11</sup> Defining ethics as ‘the wish for a good life’, he explains that justice ‘is an integral part of the wish to live well... in just institutions [which] arises from the same level of morality as do the desire for personal fulfillment and the reciprocity of friendship’.<sup>12</sup> In other words, justice presupposes a relationship of distance between persons. This distance is mediated by the institutions which ensure justice. Justice for Ricoeur is

the existence of right relationships through societal institutions.

For the above philosophers, justice is connected to ethics and the search for societal harmony. Others, however, emphasize that justice is something that society *agrees* upon which establishes laws and mores (e.g. a constitution). For example, John Rawls argues that his famous dictum, ‘justice as fairness’ expresses ‘the idea that the principles of justice are *agreed* to in an initial situation that is fair’.<sup>13</sup> Rawls argues that in the ‘original position’, members behind the ‘veil of ignorance’ would unanimously choose ‘justice as fairness’, i.e. Rawls’ theory, meaning that everyone would be situated as equals, receiving an equal distribution of rights, resources, status, etc. As ‘the first virtue of social institutions’, justice is ‘a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and... [defining] the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation’.<sup>14</sup>

To breach justice is to enter into a wrongful relationship with both victim and society. When injustice occurs, theories of corrective and punitive justice become relevant. In order to handle an infraction justly, society must determine how to uphold justice in a manner that is itself in accordance with its principle of justice. Both theories seek to regain a right relationship among victim, victimizer, and society at large.

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10 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham in Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 257.

11 *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), p. xiii.

12 *The Just*, p. xv.

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13 *A Theory of Justice* rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003), p. 11, italics added.

14 *Theory of Justice*, pp. 3-4.

In terms of punitive justice, three theories are proffered. *Retributive* justice, the theory McLellan espouses, revolves around the notion of 'desert' which holds that offenders must suffer in proportion to their crime. Next is the *deterrence* theory which maintains that punishments should be calculated so as to discourage the maximum amount of crime. The last theory has a more positive role—for *rehabilitation* theorists punishment exists to reform the guilty individual so that s/he can be restored to society. This theory shifts from the quantitative to the qualitative. At issue is not only how much punishment, but what *type* of punishment is the best for rehabilitation. Offenders need to be reformed rather than repaid.<sup>15</sup>

Corrective justice, on the other hand, focuses on the process of restoring the community. It holds that whatever act would restore society to the state of affairs it experienced prior to the infraction should be performed by the criminal. Connected to the act of restitution, it carries with it the idea of 'repaying one's debt to society'. An appropriate act of corrective justice would be an act that either undoes the crime or adds a certain quality to society that would have the same effect. Obviously no sentence is able to restore perfectly, yet the aim is to compensate society with enough 'good' so that the crime loses its negative

impact.

Each of these notions of justice revolves around the maintenance of right relationships between persons. For Plato and Aristotle justice is concerned with ensuring optimal social harmony through individuals doing what they ought. Ricoeur locates justice at the heart of ethics, arguing that it is bound up with the desire to live rightly with others through just institutions. Rawls with his emphasis on equity sees justice as an agreed upon principle where fair relationships are determined, achieved, and maintained. With both corrective and punitive justice, the focus remains upon right relationships.<sup>16</sup> With punitive justice, society seeks to mete out punishment aimed at re-establishing proper relationships amongst society, victim, and offender. Punishment gives the offender what s/he deserves and places him/her in a penal position with respect to victim and society.

In regards to corrective justice, the role of the state is to restore equilibrium, peace, and optimal relations to society. Injustice not only causes harm to individuals, but also disrupts and fragments society. Thus the role of corrective justice is to heal that division and return society to harmony. Justice, therefore, is centred on safeguarding societal interactions from becoming violent, destructive, slavish, manipulative, and unfair. Thus, as a principle that determines fair and proper conduct and how such is maintained, *jus-*

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<sup>15</sup> For a recent attempt in this vein which is now in its trial run at Red Hook, NY, see David R. Karp, *Community Justice: An Emerging Field* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); and Todd R. Clear and Eric Cadora, *Community Justice* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003).

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Clear and Cadora, *Community Justice*, p. 3.

tion is a matter of sustaining right relationships.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Forgiveness: Restoring Right Relationships

Before I argue that forgiveness stands within the realm of justice, I want to first address three common misconceptions about forgiveness. First, it must be said that forgiveness is anything but indifference towards injustice. Unfortunately there seems to be widespread suspicion that mere forgiveness trivializes wrongdoing. McLellan notes that 'forgiveness may trivialise the offence' (p. 12). However, properly conceived, it is nothing like simply 'forgetting' about or ignoring evil. One cannot forgive somebody without identifying *who* the wrongdoer is and *what* s/he has done wrong. There is always an assigning of guilt and concession that certain actions are

wrong.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, wrongs are not condoned when forgiven. To condone a wrong action is 'to deny that it is an action that caused... injury, and thus also to deny that there is anything to forgive' whereas to forgive claims that the action did cause harm, yet the victim 'would rather bear the injury than abandon the fellowship that [has been] damaged by [the offender's] action'.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, forgiveness cannot be reduced to 'pardon'. At the very least, 'divine forgiveness means more than pardon' for forgiveness cleanses the sinner as well as removing punishment.<sup>20</sup> Biblical forgiveness purifies, and as Paul Fiddes notes, 'unlike a mere pardon, seeks to win the offender back into relationship'.<sup>21</sup> It 'is not simply a word of acquittal; nor is it something that merely refers backwards' because forgiveness is a continual and eschatological process.<sup>22</sup> Whereas pardon is an act of legal mercy which has

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<sup>17</sup> I would argue that this notion is biblical. Indeed, what is at stake between God and man is a *righteous* relationship. See N. T. Wright, 'righteousness', pp. 590-92 in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer eds., *New Dictionary of Theology: A Concise & Authoritative Resource* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988); Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids/Auckland: Eerdmans/Lime Grove, 2001); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Contours of Justice: An Ancient Call for *Shalom*', pp.107-130 in Lisa Barnes Lampman with Michelle D. Shattuck eds. *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids/Washington: Eerdmans/Neighbors Who Care, 1999).

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Miroslav Volf, 'Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment', pp. 27-49 in Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Radnor: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Leon L. Morris, 'Guilt and Forgiveness', p. 285 in Ferguson, Wright, and Packer eds., *New Dictionary of Theology*.

<sup>21</sup> *Past Event and Present Salvation: the Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 66.

little focus on the relationship between the reprobate and the injured party, forgiveness is a decision made by the latter which *refuses to let an offence prevent fellowship* with the former.

The final concern over forgiveness is whether or not punishment must be meted out before it can be offered. Is it 'unjust' to forgive without first demanding that the 'price be paid'? *Prima facie*, many might be tempted to answer 'no', since punishment is absent from the common experience of forgiveness. Yet many, particularly in terms of God's relationship to humanity, believe that justice must be served first. Conversely, Volf contests the claim that forgiveness is subsequent to justice. It is best to quote him at length:

Forgiveness outside justice means treating the offender as if he had not committed the offense. Forgiveness after justice means the same—only the demand that justice be satisfied before forgiveness can be given is meant to redress the situation so that one can rightly treat the wrongdoer as if he had not committed the deed. Whereas in the first case forgiveness is the stance of a heroic individual who is 'strong' and 'noble' enough to be unconcerned with the offense, in the second case forgiveness is the stance of a strictly moral individual who shows enough integrity so that after the injustice has been redressed he or she refuses to feel and act vindictively. To forgive outside justice is to make no moral demands; to forgive after justice is not to be vindictive. In both cases it is to treat the offender as if he had

not committed the offense or as if it were not his.<sup>23</sup>

He goes on to argue that 'if forgiveness were properly given only after strict justice had been established, then one would *not* be going beyond one's duty in offering forgiveness; one would indeed *wrong* the original wrongdoer if he/she did not offer forgiveness'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, to execute 'justice' before offering forgiveness is nonsensical. The logic of forgiveness implies, as McLellan notes, a refusal to require that wrongs be righted through punishment. What is more, if justice is prior to forgiveness then Paul's statement in Romans 5:8 ('while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'), loses its force. It would appear that the biblical concepts of grace and mercy would be robbed of their profundity.

To think that punishment/justice must be exacted prior to forgiveness is to assert that there is something of which forgiveness is incapable. John Piper represents this well, asserting that 'forgiveness is not enough'.<sup>25</sup> Forgiveness, it is said, does not give the victimizer what s/he deserves and therefore 'justice' remains unfulfilled. But notice, forgiveness is exactly this; it absolves the offender from what s/he deserves. That is why it grips us as it does; its supererogatory character is

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23 'Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice', pp. 40-41, italics original.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 41, italics original. Similarly, Brümmer, *Atonement*, p. 42: 'If full satisfaction has been made or appropriate punishment has been borne, there is nothing left to forgive.'

25 *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), p. 37.

such that it gives where it should take away. It is thus grace.

Take for instance the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) or the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt. 18:23-35). In both cases, forgiveness is offered in the face of a serious infraction without prior dispensing of punishment or requiring payment. According to McLellan, the New Testament pattern of forgiveness, as well as the moral charge it lays, is one where forgiveness is offered without demanding retribution (p. 15). There is no sense that the forgiver must first be 'just'; rather, forgiveness is granted freely (Cf. Mt. 18:22).

Of course, one might reply that there is a disjunct between human forgiveness and divine. For instance, Stott: 'The analogy between our forgiveness and God's is far from being exact' because God is the creator and we are mere humans.<sup>26</sup> Or Michael Horton: 'God cannot simply forgive the way we are enjoined, because unlike us, he is not simply violated personally... , but God's moral character that establishes and upholds the moral order of the cosmos must be sustained.'<sup>27</sup> Yet both Horton and Stott affirm that God commands humans to be and do only that which is true of himself. By arguing that human forgiveness is not analogous to divine,

they undercut this position. Instead of special pleading, I believe it is best to see the aforementioned parables as true indicators of the nature of forgiveness, both human and divine.

Above I called attention to the fact that forgiveness can transpire only with an affirmation of justice. As such it is simply not the case that forgiveness undermines justice. Recall the sense of justice sketched above. Justice, I suggested, is a matter of determining and maintaining right relationships between persons. If this proposal is anything near the mark, then it now becomes plausible to view forgiveness as an act of justice. Forgiveness, of course, restores right relationships and thus is within the scope of justice.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it is inaccurate to contend that God's justice is simply a matter of punishment while his forgiveness is an event outside, something like icing on the cake. There is nothing which must be added to or accomplished prior before forgiveness can be 'just'. God's moral character and cosmic purpose are not undermined by forgiveness.

At this point those who favour the retribution theory might object, arguing that there can be no right relationship in the face of evil without penalty. 'Where there are no penalties... there is no sense of justice', McLellan states (p. 10). But I must ask what it is about retributive punishment that deals with

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<sup>26</sup> *Cross of Christ*, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), p. 190. Similarly, see Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 288-89; and Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), p. 190.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 51-52 where he writes that God's justice, righteousness, and holiness crave not for punishment but for the salvation and transformation of the unrighteous sinner, clearly locating forgiveness within the realm of justice.

wrongdoers in a manner that is superior to forgiveness? Why is retribution more just than rehabilitation? Why is making a person suffer for their misdeed more appropriate than offering that person a chance to take responsibility for their evil and reconcile with their victim? In what follows, I will argue that forgiveness, as an act of justice which takes seriously, but redemptively, the reality of evil and human sin, is aimed at transformation; this aim deals adequately and justly with criminals. But first I want to offer one more reason why forgiveness must be seen as an act of justice.

At the beginning of this paper, I pointed out that understanding forgiveness as beyond the scope of justice and arguing that justice must be satisfied prior to forgiveness makes God's justice primary and his mercy subordinate. Theologically this is unacceptable for it would undermine divine simplicity. Inasmuch as forgiveness is an act of God, it is reflective of his person and therefore is 'good' and 'just' in the same way as his 'wrath' toward sin is. It is errant to hold that God's justice flows out of his holiness whereas his mercy flows out of his love.<sup>29</sup> '[T]here is nothing in the Bible about strife of attributes.'<sup>30</sup> God's justice does not demand what forgiveness seeks to release for each attribute is united. Karl Barth puts it well:

Grace is the very essence of the being of God... This is... the secret of the forgiveness of sins. For this reason the latter does not imply merely a noteworthy episode the scope of which is open to doubt... It meets us, not in spite of, but in and with all the holiness, righteousness and wisdom of God... There is no higher divine being than that of the gracious God, there is no higher divine holiness than that which He shows in being merciful and forgiving sins.<sup>31</sup>

Forgiveness is thus fundamentally 'good' and cannot be construed as in tension with or as an act that could potentially undermine God's justice. This in mind, it would be wrong to think of forgiveness as something completely 'free' and without cost, for God's forgiveness is most potently revealed in the cross. At the cross God in Christ bears the sins against him in his own being. As McLellan points out, 'forgiveness is at a price, and the price is born by the victim'; in the atonement 'God absorb[s] in himself the guilt of the offence against him' (p. 14). I agree entirely; he swallows both sin and, by not directing his wrath outward onto sinners, his wrath against it. Yet on the cross 'the love of God breaks through the wrath of God'<sup>32</sup> for he chooses not to be wrathful towards sinners. In this way, his wrath is not enmity poured out, but rather the internal suffering of anguish from the redemptive decision to love his people in the face of their

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29 Cf. Tony Lane, 'The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God', pp. 138-167 in Kevin Vanhoozer ed., *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 63.

30 P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), p. 118.

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31 *Church Dogmatics* II/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), p. 356.

32 Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), p. 520.

evil, rebellion, unfaithfulness, and utter contempt for his will and to bear and bury in Christ their sin. Christ's last breath of air was sin's death gasp; in him sin is finally defeated (Rom. 6; 8:3; Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; 2 Tim. 1:10).

When forgiveness is offered the forgiver simultaneously bears in his/her person the offence(s) committed and offers the sinner a chance not to bear their sin. It is thus an act of grace in that it does not redirect the sin back onto the sinner through retributive punishment but rather *takes the sin upon oneself* and bears its burden. As such, forgiveness, unlike punishment, is compatible with the logic of substitution.

Sin aims at destruction and the deprivation of good. The forgiver suffers this violence in his/her person and exhausts its effects.<sup>33</sup> Choosing to forgive is thus the choice to suffer, the choice to bear the evil of sin and thereby to *stop* its parasitic spreading by exhausting its violence in oneself. In enduring sin and exhausting its destructive effects, Christ in the cross submitted himself to evil's ultimate consequence, death. Yet by bearing sin in himself, the death of Christ at the hands of evil is paradoxically the death of evil itself (Col. 2:15). Through love, sin is conquered and condemned (Rom. 8:3). Forgiveness is thus 'an alternative form of power... [which] is found in Christ's cross and resurrection... it is this power that breaks apart the cycles of violence and offers a re-turn-

ing of the announcement of God's peace'.<sup>34</sup> There is a metaphysical and expiatory power that love possesses through Christ (1 Cor. 13; Philp. 2:1-11); it is the power to purify sinners and 'overcome evil with good' (Rom. 12:21).

As an act of justice, forgiveness deals adequately with both wrongdoing and the wrongdoer; yet it does so redemptively rather than retributively. In the first place, when forgiveness is offered it stings the offender and pronounces a 'judgment of grace'. Jones argues that this 'judgment of grace' in forgiveness has a clear redemptive bite:

Christ's forgiveness must be received by us... as a judgment on the destructiveness of our lives... God's forgiveness does not come apart from an acknowledgment of, and confrontation with, human sin and evil. God does not 'overlook' or 'ignore' our destructiveness... Rather, God confronts sin and evil in all of its awfulness... *not* for the purpose of condemning us... [rather] it is for the explicit purpose of healing our—and the world's—wounds (see John 3:16-21). It is a judgment of grace... [which] involves moving initially from a third person stance of *holding* people (or oneself) responsible to a first person stance of *accepting* responsibility... [drawing] us into relationship, enabling and inviting us to remember and claim the past as our own.<sup>35</sup>

33 Cf. Jensen, 'Forgiveness and Atonement', p. 154.

34 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 97.

35 *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 146-47, italics original.

In other words, forgiveness itself has the power to judge, not through punishment, but through a love which awakens one to the evil that one has committed and the love for which one is called. 'Innocence' is the cry from the jailhouse, but in order for forgiveness to be received, the wrongdoer must plead 'guilty' and repent. 'This judgment of grace... aims at transformation—a transformation that the recipients of forgiveness consent to and that therefore calls for repentance.'<sup>36</sup> Forgiveness not only casts light on the darkness of the offence committed, but also calls the evildoer into that light, to participate in the love and grace offered and thereby to renounce evil, hatred, and violence. Forgiveness is the goodness of God which leads to repentance (Rom. 2:44).

### 5. Reconciliation: A Context of Transformation

'The purpose of forgiveness is the restoration of communion, the reconciliation of brokenness.'<sup>37</sup> This restoration takes place within the context of reconciliation.<sup>38</sup> Divine forgiveness is transformative, rehabilitative, and redemptive. It not only expiates sin but also restores justice, creating a context in which right relationships can resume and grow. This context enables

further sanctification in which ongoing confession and repentance are necessary as God remains faithful to his covenant of forgiveness through Christ. The *forgiveness of Christ* thus creates the context of reconciliation in which sinners are transformed into saints. As sinners are faced with the goodness of God and implanted with his Holy Spirit, they become sanctified and conformed to the image of the divine forgiver, Jesus Christ.

Jones argues that the process of reconciliation is best carried out in the context of the church where its practices and the sacraments transform humans into Christ as they unlearn habits of sin and learn habits of grace. By mending the broken lines of communion, God's forgiveness enables sinners to grow under the light of his Son into holy people who reflect his glory and image throughout his creation.

God's forgiveness not only invites sinners into church and provides them with responsibility in the Kingdom of God, but it also places them within the family of God. The Holy Spirit of adoption transforms cosmic criminals into *filii in filio*. As children of God, sinners receive both God's grace and his discipline which, through the work of the Spirit, transforms them into saints. This transformation enables the restoration of brokenness and the redemption of that which was lost. As reconciled people, sinners are compelled by God's grace to share his forgiveness with others through the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18).

Just as the cross has both a vertical and horizontal bar, forgiveness is not simply vertical, i.e. relations with God, but horizontal/social as well. This is most apparent in the celebration of the

36 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 136.

37 Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, p. 5.

38 For a different, but compatible account of what follows, see Colin Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp.173-203. Cf. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, Part IV.

Eucharist whereby God through Christ extends transformative communion in the power of the Spirit to his church. Furthermore, 'Christian forgiveness involves the task of responding to God's forgiving love by crafting communities of forgiven and forgiving people.'<sup>39</sup> Volf puts it well: 'Enmity toward God [is] enmity toward human beings, and enmity toward human beings [is] enmity toward God... Reconciliation involves a turning away from enmity toward people, not just from enmity toward God, and it entails a movement toward a human community, precisely that which was the object of enmity.'<sup>40</sup>

Marilyn McCord Adams suggests that as humans remove this enmity through forgiveness there will be a need for prayer. She writes, 'Christian forgiveness will be imbedded in prayer, because it involves a process of letting go of one's own point of view (regarding the situation, one's self and/or the victim, and the offender) and entering into God's point of view.'<sup>41</sup> Discipline and prayer empower the children of God through the Spirit to be ambassadors of Christ's forgiveness. Forgiveness enables reconciliation and reconciliation transforms sinners into saints, establishing a renewal of divine-human justice, peace, and dignity.

Ultimately, however, reconciliation is a two-way street. It can occur only if

the offender receives forgiveness and repents. Those who scorn and reject forgiveness reject not only the restoration of the relationship and their responsibility in evildoing, but also the opportunity to be transformed and reconciled. As the Christian doctrines of final judgment and hell maintain, those who so choose place themselves eternally at odds with God's grace and justice and therefore are given over to destruction.

## 6. Conclusion

As an action that is intimately bound up with his love as well as his justice, forgiveness is an outworking of God's character. Justice, which includes much more than retributive punishment, is concerned with maintaining right(eous) relationships. As such, justice can be appropriately recognized as not merely a matter of giving someone what they deserve, but giving someone what they *do not deserve* (forgiveness). By reducing justice to a principle of punishment and forgiveness to legal pardon, the atonement becomes a balancing act between these two elements. Yet when justice and forgiveness are understood in the way which I have outlined here, the atonement can be understood as God's forgiving justice and righteous reconciliation.

The aim of forgiveness is not to redirect sin back onto the sinner, but to bear it in oneself and exhaust its power. It is the victim's radical choice not to let an offence prevent fellowship. This creates a context in which transformation and further purification can transpire. By exhausting the effects of sin in his person, Christ suffers and dies. This act ushers in the

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39 L. Gregory Jones, 'Crafting Communities of Forgiveness', *Interpretation* 54 (2000): pp. 121-134.

40 'The Social Meaning of Reconciliation', *Interpretation* 54 (2000): pp. 158-172, p. 166.

41 'Forgiveness: A Christian Model', *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): pp. 277-304, p. 294.

Kingdom of God and creates Christ's church, providing the context in which the cross can be appropriated, sinners can be transformed, and justice becomes an already/not-yet reality. Reconciliation then is an eschatological reality that is established in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Indeed, 'instead of pursuing rightful claims of justice against the enemy, God—through Christ's death—sought to justify the unjust and overcome the opponents' enmity—not to condone their injustice and affirm their enmity, but to open up the possibility of doing justice and living in peace, whose ultimate shape is a community of love'.<sup>42</sup>

While it may be 'natural' to respond retributively toward sinners, *it is supernatural to respond with forgiveness*: 'To err is human; to forgive is divine.' Perhaps the reason why forgiveness without retribution is so hard to comprehend and embody is because it operates on the same logic as the call to love enemies, to do good to those who

do evil, to be last in order to be first. Perhaps we love justice only when it is for us, for our cause, and not for sinners. As H. R. Mackintosh majestically and profoundly challenges:

[The reason we cannot understand the atonement] *is that we are not good enough*; we have never forgiven a deadly injury at a price like this, *at such a cost to ourselves as came upon God in Jesus' death. We fail to comprehend such sacrificial love because it far outstrips our shrunken conceptions of what love is and can endure.* Let the man be found who has undergone the shattering experience of pardoning, nobly and tenderly, some awful wrong to himself, still more to one beloved by him, and he will understand the meaning of Calvary better than all the theologians in the world.<sup>43</sup>

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43 H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), p. 193, italics added. Cf. Philp. 2:1-11.

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42 Volf, 'Social Meaning', p. 167.

## Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

A Brief Rejoinder by Don McLellan

Throughout the history of Christian doctrine, the theology of atonement has been difficult. Paul wrote that the message of the cross is 'a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1:23), and it does not get any easier as the years roll on. The advent of liberalism in the 19th century saw a wholesale rejection of the centrality of the cross in human salvation.

The idea that the Son of God must bleed and die on a cross to demonstrate the love of God was repugnant to them, and even more repugnant was the idea that Jesus must suffer vicariously for our sins.

The advent of the third millennium has seen renewed interest in atonement theology. Some evangelicals are expressing dissatisfaction with the con-

cept of penal substitution as articulated by the likes of John Stott and Leon Morris. Some are openly repudiating penal substitution. The present article by James Merrick is an example of an evangelical thinker who is uncomfortable with the idea of punishment/penalty, and of course this has implications for his reading of the cross.

It would be easy to locate Merrick's thesis among the moral influence theories, but I think it represents a new departure, a new way of looking at the death of Christ that hopefully he will develop into a full scale book. The essence of what he is proposing has been touched on in some of the less technical literature on forgiveness, especially works that have arisen from the personal struggles of Christians to forgive after horrendous mistreatment. Debbie Morris<sup>1</sup> and Corrie ten Boom<sup>2</sup> are two who come to mind. This way sees forgiveness not as an act of weakness but of power, which of itself has reconciling force. Rather than calling this a version of Moral Influence, perhaps we could coin the term 'Moral Authority'.

In 'Moral Influence', the loving act of Jesus in giving his life causes the sinner to respond in sorrow and repentance. Its limitation as a theory has always been that giving one's life makes sense only where another life is in mortal peril, and if it is not, the sacrifice is senseless. Moral Influence survives only in the presence of an implied penal substitution.

In 'Moral Authority', the loving act of Jesus in forgiving those who crucified him is an act of power. Those who mocked him demanded that he show his power by coming down from the cross, but the words 'Father, forgive them...' demonstrated an infinitely greater power of a different order. His love for his tormentors and his plea for forgiveness overwhelms them, so that the centurion cries out, 'Surely this man is the Son of God!' This is moral authority, and when allowed to take its course it may lead to reconciliation.

If we approach the question anthropologically, we can find plenty of examples of how a determination to forgive has ultimately broken through aggression and enmity, has humbled the oppressor, and has led to reconciliation. When we extrapolate this theologically, we have a reconciling cross that functions on the determination of Jesus to forgive his oppressors. This is a beautiful picture, and one which I hope evangelists will take up in their preaching. Merrick makes a great contribution here.

A major part of Merrick's article focuses on what he sees as a failure of logic in the idea of penal substitution. Specifically, Merrick challenges whether forgiveness is subsequent to justice (i.e. dependant upon punishment) rather than integral to justice. That forgiveness is integral to justice is one of his important points and, I think, a sound one. I appreciate that he corrects the impression my paper may have left, that justice is only about punishment, and that he demonstrates the correspondence of *dikaïosune* with *shalom*. But it is difficult to reconcile the NT focus on the death of Christ as being 'for our sins' with Merrick's dis-

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1 Debbie Morris (with Gregg Lewis), *Forgiving the Dead Man Walking* (Zondervan, 1998).

2 Corrie ten Boom (with John and Elizabeth Sherrill), *The Hiding Place* (Chosen Books, 1983).

cussion here.

Some of the important biblical metaphors, such as ransom, redemption, purchase, sacrifice, and purification, belong to a different conceptual subset from reconciliation; and while the theologians he quotes make impressive arguments, if penal substitution fails the test of logic, it could only be said that the Bible fails it, so clear in my view is its declaration. We were ransomed, redeemed, purchased and purified by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and the possibility of reconciliation is thus effected. Merrick's thesis, I suggest, would require that we dispense with all these metaphors. The significance of the cross does not depend on its location on a time line. It does not happen 'prior' to God's forgiveness, as Merrick suggests our view proposes, but is absolutely integral to it. It is the grounds and basis of it; it is simultaneous with it.

Theology using anthropological methodology is risky, even though it is a useful and legitimate approach. The risk is that, starting from the human experience and culture angle, we find the Scriptures saying things our culture disapproves of, and so want to steer around them. Some of the evangelicals who are repudiating penal substitution find extremely creative ways of reinterpreting the New Testament. Hermeneutics is an inexact science of course, and we are duty bound to respect genuine new insights into NT interpretation. But when the motivation for a new interpretation appears to be a more convenient theology, we should exercise great caution. Evangelical theology must arise from the divine revelation of the Scriptures, and as fallen humankind we should expect

sometimes not to like what we find there. But we must adjust to the Bible, not adjust the Bible to us.

Nevertheless, to maintain the anthropological approach for a moment, the question Merrick's article raises is, Can there be justice in a fallen world without punishment? There is a natural aversion to punishment, and this is sometimes reflected in our culture even to the extent of regarding it as barbaric. Here in Queensland Australia, we have no 'jails'. A decade or two ago some criminologists managed to persuade our state government to give our jails the rather Orwellian title 'correctional centres'. Convicted felons no longer were to do 'hard time', but were to undergo 'rehabilitation' in relatively nice surroundings, the razor wire on the perimeters being practically the only indication that they were in custody. So a rapist may be sentenced to ten years 'correction', and good behaviour see him released in three. A murderer may be sentenced to life—there is no death penalty in Australia—and 'life' becomes as little as ten years if the parole board thinks he is rehabilitated. But the result is a growing disquiet in the general population. The time the judge stipulates in sentencing is a farce, for few ever serve it fully, and victims constantly ask, 'Where is justice?'

Punishment, the payment of penalties, is an idea that springs naturally to the human psyche, and the Bible nowhere repudiates it. Indeed, while the word 'punish' is not used often in the Scriptures, the concept is clearly there. It begins with *lex talionis* in Exodus 21:24, where the offender must suffer in exact proportion to the suffering caused. In the temple cultus, it is

implied in the substitution of the animal, which suffers so that the sinner may go free. Furthermore, though there have been recent attempts to reinterpret Isaiah chapter 53, the passage clearly presents foundation concepts for the NT doctrine of atonement; the word is plain: 'Upon him was the punishment that made us whole...' (Isaiah 53:5 NRSV).

Fifty or so passages in the NT express the idea that 'Christ died for our sins' (1 Cor. 15:3). He 'gave his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28); he is the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29); God 'purchased the church of God with the blood of his own son' (Acts 20:28); 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8); 'In him we have redemption through his blood' (Eph. 1:7); 'Christ... offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins' (Heb. 10:12); 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24). These are not mere proof texts. They are expressions of

the central theme of biblical theology. There is no salvation apart from the act of God in sending Jesus to die on our behalf. Sin is that serious.

Atonement theology, like all theologies, must be revisited and restated in every generation. But if we are to continue with our evangelical insistence on the ultimate authority of the Bible, we must not abandon the centrality of the cross. And the most straightforward way of reading the cross is that there Jesus died on our behalf. There are many other ways to see its significance, as John Stott's seminal work *The Cross of Christ* shows so eloquently, but the central one remains: 'Christ died for our sins'. To do away with penal substitution is to mess with the heart of soteriology.

So thank you, James Merrick, for great new insights into the cross, but penal substitution, for all its unresolved and frustrating issues, remains in my view the *sine qua non* of biblical soteriology.

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# Regensburg Redux: Have Colson and Neuhaus Succeeded where Bucer and Contarini Failed?

George W. Harper

**KEYWORDS:** *Evangelicals and Catholics Together, Roman Catholics, evangelicals, ecumenism, justification, ecclesiology*

THERE is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on  
to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea are we now  
afloat;  
And we must take the current  
when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures.<sup>1</sup>

So says Shakespeare's Brutus, and Chuck Colson and Richard John Neuhaus might say much the same

about their ongoing effort to broker a rapprochement between evangelicals and Roman Catholics. This effort, known as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT), has a twofold aim: in Latin America it hopes to stem the rising tide of hostility between evangelicals and Catholics that has led to frequent outbreaks of violence, the destruction of much property, many cases of personal injury, and a number of fatalities, while in North America it aims to provide the theological basis for an evangelical-Catholic united front in the ongoing culture war against religious liberalism and secular humanism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 3.

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<sup>2</sup> William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 181-2; Kenneth J. Collins, *The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of an American Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), pp. 169-75.

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So far four documents have resulted: an introductory statement, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium' (1994); a statement on the doctrine of justification, 'The Gift of Salvation' (1997); a statement on Scripture and tradition, 'Your Word Is Truth' (2002); and a statement on worship, ministry, the sacraments, and related topics, 'The Communion of Saints' (2003).<sup>3</sup> Colson, Neuhaus, and their colleagues are quite sanguine about what these documents denote, seeing ours as 'a time of opportunity' that calls for such bold initiatives on behalf of Christ's kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

What has been the response? In Latin America, where Colson and Neuhaus had hoped that their efforts might serve as oil on troubled waters, so far ECT has had relatively little impact. For example, Catholic clerics have continued to refer to the region's burgeoning evangelical churches as 'sects', and even Pope John Paul II, who was usually so ecumenically

minded, described these churches' leaders as 'rapacious wolves'.<sup>5</sup> In return, several evangelical organizations ministering where tension has run the highest have felt it necessary to issue statements distancing themselves from ECT.<sup>6</sup>

In North America, Catholic reaction to ECT has been generally positive, though not without an occasional cavil.<sup>7</sup> The reaction of the American evangelical community has been far noisier, and much of it has been extremely negative. For example, James Montgomery Boice, of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, has described ECT's fuzziness regarding justification as 'sell[ing] out' the Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Though not all of ECT's

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3 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium', *First Things* 43 (May 1994), pp. 15-22, and <<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9405/mission.html>>; 'The Gift of Salvation', *First Things* 79 (January 1998), pp. 20-23, and <<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9801/articles/gift.html>>; 'Your Word Is Truth', *First Things* 125 (August-September 2002), pp. 38-42, and <<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0208/articles/ect.html>>; 'The Communion of Saints', *First Things* 131 (March 2003), pp. 26-33, and <<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0303/articles/sect-saints.html>>. All citations of these documents in this article will refer to their online versions.

4 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together', ¶8.

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5 Cecil M. Robeck Jr., 'Pope John Paul II: A Personal Account of His Impact and Legacy', *Pneuma* 27:1 (Spring 2005), pp. 11, 13.

6 Vern Edmonds, Director of Tecate Mission, letter to staff members, 22 February 1995, in personal papers of Roland Rose, Tecate Mission missionary serving in Chiapas, Mexico; e-mail from Roland Rose to author, 26 October 2004, and fax from Roland Rose to author, 27 October 2004.

7 Keith A. Fournier and William D. Watkins, *A House United? Evangelicals and Catholics Together—A Winning Strategy for the Twenty-First Century* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Nav-Press, 1994); Patrick Henry Reardon, 'Editorial: Evangelicals and Catholics—Together?', *Touchstone* 7:4 (Fall 1994), pp. 6-7; Karl Keating, 'Almost Worth a Signature', *This Rock* 9:1 (January 1998), <<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1998/9801up.asp>>; Philip Blosser, 'Walking the Ecumenical Tightrope', *This Rock* 9:10 (October 1998), <<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1998/9810feal.asp>>.

8 Quoted in Art Moore, 'Does "The Gift of Salvation" Sell Out the Reformation?', *Chr T* 42:5 (27 April 1998), p. 17.

conservative critics have used such categorical language, a number of them have gone on record with expressions of unease.<sup>9</sup> This has led several of these critics to join forces with a few chastened ECT participants, producing a series of documents intended to clarify and put an evangelical spin on ECT's first two documents.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, some evangelicals have risen to the defence of ECT and other such dialogues, not only taking heart from the ongoing theological discussion but even finding a measure of promise in what they see as Catholic concessions concerning justification.<sup>11</sup>

The most eloquent of these optimists is British theologian Tony Lane, who has published an important study of recent Protestant-Catholic interaction on that point.<sup>12</sup> Lane suggests that those hoping to build on this interaction look to the example of an earlier dialogue, the Regensburg Colloquy of 1541, at which Protestant and Catholic theologians reached an agreement on justification that he sees as momentous: 'It was, one might say, one small leap for a colloquy, [but] one giant leap for Christian theology.'<sup>13</sup> The primary purpose of this article is to consider whether there may be merit in Lane's suggestion. First, though, a review of Regensburg's particulars is in order.

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9 John H. Armstrong, *A View of Rome: A Guide to Understanding the Beliefs and Practices of Roman Catholics* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), pp. 115-21; Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 491-502; Michael Scott Horton, *Evangelicals, Catholics, and Unity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999).

10 'Resolutions for Roman Catholic and Evangelical Dialogue', <[http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID560462%7CCHID1415596,00.html](http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID560462%7CCHID1415596,00.html)>; 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration', *Chr T* 43:7 (14 June 1999), pp. 51-6.

11 Matthew C. Heckel, 'Is R. C. Sproul Wrong about Martin Luther? An Analysis of R.C. Sproul's *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* with Respect to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Catholic Luther Scholarship', *JEv Th S* 47:1 (March 2004), pp. 89-120; Mark A. Noll, 'The Evangelical Mind Today', <<http://firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0410/articles/noll.htm>>; Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), pp. 178-83.

## 1. Reconsidering Regensburg

The Regensburg Colloquy was the most important of a series of meetings that brought together prominent Protestant and Catholic theologians

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12 Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

13 Anthony N. S. Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification? Reflections on Article 5 of the Regensburg Colloquy (1541)', in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 205-24; the quotation is from p. 217. Lane is planning a book-length study tentatively titled *Compromising Patchwork or Ecumenical Breakthrough? The Regensburg Article on Justification (1541): Introduction, Text, and Commentary*; see Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 211, n. 36. As the articles by Clark and Samworth cited in n. 9 above demonstrate, critics have also drawn a parallel between ECT and Regensburg.

under the sponsorship of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.<sup>14</sup> In order to face his perennial foes, the French to the west and the Ottoman Turks to the southeast, Charles needed an Empire that stood united; he hoped these theologians could find a way to restore the visible oneness of German Christendom that had been lost in the years after 1517.

For Regensburg, Charles himself chose each side's spokesmen: Philip Melancthon, Martin Bucer, and Johannes Pistorius on behalf of the Protestants, and Julius Pflug, Johann Eck, and Johannes Gropper on behalf of the Catholics. A number of other theologians were also present, including Bucer's protégé, the young John Calvin, and Pope Paul III's personal representative, Gasparo Cardinal Con-

tarini, who presided over the colloquy's sessions.<sup>15</sup> With discussion based on the so-called *Book of Regensburg*, a document prepared by Gropper with input from Bucer, agreement was soon reached on humanity's condition as created and after Adam's fall, on the nature of sin and the effects of original sin, and on fallen humanity's loss of free will.<sup>16</sup> Amazingly, as has already been noted, agreement was even reached on the nature of justification. This must have seemed very promising.

Also promising was the fact that the Catholics at Regensburg were willing to consider the granting of marriage to the clergy and communion in both kinds to the laity. In response, their Protestant counterparts were willing to consider the maintenance of the traditional clerical hierarchy, though with certain modifications, and the recognition of the pope at its head as a kind of constitutional monarch. The Catholics accepted a mildly Protestant description of the nature of the church, and the Protestants accepted as adiaphora traditional Catholic practices in regard to the eucharist. However, the Protestants could not accept the doctrine of

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14 Vinzenz Pfnür, 'Colloquies', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*; Klaus Ganzer and others, 'Religious Colloquies in the Sixteenth Century', <<http://www.religionsgesprache.uni-bonn.de/introduction.html>>. For introductions to Regensburg, see Mark Greengrass, *The Longman Companion to the European Reformation, c. 1500-1618* (Harlow, UK: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), pp. 245-6; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 405-6; and Thomas M. Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, 2 vols., International Theological Library (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 2: 519-24. For detailed studies, see Elisabeth G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 186-256; and Peter Matheson, *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

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15 Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times*, trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 179; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 51; Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 207; Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 405; Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 519.

16 Greschat, *Bucer*, pp. 179-80; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 51; Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', pp. 207-8; Ozment, *Age of Reform*, pp. 405-6; Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 519-20.

transubstantiation underlying those practices, while the Catholics found that doctrine indispensable; the Catholics could not accept any sweeping limits on the hierarchy's power, while the Protestants found that power intolerable.<sup>17</sup> The inevitable result was that the colloquy broke down.

In Regensburg's aftermath both the Emperor and the Pope changed tactics; Charles launched a disastrous war against the Protestant princes of the Schmalkald League, while Rome moved to suppress the neo-Augustinian renewal movement, so-called 'Italian Evangelism', in which Contarini had played a leading role. Charles's war was no more successful than Regensburg at putting Germany's ecclesiastical Humpty Dumpty back together again, while Catholicism in Italy and elsewhere was permanently impoverished by the silencing of Contarini, Girolamo Cardinal Seripando, and their theological allies as well as the subsequent loss of Bernardino Ochino and Peter Martyr Vermigli to the Protestants. Thomas Lindsay notes the result: 'The concept of a Catholic Reformation disappeared; the idea of a Counter-Reformation took its place.'<sup>18</sup>

What about the scheme of justification outlined in Article 5 of the *Book of Regensburg*? Is Lane correct in seeing this as an example for evangelical and Catholic theologians hoping to reach agreement today? Most scholars have

thought not, arguing that Regensburg offered a theory of so-called 'double justification' which merely juxtaposed the Lutheran idea of forensic righteousness, righteousness that is imputed and therefore 'alien' to the one justified, with the traditional Catholic idea of restorative righteousness, righteousness that is infused and therefore ultimately inherent in the one justified.<sup>19</sup>

For example, Elisabeth Gleason describes Article 5 as 'a compromise between two basically incompatible positions'.<sup>20</sup> Hubert Jedin uses stronger language, claiming that it was crippled by 'the irreconcilable opposition of contradictory doctrines'.<sup>21</sup> R. Scott Clark calls it 'a tertium quid' whose terminology was 'brilliantly and deliberately ambiguous'.<sup>22</sup> Alister McGrath gives his discussion a moral slant, claiming that Article 5 'merely placed opposing views side by side, without reconciling, or even addressing, the underlying questions' and accusing the authors of 'a purely superficial engagement with the serious theological issues at stake'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 406. Mark Seifrid, in "The Gift of Salvation": Its Failure to Address the Crux of Justification', *J Ev Th S* 42:4 (December 1999), pp. 679-88, claims to find 'double justification' in the documents of ECT as well as those of Regensburg.

<sup>20</sup> Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini*, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), 1: 391.

<sup>22</sup> Clark, 'Regensburg and Regensburg II', ¶¶12 and 19.

<sup>23</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 248.

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<sup>17</sup> Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 52; Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 208; Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 519 and 521-3.

<sup>18</sup> Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 524.

This pejorative reading of Regensburg has a distinguished pedigree. Martin Luther himself claimed that the colloquy's theologians had simply sewn a new patch onto an old garment, 'so [that] they [Catholics] are right, and so are we'.<sup>24</sup> Certainly Melancthon and Bucer among the Protestants and Contarini among the Catholics were well known for their irenic approach to theology. Could it be that their eagerness to come to terms blinded them to the crazy-quilt nature of the document they drafted?

While this is possible, it is important to note that the young Calvin, with theological perspicuity second to none, saw Regensburg very differently, indeed very positively. In a letter to William Farel, his former colleague in Geneva, he commented: 'You will be astonished, I am sure, that our opponents have yielded so much.... Our friends have... retained... the substance of the true doctrine [of justification], so that nothing can be comprehended within it [Article 5] which is not to be found in our writings. You will desire, I know, a more distinct explication and statement of the doctrine.... However, if you consider with what kind of men we have to agree upon this doctrine, you will acknowledge that much has been accomplished.'<sup>25</sup>

So which assessment is correct, Luther's or Calvin's? McGrath's or Lane's? The only way of deciding is to look at Regensburg's text. When we

do, we find that those characterizing Article 5 as nothing more than a juxtaposition of the Protestant and Catholic positions are seriously mistaken. While the quintessentially Protestant terminology describing justification as *sola fide*, 'by faith alone', is not required by the text, it is at least sanctioned.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, the doctrinal content summarised in that terminology is strongly affirmed: 'By... faith [the repentant sinner] is lifted up to God by the Holy Spirit, and so he receives the Holy Spirit, remission of sins, imputation of righteousness, and countless other gifts.'<sup>27</sup> 'So it is a reliable and sound doctrine that the sinner is justified by living and efficacious faith, for through it we are pleasing and acceptable to God on account of Christ.'<sup>28</sup> 'And thus by faith in Christ we are justified or reckoned to be righteous, that is, we are accepted through his merits and not on account of our own worthiness or works.'<sup>29</sup>

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**26** *Book of Regensburg*, Article 5, 'Articula iustificatione hominis', trans. Lane, ¶10, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, pp. 236-7, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 224. Contrast the Council of Trent's *Decree on Justification*, canons 9, 11, 12, 14, and 29, and *Decree on the Sacraments*, canons 7 and 10, in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H.J. Schroeder (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1941; reprint ed., Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1978), pp. 43, 44, 45-6, 53, and 54.

**27** Article 5, ¶3, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 234, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 222.

**28** Article 5, ¶4, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 234, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 222.

**29** Article 5, ¶5, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 235, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 223.

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**24** Quoted in Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 209; note Luther's allusion to Mt. 9:16.

**25** Quoted in Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 209.

It is true that Article 5 also affirms the divine infusion of love into the repentant sinner's soul, so that righteousness comes to inhere in that soul as well: '[Justification] happens to no one unless at the same time love is infused which heals the will so that the healed will may begin to fulfill the law, just as St. Augustine said.'<sup>30</sup> '[T]he one who is justified... has inherent righteousness, as the apostle says: "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified, etc." [1 Cor. 6:11], which is why the holy fathers made use of the term "to be justified" even to mean "to receive inherent righteousness."<sup>31</sup> A Protestant could easily see this latter affirmation as dangerous, since Catholics have traditionally used it as the basis for a system of merit that makes our salvation a matter both of God's grace and of our own works, so that we can even be said to 'truly merit' eternal life.<sup>32</sup>

However, Article 5 flatly rejects such a line of argument. Each sentence affirming the inherent righteousness of the justified is followed by a sentence insisting that this righteousness is not the basis for their justification: 'Nevertheless it remains true that it is by... faith that we are justified... inasmuch

as [faith] appropriates the mercy and [the] righteousness that is imputed to us on account of Christ and his merit, not on account of the worthiness or perfection of the righteousness imparted to us in Christ.'<sup>33</sup> '[N]evertheless the faithful soul depends not on [inherent righteousness], but only on the righteousness of Christ given to us as a gift, without which there is and can be no righteousness at all.'<sup>34</sup>

In short, it is hard to avoid Lane's conclusion that in Article 5 the possibility of our acceptance before God 'on the basis of inherent righteousness... is very carefully excluded'.<sup>35</sup> But this means that the traditional Catholic teaching on justification is excluded as well. In other words, the text does not teach 'double justification' in the common meaning of that term. It does teach that those God justifies can, will, and indeed must perform works he justifies as well, works he graciously accepts and even chooses to reward, but so does Calvin himself, not to mention the New Testament.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the doctrine set forth in it is no misbegotten hybrid. Instead, though it sometimes draws on Catholic terminology, the content is best seen as essen-

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**30** Article 5, ¶4, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 234, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 222.

**31** Article 5, ¶5, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 235, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 223.

**32** Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, chap. 16, in *Council of Trent*, p. 41; cf. Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, canon 26, in *Council of Trent*, p. 45.

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**33** Article 5, ¶4, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, pp. 234-5, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 222.

**34** Article 5, ¶5, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 235, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 223.

**35** Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 59; see also Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 520-21.

**36** Lane, *Justification by Faith*, pp. 26-39; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.17.3-10 and 3.18.1-5; Mt. 25:31-46, etc.

tially Protestant.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that Article 5 cannot be given a Catholic interpretation, but only that such an interpretation seems forced while the Protestant interpretation seems much more natural.<sup>38</sup>

As further corroboration of the point, note that at least by implication the text also appears to take a Protestant view of the possibility of assurance of salvation, a subject which is closely related to justification. Article 5 insists that in spite of the soul's imperfect renewal and spiritual weakness in this life, 'those who truly repent may always hold with most certain faith that they are pleasing to God on account of Christ the mediator'.<sup>39</sup> Again this apparently excludes the traditional Catholic teaching on assurance.<sup>40</sup> In light of the above, it should come as no surprise that Eck had to be persuaded to sign Article 5, that Rome flatly rejected it, and that five years later, when Cardinal Seripando defended the same concept of justification at the Council of Trent, the Jesuit

Diego Lainez decried this as a 'Lutheran' (i.e., Protestant) innovation which threatened to undermine traditional Catholic doctrine and sacramental practice.<sup>41</sup> It certainly did, just as it does today. This point will be developed further below.

## 2. Regensburg and ECT

Does Regensburg have any light to shed on more recent Protestant-Catholic dialogues, especially ECT? Like Lane, I think it does, although, unlike Lane, I think the light it sheds is mainly premonitory. The fact is that so far Colson, Neuhaus, and ECT's other participants have taken a path eerily like that taken long ago by Bucer, Contarini, and Regensburg's other participants.

As already noted, ECT's initial statement was strongly criticized by some evangelicals for its implicit marginalization of the doctrine of justification. Those involved with ECT responded by issuing a statement focusing on that doctrine, one taking a position that, like Regensburg's Article 5, seems to be in broad agreement with classic Protestantism. At its heart is a passage stressing that justification 'is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God's gift, conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son.... In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's right-

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<sup>37</sup> Lane, in *Justification by Faith*, describes Contarini's doctrine of justification as 'close to Luther's' (p. 48) and 'not so far removed from the Protestant doctrine' (p. 59).

<sup>38</sup> Note the parallel to John Henry Newman's strained attempt at a Catholic reading of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles. In Newman's famous *Tract XC* (1841), he argued that there was nothing in those Articles which could not be harmonized with the dogmatic teachings of the Council of Trent.

<sup>39</sup> Article 5, ¶6, in Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 235, and Lane, 'Twofold Righteousness', p. 223.

<sup>40</sup> Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, chap. 9 and canon 16, in *Council of Trent*, pp. 35 and 44.

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<sup>41</sup> Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, 2: 521; Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 63; Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p. 406.

eousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so.<sup>42</sup> As with Article 5, it might be possible to read this in a way that is consonant with Trent, but, as with Article 5, doing so would require a great deal of exegetical contortion. The most obvious way of reading both statements is that they affirm an understanding of justification seemingly rejected and even anathematized by Trent.<sup>43</sup>

At Regensburg, Trent's anathemas did not matter because they were still five years in the future. For Catholic participants in ECT, though, as well as other Catholics who hope to further such dialogues, those anathemas matter very much.<sup>44</sup> The sixteen Catholics who signed 'The Gift of Salvation' could do so only because Catholic scholars' views of justification are no longer what they were in the sixteenth or even the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Though one of those sixteen, Avery Dulles, has claimed that in ECT's work on this topic '[w]e were careful to follow Trent',<sup>46</sup> the fact is that over the course of the twentieth century, leading Catholic exegetes shifted from Trent's position to that of Luther when

dealing with pivotal texts such as Romans 3:28.<sup>47</sup>

The bottom line is that, in Lane's words, 'most Roman Catholic theologians today regard it as legitimate despite Trent to accept a more or less Protestant doctrine of justification by faith'.<sup>48</sup> Previously the significance of this development might have been discounted, since in the Catholic Church it is not what theologians say but what the magisterium says that is decisive. However, recently the magisterium has begun to follow Catholic theologians' lead on this point, slowly backing away from Trent's robust endorsement of the role of merit in our justification, stressing instead the primacy of God's grace, and finally even accepting Luther's battle cry that justification is by faith alone.<sup>49</sup> If the magis-

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47 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1993), p. 363.

48 Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 90. For discussions of recent Catholic thought on justification, see Lane, *Justification by Faith*, passim; and George Carey, 'Justification by Faith in Recent Roman Catholic Theology', in *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought*, ed. Gavin Reid (Glasgow, Scotland: Fount Paperbacks, Collins, 1980), pp. 62-88.

49 'Annex to the Official Common Statement', in *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 45. For discussion of events leading up to the promulgation of this document by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, see John Reumann, 'Justification by Faith: The Lutheran-Catholic Convergence', *Chr Cent* 114:33 (22 October 1997), pp. 942-6; Richard E. Koenig, 'Ecumenical Impasse?', *Chr Cent* 115:27 (14 October 1998), pp. 926-7; and Douglas A. Sweeney, 'Taming the Reformation', *Chr T* 44:1 (10 January 2000), pp. 63-5.

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42 'Gift of Salvation', ¶7.

43 Timothy George, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative', *Chr T* 41:14 (8 December 1997), pp. 34-5.

44 Karl Lehmann, Michael Root, and William Rusch, eds., *Justification by Faith: Do the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

45 Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 226.

46 Quoted in Moore, 'Gift of Salvation', p. 21.

terium had said the same in 1517, perhaps there would have been no need for a battle. Surely this is a very positive development, isn't it?

But I would argue that it is not as positive as might at first seem to be the case. True, unlike Regensburg's Article 5, which was emphatically rejected by Rome, ECT's documents, including 'The Gift of Salvation', have met with Rome's approval. True, unlike Contarini and his cohorts, who rapidly lost their influence after Regensburg, the signers of ECT and other contemporary Catholic 'evangelicals' seem quite secure in their positions.<sup>50</sup> True, the hierarchy has even given its sanction to the use of terms like *sola fide* that were once exclusively Protestant. But what about those other issues that led to Regensburg's failure? What about the sacraments, especially the Mass and the doctrine of transubstantiation? What about the church's authority and authority structures, the episcopacy and especially the papacy? And what about an array of issues Regensburg did not attempt to address that have become extremely important for modern evangelicals, issues having to do with Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium? ECT has issued documents dealing with all of these, as has already been noted, but unfortunately the content of those documents is mainly a summary of the two parties' positions

along with a bit of healthy self- and mutual criticism.

For example, ECT's document on Scripture and tradition, 'Your Word Is Truth', states the evangelical position on 'the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture as the theological norm—the only infallible rule of faith and practice' that is traditionally summarized in the phrase *sola scriptura*; it notes both 'the widespread misunderstanding in [the evangelical] community that *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) means *nuda scriptura* (literally, Scriptura unclothed; i.e., denuded of and abstracted from its churchly context)' and the evangelical belief that 'in practice if not in theory, the Catholic understanding of the Magisterium, including infallibility, results in the Roman Catholic Church standing in judgment over Scripture, instead of vice versa'.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, this document states the Catholic position that 'the lived experience (tradition) of the community of faith through time includes the ministry of faithful interpreters [of Scripture] guided by the Holy Spirit', i.e., the magisterium; again it notes both 'the widespread misunderstanding in [the Catholic] community that tradition is an addition to Holy Scripture or a parallel and independent source of authoritative teaching' and the Catholic belief that 'Evangelicals have an inadequate appreciation of certain elements of truth that, from the earliest centuries, Christians have understood Christ to have intended for his Church'.<sup>52</sup> The most recent of ECT's

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50 Ralph Martin, 'Catholics, Evangelicals, and Catholic Evangelicals', in *Serving Our Generation: Evangelical Strategies for the Eighties*, ed. Waldron Scott (Colorado Springs, Colo.: World Evangelical Fellowship, 1980), pp. 249-65; Keith A. Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1990).

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51 'Your Word Is Truth', ¶¶13 and 21.

52 'Your Word Is Truth', ¶¶14 and 20.

documents, ‘The Communion of Saints’, contains similar statements concerning the sacraments and various aspects of worship.

My point is that the value of these documents lies mainly in their delineation of what ‘good’ evangelicals and ‘good’ Catholics should and should not believe and do. The genuine convergence they demonstrate in regard to justification as *sola fide*—and, it should be added, in regard to tradition as ‘proper reflection of biblical teaching’ rather than addition to that teaching<sup>53</sup>—is based on the prior shift first of Catholic scholars and then of the Catholic magisterium toward the Protestant position on both of these points. When ECT attempts to go farther, it becomes an exercise not in the convergence ECT seeks but merely in clarification.<sup>54</sup>

And what about justification? The shift of position on that point apparently made by the magisterium in its approval of ECT and similar ecumenical documents has yet to be reflected in the magisterium’s other authoritative statements, most notably the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>55</sup> The *Catechism*’s discussion of justification is rather brief, set in a conventionally Augustinian framework, and mentions faith only five times, almost in pass-

ing.<sup>56</sup> Its discussion of merit is almost as long, and although the position staked out there is more mildly worded than that of Trent, its claim that God ‘bestow[s] *true merit* [italics in original] on us’ does echo Trent’s language.<sup>57</sup> In all of this there is absolutely no sign of the Protestantizing shift noted above.

Is this an inconsistency? If it is, will consistency eventually be achieved by a more general Protestantizing, or perhaps by what might be called a re-Catholicizing, or will the inconsistency instead become a permanent fixture of the Catholic dogmatic landscape? Lane argues that at least in these recent ecumenical documents, Catholics have been able to adopt a more-or-less Protestant position on justification without actually becoming Protestants because ‘for the inner life of the Catholic Church [this] doctrine [is] not very important’.<sup>58</sup> The implication is that inconsistency on such an allegedly minor point, especially in pursuit of the major goals of ecumenical reconciliation and ecclesiastical reunion, can easily be tolerated. This is evocative of Walt Whitman’s lines: ‘Do I contradict

53 ‘Your Word Is Truth’, ¶15.

54 ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’, ¶5.

55 D. A. Carson, ‘Reflections on Salvation and Justification in the New Testament’, *J Ev Th S* 40:4 (December 1997), pp. 581-608; analysing recent papal encyclicals as well as the *Catechism*, Carson sees little change from the position defined at Trent.

56 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §§1987-1995 and 2018-2020. Faith is referred to in §§1991, 1992, and 1993; two of the five references are in a quotation of Romans 3:21-26. For further critical discussion of the *Catechism*’s treatment of justification, see David H. Linden, ‘The Doctrine of Justification in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*’ (unpublished paper); and Eveson, *The Great Exchange*, pp. 81-7.

57 *Catechism*, §§2006-2011 and 2025-2027.

58 Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 84; see also pp. 230-1.

myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself./ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)<sup>59</sup>

But if Catholics see justification as relatively peripheral, they see the sacraments as absolutely central, and of course their sacramental theory and practice revolve around humanity's 'need to offer satisfaction for our sins'.<sup>60</sup> Again, is it possible to reconcile the traditional Catholic theology of the sacraments found in the *Catechism* with the new Catholic theology of justification found in recent ecumenical documents? I would argue that it is not. Bruce McCormack makes this point very forcefully:

[T]he idea of an immediate divine imputation renders superfluous the entire Catholic system of the priestly mediation of grace by the Church. To speak of a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness is to affirm the priesthood of all believers, the communion of the saints with its necessary protest against clericalism, the primacy of the preached word in worship, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Whether or not Rome has embraced imputation, there is absolutely no indication that it has embraced these ideas which McCormack rightly describes as imputation's consequences.<sup>62</sup>

And what of so-called 'folk Catholi-

cism'? Having taught for eleven years in the Philippines, a country whose population of roughly 85 million includes close to 70 million nominal Catholics, I would be remiss if I failed to comment on this at least in passing. Practices such as reciting a special novena in order to persuade God to grant one's request, participating in a religious procession and especially carrying a sacred image or statue as part of that procession in order to accrue merit, and certainly engaging in public self-flagellation during Holy Week in order to atone for one's sins—all of these are deeply ingrained in Philippine culture, they are all endorsed or at least condoned by the Philippine Catholic hierarchy, and they all reflect a works-oriented understanding of righteousness that is poles apart from *sola fide*.<sup>63</sup> The Second Vatican Council left the door open to such practices, the *Catechism* affirms what it describes as their 'storehouse of values', conveying '[t]he Catholic wisdom of the people', and the national catechism issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is even more enthusiastic.<sup>64</sup> Certainly the Philippine Catholic Church has not embraced imputation.

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59 Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, stanza 51.

60 Lane, *Justification by Faith*, p. 84.

61 Bruce L. McCormack, 'What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West', in *Justification*, eds. Husbands and Treier, p. 82.

62 Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2003), p. 118.

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63 George W. Harper, 'Philippine Tongues of Fire? Latin American Pentecostalism and the Future of Filipino Christianity', *Ev R Th* 26:2 (April 2002), pp. 156-8.

64 *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, §13, in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1996), pp. 123-4; *Catechism*, §§1674-1676; *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila, Philippines: ECCCE, Word and Life Publications, 1997), §§1535-1536 and 1579.

### 3. Conclusion

Some time ago, when I described this article's contents to another evangelical theologian, he expressed surprise at what he saw as my optimism regarding ECT. I responded that I am indeed optimistic about it as a vehicle to help evangelicals and Catholics understand their own and each other's positions better and establish a firmer foundation for cobelligerency in the West's ongoing culture wars. However, about ECT as an instrument of theological detente and possibly even entente I am just as pessimistic as my friend.

ECT and other recent ecumenical documents, like Regensburg's Article 5, demonstrate a genuine convergence in regard to the doctrine of justification. But this convergence is limited because so far the understanding of justification found in those documents

has been kept insulated from other aspects of Catholic faith and life.<sup>65</sup> It is not found in the magisterium's most authoritative summaries of Catholic dogma, it has had no effect on Catholic teaching in regard to the church or the sacraments, and common Catholic devotional practices continue as though justification were on the basis not of faith but of works. Returning to the question that forms this article's subtitle, have Colson and Neuhaus succeeded where Bucer and Contarini failed? No, they have not, at least not yet. Any hope for success in the enormous task they have set themselves will depend on Rome's willingness to follow through on the idea of justification it claims to have accepted, accepting that idea's implications as well. If there is indeed a 'tide' in the affairs of these men, it may not reach the flood for many years yet.

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<sup>65</sup> There is precedent for this in Contarini, who, according to Matheson, 'while accepting a doctrine of imputed righteousness,... insulate[d] it off from the other doctrines' (*Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg*, p. 179).

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# Eucharist then, Scripture now: How Evangelicals can Learn from an Old Controversy

Carlos R. Bovell

**KEYWORDS:** *Eucharist; Lord's Supper; Martin Luther, radical reformers, inerrancy, real presence, consubstantiation, Word of God, potential absoluta*

OVER the past 15 years or so, it seems that the 'battle for the Bible' has evolved in such a way that *within Evangelicalism* one can discern the emergence of a conservative group, a moderate sector and a liberal constituency that vaguely resembles the parities of the old Fundamentalist era.<sup>1</sup> Expectedly, the three can be partially identified by their respective views on Scripture, whether divine or human traits are emphasized and in what ways. Of course, not all in each category agree with each other and there are always

borderline cases, but in terms of allegiance it seems to me that, perhaps subconsciously, evangelicals are more concerned with identifying themselves by who they are *not* rather than who they *are*.

In this essay, I suggest that the pattern of this disagreement and subsequent delineation of parity follows that of many other disagreements in church history. The pattern I have in mind involves the unsuspecting collusion of a painful searching for God in the midst of a changing culture and a concomitant quest for social and ecclesial belonging. These two factors can overwhelmingly compel believers to take positions that are overly rigid and unusually insistent. This is how many have learned to avoid being 'guilty by association'. Unaffected by spiritual disquiet or social displacement, believers might otherwise pursue more nuanced positions, but burdened by these pressures, nuance can easily give way to a preoccupation with niceties. A simplistic description of contemporary intra-church disputes

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<sup>1</sup> 'Liberal' evangelicals have called themselves the 'Evangelical Left' or 'Post-Evangelical'. Likewise, some liberals have moved on to become 'Post-liberals'.

illustrates the pattern: Fundamentalists do not want to be mistaken for moderates; moderates for liberals or fundamentalists; liberal evangelicals for either of the others, even though, theoretically, all comprise the same body of Christ. Such concern over self-identification may stem from many factors, but charitably we proffer the widespread belief that 'one's fellowship is indicative of where one's heart is'.<sup>2</sup>

To help understand this pattern, it may prove helpful to compare the current situation with a controversy that arose during the Reformation over the Eucharist. That the Eucharist meal from its very institution would be a perpetual source of division amongst and within Christian churches is evident as early as Paul's attempt to explain the meal in his first letter to the Corinthians. As many church historians have remarked, the ramifications of the fact that the Lord Jesus had never given his followers a prescriptive manual for church government, practice and discipline continue to beleaguer Christendom. To this day, a variety of opinions persist regarding the Lord's Supper with respect to its status as a sacrament, its purpose, its efficacy, its frequency, its manner of presentation and distribution, its constituency (i.e., who can rightfully partake), and so on. Although it is difficult to apprehend adequately the differences between the times of the Reformation and the present, we shall revisit one side of the

Eucharist controversy—that which centres upon Martin Luther—in an attempt to gain some perspective on squabbles that persist even today over the place and nature of Scripture and, more importantly, the need to discriminately identify believers.

### 1. A Medieval Harbinger

It is fascinating to observe how concern over what can or cannot be believed is always at least tacitly defined by what competing groups believe or disavow. Personal spiritual predicaments and socio-ecclesial relations have an often underappreciated impact upon what Christians believe. Martin Luther's view of the real presence in the Lord's Supper proves no exception when examined in light of his painful existential plight, his consequential insistence upon the Word and the socio-political order that were for him embodied in the rival views of the Roman church and those of the other Reformers. Perhaps, the most peculiar feature of Luther's Eucharistic view is better understood through medieval categories.

The Lutheran view of the Eucharist is known as consubstantiation. The *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* defines 'consubstantiation' as 'the coexistence of the Real Presence of Christ's Body and blood and the bread and wine'.<sup>3</sup> However, *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* points out that definitions such as these are

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<sup>2</sup> B. Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 108.

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<sup>3</sup> John Henry Blunt, editor, *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* (London, Oxford and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1871), p. 151.

incorrect, or at best misleading, insofar as they might imply that it is *upon consecration* that the elements are joined with the Real Presence. *The Encyclopedia* clarifies that only upon reception does the joining occur.<sup>4</sup> This idea of consubstantiation is sometimes associated with Martin Luther himself. Although one might be tempted to view Luther in light of modern day Evangelical Lutheranism, it will prove more helpful to trace the contours of the argument from the other direction.

In the ninth century C.E. there was a dispute involving two Benedictine monks at Corbie. One monk, Radbertus, had written a book that explicitly argued that ‘through the consecration of his sacrament by his invisible power, [God] effects (*operatur*) in the substance of the bread and wine the flesh and blood of Christ’.<sup>5</sup>

As Everett Ferguson has pointed out, throughout the early church two main strands of thought with regard to the Eucharist had coincided without apparent conflict.<sup>6</sup> Ferguson considers Ambrose and Augustine to be representatives of the two dominant understandings of the Lord’s Supper in the early church: the former emphasized

an actual ‘metabolism’ and the latter focused upon symbolism. Without subjecting Ferguson’s interpretation of the history of this sacrament to scrutiny,<sup>7</sup> it can be granted that Radbertus sought ‘to combine the religious conceptions of the church at large with the theory of Augustine’.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Radbertus conjoined metabolism and symbolism. He asserted that there was a reality present in the elements, the reality of the body of Christ, and that ‘this body is in substance the same body in which Christ was born, suffered, rose from the dead, and which he still possesses in heaven’.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Radbertus emphasized that the elements of the sacrament were symbols of a greater reality in that although the bread and the wine never cease to appear, feel and taste like bread and wine, a spiritual effect is exacted:<sup>10</sup>

They are called sacraments either because they are secret in that in the visible act divinity inwardly accomplished something secretly through the corporeal appearance, or from the sanctifying consecration, because the Holy Spirit, remaining in the body of Christ,

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4 J. Bodensieck, editor, *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965).

5 *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* 3.4 as cited in R. Seeburg, *The History of Doctrines*, 2.41.2, (trans. Charles E. Hay; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

6 ‘The Lord’s Supper in Church History: The Early Church Through the Medieval Period’ in *The Lord’s Supper: Believers Church Perspectives* (ed. Dale R. Stoffer; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), pp. 21-45.

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7 See, e.g. Thomas Cajetan’s nuanced perspective in ‘Errors on the Lord’s Supper—Instruction for the Nuntio, 1525’ in *Cajetan Responds: A Reader in Reformation Controversy* (ed. and trans. Jared Wicks; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), pp. 153-173, p. 172.

8 Seeburg, *History*, 2.41.2.

9 Seeburg, *History*, 2.41.2, citing *De Corpore* 1.2; 4.3; 21.9.

10 This view later developed into the metaphysical theory of transubstantiation.

latently accomplishes for the salvation of the faithful all these mystical sacraments under the cover of things visible.<sup>11</sup>

We should point out here that, among other things, Radbertus' two emphases introduce an underlying tension between the ordinary workings of the natural world and the extraordinary workings of the divine realm.<sup>12</sup> The tension was such that another monk, Ratramnus, who was from the same order, was asked to respond to Radbertus' theory.<sup>13</sup> Ratramnus isolated two points in his response. He addressed the manner in which Christ was present in the sacrament and the relation between his presence in the Eucharist and his historical presence in his earthly body.

Radbertus, as we saw above, identifies Christ's presence in the sacrament with his historical, earthly body. Ratramnus, for his part, agreed with Radbertus insofar as he (Radbertus) held that the Lord's Supper 'exhibits one thing outwardly to the human sense and proclaims another thing

inwardly to the minds of the faithful'.<sup>14</sup> This distinction in Ratramnus' mind, however, called for a further distinction between the body of Christ as it was present in the elements and the historical body of Christ that actually walked the earth. On this latter point the two Benedictine monks differed in their opinions.

The outcome of the dispute<sup>15</sup> is of less interest to us here than the observation that there were competing understandings of the relation between an ordinary natural world in which things happen in accord with a certain order and an extraordinary divine realm in which the given order of things can be superseded. This is not to suggest that medieval theologians (or the Reformers) entertained some version of naturalism *vis-à-vis* supernaturalism, but the observation does broach an ongoing discussion concerning the relation between what was later brought to the fore by Gabriel Biel in terms of God's *potentia absoluta* and God's *potentia ordinata*.<sup>16</sup> As Oberman points out, these terms became formative in theological discussions begin-

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**11** *Corp* 3.1, quoted in Ferguson, 'Lord's Supper', p. 36.

**12** The present author cannot help but be reminded of the parallel between current day arguments over the place of the human and the divine in Scripture.

**13** For a brief overview of the affair, including its broader connections to Carolingian hermeneutics and ecclesiology, see Willemien Otten, 'Carolingian Theology' in *The Medieval Theologians* (ed. G. R. Evans; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 65-82 of which pp. 73-76 pertain to the present topic. Ratramnus' book, incidentally, had the same title as that of Radbertus.

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**14** Ratramnus, *Corp* 9, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1100)*. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 76-77.

**15** The dispute had not been as grievous as later theologians, especially the Reformers, have made it out to be. See Otten, 'Carolingian Theology'.

**16** See Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

ning with Duns Scotus;<sup>17</sup> however, the concepts were present much earlier and touched upon everything from Christology to Mariology to ecclesiology.<sup>18</sup>

In any event, many of the disputes that broke out later during the Reformation are illuminated by the historical observation that the church had for some time been arguing over how to relate the manner in which God *has chosen* to work with the fact that God *is able* to work in ways other than those which he has chosen.<sup>19</sup> In other words, what does the fact that God *has chosen* to operate in a certain fashion indicate about how God *is able* to operate and what does the fact that God *can* operate in any fashion that he pleases ramify with respect to how God *has chosen* to operate? Or again, in what ways, if any, has God bound himself to do things in accord with the means that he has chosen? And in what ways do God's absolute freedom, authority and power relativise, diminish, or minimize those means by which he has chosen to accomplish his will?

A reader who is familiar with the literature on the Reformation debate over the Eucharist knows that scholarly discussions revolve around the several understandings of symbols and the relations that these have with the realities signified. We have opted to

pursue another point of departure in order to connect the Reformation dispute with those among present day evangelicals. The relation of the two orders (*ordinata* and *absoluta*) will provide us with a helpful vantage from which to perform our proposed comparison.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Luther's Theological Concerns

As with every doctrinal disputant, Martin Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper cannot be fully understood in isolation from his personal theology, from the political and social climate of the time, or from his personal, existential angst that was effectively dispelled in his 'tower experience'. We shall here briefly outline the Reformer's theology in light of his personal emotional and spiritual struggles. The political and social climate will be considered in the next section.

In 1545, Luther reflected upon a powerful conversion experience that he underwent some twenty-five or so years earlier. He recounts:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God

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17 Oberman, *Harvest*, p. 36.

18 See, for example, Pelikan, *Medieval*, pp. 66-80. Oberman (p. 473) mentions that the medievals offered this distinction solely to aid theological discourse and not as an attempt to describe what actually exists.

19 See, for example, St. Anselm's *Why God Became Man* and *On the Incarnation of the Word*.

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20 In this way, Pelikan's application of the two orders to the dispute over the virgin birth is very suggestive.

and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.<sup>21</sup>

The despair that had overcome Luther during that time was such that although the German monk maintained a very strong belief in God and all that God had purposed to accomplish in the cross of Christ, yet his belief involved a terrible God before whom Luther felt all but condemned. 'For I hated that word, "righteousness of God", which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness... with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.'<sup>22</sup> One can easily detect in these words an intense awareness of God's holiness and righteousness; however, the God that Luther knew was so glorious that the Reformer found himself 'raging with wild and disturbed conscience' over the fact that there seemed to be no hope of sinners escaping his holy

wrath.

Luther never lost sight of this holy God, but he did manage to complement his understanding with a second perspective. For example, in Luther's *Table-Talk* appears the following anecdote: 'When one asked, where God was before heaven was created? St. Augustine answered: He was in himself. When another asked me the same question, I said: He was building hell for such idle, presumptuous, fluttering and inquisitive spirits as you.'<sup>23</sup> For Luther, God was the same damning God who so troubled his conscience earlier; however, Luther could now continue:

After he had created all things, he was everywhere, and yet he was nowhere, for I cannot take hold of him without the Word. But he will be found where he has engaged to be. The Jews found him at Jerusalem by the throne of grace (Exod. xxv). We find him in the Word and faith, in baptism and the sacraments; but in his majesty, he is nowhere to be found.

The majestic God who so troubled Luther earlier is still one who is beyond the reach of sinners; however, Luther had since discerned a way in which God can be known and worshipped by Christians. As Vilmos Vajta points out, Luther believed that

God indeed is present everywhere, but he cannot be found everywhere,

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21 *Luther's Works* 55 Vols. (eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955-76). (LW) 34:336-337. Compare LW 54:193-194, 308-309. *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther* (trans. William Hazlitt; Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.) 22 LW 34:336.

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23 *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*. (trans. William Hazlitt; Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.) lxvii. Compare LW 54:377. Augustine, in fact, does give Luther's response in *Confessions* 11.12.

at least not as the God of love and mercy. There is a significant difference between his omnipresence and his 'presence-for-us'. The latter is a presence in the Word. God can be found only where he adds the Word to his work.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that the same mediatory role that the Word plays in so many of Luther's writings seems to be that which Scripture plays in the writings of contemporary evangelicals. Perhaps, and without being unfair, a difference can be found in that in many ways the incarnated Christ himself and his historical plight played a noticeably stronger role in Luther's theology. For example, in his *Larger Catechism*, Luther explained:

These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and separate us Christians from all other people upon earth. For all outside of Christianity, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, although they believe in, and worship, only one true God, yet know not what His mind towards them is, and cannot expect any love or blessing from Him; therefore they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they have not the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Ghost.<sup>25</sup>

According to Luther, those who

'have not the Lord Christ' are subject to God's wrath.<sup>26</sup> In the *Table-Talk*, we read,

he that does not take hold on Christ by faith, and comfort himself herein, that Christ is made a curse for him, remains under the curse...for where he is not known and comprehended by faith, there is not to be expected either advice, help, or comfort, though we torment ourselves to death.<sup>27</sup>

Only in relation to Christ could anyone rightfully set aside their fears of God exacting his judgment upon them.<sup>28</sup>

Reminiscent of widespread evangelical belief, Luther's Christ is available only through the Scriptures:

I know nothing of Jesus Christ but only his name; I have not heard or seen him corporally, yet I have, God be praised, learned so much out of the Scriptures, that I am well and thoroughly satisfied; therefore I desire neither to see nor to hear him in the body.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, we see that the Word, i.e., the Scriptures, takes on for Luther a very

<sup>26</sup> Apparently, Luther counted himself among these until he began to study the book of Romans and the Psalms. See LW 34:336 and also Philip Melancthon, 'The History of the Life and Acts of Luther. 1548', prepared by Dr. Steve Sohmer 1996. Translated by T. Frazel 1995. Cited 10 April 2003. Source: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/melan/lifec-01.txt>

<sup>27</sup> *Table-Talk* CCI.

<sup>28</sup> For a warm expression of his understanding of Christ's nature, see *Table-Talk* CXXXI.

<sup>29</sup> *Table-Talk* CXXXII. Compare XLVIII.

<sup>24</sup> *Luther on Worship: An Interpretation* (trans. U. S. Leupold; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Article III.

integral role with regard to his relation to Christ.

Since it is impossible to do justice to Martin Luther's understanding of the gospel, not to mention its development throughout the course of his life, in this article, we shall raise only one last point here. The place of the creeds in theological formulation and construction during the history of the church, including the Reformation can hardly be overestimated. It had long been believed in line with the creeds that the life of Christ began when he was born of a virgin and ended when he ascended into heaven. Luther, however, did not see Christ's ascension as the termination of his earthly ministry.<sup>30</sup> He seems to have welcomed the gospel (and, especially, the incarnation) so openly and heartily that he refused to view Christ's ascension as the end of a wonderful ministry that purposed to set sinners free. When the incarnate Christ came into the world, so did the gracious gospel; conversely, if the incarnate Christ were to leave the world, then so would Luther's precious gospel.

After all the life-changing soul-searching that Luther had done, he was not about to let the gospel get away from him, or any of God's people for that matter. He understood that Christ's humanity was crucial to the gospel's validity and efficacy. He also understood that when Christ promised that he would be with his disciples always—even to the end of the age—

and that he would be in the midst of two or three that gather in his name, he was not claiming that he would be present in some spiritual way only, but that Christ as incarnate Christ, *the Christ that the disciples knew*, would somehow be there in accordance with his promise.

It must be pointed out that the same anxiety that overtakes Luther at the thought of an Incarnate Christ not being present to him in the sacrament is very similar to that anxiety that seems to overwhelm evangelicals when they consider the thought of an inerrant or infallible Bible not being available to them. The former was not about to relive his Tower Experience; perhaps the latter are not about to give up their own spiritual niche and be swept away by cultural and moral pluralism.

In sum, we have highlighted three salient features found in Martin Luther's personal theology. First, Luther understood that the God of the Bible had determined judgment for all persons and that this judgment could not be averted by humans. Second, he understood that Christ the Lord had brought good news (i.e., the gospel) to the effect that he was making a way for sinners to receive forgiveness of sins and blessings from God. Third, he saw a crucial connection between the duration of the earthly incarnation and the efficacy and availability of the proffered gospel. With these three points in mind we shall review Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Certain aspects of his position will be cast in light of his disposition towards his contemporaries and then his doctrine of the real presence will be considered in light of a handful of critics.

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<sup>30</sup> For this point see, David C. Steinmetz, 'Scripture and the Lord's Supper in Luther's Theology', *Int* 37 (1983) pp. 253-265, p. 262.

### 3. Luther's View of the Eucharist

As remarked earlier, most studies that investigate the various views of the Lord's Supper that were held during the Reformation typically begin with a discussion regarding theories of signs and how and whether they actually relate to what they signify.<sup>31</sup> The present inquiry, by contrast, will, as far as possible, omit such discussion, intentionally endeavouring rather to detect eventually the relation between God's *potentia ordinata* and God's *potentia absoluta* in Luther's position and in those of his opponents. This will allow our parallel to contemporary disputes. We shall forego, therefore, the customary prefatory introduction.

Socially and politically, it should be said from the outset, Luther initially identified himself over against two groups of people. The first is mentioned early in his writings, for example in his *Letter to Pope Leo X* (1518), and is comprised of corrupt Roman Catholic priests.<sup>32</sup>

There was just one means which they used to quiet opposition, to wit, the protection of your name,

the threat of burning at the stake, and the disgrace of the name 'heretic.' It is incredible how ready they are to threaten, even, at times, when they perceive that it is only their own mere silly opinions which are contradicted... I am not much moved, however, by the fact that they envy me the privilege granted me by the power of your Holiness, since I am unwillingly compelled to yield to them in things of far greater moment, viz., when they mix the dreams of Aristotle with theological matters, and conduct nonsensical disputations about the majesty of God, beyond and against the privilege granted them.<sup>33</sup>

Luther is disgusted with a prevalent misuse and outright abuse of priestly authority along with a disproportioned co-mingling of Aristotelian philosophy and theological construction and reflection.

The second group over against which Luther identified himself was one whom he commonly branded 'Radicals', 'Evangelicals' or 'Heretics'. Perhaps, a genuine fear can be detected in certain of Luther's writings that reveals just how seriously he wished to dissociate himself from this broad and, in his mind, hetero-Christian movement. His rationale is understandable

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31 E.g., B. A. Gerrish, 'Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther's Controversy with the Swiss', *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988): pp. 377-395; J. Stephenson, 'Martin Luther and the Eucharist', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): pp. 447-461; K. R. Craycraft, Jr., 'Sign and Word: Martin Luther's Theology of the Sacraments', *Restoration Quarterly* 32 (1990): pp. 143-164.

32 This group, of course, eventually expanded to include the entire Roman Catholic infrastructure, not least the pope himself.

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33 This English translation is taken from Martin Luther, 'Letter to Pope Leo X, Accompanying the "Resolutions" to the XCV Theses 1518' in *Works of Martin Luther* (trans. and eds. Adolph Spaeth, L.D. Reed, Henry Eyster Jacobs, et al.; Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 1:44-48. Cited 10 April 2003 <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/nine5-pope.txt>

considering the political associations that attended the more extreme ranks within the group. Martin Luther's volatile relationship with his one-time colleague, Andreas Karlstadt, is well-known.<sup>34</sup> As Euan Cameron writes: 'It is impossible to separate the strife of ideas over the Eucharist from the context and the personalities which produced it.' He continues:

Luther, already disgusted with Karlstadt because of his precipitate moves in altering worship at Wittenberg and his tactlessness, despised him yet more on this issue. When Luther heard that Karlstadt's ideas were gaining adherents in Switzerland he was at once predisposed to listen no further.<sup>35</sup>

According to Cameron, Luther associated a whole family of ideas pertaining to the Eucharist with Karlstadt. His disdain for the man attached itself to his ideas and, in one fell swoop, extended to all who entertained or promulgated ideas that bore even the slightest semblance to his, whether they had been influenced by him or not. One major reason for this was what culminated in Karlstadt's personal involvement in the Peasants' Revolt of 1524/5. For this uprising and the social

and political attitudes that incited it, Luther had nothing but the strongest contempt:

For baptism does not make men free in body and property, but in soul; and the Gospel does not make goods common, except in the case of those who, of their own free will, do what the apostles and disciples did in Acts 4 [32-37]. They did not demand, as do our insane peasants in their raging, that the goods of others—of Pilate and Herod—should be common, but only their own goods. Our peasants, however, want to make the goods of other men common, and keep their own goods for themselves. Fine Christians they are! I think there is not a devil left in hell; they have all gone into the peasants. Their raving has gone beyond all measure.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, though, after his return to Wittenberg in 1522, Luther had already begun to despise Karlstadt. Violence, iconoclasm, and extreme mysticism had earlier proved (at least theoretically) appealing to Karlstadt, who had, in Luther's judgment, 'devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all'.<sup>37</sup> Luther's former colleague had allowed a dangerous subjectivism to obscure and gradually overtake his sense of judgment.<sup>38</sup> Karlstadt, of

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34 For a brief biography, one might start with Alejandro Zorzin, 'Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486-1541)' in *The Reformation Theologians* (ed. Carter Lindberg; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 327-337.

35 Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 163-4; for Karlstadt's ill-timed reforms, pp. 210-214. See also Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1972), pp. 50-62.

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36 *LW* 46:51-52.

37 *LW* 40:83.

38 One example is related in the *Table Talk*: 'Our burgomaster here at Wittenberg lately asked me, if it were God's will to use physic? for, said he, Doctor Carlstad has preached, that whoso falls sick, shall use no physic, but commit his case to God, praying that His will be done.' (DXCIII)

course, was not the only one who had developed and accepted the opinions of the 'radicals' nor was he the most radical.

Others, notably Thomas Muntzer,<sup>39</sup> also emphasized the immediacy of the Christian experience, innovatively stressing individualism, egalitarianism and other mandatory social justices in the name of the Holy Spirit. He asked: 'What possible chance does the common man ever have to welcome the pure word of God in sincerity when he is beset by such worries about temporal goods?'<sup>40</sup> But as it became more and more clear that the followers of these Christian activists had set themselves to the institution of their reforms by violently upsetting the civil and social order, Luther began to associate the leaders' theological schemas with the populace's anarchic activity. His abhorrence of both the former and the latter went hand in hand and often conflated in his mind.

Luther's un-nuanced grouping of his opponents into stark Roman or Radical categories was unfortunate (e.g., identifying a Karlstadt with a Muntzer). Inevitable inconsistency in

this regard is evident in his close friendship with Melancthon, for example. Such black-and-white thinking helped Luther reduce matters in a way that made the theological and political landscape appear naively uncomplicated. For example, Luther writes: 'Anyone who has failed to grasp the faith may thenceforth believe whatever he likes, it makes no difference. Just as when someone is on the point of drowning, whether he drowns in a brook or in the middle of a stream, he is drowned just the same. So I say of these fanatics: if they let go of the word, let them believe whatever they like...' He acknowledges 'that six or seven sects have arisen over the sacrament', but he repeatedly and categorically dismisses them as one.<sup>41</sup>

Luther, then, sought to articulate his understanding of the Eucharist along the trajectory set by his broader theological program. However, his formulation had to bear in mind those that were offered by the two groups mentioned above (the 'papists' and the 'radicals'): the social and political dynamic was such that in order for Luther's Reformation to succeed he could not be mistaken for either group. In other words, Luther was forced in many ways to react to transubstantiation as well as the Radicals' symbolic understanding of the sacrament. The former could be interpreted as the Roman insistence upon the appropriation of Aristotle and the legitimacy and cruciality of the priesthood and papacy; the latter a forthright repudiation of the Word and a devilish desire

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<sup>39</sup> Karlstadt apparently did not initially endorse Muntzer's radicalism; however, they eventually joined in common cause (at least in a manner of speaking) in the so-called Peasants' War. For an overview of the series of outbreaks, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, pp. 202-209.

<sup>40</sup> *The Collected Works of Thomas Muntzer* (trans. and ed. Peter Matheson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), p. 151, cited in Gottfried Seebass, 'Thomas Muntzer (c. 1490-1525)' in *The Reformation Theologians* (ed. Carter Lindberg; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), pp. 338-350, p. 346.

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<sup>41</sup> *LW* 36:336-337; 34:162, 379.

to commune with God immediately and directly, i.e., without the Word (understood as the Scriptures and, of course, Christ) and without priests (understood as any type of church leadership, i.e., anarchy).

Luther, for his part, developed his own theology of the sacraments in keeping with his broader theological emphases, but always in light of his opponents' positions. For example, he complains: 'Now that [Satan] sees he cannot subdue us from the left side, he rushes over to the right side. Formerly he made us too papistic; now he wants to make us too evangelical. But God commanded us many times in the Scriptures to keep on the straight path and not to turn either to the right or to the left.'<sup>42</sup> Interestingly enough, it has been reported that Luther went as far as to say: 'The reading of the Bible would never have lead me to the understanding I have unless I had been instructed by the actions of my adversaries.'<sup>43</sup>

One main point for Luther involved the vital role of the Word in God's dealings with his people. The Radicals claimed that on account of believers' possession of the Holy Spirit, it was not always necessary for the Word to play such a central role in the Christian's life, much less clergymen.<sup>44</sup> For its part, Rome had annexed, centuries before, an entire sacramental system to their understanding of how God mediated Christ to believers, that

seemed to relegate the Word to the periphery of Christian worship and living. This had the effect of elevating (even if inadvertently) the position of the priests. For Luther, however, the Word was absolutely crucial to any interaction with God; he also appropriated the Word in a way that sought a balanced role for the ministry of clergymen. It is very important to keep this in mind when discussing any of Luther's beliefs.<sup>45</sup>

Luther, in many religious matters, was content to leave decisions up to individual consciences. For example, though Luther believed that all believers were entitled to partake of both elements of the Eucharist, he thought it fitting neither to compel parishioners to partake of one without the other, nor to require that they partake of both. He only demanded that the church offer both to the laity in order that they could partake in accordance with their conscience. He also appealed to the conscience of a believer with regard to the adoration of the sacrament. This can be seen through his encounter with the Bohemian Brethren, for example.<sup>46</sup> Luther even went so far as to permit churchgoers to retain their beliefs in transubstantiation if they preferred to do so. He writes:

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<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, many scholars tend to pre-occupy themselves with Luther's peculiarities with respect to the Eucharist at the cost of his broader theological concern. There are, of course, exceptions, e.g., Thomas J. Davis, "The Truth of the Divine Words": Luther's Sermons on the Eucharist, 1521-28, and the Structure of Eucharistic Meaning', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999): pp. 323-342.

<sup>46</sup> *LW* 36:271-305.

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<sup>42</sup> *LW* 36:237; Compare 54:43.

<sup>43</sup> *LW* 54:274.

<sup>44</sup> *LW* 54:97. Of course, not every Radical promulgated this view, but in Luther's mind, a Radical was a Radical.

My one concern at present is to remove all scruples of conscience, so that no one may fear being called a heretic if he believes that real bread and real wine are present on the altar, and that every one may feel at liberty to ponder, hold, and believe either one view or the other without endangering his salvation.<sup>47</sup>

Martin Luther upheld Christian liberty to the greatest extent that he could. He, however, would not tolerate those views of the Eucharist that in some way denied the bodily presence of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> He adamantly insisted: 'So we say, on our part, that according to the words Christ's true body and blood are present when he says, "Take, eat; this is my body."<sup>49</sup> Luther held this to be no 'minor matter' on which Christians were free to disagree since 'God's Word is God's Word'. Neither reason nor experience could dissuade Luther of his position.

Though he regarded one particular argument to be 'the strongest of them all', Luther could not change his mind even on account of the fact that his doctrine might become 'burdensome to the people' in that 'it is difficult to believe that a body is at the same time in heaven and in the Supper.'<sup>50</sup> Luther

believed that 'philosophy understands naught of divine matters' and that reason was 'mere darkness' if not 'in the hands of those who believe'.<sup>51</sup> Difficulty of belief, after all, was not a test of truth. In any event, Luther was always suspicious of a 'spirit [that] will not believe what the Word of God says, but only what he sees and feels'.<sup>52</sup>

In all fairness to Luther, it is improper to focus exclusively or even predominantly on Luther's understanding of the bodily presence of Christ in the bread and the wine.<sup>53</sup> After all, 'up to now I have not preached very much about the first part [what one should believe about the sacrament], but have treated only the second [its proper use], which is also the best part', wrote Luther in 1526.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Luther's understanding of the real presence, though crucial, was not considered by him to be the most significant part of his doctrine and not one with which he would ordinarily occupy himself during preaching. Luther continued: 'But because the first part is now being assailed by many...so that in foreign lands a large number are already pouncing upon it and maintaining that Christ's body and blood are not present in the bread and wine, the

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<sup>47</sup> *LW* 36:30.

<sup>48</sup> Luther's contempt for Zwingli, for example, is famous. While considering how Zwingli had died with weapon in hand, he is reported to have remarked, 'If God saved him [Zwingli], he has done so above and beyond the rule' (*LW* 54:152).

<sup>49</sup> *LW* 37:25.

<sup>50</sup> *LW* 37:74-75. See also *LW* 54:91-92; 54:284.

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<sup>51</sup> *Table-Talk*, XLVIII; LXXVI. Compare *LW* 54:183-184; 54:377-378.

<sup>52</sup> *LW* 40:216.

<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, it is understandable since Luther's understanding of the sacrament underwent several changes throughout his career. Yet the real presence is one of the few features that remained constant. Furthermore, it was the real presence against which so many of his critics focused their energies.

<sup>54</sup> *LW* 36:335.

times demand that I say something on this subject also.<sup>55</sup>

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther's 'first captivity of the sacrament' was the fact that 'the sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all men'.<sup>56</sup> The second 'captivity' referred to the real presence and 'is less grievous as far as the conscience is concerned'. Luther then claimed that the third 'captivity' (that the mass was a sacrifice) was 'by far the most wicked abuse of all'. Granted, this was one of his earliest works to address the sacrament, yet, as Quere points out, 'even though it changed its place in the structure, the function and power of the Word remained the same' throughout the Eucharistic controversy.<sup>57</sup> It is well known that Luther's view of the Eucharist changed with time. Yet Quere makes a good point: 'While I tend to agree with Althaus that the real presence had no significant theological function in the early 1520s, it might be more accurate to say that it had a clearer place in the new structure in the late 1520s.'<sup>58</sup>

Why did Luther retain the Word as the core of his sacramental theology throughout his career? Because, as we

saw above, there is no other way to commune with God but through the incarnate Christ, according to Luther. Or as Davis puts it: 'If one would know God, one must know Christ; what's more, one must know Christ in his humanity.'<sup>59</sup> Therefore, whether Christ's body and blood were considered by Luther (as they were during various times throughout his career) as the sign, the res, the vehicle, or the vessel of the Church's incorporation into the body of Christ and/or of the Church's forgiveness of sins,<sup>60</sup> without the real presence of Christ he would not have been able to teach, for example: 'Here my Lord has given me his body and blood in the bread and wine, in order that I should eat and drink. And they are to be my very own, so that I may be certain that my sins are forgiven, that I am to be free of death and hell, have eternal life, and be a child of God and an heir of heaven.'<sup>61</sup>

This section aimed to show that Luther was heavily influenced by his personal spiritual journey and the positions of rivalling factions as he constructed his Eucharistic theology over the years. It is always easier to see such influences in other people than in ourselves. Therefore, before rendering a brief comparison between the Eucharistic dispute and that amongst evangelicals, let us consider how Luther dealt with certain competing arguments.

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55 LW36:335. This particular work was originally a sermon. Luther's absolute insistence upon the real presence of Christ in the sacrament is demonstrated, for example, in his inordinacy on the subject during the ecumenical venture of Philipp of Hesse (1529).

56 LW 36:27, written 1520.

57 R. W. Quere, 'Changes and Constants: Structure in Luther's Understanding of the Real Presence in the 1520's', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985): pp. 45-76, p. 75.

58 Quere, 'Changes and Constants', p. 74. See also, Davis, 'Luther's Sermons'.

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59 Davis, 'Luther's Sermons,' p. 338. He continues, 'There is no other God for us, Luther stated, than the one who comes in "swaddling clothes".'

60 Quere, 'Changes.'

61 LW 36:350-351.

#### 4. Luther's Critics' Chief Argument

The controversies in which Luther found himself enmeshed primarily arose on account of how he could hold that the elements of the sacrament are both the body and blood of Christ and the bread and wine at the same time. We have endeavoured to show that though this was crucial for Luther it did not comprise the core of his teaching of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, the real presence had achieved such attention from his opponents that he contended fiercely for its validity as more and more theologians inveighed against him. We shall consider here what Luther deemed the 'strongest [argument] of all': it was a burden to the people.

That the real presence of Christ is too difficult for the ordinary person to believe is indeed the chief argument against Luther, especially given his sensitivity to the consciences of believers. The argument is actually a family of arguments that regards the belief's affront to simple, everyday reasoning. One version of the argument that Luther credits to 'the subtle Wycliffe and the sophists' maintains 'that two distinct beings cannot be one, nor can one being be confused with the other'.<sup>62</sup> Another, quoted earlier, complained of the difficulty in believing that Christ was both in heaven (at the right hand of the Father) and on earth (in the bread) at the same time. We shall examine these criticisms in light of the concepts of God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta*, introduced above.

Whether a theologian would charge another that his belief in the real presence is absurd could be said to depend in great measure on that theologian's understanding of the relation between God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta*. An interesting question to ask is what did a particular theologian seem to think with regard to what God could do (but did not opt to do) and what God did do. For example, Cajetan explained:

It is first clear that in the words 'This is my body,' the pronoun 'this' indicates neither the bread nor the body of Christ, since an indication of the bread would go against the truth of what is. Then the sense would be that this, this bread, is my body—which is patently false. This bread is not the body of Christ, neither at the end of the words, nor afterwards, nor before, since bread is never the body of Christ. However, once the sacrament is confectioned and while it continues to be, it is true that what was bread is the body of Christ. Nonetheless it is never true that bread is the body of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Cajetan's wording is very interesting. Luther's understanding of the Eucharist is not 'absurd' (as Zwingli charged) but rather 'goes against the truth of what is'. Perhaps Cajetan is intimating that since God can do all

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<sup>63</sup> 'Errors on the Lord's Supper—Instruction for the Nuntio, 1525' in *Cajetan Responds: A Reader in Reformation Controversy* (ed. and trans. Jared Wicks, S.J.; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978), pp. 153-173, p. 166.

things,<sup>64</sup> the Lutheran sacramental view is not impossible for God: it is simply not the way that God has chosen to constitute the sacrament.

Zwingli, by way of contrast, may<sup>65</sup> have considered Luther's version of the real presence as logically impossible and therefore without both God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta*. Zwingli might have thought along these lines:

[I]f the finite humanity of Christ is at the right hand of God, then it cannot be in the eucharistic elements. Christ stands at the right hand of God to intercede for the church. But if he is there, he cannot be here. *It is not possible for a finite body to be in two places at the same time.*<sup>66</sup>

Oecolampadius seems to have reasoned in a similar fashion. Against him, Luther writes:

Since God can do more than we understand, we must not say without qualification, simply on the basis of our own deduction and opinion, that these two propositions are contrary to each other: Christ's body is in heaven, and in the bread. For both are God's words.<sup>67</sup>

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64 In other words, this need not entail a logical contradiction. For the medieval resolution of the apparent contradiction that attends the real presence, see Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 271-280; Steinmetz, 'Scripture and the Lord's Supper', pp. 260-261.

65 Though see *LW* 37:156; 37:171.

66 Steinmetz, 'Scripture and the Lord's Supper', p. 260 (emphasis mine).

67 *LW* 37:276. Luther sees no contradiction 'just as it is no contradiction that Christ sat

It is apparent, at least from Luther's vantage, that Oecolampadius' stumbling block was his misidentification of the real presence as a logical impossibility and therefore without God's *potentia absoluta*.

Luther, for his part, saw the matter very differently. In fact, Luther argued not only that the real presence was within God's *potentia absoluta*, but that given the way that Christ was able to appear at will where he willed upon his resurrection,<sup>68</sup> the real presence was indeed within God's *potentia ordinata*. How does one distinguish between what God *did* do and what God *can* do: that is a big part of the question. Not only that, but what *others* think about it is perhaps an even bigger part of the question. Without denying the primacy given to arguments from Scripture to each of these theologians, the relation of God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta* with respect to the Eucharist and also with respect to the positions held by opponents played important roles in the continual formulation of Luther's position on the Eucharist.

## 5. Application

It was said above that we would not occupy ourselves here with arguments over the relation between 'signs' and 'signifieds'. Rather, we took great

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with his disciples after his resurrection, Luke 24 [:44], and yet at the same time was not with them, as he himself says, 'These things I spoke to you, while I was still with you.' Here we find 'with you' and 'not with you,' and yet there is no contradiction...'

68 Steinmetz, 'Scripture and the Lord's Supper', p. 261; Compare *LW* 54.92-93.

pains to incorporate arguments over the relation between God's *potentia ordinata* and his *potentia absoluta*. In this way, the above account may prove relevant to current disputes over the nature of Scripture.

Could God arrange for a Scripture without error? Would not most evangelicals—even the most liberal say, 'Yes, there must have been a way for God to do that'.<sup>69</sup> There is not much dispute here on this question among evangelicals. Did God inspire Scripture in this way? The answers to this question are what divide. 'Yes, I think he did' might be said to be the answer of both fundamentalists and moderates. The difference between them can be explained by virtue of whether God's doing so was on account of his *potentia ordinata* or his *potentia absoluta*. Fundamentalists would categorize the inspiration of Scripture with the former and moderates with the latter. Liberals, for their part—perhaps not all—would answer, 'No, though he might have done things this way, he did not choose so to inspire the Scriptures.'

Viewed in this way, the break among the three camps is not as severe as commonly depicted since all answer, 'Yes', to the first question. That said, on account of the personal and spiritual journeys which colour discussions and decisions bearing upon the topic of Scripture, it may not prove easy to live comfortably with

these familial resemblances. For example, fundamentalists may be so scared of what they categorically denounce as 'liberalism' that they refuse any (or allow only limited) interaction with either of the other two camps, even though they are both evangelical. Moderates, on the other hand, may not be taken seriously by either of the other two groups, being mistaken by the others for that camp that lies on the opposite end of the spectrum. Lastly, so many 'post-evangelicals' happen to be former moderate evangelicals or former fundamentalists—non-evangelical liberals incidentally often fall into this category—and have no desire for any thing that even smells of the burdens of their pasts.

Surely there is much to learn from the Eucharist controversy by way of how intra-church disputes unfold. To believe that 'whatever the Bible ultimately says is what I believe'—irrespective of whether it was the predominant rhetoric of the Reformers—does not wholly describe the motivation and rationale for why Luther believed what he did. To believe that Luther was true to this sort of creed is a mistake that bespeaks untold consequences for Christ's church. Evangelicals should go further and consider that if it was not the case that 'whatever the Bible ultimately says is what I believe' for Luther, it most certainly is not the case among evangelicals. In precisely the same manner, evangelicals can be influenced to believe certain things on account of other deeply held religious beliefs, political and socio-ecclesial pressures, and personal, existentially relevant issues. May God grant grace to his churches as we try to live with ourselves!

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<sup>69</sup> Contemporary crusades against 'methodological naturalism' or the older, 'secular humanism' may overlook the fact that many Christians, evangelical and otherwise, are often very willing to concede that God *could* have done things a certain way; he simply chose not to do so.

# The Christ of Shia Islam

Anthony McRoy

**KEYWORDS:** *Virgin birth, miracles, ascension, marriage, crucifixion, Gospels, Infancy Gospels, Hadith*

## Introduction

THERE are reports that President Bush, meeting Iraqi dissidents before the invasion of Iraq, was surprised and mystified by the revelation that there were significant differences between the Sunni and Shia communities. Since then, the ongoing civil conflict between Sunnis and Shia in Iraq and the current nuclear crisis concerning Shi'ite Iran have made this bewilderment more general—and the need for a proper understanding more urgent. Even among Islamicists, Shi'ite Islam is arguably the Cinderella of academic investigation when compared to the massive attention paid to Sunni Islam. In one sense this is inevitable: over ninety per cent of Muslims worldwide are Sunnis, and whereas Sunni texts are freely available in translation, the same cannot be said for their Shi'ite equivalents. For Christians, the obvious point of reference is to examine what Shi'ism teaches about the Person and Work of Christ.

## 1. Jesus in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an Jesus is termed '*Isa bin Maryam*'—Jesus Son of Mary. There are different theories about the origins of the term '*Isa*'. One is that it derives from the Syriac *Yeshū*, and thus ultimately from the Hebrew/Aramaic name *Yeshua*.<sup>1</sup> The great Christian missionary and author Samuel Zwemer noted the hypothesis of Otto Pautz that '*Isa* derived from 'Esau', reflecting a derisory term by the Jews in Medina for Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Zwemer himself suggests that '*Isa* was constructed to rhyme with *Musa*, the Arabic for Moses, and this would be in keeping with the Qur'an's rhythmic character.<sup>3</sup> More important is the title 'Son of Mary'. In Arab culture, men are described in terms of their paternal rather than maternal origins, yet the latter is true of Jesus in Islam. There are three possibilities for its origin.

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1 F.P. Cotterell, 'The Christology of Islam', in Harold H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: IVP, 1982), p. 284.

2 Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ* (London: Oliphants, [1912?]). pp. 34-35.

3 Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, p. 33.

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Firstly, it may reflect Islam's emphasis on the virgin birth of Jesus. Surah An-Anbiyaa 21:91 states: 'And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit and We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples'. Similarly in Surah Al-i-Imran 3:45ff we encounter terms that resemble the Lukan Annunciation narrative:

(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary...<sup>47</sup> She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said:... Allah createth what He will... He saith unto it only: Be! and it is.

It should be stressed that Islam attaches no theological significance to the Virgin Birth; in Surah 3:59 we are informed: 'Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is.' Muslims will often point out that Adam's creation was a *greater* miracle, since he had no parents at all! Moreover, there does not seem to be any compelling reason for the virgin birth in the Qur'an, since Islam denies original sin; the miracle is merely an arbitrary act of God's will, an expression of his power.

The second possibility is that the term may have been encountered by Muslim refugees in Abyssinia. Cotterell has considered this hypothesis, but ultimately rejects it:

The suggestion that the title 'Son of Mary' originated in Abyssinia, and indicated a high view of Mary rather than a low view of Jesus,

fails at two points. Firstly, it is supposed that the title was brought back from Abyssinia by returning Muslim refugees, after the first hijra. However, the title occurs in Meccan Suras, decisively in Sura 19 which, according to tradition, was recited to the Abyssinian Nagash (Eth. *negūs*, 'king') by the refugees. Secondly there is no evidence that the title 'Son of Mary' was used by the Abyssinian church: it does not appear in the Ethiopic Qiddase. In any event the use of the title by the Abyssinian church is highly unlikely since its strong monophysite position ensured that the deity of Christ all but eclipsed his humanity.<sup>4</sup>

The third possibility is that it was borrowed from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy where the term (though not the *title*) 'Son of Mary' is employed on several occasions. The apocryphal gospel addresses the mother of Jesus as 'Lady Mary', so it may be the case that the term was taken from this source. The birth of Jesus is accompanied by Mary's retirement to a remote place under a palm-tree, Surah Maryam 19:23, as opposed to a detailed journey to Bethlehem; the only topographical reference is to Mary 'when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East', v16, but no specific geography is presented.

In the Qur'an Jesus is described as a *nabi*—Prophet (Surah Maryam 19:30: He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet...") and a *rasul*—

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4 Cotterell, 'The Christology of Islam', p. 285.

Apostle/Messenger (Surah Nisaa 4:171: O people of the Book!...Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an Apostle...), the essential distinction being that the latter is given a book and establishes a new dispensation.<sup>5</sup> This often causes confusion for Christians in discussions with Muslims. If the former address the latter and refer to 'the Gospel of Christ', the latter often think in terms of their own beliefs—that Jesus was given a book (the Injil—'Gospel') by Allah, rather than what Christians mean, either the message of Jesus or the writings of the Four Evangelists.

The reference in 3:35 to Jesus being 'a word from Allah' should not be confused with the biblical concept of the Logos. Rather, it refers to Jesus being created by a divine *fiat* rather than paternal human generation—Surah 16:40: '...We but say the word, 'Be', and it is'. Linked to this, and frequently confusing for Christians, is that Jesus is termed *Ruh'Allah* —'spirit of God'. Again, this means no more than the fact that his spirit was directly given by God through the virginal conception. It should be noted that the title 'Holy Spirit' usually refers to the Angel Gabriel, with whom Jesus was 'strengthened', Surah Baqarah 2:87.

Another description, used also in a titular sense, is *Al-Masih*—the *Mesiah*, as in Surah Al-i-Imran 3:45. However, it should be noted that the Qur'an never explains the meaning of the term—there are no references to Jesus reigning. It is usually held on the basis of Surah An-Nisa 4:157:

...they said (in boast) 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary the Apostle of Allah'; but they killed him not nor crucified him but so it was made to appear to them...158. Nay Allah raised him up unto Himself...

Muslims have different theories as to what occurred on Calvary. Usually, it is believed that a passing Jew, one of the Roman soldiers, Judas, Simon of Cyrene or even one of the disciples, usually Peter, had his features transformed by God. Others interpret 4:157 by viewing the text as rejecting the claim that the *Jews* killed Christ. Rather, *Allah* was responsible, and it only *appeared* to the Jews that they had got their way. For example, referring to Muslims who killed their foes at the battle of Badr, Surah 8:17 states 'Ye (Muslims) slew them not, but Allah slew them'.

The biblical infancy narratives are not reproduced in the Qur'an; instead we are introduced to the *wunderkind* of apocryphal gospels, with Jesus speaking in the cradle, Surah Maryam 19:19ff, as we find in the apocryphal *Gospel of the Infancy* '1... Jesus spoke... lying in His cradle...' Surah Maida 5:110 presents Jesus performing the miracle of animating clay birds: '...thou makest out of clay as it were the figure of a bird...and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird...' Again in *Infancy* 36 we read that the seven year-old Jesus: '... made figures of birds and sparrows, which flew when He told them to fly...' Similar ideas are found in the *Gospel of Thomas the Israelite*.

5 Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, pp. 30-31.

## 2. Jesus in the Shi'ite Hadith

The Sunni-Shia dispute largely arose over the succession to Muhammad. Sunnis believe that Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, was the rightful leader as he was elected by the Muslim community. In contrast, the Shia believe that Muhammad, under divine guidance, had chosen Ali to succeed him—thus over-ruling any 'democratic' choice by the community (God plus one—or even God alone—being a majority). Thereafter, the Shia believed that legitimate rule rested with the progeny of Ali.

The majority Shia denomination is the Twelvers, so-termed because they believe in Twelve 'Imams', as their hereditary *Amirs* are termed, commencing with Ali and culminating with a four year old boy, Abul-Qasim, who disappeared into a cave at Samarra, near Baghdad, in 873, the 'Lesser Occultation'. This was followed by the 'Greater Occultation', when government by his four deputies came to an end in 939, and a problem emerged of legitimate government; the 'Guardianship of the Jurist' theory (*Vilayet i-Faqih*) proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini is an attempt to resolve this question. As the 'Hidden Imam', however, Abul-Qasim continues to exercise an inner spiritual influence, watching over his followers and influencing their relationship with God. The Shia eagerly await his return from occultation.

Imams are considered as infallible, and since the Amirate was assumed by someone other than the man designated by the Prophet, the implication is that the first three Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and 'Uthman were guilty of apos-

tasy. In consequence, the Shia traditionally engaged in liturgical cursing of the first three caliphs (until Khomeini banned this), and are especially antagonistic towards Aisha. Shia greatly venerate Ali and his sons Hasan and Hussain.

There are other differences also. Apart from ritual distinctions, Shi'ites also practise *mut'ah*—temporary marriage. A contract is signed between the parties effecting 'marriage' for anything between one hour and ninety-nine years. Any child born of this relationship is recognized as the legal offspring of the father, but does not enjoy the same rights as the child of a full marriage. As a result of their persecution by Sunni elements, they sometimes engage in *taqiya*—dissimulation/concealment, and *ketman*, where they pretend to be something other than Shi'ites.

In regard to the Qur'an, the Shia, because they hold that the *active* attributes of God, such as speaking, are not eternal, believe that the Qur'an, as the 'speech' of God, is created.<sup>6</sup> To Shia, the Sunni view which holds that the Qur'an is eternal and *uncreated*, borders on polytheism.<sup>7</sup> Sunni and Shi'ite polemicists accuse each other of corrupting the *Qur'an*. Sunnis assert that the Shia believe that there is a Surah 'missing' from the Qur'an about Ali, *Surah Wilaya*, that the Shi'ites are supposed to allege was excised from the

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6 S. Husain M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London and New York: Longman, 1979), pp. 311-312.

7 Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1985.), p. 176.

Muslim holy book.<sup>8</sup> Another claim is that Shi'ites supposedly hold that another chapter Surah Nurain (forty-one verses), the 'Chapter of the Two Lights' (i.e. Muhammad and Ali) was deleted. Jafri comments:

...the text of the Qur'an as it is to be found in the *textus receptus*... is accepted wholly by the Shi'is, just as it is by the Sunnis. Thus the assertion that the Shi'is believe that a part of the Qur'an is not included in the *textus receptus* is erroneous.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, whilst Shi'ites uphold that nothing has been *added*, some have asserted that references to Ali have been excised.<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that the Qur'an holds that some of its verses are explicit whilst others are allegorical.<sup>11</sup> Shi'ites believe that the latter have a deeper, mystical meaning known only to the Imams and thus revealed in their narrations. Shi'ites also believe that the Qur'an is not in the original chronological order (a fact acknowledged by Sunnis),

which the following narration observes:

I heard Abu Jafar (AS) saying: 'No one (among ordinary people) claimed that he gathered the Quran completely in the order that was revealed by Allah except a liar; (since) no one has gathered it and memorised it completely in the order that was revealed by Allah, except Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) and the Imams after him (AS)' (*Usul al-Kafi* 607).

Apart from the Qur'an, Muslims also follow the Hadith—the traditions of Muhammad—his words, deeds and silences. The problem is that Sunnis and Shia have distinct, sometimes competing *Hadith* collections. The most important Shia collections are the two collations of Mohammad Ibne Yaqoob Abu Jafar Kulaini (d. 939), *Usool al Kafi* and *Forroh al Kafi*. Others include *Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih*, by Muhammad ibn Babuya (d. 991); *Tahdhib al-Akhkam*, by Sheikh Muhammad at-Tusi, Shaykhu't-Ta'ifa (d.1067); *Al-Istibsar*, by the same author. To get the distinctive Shia position on Jesus, we must examine the Shia Hadith.

## The Birth of Jesus

We have noted the absence of any clear reference to Bethlehem in the Qur'anic narrative, although it is said Mary went to a place in 'the east'. The Shi'ite Hadith goes further: it identifies where this place was:

...And do you know what was the river beside which Mary gave birth to Jesus ('a)?... It was the Euphrates, and beside it were date palms and grape vines. There is

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8 O believers, believe in the Prophet and in the guardian (Wali), whom We sent to guide you to the straight path...7. Glorify the praises of your Lord and 'Ali is among the witnesses. Al-Afghaane, Dr Ahmad, *The Mirage in Iran*, (Saudi Arabia: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1985, trans. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips), pp. 17-18.

9 Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, p. 312.

10 Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 172-173.

11 Surah Al-i-Imran 3:7: 'He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning)... others are allegorical...'

nothing like the grapes and date palms near the Euphrates... (*Kāfi*, 1, 478, 4)

The significance of this is that the Euphrates is by Kerbala, the Shi'ite holy city in Iraq, near where Hussein, the grandson of Muhammad was martyred. We therefore can infer an aspect of typological salvation history in this tradition. Significantly, there is nothing comparable to these narrations in the Sunni Hadith. Indeed, the treatment of Jesus in the Shia Hadith is much more fulsome than its Sunni equivalent (which is not to say that the presentation of Jesus in the Sunni Hadith is insignificant), and there are far more points of contact between Shi'ism and the Gospel presentation than the latter has with Sunni traditions (and indeed, with the relatively sparse picture of Christ in the Qur'an). Perhaps this is because Shi'ism has so much emphasis on the mediatorial role of the Twelve Imams, whom Shia believe were created from the Light of God.

There is also a strong stress on the martyrdom of Hussein by Yazid and Muawiya, whom Shia hold to be evil usurpers. Every year at the Ashura festival Shia identify with this martyrdom and express their repentance for not coming to Hussein's aid by slashing and beating themselves. Arguably, this suggests that in some form the martyrdom of Hussein was redemptive, and that Shia seek to identify with this redeeming act. Another narration links Kerbala to Jesus and thus to *Al-Qa'im*, the Twelfth Imam, whom Shia hold to be the Mahdi:

Mufaddal reported in a lengthy narration from al-Sàdiq ('a), 'Then Abu

'Abd Allah ('a) took a breath and said, 'O Mufaddal! The places on the earth boasted among themselves... Allah revealed, "... It [Karbala] is a blessed place from which Moses was called from a bush, it is a hill where Mary and Christ found refuge, at which there is a river where the head of Husayn was washed and where Mary washed Jesus ('a), and where Mary washed herself after giving birth to Jesus. It is the best place from which the Apostle of Allah ('s) ascended when he was absent, and for our *Shi'ah* there are blessings until the appearance of the *Qa'im* ('a).'" (*Bihār al-anwar*, 53, 1-11)

The birth of Jesus is also held to have had a remarkable consequence in terms of spiritual warfare on Iblis, the Devil, with events resembling the fall of Dagon before the Ark of the Covenant and the purported collapse of the idols in the Ka'aba before Muhammad after the conquest of Mecca:

Iblis came that night and it was said to him that a child had been born that night, and that there was no idol on the earth that did not fall on its face. Iblis went to the East and West in search of him. Then he found him in a room of a convent. The angels surrounded him. He tried to get close to him. The angels shouted, 'Get away!' He said to them, 'Who is his father?' They said, 'His case is like that of Adam.'... (*Bihār al-anwar*, 14, 215, 14)

It is reported that Abu 'Abd Allah al-Sàdiq ('a) said, 'The devil, may Allah curse him, used to pass through the seven heavens. When

Jesus was born, he was barred from three heavens....' (*Bihâr al-anwar*, 15, 257, 9)

### The Ministry of Jesus

According to the Shi'ite Hadith, Jesus actually started his prophetic ministry at age two (or three in some narrations):

It is reported that [Imam] Ridâ ('a) said, 'Verily Allah, the Exalted, authorised Jesus ('a) when he was two years old.' (*Bihâr al-anwar*, 14, 257, 54)

Whereas the Qur'an makes no mention of the number of the apostles, Shi'ism does indeed identify their number, and also presents a Jesus who has an ethically/geographically restricted ministry, since Islam holds that only Muhammad was chosen to be the Messenger to the whole world:

It is reported that [Imam] Bâqir ('a) said, 'Allah sent Jesus especially to the children of Israel, and his prophecy was in Jerusalem, and after him there were twelve apostles.' (*Bihar al-anwar*, 14, 250)

Despite this idea, the Shia narrations refer to an incident very familiar to Christians—the supplication of a Canaanite woman to Jesus for a miracle on behalf of her child, only in this case it is in aid of an invalid son, rather than a demonised daughter as in Matthew 15:22ff:

It is reported that a woman from Canaan brought her invalid son to Jesus, Peace he upon him. She said: 'O Prophet of God! This my son is an invalid. Pray to God for him.' He said: 'That which I have been com-

manded is only the healing of the invalids of the Children of Israel.' She said: 'O Spirit of God! Verily the dogs receive the remnants from the tables of their masters after the meal, so, avail us of that which may benefit us of your wisdom.' Then he supplicated God, the Supreme, asking for permission. Then He gave His permission, and he made him well. (*Bihar al-anwar* xiv, 253)

One interesting point of contact between Shi'ism and the Bible is that unlike the Qur'an, where mention is absent, we are presented with Jesus being tempted by Satan, and one tradition in particular resembles the Temptation in the Desert:

It is reported that Imam Sadiq ('a) said: 'Iblis came to Jesus ('a), then he said: "Do you not claim that you can revive the dead?" Jesus said: "Yes." Iblis said: "Then throw yourself down from the top of the wall." Then Jesus said: "Woe unto you! Verily the servant does not try his Lord."... (*Bihar al-anwar*, xiv, 271)

Another tradition bears some resemblance, though in a rather altered fashion, to the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman:

It has been reported that Abu 'Abd Allah [Imam Sadiq], Peace he upon him, said: 'The world took the form, for Jesus ('a), of a woman whose eyes were blue. Then he said to her: "How many have you married?" She said: "Very many." He said: "Then did they all divorce you?" She said: "No, but I killed all of them." He said: "Then woe be to the rest of your husbands! How they fail to learn from the example of the past ones!"' (*Bihar al-anwar*,

xiv, 330, 66)

There are also more hadiths which bear more than an echo of comments or actions from the Gospels, such as the following, where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples on one occasion and in another narration promises that as Allah will provide for them, they need not be anxious for their lives:

Jesus the son of Mary ('a) said: 'O assembly of Apostles! I have a request of you. Fulfill it for me.' They said: 'Your request is fulfilled, O Spirit of Allah!' Then he stood up and washed their feet. They said: 'It would have been more proper for us to have done this, O Spirit of Allah!' Then he said: 'Verily, it is more fitting for one with knowledge to serve the people. Indeed, I humbled myself only so that you may humble yourselves among the people after me, even as I have humbled myself among you.' Then Jesus ('a) said: 'Wisdom is developed by humility, not by pride, and likewise plants only grow in soft soil, not in rocks.' (*Bihar al-anwar*, ii, 62; *Al-Kafi*, vi, 37)

Al-Sayyid ibn Tawus, may Allah have mercy on him, said: I read in the Gospel that Jesus ('a) said: 'I tell you, do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or with what you will clothe your bodies. Is not the soul more excellent than food, and the body more excellent than clothes? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor store away, yet your heavenly Lord provides for them. Are you not more excellent than they?' Who among you by worrying can add a single measure to his

stature?' Then why do you worry about your clothes?' (*Bihar al-anwar*, xiv, 317)

Another Shi'ite tradition seems to reflect the longer ending of the Gospel of John 7:53-8:11 about the woman taken in adultery:

Imam al-Sadiq, Peace be upon him, said: 'Verily, a man came to Jesus the son of Mary, Peace be upon him, and said to him: "O Spirit of Allah! I have committed fornication so purify me." Then Jesus ordered the people to be called so that none should be left behind for the purification of so-and-so. Then when the people had been gathered together and the man had entered into a hole, so as to be stoned, the man in the hole called out:

"Anyone for whom Allah, the Supreme, has a punishment should not punish me." Then all the people left except for John and Jesus, Peace be upon them. Then John, Peace be upon him, approached him and said to him: "O sinner! Advise me!" Then he said to him: "Do not leave your self alone with its desires or you will perish." John, Peace be upon him, said: "Say more." He said: "Verily, do not humiliate the wrongdoer for his fault." John, Peace be upon him, said: "Say more. He said: 'Do not become angry.' John, Peace be upon him, said: "That is enough for me." (*Bihar al-anwar*, xiv, 188)

The interesting point about this text is that it presents a different picture from the biblical narrative about the ministry relationship of the two prophets. Whereas in the New Testament the only points of contact

between the two are at the Baptism and when John contacts Jesus from prison, according to Shi'ism they seem to be in a team ministry. Intriguingly, a Shi'ite hadith relates that Jesus resurrected John, but the latter preferred to return to Paradise:

It is reported that Abu 'Abd Allah [Imam Sadiq], Peace be upon him, said: 'Verily, Jesus the son of Mary, Peace be upon him, came to the tomb of John the son of Zachariah, Peace be upon him, and he asked his Lord to revive him. Then he called him, and he answered him and he came out from the grave and said to him: "What do you want from me?" And he said to him: "I want you to be friends with me as you were in this world." Then he said to him: "O Jesus! The heat of death has not yet subsided, and you want me to return to the world and the heat of death would return to me. So he Jesus left him, and he returned to his grave.'" (*Kafi iii*, 260)

As we continue down the list, we discover more traditions that clearly reflect biblical tradition, amongst them the following ethical injunctions. The first reflects Matthew 5:39 and which seems at variance with the Qur'anic command 'Fight in the cause of God those who fight you' (Surah 2:190). The second obviously echoes Matthew 5:27-28, whilst the third mirrors Matthew 7:15-17:

It is reported that Imam Sadiq, Peace be upon him, said: 'Jesus the son of Mary, Peace be upon them, said to some of his companions: "Do not do to others what you do not like others to do to you, and if

someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him your left cheek too.'" (*Bihar al-anwar*, x, 287)

Jesus ('a) said: 'You heard what was said to the people of yore, "Do not commit adultery," but I tell you, he who looks at a woman and desires her has committed adultery in his heart. If your right eye betrays you, then take it out and cast it away, for it is better for you that you destroy one of your organs than cast your entire body into the fire of hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it away, for it is better for you to destroy one of your organs than that your entire body should go to hell.' (*Bihar al-anwar*, xiv, 317)

It is reported from the Gospel: 'Beware of liars who come to you in sheep's clothing while in reality they are ravenous wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. It is not possible for a good tree to bear vicious fruit, nor for a vicious tree to bear good fruit.' (*Uddat al-da'i*, 152).

A further ethical difference between Christianity and Islam is over polygamy. It is well-known that Islam permits the marrying of up to four wives, whereas Christianity is strictly monogamous, largely based on the fact that God created one wife for Adam, not a harem; that Jesus implied support for monogamy in Matthew 19: 4-6; and that Paul emphasized monogamous marriage as a condition for eldership, e.g. 1 Timothy 3:2. The Shia Hadith answers the objection that Muhammad permitted what Jesus forbade by observing that Islam, which often

describes itself as 'The Middle Path', gave a middle way between the unlimited polygamy of the Old Testament era and the strict monogamy of Jesus by allowing limited polygyny:

It is reported in true narrations that getting married without limit [to the number of wives] was permitted in the revealed law of Moses for the sake of men's affairs; and in the revealed law of Jesus only one was permitted for the sake of women's affairs. So this revealed law [of Islam] came for the sake of both. (*'Awàlî al-La'âlî*, 1, 446)

We also find parallels in terms of Jesus instruction as to importunate prayer, and also in terms of some miracles. As we saw in the Qur'an, some miracles of Jesus therein reflect those in apocryphal traditions, and these are indeed reproduced in the Shia Hadith, but we also find some which mirror those in the Bible:

Al-Sayyid ibn Tawus, may God have mercy on him, said: 'I read in the Gospel that Jesus ('a) said: "Who among you gives his son a stone when he asks for bread? Or who hands out a snake when asked for a cloak? If despite the fact that your evil is well-known you give good gifts to your sons, then it is more fitting that your Lord should give good things to one who asks."' (*Bihar al-anwar*, xiv, 318; Sa'd al-su'ud, 56)

Al-Sayyid ibn Tawus, may God have mercy on him, said: 'I read in the Gospel that Jesus ('a) boarded a ship and his disciples were with him, when suddenly there was a great confusion in the sea, so that

the ship came near to being covered by the waves. And it was as though [Jesus ('a)] was asleep. Then his disciples came to him and awakened him and said: "O master! Save us so that we do not perish." He said to them: "O you of little faith! What has frightened you?" Then he stood up and drove away the winds, and there was a great stillness. The people marveled, and said: "How is this? Verily the winds and the sea obey him."' (*Bihar al-anwar* xiv, 266)

The Prophet ('s) said, 'Verily, Allah sent down a spread to Jesus ('a) and blessed him with a flat loaf of bread and fishes, so four thousand seven hundred people ate of it and were sated.' (*Bihar al-anwar*, 14, 249, 37).

There are several texts in the Qur'an—2:65; 5:60; 7:166 which refer to disobedient Jews who broke the law of God being punished by him through being transformed into apes and pigs—Surah Baqarah 2:65: And you know well the story of those among you who broke Sabbath. We said to them: 'Be apes—despised and hated by all.' The Shi'ite Hadith links this with Jesus and the story of the Gadarene swine:

Mughayrah narrated from Abu 'Abd Allah, and he from his father, and he from his grandfather, peace be with them, that he said, 'The transformed among the children of Adam are thirteen kinds: monkey, swine and... As for the monkeys, they were a group that came down to a town near the beach of the sea, acted unlawfully on Saturday and fished. So Allah, the Exalted, transformed them into monkeys. As for

the swine, they were a group among the children of Israel that Jesus the son of Mary ('a) cursed. So Allah, the Exalted, transformed them into swine.' (*Ilal al-Sharà'i'*, 2, 487)

## The Ascension and Return of Jesus

As we have seen, there are different Sunni theories on the Crucifixion, but it is clear that the Shi'ite Hadith, unlike its Sunni equivalent, explicitly denies that Jesus was crucified:

It is reported that Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) said, '... as for the occultation of Jesus, the Jews and the Christians are agreed that he was killed, so Allah, the Mighty and Magnificent, belied them by His saying, They did not kill nor crucify him, but it appeared to them so (4:157). Likewise, the occultation of al-Qà'im ('a), then the community will deny it.' (*Bihar al-anwar*, 51, 220, 9)

We saw that Muslims usually hold that Judas was miraculously transformed to look like Jesus and was crucified in his stead, which probably reflects the ideas of the Gnostic Basilideans about Simon of Cyrene being so-transmogrified. Whilst this notion is absent from the Sunni Hadith, it is present in the Shia narrations:

It is related in the *tafsir* attributed to Imam Hasan 'Askari that regarding the verse, and **We strengthened him with the holy spirit** (2:87) he said, 'He is Gabriel, and this was when Allah raised him through a hole in his house to heav-

en, and He cast his likeness on the one who had desired to kill him, so he was killed instead of him.' (*Bihàr al-anwar*, 14, 338, 10)

It has previously been noted that the Shia traditions like to link Jesus to Hussein, but this is also true in terms of the son-in-law of Muhammad, Ali, who was assassinated. They do so by claiming that their deaths occurred on the same day several centuries apart:

It is reported that Habîb ibn 'Amr said, 'When the Commander of the Faithful passed away, Hasan stood and spoke. He said, "O you people! On this night Jesus the son of Mary was raised."' (*Bihàr al-anwar*, 14, 335, 1)

Jesus is further linked with towering Shia figures by his parallel with the Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam. Muslims of all descriptions believe in the coming of the Mahdi as a point of faith, and Sunni traditions definitely describe him as a descendant of Muhammad, without explicitly identifying him. In contrast, Shi'ites clearly identify him with the Twelfth Imam. Like Jesus, he plays an important eschatological role towards the end of the world. The Shia concept provides a greater parallel in that like Jesus he is now in 'occultation', and Shi'ites anxiously await his return to fill the world with justice and equity. The first parallel is with the number and identity of angels who accompany the two figures:

Abu 'Abdullah ('a) said, 'It is as if I were looking at al-Qà'im ('a) outside of Najaf mounted on a horse... When he raises the flag of the Apostle of Allah ('s) thirteen thousand and thirteen angels come down to him each of whom looks to

him, and they are those who were with Noah on the ark, and they were with Abraham when he was cast into the fire, and they were with Jesus at his ascension....' (*Bihâr*, 19, 305, 47)

In temporal terms, the coming of the Mahdi and Jesus is linked, with the Mahdi returning first, then Jesus descending to aid him. After Jesus' triumphantly vanquishes the enemies of Islam, he will show admirable humility by declining to lead the *Salat* (communal Muslim prayers) in deference to the Twelfth Imam:

The Apostle of Allah said, 'How can a community perish when I am at the beginning of it, Jesus the son of Mary will be at the end of it and al-Mahdî will be in the middle of it.' (*Dalâ'il al-Imâmah*, 234)

It is reported that the Prophet ('s) said, 'Among my progeny is the Mahdi. When he emerges, Jesus the son of Mary will descend to help him, then Jesus will send him ahead and pray behind him.' (*Bihâr al-anwar*, 14, 349)

In the New Testament, we read of the 'Man of Lawlessness', often identified as the Antichrist, being slain at the Parousia of Christ 'with the breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming'. The Shia Hadith has a more literal understanding of this prediction, and a similar tradition also reveals him as a pious Muslim who brings and end to all religions save Islam:

It is reported that Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) said, 'Jesus the son of Mary is the Spirit of Allah and His Word. He was thirty-three years old in the

world. Then Allah raised him to heaven. He will descend to the earth and it is he who will kill the Antichrist (Dajjâl).' (*Tafsîr al-Qumî*, 2, 271)

It is reported from Abu 'Abd Allah from his fathers that Hasan the son of 'Alî ('a) said when disputing with the king of Byzantium, 'The life of Jesus in the world was thirty-three years. Then Allah raised him to heaven and he will descend to the earth in Damascus, and it is he who will kill the Antichrist (Dajjâl).' (*Bihâr al-anwar*, 14, 247, 27)

It is reported that, 'Jesus ('a) will descend, wearing two saffron colored robes.' According to another tradition, 'Jesus the son of Mary will descend to a hill of the Sacred Earth that is named Ithbanî [or Ithbayt]. Two yellow dresses are on him and the hair of his head is anointed and there is a lance (arm) in his hand by which he kills Dajjâl. He comes to Jerusalem while the people pray the afternoon prayer and Imâm is in front of them. Imâm comes back, but Jesus prefers him and prays behind him according to the revealed law of Muhammad. Then he will kill the swine, break the crosses, destroy the churches and temples and kill the Christians unless they believe in him.' (*'Umdah*, 430)

## Conclusion

Our venture through the Shi'ite Hadith has revealed an often surprising series of echoes from the Gospels. Of course, there remain serious differences, but it

may well be the case that the many parallels between the two religious traditions offers an opportunity for fruitful dialogue between Evangelical Christians and Shia Muslims, since as far as the Hadith goes there is much more in common with Shi'ites than there is with Sunnis. The same problems we often experience in trying to explain what we believe about Jesus, based on our understanding of the Gospel narratives, in regard to Sunnis are less to the fore when we consider relations and dialogue with the Shia. Hopefully this display of Shi'ite narrations may well aid and advance such an encounter. After all, both Shi'ites and Christians eagerly await the Second Coming of Christ.

It follows that apart from the academic dialogue, Evangelical Christians at 'ground level' interested in encountering their Shia Muslim neighbours can employ many Hadiths to explain what Christians believe more fully. In Britain some Evangelicals have been

holding 'Meetings for Better Understanding' with their Muslim neighbours, which are neither debates nor 'inter-faith' ecumenism, but meetings where each group presents what their faith community believes about a certain subject. We have seen that problems arise when we use the same phrase as Muslims but mean something different-as with the term 'the Holy Spirit'. Moreover, in the Qur'an, the narratives about Jesus sometimes have more in common with apocryphal pseudo-gospels than with the New Testament. However, since a number of Shia Hadith parallel to one degree or another narratives in the canonical gospels, the prospects for understanding are somewhat greater between Christians and Shi'ites, so perhaps in such meetings Evangelicals could employ certain Shia narrations to illustrate their points. After all, for Shia aware of such traditions, the Gospel narratives will not seem all that strange.

## **Christology in Dialogue with Muslims**

### **A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries**

I. Mark Beaumont

This book analyses Christian presentations of Christ for Muslims in the most creative periods of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the first half of the ninth century and the second half of the twentieth century. In these two periods, Christians made serious attempts to present their faith in Christ in terms that take into account Muslim perceptions of him, with a view to bridging the gap between Muslim and Christian convictions.

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# Human Rights and Islam—Is the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ already pre-programmed?

Rolf Hille

**KEYWORDS:** *United Nations, Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, liberty, revolution, Enlightenment, Sharia Law, Wahbi, Crusades, conscience*

THE case of the Christian Abdul Rahman has created quite a stir in Europe. It has made the public keenly aware anew of the question of the preservation of human rights in Islamic countries. Abdul Rahman, who converted to the Christian faith in Germany, was threatened with the death penalty according to the Islamic Sharia law in his native Afghanistan. Yet, according to western understanding, the freedom to change one's religion is one of the most fundamental, basic human rights. It is totally different, though, in the legal tradition of Islam, where, according to all the traditional schools of Islamic law, apostasy from Islam must be punished by the death penalty. How

are human rights adhered to in Islamic-dominated countries? Is the Declaration of Human Rights signed by the United Nations in 1948 universally valid for people of all cultures and continents, or are we dealing with an open ‘clash of cultures’ with regard to the acceptance and preservation of human rights?

## 1. The Declaration of Human Rights as an Outcome of Modern European History

On December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly announced the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. It consists of 30 articles and contains the important rights and basic liberties to which every citizen is entitled. The first article states: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should

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act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' The new and unique part of this legal declaration of the United Nations is that here, for the first time, global rights are preserved to protect every individual against government or the state and society. Thus, almost every article begins characteristically with the words: 'Every human being has the right to...' or 'No person may...' Human rights strengthen the resolve of the individual against inhumane treatment by government despotism. It is crucial that, through the United Nations, human rights are also thereby anchored in international law.

### The History of Political Liberties in England

The origins of human rights go back to Medieval England. On July 15, 1215, King John Lackland issued the so-called 'Magna Charta Libertatum' on a piece of meadow property between Windsor and Staines. While not all subjects were granted individual liberties in this document, nevertheless the privileges of the nobility guaranteed by the Magna Carta were later developed into liberties for the Parliament. Finally, in the course of the further history of the law, every individual citizen gradually came to enjoy personal civil liberties. The equality of all before the law, the protection from arbitrary arrest, as well as the right to a fair court trial and legally authoritative rules for levying and collecting taxes are these kinds of basic rights. In connection with the so-called 'Habeas Corpus Acts', this development finally led to the 'Bill of Rights' in the year 1689.

### The Important Impetus Given By the Reformation

The Lutheran as well as the Reformed parts of the Protestant Reformation had a vitally important influence on the achievement of religious freedom and freedom of conscience. Luther gave an impressive example of what a single individual can accomplish in questions of faith and religion against a world church with the pope as its head and against the representative of political rule, namely, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

At first, the division of the Roman Western Church caused major religious wars. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) brought immeasurable suffering upon Germany through the intolerant conflict between the religious confessions (churches) and the political power blocs allied with them. The so-called Augsburg Religious Peace Accord of 1525 was only a temporary solution in this context. Each respective princely ruler was granted the possibility of choosing between one or the other of the two large religious faiths (Protestantism or Catholicism) as the official religion of his territorial dominion-region. Citizens were left only with the right to emigrate from their homeland for religious reasons. In a long and painful process, Europeans have had to learn that religious questions cannot be decided by political power.

### The First Implementation of Human Rights in the U.S.A.

As a fundamental part of English Law, the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the 'Bill of Rights' had a profound effect on the

creation of the Constitution of the United States of America and its culture of human rights. Through this, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, proclaimed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, was influenced by the spirit of the European Enlightenment. It combined the call for tolerance with the Reformation understanding of religious freedom and freedom of conscience and the Puritan yearning for individual life expression. Thus, in the New World we find the first democratic constitution of the Modern Age with the establishment of basic civil rights from the spirit of Christian enlightenment.

### Human Rights Under an Atheistic Sign in Revolutionary France

Only thirteen years after the American colonies broke away from the British kingdom, the French Revolution broke out in 1789. The newly-founded Republic of France also placed the 'Basic Human Rights and Rights of Citizens' at the beginning of its constitution. While the American Revolution was basically characterized by a Christian-based Enlightenment, the fight of French revolutionaries against the 'ancien régime' of the nobility and the clergy as well as against the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI proved itself to be influenced increasingly by atheistic ideologies.

When Louis XVI was executed four years later, the royal families of Europe all became enemies of the new republic. The state churches of Europe were turned upside down as well by the fact that in France, the veneration of a 'higher being', namely, that of reason,

was declared as the new religion. But, German Protestantism had been, in fact, closely tied to the royal families since the Reformation. Often, the prince also served as the bishop of the respective regional state church. Therefore, it is easily understandable that the shocking attendant circumstances of the French Revolution discredited the human rights ideas propagated with it. As a result, the freedom movements in Europe were able to achieve human rights only gradually over a very difficult and arduous process in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### The Central Ideas of the Philosophy of Enlightenment Philosophy

Historically and philosophically crucial for political freedom in Europe was the belief that man, as an autonomous subject, was the master of his own destiny. This enlightened conviction was combined with the idea of a civil society which had made the state, as the Leviathan monster, to be the problem. In opposing the predominance of the state against the overabundant power of the state, the political philosophy of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes sought to achieve and to guarantee individual liberties against the state through social contracts.

Present-day European culture feeds on these sources. With this, the strict separation of church and state or religion and politics has become the foundation of modern, democratic states. In view of cultural and societal pluralism, the ideal of tolerance is combined, with respect to content, with these legal and constitutional foundations.

## 2. The Islamic Understanding of Human Rights and Its Problems<sup>1</sup>

Islamic culture, which experienced a flourishing period of intellectual development between the 9th and the 12th centuries, did not take part in the struggle of European peoples in the Modern Age for the development of human rights.

In the present day, there are three Islamic schools of thought which take very different positions on the matter of human rights.

For one, there is the traditional-conservative positive of the Ulema, the position of the Islamic legal scholars who reject human rights as western thought. They stabilize the rule of Islamic dictatorships. Secondly, there are fundamentalist groups that appeal to human rights for Islam for propaganda purposes. They claim that human rights are not an achievement of the European Enlightenment, but of Islam. In their legal practice, they stand for a rule of law and government oriented strictly to the Sharia, in spite of all formal appeals to human rights.

Finally, there is the numerically small 'Arab Organization for the Defense of Human Rights' whose adherents are tolerated only in a few Arab countries like Egypt and Morocco. In general, they have little other choice but to leave their native

countries in order to actively pursue their aims from abroad.

### The Strict Rejection of Human Rights on the Part of Islamic Orthodoxy

The Wahbi-sanctioned oil monarchy of Saudi Arabia represents a Medieval form of Islam. It has not signed the UN Declaration on Human Rights, justifying this stance on the grounds it would contradict Islam. Instead, proponents of this view presuppose Islamic categories for the entirety of humanity and their goal is to make the world Islamic ('Islamize') either through 'peaceful Saudi jihad with oil dollars' or, in extreme cases, to accomplish it through the 'jihad of terrorism'. An important basic assumption for this is the belief that, through the revelation of Allah to Mohammed, which is fixed for all eternity in the Qu'ran, political questions are to be decided not by using reason, but by divine law.

Islamic Shiites also argue from this position. As the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini once declared: 'What the Europeans call human rights is none other than a collection of corrupt rules worked out by Zionists to destroy the true religion of Islam.' His successor, Ali Khanei, disparaged the UN Declaration of Human Rights as 'Satan's hocus-pocus'. Behind this polemic lies the radical Islamic division of the world into good and evil, believers and unbelievers, into the Dar Al-Islam (House of Islam) and the Dar Al-Harb (House of War).

What makes it so difficult for Muslims to recognize and to practise universal human rights? First of all, the Islamic world understands itself as the

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<sup>1</sup> The basic ideas of the Islamic understanding of human rights outlined here are explained in depth in Bassam Tibi's German work, *Im Schatten Allahs. Der Islam und die Menschenrechte* (Ullstein-Taschenbuch 36388, Düsseldorf, 2003).

'*khair umma*' (Surah 3,110), that is, as the best society on earth. From this standpoint, there are great inner barriers to recognizing the cultural achievements of non-Muslims and to learning from them. But, this is necessary for the Islamic world with regard to the European-influenced tradition of human rights. Instead, all non-Muslim influenced civilizations are devalued as *djahiliyya*, that is, as 'the age of ignorance without knowledge of the revelation of God to Muhammed'. Cultural achievements such as the Declaration of Human Rights are therefore considered of less value compared to Islam.

From this, specific areas of conflict result between Islamic culture and the European tradition of human rights. Even today, the Islamic understanding of government is still based on the thinking of Ibn Taimiyya, a Medieval Islamic legal scholar who held that the political ruler as religious leader (imam) is alone responsible before God, even when he is unjust. He is considered to be 'Allah's shadow'. Because political rule is granted by God alone and not by the people, no human institution can remove a political leader from office.

Therefore, the typically democratic control of political power never takes place and the principle of the separation of powers also does not exist. Instead, Islamic fundamentalists base their government on the system of the *shura* according to surah 37, which says: 'And they perform their duties by mutual consent.' This concept of mutual consent or advice is declared by orthodox Muslims to be the real form of democracy without having to consider the modern legal structures of democracy.

Another basic point of conflict is the lack of religious freedom. The person who falls away from the faith (apostatizes: '*murtad*') is threatened with the death penalty unless the apostate Muslim shows regret and returns to Islam. Apostasy is considered the worst 'offense against Allah's law'. It is not human rights, then, which are in the centre, but the law of God as the Sharia defines it. No human being is authorized to question the punishment laid out by Allah in the Qu'ran. In this context, when Islamic apologists quote the Qur'anic verse surah 2,256: 'no compulsion in religion', this has nothing to do with the free choice of religious affiliation. This context simply deals with a limited right to discuss the source texts of Sunni Islam, namely, the Qu'ran and the Hadith, that is, the legal tradition of the words and deeds of the prophet, in a prescribed format.

A further important contradiction to the modern understanding of human rights relates to the question of the equality between man and woman, which does not exist in Islam. Women may inherit only half of what men are entitled to and they may not get a divorce. Basically, they are considered below men. Surah 4,11 states: 'Men are above women because Allah honored (distinguished) them, i.e., men (by nature above them, i.e., women).' In verse 34 of this surah, it says: 'If you fear that (some women) rebel, then warn them. If this doesn't help, then shun them in the marriage bed and beat them.' These kinds of ordinances of the Sharia are fundamentally irreconcilable with the understand of individual human rights.

## The Sharia in Contradiction to Human Rights

Of course, it is conceivable that a philosophical tradition could have arisen during the Islamic Middle Ages between the 9th and the 12th centuries that could have led to similar results to those of the European Enlightenment. If rationalist theologians influenced by Greek philosophical traditions, who saw no contradiction between reason and faith and between the subjectiveness or human free will and the sovereignty of Allah, had been able to assert themselves, then Islamic history would have taken a very different course. But, Sufi Muslims, that is, Islamic mystics, as well as rationalistic thinkers were accused of *kufur* (unbelief) and some of them were even executed. Even in our day, Sheik Al-Ghazali declared before the Supreme Court of Egypt: 'Anyone who publicly stands against the application of Sharia law is guilty of apostasy and must be put to death...; anyone who puts this kind of apostate to death will not be punished!'

One is completely justified in asking what kind of understanding of human rights is behind it when the same Islamic fundamentalists publicly declare: 'We Muslims possess the final revelation and with it we have had everything, including the tradition of human rights, before the Europeans even began to have anything at all.' From this, the question may be raised concerning the nature of the Sharia, which stands in principal conflict with the European understanding of human rights.

The average viewer of the western media typically associates the word 'Sharia' with spectacular measures of

punishment, such as the amputation of the right hand of a thief or the stoning of an unfaithful wife. But, no such law book with the title 'Sharia' actually exists. Rather, the Sharia is a post-Qu'ranic legal system which is, in principle, subject to interpretation. This interpretation is done by religious jurists of different schools of law who each claim that their interpretation of the Sharia has divine character. On the contrary, the califs of classical Islam well understood how to distinguish between Sharia and the tasks of the *siyasa*, that is, of the public business of government. In practice, they did not act according to the doctrinal principles of the Sharia, but, more pragmatically, oriented to the exigencies of government (decisions based on reason), that is, the *siyasa*.

In Sunni Islam, the legal schools have the status of confessions or denominations. Thus, the law is tied to the faith and to the adherence to a school of Islamic law, but not to a political institution. The construction of modern states in the Islamic world necessarily had to bring with it the introduction of a codified system of law and, therefore, it stands closely connected with the introduction of national states. Islamic fundamentalists today interpret the national state order with its institutions as an expression of cultural imperialism and see in their return to the Sharia an important step towards a lessening of western influences.

In Islamic history, the Sharia was very quickly interpreted and expanded as a code of civil and criminal law beyond the general obligation to morality. Today, the Sharia is even considered as the basis for the political order

of an Islamic state and its economic structure. Every Muslim, regardless of the culture in which he lives, is required to observe the morality prescribed by Sharia. Of course, as soon as there is an Islamic-governed state, the Sharia is also considered as the basis of modern penal law and government order.

Because of this, we must question whether the loyalty of Muslim immigrants to the German constitution can be limited to the time in which they constitute a minority. If a Muslim majority came into being, then the Basic Law would logically have to be replaced by the Sharia.

### The Universal Claims to Validity by Human Rights and the Self-Understanding of Islam

Do human rights have universal validity from the Muslim point of view? The announcement of an 'Islamic Declaration of Human Rights' by Islamic groups in Paris and London brings the deep tension here to full expression. On the one hand, they explain that there is a genuine Islam origin of these rights, but these are basically not valid for all people, but only for Muslims.

Philosophically and historically, this is a contrast to the European concept of natural rights that state that these rights are granted to each individual person based on his individuality as a human being, regardless of religious and political convictions, social status, race, gender, etc. This understanding of human rights presupposes a global context for its validity, without calling, at the same time, the cultural and societal diversity of humanity into question. Furthermore, under the sign

of the universal validity of human rights, it is possible carefully to respect particular cultures. However, as long as Islam understands itself as the universally valid standard by which humanity is defined at all in terms of its humanness, human rights will present themselves as an unfriendly rival.

A further difficulty is the a-historical self-understanding of Islam. People do not want to admit that the present situation of Muslim countries affects and changes them anew. As long as one onesidedly defines Islam only from the study of the primary source texts, namely, the Qu'ran and the Hadith, important religious and sociological questions are passed over and one comes to the construct of a *homo islamicus* (the idealized Islamic view of man). As documents at the first publication of the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights in 1981 show, this leads, then, to an a-historical idea of the original Islamic background of human rights. 'Fourteen hundred years ago Islam laid the legal basis for human rights in their entirety. With these rights, Islam combined all necessary guarantees for their protection. Islam created society according to these rights and thereby offered the basis for their realization.'

Here, a construct is presented by Islamic orthodoxy as reality, something that never existed as such in the 1400-year history of Islam. The modern European ideas that stand behind human rights, such as the principles of reason and subjectivity, are eliminated in this way. This is clearly presented by the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights as follows: 'We proceed from the assumption that, without divine leading, human reason is incapable of

finding the right way for a good life.' Instead of admitting that their own religion and culture are also changed by the respective conditions of history and society, they construct an Islamic ideal, which is ultimately based on a projective interpretation of Islamic source texts, which pretends to anticipate the ideas of human rights.

### Obligations (Duties) Instead of Rights

Giving lip service to human rights while quietly still assenting to the Sharia-based concept of *faraid* (duties, obligations) is self-delusion. The European understanding of civil rights speaks of natural rights that guarantee every individual personal freedom over against the state and society. But, the Islamic definition of human rights implies a further, critical area of conflict. The collective, the *umma*, always takes precedence over the individual.

### 3. Cultural and Political Consequences for the Western World

Structural globalization in the modern world is increasing, but this has not led to greater international solidarity. On the contrary, fragmentation is only getting worse. The diversity and efficiency of current means of communication and transportation only enhance the cultural fragmentation of humanity. We are edging up to a situation where cultures must now be clearly recognized in their distinctiveness. The regional and cultural contrasts, by their explosive nature, even lead to hate.

### The Moral and Political Disaster of the Balkan Wars for Europe

In view of the long historical memory of Muslims, the genocide committed against their fellow Muslims by Serb ethnofundamentalists during the Balkan wars of 1992 to 1995 has proven to be very disastrous. Since that time, Islamic fundamentalists have warned immigrants to Europe that similar things could happen to them at the hands of Christians as happened to Bosnian Muslims. This creates resistance rather than willingness to integrate. In Muslim understanding, Bosnian Muslims are considered part of the worldwide Islamic community (*umma*). The fate they suffered could lead to collective vengeance according to the principle of 'a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...' (cf. Surah 5,45). One could view the terrorist attacks on Washington and on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 as evidence for this kind of an act of revenge.

With respect to the massacre in the Balkans, the European Union was not able to take care of their geopolitical business of protecting the human rights of Muslim Bosnians. Now, Islamic extremists point out that western governments make only a rhetorical appeal to human rights, but do the exact opposite of it. In doing so, the term human rights is degraded in their eyes to the level of pure political opportunism. Even the U.S prison camp at Guantanamo on the island of Cuba and the demeaning acts of American and British soldiers on Muslim prisoners in Iraq understandably fuel this resentment.

## No Special Rights for an Islamic Ghetto, but a Strong, Defensible Democracy

In the face of the serious and manifold offences to human rights in the world-wide context, a consensus that goes beyond cultures and an institutional safeguard of human rights should be worked out. While human rights are universal rights, this does not mean demanding a multi-cultural society. The model of a multi-cultural society leads to cultural relativism and the cheapening of life. Rather, a basic consensus for human rights is needed in view of contradictory claims to truth and the ever-increasing acute, ideological danger to humanity in the 21st century. It must be clear here that world peace can be realized only as a democratic peace, while political theocracies only lead humanity permanently into ideological and, ultimately, military confrontation.

Human rights are, in principle, indivisible as universal rights. One cannot, as happens time and again among the European Islamic diaspora, make practical and one-sided use of civil rights, in order at the same time then to criticize the values that stand behind these rights. One may not also stand for the slogan that, for Islamic states, there is freedom for 'different development' when the use of torture and the disregard for freedom of expression are meant. The Sharia as a collective special law for Islamic minorities is not acceptable anywhere in the world. An Islamic ghetto where the Sharia is law means existential danger for Europe.

Indeed, in view of the ever-increasing pressure of immigration and a modern mass exodus from North Africa to

Europe, a strong democracy which is able to protect and defend itself is necessary with respect to Diaspora Islamism. Here, even Germans are too easily pushed into a defensive position by Islamists, who appeal directly to the guilty conscience of Christians because of the Crusades. It is also not enough to fight rightist extremism in Germany, as is evident, for example, in hostile prejudice against foreigners, and, at the same time, avoid confrontation with Islamic fundamentalists.

The French and the English, who are more self-confident, are seen as much more offensive and courageous than Germans. They proudly appeal to the ideas of the American and the French revolutions to oppose Islamism (radical Islamic fundamentalism). The cultural roots of the modern European age do not lead our neighbors to ignorant nationalism, but, instead, to self-confident and constitutional patriotism that knows that political and cultural modernity cannot co-exist side by side with the Islamic Sharia because they are simply incompatible. Therefore, Europeans must promote globally the process of democratization and stand for the universal recognition of human rights.

The dialogue with Islam must, then, be perceived as a two-fold strategy: namely, as a way to strengthen liberal and democratic tendencies among Muslims and, at the same time, as a rejection of totalitarian, Islamic fundamentalism. There is no freedom for those who would do away with freedom, no tolerance for those who misuse western freedoms and values to preach intolerance. In the Muslim countries of Africa, it is evident that there are indeed cultural convergences

between local traditions and Islam. The West must stand for the genuinely European form of an enlightened Islam in a much broader sense. Muslims can practise their religion unencumbered in free Europe, build mosques, and preserve cultural institutions. But, these institutions may never be misused as instruments of Islamic indoctrination.

#### 4. Human Rights from a Biblical, Theological Perspective

Muslim legal scholars derive their understanding of the Sharia directly from the Qu'ran and the Hadith, the primary sources for Islam. It is evident in this that the Sharia's dogma of duties is not compatible with human rights in the sense of enlightened Europe. But, what is the relationship between Christianity and human rights? Even in the history of Christianity, there have been terrible violations of human rights in the form of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and religiously-motivated wars. Old Testament divine law, the tradition of Israel's 'holy wars', and theocracy in general were appealed to as justifications.

But, in this context, it was overlooked that, with Jesus Christ and the New Testament, which tells us about his life and his teachings, an entirely new situation has arisen. With Jesus, the political understanding of theoc-

racy, in particular, Old Testament theocracy, has come to an end. Standing before Pontius Pilate, the representative of Roman imperial power, Christ emphasized that his Kingdom is not of this world. He is the King of truth, yet he categorically rejects using violent means to spread faith in him. Jesus respects the freedom of conscience of every person. Inner convictions arise from the Word. They cannot and may not be forced from the outside. Thus, Jesus is fundamentally different from Muhammed in his preaching and practice.

Although the Church in Europe has had an intense and continuous conflict with the goals and ideals of the Enlightenment, which cannot be related in further detail here for lack of space, it is still clear that the primary source of Christianity, namely, the New Testament, speaking for itself, not only tolerates the call for human rights, but also, in fact, itself demands it.

In following Jesus Christ, his church stands for personal tolerance, that is, it respects the free decision of conscience and promotes the rights of free assembly, freedom of speech, and religious freedom, including the possibility of changing religions. With respect to universal human rights, a Christianity strictly oriented to Jesus is, in fact, in inner agreement with the Enlightenment. Moreover, with the commandment to love one's enemy, it even goes well beyond it.

# On Prayer and Forgiveness

James Danaher

**KEYWORDS:** *Presence, words, love, attention, Spirit, flesh, sonship, sin, righteousness, Lord's Prayer*

We get our idea of prayer, not from the Gospels, but from our parents and other adult members of our culture and language community. That idea of prayer centres on words. As children we are told to say our prayers. The pastor says, 'let us pray' and words follow. We come to think that prayer is all about words. I was at a prayer meeting one day and when we began to pray there was a short silence. Before a minute had passed one of the men blurted out, 'If we're not going to pray, I have better things to do.' Our culture has led us to believe that prayer is about words, but Jesus says that it is not about words. He says,

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him (Matt. 6:7-8 (NRSV)).

Paul also reinforces this idea that prayer is not about words when he says, 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17). It seems obvious that Paul does not expect us to be constantly mumbling words. Augustine says something very similar.

When we pray there is no need of speech, that is of articulate words, except perhaps as priests use words to give a sign of what is in their minds, not that God may hear, but that men may hear and, being put in remembrance, may with some consent be brought into dependence on God.<sup>1</sup>

So sometimes prayer may involve words but it is not essentially about words. Augustine makes the point that the words we use in prayer are not for God who knows our hearts and is not in need of the mediacy of words.

Mother Teresa was once asked

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *De Magistro* 1.2, in *The Library of Christian Classics*. Vol VI. *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 70.

what she said when she prayed? She responded by saying, that she did not say anything, she listened. She was then asked what God said when she listened? She said, 'he doesn't say anything, he listens.' God listening to us listen to him. What a beautiful picture of prayer. It is like two lovers who simply return a gaze without saying a word. This is the communion that is prayer. It is openness before God. As such, some people never pray in spite of their mumbling words that we call prayers. Other people have lives that are prayers. Jesus' life was certainly a prayer in that he was constantly open to God. As his disciples, our lives should be prayers as well, but how do we achieve such a state of prayer?

### On Being Present

One thing that is essential in order for us to be open before God is that we be present. Being present means that we are here and nowhere else. In order to truly communicate with any person, divine or human, we must be present to that other person. Intimate communication with another person requires that our attention must be focused on that other person. The Spanish philosopher, Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), went so far as to claim that love itself was essentially a matter of attention abnormally fixed: 'Falling in love, initially, is no more than this: attention abnormally fastened upon another person.'<sup>2</sup>

His claim was that within the consciousness of 'the lover his beloved... possesses a constant presence'.<sup>3</sup> This certainly seems true of the love that exists between people who are romantically *in love*, but I think it is also descriptive of other forms of love as well. In fact, it seems to be what is at the base of all true affection and what we most desire in our relationships. The affection children desire from their parents largely involves attention, in the same way that the affection we desire in a romantic relationship largely involves attention. Even friendships, if they are to be meaningful, require that we are capable of fixing our attention upon our friend, and if someone we consider a friend is unwilling to give us their attention, we feel we may have been mistaken in considering them a friend in the first place. This is also true in regard to our love relationship with God. Our attention is what God most desires from us.

Unfortunately, the ability of most human beings to really give their attention and be truly present to anyone, including God, is very limited. Because of this, we are a constant disappointment to our spouses, children, and friends. My wife's disappointment in me, as a lover, usually involves my lack of attention. 'You're not here' is her complaint. And although I try to assure her that I was listening and can even repeat what she said, her complaint is still true. I may have been listening, but I was not attentive. My wife knows that to be truly loved is a matter of attention, and she is frustrated by my

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<sup>2</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme* (Trans. Toby Talbot; New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1957), p. 64.

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<sup>3</sup> Gasset, *On Love*, p. 65.

lack of attention. Small children seem instinctively to know the same thing and evidence it by clamouring to their mothers, 'Watch me!'

It is certainly difficult to be attentive and present in today's world. One reason for that is that in today's world, if we are to be successful, we have to plan. We have to be focused upon the future rather than the here and now. The further we climb the ladder of success, the more we need to plan and be looking to the next thing we have to do. Because of this, successful people are seldom truly present and end up living in the future. Their attention is always somewhere else and seldom here and now. For this reason many successful people are not very good at relationships, since real relationships, whether they be with God or other human beings, require that we be present to that other person. When people are constantly planning the next thing they have to do, it is very difficult for them to be present enough to have truly intimate relationships.

By contrast, there are other people who are seldom present because they live in the past. They have difficulty being present because of something, either good or bad, in the past that possesses their attention and keeps them from being present. In order to pray and be open to God, we must be present and escape the pull of both past and future.

### Being in the Spirit

The other necessary condition for prayer, or true openness before God, is to be 'in the spirit' and not 'in the flesh'. Jesus, like Paul, uses the metaphor *flesh and spirit*. We might

immediately assume that in those instances where *flesh* is contrasted with *spirit* it is a metaphor for the physical body in contrast to the immaterial mind or spirit. It is easy to make such an assumption since our western culture has a long tradition of distinguishing mind from body and elevating mind or spirit while demeaning the physical body. But what Paul identifies as the works of the flesh include things like: idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, sedition, and envy.<sup>4</sup> These are not works done by the body.

The New International Version of the Bible translates flesh (σάρξ) as 'sinful nature'. Of course, that is as much a metaphor as 'flesh', so what is this flesh or sinful nature? The one thing it is not is that which causes God to turn away from us. Jesus quite clearly tells us, in too many places to mention, that it is not God who turns away from us but we who turn away from God. In the parable of the banquet,<sup>5</sup> it is not the fact of being uninvited that keeps people from the banquet but the fact that they had better places to be. More than anything else, this seems to be our sinful nature. It is the fact that we would rather find life and meaning apart from God and all that he has for us. As such, the flesh is the self that we create rather than the self that God has created.

This does not mean that the flesh and spirit are two different selves. The spirit is simply a deeper self. It is who we are at the core of our being. By con-

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<sup>4</sup> Gal. 5:19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 22:2-5.

trast, the flesh is the outer self that we create as we identify with those things that become our source of meaning and purpose rather than God. The flesh is what develops when we begin to find life and meaning in the very things of which Jesus warns us of in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is our real sin and what separates us from God. It is that we spend trivial existences with our attention focused upon all of the little gods of this world. Our real sin is that instead being who Jesus tells us we are, we create our own identity by attaching ourselves to the things of this world and attempting to draw life and meaning from them. Jesus repeatedly tells us that God is our (your) father and we are his beloved daughters and sons,<sup>6</sup> but we ignore that identity and instead attempt to create an identity for ourselves apart from God.

The things of which Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount are the very things from which we create such an identity. They are the things from which we attempt to draw energy and life—the things from which we derive meaning and purpose for our lives. For many of us, what provides energy and vitality is the anger and lust that Jesus warns us against and tells us are as deadly as murder and adultery.<sup>7</sup> Equally, our oaths, our sense of justice, and even our enemies<sup>8</sup> provide many with purpose and motivation that fuels

their lives rather than God.

Perhaps even more sinister are our good works and religious activities,<sup>9</sup> which may look pious, but, when they rather than God are our source of identity, they are the very things that separate us from God. Many think that they will find identity and happiness in earthly treasure,<sup>10</sup> while others become possessed by worry and it is worry that occupies all of their thoughts rather than God.<sup>11</sup> These are the things that identify us and make us who we are in other people's eyes, and most often our own eyes as well. They are, however, the very things that separate us from God and our true identity.

In God's eyes, we are his beloved daughters and sons. He does not love us because of the greatness of our charitable or pious works,<sup>12</sup> nor does he love our ability to keep our oaths.<sup>13</sup> These may be the reasons other people love us, but God is not like other people. As a matter of fact, the things for which other people love us are often the very things that keep us from God. They keep us from God because they capture our attention and cause us to focus on them to such an extent that we become oblivious to God's presence in our lives. As we form an identity in the flesh by finding the source of our energy and life in the things of which Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount, we lose sight of who we are at the very core of our being. Our atten-

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6 Matt. 5:16; 5:45; 6:1; 6:8-9; 6:15; 7:1; 10:20; 10:29; 18:14; 23:9; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:36; 12:30; John 20:17.

7 Matt. 5:21-30.

8 Matt. 5:33-48.

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9 Matt. 6:1-18.

10 Matt. 6:19-24.

11 Matt. 6:25-34.

12 Matt. 6:1-4.

13 Matt. 5:33-37.

tion becomes fixed upon those things that give rise to the flesh, and thus we no longer live out the ultimate reality of who we are as God's beloved children. This is our real sin, it is the fact that we have assumed a false identity.

In order to get to a place of prayer, we have to assume our true identity rather than the one we have created for ourselves. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. This is what it means to be in the spirit rather than the flesh. To be 'in the *spirit*' is to be at the core of our being. This is our real self, the self that will live on after the flesh is long dead and forgotten. This is the self that is loved by God. Before we did anything right or wrong we were his creation, and he loved us because we were his.

We discover this true identity by living as Jesus lived. The way Jesus lived was with God in all of his thoughts. He did not identify with, nor allow himself to be occupied by, those things that he warns us of in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead he lived a life in a constant awareness that he was God's beloved son. He tells us to follow him and live in that same sonship. This is who we are at the core of our being. This is who we are in our spirit, and it is out of this core of our being that God wishes us to live.

Sin and righteousness are essentially matters of belonging. Do we belong to God or the things of this world? Our natural tendency is to take our identity from the world. Kingdom living occurs when we repent, and turn from those things that create the illusion that is the false self, and instead found our identity upon who we are in God. This is what it means to live in the spirit rather than the flesh. It is also what it means to live a life of prayer.

Jesus gives us instruction on how to pray or be present to God from the core of our being. He says, when you pray, 'go into your room and shut the door' (Matt. 6:6 NRSV). Of course, 'go into your room and shut the door' is a metaphor that could imply several things. The one thing it implies is that when we pray, we should not be seen by others. The most important reason for not being seen by others is because when we first learn to pray it is extremely difficult in the presence of others. When we are in the presence of others we are almost always 'in the flesh' and seldom who we really are at the core of our being. Augustine, in commenting about this teaching of Jesus, says that what this metaphor of going into our room and shutting the door means is that we are to go into the innermost part of our being.

We have been commanded to pray in closed chambers, by which is meant our inmost mind, for no other reason than that God does not seek to be reminded or taught by our speech in order that he may give us what we desire. He who speaks gives by articulate sounds an external sign of what he wants. But God is to be sought and prayed to in the secret place... which is called 'the inner man.' This he wants to be his temple.<sup>14</sup>

In my room, or the King James Version says 'closet', I have the best chance to find that inner man of which Augustine speaks. In my closet I have the best chance to be in my spirit rather than my flesh because in my closet

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14 Augustine, p. 70.

there is no one with whom I am angry or no one after whom I lust. My enemies are not there and my good works and religious activities no longer identify me. In my closet, my earthly treasure does not establish my worth, and I have the opportunity to assume my true identity as who Jesus says I am. That is, that God is my father and I am his son. This is my true identity, and it is the place of prayer—the place from which I can be present to God from the core of my being.

### The Purpose of Prayer

From this place of prayer, we get a strange assurance that all will be well no matter what problems face us. From this place of prayer, God communicates to us that he is listening, and he does so, as Mother Teresa tells us, without using words. But as wonderful as such things are, they are not the ultimate purpose of prayer. The ultimate purpose of prayer is that it is only from such a place that our capacity for forgiveness increases.

In Jesus' teaching on prayer from the Sermon on the Mount, after the verses that have come to be known as the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says,

If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15 NRSV).

The Lord's Prayer conveniently ends with the 13th verse and does not include the above quoted verses 14 and 15. We like to think that the Christian life is about God blessing us, and blessing us because of something good

about us. But God loves us because of his goodness and not ours. We enter heaven because of forgiveness and not goodness.

Of course, if we are not forgiving of others, we will not wish to spend eternity with a forgiving God. If we do not want to spend eternity with people who we had good reason to hate, heaven will not be very heavenly. We may like to think that people we hate are not going to be in heaven. We believe that in heaven there will only be good people like us. To believe that, however, is to not understand the nature of the God that Jesus reveals.

The God of the Gospels is all about forgiveness. We all come to God because we have been forgiven, but we will not want to share eternity with others whom God has forgiven if we have not forgiven them. Even if God did permit us to enter heaven with unforgiveness, it would not be very heavenly once we discover that there are other sinners there that God has forgiven but we have not. Without forgiveness, we want separation from such people. Separation from such people, however, requires separation from God as well.

However, most of us have a different picture of heaven. We imagine that Heaven will be a place where all of our desires will be fulfilled. But God is not interested in satisfying our desires. His interest is to transform us and make us into the likeness of his Son—which, of course, is in our ultimate interest as well. Being like Jesus, however, is not about being sinless. In fact, the good religious people of Jesus' day saw Jesus as a sinner. He seemed to deliberately break the Jewish law, which they held as God-given. Likewise, he did not abstain from drinking and asso-

ciating with disreputable people. Overall, he did not appear to be interested in creating an image of sinlessness, in spite of all our efforts to make him into our idea of a religious figure. Instead, Jesus manifests the holiness of God through his ability to forgive the very ones who tortured and put him to death. Furthermore, he calls us to follow him in that forgiveness. Thus, wanting to be like Jesus is first and foremost a desire to be forgiving as Jesus was forgiving. This is what it means to be holy as he was holy.

Of course, our capacity for such forgiveness is very limited. The *cliché*, 'to err is human, to forgive divine' may not be a *cliché* at all. When we are offended, we desire the offending party to pay for the offence. The idea of suffering an offence for the sake of restoring relationship with the person who offended us is certainly unappealing. If the offence is serious enough, we do not desire restoration at all, especially since we will have to suffer something in order to accomplish that restoration. That, however, is what forgiveness is, and it is the revelation of the divine that Jesus offers from the cross.

I remember a story about a woman who had been raped and her entire family killed by a gang of soldiers. Years later, while working as a nurse, a soldier was brought to her hospital on the brink of death. The nurse recognized him as the officer in charge of the men who raped her and killed her family. After eight days, the woman nursed the man back to health. Upon regaining consciousness, he was told that the only reason he was alive was because of the loving care of this nurse. Upon recognizing her, he asked why she would do such a thing? She replied by

telling him that she followed one who said, 'love your enemies'.<sup>15</sup>

Now in spite of how grand her act of love and forgiveness seems, it does not approach the love and forgiveness of God. Indeed, in order for it to replicate God's love and forgiveness, the nurse would have to be willing to marry the soldier and take him as her beloved just as Jesus from the cross asks his Father to forgive his torturers so they might share eternity with him.

We marvel at such forgiveness in Jesus or anyone else who can replicate it in whatever small measure; but although we admire such forgiveness in others, it is not something we wish for ourselves. We much prefer to follow Jesus by being good rather than forgiving. Indeed, the idea of the innocent paying for the guilty, for the sake of restoration, is not only unappealing but it may be something that is impossible and out of our reach.

Given our all-too-human nature, true forgiveness of anything more than trivial offences may be beyond what is possible. Our nature is certainly limited in regard to forgiveness, but as limited as it may be, our capacity for forgiveness does increase with prayer. That is because true prayer, like true forgiveness, is not a work of the flesh. Indeed, it is not a work at all but rather a letting go. Furthermore, the thing we let go of in both prayer and forgiveness is the flesh itself. The flesh is what holds most of our hurts and it is what must be let go of with forgiveness. Of course, the more substantial the flesh, and the more we live exclusively in the

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15 Matt. 5:44.

flesh, the more impossible it is to let go of that which seems to be the totality of who we are.

I recently heard a very famous person say that one of his life principles was to always get even. Do not let any offence go unpunished. If we live exclusively in the flesh that certainly makes sense. If our identity is founded exclusively upon our sense of justice<sup>16</sup> and our earthly treasure,<sup>17</sup> or our good name and reputation,<sup>18</sup> any threat to such things are threats to our very being and the threat must be destroyed. If we are able, however, to get to that deeper self—that self that we are before God—the offence against our flesh has little meaning because our flesh has little meaning.

This is one of the reasons that Jesus tells us that we must be like little children.<sup>19</sup> We must return to that core of our being—that core of who we were before we created for ourselves that flesh that we hold so dear.

We must realize that there are some wounds that need to be forgiven that are not flesh wounds. Some wounds are deep wounds that have damaged the core of our being. Things like childhood sexual abuse or other childhood traumas may have occurred before we

had the chance to develop a flesh. Such deep wounds may require more in the way of forgiveness than simply letting go of the flesh. Even in such cases, however, the solution is a forgiveness that requires that we return to the core of our being. Indeed, very often the person who has received a wound to the core of their being has a very well developed flesh since they wish to be protected from any future deep wounds. But deep wounds, like flesh wounds, still require forgiveness, and forgiveness requires the kind of return to our core that is found in prayer. The kind of forgiveness that is so essential to the Christian life can be accomplished only when we are present to God from the core of our being—when we are in a place of prayer.

If we are to be like Jesus and forgive as he forgave, we must live a life of prayer—a life of being present to God from the core of our being. It is only from the security of who we are in God at the core of our being that we can experience the letting go that is so essential to real forgiveness. As long as we are in the flesh, the best we can do is to make a pretence of forgiveness. Forgiveness in the flesh is simply a work of the flesh. It puffs up and makes us into religious people with more reason to be proud of our flesh. Real forgiveness comes only when we are in God's presence and at the core of our being—real forgiveness takes place only in that deep place of prayer.

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16 Matt. 5:38-42.

17 Matt. 6:19-21.

18 Matt. 6:1-4.

19 Matt. 18:3.

## Books Reviewed

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*Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition.*

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## Book Reviews

ERT (2006) 30:4, 370-371

### **Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition.**

**Hans Boersma**

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

ISBN: 0-8010-2720-9

Hb pp 288 bibliog index

*Reviewed by Terry A. Larm, Theological Centre for Asia, Singapore*

Hans Boersma is an amiable and charismatic person. He is willing to engage carefully with postmodern and feminist critiques of the atonement, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of a Reformed and evangelical theologian.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part discusses hospitality, violence, and election. The second part begins with a good discussion of metaphors before covering three of the main atonement theories. Lastly, it deals with how hospitality works itself out in the church and in the public sphere.

Instead of trying to deny the violence inherent in the system, Boersma recognizes that the cross necessarily involves violence. What he does deny is that violence is in the very heart of God. The cross demonstrates the real heart of God, divine hospitality, in spite of the violence entailed. In order to accomplish this he maintains that not all violence is evil. Exclusion, for example, is a form of violence entangled in hospitality. Absolute

hospitality, even for God, cannot occur on this side of the eschaton. But is absolute hospitality ever achievable without some form of universal salvation? Boersma pre-emptively attacks this by pointing out that God is not the only one who chooses.

The problem for Calvinism, as Boersma sees it, is that the Calvinist version of election places violence at the heart of God's character. The Calvinist God of unconditional election turns out to be a tyrant who forces the stranger inside. Alternatively, Boersma strives to show that hospitality is more fundamental to the nature of God than violence. Yet, at the same time he refuses to expunge the presence of violence from the biblical narrative. In Christ, God's hospitality prevails over violence.

Boersma deals extensively with theories that try to show that the cross is a non-violent act. He rejects these theories in favour of his own theory of limited violence. He has a whole chapter on René Girard's theory of mimetic violence and also rejects that option. However, he never deals with Jesus' own sayings that lead some Mennonites and others to eschew the violence of the cross.

Boersma devotes one chapter each to three major atonement theories: the moral influence theory, penal substitution—including satisfaction theories—and his favourite, Christus Victor. However, he does not simply adopt Aulén's theory without critique. He draws more from Irenaeus and N. T. Wright than Aulén. Boersma does not, however, engage with either Eastern Orthodox or some Catholic theories of the atonement. For Boersma, Irenaeus's theory of recapitulation underlies all three models of the atonement that he addresses. Because the incarnation is part of recapitulation, Christ gains victory via his life and death. He also becomes our perfect

teacher—imparting true knowledge—and serves as our moral example—persuading us to imitate him.

It is in the church, as the presence of Christ, where the hospitality of God is worked out in the world today. The church brings God's hospitality through the preaching of the word, by means of the sacraments, and, more surprisingly, through penance and suffering. However, God's hospitality extends beyond the bounds of the church. Boersma sides with liberation theologians, like Sobrino and Gutiérrez, in their call for opposition to injustice even if he does not support their revolutionary activities.

In the end—I mean the eschatological end—God's hospitality will result in the end of violence. It is then, and only then, that God's hospitality will be unconditional. And more than that, the eschatological hospitality of God will never end.

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**The Glory of the Atonement:  
Biblical Historical & Practical  
Perspectives; Essays in Honor of  
Roger Nicole.**

Charles E. Hill and Frank A.  
James III (editors)

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press,  
2004

ISBN 0-8308-2689-0

Pb, pp 495 bibliog, indices

*Reviewed by Don McLellan, Garden City  
College of Ministries, Brisbane, Australia.*

Suddenly, after a hiatus of around fifteen years before the turn of the millennium, we are swamped with books on the atone-

ment. It is perhaps not surprising that the milestone turned people's interest back to what has historically been regarded as the central theme of Christianity, the cross of Christ, and its theological implications.

Earlier in this decade a number of books were published from publishing houses usually associated with evangelicalism openly raising objections to penal substitution. This was a new departure. Until then the greatest challenges mostly arose from within the ranks of whatever is left of liberalism. So it was surprising to read some of its objections to substitutionary atonement now coming from the pens of evangelical contributors: that it is basically repugnant; that it is directly responsible for a violent culture within Christendom; that it is morally reprehensible and logically flawed.

Such assertions appear to be gaining traction, so it was a great relief to find that the contributors to this volume continue to support substitutionary atonement. The book is a festschrift to Roger Nicole to which he himself contributed, which is a little unusual. Substitutionary atonement has been one of his passions throughout his long life, and he has often defended it vigorously. Now he, and others of his generation such as Leon Morris and John Stott, must pass on the torch, and it is encouraging to find a significant section of the next generation of evangelical theologians and biblical scholars still running with it.

Festschriften can be very uneven in content and quality, especially when contributors are given carte blanche. This one was carefully planned, and the editors chose their contributors not just because they knew and appreciated Nicole, but because they are experts in the areas from which specific contributions were desired. The result is an impressive vol-

ume which could work as a textbook for a course on the atonement. While there is some unevenness, it is hard to find serious fault. Some may lament its unrelenting support for penal substitution and its lack of any essay on a different view, but those voices may be read elsewhere, and citations to them are clearly referenced.

Nor is this merely a regurgitation of old stuff. Penal substitution is a difficult doctrine, far too easily expressed in crudities and absurdities, and every generation can find reasons to reject it as even the apostle Paul noted (1 Cor. 1:22). But the cross is something in which to glory, and uniformly these writers find glory in it. Just as uniformly, they articulate its importance and its nuances in terms that allow today's thinker to take it on board. A few highlights:

Don Carson's essay on Romans 3:21-26 (*ERT* 28:4, pp. 345-362) is a must-read for anyone in danger of being seduced by clever new exegeses of this passage. For example, the phrase *dia pisteos Iesou Christou* ('through faith in Jesus Christ') has come in for some fancy efforts recently, suggesting that the genitive should be read either as a possessive ('through the faith of Jesus Christ') or more commonly a subjective ('through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ'). Some use what they consider to be assured findings of the latter to reconfigure everything the NT says about atonement. Carson's detailed exegesis and calm syntactical logic effectively sees off such adventures. It would be nice to see more complete volumes responding to this kind of thinking.

Bruce McCormack's essay on Barth's ontological presuppositions draws attention to the all-important Trinitarian assumptions that lie behind soundologies of the atonement. Reject or revise the Nicene view of the Trinity, and atonement through the cross quickly becomes

nonsensical, or turns the Father into a monster.

Roger Nicole's own essay rounds off the volume nicely. He sees substitution as 'the major linchpin of the doctrine of atonement', because if Christ has not died in the place of the sinner, none of the other benefits claimed of the cross can arise. Nicole then goes on to examine the other two main kinds of atonement theory, moral influence and *Christus victor*, and shows that while there is biblical merit in each, they can stand only against the backdrop of penal substitution.

The book is a must-read for anyone who may be thinking that it is time to move the locus of evangelical Christianity from the cross to something else, whether the resurrection or Pentecost or the incarnation. Devalue the cross, and Christianity quickly becomes just another religion. The book is also highly recommended for theologians and biblical scholars, for Bible and theological college libraries, and for preachers and interested lay people who want good contemporary material on the atonement.

ERT (2006) 30:4, 373-375

**Saving Power: Theories of  
Atonement and Forms of the  
Church**

**Peter Schmiechen.**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005

ISBN 0-8028-2985-6

Pb pp 371 Index

*Reviewed by James R. A. Merrick,  
Deerfield, IL, USA*

Peter Schmiechen believes that the integrity and vitality of the church's faith and proclamation, rooted as they are in Christ's cross, are bound up with her

clarity concerning atonement theories. Thus he intends to forge a tighter connection between atonement *theory* and ecclesial *practice*.

Schmiechen supplies four overarching categories under which he locates ten theories. First, 'Christ Died for Us' consists of sacrifice in Hebrews; Martin Luther's theology of justification; and penal substitution as exemplified by Charles Hodge. In each case he emphasizes that the 'evangelical nature' of atonement demands that God is the agent and humanity is the recipient. Hence, Hebrews describes Jesus dying to decisively cover human sin and procure new covenant fellowship. Justification is God creating a new status for humanity. Penal substitution, however, is 'contrary to the evangelical message in the New Testament' (p. 112) since it inverts this direction; the 'idea of satisfaction or appeasement of God is simply not biblical' (p. 111).

'Liberation,' the next category, looks to Irenaeus and liberation theology as examples. Deliverance from sin, death, cosmic evil powers, socio-economic oppression, racism, and sexism are important elements of atonement according to Schmiechen. Christ's saving power frees humanity from her plight by recreating a new humanity and eschatologically reordering societal structures.

The 'Purposes of God' is comprised of: creation's renewal in Athanasius; creation's restoration in Anselm; and Christ as creation's goal in Friedrich Schleiermacher. These three theories link God's plan of redemption with creation. Thus, the project of creation is restored through Jesus's incarnation, death, and resurrection (Athanasius), the created universe's moral order is reestablished through Christ's sacrificial satisfaction of God's honor (Anselm), and God's *telos* for

humanity is fulfilled in Jesus's life unto God (Schleiermacher).

Reconciliation is the final category. Here, Schmiechen examines: Richard Niebuhr's understanding of Christ as the way to the knowledge of God; Christ as the reconciler in 1 Corinthians; and the atonement as a potent portrayal of God's love with Peter Abelard, John Wesley, and Jürgen Moltmann as examples. Niebuhr elucidates a framework of Christ imparting a pattern of lived ethical existence to humanity. Schmiechen contends that in 1 Corinthians 1-2 Paul views the world as in constant spiritual warfare, violently battling for power. In a way similar to René Girard's theory of mimetic violence, Schmiechen explains that this theory has Christ on the cross bearing the world's cyclical violence and thereby shattering worldly power structures. Christ thus establishes a new mode of existence, a heavenly power structure, and a community of reconciliation where fragmented humanity is reunited. Lastly, the cross is a decisive expression of God's love in that Christ enters into solidarity with humanity and suffers for her redemption, displaying the extent of God's love.

The author concludes by reiterating that instead of one theory of atonement or Gustaf Aulén's threefold typology, the Scriptures and traditions affirm a multiplicity of theories. A theory must be recognized on the basis of its 'basic image' and 'must be able to correlate the saving power of Christ with a specific human need' (p. 314). Each of the above theories meets this goal, though penal substitution is in need of revision. Thus, Schmiechen believes that the church, to be effective in its mission, must recognize the array of ways the human plight is remedied by Christ's saving power. And this through appreciating the variety of atonement models.

Schmiechen's work has much worthy of commendation. The diversity of examples from which he draws is particularly impressive. This, coupled with the union of atonement theories and church practices, make for a fruitful account of this core doctrine. Yet, there are some points of questionable research or selective appropriation of sources. For instance, Schmiechen's comment that it is 'difficult to find general support among biblical scholars that...Hebrew sacrifices involves satisfaction of God' (p. 111) gives one cause for pause since many OT scholars see sacrifice as directed toward God as well as toward sin. Moreover, his belief that sacrifice in Hebrews is not penal ignores commentators like Scott Hahn who interpret 9.15-22 as describing Jesus as suffering the covenantal sanction which stood against Israel for her failure to keep the Mosaic covenant. Furthermore, the statement that 'nowhere [in Scripture] is there a fully developed idea of Jesus' death being the payment of a penalty offered to God' (p. 111) is misleading, Isaiah 53.4-5 and Galatians 3.10-13 being glaring omissions.

His handling of Calvin and Luther is also problematic. With Calvin, he puts a false dichotomy of God either being the agent or recipient of atonement, failing to see that Calvin held God to be both. With Luther, Schmiechen goes the way of Aulén, asserting that 'Luther never speaks of punishment as a vicarious act assumed by Jesus to satisfy the demands of the Law' (pp. 74-75). Yet Luther scholars (e.g. Ted Peters and Timothy George) have often criticized this reading, arguing that Luther added penal aspects to Anselm's satisfaction theory. Some have even tagged Luther as penal substitution's originator (e.g. Wolfhart Pannenberg). Lastly, absent in the discus-

sion of the background to Athanasius's atonement theology is engagement with the standard texts in patristic studies (those of Richard Hanson and Lewis Ayres). Thus the description is rather dated.

Despite the weaknesses, the survey of theories and the diversity of examples make *Saving Power* a fine introductory text on atonement theology. Its integration of theory and practice also make it a helpful resource for both the laity and the clergy.

ERT (2006) 30:4, 375-376

### Beyond the Bible—Moving from Scripture to Theology

I. Howard Marshall

Grand Rapids Baker Academic 2004

ISBN 0-8010-2775-6

Pb, pp136 indices

*Reviewed by Bob Haskell, USA.*

In this book Dr. Marshall makes a case for allowing the Christian worldview itself to push theology and practice beyond the Bible. For Marshall the world has changed too much over the last 2000 years for us to pretend that we can simply apply everything the Bible teaches directly and without limitations. His solution, going 'beyond the Bible', means allowing the core biblical message to determine which parts of the biblical account ought to be normative. In fact, he says, the church has always gone beyond the Bible, and rightly so. For example, the Bible itself does not condemn slavery, but it did not take the historical church long to condemn it. This view of slavery is now overwhelmingly shared by Christians of every tradition.

There are other areas that concern him as well. Can people in the 21st century really

accept a God who commanded genocide? Obviously Christians everywhere are opposed to genocide. What about the suffering of hell? Christians are split on this one. But, says Marshall, how can civilized people accept the brutal concept of eternal punishment? What about the place of women in the church and society?

His approach to these matters is reminiscent of Rudolf Bultmann's 'modern man's impasse' where technology and science had so changed the 20th century individual that it was no longer possible for him to accept the fantastic universe of the Bible. Bultmann's solution was to find the root meaning behind all the crazy stories of the Bible (to demythologize them) and translate that core teaching into modern categories. But although Marshall mentions Bultmann positively, he is not really doing the same thing. Marshall does posit a situation in which some of the ideas of Scripture are not 'believable', but the reality that makes these ideas difficult to believe is the Christian worldview itself, which has transcended the cultural limitations in which the Bible was written. Just as a biblical world view led to a stricter definition of the morality of slavery than the Bible itself presents, so the Christian worldview has also, argues Marshall, led to a re-evaluation of other biblical principles such as eternal punishment, the role of women in the church and genocide.

Marshall sees this kind of development at work in the Bible itself. The Bible goes beyond itself. He offers various examples of practices and laws from Leviticus that were set aside in the New Testament, and he also notes that New Testament writers at times read new significance into Old Testament passages, inserting meaning that could not have been intended by the original author. He claims that this kind of progression from doctrine to doctrine,

done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ought to be our model for doing theology as well.

It seems difficult to deny Marshall's claim that the church has in some ways moved beyond the Bible, and it seems equally true that it has done so as a result of root biblical principles. But one area worth exploring here is just how much the Bible really does approve of certain practices that the church has 'gone beyond'. The Exodus, for example, is a powerful polemic against slavery and Paul is also aware of the problematic nature of the institution, but he seems to hold back his criticism because of the exigencies of the cultural and historical moment. It might be argued, then, that the Bible comes out much more explicitly on some of these troubling matters than Marshall is acknowledging and that the answer is not necessarily to go 'beyond the Bible', but to work harder at getting the full biblical view of them. Many, for another example, do not think they have to go outside of the Bible to find an egalitarian view of the role of women.

The book concludes with two response chapters, one by Kevin Vanhoozer and another by Stanley Porter. Vanhoozer commends 'the Marshall plan' as a proposal that works toward the much needed integration of exegesis and theology, but he also wonders if Marshall is bringing some preconceived notions about God 'to the exegetical table'. Porter's chapter is a very useful outline of five hermeneutical models for New Testament exegesis, in which he commends dynamic equivalence (a term more often used in Bible translation) as the matrix in which to discuss the questions raised by Dr. Marshall.

Controversial hermeneutics aside, Marshall makes a strong case for working out the premises of the Bible to their logical conclusion, and that is a welcome challenge.

ERT (2006) 30:4, 376-378

### Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions.

Terrance L. Tiessen

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004

ISBN 0-8308-2747-1

Pb, pp511, glossary, appendices, indices.

*Reviewed by Roger Hedlund, Chennai, India*

Can the unevangelised be saved? If so, how? *Who Can Be Saved?* is a book about accessibility of salvation. The author approaches the question through the methodology of dogmatics. His search is thoroughly systematic and well-informed, orthodox yet open to possibilities of new light. Consistent with Reformed Theology (and Saint Paul), he affirms that 'Apart from revelation, our speculations about the divine are only "foolishness" and in fact contradict true knowledge of God'. Nevertheless the book is a departure from the worn exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist paradigm and gives relief from the medieval Calvinist-Arminian debate. New categories stimulate thought: monargist, synergist, ecclesiocentrist, implicit-explicit faith. An entire chapter concerning salvation of infants is highly recommended. The possibility of a moment of death encounter with Jesus Christ is a stimulating proposal, regardless of one's theological preferences.

The author's discussion of the views of Luther and Wesley is informed by historical and Reformed theology. The author is a Reformed theologian who struggles to avoid the pitfalls of double predestination and is attracted to Wesley. The conclusion rescues God from the charge of unjustly condemning sinners who were

not given sufficient grace to be able to believe and be saved. Conversion is ongoing, and the normative biblical model is Peter, not Paul! Thoroughly evangelical, Tiessen insists on the essentiality of conversion, but the timing of salvation may be different from that of conversion—a proposition pregnant for debate among contemporary Baptists and others. The author posits the view that ‘God’s saving program has been wider than his building of the covenant communities’. If so, this gives scope for ‘pre-Christians’ in the Old Testament era and beyond who are being drawn toward the Light in Christ.

This book is bound to cause controversy. The author dares to raise questions many would rather not consider, and refuses to be bound by stereotyped categories of the twentieth century. Critics are bound to misunderstand. Whatever some may think, Tiessen’s soteriology is clearly *Christocentric*. That it is not ecclesiocentric is evident. Yet the author upholds God’s intention that all the saved should experience fellowship in the new covenant community.

The possibility of salvation for the ancestors is a particularly relevant issue in Asia. The question is addressed at several points. Citing Bavinck and other sources, the author considers the work of the Holy Spirit outside the church. Melchizedek is one of several biblical examples of salvation outside the Old Testament covenant. That believers are distinguished from *Christians* is a stimulating as well as provocative point. With Newbigin the author notes the existence of devout Hindus and Muslims having an experience of God, but also that the most religious are often those who reject the gospel. The author argues the necessity of mission informed by theology. Based on careful exegesis, the second half of the book becomes a biblical theology of mis-

sion. The church is God’s instrument for mission in the world and for nurture of new believers in Christ. Can other religions nurture disciples of Jesus? Tiessen quotes Miriam Adeney: ‘But if we enlarge the question to whether someone can grow up to maturity in Christ in another religious context, whether someone can become a full-fledged disciple of Christ while worshiping in another faith, then the limitation of other religions and the value of missionary work become clearer.’

Insights from anthropology are appreciated, accommodation and assimilation without religious syncretism are welcomed. Translation entails making appropriate choices. A helpful evaluation of the gift of prophecy is offered. Scriptures of other religions are appreciated, but they are not revelatory. Hindu *bhakti* is a potential bridge to the gospel. But the fallacy of fulfillment theory is pointed out. The issues explored are current and relevant in Asia and Africa as well as in the West. The work is well-documented, the author has made use of a wide array of sources. The only weakness is in an occasional use of secondary sources when the original documents are generally available. Some readers might find the 500 pages a bit ponderous. These detractions aside, *Who Can Be Saved?* is a welcome instrument for theologizing in a religious world. The author’s conclusion is a carefully hedged accessibility. This is bound to bring flack from some, but the author provides an entire chapter to help us discern common grace in the religions (ch.17). More important, he offers a three-fold test to discern God at work: truth, morality, and orientation. The third point is profound, for only God can turn our hearts toward him. The author of this stimulating book has his PhD from the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. He is Professor of Theology and Ethics at

Providence Theological Seminary,  
Manitoba, Canada.

ERT (2006) 30:4, 378-380

**Discerning the Spirit(s):  
A Pentecostal-Charismatic  
Contribution to Christian  
Theology of Religions**

**Amos Yong**

(Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic  
Press, 2000);

**Journal of Pentecostal Theology  
Supplement Series 20  
ISBN 0-8010-2770-5  
Pb, pp 392 indices**

*Reviewed by Tony Richie, Knoxville.*

(This review was previously published by  
*Pneuma Review* (Fall 2005), pp. 68-71)

Amos Yong is a leading Pentecostal-Charismatic theologian. This book helps explain why. There are a number of reasons why I think pastors, church leaders, missionaries, teachers, and students should read it. First, it skilfully grapples from a Pentecostal perspective with one of the most important issues of our day: a theology regarding rival religions. Surely post 9/11 Christianity has a responsibility to address the issue of religions as a contemporary priority? Second, the missiological and evangelistic impulse and experience of a burgeoning and blossoming Pentecostalism demands sound biblical and theological underpinnings for continuing and increasing depth and effectiveness. Third, globalization and modernization of contemporary society, making the world our neighbour, confronts Christianity with an unprecedented opportunity to apply the Golden Rule of Christ (Mt. 7:12), an application that cannot occur without understanding ourselves in

relation to religious others.

Dr. Yong, the son of first generation converts from Buddhism to Pentecostal Christianity, has perhaps been providentially prepared to help Pentecostalism develop a viable theology of religions. His work in an undeniably difficult area, a virtual theological minefield, is instructive and inspiring. A creative combination of testimony, history, philosophy, and theology, *Discerning the Spirit(s)* is at times challenging and stretching reading but always rewarding and worthwhile. Personal narratives show that theology of religions is not an abstract intellectual exercise for Amos Yong, but a burning personal passion. That spiritual passion is communicated through this writing and can be contagious to the reader!

Yong's work wrestles with issues raised by implications for Pentecostal theology by the 'primal spirituality' thesis of Harvard theologian Harvey Cox in *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (NY: Addison-Wesley, 1995). Yong approaches theology of religions pneumatologically without trying to 'untangle the christological debates' (p. 25). He suggests that the generally negative rhetoric of Pentecostals against other religions belies an underlying attitude of openness. Yong's own adventurous attitude shows when this work is said to set forth a 'pneumatology of quest' (p. 32). He sketches the history of Christian theological reflection on non-Christian religions in light of the reality of contemporary religious pluralism, calling attention to tensions between competing truth claims in the context of universality and particularity issues raised regarding Jesus Christ. He suggests pneumatological approaches to theology of religions have an advantage in perceiving the Holy Spirit as cos-

mic divine presence, but argues that the problem of discernment becomes paramount.

He then advances his idea of 'pneumatological imagination,' or a Pentecostal-Charismatic experience of and orientation toward the Holy Spirit. Yong describes the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and its historical responses to religions, and argues why Pentecostals need and should desire a theology of religions. He revises Cox's primal spirituality categories to lift up religious experience, utility, and cosmology. A dialogical case study between Pentecostalism and Brazilian Umbanda religion is a bold application of Yong's pneumatological approach.

Finally, he expounds some important supportive theses for Pentecostal-Charismatic theology of religions, sets forth some provisional theological implications arising from this study, and offers recommendations for further research. Throughout Yong relies on a wide ranging grasp of a massive amount of relevant material as well as his own Christian experience of the Spirit and respect for the teachings and traditions of the Pentecostal-Charismatic community of faith.

Dr. Yong has written a distinctively Pentecostal Christian theology of religions. Progress in theology of religions often halts because of apparently irresolvable issues regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Yong wishes to by-pass this Christological impasse by re-directing attention to pneumatology. He does not deny that this is only a temporary tactic. He himself insists on the necessity and desirability of a robust trinitarian theology of religions developing the ancient idea of the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father (pp. 311, 315-16). But setting aside Christology, even tem-

porarily, may be a sticking point for some Pentecostals.

Viewing Christ as divine particularity (historic) and the Spirit as divine universality (cosmic) doubtless has much to offer Pentecostal theology of religions. An artificial isolation, however, of Christology and pneumatology may be neither plausible nor possible. For one thing, Christology is not without universality (cf. Jn. 1:1) and pneumatology is not without particularity (cf. Rom. 8: 11). More importantly, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Gal. 4:6). Any attempt to separate or isolate Christ and the Spirit is doomed to distortion. Yong's complaint about the lacuna in theology of religions regarding pneumatology is certainly legitimate. (The imbalance applies to many other areas as well!) His concept of pneumatological imagination is an exceedingly helpful corrective.

But though Yong is himself absolutely orthodox, his isolationist approach may open up unwarranted and unwanted unorthodoxies breezily by-passing Christ altogether. Better than either isolating Christology, an obvious majority mistake of the past, or isolating pneumatology, a possible Pentecostal mistake of the present, is a simultaneous, systematic exegesis and exploration of both Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit in relation to the religions. Though this might not erase the Christological impasse from the books, it may indeed show surprising results as the old, lop-sided Christology with its longstanding pneumatological lacuna is replaced with a more complete, comprehensive trinitarian perspective.

The goal is to realize that in some sense the Spirit 'is at work in the religions, shaping and re-shaping them, or else mollifying their resisting spirits', and to challenge us to follow the Spirit's 'lead and work with him to do the same' (p. 324). I

heartily agree. More awareness of the Spirit's work in the world and in the world's religions has extremely important implications for Christian theology of religions. Yong is not unaware of or ambiguous about possible dangers in this project. As a spiritual safeguard, and in top Pentecostal style, he develops a practical doctrine of discernment of God's presence or absence and also of the presence of the demonic in religions (pp. 312-15, 321-22). He does not stop with telling us the Spirit may be found working throughout the world, which is, after all, God's creation, or even in the midst of non-Christian religions, with their mixture of the divine, human, and demonic. He goes on to help us identify when and where the Spirit is present and active, or not, and when and where demonic presence and activity

occurs. His is not a naive or nostalgic theology of religions but a practical, workable, and fully Pentecostal approach.

Yong's description of his work as a 'pneumatology of quest' requires remembering (pp. 32, 314; 323). The adventure is open-ended. He humbly acknowledges the provisional nature of his work, submitting it to peers for perusal and possible adjustments. He has left himself, and us, room to move and grow and change as the Spirit leads. In his own life, he allows uncertainty derived from the Spirit's mystery to co-exist (comparatively!) comfortably with faith's verity (Jn. 3:8; cf. p. 310). Readers are invited to join in this Holy Spirit-guided quest. One could hardly do better than by tackling *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.

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Myung Sung-Hoon and Hong Young-Gi: *Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*. Carlisle: Regnum/Paternoster, 2003. ISBN 1-870345-45-2. Pb, 217.

This book from the Regnum Studies in Mission series is a handy manual giving an overall presentation of the main facts about its subject, including seven chapters in Part 2 summarising Yonggi Cho's Church Growth Seminars; they cover topics like prayer, preaching, cell groups, leadership and mass media. Part 1 has four interviews, (including one with Yonggi Cho himself and another with Peter Wagner), giving interesting insights on the growth of the church and Cho's ministry. The final section comprises five essays evaluating Cho's influence on Korea and its churches, his preaching style and the cell group movement. A product of the Institute for Church Growth, this book is hagiographic to the extreme and marred by poor translation from the original Korean and a lack of indices, but it is useful to have so much information by and from one of the world's most outstanding churches and its leader in about 200 pages of text. No one reading it could fail to be impressed with Cho's consistent commitment to his calling and the unique context in which he has ministered now for almost fifty years.

Reviewed by David Parker, Editor of *Evangelical Review of Theology*

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EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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