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of discerning the obedience of faith*



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Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

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Editorial: Faith, Words and Deeds

We commence this issue and this new volume with papers on two practical issues. First Jeffery Gates (USA), provides justification for personal self-care within a Christian perspective while encouraging love for God and others, and discouraging self-indulgence. He argues that we should practise a type of self-care that imitates God's care for himself and people, and that results in honour to God and in benefits to ourselves and others.

We then turn to a short paper by Thomas K. Johnson (Czech Republic), on how we need to integrate two opposite trends – believing in human dignity by helping those in need, and doing so in such a way as not to treat them simply as objects of charity, which in fact destroys their dignity.

After these two theologically founded discussions we turn to three biblical studies. To start with, Michael Parsons (UK), helps us understand some passages on 'difficult' deaths by examining John Calvin's approach to them. In the cases of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (NT) and Uzzah and Uriah (OT), we are introduced to the ways the reformer reads the texts to resolve their pastoral and moral problems. Then Mario Phillip (Trinidad), takes us to the difficult pastoral problem of those believers who persist in sin and a church with its leaders who are compliant in such sin. The text is 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, with a focus especially on verse 5, where the offender is to be 'given over to Satan'. We are shown how this instruction relates to the church and the individual, and how

it is aimed at restoration and the ongoing positive witness of the gospel. The final article in this trio by Michael Haller (Switzerland), takes up the important Christian theme of forgiveness, but contrasts it with Islamic teaching; Matthew 6 and Surah 3 are the foci of the study which includes literary analysis, theological reflection and practical outcomes, showing that formal similarities do not necessarily point to substantial similarities on this vital matter.

Our section of book reviews is expanded in this issue with two longer 'review articles', both relating, in different ways, to the early church. Thomas Schirmmacher (Germany), looks at some publications dealing with Constantine the Great, showing the need for accurate and sensitively handled analysis of historical events and personages for understanding modern developments. The second by Frederik Herzberg (Germany), focuses on the continued significance of the early formularies by examining a famous modern day criticism of them. He reviews a book on John Hick (famous for his *The Myth of God Incarnate*), in which the author, David S. Nah (USA), provides a 'powerful, yet irenic defence of two-natures Christology'. Both of these articles reinforce our need for careful understanding of historical developments in order to maintain and enhance our faith today – a faith that is to be nurtured and expressed in word and deed as much now as ever.

Thomas Schirmmacher, General Editor
David Parker, Executive Editor

Self-Care: A Christian Perspective

Jeffery Gates

OUR ATTITUDE AND behaviour toward ourselves are very significant to us, but many of us who are Christians are not sure how we should think about and behave toward ourselves.¹ If we have never examined the subject, we tend to view ourselves according to our temperament, personality, upbringing, education, and church background. We might take an overly negative view of ourselves or see ourselves more positively than we should.²

We may emphasize that we are in the image of God without also considering our own sinfulness,³ or we may stress the evil part of ourselves, equate affirming ourselves with selfishness, and think that love toward others should be without any advantage to

ourselves or without any thought of ourselves.⁴ We might even put ourselves down.⁵ Furthermore, pastors and Christian counsellors can give bad advice to their congregants and clients because they lack understanding of the place of self in the Christian life.⁶ The following scenario demonstrates this confusion about the place of self in the Christian life.

Imagine a thirty year old woman with severe depression coming to a

1 I wish to thank Dr. Chuck Dolph, Senior Professor of Psychology at Cedarville University, Dr. Dennis Sullivan, Director of the Center of Bioethics at Cedarville University, Dan Eads, missionary to Tanzania, and my wife for helpful suggestions in this article.

2 P. E. Staes, *Positive Self-Regard and Authentic Morality* (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1972), 57; J. McGrath and A. McGrath, *Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 14.

3 See, for example, R. Schuller, *Self-esteem: The New Reformation* (New York: Jove, 1985).

4 J. R. W. Stott, 'Must I Really Love Myself?', *Christianity Today* 22/15 (1978), 34-35; J. R. W. Stott, 'Am I Supposed to Love Myself Or Hate Myself? The Cross Points a Way Between Self-Love and Self-Denial', *Christianity Today* 28/7 (1984), 26; See also J. E. Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, and Self-Image* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1986), 111; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1.2, trans. G. W. Bromiley, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, (eds.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 388; P. Brownback, *The Danger of Self-Love: Reexamining a Popular Myth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 155; T. J. Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy*, (Chorley, UK: 10 Publishing, 2012).

5 D. F. Weaver, *Self-Love and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4-7.

6 Weaver, *Self-Love*, 1.

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pastor for counselling. While the immediate cause of her depression is a second pregnancy, she has suffered from feelings of inadequacy and episodes of depression as long as she can remember. Her parents had negative attitudes about the body and sex and taught her that all physical suffering was the result of personal sin. These incited her to feel inferior, 'dirty', and wicked during this pregnancy. When growing up, she had been a model child and acted as a mother to the other children in her family. Though she received little affirmation from her father, she had followed his teaching that it was always wrong for her to do what she wished. Instead of pursuing normal interests as an adolescent, she took care of the home while her mother took courses at college and her father taught as a professor of philosophy. Rather than fulfil her dream of going to college and being trained as a musician, she stayed at home after her high school graduation to care for the younger children. When the next younger sister, her father's favourite child, was ready for college, the woman worked for two years to help her sister financially.

Now that she was married with a seven year old daughter, she felt she should give up her own music and devote her time to training her daughter to be a concert pianist. She also felt ashamed of herself when her husband showed any displeasure about meals, the appearance of herself or their home, or her sexual performance—regardless of the cause. She asked the pastor why she was so miserable when she had given up so much to help oth-

ers.⁷ What advice should the pastor or counsellor give to this woman? After briefly discussing the meaning of self-care, we will look at the motivations for self-care and explore practical suggestions that could help the woman in the scenario.

Before discussing self-care, we need to define what it means. A definition of self-care may be derived from the second greatest commandment and Ephesians 5.⁸ According to the second great commandment, people should care for others as they should care for themselves. When Moses, Jesus, Paul, and James made self-care a model for care of others (Lev 19:18; Mk 12:31; Rom 13:9; Jas 2:8), they legitimized it and helped define what it means. They were not to indulge themselves, but to care for themselves. As we should care for others rather than encourage their self-indulgence, so we should care for ourselves rather than indulge ourselves.

In Ephesians 5:28-29, the apostle Paul told husbands to love their wives as their own bodies and to nourish and care for their wives' physical and spiritual development, just as they did for themselves. The goal of a husband's love for his wife is not for her self-indulgence but for her ultimate well-being, that is, to encourage whatever helps this and to protect from whatever hinders this. If a husband

⁷ R. H. Bonthius, *Christian Paths to Self-Acceptance* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948), 126-129.

⁸ C. E. Sheely, *The Christian Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1949), 123; J. Piper, 'Self-Love and the Christian Counselor's Task', *Reformed Journal* 28/5 (1978), 13-14.

is to care for his wife as he cares for himself, and this care entails promoting her ultimate well-being and protecting her from ultimate harm rather than encouraging self-indulgence, then a husband's care for himself includes promoting his own ultimate well-being and protecting himself from ultimate harm while excluding self-indulgence.

When people practise self-care, they do not indulge themselves but rather behave in ways that normally enhance their own ultimate well-being and avoid activities that usually bring them ultimate harm. According to the Bible, our primary motivation should be love (Mt 5:44; 22:34-40; 1 Cor 13:1-3; Eph 5:1,2; 1 Jn 4:7-12, 19-21). Though there is no explicit biblical command for us to love ourselves,⁹ there is some positive biblical evidence for self-care (Ex 18: 17-18; Lev 19:18; Mk 6:31; 12:30-31; 1 Cor 16:19-20; Eph. 5:29; 1 Tim 5:23; 3 Jn 1:2). The biblical authors strongly imply that we ought to practise self-care, and there are two good reasons for us to care for ourselves; self-care imitates God's care for himself and self-care benefits God, others, and ourselves.

I Imitating God's Care for Himself

Many assume that God is selfless and loves people without thought of ben-

efitting himself. Since they believe they should follow God's example, they conclude that they should love others without any thought of benefiting themselves. Indeed, to affirm otherwise is considered sinful by some.¹⁰ There are, however, good reasons to believe that God is not selfless and that he is motivated to benefit himself. Additionally, since we are in God's image, we may be able to use his proper example of self-care to assess how we should care for ourselves.¹¹ The Bible teaches that God made all things for himself, is motivated to do what brings him the most glory, and cares about people primarily for those reasons (Isa 43:6-7; 48:9-11; Eph 1:3-14; 3:10; Col 1:16; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 4:11). God values himself infinitely and seeks to have his creation value him as well.¹²

⁹ Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem*, 66-67; C. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 335; Brownback, *The Danger of Self-Love*, 59-60; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 100. See also Clark, 'Philosophical Reflections on Self-Worth and Self-Love', 7; J. Piper, 'Is Self-Love Biblical?', *Christianity Today* (August 12, 1977), 6-9.

¹⁰ T. Barrosse, 'Christianity: Mystery of Love: An Essay in Biblical Theology', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20/2 (1958), 137-138, 145; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 75-77, 99, 140-143, 201, 500, 646-648, 678-680; Stott, 'Must I Really Love Myself?', 34-35; Stott, 'Am I Supposed to Love Myself Or Hate Myself?', 26. See also Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem*, 34, 111; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 388; T. M. DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self: A Study of Thomistic and Modern Theological Discussion* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 59; F. Tillmann, *The Master Calls: A Handbook of Christian Living*, trans. G. J. Roettger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 130; Weaver, *Self-Love and Christian Ethics*, 4-5.

¹¹ Davidson, 'The Four Faces of Self-Love in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards', 89, 91.

¹² J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M. with an Essay on His Genius and Writings by Henry Rogers: And a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight*, vol. 2, ed. E. Hickman (London: William Ball, 1839), 626; J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a Memoir by*

Another argument against God's selflessness is that God seeks to have his love returned. While he cares for those whom he knows will never return his love simply because it is his nature to love, God also loves people so that they will love him in return.¹³ This is true because God's love toward people is modelled after his mutual relationship within the Trinity.¹⁴

God's love may take the form of self-sacrifice or involve one-sided behaviour temporarily out of respect for human freedom, but the goal is mutual love.¹⁵ Christ's example of enduring the cross for the 'the joy that was set before him' demonstrates how God took the first step of sacrifice to bring about or restore a relationship of mutual love (Heb 12:2). Likewise, we should reach

out in sacrificial love toward others in hopes of mutual love even if our love is never returned.¹⁶ Divine suffering is incomprehensible and divine grief for the lack of response is illogical—unless God seeks a response.¹⁷ Furthermore, God has such a strong desire for a response from his love that those who fail to respond to his love are the subject of God's wrath.¹⁸ Since God is motivated to seek his own benefits and loves people so that they will love him, God is not self-less.

Throughout the New Testament, we are encouraged to follow God's moral example (Mt 16:24; Jn 13:15; 1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Pet 2:21; 1 Jn 2:6). Although we are unlike God in that we are limited and morally fallen, our similarities to him make his example of proper self-care a model for us.

II Imitating God's Care for Us

Another reason that we should practise self-care is because people are the subject of God's love (Mt 12:11-12; Lk 12:7).¹⁹ The greatest demonstration of God's love for people is his sending

Sereno E. Dwight, vol. 1, E. Hickman (ed.), (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1834), Section 3, para. 5, <http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/works1.iv.html>; T. E. Fretheim, 'God, Creation, and the Pursuit of Happiness', in *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness*, B. A. Strawn (ed.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 54; H. Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. A. Dru, M. Sebanc, and C. Fulsom (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 164; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 440; J. Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 43.

13 Barrosse, 'Christianity: Mystery of Love', 139, 157-158; D. C. Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', *Presbyterian* 12/2 (1986), 88 [footnote 81].

14 R. M. Adams, 'Pure Love', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8/1 (1980), 96; M. C. D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love, Lion and Unicorn: A Study in Eros and Agape* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Co., 1956), 127-128.

15 G. Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 175-176, 209, 277-278.

16 G. W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 17.

17 S. Post, 'The Inadequacy of Selflessness: God's Suffering and the Theory of Love', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56/2 (1988), 215.

18 S. Post, 'Communion and True Self-Love', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988), 345, 349, 351, 354, 358; Post, 'The Inadequacy of Selflessness', 213.

19 D. K. Clark, 'Interpreting the Biblical Words for the Self', *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 18/4 (1990), 310; B. Parmenter, *What the Bible Says about Self-Esteem* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1986), 25-26.

Jesus to redeem them from sin (1 Cor 6:19-20).²⁰ By taking on a human body, Jesus Christ affirmed the dignity of human nature, and by dying on the cross for human beings he demonstrated that to him they were worth saving (Jn 3:16; I Pet 1:18-19).²¹ The Bible teaches that God cares for us just as he cares for other people.²² Since God loves people, and I am a person, God loves me. Our care for ourselves has the same basis as our care for others, i.e. God's love for both.²³

We may then read the second great commandment as 'Love your neighbour as a person like yourself.'²⁴ Thus, we are not to love our neighbour more than ourselves or instead of ourselves.²⁵ Rather, as we love ourselves, we should also love our neighbour.²⁶ Furthermore, when the biblical writers instructed us to love our neighbour as ourselves, they were referring to self-care rather than self-indulgence.

Since God does not encourage self-indulgence, neither should we encourage self-indulgence in ourselves or others.

A valid implication of God's care for us is that we should care for ourselves.²⁷ It is 'inappropriate that you should value yourself any less than God values you....We ought to delight in what God delights in, affirm what He affirms, and celebrate what He celebrates, that is, people.'²⁸

III Benefitting God, Others, and Us

A third reason that we should practise self-care is for the ultimate benefits it brings to God, others, and ourselves. All Christians understand the importance of being motivated to honour God and help others, but many of them question motives that include any self-benefit because they equate this with self-indulgence. Many of them also have difficulty seeing how self-care could benefit God and others. As a result, they try to pit self-care and love for God and others against each other.²⁹ For them, love for God and others is based on the prohibition of self-love,³⁰ and promoting self-care puts

²⁰ See McGrath and McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 98, 116.

²¹ See Clark, 'Philosophical Reflections on Self-Worth and Self-Love', 5, 7-8; Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', 73; J. McDowell, *See Yourself as God Sees You* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 140; McGrath and McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 129.

²² Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, 133-134.

²³ W. R. Clough, 'To Be Loved and to Love', *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34/1 (2006), 29; O. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 44-45.

²⁴ Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', 91.

²⁵ Brownback, *The Danger of Self-Love*, 150.

²⁶ P. E. Johnson, 'Christian Love and Self-Love', *Pastoral Psychology* 2/2 (1951), 16.

²⁷ DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self*, 115, 186; Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 194-195.

²⁸ Parmenter, *What the Bible Says about Self-Esteem*, 162. See also A. Farrer, 'A Starting-Point for the Examination of Theological Beliefs', in *Faith and Logic*, B. Mitchell (ed.) (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), 20; Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, 131.

²⁹ Barrosse, 'Christianity: Mystery of Love'.

³⁰ Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem*, 43; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 450; D. Gran-skou, 'The Concept of Selfhood in the New Testament and Modern Ethics', *Religion in Life*

too much emphasis on self instead of God.³¹ Moreover, they assume that we cannot do well to God, others, and ourselves at the same time. However, there are good reasons to question these assumptions.

Loving ourselves is beneficial to God, others, and us, because love for all three are interrelated and complementary.³² As we can love God and others simultaneously,³³ so can we love God and care for others and ourselves at the same time. Therefore, if we care for ourselves we will not fail to love God and others, because we cannot care for ourselves without also loving God and others.³⁴ Therefore, choosing

between loving God and others and caring for ourselves is not an either/or proposition.³⁵ Self-indulgence, rather than self-care, hinders people from loving God and others.³⁶ Additionally, if we try to care for ourselves without loving God and others, we are being self-indulgent and choosing what is against our well-being,³⁷ just as we do not love God when we do not care for others.³⁸

1. Self-care benefits God

Love for God does not exclude self-care. Rather, self-care is a way to express our love for God. Self-care is a form of love to God in whose image the self is.³⁹ 'When I devalue myself, I fail to honour God's creative goodness as this is expressed in me, just as when I selfishly make myself the centre of the universe, I fail to recognize God as

30/1 (1960-1961), 97; G. H. Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 58; S. Krishek, 'Two Forms of Love: The Problem of Preferential Love in Kierkegaard's Works of Love', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36/4 (2008), 598-599; M. Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. and trans. W. Pauck (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1961), 407-408; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 101, 131, 712-713; Post, 'Communion and True Self-Love', 345.

31 See Canning, 'Out of Balance', 70-71.

32 Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, 153.

33 J. Butler, *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler*, vol. 2, W. E. Gladstone (ed.), (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1896), 197; N. Fiering, *Jonathan Edward's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 156-157; C. Maurer, 'Two Approaches to Self-Love: Hutcheson and Butler', *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 2/2 (2006), 87, 89.

34 T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), II-I, 28, 1; D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love, Lion and Unicorn*, 103-104; Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, 133; S. J. Pope, 'Expressive Individualism and True Self-Love:

A Thomistic Perspective', *Journal of Religion* 71/3 (1991), 388; Tillmann, *The Master Calls*, 130, 184.

35 See Johnson, 'Christian Love and Self-Love', 18; Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, 73.

36 See J. Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel: To Which Is Added Six Sermons Preached on Publick Occasions*, 6th ed. (London: Printed for F. and C. Rivington, and S. Hayes, 1792), 17.

37 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 233-239.

38 Butler, *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler*, 188; DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self*, 144-147; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 480; Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', 86. See also O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, 37.

39 DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self*, 18, 156-157, 178-179.

God.⁴⁰ People who depreciate themselves and deny their own worth do not honour God. Just as failing to accept a gift is a rejection of the giver, so rejecting the self is rejecting God who made the self.⁴¹ 'To value ourselves... is to become receptive to what God has given us and to what He wants to make of us.'⁴²

Furthermore, failing to care for ourselves properly may result in less glory to God because it can negatively influence our job performance and our ability to resist temptation, trust God, be a joyful witness for Christ, and grow to spiritual maturity. If caring for others is an expression of love for God, it is just as logical to say that caring for ourselves is an expression of love for God since both are in his image.⁴³

2 Self-care benefits others

Self-care is interrelated with care for others. To love others is to love ourselves and to love ourselves is to love others.⁴⁴ Isaiah's vision resists 'the altruistic emptying of self for others [and] the pouring out of others for self [in favour of] the self deeply and meaningfully connected with other selves,

living in a community marked by a profound relationship to God and to one another.' Furthermore, 'the well-being of the self is extricably tied to the well-being of others, and vice versa, because all are woven into communal life....'⁴⁵ We can wish for our own happiness while wishing for the happiness of others, just as we can enjoy the benefit of the air and light of the sun while others enjoy it.

When Moses, Jesus, Paul, and James (Lev 19:18; Mk 12:31; Rom 13:9; Jas 2:8) spoke of loving our neighbour as ourselves, they addressed the manner in which we were to care for others, i.e. in the same way we care for ourselves. As we naturally seek our own happiness and avoid misery, likewise, we should do so to others.⁴⁶ In reality, we must care about ourselves before we can care about others, because our self-care is the model or standard of neighbour-care.⁴⁷ Therefore, self-care cannot be wrong because it is 'a rule and measure by which our love to others should be regulated'.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 195.

⁴¹ Parmenter, *What the Bible Says about Self-Esteem*, 199.

⁴² McGrath and McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 127-128.

⁴³ C. R. Gerber, *Christ-Centered Self-Esteem: Seeing Ourselves through God's Eyes* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 23-24, 62-63.

⁴⁴ D. O. Brink, 'Moderate and Extreme Harmony of Interests', in *Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes in the Philosophy of T. H. Green*, D.O. Brink (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 60-62.

⁴⁵ J. Lapsley, 'A Happy Blend: Isaiah's Vision of Happiness (and Beyond)', in *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness*, B. A. Strawn (ed.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 79, 93.

⁴⁶ DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self*, 112. See also A. J. Dyck and C. Padilla, 'The Empathic Emotions and Self-Love in Bishop Joseph Butler and the Neurosciences', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37/4 (2009).

⁴⁷ O. Hanfling, 'Loving My Neighbour, Loving Myself', *Philosophy* 68/264 (1993), 153; Johnson, 'Christian Love and Self-Love', 16; Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, 289; L. Thomas, *The Fragility of the Moral Self: Self-Love and Morality* (Bloomington, IN: Poynter Center, Indiana University, 1997), 10-11.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 230.

Furthermore, without the model of self-care, we will have difficulty caring for others.⁴⁹ Love of others is intimately related to self-care because loving others fulfils the tendency to love beings like ourselves and it is in loving others that people care for themselves. Caring for ourselves is the basis and model for us to care for our neighbour, because our neighbour is like the one about whom we care a great deal, i.e. ourselves.⁵⁰ Moreover, we empathize with others because others are like us and, therefore, we treat others as we want to be treated. In this way, when we care for others, it is like caring for ourselves.⁵¹

Therefore, only when we have compassion for ourselves can we have compassion for others, and our ability to show compassion toward others results from our capability to substitute the interests of others for our own. We assume that others are like us and that the behaviour which makes us happy also makes others happy. So when we make others happy, we feel as happy as if we made ourselves happy. Furthermore, we were made to seek the happiness of others and ourselves, and we do evil and good to others as we do evil and good to ourselves.⁵²

Caring for ourselves enables us to more effectively care for others,⁵³ but if we fail to care for ourselves we are less able to care for others.⁵⁴ The Second Greatest Commandment teaches that people who do not love themselves cannot love their neighbour,⁵⁵ and only those who have their basic needs met are able to help others.⁵⁶ Just as we cannot save another drowning person if we are drowning, so if we have pressing personal needs we will concentrate all our energies on solving them and have little left for God and others. Likewise, we cannot help others grow spiritually if we have not grown spiritually ourselves.⁵⁷

3 Self-care benefits us

It is commonly believed that we naturally care for ourselves and, therefore, do not need encouragement to do so.⁵⁸ On the contrary, we frequently behave in ways that bring us harm instead of well-being.⁵⁹ As it is possible for us to behave toward our neighbour in unloving ways, so we can be unloving toward ourselves.⁶⁰ Gluttony, anorexia,

49 McGrath and McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 128-129.

50 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-I, 27, 3; II-II, 44, 7.

51 DeFerrari, *The Problem of Charity for Self*, 64, 156-157, 178-179.

52 Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, 66, 92, 193; Dyck and Carlos, 'The Empathic Emotions and Self-Love in Bishop Joseph Butler', 578, 587-588. See also Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight*, Section 4, para. 10.

53 Canning, 'Out of Balance', 72.

54 See Maurer, 'Two Approaches to Self-Love', 86.

55 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 22-23.

56 Clark, 'Philosophical Reflections on Self-Worth and Self-Love', 10.

57 See J. S. Norcross and J. D. Guy, *Leaving It at the Office: A Guide to Psychotherapist Self-Care* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

58 J. Makujina, 'The Second Greatest Commandment and Self-Esteem', *Master's Seminary Journal* 8/2 (1997), 222-223.

59 Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, 36-47.

60 K. Green, 'Aquinas's Argument against Self-Hatred', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35/1 (2007), 113-139.

smoking, drug abuse, and suicide are obviously not good for people, yet some people practise them.⁶¹ People may also depreciate, demean, and put themselves down without realizing how destructive this is to them.⁶²

Apparently, God made us with a natural tendency to care for ourselves, and this natural self-care is one of his ways of ensuring that we are cared for.⁶³ It is reasonable to assume that taking care of our bodies and seeking healthy relationships with God and others promotes our own physical, emotional, and spiritual health and protects us from physical, emotional, and spiritual harm.⁶⁴

When sin entered into the human race, it brought a self-indulgence that hinders people from caring for themselves.⁶⁵ As a result, apart from God, self-indulgence tends to replace self-care,⁶⁶ and we often desire things for ourselves that are harmful to us and others.⁶⁷ Since sinful behaviour is always harmful to us, when we sin we

actually hate ourselves (Prov 6:32; 15:27, 32; 29:24). If we cared for ourselves perfectly we would not choose to sin. Since we choose to sin, this is evidence that we do not care for ourselves as we ought—just as our choice of sin is evidence that we do not love God and others properly.⁶⁸ Therefore, we should sacrifice immediate desires for our own benefit, just as we should sacrifice immediate desires for the benefit of God and others.

While many people are too concerned with their own happiness and unconcerned about the happiness of others, other people are overly concerned with the well-being of others and too quick to sacrifice their own well-being.⁶⁹ In light of the evidence that people often do not care for themselves, the phrase, 'no one ever yet hated his own flesh', in Ephesians 5:29 cannot be an absolute statement.⁷⁰ While we intend to care for ourselves, we do not always do so.⁷¹ Though we intend to promote our own well-being and protect ourselves from harm, we may behave in ways that harm us.⁷²

Jonathan Edwards referred to this thinking when he wrote that 'wicked men do not love themselves enough—

61 D. G. Myers, *Social Psychology*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 74.

62 T. I. Rubin, *Compassion and Self-Hate: An Alternative to Despair* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 39.

63 T. Smith, 'The Practice of Pride', *Social Philosophy & Policy* 15/1 (1998), 82.

64 See D. C. Myers, 'A Level-of-Explanation View', in *Psychology and Christianity: Five views*, E. L. Johnson (ed.), (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 65-66.

65 Davidson, 'The Four Faces of Self-Love in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards', 94. See also Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, 17.

66 T. D. Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-acceptance: The Problem of Identity in Theology & Psychology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003). 14-25, 38.

67 67 Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 101; Clough, 'To Be Loved and to Love'.

68 Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', 88; Pope, 'Expressive Individualism and True Self-Love', 399.

69 Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-acceptance*, 61-66, 71-86; Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 182; V. S. Goldstein, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine Viewpoint', *Pastoral Psychology*, 17/3 (1966), 38.

70 Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 106-109.

71 Aquinas, *Suma Theologica*, I-II, 29, 4; Jones, 'Love: The Impelling Motive of the Christian Life', 87. See also Hanfling, 'Loving My Neighbour, Loving Myself', 156.

72 See Myers, *Social Psychology*, 47, 73.

not so much as the godly do; for they do not love the way of their own welfare and happiness'.⁷³ The biblical command to love our neighbour as ourselves does not state that we always care for ourselves in the right way, but that we should care for others in the same way that we intend to care for ourselves. Since we are often ignorant of what is truly good for us and are prone to self-indulgence, only when we care for ourselves as God directs, do we truly care for ourselves. For this reason, the command to love our neighbour as ourselves assumes that we should care for others as we should care for ourselves and that we should care for ourselves as we should care for others.⁷⁴ Consequently, we should not treat others as we treat ourselves when we do not care for ourselves. Furthermore, we have a moral duty to care for ourselves just as we are obligated to love God and others, and we are wrong not to do so.⁷⁵

One source of confusion about self-care comes from a misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching about denying self and self-sacrifice (Mk 8:34).⁷⁶ However,

when Jesus referred to self-sacrifice, he spoke of giving up self-indulgence rather than self-care. In fact, Jesus offered what was ultimately good for his followers as a reward for giving up self-indulgence.⁷⁷ While focusing on immediate rewards was shunned, being motivated by future rewards was praised (1 Cor 13:3).⁷⁸

Self-indulgence causes us to pursue immediate pleasure and avoid immediate pain without regard to long-range rewards or consequences. On the other hand, self-care enables us to sacrifice immediate pleasure and/or endure temporary pain, even to the point of giving up our lives, for the sake of joy in the future just as Jesus did (Heb 12:2). Self-indulgence is its only reward and often results in harm (Mt 6:16; Prov 21:17; 23:21; 1Tim 5:6), but when we sacrifice for Christ, he offered rewards that benefit us ultimately (Mt 5:11-12; 6:16-18; 16:24-27; 19:28-29; Mk 20:21, 29-30; Luke 6:22,35; 18:22,29-30; Rev 2:8-11).

Even in the clearest description of love in the New Testament, namely 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul spoke of the advantage to self of loving others. The phrase, 'it profits me nothing' (vs. 3), implies that people benefit from loving others. Here Paul wrote as positively of self-benefit as he did of the benefit of others. His appeal to the Corinthian believers is based chiefly on their own ultimate advantage on three occasions in 1 Corinthians (6:12;

73 Fiering, *Jonathan Edward's Moral Thought*, 171. See also J. Butler, *The Works of Joseph Butler, D.C.L.: Sometime Lord Bishop of Durham*, W. E. Gladstone, (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), xiii-xxiv.

74 J. W. Jepson, *Don't Blame It All on Adam* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 86; A. C. Knudson, *The Principles of Christian Ethics* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), 129; Sheely, *The Christian Virtues*, 123. See also J. Bransen, 'Selfless Self-Love', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9/1 (2006), 20.

75 Johnson, 'Christian Love and Self-Love', 16; Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*, 70-74.

76 See, for example, Canning, 'Out of Bal-

ance', 70, 72.

77 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 25-26. See also Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, 131.

78 See J. Lippitt, 'True Self-Love and True Self-Sacrifice', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 66/3 (2009), 132.

7:35; 10:23). Additionally, in his other writings he taught that suffering for Christ results in future rewards (Rom 8:18; 2 Tim 2:12; 2 Tim 4:8). Other New Testament writers also wrote of future rewards for faithful service (Heb 11:24-26; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 5:1-4; 2 Jn 1:8). In light of the proper place of rewards in the Christian life, Paul's affirmation that love 'does not seek its own' must refer to self-indulgence rather than ultimate benefit to self (1 Cor 13:5). If serving God for self-benefit is wrong, why did God appeal so often to rewards for service? Although many would argue that loving others only for the reward it brings is selfishness, a reward may be at least a partial incentive for doing so.⁷⁹

An important benefit of self-care is prevention of the excesses of self-sacrifice. Some in church history castrated themselves as an application of Jesus's command to cut off an arm or pluck out an eye to prevent them from sinning. Others promoted martyrdom.⁸⁰ However, there is no command in the Bible for self-hatred or loathing the very per-

son God created and redeems.⁸¹ Serving the needs of others while ignoring our needs is a false view of Christianity that should be repudiated.⁸² In fact, 'excessive self-sacrifice or self-abnegation can potentially be at least as big a worry as excessive self-love',⁸³ and self-sacrifice could be as much a vice as selfishness.⁸⁴

Moreover, the 'dangers of religion's inner restraint upon self-assertion, and its effort to achieve complete disinterestedness [impartiality], are that such a policy easily becomes morbid, and that it may make for injustice by encouraging and permitting undue self-assertion in others'.⁸⁵ Self-sacrifice is a sacrifice because the self has value. Therefore, there are limits to our sacrifices, and we should sacrifice ourselves only for something that is worthwhile.⁸⁶

God's simultaneous love for himself and us is a model for us to love God, others, and ourselves simultaneously.⁸⁷ There is no contradiction between God glorifying himself and being benevolent to his creation, because glorifying him is good for his creation. In other words, when we honour God we are benefit-

⁷⁹ R. E. Ciampa and B. S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William E. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), 638; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 306.

⁸⁰ M. Hassett, 'Martyr', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 2010), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09736b.htm>; M. Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); P. Logan, 'Sermon on the Mount', in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, T. C. Butler (ed.), (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 1247.

⁸¹ Duff, 'The Second Great Command', 22.

⁸² D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love, Lion and Unicorn*, 103-104; Post, 'The Inadequacy of Selflessness', 224.

⁸³ Lippitt, 'True Self-Love and True Self-Sacrifice', 130.

⁸⁴ D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love*, 303.

⁸⁵ R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 261-262.

⁸⁶ Groenhout, 'Kenosis and Feminist Theory', 299-307.

⁸⁷ A. Von Hildebrand, 'Problematic Self-Love', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 12/3 (2009), 88.

ted.⁸⁸ Thus, he encourages us to love him for his benefit (his glory) and our benefit. For that reason, self-care sees its best example in God whose primary motivation is doing what benefits him even as others are benefitted.⁸⁹ God's simultaneous love for himself and us is an example for us to love God, others, and ourselves simultaneously.

IV Practical Applications

Caring for ourselves while loving God and others goes against our natural propensity to self-indulgence, but we can improve over time with practice through the assistance of God and others. Here are some suggestions.

First of all, we can care for ourselves by recognizing the importance of doing so. While usually intending to care for ourselves, we often do not do so. God wants us to care for ourselves and to seek love from him and others, just as he cares for himself and loves us so that we will return his love. Harming ourselves or failing to care for ourselves is as bad as harming others or not caring for others, because we are equally valued by God. Caring for ourselves not only benefits us, it also enables us to honour God and give better care to others. Being aware of our need and responsibility to care for ourselves can motivate us to put self-care into practice.

⁸⁸ Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight*, Section 3, para. 7-8, 12. See also P. Copan, 'Divine Narcissism? A Further Defense of God's Humility', *Philosophia Christi* (New Series), 8 (January 2006), 318.

⁸⁹ Fiering, *Jonathan Edward's Moral Thought*, 154.

Secondly, we care for ourselves by distinguishing between self-care and self-indulgence in our lives. Seeing our behaviour in the light of its long-term effects instead of just the immediate benefits or consequences is a good practice. So also does avoiding what brings us ultimate harm rather than what does not ultimately harm us, and seeking our ultimate well-being and long-range earthly and heavenly rewards instead of just what feels good at the time is proper.

Thirdly, we care for ourselves by viewing love for God, others and ourselves as one package. We need not decide between loving God, others, or ourselves. Recognizing that we can 1), demonstrate our love for others and ourselves by loving God, 2), show our love for God and ourselves by loving others, and 3), demonstrate our love for God and others by caring for ourselves, may help us see the need for loving all three. Some behaviour may be more beneficial to one than the other two, but we can seek to balance our love for all three throughout the day, week, or month.⁹⁰

Instead of seeing only the immediate benefits to God, others, and ourselves, we can combine this practice with the previous two and ask ourselves the following questions that focus on long-range benefits for all three. What behaviour in this situation will bring the most glory to God ultimately? How will my actions in this particular time and place help others ultimately? Will my behaviour toward myself in this setting benefit me ultimately?

Fourthly, we care for ourselves by

⁹⁰ See Canning, 'Out of Balance', 72-73.

growing less self-indulgent and more loving to God, others, and ourselves through the assistance of the Holy Spirit and others (Rom 5:5; Eph 4:15; 1 Thess 3:12; Heb 10:24). The temptation to ignore God and not care for others and ourselves is strong. We can also be enticed to dishonour God and disrespect others and ourselves. We need assistance to care for ourselves, just as we need help to love God and others.

Nevertheless, through Bible study, prayer, and the encouragement of others, we can grow to overcome the temptation to indulge ourselves and give proper attention to God, others, and ourselves. This also includes helping us distinguish self-indulgence from self-care in our lives and putting aside self-indulgent practices that hinder us from loving God and caring for others and ourselves.

V Conclusion

In the introduction we met a thirty year old pregnant woman with severe depression who came to see a pastor for counselling. In light of this study of a Christian perspective of self-care, what advice should the pastor give her? The pastor would need to help the woman gain a biblical understanding of her relationship with God, others, and herself. He would be required to help her see that God values her as much as he values other people and that consequently he wants her to care for others *and* herself. He would want to emphasize that it is just as wrong for her not to care for herself as it is for her not to care for her husband or daughter.

The pastor would be compelled to emphasize that caring for herself would

not necessarily hinder her from caring for her family, but that it would enable her to do a better job of caring for her family. He would be obliged to help her think of loving God, others, and herself as a package and help her think of ways that loving one benefits the other two. He would then need to discuss her needs and help her examine whether or not she was caring for herself properly. The pastor would have to explain the difference between self-care and self-indulgence to the woman and help her see which of her behaviours were self-indulgent and which contributed to her love for God and care for herself and others.

This might help her understand that her acts of self-denigration might be more to fulfil her desire to be perfect or some other emotional or spiritual need than to help her sister in the past and her daughter now. It might be essential for him to try to help her see how her extreme self-sacrifice was a way to avoid her other responsibilities, such as being properly assertive toward her parents and husband so that she can obey God.⁹¹

While helping the woman gain a biblical understanding of her relationship with God, others, and herself is necessary, it is not enough. She must also act upon that understanding. However, it would probably be difficult for her to change her self-deprecating ways. She needs the help of God and others (Rom 5:5; Eph 4:15; 1 Thess 3:12; Heb 10:24) and a determination to grow in self-care, even as she needs their help to grow in her love for God and others.

⁹¹ Groenhout, 'Kenosis and Feminist Theory', 305, 310-311.

Therefore, if she was not a Christian, the pastor should try to persuade her to receive Jesus Christ as her Saviour and to cultivate a relationship with God through prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship with other Christians.

Most probably, he would want to encourage her to read biblical passages and Christian literature to help her gain a biblical view of herself, her body, and sex. He ought to encourage her to meet regularly with him, another mature Christian, or a counsellor for encouragement and accountability regarding her relationship with God, others, and herself. While the insights the woman receives from the pastor can help her grow to be more caring of herself and more loving to God and others, he should caution her to be patient with herself.

If the woman grew to be more self-caring, how would her life be different? She would feel more positive about being pregnant and would probably feel higher regard toward her husband for making her pregnant and the resulting child in her womb. When her husband complained about a meal that she had prepared, the appearance of herself or their home, or her sexual performance, she would be more objective about the cause and better able to assert her-

self to discuss these issues with her husband and, if necessary, improve in ways that she could improve.

She would probably mature in her relationships with God, her daughter, and others outside her home. She would also grow closer to her husband, unless he was more interested in self-indulgence than in his love to God, his wife, and himself. The woman would probably continue to give her daughter piano lessons, but she might also enquire into taking advanced piano lessons or even consider obtaining a college degree in music. Her feelings of inadequacy would lessen and her depression would probably lift.

In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate a Christian view of self-care. We are made in the image of God and responsible to God to care for ourselves. Self-care is not indulging ourselves without regard for God and others, but recognizing our legitimate need to care for ourselves by seeking what ultimately benefits us and protecting ourselves from what ultimately harms us—even as we do the same for God and others. Although we often do not care for ourselves properly, when we do care for ourselves we imitate God, care for the subject of God's love, and express love to God and others.

The Church's Complex Relationship with the Idea of Wealth and Need

Thomas K. Johnson

I AM VERY GLAD I WAS asked to use the word 'complex' to talk about our theme this afternoon. Under the influence of our own moral and spiritual blindness it is very easy to be one-sided and miss a balanced and complete perspective. This is a major reason why in evangelical theology and philosophy today we increasingly talk about complementarity, meaning convictions and truth claims that we have to hold together simultaneously to keep our worldview and lives in balance, convictions that might otherwise come apart, making us one-sided.

I Two Theses

This desire, not always articulated in exactly this way, has been a part of Protestantism at least since the time of Martin Luther, who sometimes used a turn of phrase that sounded completely contradictory in order to get his readers to listen carefully and to think with him. For example, in his essay, 'The Freedom of the Christian', he famously wrote, 'A Christian is a perfectly free

lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.' My theses lack the eloquence of Luther, but in this spirit let me suggest the following complementary theses for your consideration:

1. A crucial way to demonstrate to the watching world that we truly believe that both creation and redemption bestow a unique dignity on humanity is to help people in need.
2. An easy way to destroy the dignity of the poor who are created in the image of God, for whom Jesus gave his life on the cross, is to treat them like objects of charity.

Before clarifying these complementary theses, let me mention two of my background observations that inform how I think about these themes.

1. What is humanness?

Background observation number one: A key ethical question running through all of western culture, including education, health care, politics, business, law, and the arts, is, 'what is a human

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being?' The West is stumbling and tripping because our culture at large does not have a satisfactory answer. As Christians we have real answers about human nature, answers that are rooted in the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption. Western culture, probably every culture, urgently needs such answers. A more adequate understanding of humanity can and should have multiple valuable functions religiously and culturally.

On the one hand, a better understanding of humanity, with our created dignity and fallen shame, should provide the framework for appropriating the gospel; knowing ourselves properly should lead to knowing God, just as knowing God should also lead to understanding ourselves. On the other hand, a better understanding of humanity should also contribute to the healthy functioning of the several different spheres of society, including health care, education, business, law, and government.¹

How a visible society functions is heavily dependent on the invisible realm we call culture, including customs, theories, ideas, practices, habits, role models, slogans, proverbs, and more, all of which are oriented around understanding and guiding our humanness. God has created us such that there are multiple structures in society, but whether we move in a healthy or an unhealthy direction within these structures depends on a cultural definition of humanness. Healthy governments, economies, and educational systems require direction-setting definitions.

¹ I am consciously using the language of 'sphere sovereignty' developed in the terminology of Dutch Protestants.

Of course, religions and belief systems play pivotal but multifaceted roles in every culture.² In order to set the stage both for more people to come to faith in Jesus and for a more healthy society we Christians should communicate our biblical convictions about human nature more clearly and effectively.

2. Do we believe our beliefs?

Background observation number two: our world around us, that is often watching Christians, assumes we do not honestly believe our own Christian message. People frequently assume we Christians do not believe our own words because they do not completely believe their own worldview or philosophy of life. Many of our neighbours, I believe, go back and forth between worldviews, changing them like clothes. Perhaps at university they talk as if they are rationalistic naturalists, saying that only that which is physical exists, while in private they jump into a realm of irrationality to find faith, hope, and love.³ Some of the time our neighbours act as if they accept parts of the Christian worldview because God's general revelation is constantly impinging on human experience; simultaneously the same people may profess another belief system.

People cannot escape this situation of being of two minds if they are cre-

² On the multiple relations of God's word to cultures see Thomas K. Johnson, 'Christ and Culture', MBS Text 79 (2007), online at <http://www.bucer.org/resources/details/mbs-texte-079-2007-christ-and-culture.html>.

³ This observation is based on two decades teaching philosophy, ethics, and religions in secular universities in Europe and North America.

ated in God's image and live in God's world but do not acknowledge God. The everyday truths that all people learn as a result of God's general revelation provide the transcendental conditions of human life and experience even if people suppress their knowledge of God.⁴ Our neighbours have to see that we honestly believe our own words for which our response to people in need is crucial.

II Proving We Believe in Human Dignity

Our first thesis: We have to demonstrate to the world that we truly believe that creation and redemption bestow a unique dignity on humanity by helping those in need. The preferential option for the poor stands as a test for the Christian community so that the world can see that we truly believe and practise our professed beliefs.

As a result of modern media, more than in previous generations, we are constantly confronted with scenes of suffering: refugees from wars, the victims of religious persecution, honour murders, natural disasters, people dying as a result of air or water pollution, generations of hunger and poverty, human trafficking. All these scenes and more prompt a God-given sympathy reaction in the hearts of millions across the globe. And even if few can formulate the words, many know that their good reactions to human suffering are

related to their natural awareness of God, their *sensus divinitatis*.

1. Human Need, Duty, and Atheism

As a part of God's direct general revelation into human consciousness, even one who claims to be an atheist will both sense the dignity of the other and perceive a moral duty to help the person in urgent need so both human dignity and duty have a vague but real reference to God. This moral/religious sympathy reaction may stand in conflict with the claimed worldview or religion of the person reacting.

If anyone is truly convinced of atheistic evolution, that person might be expected to say something about the survival of the fittest in reaction to human suffering, but almost no one says that. I have never heard anyone say that 'we can be happy so many poor people die as a result of disasters, persecution, and pollution so that the strong can survive to perpetuate humanity'. The moral reactions of millions to others in urgent need show that many may not fully believe their own worldviews which seem to deny human dignity. Their practised beliefs, including their moral sympathy reactions, are better than their professed beliefs.

2. Human Need in Christian Theology

For us, as people of the Bible, we have always had good explanations of why we should help people in need. The first explanation was that God created us male and female in his image. Even if we do not know all that this means, it is clear that people have a very special

⁴ See Thomas K. Johnson, *The First Step in Missions Training: How our Neighbors are Wrestling with God's General Revelation*, World of Theology vol. 1 (WEA Theological Commission, 2014), available online at <http://www.bucer.org/resources/category/buecher.html>.

status and value in the universe. This status explains why our moral reactions to people are properly different from our reactions to a stone or a tree.

The theological basis for helping people in need is developed in redemption, since redemption is a restoration of creation. But redemption tells us more about both God and our duties to people in need, since redemption is God's response to people in need. And at certain points in the history of redemption we see that God is not concerned only about spiritual needs.

The Exodus from Egypt shows God setting his redeeming love on poor slaves, while the wealthy, powerful army that had been oppressing them died under the water of the sea. With this background the Old Testament people of God received very high standards for care for people in need. Shortly after the Exodus they were told, 'If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest' (Ex 22:25). In the Ten Commandments, the servants were specifically mentioned as not having to work on the Sabbath, and the phrasing of the Sabbath commandment sounds as if it is the special duty of people in positions of authority to be sure that those under their authority do not have to work on the Sabbath.

Even the Old Testament institution called 'slavery' was radically different from slavery in the surrounding nations. If properly applied, the Old Testament transformed slavery from an abuse of the poor to become a safety net to keep the poor from starvation; if properly implemented, it would have led to renewed economic independence. God set high standards for pro-

tecting and restoring the poor within his covenant people.

It seems to me that the protection of the poor, even the rehabilitation of the poor, was intended by God to be a distinguishing characteristic of his ancient people. The protection of the poor was emphasized much more in the Old Testament than in the other systems of law and ethics in the ancient near eastern world, even those other systems that are usually deemed somewhat humane.⁵ In this light it was especially wicked, as Amos mentioned, for the people of Israel to sell the needy for a pair of sandals and to trample on the heads of the poor (Amos 2:6,7).

This moral theme continued directly into the New Testament, with the care of the poor becoming a crucial theme in the relations between Jewish and Gentile believers in the first century (Gal 2:10); wealthier Gentiles assisted poorer Jews. And John wrote, 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?' (1 Jn 3:17). This principle was practised to the extent that it was noticed in the unbelieving world. Christians have often quoted the pagan Emperor Julian (332-363) who complained that the Christian faith

was specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans [Christians] care not only for their poor but for ours as well; while

⁵ Compare Old Testament ethics with the Code of Hammurabi to see this contrast.

those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render to them.⁶

Christian care for the poor confirmed that Christians really believed what they said they believed, challenged the belief system of the surrounding world, and thereby helped set new social standards for caring for people in need. Early Christian practice and preaching offered a critique of the culture of the ancient world that stood behind and guided the societal institutions while a more humane alternative was offered.

Whereas in the unbelieving world people often practise better than they believe, so that their practised belief is better than their professed belief and they practise sympathy though their worldview might call for ruthlessness, within the Christian churches we sometimes face the opposite problem. Our professed belief is wonderful. At times our practice has been wonderful. But today informed people are much more aware of global human suffering than in previous generations; it fills our TVs and computer screens. Our neighbours will wonder if we really believe the poor and needy are created in God's image (and can also receive redemption in Christ) if they do not see us practising what we say we believe. The Christian community faces a continuous test.

I have written and edited academic materials about human rights and human dignity as based in creation and redemption, and I wish those materials would convince our world that God has

truly given dignity to the poor and desperate. But I do not expect our books and journals to change the world very much. It has a far larger impact when people see Christians honestly caring for the poor and needy. This has to be at every level, local, regional, and global. If our neighbours see that we truly care for the homeless, the boatpeople, the victims of trafficking, the refugees, and those suffering religious persecution, then they may question their secularism (which has terrible difficulty explaining human dignity) and consider our Creator and Redeemer. As a friend described it, caring for human needs can be the boat that carries the gospel as a passenger.

III Compassion Gone Astray

Now the opposite thesis: An easy way to destroy the dignity of the poor who are created in the image of God, for whom Jesus gave his life on the cross, is to treat them like objects of charity.

Many of us have heard the stories of many generous attempts to help people in need that have done more harm than good. The stories are very discouraging. It sometimes seems as if the larger the effort, the greater the problems that we cause. The irony could easily make us bitter and disillusioned. Everywhere we turn we see examples of humanitarianism causing destructive dependence, sometimes fuelling corruption, often preventing economic development of people in need.

Two specialists from my church circles who have addressed this problem summarized the issue in the title of their excellent book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without*

⁶ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 4th edition (Thomas Nelson, 2013), 38.

*Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself.*⁷ I will not summarize their important study, but I believe the key to the problem is the total picture of how people are viewed that is communicated by our activities and embodied in our programs. Do we treat people as *objects* of pity, or do we treat them as *subjects* who will make decisions and implement plans for their future based on their values and convictions?

1. Thinking about people in need

If there is even a hint that we see people as objects, this way of thinking will be perceived by people in need; it can easily cause the poor to see themselves as objects, inferior to the people helping them, thereby causing further dependence and discouragement. In contrast, engaging people as subjects with whom we are in conversation helps them to plan a better future for themselves. Regarding a person's subjective feelings, convictions, and decisions as truly decisive is a central part of recognizing the image of God in that person. Fellowship with those in real need is part of what draws them out of their need. Indeed, when people who were in terrible need begin to participate in a wider economy, which could be described as participation in business fellowship, serious need is nearing its end.

A complementary observation is that efforts to relieve poverty that see a lack of money as being the primary characteristic of poverty tend to cause

destructive dependence and more poverty, for within this way of thinking a person's value comes from the amount of their possessions. Inadequate definitions of poverty, with terrible irony, become causes of continuing poverty. Defining poverty primarily as the lack of money defines the poor as inferior to and dependent on people who have money.

Ideas have consequences, especially when those ideas are incarnated into the way programs and organizations are designed. The poor often feel worthless because they do not have money, that very characteristic that defines value in a materialistic society. And then our definitions of poverty, communicated by the whole way in which our anti-poverty programs and organizations are designed, confirm that people without money are, in fact, worthless.

Fortunately there are better definitions of poverty available. Those better definitions lie in the direction of seeing poverty as an organic part of comprehensive alienation. If we define poverty as an economic symptom of people being alienated from themselves, from other people, from nature, and from God, then our efforts will tend to succeed and raise people back up to being socially functional and related, closer to being in good relationships with themselves, nature, and society, perhaps even reconciled with God. This holistic reconciliation will bear fruit in the realm of raising people out of financial poverty.

2. Economics and Culture: Marx or Weber

For the sake of university students I would point out that I am intention-

⁷ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor. . . and Yourself*, 2nd edition (Moody, 2012).

ally interacting with Karl Marx at this point, taking note of his sensitive descriptions of human alienation while fundamentally disagreeing with his understanding of human nature.⁸ Marx and his modern friends habitually perceive most of the conscious dimensions of human life, including religion, belief systems, ethics, relationships, and alienations, as resulting from economic influences.⁹ Change the economic situation of a person or a class, or so the thought goes, and you can change everything else in the life of that person or class. Conscious life (including relationships, beliefs, and values), within the perspectives influenced by Marx, is shaped or even controlled by economic relations. I would call this 'economic determinism'.

When we pick up the Bible and classical Christian books we see a very different perception of how human life works. This sounds theoretical and impractical at first, but it is very practical long-term. Within the biblical worldview, the contents of human consciousness, meaning our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, relationships, hopes, and loves, shape everything else, including economic activity. What is inside the human mind and heart, obviously including education and those contents and skills communicated by education, plays a massive role, whether contributing to poverty or to plenty, contribut-

ing to alienation from God, world, self, and others, or contributing to reconciliation with God, world, self, and others.

Please do not misunderstand me at this point. This does not mean that we first discuss philosophy of life with the boatpeople before we get them shelter or medical care. It does not mean that religious education comes before taking care of the refugee. We need good distinctions between crisis intervention and long-term development, and these distinctions are clarified in the better books.¹⁰ We need a clear distinction between crisis intervention and evangelism along with an ethics of mission that forbids using humanitarian aid to manipulate people to believe the gospel we constantly discuss.¹¹

But whatever the situation of a person or group, part of the way to a better future will include a lot of new thinking, learning, planning and imagining a different future, all of which can best occur in relationships and dialogue with other people. Within the biblical worldview, the way to a better future normally comes through the subjectivity of people; this means through their conscious planning, learning, and work. This requires engagement in relationships, not treating the poor as objects of our pity.

So that educators see the connections I am drawing let me explicitly reference Max Weber's theory of society in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit*

⁸ See Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>.

⁹ See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, chapter 3, online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch03.htm>.

¹⁰ Again I would mention Corbett and Fikkert.

¹¹ See *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, principle 4, http://www.worlddevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf

of *Capitalism*.¹² Protestant theologians have long pointed out that Weber largely misunderstood Protestant theology, especially on the themes of predestination and assurance of salvation.¹³ But the Roman Catholic theologian Michael Novak has pointed out that Weber offers a real alternative to Marx in terms of the relation between the contents of human consciousness and economic development.¹⁴

Without looking at details but following Weber let me suggest that religious values such as diligence, honesty, and thrift, preached initially by Christians as a God-given calling and work ethic, first concentrated in northern Europe and North America but now widely distributed, contributed significantly to economic growth in the developed world. Much of this work ethic was started with directly religious motivations, such as seeing daily work as a place to serve God by means of serving people, but its influence came after it was no longer seen as a purely religious conviction but as

economic rationality.

More pointedly for our purposes, the way out of the poverty that still gripped most of Europe and North America in 1800 came largely through values, expectations, and convictions, some seen as more religious and some as more rational, in the hearts and minds of people. It was not the result of an impersonal power of development or class struggle in which people were passive objects. The intelligence and creativity invested by particular people led to economic growth, lifting entire regions of the world out of poverty. So too today, the way out of terrible circumstances for most people will include their planning and efforts in light of what they know, believe, and value, even when they need emergency aid and a lot of help.

IV Reflections

A compassionate but wise response to wealth and people in need is a test of our moral/spiritual integrity if we claim to be followers of Jesus. It is also a test of our ability to think carefully, but not out of a speculative interest in academic theories. Compassion guided by bad ideas will lead to bad results for real people. But compassion guided by a theology which embraces properly complementary principles can lead to several distinct good results. Real people can be helped and moved from a position of crisis and desperate need to restoration; wisely planned humanitarian aid and economic development work.

In this way we can also contribute to the cultural definitions of humanness that guide how societies function. This in turn tends to convince our neigh-

¹² Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, vol. XX and XXI (1904 and 1905) of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. English: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, foreword by R. H. Tawney (New York, Scribner, 1958; New York, Dover, 2003).

¹³ On using Weber's ideas in Protestant ethics see Thomas K. Johnson, 'The Spirit of the Protestant Work Ethic and the World Economic Crisis', chapter 5, *Christian Ethics in Secular Cultures*, World of Theology vol. 2 (WEA Theological Commission, 2014), online <http://www.bucer.org/resources/category/buecher.html>.

¹⁴ See Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Madison Books, 1990) and *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Free Press, 1993).

bours that we honestly believe what we say we believe as Christians, so that they are challenged to move from the position of being of two minds to

consider the biblical message. I think it is crucial that we practise our complex Christian relationship to need and wealth consciously and intentionally.

Job's Way Through Pain: Karma, Clichés & Questions

Paul Hedley Jones

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Paul Hedley Jones is an Australian author, teacher and musician, and currently a doctoral student, working under Professor R.W.L. Moberly, at Durham University, UK.

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‘Let us not be like those ... who want to call God to account.’¹

John Calvin’s reading of some difficult deaths

Michael Parsons

JOHN THOMPSON’S fascinating study, *Writing the Wrongs*,² examines pre-critical commentators on some very difficult narratives that concern abuse of women in a patriarchal society. After detailed consideration of the primary texts he concludes that pre-critical commentators are ‘fully capable of applying their own kinds of reading strategies to the Bible in order to deal with offensive narratives in ways that bend even the awkward silences of Scripture toward the divine norm of fairness, justice and the like’. He continues, ‘Silences are mined for coherence, not incoherence. If we cannot see

the coherence, the problem does not lie with the text or its divine author, but with the limits of our finite minds or the limits of revelation, for God does not tell us everything.’³

As Thompson’s work indicates, even on a cursory reading some biblical narratives are deeply disturbing and, consequently, the commentator or preacher has often felt constrained to address and to resolve the apparent dissonance. This is true, for example, of the stories that recount rape and sexual abuse, as many following Phyllis Trible’s seminal work have shown.⁴ However, it is not only commentary on the narratives of sexual abuse that por-

1 John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, translated by D. F. Kelly (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 245—henceforth, *Sermons*.

2 John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs. Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

3 Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 252.

4 See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). See also, for example, Michael Parsons, ‘Luther and Calvin on rape: Is the crime lost in the agenda?’ *EQ* 74 (2002), 123–142.

trays this characteristic. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament and those of Uzzah and Uriah in the Old are also narratives that exemplify the problem, simply because (in the first two instances) the punishment seems to be somewhat excessive, and in the last example God appears to allow a righteous man to suffer without taking into account his innocence, or coming to his aid.

The principal interest of this essay, then, is to examine John Calvin's response to these stories, a response which reveals the need to make some moral sense of what is happening in the narrative, and therefore a response that appears to show that the reformer reads the disturbing texts strategically. That is to say, a careful and close reading of Calvin's comments shows that he employs reading strategies in a conscious attempt to come to terms with at least some of the problems in these texts, particularly problems related to the centrality of God's involvement.

I Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

The evangelist's account of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira still has the ability to shock its readers and that shock is often registered as a question. Accordingly, the contemporary commentator, F. Scott Spencer asks, 'How do we ever adequately make sense of the manner in which Ananias and Sapphira are taken away: suddenly struck dead by the hand of God? Even granting the severity of their breach of community trust, does it warrant divine

capital punishment?'⁵

The shock of the incident is certainly apparent in Calvin's commentary on the short passage, and (as with Spencer) it appears as a series of questions on the severity of the punishment in relation to the crime. There is, however, an obvious difference between the responses. Whereas Spencer's interrogative response is inclusive of himself, Calvin's is not. Even as Calvin raises the concerns of others, it is evident that the reformer himself does not share the speculative questioning of these readers—a questioning he believes to be derived from a self-oriented, impious and prejudiced outlook.

In a long paragraph in his explication of verse 5⁶ he says that 'some are of the opinion that the punishment was too cruel'—that they are 'displeased with the excessive severity of God', and that others simply do not believe the narrative as it stands because it does not accord with the experience of those who today are as hypocritical as Ananias and Sapphira but 'get off scot-free', not being punished for their sin. That is, they argue on the grounds of

5 F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 57–58. He mentions the *Vaccæi*—a community that executed any member who hoarded a portion of community land and crops for themselves—and the Israelites' stoning of Achan and his family, for example. See also, Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles. A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1.

6 John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 1–13*. Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, volume 6 (translated by J. W. Fraser and W. J. G. McDonald: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 135—henceforth, *Comm. Acts*, CNTC 6.

an apparent discrepancy between the text and actual, lived or observed, experience. Calvin judges that the former critics conclude as they do because they contemptuously minimise Ananias’ sin, evaluating it from their own perspective and weighing it in their own scales and not from the divine perspective or in God’s scales, and in so doing they are ‘arrogating far too much to themselves’.⁷

The latter critics, however, are not as conveniently answered and Calvin is forced to argue the point. He does this in a rather complex way. First, the reformer writes concerning the Lord’s punitive intrusion during the initial stages of the nascent church—those recounted in New Testament history—suggesting the principle that in the early church the divine punishment was as open, external and obvious as were the divine gifts. That is no longer the case, however. Things have changed. Neither the spiritual gifts nor the divine discipline are manifest in the same way today.

Second, he indicates that the very visible punishment of Ananias and Sapphira reminds us that though as yet we do not necessarily see people punished in the same way there is a very real divine judgement to come. The past punishment acts as a kind of precursory warning to the contemporary church.⁸

At some length he says,

But as God poured out visible graces on His Church at the beginning, so that we may know with assurance that He will be present with us by the secret virtue of His Spirit, and furthermore, showed openly by external signs what we realize inwardly by the experience of faith, so He has demonstrated by the visible punishment of two persons, how horrible a judgment awaits all hypocrites, who have held Him and the Church in derision.⁹

There is clearly in Calvin’s mind a parallel between the gifts of the Spirit and the punishment of sinners in the experience of the early church of Acts. The reason he can suggest this is that the reformer earlier explained the word of Peter to Ananias as proceeding from a direct revelation of the Spirit, adding that ‘Luke ... indicates that the apostles to some extent represented God (*sustinuisse Dei personam*), and acted in His stead’.¹⁰ So, just as spiritual gifts were prominent (‘visible’, ‘showed openly’ and ‘external’) in the apostolic age, so too was punishment as pronounced and public as that described in the text—after all, it came with the gift of a divine revelation to the apostle.¹¹ ‘This was an extraordinary affair’ (says Calvin)—evidently not something that one would expect to find in

⁷ *Comm. Acts* 5:8, CNTC 6.137.

⁸ Calvin says, for example, ‘When we hear this let the threats of the Gospel terrify us, and be quick to humble us, in case we ourselves also experience a similar fate’—*Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135. Earlier he had asked, ‘Now if the Spirit of God uses the mouth of a mortal man to deal so summarily with a hypocrite ... how will the spurious stand up to the voice

of God Himself, accompanied by the shrill of the trumpet, when they will be brought before His judgment seat?’—*Comm. Acts* 5:3, CNTC 6.133.

⁹ *Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135–136.

¹⁰ *Comm. Acts* 5:3, CNTC 6.133.

¹¹ ‘[T]his is one of the gifts of the Spirit, as is plain from 1 Cor 12:10’—*Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135.

contemporary Europe or in the city of Geneva in particular.¹²

In typical reformational manner, this line of argument has the result of pointing readers to the authoritative Word of God, of course. Indeed, by implication, Calvin underlines this direction himself by asserting that ‘the death of Ananias truly confirms the force of the Word, which Paul magnificently brings out, in saying that “it is the savour of death unto death to those who are perishing” (2 Cor 2:16)¹³—that is, the physical, observed experience of Ananias’ death is indicative, not merely of the written text, but of the powerful and poignant work of God to which that inscribed text so vividly points. It is God, after all, who takes life away.¹⁴

Later, Calvin defends the divine decision to punish Ananias and Sapphira on the rather obvious theological grounds that it is up to God himself to determine when and how to punish. After all he (and not us) is ‘the Judge of the world’. However, he continues,

[I]n the bodily punishment of these two, there has been set before us, as in a mirror, the gravity of the spiritual judgment which is still hidden. For if we think over what it means to

be cast into the eternal fire, we shall not consider it the worst of evils to fall dead before the eyes of men.¹⁵

Here we notice that, if anything, the result of the reformer’s explanation appears to be a reduction in the significance of the physical death of Ananias and Sapphira—it is not ‘the worst of evils’ as some no doubt contend, particularly as it contrasts with the spiritual and eternal death that judgement may usher in. Indeed its significance is seen most clearly as symbolic of ‘the punishment which escapes human eyes’.¹⁶

1. Calvin’s strategy

We have seen how the reformer handles the critical sceptics, but how does he himself handle the text—or, rather, more pointedly, how does he handle the problem of the text? Calvin appears to have a reading strategy that he adopts to satisfy the questions prompted by the punishment meted out against Ananias and Sapphira. We discover this in his emphases on the enormity of the couple’s crime, on Satan’s involvement and on the nature of God and the divine positioning in the narrative.

a) The enormity of the couple’s crime

It is clear that if Ananias and his wife are to receive divine judgement, if they are to be condemned to on-the-spot death, then the heinousness of their crime needs to be stressed to show that in certain respects, at least, the punishment was proportionate to the crime

¹² *Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135.

¹³ *Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135. Calvin continues, ‘He is speaking indeed of the spiritual death of the soul, but in the body of Ananias there was a visible symbol of that punishment which escapes human eyes.’ Calvin cites other texts in a similar way throughout his exposition of Acts 5:1–11. For example, he cites Prov 15:8, Lk 21:2, Matt 6:3, Matt 18:20, 1 Cor 3:16, Isa 11:4.

¹⁴ Calvin comments that Ananias was ‘not struck down by a sword, by force, or by a hand, but he was deprived of life merely by hearing a voice’—*Comm. Acts* 5:7, CNTC 6.135.

¹⁵ *Comm. Acts* 5:8, CNTC 6.137.

¹⁶ *Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135.

or, in other words, that the sin somehow deserved the severe punishment it accrued. We discover that the reformer is at pains to demonstrate this.

On the face of it the biblical text singles out the pair's sin as deceit (5:2) and lying (5:3–4,8). However, in his initial summary Calvin states that Ananias is condemned for only one crime, ‘his wishing to deceive God and the Church with a false offering’.¹⁷ It is significant, of course, that Calvin judges that the crime is against both God and the church, underlining the fact that the couple sin against God *in the context of the church*.¹⁸

However, the reformer does not leave his summary-statement as if it said all that needs to be said. In fact, he considerably expands upon this by listing no fewer than six ‘evils lying behind this deceit’: (1) a contempt for the living God; (2) ‘sacrilegious fraudulence’, that is, a refusal to give to God what rightfully belongs to him; (3) perverse ambition and vanity, wanting to be seen in a good light before the community; (4) faithlessness; (5) ruining the church's communal strategy; (6) hypocrisy. Then, having listed the six evils to which he alludes, he adds, ‘deliberate and audacious lying’. Later, he appears to define the sum total simply as ‘impiety’.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132.

¹⁸ Barbara Green, ‘This Old Text: An Analogy for Biblical Interpretation’, *BTB* 36 (2006), 72–83, speaks of the precritical period being ‘filled with insight about the experience of being Christian in relation to God and in solidarity with others’ (74). It is to this emphasis that Calvin draws our attention.

¹⁹ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132–133; *Comm. Acts* 5:8, CNTC 6.137, respectively.

Unlike many scholars contemporary to us²⁰ Calvin appears to be as certain about the eternal fate of the couple, as he is about the crimes for which they were put to death before the onlooking community of faith. As for the fate of Ananias, for example, that appears to be summed up in Calvin's conclusion that, ‘The sign of a *reprobate man* is this: he is so given over to Satan, that no room is left for the Spirit of God.’²¹ Ananias was a member of the community, but he was not a true believer, not a spiritual man, not a man of faith.

It is important to note that Sapphira is treated as fully complicit with her husband and therefore as culpable and as deserving of the divine punishment. Though he makes nothing of the first verse that states that the wife had ‘full knowledge’ of her husband's duplicity, the reformer is adamant that Peter's interrogation (5:7–9) and the wife's punishment (5:10) demonstrate that she was ‘no better than her husband’. Indeed, it is noticeable that Calvin emphasises this point.

He does so by phrases that reiterate the idea, both coupling them in their sin and also singling Sapphira out in her own right: ‘the Church saw, sepa-

²⁰ See, for example, Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 38; Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts. A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 65. Lüdemann claims that the exact crime is no longer clear (66).

²¹ *Comm. Acts* 5:3, CNTC 6.133–134, emphasis added. This conclusion is seen also by implication in Calvin's comment that, ‘Since the proper nature of His Word was to save, it must indeed bring death to those who reject the salvation it offers’—*Comm. Acts* 5:5, CNTC 6.135, emphasis added.

rately, the treacherous intention and the stubborn wickedness of each of them', 'they were equally responsible', 'they were on a level in wickedly lying'; and also, 'she shows she is incurable', 'she has no terror of God'. Calvin concludes that 'they became mutual accomplices in their crime'.²²

The reformer's application to his audience is both diverse and clear: negatively and personally, that they must neither make pretence to holiness that is non-existent, nor to be striving for the approval of 'onlookers (*theatri plausum*)';²³ positively and corporately, that God greatly approves of honesty in his people, and of a pure and holy government in the church.²⁴

So we have discovered that a significant part of Calvin's strategy in dealing with the difficult situation that confronts him in this text is to emphasise the sinfulness of the recipients of divine judgement. Ananias and Sapphira demonstrate in their covert planning and in their actions that they are guilty before God and before the community of faith. Within this context, they deserve their fate. This is particularly highlighted by the implied contrast of Calvin's rather naïve insistence that the generous church in which these people sinned 'were more like angels than men'.²⁵

The contrast could hardly be drawn more sharply. However, as noted above, there are two other important compo-

nents to Calvin's reading strategy that are prominent in his short exposition: first, he stresses the role of Satan; second, he underlines the nature of God and his relationship to the church.

b) Satan's involvement

The narrative itself gives Calvin the cue on Satan's involvement, of course. Peter's accusation that Satan has filled Ananias' heart causing him to lie to the Holy Spirit allows the reformer to speak of the devil's tactics. He comments, for example, that Satan had devised 'a trick to penetrate that holy community', insinuating that he does so invidiously through the hypocrisy of two of its members. Calvin states this as a general rule: '[T]hat is the way Satan attacks the Church of God, when he can get nowhere with open war.'²⁶ Later in his exposition, commenting on Peter's explicit words ('Satan has filled your heart'), Calvin is adamant that Satan tempts everyone; it is a universal experience. However, he warns, 'when Satan takes possession of the heart he holds sway over the whole man, as if God were driven out'.

This indicates that both Ananias and his wife (by implication) were given over to Satan, that they had 'no room left' for the Spirit of God.²⁷ Proof of this derives from the fact (as Calvin sees it) that no one would dare to be so abusive of God unless they were 'devoid of all sense and reason'. It is noticeable, though, that Calvin allows no diminishing of responsibility on Ananias' part—no necessity drove

²² *Comm. Acts* 5:8, CNTC 6.137; *Comm. Acts* 5:7, CNTC 6.136; *Comm. Acts* 5:9, CNTC 6.137, respectively.

²³ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132; *Comm. Acts* 5:2, CNTC 6.133, respectively.

²⁴ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132.

²⁵ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132.

²⁶ *Comm. Acts* 5:1, CNTC 6.132.

²⁷ *Comm. Acts* 5:3, CNTC 6.133, 134, respectively.

him to sin, no outside influence forced him. Neither he nor his wife was excusable in this. Despite Satan’s treachery both were responsible for calling the wrath of God down on their heads.²⁸ This adds ammunition to his argument (noted above) that the crime deserved the punishment.

c) The nature of God and the divine positioning in the narrative

The third component that allows Calvin to handle this difficult text as he does is his view of God in the context of the narrated events. Interestingly, as Calvin expounds the passage, it is the person of God who almost imperceptibly but profoundly dominates the whole episode. And, typically, it is to the Triune God that Calvin points his audience—specifically to the two important theological doctrines of providence and *coram Deo*.

Calvin realises that it might have been otherwise, but considers it to be ‘the certain providence of God’ that caused the church community to see ‘separately, the treacherous intention and the stubborn wickedness’ of both spouses.²⁹ In another (but related) context John Thompson states that especially where Scripture seems obscure and offensive precritical commentators seek a ‘rule’ that will help to explain the event. He continues, ‘[T]hey frequently resort to providence: whatever happened in Scripture, surely God was in charge.’³⁰ It is in this spirit that Calvin hints at the over-arching divine providential determination of events

and, as is always the case, that determination has purpose: ‘it was ... appropriate and beneficial for the edification of the Church’.³¹

The reformer also has a great deal to say about the fact that the events took place before God (*coram Deo*). For example, he says this following on Ananias’ sin:

At the same time it does not enter his head that he is lying and cheating *in the sight of God*, and that God will punish him for his falsehood. In effect he honours the feet of the apostles more than the eyes of God.³²

Later, on reflection (almost by way of application), he says that Ananias should have behaved in the community ‘as if he were seeing God with his eyes’. In other words, the reformer is anxious that his audience should realise that God is a present, personal and a living God in the context of the assembly. He rules the *ecclesia* through his Word, preached by the apostles—they were not acting on their own (*privati*).³³ He also makes the Trinitarian observations that it is actually Christ who ‘presides in the assembly of those to whom they belong’³⁴ and that Ananias and Sapphira tempted the Spirit ‘because they heedlessly devised their fraud as

³¹ *Comm. Acts* 5:7, CNTC 6.136.

³² *Comm. Acts* 5:2, CNTC 6.133, emphasis added.

³³ *Comm. Acts* 5:4, CNTC 6.135.

³⁴ *Comm. Acts* 5:8, CNTC 6.137. Earlier, Calvin had stated that Ananias had deceived the church and that ‘where two or three are gathered in the name of Christ, He is present, presiding (Matt 18:20)’, *Comm. Acts* 5:4, CNTC 6.134.

²⁸ *Comm. Acts* 5:3, CNTC 6.134.

²⁹ *Comm. Acts* 5:7, CNTC 6.136.

³⁰ Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 251.

if the Spirit of God was not the Searcher (*cognitor*) of hearts'.³⁵

2. Reflections

We can see, then, that to his own satisfaction Calvin is able to answer the difficult question that naturally surfaces on a reading of Acts 5:1–11, Why is God so severe with Ananias and Sapphira? We need to acknowledge, first of all, that Calvin sees the difficulty, but he accepts it as such largely through the eyes of others who complain. Second, we have recognised a reading strategy in Calvin's response to the events recounted in the text. To allow the punishment meted out by God to be judged as deserved he does three specific things: he paints the couple in very bleak colours, portraying their sin as an enormous crime against both God and the church to which they belong.

With the help of the text he is also able to draw into the picture the malice of Satan himself. Finally, he positions the Triune God in the narrative in such a way as to underline the divine centrality in terms of his providential determination and his omniscient presence within the Christian community.

However, I think it would be quite inappropriate to say that the reformer answers the question objectively, or even comfortably. Arguably, his continual and urgent pastoral application suggests that he finds no comfort in the destruction of this couple, however sinful and culpable he maintains they are. Indeed, his heaping of fault against them points to a similar conclusion,

necessitating as it does (according to Calvin) their demise and permanent removal from the pristine Christian community. Ultimately, though, they serve a broader purpose—then and now.

Calvin expresses this purpose in his comment on verse 11 ('Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events'). In delineating a twofold fear at this point the reformer suggests that by punishing some God calls believers back from temptation and forces unbelievers to give glory to him—'the punishment of one person was a warning for all'.³⁶

On the surface this chapter appears to recount a fairly perspicuous event, after all Ananias and Sapphira *had* clearly sinned against the Holy Spirit and, by implication, against the community of faith. They had been punished for what they had clearly done. But what of a text in which, though someone *is* punished, the crime is far from certain. We turn to examine how Calvin reads and explains the passage in which Uzzah reaches out a hand to steady the ark of the Covenant and is slain in the effort.

II Uzzah and the Ark (2 Samuel 6)

There is no doubt at all that Calvin struggles more with the narrative of Uzzah's undoing than he did with that of Ananias and his wife, and for obvious reason. His introduction to the 17th sermon on 2 Samuel³⁷ indicates

³⁵ *Comm. Acts* 5:9, CNTC 6.137. He states that Ananias and Sapphira had made their plans 'as if God had been shut out'.

³⁶ *Comm. Acts* 5:11, CNTC 6.138.

³⁷ The significance of Calvin's preaching is well documented. See, for example, T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992); Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biog-*

as much: ‘We have here a very strange story, that a man attempting to honour God, burning with a good and holy devotion, was punished like a criminal.’ The reformer continues explicitly in the same vein:

Now this certainly offends our feelings. We know that the main cause of offending God is our wicked will. ... But ... *when our desire is to glorify him, and we have no ill will in us, even if we have erred and made a mistake, still it seems that God ought not to hold it against us. ... It seems that this ought to be acceptable to God.*³⁸

Then, the inevitable question, ‘Was being zealous that the ark of God should not be shamed a crime worthy of punishment?’³⁹ In reading this text the reformer clearly cannot use the reading strategy that worked in the case of Acts 5 where (as we observed) he was

able to emphasize the enormity of the crime. Indeed, the way the question here is framed puts a stop to that approach. In many ways Uzzah is considered to be innocent (even ‘zealous’)—at least from the human perspective.

Calvin preached two sermons directly related to the terrible incident under discussion⁴⁰ and makes further indirect comment in the other two sermons he preached on 2 Samuel 6.⁴¹ The question is how the reformer tackles the problem posed by God’s seemingly excessive punishment of Uzzah’s hasty action.⁴²

1. Calvin’s strategy

As we examine Calvin’s approach to the problem we see that his reading strategy at this juncture appears to have three elements. The first (sequentially, though not necessarily in priority) is to stress the significance of the ark. The second is to point out the enormous difference between God’s wisdom and humanity’s, thereby seeking to silence any complaint. As we saw in our analysis of the previous example, this again

raphy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 288–308; Hughes O. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 90–134; Lee P. Wandel, ‘Switzerland’ in Larissa Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 240–245; Dawn DeVries, ‘Calvin’s Preaching’ in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 106–124; Andrew Pettergree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 10–39; Michael Parsons, *Calvin’s Preaching on the Prophet Micah* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2006).

³⁸ *Sermons*, 244, emphasis added.

³⁹ *Sermons*, 244–245. This is apparent later in the same sermon where Calvin says that some might argue, ‘Why did God exercise such excessive severity on Uzzah? Would it not have been sufficient merely to admonish him?’—*Sermons*, 249.

⁴⁰ That is, sermons 16–17 (Friday July 3rd and Saturday July 4th, 1562), *Sermons*, 229–261.

⁴¹ That is, sermons 18–19 (Monday July 13th and Tuesday July 14th, 1562), *Sermons*, 262–294.

⁴² Early on Calvin speaks of the hastiness of Uzzah and adds that ‘God smote him ... because of his hastiness’—*Sermons*, 242 (emphasis added). This comes at the close of his first sermon on the subject and is revisited only once, briefly, in the following sermons. Calvin speaks in this context of Uzzah’s ‘recklessness’ and comments, ‘Now you might consider this hastiness to be commendable zeal, but in the eyes of God it was inconsiderate zeal, and merited punishment’—*Sermons*, 249.

has the effect of positioning God-in-relation-to-humanity with reference to the narrative. This is where the answer is ultimately to be found.

The third element in Calvin's reading is an attempt to concretise the answer to the problem in human experience and fault. Here, we find that he blames Uzzah by introducing the important reformational topic of vocation (*vocatio*) and (though rather half-heartedly) even adds the qualification that Uzzah may have been ambitious in what he did.

a) The significance of the ark

Given that Uzzah touched the ark and died, it is important for Calvin to show the dreadful significance of the ark and he does this in two ways. In a secondary manner, it is significant in the overall narrative, of course. According to the reformer, chapter 6 indicates that David has turned his attention 'to restoring the integrity of the worship of God'; indeed, God has called and established him as king for that particular purpose.⁴³ During the previous reign the people had given up seeking God, they had no zeal or affection for him: 'Although there was an outward appearance of religion, it was coldly and grudgingly performed.'⁴⁴

Apparently, then, David wanted the ark to be 'lodged in the centre of the country' where people could worship

more easily.⁴⁵ So the ark is significant because of its centrality both to Israel's worship and to David's major task at this point. Nevertheless, the primary significance of the ark goes well beyond that.

Calvin understandably stresses the idea that the ark is representative of divine presence.⁴⁶ Here, preaching on 2 Samuel 6, he states that 'undoubtedly the Holy Spirit wanted ... to emphasise that this ark was a definite sign and seal of the presence of God'. Indeed, in a daring application of Psalm 27:8 ('I have ever sought your face'), the reformer likens the ark to the face of God of which David speaks.⁴⁷ This notion presents the reformer with the opportunity to promote the magnificence and incomprehensibility of God—an opportunity he never misses.

At this point Calvin is attempting to square the obvious discrepancies between what he later calls 'a box', 'a casket of wood' and the 'greatness, majesty and power of God' whose dwelling place it represents.⁴⁸ He adopts the familiar idea of accommodation to explain it and in so doing emphasises the enormous difference between humanity and the Divine. We are 'too crude and weak', even applying all our senses to know God; he remains totally inaccessible; 'we can only crawl upon the earth, while "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him"'.⁴⁹

Therefore, he must come down to

⁴³ *Sermons*, 229.

⁴⁴ *Sermons*, 230. His application is inevitable, 'We must realise that it takes far more than making a formal profession and merely declaring that we are God's people and want to serve him. ... [I]t should encourage us to seek him voluntarily, and not in such a cold manner.'

⁴⁵ *Sermons*, 231.

⁴⁶ He also speaks of it as 'a mirror in which he might be seen'—*Comm. Ps* 78:61, CTS 5.271.

⁴⁷ *Sermons*, 232.

⁴⁸ *Sermons*, 268, 271, 255, respectively.

us when we cannot reach up to him. And how does he come down? It is not that he changes his place as far as his essence is concerned, but he must make himself known in a familiar manner. So when he conforms himself *to our smallness*, he does it only insofar as he abases himself. Not that there is change in him, but *his coming down refers to our capacity*.⁴⁹

The italicised words indicate clearly that Calvin has in mind that the ark is the dwelling place of God in respect to our very limited understanding⁵⁰—that is, it is (as Calvin puts it), ‘a standing witness that God wanted to dwell in the midst of the people’. The reformer speaks in God’s voice, ‘Here am I, and when you come through these means, it is the same as if I were manifest to you and you were seeing me with the naked eye.’⁵¹

That is what the ark means to

49 *Sermons*, 233. Later, Calvin says, ‘We need God to make himself small, so that we can have access to him, otherwise we would be completely shut out. ... [h]e indeed deigns to transfigure himself, so to speak, that we might approach him’—*Sermons*, 235. Notice the soteriological motivation: ‘He wishes to display his virtue there for the salvation of his people’—*Sermons*, 236. Elsewhere, Calvin says that ‘the mode of accommodation is for (God) to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us’—*Inst.* I.xvii.13.

50 David Willis, ‘Rhetoric and Responsibility in Calvin’s Theology’ in A. J. McKelway / E. D. Willis (eds), *The Context of Contemporary Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974) 58, makes the point well, ‘God begins with our incapacity, makes himself small to adjust to it, and by his gracious action of strategic self-limitation, transforms us so that we are increasingly united to God himself.’

51 *Sermons*, 233.

Calvin. It represents the immediate, personal presence of the living God amongst his people. Indeed, later, he briefly likens the ark to a sacrament—at least in principle. ‘The people,’ he says, ‘had to be moved to seek God in a very tangible manner.’⁵² Elsewhere, he speaks of it as ‘a pledge of his presence’.⁵³

What Calvin has done in relation to the problematic situation is clear. If Uzzah is killed for touching the ark, then the significance of the ark had better be determined. The wooden box represents the very real presence of God among his people. When Israel looks at it they see his ‘face’.⁵⁴ It is *that* ark that Uzzah handled.

b) God’s unfathomable wisdom

Ultimately, as I previously mentioned, according to Calvin, it is in the wisdom of God that we find the answer to the narrative’s inherent problem. We saw this in the case of Ananias and Sapphira’s deaths as well. Again, Calvin emphatically draws his audience’s attention to the fact that the divine judgement is beyond our understanding—though, noticeably, the reformer continues to acknowledge the difficulty.

52 *Sermons*, 234. The similarity between a sacrament and the ark is put thus: ‘God, therefore, must come down to seek us. But when he has come down, it is not to make us dull-witted; it is not to make us imagine that he is like us. Rather, it is so that we might go up little by little, by degrees, as we climb up a ladder one rung at a time. The sacraments are like this.’ See also, *Sermons*, 236, 251.

53 *Sermons*, 237. See also, *Sermons*, 279, 499.

54 The ark was named, ‘The Living God’; ‘[I]t says that God truly dwells between the cherubim’—*Sermons*, 232, 236, respectively.

Scripture so often warns us ... that the judgements of God are a profound abyss. This should make us utterly astonished, so that we fear God and his judgements, and find good in all he does—even when we are confused over it. ... If many of his works still do not agree with our appetites or our reason, let us remain his captive, and realise that it is quite necessary that God should surpass all our senses.⁵⁵

Calvin then suggests that if *we* were the judge of Uzzah he would have been absolved of any guilt because his motives were good and his zeal virtuous. Indeed, he would have been rewarded! Nevertheless, it is God's responsibility to discern between good and evil, not ours. The reformer's rule or principle is clear: 'God's will is the sole standard of all perfection.'⁵⁶ If the angels themselves are confused, continues Calvin, then our attitude should be one of quiet humility before the glory of God.⁵⁷

This seems enough to settle the matter, but interestingly there is in Calvin's exposition a hint that the cause of Uzzah's death is still a niggling con-

cern. Apparently, the reformer needs to find fault.

Uzzah's fault. Calvin has to move from his own perception that Uzzah was basically good—'holy devotion'; 'desire to glorify' God; zealous, though making a mistake⁵⁸—to the divine perception that he had offended God. As we have observed, it should be enough for Calvin to believe that God knows what he's about, but the reformer clearly wants to satisfy himself from a very different perspective. He needs to know that Uzzah is in some way to blame; that God justly punished him. Pastorally, this is reassuring for those who listen—they can trust God to do the right thing in relation to his people, and it is a great deal easier if we can see the problem concretely.

At this point in the reformer's argument he brings in the important reformational subject of vocation in an attempt to prize open Uzzah's culpability. Calvin suggests that Uzzah went beyond the limits of the vocation to which God had called him. He defines vocation as 'the duty to which God binds us' and its use 'to prove the obedience that we render him'. In vocation (or calling) God defines the limits, our task is to walk within them: 'we should not go further than is legitimate for us'. In the example of Uzzah touching the ark, says Calvin, '[W]e are instructed not to attempt to go beyond the demands of our office'.⁵⁹

It is at this juncture that Calvin begins to use words like 'presumption' and 'recklessness' and to imply pride

⁵⁵ *Sermons*, 245, emphasis added. He continues, 'For what is his wisdom? It comprehends both heaven and earth, and yet cannot be perceived, because it is infinite. And what is our reason and intelligence? It is nothing but a little drop.'

⁵⁶ *Sermons*, 245. God's 'justice is fair'—*Sermons*, 250.

⁵⁷ *Sermons*, 246. Later, he says, 'When we come to God, let us fear, let us be stunned by his majesty, above all let us realise what we are, that we are full of nothing but rottenness and infection.' Though, he adds, 'However, let us not fail to taste the goodness of God'—*Sermons*, 255.

⁵⁸ *Sermons*, 244. Later, Calvin speaks of the very real devotion of Uzzah within the situation—*Sermons*, 263.

⁵⁹ *Sermons*, 246.

and ambition in reference to Uzzah, and, of course, these are displeasing to God.⁶⁰ Now Calvin feels more confident to assert God’s just judgement.

[I]f someone argues, ‘Why did God exercise such excessive severity on Uzzah? Would it not have been sufficient merely to admonish him?’ ... God knows exactly how to silence our babbling and our rash judgements. ... Let us learn, therefore, to avoid such arrogance, and to adore the judgements of God—and to realise that since Uzzah did not stay in his place, God had just cause to chastise him for his recklessness. ... God was justly angry.⁶¹

Calvin argues further that in touching the ark Uzzah was a private person seeking to do what only consecrated people should.

In our examination of the deaths of Ananias and his wife we observed that Calvin was confident, because of their crime, that they were not people of faith, not authentic members of the Christian community, and that their fate was one of eternal judgement prefigured by their physical death. Here, in relation to Uzzah, Calvin is just as confident of Uzzah’s fate—that he is a man of God and that his fate is a positive one, despite his death. God was not eternally angry with Uzzah.

[D]eath could have been profitable to Uzzah, in that being thus pun-

ished, he did not fail to obtain pardon from God, and that it was even a mercy which God bestowed upon him when he took him out of the world. ... God, seeing his zeal, had pity on him.⁶²

God was angry with Uzzah, but because he saw his zeal ‘he punished only his body in order that his spirit might be saved’.⁶³ Again, the victim becomes an example to instruct, not only his own generation, but also future generations, including sixteenth century Geneva.

2. Reflections

We see that Calvin himself has difficulties with the death of Uzzah, that he acknowledges them and that he struggles to come to some sort of conclusion on the matter. In so doing he struggles particularly with the thought that Uzzah appears to be spiritually zealous for the things of God yet that he is killed as punishment for an undisclosed wrongdoing. The reformer attempts to resolve the issue with the simple, dogmatic assertion that God’s wisdom is incomprehensible to us. However, we notice, too, that this seems somewhat less than entirely convincing (even for Calvin) and, against the text, he pursues the problematic line that Uzzah overstepped the boundaries of vocation.

⁶⁰ *Sermons*, 247. Calvin’s application implies a great deal about his thinking on Uzzah. He says, ‘Let everyone openly devote himself to it, so that we will not go beyond our boundaries like wild horses’, emphasis added. See also, *Sermons*, 250.

⁶¹ *Sermons*, 249, 250, respectively.

⁶² *Sermons*, 250. Calvin argues that God will punish the body of anyone who has done wrong, ‘yet it will be for their profit’. Further, Uzzah died there, ‘but it is a very small and light thing to pass out of this world. When God takes us from here, it is not a judgement so grievous as we think, in that we do not understand the life eternal to which he calls us’.

⁶³ *Sermons*, 250.

It is worth pointing out what appears to be a glaring inconsistency in Calvin's argument as he proceeds through the sermons on 2 Samuel 6. It has to do with his reasoning on Uzzah's situation in relation to his conclusions on David. We have noticed that the reformer argues that Uzzah—though he was generally motivated by holy zeal and devotion—was guilty of overstepping the boundaries of vocation. He was smitten of the Lord because of this. However, as Calvin portrays the king we see that he stands in the same difficulty but is *not* killed by God. This seems to be contradictory.

That is to say David is continually represented by Calvin as failing before God in the same area as Uzzah. For example, Calvin suggests that David *presumed* to remove the ark, 'without being specifically commanded to do so'.⁶⁴ More relevantly, he is said to be without excuse for placing the ark of God on the new cart, 'because this duty was assigned to the Kohathites. ... God ordained it this way, it should have been done in obedience to him'.⁶⁵ This speaks directly to the subject of vocation. David himself failed to recognise vocational boundaries, though he acts as he does—like Uzzah—with good intentions.⁶⁶ But according to Calvin's argument God should have smitten David.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Sermons*, 231.

⁶⁵ *Sermons*, 237. Significantly, later, Calvin singles out as the reason for Uzzah's death the fact that the ark should have been touched only by the Kohathites. The reformer repeatedly speaks of David's failure in this and of his contempt—see *Sermons*, 238.

⁶⁶ *Sermons*, 239.

⁶⁷ Later, Calvin says that David was dis-

Perhaps the answer for this inconsistency is to be found in the centrality of David to the narrative, and particularly to the soteriological significance of the king—a significance that Uzzah could not possess, of course. Indeed, Calvin sees Uzzah's example as primarily having instruction to David, and only then to others. The centrality of the king also plays a huge part in the last example, that of Uriah, Bathsheba's ill fated husband.

III Uriah, an Innocent Man (2 Samuel 11–12)

In reading of the terrible death of Uriah⁶⁸ Calvin is clearly in a quandary. Uriah is obviously innocent of any crime, and, though he does not punish Uriah as he had Ananias and his wife and Uzzah, God is still plainly centrally involved in the whole situation. We might gauge the reformer's response by a paragraph that emerges some way through his sermons on the narrative in which he lists no fewer than six promises that God seems to have broken in regard to Uriah's death.

Where were the promises by which

pleased and angry because he had been involved 'in the scandal of seeing Uzzah die'—*Sermons*, 253. Apart from this, if as Calvin states in Sermon 19 (2 Samuel 6:20–23) that God 'is not interested in what is external' the difficulty over Uzzah's death not only remains, but is also sharpened—*Sermons*, 290 (he cites Jer 5:3).

⁶⁸ Calvin speaks of Uriah as 'an innocent man' in his second sermon on the incident—*Sermons*, 505. Also, *Sermons*, 507. The reformer preached two sermons on David which touch directly on Uriah's fate: sermons 33–34 (Thursday August 13th and Friday August 14th, 1562), *Sermons*, 490–518.

God testified that he would never forsake his own (Ps 37:28); that their blood would be precious to him (Ps 72:14; Heb 12:24); that even a hair of their head would not fall, and that they were numbered by him (Matt 10:30); that he would guide their steps, and that he would cause them to be guided by his angels (Ps 91:11); and that they would be fortified with a double rampart; that he would be their strength and their shield (Ps 28:7); that he would hold them dear as the apple of his eye (Deut 32:10; Ps 17:8).⁶⁹

Calvin adds, ‘and everything else that it is possible to say’, signifying a depth of concern here. The inevitable question, ‘Why, then, did God not help him in time of need?’ follows the assertion of Uriah’s innocence and his reverence for God and precedes the poignant comment, ‘[I]t seems that he was frustrated *for having carefully served God*.’⁷⁰

1. Calvin’s strategy

The reformer’s use of Uriah defines his strategy. He naturally presents him in stark contrast to the king. In contrast to David’s shameless abuse of Uriah (both in taking his wife and in having him killed) Uriah himself is said to be faithful to David. In fact, he is a friend.⁷¹ It is Uriah, not David who acted and spoke in a manner worthy of his vocation or calling.⁷² ‘Above all,’ Calvin

says, ‘he put God first’.⁷³ In this way Calvin is able to show something of David’s fall by revealing Uriah in such a contrasting and positive light.

However, there is more to Uriah in Calvin’s reading of the text. He presents him as in a sense a prophet of God and this is where the doctrine of providence comes to the fore in his handling of the narrative. At the point of Uriah adamantly refusing to sleep with Bathsheba Calvin makes the point that it was God who controlled his feelings. Indeed, more formally, Uriah had been prevented from sleeping with Bathsheba ‘by the secret counsel of God’.⁷⁴ The reformer concludes that ‘it is certain that when Uriah refused to go into his house, it was a just judgement of God on David, *to lead him to recognise his sin*’.⁷⁵

The italicised words show that Calvin (understandably) expounds the narrative with David as the central and determining character. All other characters (including Uriah) are significant only as they serve his situation of downfall and gracious restoration.⁷⁶ When Uriah speaks to David, Calvin is convinced that he has been instructed by God: ‘[I]t is certain that God placed these words in the mouth of Uriah *in or-*

⁷³ *Sermons*, 497. Calvin continues, ‘Uriah was a man who feared God, and had his heart in religion.’

⁷⁴ *Sermons*, 493.

⁷⁵ *Sermons*, 493, emphasis added. See also, *Sermons*, 496. ‘God ... did not permit Uriah to go and sleep with his wife’ – *Sermons*, 491. Calvin repeatedly makes this important point: see *Sermons*, 492, 493, 496.

⁷⁶ See Michael Parsons, *Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narratives. Reformation Thought and Narrative Text* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004), 205–224.

⁶⁹ *Sermons*, 507.

⁷⁰ *Sermons*, 507, emphasis added.

⁷¹ *Sermons*, 477, 484, 507. Calvin asserts that Uriah honoured David in his position of leadership, *Sermons*, 496.

⁷² *Sermons*, 496–7. See also, *Sermons*, 498.

*der to keep David more than convicted.*⁷⁷

As we have seen, this whole construct that Calvin pursues appears to corner him, and naturally throws up what appears to be an insurmountable question on the nature of God's love for his own people. We have already seen that Calvin realises this. He recognises that if Uriah was doing nothing less than faithfully carrying out that which the Lord had given him to do, then why does he die so ignominiously?

Having asked the hard question, we find that Calvin teaches the opposite of the conclusion to which he appears to be coming. He says that far from teaching us that it is pointless to serve God, Uriah's death shows that this world is not our rest and that there is such a thing as eternal life. 'Indeed, there must be a better life than this one, for otherwise we would have to say that God was asleep in the heavens when Uriah was put to death.'⁷⁸ Again, notice the implicit reference to providence in this statement.

The logic seems to be: If God is not actively involved in human affairs ('asleep in the heavens') the conclusion would be that there is nothing beyond; however, God is implicitly involved in Uriah's life (and death) and because God is loving (implied) then Uriah's death must usher in something far better than that which he leaves in this world.⁷⁹ Indeed, Calvin concludes

⁷⁷ *Sermons*, 499. Later, Calvin concludes: 'To sum up, we see how the tongue of Uriah was governed by the secret counsel of God, so that he taught David in such a way that he received greater condemnation'—*Sermons*, 500.

⁷⁸ *Sermons*, 508.

⁷⁹ Calvin makes a similar point earlier. He concludes that if this world is a final goal 'one

that, 'Death comes when the right moment arrives; that is to say, when God wills it.'⁸⁰

As we have observed above on Ananias and Sapphira, and Uzzah's deaths, this particular death serves as an example. In this context 'we see that this death, instead of horrifying us, is useful to us, because it is like a mirror which represents eternal life before our eyes'.⁸¹ The wages of the faithful are not received in this life, but in the next. The reformer cites Romans 8:28 and suggests on the basis of it that 'even death will be our entrance into a better life'. So he turns a very negative problem to a positive theological conclusion in focusing on the individual eschatology involved. Enjoying God's mercy here in this life ought to make us aspire to eternal rest in which we will fully know that goodness. Notice his conclusion:

This is how we should judge the death of Uriah, and recognise that we most certainly have not been forsaken by God when he takes us to himself, for we must always go home that way. So let us not be surprised or think that God has mocked us in his promises that he wants to be our Saviour.

It is clear from this quote that Calvin has finally resolved the problem of Uriah's death. We would have to say, though, that he does this partly by ignoring the details and by normalising the death ('we must always go home that way') and also by asserting that it

would have to conclude that God is an idol or a phantom'—*Sermons*, 507.

⁸⁰ *Sermons*, 508.

⁸¹ *Sermons*, 508.

is in that way that God shows himself to be our Saviour (*not* our Enemy).

2. Reflections

It is apparent that Calvin is deeply concerned with the tragedy of Uriah. The narrative problem is highlighted by the fact that Uriah is seen to be in stark contrast to David the king, even to being the mouthpiece of God himself. But it is more crucial than that. It seems to go right to the heart of a pastoral problem, perhaps *the* central pastoral question: Is God for his people? Can the righteous trust a God who allows Uriah's death?

The reformer himself questions the God of the promises against the God of Uriah's death. But ultimately, of course, Calvin wants to give an open access to the Scriptures to the unlearned, ordinary believers and to confirm their faith in the doctrine they are taught, not to shake that faith.⁸² God is to be vindicated.

Pulling the rug from beneath the counter-argument, Calvin asserts that if God were *not* involved in Uriah's death there would be a greater difficulty. It is because God is intimately implicated in the death that we know Uriah's experience worked for his good, not ill. In other words, it is the divine involvement that assures us that Uriah was not forsaken of God (as it appears on the surface) but was taken to his eternal rest by divine mercy. Uriah's death was not punishment or abandonment, but rather blessing.

IV Conclusion

A few closing remarks might be made by way of conclusion. First, it is clear that in reading the narratives discussed Calvin refuses to take the easy way out by simply ignoring the difficulties. Indeed, in each case we have discovered his acceptance of the inherent difficulty, though in the situation concerning Ananias and Sapphira he targeted the problem from the perspective of others. The reformer struggles to handle the problem in the Uzzah and Uriah narratives—in the latter backing himself into a corner of his own making as he considers the apparent discrepancy between the divine promises and God's providential dealing with his servant.

Second, we have noted that there is in the reformer's approach a casuistic analysis in which Calvin assesses and assigns blame.⁸³ It appears that these narratives are dealt with more easily if blame and culpability can be apportioned. Within the context and scope of his own work Thompson comments that, 'Considerations are almost always tinged with an explicit concern for questions of praise and blame, with worries over right and wrong'.⁸⁴

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira become less of a problem for Calvin by the reformer's insistence on the enormity of their crime, for example, Uzzah's death is 'legitimised' by drawing on the reformational idea of vocation and suggesting that Uzzah went beyond its boundaries in his touching the ark. Uriah's death, of course, proves

⁸² See Randall C. Zachman, 'Gathering Meaning from the Context' in idem *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 103–130 (105).

⁸³ The phrase, 'casuistic analysis', comes from Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 246.

⁸⁴ Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs*, 8.

more problematic, but (naturally) the reformer still refuses to blame God.

Third, we have pointed out that Calvin's reading strategy includes introducing theological ideas that might help him to resolve the difficulties within the narrative. Interestingly, the reformer himself alludes to this in his treatment of Uzzah's death.

Our glasses are doctrine. Through these glasses of true doctrine, we fear God and interpret his works. ... Thus, when we have the Word of God to regulate our sense towards a proper appreciation of his works, then our judgement is right. When God exercises his judgement, we will say that it is just and equitable, and we will bow our necks beneath his yoke; we will make no complaint. ... Yet our fear will make us humble and our faith will always remain constant and firm.⁸⁵

The doctrine of providence is explicit in Calvin's comments on Acts 5 and Uriah's story, but it is clearly beneath the surface of his remarks on the other passage. This may appear to point to divine culpability, but the reformer's understanding is more complex than that and allows for a 'diversity of purpose' that leaves Ananias, Sapphira and Uzzah all guilty before God

and without excuse.⁸⁶ At other times Calvin draws upon the ideas of *coram Dei*, vocation, personal eschatology, God's wisdom and so on in an attempt to make sense of the narratives, in an attempt to resolve the moral question implied in each.

Finally, it is worth noting that each death narrative forms an example for those who follow. Calvin's pastoral intention is to go beyond the text as such and to apply even the disturbing tales to his own people in Geneva. As Thompson underlines, Calvin was committed 'to an exposition of Scripture that would be *useful* in serving the cause of gospel and church'.⁸⁷ In that setting it is worth getting the reading strategy sufficiently watertight in order to move on to the purpose for which the passage is related, the up-building of believers in every subsequent age.

⁸⁶ 'It is the linchpin of Calvin's account of the relation of providence and evil that there is "diversity of purpose" in providence; in the one event, a human agent, Satan and the Lord may each have different purposes'—Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 100. See, generally, 93–128. Also, Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation* (Allison Park, Penn: Pickwick, 1996), 69–72.

⁸⁷ John Thompson, 'Calvin as Biblical Interpreter' in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 62, emphasis added.

⁸⁵ *Sermons*, 260.

Delivery into the Hands of Satan—A Church in Apostasy and not Knowing it: An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:5

Mario Phillip

I Introduction

The Epistles are not merely doctrinal treatises removed from the practical implications of theology, but in their pages can be discerned both a fervour for orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as well as an uncompromising impetus for holiness. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 the author endeavours to balance theological dogmas with consistent principle-based Christianity—an initiative shown to be indispensable to the growth and continued relevance of the church. Unlike current trends, this passage does not condone passivity or spiritual inertia, but instead, it promotes strict moral conduct among those who would be followers of Christ. The Epistles are no strangers to anomalies (1 Cor 11:10; 15:29); thus the seemingly enigmatic and grotesque rhetoric of ‘delivering someone over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that he may be saved’ (1 Cor 5:5) would not have un-

nerved the primary audience, nor the apostle, since the complexities in the Epistles are well attested too.

Scholarly views vary on what precisely is meant by ‘delivering someone to Satan for destruction’. There are those who believe that Paul is referring to a degenerative physical illness that will befall the offender.¹ Some believe

¹ W. Barclay, *By What Authority?* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1974), 118; M. Dodd, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 118; R. A. Knox, *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 2, 140; H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1851), 90; H. Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 471; W. G. H. Simon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), 78; M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians, CBC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 40.

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that the command signals a destruction of the offender's sinful nature.² Then, there are those who see it signifying an expulsion from the church community.³ Finally some believe that Paul is referring to the physical death of the offender.⁴ Are all these views correct? If not, then which is? What is the intended

primary meaning? This paper endeavours to find a possible understanding of this anomaly, bearing in mind the inner contextual clues furnished by the text.

Although couched within seeming anomalous rhetoric, this text (1 Cor 5:5) speaks to believers of all ages. Nevertheless, there are questions such as, how can restitution and salvation result from delivering someone over to Satan? Why the apparent rhetoric? How can such an action help the individual, and the church? Are there implications that can be applied to the present Christian church?

Often a casual reading of the text can initiate the hermeneutical trajectory in which any interpretation must be based, but this does not preclude the reader's obligations to engage in a closer exegetical examination. Notwithstanding the works that have already been produced, this paper will endeavour to highlight the relevance of the discipline and salvation motifs to the theology and practice of the church. The combination of salvation and excommunication in the hands of Satan seems incongruent. The question then is, would the primary audience have grasped Paul's intent and not be perturbed by his rhetoric as the modern reader would?

II Historical Background

The letter to the Corinthians, written around AD 55, has been one of the few where Pauline authorship is hardly contested (1 Cor 1:1).⁵ Corinth was a

2 F.W. Farrar *et al*, *1 Corinthians* (New York/London: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 167; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 123; M. L. Jeschke, 'Toward an Evangelical Conception of Corrective Church Discipline' (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1965), 149; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Columbus Wartburg, 1946), 217; J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888), 67; G. C. Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul* (New York: Revell, 1946), 83. A variation of the view is expressed by A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d, ICC (New York: Scribner's, 1916), 99.

3 James T. South, 'A Critique of the "Curse/Death" Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8,' *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 539-61; Simon J. Kistemaker, 'Deliver this Man to Satan' (1 Cor 5:5): A Case Study in Church Discipline' *TMSJ* 3 (1992): 33-45.

4 R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1951-55), 1 233; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia Fortress, 1975), 97, S. M. Gilmour, 'Pastoral Care in the New Testament Church,' *NTS* 10 (1963-64): 395, J. C. Hurd, Jr, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1965), 137, 286 η 5, G. W. H. Lampe, 'Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians,' *Christian History and Interpretation Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule and R. R. Niebuhr, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1967), 349, 353.

5 D. A. Carson, Douglass J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 262-263, 282.

thriving metropolis in the ancient Mediterranean with a culturally and linguistically robust populace of different races, mainly Roman veterans, tradesmen, and daily labourers, Jews (Acts 18:2, 7; 1 Cor 1:14; 16:17), Latins (Rom 16:22–23) and Greeks, as well as others. Although the city was populated by Greeks, its cultural moorings were based on Roman norms. The inhabitants came from all stratas of society, all converging on Corinth as an economic and social melting pot. Corinth boasted two harbours, thus serving as an important transit point for vessels traversing from the southern peninsula to central Greece. The seaports of Corinth were always bustling with commerce, trafficking and trade, making Corinth a commercial epicentre.

The city was also noted for its licentiousness and sexual debauchery so much so that the adage ‘to corinthicize’ became a common term for persons involved in sexual immorality. This explains the prominence given to the Greek goddess of love—Aphrodite.⁶ Religious pluralism was accepted in Corinth, allowing different ideologies to co-exist. The Corinthians also allowed many diverse religious groups to practise their faith. With its wealth and recognition, the city felt self-sufficient and aloof from the impoverishment of some of its people. Corinth thrived on

its enviable consumerist culture and economy of trade, business and entrepreneurship.⁷

A population as diverse as Corinth would inevitably have varying conceptions on values—a fact which is reflected in the Corinthian correspondence. The conflicts and concerns in the church might have easily been a clash over ideologies—philosophical, religious and political. The trepidation over rhetorical speaking, castigation of manual labour befitting a moral exemplar, and proper decorum befitting believers appear to stem from a clash of cultures.⁸ The historical circumstance from which the church emerged made it easy to relapse into idolatry and susceptible to fragmentation. One can understand therefore why the Epistle essentially endeavours to prevent these very same phenomena from occurring.

In 1 Cor 5:1-11 an incestuous relationship existed in the church which received a staunch denunciation from the apostle. Incest is strongly prohibited in the Pentateuch (Lev 18:8; 20:11; cf. Gen 35:22; 49:4; Ezek 22:10-11). The punishment associated with an incestuous or even adulterous affair was often a curse or even death (Deut 27:20; 22:22, 24, 30). Even in later Judaism, incest was never tolerated. In the Mishnah it is said that ‘these are [the felons] who are put to death by stoning: He who has sexual relations with his mother, with the wife of his father, (with his daughter-in-law, with a male, and with a cow; and the woman

⁶ Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Rom 16:27; Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, vol. 18, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 5.

⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 2-5.

⁸ *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, s. v. Rom 16:27.

who brings an ox on top of herself.' (*m. Sanh* 7:4; cf. 9:1) Of all the offences that warranted an expulsion in Judaism, incest headed the list (*m. Ker* 1:1; *Jub.* 33:10–13; *t. Sanh.* 10:1; CD-A V; 11Q19 LXVI). Both Josephus and Philo even expressed the reprehensibility of incest (*Ant.* 3.274; *Spec. Laws* 3.13–14; cf. 3.20–21).⁹

In 1 Cor 5, the motif of discipline is associated with the motifs of holiness, the covenant, and corporate responsibility. The common seam that unites all these is the holiness of the covenant community which sets them apart unto righteousness.¹⁰ Thus expulsion of anything that threatens the holiness of the community was considered a necessary act in the same way that cleansing the earthly sanctuary from sin was of paramount importance.

III Literary Analysis

In 1 Cor 1:10-6:20 Paul responds to oral complaints that are brought to him by the house of Chloe (1 Cor 1:10), and also to written reports received from concerned segments of the church (1 Cor 7:1). In his pastoral function he first dealt with a church that was divided internally, and one which misunderstood the role, function, and relationship of the gospel and its messengers.¹¹ Contrary to what was prac-

tised in Corinth, the gospel served as a polemic against human hubris, espousing rather the self-effacement of the message and its messenger (1 Cor 3:5-17; 4:1-21).

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians essentially addressed the problems of the divisions as reported to the apostle (1 Cor 1:10). The noun *schismata*, 'division', and the verb *schizo*, 'to divide', which are used rarely in Scripture denote either the act of being physically torn (Mt 9:16; Mark 2:21), or being divided due to conflicting aims or ideals (Jn 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; 1 Cor 18; 12:25).¹² The central aim therefore of the letter revolves around mending brokenness or division within the church. It will later be demonstrated that this brokenness existed both in practice and in ideology.

The first section of the letter is built on an antithetical framework where ideal realities are contrasted with opposing or competing ideologies. For example, the so-called followers of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ are compared with each other (1 Cor 1:10-17); the wisdom of God is compared with the wisdom of this world (1:18-2:13); spiritual and carnal minds are compared (2:6-3:23); correct and improper attitudes towards the apostle are contrasted (4:1-21);¹³ moral perspicuity is contrasted with moral negligence and indifference (5:1-13); legal litiga-

⁹ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 596, 602.

¹⁰ B. S. Ronser, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 61-93.

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 66-89.

¹² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, BDAG, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s. v. 'schisma.'

¹³ Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 42-88.

tion is contrasted with ecclesiastical litigation (6:1-11); Christian liberty is set against the perversion of Christian liberty (6:12-20); marriage and singleness are contrasted (7:1-40); and Christian liberty is viewed in both its proper exercise and its abuse (8:1-14:40). These contrasts are meant to elucidate the ideals of Christian conduct which ought to characterize God's community of faith.

The link between the first five chapters is further illustrated by the use of the noun *kauchēma*, 'boasting' (1 Cor 5:6), and the corresponding verb *kauchaomai*, 'to boast' (1 Cor 1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:7). Moreover, the verb, 'puffed up', (1 Cor 5:2), is also used several times in chapter 4 (vv 6, 18, 19). The unity of chapters 5 and 6 is also seen as evidence of the coherence among the first six chapters of the letter. In 1 Cor 5-6 the word *porneia*, 'sexual immorality' and other derivatives are used (1 Cor 5:1, 9, 10, 11; 6:9, 13, 15, 16, 18). This emphasizes the unitary thrust of the pericope in dealing with matters pertinent to Christian behaviour and decorum.¹⁴

The text under consideration thus falls between two pericopes that address attitudinal concerns towards the gospel and its messengers (1 Cor 1:10-4:20), and the knowledge and practice of gospel principles (1 Cor 5:1-14:40).¹⁵ More specifically the text relates to behaviours befitting those belonging to the community of faith, and the corporate responsibility that

such community has for those within its jurisdiction.

1. Contrasting Attitudes

To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5 KJV).

The author endeavours to confront the dilemma facing the Corinthian church by establishing the parallels between realities, thus showing the disparity between moral ideals and the present circumstance of the believing community. In response to the reports on sexual impropriety, the rhetorical question is asked, 'What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?' (1 Cor 4:21). This was aimed at establishing the dualistic paradigm earlier elucidated. More importantly, it sets forth the focal constituent of the ensuing pericope (1 Cor 5:1-13).

The use of the substantive *ravdos*, 'rod/staff'¹⁶ is a rarity in the NT, but its occurrence is often associated with an instrument of physical support (Mt 10:10; Mk 6:8; Lk 9:3), guidance (Heb 9:4), or judgment (Heb 9:8; Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:5). As to in what sense it is understood here in 1 Cor 4:21, the phrase 'in love and spirit of gentleness' can shed some light. The noun *prautētos*, 'gentleness'¹⁷ occurs in the NT consistently within the contexts of the attributes of Christ (2 Cor 10:1), fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23), an attitude of humil-

¹⁴ See Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The function of "Excommunication" in Paul', *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 251-252.

¹⁵ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 1999), 235-238.

¹⁶ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 3, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-), s. v. 'ravdos.'

¹⁷ BADG, s. v. 'prautēs.'

ity (Gal 6:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:25; Jas 1:21; 3:15; 1 Pet 3:16), and showing consideration (Tit 3:2).

1 Corinthians 5:5 should be understood from the perspective of the subsequent admonition for believers to dissociate themselves from those within the household of faith who live immorally (1 Cor 5:9-13). What was it about the conduct of immoral believers that made it so deplorable? The verb that is used, *sunanamignusthai*, 'to associate' is found elsewhere in reference to shunning people of immoral practices (1 Cor 5:11), recalcitrance (2 Thess 3:14), and indiscriminate association (Hos 7:8). Exhibiting a quite opposite set of values, the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9) choose to associate with and endorse immorality within the community of faith through failing to address the gravity of the sin.

The central issue at stake in 1 Cor 5:5 is of a two-fold nature. The first is stated in 1 Cor 5:1—immorality within the church. Although the author chose not to divulge much detail of the actual offence, his usage of the adverb *olōs*, 'completely', implied that he was privy to substantial information.¹⁸ The sin committed is identified as *porneia*, a practice that was condemned by the Old Testament (Lev 18:6-8; Deut 22:30),¹⁹ and also receives the staunchest of condemnations from the

New Testament, particularly the apostle Paul (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor 6:13, 18; 7:2; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3).²⁰

The second issue is conveyed by the expression, 'you are arrogant', or to put it another way, you possess 'an exaggerated self-perception'²¹, 'haughtiness and pride'²² (1 Cor 5:2). The use of the plural personal pronoun 'you' is meant to give prominence to the members in question. It may further be extrapolated that the imperative of 1 Cor 5:5 envisions more than a single individual, speaking instead to the entire corporate body. The arrogance demonstrated by the Corinthians seems most worrisome to the apostle partly because it stands in opposition to the very attitude of humility, which is possessed by the apostle (1 Cor 4:21).

The perfect participle, *pephsiōmenoi*, 'you have become puffed up' (1 Cor 5:2) is used periphrastically not just for redundancy,²³ but also to emphasize the present resultative state or condition.²⁴ This means that even up to the moment of writing, believers were

¹⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d (New York, NY: UBS, 1989), s. v. 'olōs'.

¹⁹ Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, 'Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, The Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of The Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14', *JBL* 121 (2002): 711-744.

²⁰ See William Horbury, 'Extirpation and Excommunication', *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 13-38. Incest was shunned even by the Romans, see Cicero *Pro Cluent* 5.11-14.

²¹ Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'phusioō'.

²² Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), s.v. phusioō, Kistemaker, 'Deliver this Man to Satan', 36.

²³ See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 647.

²⁴ See Cleon L. Rogers Jr. & Cleon Roger III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 356.

filled with maleficent pride. The aim therefore of 1 Cor 5:5 is not merely to address a single member living immorally, but more so a church in apostasy and oblivious to that reality. Additionally, the participle also functions as a predicative adjective in that it makes an assertion about the subject in question.²⁵ The Corinthians' arrogance seemed to have been so constitutive of who they are that it created the greatest hindrance to the community of faith. This arrogance was earlier alluded to in 1 Cor 4:18, 19; now a practical depiction of this arrogance is at work as demonstrated in their attitude to immorality within their midst.²⁶

The attitude of the Corinthians is further highlighted by the call 'to mourn' (*epenthēsate*, 1 Cor 5:2). The aorist indicative here seems to have a constative nuance where the action is stated as a matter of fact as opposed to indicating whether or not it has begun or even been completed.²⁷ The focus therefore is not on the nature of mourning but rather on the act of mourning that is warranted by the circumstance. Judging by the context, it can be assumed that the act of mourning among the Corinthians that should have been in occurrence was yet to begin. The verb *pentheō*, 'to mourn', speaks of a godly sorrow that accompanies a particular state or condition (Mt 5:4; 9:15; 16:10; Lk 6:25; 2 Cor 12:21; Jas 4:9).²⁸

2. The Apostle's Judgment

Up to this point it can be said that the apostle is aggrieved at the failings of the Corinthians. Rather than exhibiting godly sorrow they are demonstrating arrogance, and thus cannot see there is one among them so much in need of discipline and restoration. The apostle then compares his uncompromising stance with their inconsistency. The expression, 'on the one hand although I am away in body, on the other hand in the spirit I have already judged', expresses his consistent position on the side of principle. The use of the present participles *apōn*, 'away', and *parōn*, 'present', if understood as concessive, then would imply that the action or state of the main verb *kekrika*, 'to judge', is true irrespective of the state of the participles.²⁹

Two things can be inferred at this point: first, the action of the apostle would be the same whether he was present or absent: second, the present nature of the participles implies the simultaneous or consistent nature of the action. Further, the perfect tense points to the continuing or perpetuating results of the action of being judged. It in some ways mirrors a consummative perfect where the emphasis is on the completed act in the past which explains the present state.³⁰ Thus the focus here is on the consistency of the apostle Paul's standards whether present or absent, as opposed to the inconsistency and failings of the Corinthian believers.

The apostle invokes two authorities in his attempt to pronounce his verdict

25 Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament With Reference to Tense and Mood* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 484.

26 See Paul S. Minear, 'Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5-6', *Review & Expositor* 80 (Sum 1983), 343.

27 See Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 557-560.

28 See also Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'pentheō'.

29 Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 634.

30 Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 577.

on the offender. The first was a divine authority as indicated by the expression, 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 5:4a), and the second is his own apostolic authority energized by the power of God (1 Cor 5:4b). Several interpretational alternatives have been suggested concerning what the expression 'in the name of the Lord' qualifies.³¹ This study assumes that here the author seems to be drawing on a technical terminology which invokes his apostolic authority.

The question that requires some clarity is whether or not the offender of 1 Cor 5:5 was at the time of writing still committing the acts of immorality, or if it was something committed only in the past. The answer to this question is contingent on how one views the participle *katergasamenon*, which can be understood either attributively as 'committing', or predicatively as 'committed'. The former, while describing the action, also makes it a continuous activity, while the latter emphasizes the reality of the action without any reference to the beginning or end. The articular usage of the pronoun, 'this one', points to a something that was well known,³² both to the author and the audience, and therefore might allude to an action that has been persisting even up to the time of writing.

1 Corinthians 5:5 begins with an imperatival infinitive *paradounai*, 'to handover', which gives the impression that the apostle is laying down a norm that he expected to be practised, both at

Corinth and wherever else it might become applicable. The verb *paradidōmi* is used in the NT over 117 times and carries the nuance of giving up something that is held too strongly (Mt 25:20, 22; Lk 4:6), committing something for preservation and care (Acts 15:40; 14:26; 1 Pet 2:23), or making it possible for something to happen (Mk 4:29). In the epistles, the primary sense denotes ownership (Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 4:25; 6:17; Eph 4:19; 1 Tim 1:20).

3. Destruction of the Flesh

The use of the articular 'such a one' (1 Cor 5:5) points anaphorically back to *ton touto*, 'this one/him', (1 Cor 5:3), thus adducing to the fact that the same person is meant. The sense in which a person is delivered to Satan must be understood more as a dative of sphere rather than destination. The one to be delivered is delivered in the sense of being allowed to function in the realm of Satan, and not necessarily as being sent to Satan—as a recipient.

In handing over to Satan one of two things eventuates—destruction of his flesh or the saving of the spirit. Do these two happen together, or does the occurrence of one abnegate the reality of the other?

In the NT the noun *olethron*, 'destruction', denotes a state or act of destruction, ruin or even death (1 Thes 5:3; 2 Thes 1:9; 2 Tim 6:9). The destruction referred to in 1 Cor 5:5 therefore is meant to bring a climax to that which it targets. This destruction either targets the life of the offender or his actions. Based on the context it seems evident that since salvation is still a real possibility, the destruction intimated points to attitudes more than actions.

³¹ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 97.

³² Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 225.

In fact the verb *sōzō*, 'save', speaks either of rescue from natural disasters or afflictions (Mt 14:30; 24:22; 27:40, 42, 49; Mk 13:20; 15:30; Lk 23:35, 37, 39; Psa 21:9; 59:4; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31), or being rescued from transcendent danger or eternal death (Mt 18:11; Lk 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Cor 1:21; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5; Jas 4:12; 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 7:25). Adela Collins suggests that flesh and blood in the epistles speaks more of attitudes towards life (Gal 3:3; 5:13, 16-26; 6:8; Rom 8:3-18).³³ The prepositional and subjunctive phrases, 'destruction of his flesh' and 'in order that the spirit be saved' attest to the pre-eminent purpose of the author in this execration dictum.³⁴

The phrase, 'in the day of the Lord', implies that the salvation spoken of is of eschatological significance. The clause, 'in order that the spirit be saved', indicates both the purpose and result of handing over the offender to Satan. Bearing in mind that the entire church was essentially implicated for its silent acquiescence of the offender's immoral conduct, it seems prudent to see the dictum here as including the whole corporate body and not necessarily the single offender.³⁵

Robertson and Plummer suggest that Paul is here alluding to a 'solemn expulsion from the Church' and plac-

ing the offender outside the covenant (Eph. 2:11, 12) where Satan functions as ruler (Jn 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4). The destruction of the flesh is seen as the burning away of the lust accompanied by the requisite physical pain. On the other hand the saving of the spirit is meant to be remedial, and the result of suffering.³⁶ Gordon Fee, while agreeing in principle with the above, sees the destruction of the flesh as referring to the life oriented away from Christ, while the spirit refers to the life oriented towards God.³⁷ Garland believes that the language is meant to highlight the defencelessness that one incurs outside the protection of Christ.³⁸ Others postulate that the imperative pertains more to God allowing Satan to have his way through physical affliction (1 Cor 11:30, 32), and the destruction of fleshly lust (Rom 8:13, 23).³⁹ Some of the views which have been refuted include the idea that Paul intended to turn the offender over to the civil authorities⁴⁰ or that it is meant

³⁶ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1911), 99.

³⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212-213.

³⁸ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 173-174.

³⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. '1 Cor 5:5'.

⁴⁰ William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation, Introduction, With a Study of the Life of Paul, Notes, and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 186.

³³ Collins, 'The function of "Excommunication" in Paul', 258.

³⁴ Bath Campbell, 'Flesh and Spirit In 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise In Rhetorical Criticism of the NT', *JETS* 36 (1993): 335.

³⁵ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 213-314.

to show how God uses Satan amidst all his evil plans to accomplish his plans.⁴¹

4. Execration texts

1 Corinthians 5:5 can best be understood from the perspective of the ancient concept of execration or curses where persons were devoted to the gods of the lower world. An examination of the history of execration texts shows that both secular and religious literature contained this kind of terminology.⁴² Often a person who wished to harm someone else for wrong committed that person to the gods via incantation or execration rites. These rites can be found in both Jewish and pagan texts, the only difference being that in Jewish setting Satan replaced the gods of the underworld.⁴³

Paul's language of extirpation and excommunication finds parallels both biblically and extra-biblically. Here are some extirpation formulas, which could have been possible precedents or allusions for Paul's usage.

In the London Magical Papyrus (4th) it is said:

I say to demons of the dead, 'this you are, if I will deliver to you him, how not he will do the deeds whether he receives....'⁴⁴

The Paris Magical Papyrus (3rd BC) states:

I will bind her ... in fellowship with Hecate, who is below the earth, and the Erinyes.

In the epitaph from Halicarnassus it is said,

But if any one shall attempt to take away a stone ... 'let him be accursed.'⁴⁵

In the Damascus Document it is said to betrayers of the covenant

12 ... [And whoever], 13. divulges the secret of his people to the pagans, or curses his people or preaches 14. rebellion against those anointed with the spirit of holiness and [leads his people to] error [or rebels against] 15. God's word (4Q270 [= 4QD^e], fragment 2.12–15).⁴⁶

In the Rule of the Community a liturgy is prescribed for the admittance of new members into the community.

And the levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Belial. They shall begin to speak and shall say: 'Accursed are you for all your wicked, blameworthy deeds. May God hand you over to terror by the hand of all those carrying out acts of vengeance

⁴¹ C. K. Barrett, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968), 126.

⁴² Adolf Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Greco-Roman World* (New York and London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 92-94.

⁴³ Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, 303-304.

⁴⁴ Greek Papyri in the British Museum, ed.

Frederic G. Kenyon, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1893), 75.

⁴⁵ Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, 304-305.

⁴⁶ David Flusser and Azzan Yadin, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids, MI; Jerusalem: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2007-), 81. See also Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (ConB; Lund: Gleerup, 1972), 87-108.

ance. May he bring upon you destruction by the hand of all those who accomplish retributions. Accursed are you, without mercy, according to the darkness of your deeds, and sentenced to the gloom of everlasting fire. May God not be merciful when you entreat him. May he not forgive by purifying your iniquities. May he lift the countenance of his anger to avenge himself on you, and may there be no peace for you by the mouth of those who intercede^a. And all those who enter the covenant shall say, after those who pronounce blessings and those who pronounce curses: 'Amen, Amen'^a... May God's anger and the wrath of his verdicts consume him for everlasting destruction. May stick fast to him all the curses of this covenant. May God separate him for evil, and may he be cut off from the midst of all the sons of light because of his straying from following God on account of his idols and obstacle of his iniquity. May he assign his lot with the cursed ones for ever^a. And all those who enter the covenant shall respond and shall say after them: 'Amen, Amen. (1QS Col. II. 5-10, 16-18 (= 4Q256 II, III; 4Q257 II, III; 5Q11).

Concerning persons who engage in wilful callous behaviour it is stipulated in Col VIII

All who enter the council of holiness of those walking in perfect behaviour as he commanded, anyone of them who breaks a word of the law of Moses impertinently or through carelessness will be banished from the Community council 23 and shall not return again; none of the men of

holiness should associate with his goods or his advice on any 24 matter. Col. VIII. 21-24 (= 4Q258 vi, vii; 4Q259 II-III)

The Mishnah has outlined sixty-six reasons for extirpation Interestingly, sexual misdemeanours head the list, attesting to the reprehensibility with which the Jews perceived them. In Mishnah Keritot it is said:

Thirty-six transgressions subject to extirpation are in the Torah: B. He who has sexual relations with (1) his mother, and (2) with his father's wife, and (3) with his daughter-in-law; C. He who has sexual relations (4) with a male, and (5) with a beast; and (6) the woman who has sexual relations with a beast; D He who has sexual relations (7) with a woman and with her daughter, and (8) with a married woman; E. He who has sexual relations (9) with his sister, and (10) with his father's sister, and (11) with his mother's sister, and (12) with his wife's sister, and (13) with his brother's wife, and (14) with his father's brother's wife, and (15) with a menstruating woman (see m. Ker. 1-13; cf. Lev. 18:6ff).⁴⁷

The above parallels do not infer Paul's dependence but rather they attest to the ubiquity of formulas for extirpation and excommunication both in biblical and the extra-biblical writings. These texts like the biblical text were designed to maintain a moral balance within the corporate community.

⁴⁷ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 836.

5. Delivery into the Hands of Satan

Paul has referred to execration formulas in other places besides our current text, 1 Cor 5:5. In fact a seeming identical reference can be seen in 1 Tim 1:20 where it stated concerning those who abandoned the faith, 'Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme' (1 Tim 1:20 NAS). Later on he described the chatter of Hymenaeus as 'gangrenous', thus attesting to its malevolent nature. In other passages Paul emphasized the importance of removing sinners from the midst of the congregation lest their influence spread throughout. In 1 Tim 5:20 he advises, 'Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.' (NASB). Is Paul now putting into practice this very counsel? It seems precisely this, because to leave the offender untouched would inflict a grievous wound, while extricating him can lead to his repentance and restoration.⁴⁸

Apart from inferring apostolic authority, delivering into the hands of Satan points primarily to a disciplinary motif at work in 1 Cor 5:5. This discipline is not to be seen as an ultimatum but rather as remedial with the possibility of restoration,⁴⁹ since the text alluded to salvation as a real possibility in the Day of the Lord. The handing

over to Satan is a transference of the realms/spheres of protection,⁵⁰ or to put it another way, it is placing someone at the behest of Satan's power.⁵¹ In 2 Thessalonians 2:11 it is said that 'God sends a deluding wonder' which causes unbelievers to believe the lie of the Satan and the man of lawlessness. Essentially God allows the effects of sin to be fully manifested without his mitigating grace, thereby allowing the sinner to bear the consequence of his actions.

In principle something similar occurs in 1 Cor 5:5. By handing over the offender to Satan, Paul allows the offender's decision to associate with immorality to become a reality so that he can experience the full ramifications of such actions. Thus Richard Hays' assertion that this action is meant to put the offender outside the realm of God's redemptive protection, is appropriate.⁵² Belonging to the believing community is a privilege, but it also has immense responsibility attached to it. It gives both an identity and a protection to those who are part of that community. When one is handed over to Satan it is basically God allowing their identity and protective garb to be altered. Therefore what eventually happens is

⁴⁸ Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), s.v. 1 Cor 5:5.

⁴⁹ John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: I & II Corinthians* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 49.

⁵⁰ Franklin H. Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman P, 1972), 725.

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of First Corinthians*, (Escondido, California: Ephesians Four Group, 2000), 108.

⁵² Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1997), 85.

that the individual self-destructs, because sin by nature is destructive,⁵³ and if not addressed it infects all within its environs.⁵⁴

6. Decisive Action

The reason why prompt and decisive action was needed by the believers at Corinth is given in 1 Cor 5:6-8. The Greek word *zumēn*, 'leaven', in its literal meaning refers to yeast and by implication to that which affects the whole group.⁵⁵ Metaphorically it speaks of that which permeates attitude or behaviour.⁵⁶ Here the leaven can be understood in both senses, because it typifies sin and its insidious work. Some scholars see the Passover motif at work in verses 6-8,⁵⁷ and I cannot help but concur. In verses 6-8 Paul here refers to corporate ownership of the offender's guilt.⁵⁸ The shared responsibility for the offender's sin can

be seen in the shift from the singular 'deliver such a one' (1 Cor 5:5), to the plural, 'your boasting is not good' (1 Cor 5:6). The sins of immorality and deceptive boasting are symptomatic of spiritual complacency.

The aorist imperative *ekkatharate*, 'cleanse out' (1 Cor 5:7), implies a call to commence an action not yet started.⁵⁹ This action denotes a single, momentary action,⁶⁰ which was future from the time of speaking, and thus a mere hypothetical possibility.⁶¹ It explains why the future, subjunctive and optative were used as alternatives for the imperative.⁶² The apostle is thus hoping that his rebuke would be an impetus for an immediate action. This is substantiated by the use of the purpose clause, 'in order that you may be a new lump' (1 Cor 5:7).⁶³ The extrication was not meant to be a permanent exclusion, but momentary, again attesting to the redemptive thrust of the dictum.

The optimism on the part of the author that the believers would get it right is seen in the phrase, 'just as unleavened you are' (1 Cor 5:7). This is more a futuristic hope than a present reality. Although still pompous and

53 Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 85.

54 Gerald Lewis Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 7. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), 46.

55 Ralph Earle, *Word Meaning in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 225.

56 Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'zumē'.

57 Paul Ellingworth, Howard Hatton and Paul Ellingworth, *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 116; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 172-173.

58 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1963), 219-221.

59 For more on the imperative see Ray Summers, *Essential of New Testament Greek*, rev. by Thomas Sawyer (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 127.

60 William W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (Boston, MA: Gin & Heath, 1878), 12, 30.

61 A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 942-943.

62 Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 942.

63 For more on the use of the subjunctive see Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 471-478.

boastful it is the hope of the author that the body will return to that which they ought to be. The inference in verse 8 intimates the logical goal of removing the leaven so that sincerity and truth will be restored to the community. The true intent therefore of the apostle's adherence to excommunication is the communal rectitude and holiness.⁶⁴ The offender and his immorality were only symptomatic of a church being disconnected from God and his ideals.

IV Contemporary Application

This question asked by Paul is still very pertinent for today. The rod or gentleness of spirit—are these mutually exclusive? The author uses a dialectic relationship to highlight the problems and the requisite discipline, a continuing issue for both the church and the home—should gentleness abrogate the use of the rod? Can the latter be used with an attitude of gentleness? This dilemma that confronted the early believers is still with every one entrusted with a position of authority over subordinates. The approach taken to administering discipline as depicted in 1 Cor 5:5 is of salvific importance; hence the need to ensure that discipline is carried out within the spiritual context.

Through their failure to deal with the issue forthwith, the corporate body became equally responsible for the sin. Believers are covered with the blood of Jesus just as the Israelites had the blood of animals as a type; outside of this covering they have essentially crossed the realm of protection (Ex

12:12–13, 21–27). Deliverance to Satan signifies a relinquishing of divine restraint upon the offender so that he can experience the enormity of persisting in sinful practices and so find himself at the mercies of Satan. The hope is that he will later recognize his utter helplessness and return to Christ.

Throughout scripture God has often allowed Satan to exercise his restricted power (see Acts 5:1–11; 13:11; 1 Tim 1:20). Satan is sometimes given power to try the godly, as Job (Job 2:4–7), and Paul (2 Cor 12:7, also Peter, (Lk 22:31), and he is dubbed the 'accuser of the brethren' (Rev 12:10).⁶⁵ In several instances in the OT, Satan functioned as an adversary (cf. 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25; Job 1, 2; Zech 3:1). In 1 Cor 5:5 the role of Satan is not solely to inflict physical punishment (though not excluding it), nor is he a party in the salvation schema, but rather he allows the sinful nature to become alive. When people are outside the realm of Christ, they are most vulnerable and at their weakest (Eph 2:12; Col 1:13; 1 John 5:19).

The central concern of 1 Cor 5:5 is the holiness of the communal body. Holiness within the community serves as deterrent to the practice of sin. Sin when left alone destroys both the sinner and those within his sphere of influence. It is no surprise that throughout Scripture a pungent appeal is made with regards to abstaining from all forms of impurity and unholiness. Paul's command to excommunicate the erring offender is essentially an exer-

⁶⁴ Collins, 'The function of "Excommunication" in Paul', 259.

⁶⁵ Richard L. Pratt, Jr, vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 75.

cise of brotherly concern and love for the erring mingled with godly sorrow and a divine wrath against sin. Much to the surprise of the reader, those with whom the offender associated showed that they possessed neither godly love for the sinner nor hatred for sin through their negligence in correcting his wrong. Whenever sin is left unheeded it grows into wanton indulgence and seeks only to plunge the sinner deeper into enslavement.

The reason the Corinthians must remove the leaven among them runs even deeper than the mere offender; rather it hinges on who they are in Christ—they are his temple (1 Cor 3:16, 16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). As God's temple he requires from them scrupulous moral rectitude because the Holy Spirit ought to be dwelling within their bodies. Sin existing in the church both communally and individually poses an affront not only to the witness of the church but also to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ Therefore believers were cautioned to shun any desecration of the temple of God. In 1 Cor 6:18-19 the imperative is given:

Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:18-19 NAS)

The violator of God's temple will evidently be destroyed. The believers were warned, 'If any man destroys

the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are' (1 Cor 3:17 NAS). Therefore what was at stake in 1 Cor 5:5 was not merely an act of gross immorality, but the sanctity of God's indwelling among his people and their ultimate damnation was at stake. The call to deliver the offender to Satan is thus meant to awaken both a church and an individual dead to sin and destined to destruction unless redeemed.

In the light of the aforementioned the following practical lessons can be gleaned from 1 Cor 5:5 for the church today.

1. The church exists foremost as a community of holiness and as such must never be compromised by the presence or indulgence of sin by any member within the community
2. The corporate body has a sacred responsibility for ensuring that the spiritual wellbeing of every member is prioritized especially when that member is in wrong.
3. When sin however small is left untouched, its consequences eventually expand to a wider domain
4. A failure to deal with known sin is tantamount to being an accomplice in that sin, thus making the corporate body equally culpable for the wrong
5. When sin is corrected the wellbeing of the sinner must never become subsumed in well-meaning but often misguided actions. Correcting sin in Scripture is always remedial and never an ultimatum against the erring
6. Sin though forgiven must invariably carry some physical and emotional scars which the offender will have to bear knowing fully well that

⁶⁶ See Campbell, 'Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5', 340; Paul S. Minear, 'Christ and the Congregation: I Corinthians 5-6,' *RevExp* 80 (1983): 341-350.

whom the Lord loves he chastens.

7. The offender must recognize the seriousness of sins committed and be willing not to continue in order that true forgiveness and restoration be made effectual

V Conclusion

In 1 Cor 5:5 the echo of a shepherd is heard as he beckons the flock which is spiralling towards destruction. This paper has shown that discipline within the church is an imperative both for the eternal salvation of the offender and the church at large. Discipline ought always to be redemptive with the sinner given all possible opportunity to make restitution. A failure to administer discipline with dispatch and decisiveness results in the perpetuation of its debilitating effects on both the sinners and those around them. A prompt and decisive approach to correcting the erring safeguards the holiness of God's temple, and creates the framework in which the offender can begin the process of restoration. Conversely a protracted and negligent attitude in

correcting corporate wrongs within the community of faith allows for its perpetuation and it makes the sacred intent of discipline to be merely mundane and ineffectual.

The author of Corinthians has shown that God is more interested in making his church holy than their mere adherence to religious formality. Sin stands as an affront to holiness and must always be resisted by all in whom the Spirit of God dwells. Sin must be dealt with decisively and with dispatch lest it become infectious. The old adage, 'a stitch in time saves nine', holds true for sin—if dealt with expeditiously both the sinner and others can be saved.

The church of God today must become more proactive than ever in its resolve to maintain its purity both individually and collectively. This will mean requiring from members the highest possible moral code and ensuring that they are committed to its strictures. A failure to act promptly often complicates the entire process and eventually disgraces the name of God and his church.

Forgiving your neighbour

A comparative reading of Matthew 6:12 and Surah 3:134

Michael A. Haller

GLOBALISATION, MIGRATION and the growing presence of Muslims in western contexts shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition have brought Christian-Muslim relations to the forefront of theological debates. There is a need to explore the beliefs, questions and critique of Islam in order to gain a fresh appreciation of our own Christian self-understanding and at the same time to find new ways in articulating it for a Muslim audience. Although extensive research on the concept of forgiveness in human relationships has been carried out in the social sciences, a comparative reading of the texts in which the two protagonists of Christianity and Islam deal with the topic seems to be an uncharted territory. Various attempts have been made to harmonise the teachings of Jesus and Muhammad. From a Christian perspective a scholar concludes:

If Christians and Muslims are truly committed and submit themselves to the way of God then it behoves them to tread the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus sum-

marized this when he said 'Forgive, and you shall be forgiven' (Lk 6.37). Likewise it would be true to say 'reconcile and you shall be reconciled' because in the end the call is 'to be reconciled to God' (2 Cor 5.18) which is the essence of both the Christian and the Muslim tradition.¹

And seen from a Muslim viewpoint an expert in Islamic studies refers to an occasion on which Muhammad was almost stoned to death:

According to Islamic sources, an angel came to him and said, 'Your Lord asks you that if you want He will destroy all of them by throwing these mountains over their city.' But the Prophet said, 'My Lord, forgive them. They don't know what

1 Sigvard von Sicard, 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation Through the Lenses of the Bible and the Qur'an', in *World Christianity in Muslim Encounter: Essays in Memory of David A. Kerr Volume 2*, ed. Stephen R. Goodwin (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 39.

they are doing... Here, the Prophet echoes what Jesus said about his persecutors, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'.²

Did Muhammad essentially share his views on human forgiveness with Christ? In other words, did they pass on the same message? How do Jesus' teaching and Muhammad's instruction on it relate to each other? This article explores the theme of forgiveness in human relationships in the Sermon on the Mount and Surah 3—two sermons whose purpose is the formation of a new community in view of other religions. Based on a literary approach, this essay is primarily concerned with the exploration of the texts in their respective faith traditions rather than with their genesis and development. It will first discuss Jesus' and Muhammad's view of human forgiveness. The second part is devoted to bringing to the surface similarities and contrasts between the two visions. A third section will work out a few selected contemporary reflections on human forgiveness both in Christianity and Islam.

I Human Forgiveness

1. In Matthew 6

The Sermon on the Mount has been called a manifesto of a 'Christian counter-culture'.³ Jesus' description of the

new community in the kingdom of God was in marked contrast to the pagan nations on the one hand and to the (Jewish) scribes and Pharisees on the other. The pagans differ from the hypocrites in that the pagans are outsiders whereas the hypocrites are insiders. In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus offers cultic instruction regarding the three most important acts of worship in the Jewish tradition: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. His main concern is the righteousness of people (Mt 6:1) and its relation to religious activities.

The section in Matthew 6:5-15 is about prayer and forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9b-13) as a very old liturgy stands in the centre not only of the teaching on worship but of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. It provides a model that his followers should copy. The prayer consists of three parts: the invocation, two sets of three petitions, and a doxology. The first set of petitions concerns the desires of God, whereas the second set pertains to human needs. The *fifth petition* (Mt 6:12) deals with the subject of forgiveness: 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'⁴

Immediately after the Lord's Prayer the evangelist offers a theological assessment of this petition, a rule of religious law concerning the forgiveness of sins (Mt 6:14-15): 'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

² Zeki Saritoprak, 'Reconciliation: An Islamic Theological Approach', in *Reconciliation in Interfaith Perspective: Jewish, Christian and Muslim voices*, ed. R. Bieringer and D. J. Bolton (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 85.

³ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian counter-*

culture (Leicestershire; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 19.

⁴ Quotations from the Bible are taken from the English Standard Version.

In the gospel of Matthew the Greek terminology used to describe the concept of human forgiveness relates to *aphiēmi* and its cognates. We find the verb *aphiēmi* 12 times⁵ and the noun *aphēsis* once.⁶ Originally, this word connotes the idea of 'to send off', literally and figuratively, in its broadest sense from 'to hurl' to 'to release'. Both the verb and the rarer noun are used in the legal sense of 'release' from office, marriage, obligation etc., also from debt or punishment, though never in a religious way.⁷

In the Septuagint it rarely denoted the concept of the forgiveness of sins. Nonetheless, the literature of Hellenistic Judaism suggests that *aphiēmi* is closely connected with the idea of God out of his mercy forgiving sin. Josephus uses *aphēsis* to describe human forgiveness in Bell, 1, 481, but mostly release.⁸ In the New Testament the verb occurs 146 times, out of which 45 times it carries the meaning of *cancel, forgive, remit* (of sin or debts).⁹ Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida classify it as a subdomain of reconciliation and forgiveness. This semantic field contains meanings that are opposed to hostility and strife. For them the stress in the meaning of *aphiēmi*

is upon the guilt of the wrongdoer and not upon the wrongdoing itself. The event of wrongdoing is not undone, but the guilt resulting from such an event is pardoned. To forgive, therefore, means essentially to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing.¹⁰

In the fifth petition the language of *aphiēmi* in connection with *opheilēma* is taken from business and law. It is used as a metaphor for the religious topic of sins and forgiveness of sins. Accordingly, sins are described as obligations human beings owe to God and to other people rather than as violations of taboos or transgressions of legal codes.¹¹ To forgive basically means to restore a relationship between two parties that is broken by obligations outstanding and not met. The direct correlation between divine and human forgiveness as well as the connection between prayer and the forgiveness of others are worth noting. In his commentary on Mt 6:12 Hans D. Betz notes:

The fact that an appeal is made means that as petitioners we are unable to come to terms with our indebtedness by ourselves...If vs 12a presents an appeal for what we cannot accomplish by ourselves, vs 12b states as a fact that we do (and

5 Mt 6:12,14-15; 9:2,5-6; 12:31-32; 18:21,27,32,35.

6 Mt 26:28.

7 Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 509.

8 Kittel, *TDNT*, 510.

9 Barclay M. Jr. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

10 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

11 Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Y. Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A commentary on the Sermon on the mount, including the Sermon on the plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 403.

must do) what we are able to do.¹²

This is explained further in the parable Jesus told in answer to Peter's question concerning how often he should forgive his 'brother' (Mt 18:23-35). He gets the following message across (Mt 18:33-35):

'And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Jesus is clearly demanding that his followers should forgive others. It is a Christian ethical imperative. However, it would be wrong to presuppose a claim for God's forgiveness by simply forgiving our debtors. This would amount to a kind of works righteousness. In light of the parable of the Unforgiving Servant the generous gift of God's forgiveness always precedes the call for human ethical behaviour. Therefore, the person who has received grace from God (*gratia praeveniens*) will in gratitude for it extend forgiveness to others who may offend him (consequential action). Someone who does not grant forgiveness to others treats God's enormous forgiveness with contempt and does not deserve it.

Jesus' demand to not take revenge on someone who wrongs us (Mt 5:39) should not be taken to mean the abolition of the *lex talionis*. He clearly upheld this principle of justice (Mt 7:1). What Jesus had in mind was the realm of personal relationships. His followers were

called to have an attitude towards evil-doers which is based on love, not justice, which renounces personal revenge and leaves justice in the hands of God and God-ordained institution, which is motivated by the determination to seek someone's highest good and never by the desire to cause him harm.

2. In Surah 3

In contrast to the Meccan Surahs, the Medinan Surahs have not yet been studied extensively with regard to form and content. Their exact chronology represents another field of research. In summary, their main themes relate to detailed legal decisions, the debate with Jews and Christians, and military campaigns. According to Muslim tradition *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Surah 3) was revealed in Medina during 624 and 625. Surah 3:123 seems to allude to the victory at Badr, whereas 3:155-174 to the setback at Uhud. Neal Robinson has argued that in its present form Surah 3 'constitutes a single multi-faceted response to the threat of apostasy that menaced the Muslim community after the debacle at Uhud'.¹³ It therefore reflects the formation of an Islamic community in dispute with Jewish and Christian communities.

The following passage in 130-136 connects the forgiveness from God with the pardon of men. Some scholars suggest that Muhammad received the revelation of these verses late in his life because it introduces the prohibition on charging interest (cf. 2:275 ff.; 30:39; 4:161).

¹² Betz and Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 403.

¹³ Neal Robinson, 'Sūrat Āl 'Imrān and Those with the Greatest Claim to Abraham', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no.2 (October 2004): 1.

130 O ye who believe! Devour not usury, doubled and multiplied; but fear God that ye may (really) prosper. 131 Fear the Fire, which is prepared for those who reject Faith: 132 And obey God and the Messenger; that ye may obtain mercy. 133 Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous, 134 those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity or in adversity, who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men—for God loves those who do good, 135 and those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except God? and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done. 136 For such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing underneath, an eternal dwelling: How excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)!¹⁴

In the Qur'ān the Arabic root *ḡafara* / *yaḡfiru* to forgive, to grant pardon is by far the most important. Etymologically, the word has the meaning of 'to cover, to veil, to conceal'. Covering someone's sin is the unique prerogative of God (3:135). He alone grants *maḡfira*, forgiveness (3:133 and 136). *Ḡafūr* and *ḡaffār*, very forgiving, are two

of his names. Humankind, on the other hand, is invited to ask God's pardon for its sins (3:135). Only Muhammad may invoke forgiveness for others.¹⁵ In order to receive God's forgiveness, man has to meet certain conditions, e.g. repentance, faith, fear of Allah, obedience to Muhammad, good deeds, etc. Nevertheless, the phrase, 'He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills' (thus without condition out of his power) occurs no less than seven times in the Qur'ān (3:129).¹⁶ Taken together, these verses suggest that the Qur'ān depicts an ambivalent idea about God's forgiveness.

Another term that describes the concept of forgiveness is the verb *ṣafaha* / *yasfahu*, which means 'to turn oneself away from people (so as to overlook their misdeeds)'.¹⁷ It is often used in view of God's judgment, e.g. Surah 15:85 'And the Hour is surely coming, so overlook (any human faults) with gracious forgiveness.'¹⁸ It seems that the required action has to do with exercising restraint in overlooking human faults, considering God's final decision, rather than extending real forgiveness. This will suffice to illustrate the point since the root does not occur in Surah 3.

The third root that denotes human forgiveness is 'afā / ya'fū which literally means 'to efface, to erase'. The word is used for the blowing wind in the desert that effaces all footprints. In the Qur'ān it appears only in the sense of 'to forget (about people's misdeeds),

¹⁴ References are to the standard Egyptian edition. Verses from the Qur'ān that have been translated into English are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (11th ed., Beltsville: Amana Pub., 2011).

¹⁵ Q 4:64.

¹⁶ Q 2:284; 5:18,40; 17:45; 29:21; 48:14.

¹⁷ Arne A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004).

¹⁸ Q 2:109; 5:13; 24:22; 43:89; 64:14.

to grant pardon, to waive one's right',¹⁹ e.g. whoever is absolved of some (of the penalty) by his brother.²⁰ Forms that are derived from this root occur 35 times in the Qur'ān and describe both divine and human action, e.g. God is much forgiving and ready to forgive.²¹

In 3:134 we find *'aḥīn* as the plural of the active participle *'aḥī one who forgives*, meaning 'those who pardon the offences of people'.²² This word appears in an enumeration of good deeds. Toshihiko Isutzu attributes it to the semantic field of good and bad. According to him 'to do good' which occurs in 3:134 as the generic term for righteous people represents one of the key ethical terms in the Qur'ān: 'In the actual Qur'ānic usage this word is applied mainly to two particular classes of "goodness": profound piety towards God and all human deeds that originate in it, and acts motivated by the spirit of *ḥilm*'.²³ Thus, human forgiveness is the epitome of the virtue of *ḥilm*, which is gentleness, kindness and patience.

All three roots do occur in Surah 64:14: O ye who believe! Truly, among your wives and your children are (some that are) enemies to yourselves: so beware of them! But if ye forgive *ta'fū* and overlook *taṣfaḥu* and cover up (their

faults) *taḡfirū*, verily Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Yūsuf 'Ali makes the following summary statement:

Three words are used in the Qur'ān, with a meaning akin to 'forgive', but each with a different shade of meaning. 'Afā (here translated 'forgive') means to forget, to obliterate from one's mind. Ṣafaḥa (here translated 'overlook') means to turn away from, to ignore, to treat a matter as if it did not affect one. Ghafara (which does not occur in this verse) means to cover up something as God does to our sins with His grace: this word is particularly appropriate in God's attribute to Ghaffār. The One who forgives again and again.²⁴

Commenting on 3:134 Yūsuf 'Ali emphasises that the righteous 'do not throw the blame on others. Even where such blame is due and correction is necessary, their own mind is free from a sense of grievance, for they forgive and cover other men's faults.' Both Yūsuf 'Ali and Muhammad Asad translate the Arabic word for people *al-nās* as '(all) men and fellow men', thus having a universal perspective. They perceive human forgiveness as a positive capacity of human nature and a display of good human character.

As in the case of the Gospel we need to briefly discuss the Qur'ān's understanding of the *lex talionis*. The Qur'ān adopted the biblical principle of like retaliation *qiṣās* (2:178), gave some room for monetary compensation *diyya* (5:45) and also left the option of forgiveness: The recompense for an injury is an in-

19 Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*.

20 Q 2:178.

21 Q 58:2.

22 Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Brill Online, 2013). <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/dictionary-of-quranic-usage/fw-SIM_001160> accessed 9 July 2014.

23 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal, Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 224-225.

24 Yūsuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, Commentary on Q 2:109.

jury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God, for (God) loveth not those who do wrong (42:40).

In other words, whoever forgives and does not demand an exact punishment (but accepts an amount of money paid in compensation for physical injuries instead) will be rewarded by God. To forgive (the Arabic root is *'afā*) in this context takes the form of an optional but most desirable virtue. Zeki Saritoprak sums it up well: 'As the verse indicates, the Qur'an presents forgiveness as a beautiful action that God loves.'²⁵

From a Muslim perspective M. Mahdi Allam made the concept of forgiveness in the Qur'an more accessible to western scholarship in an attempt to reconcile the Qur'anic code of punishment with its treatment of forgiveness. He distinguishes between three levels of ideal ethical behaviour, namely the one of God, the one of the prophet and the one of the best type of man, the most pious. Discussing the verses that refer to the average person, he proposes that the teaching on human forgiveness in the Qur'an is not given in the form of a command, but rather takes the shape of a strong recommendation, hence taking into account both man's personal as well as societal interests.²⁶ Muslims are not expected to forgive unconditionally (before they see that justice is done to them).²⁷

II Similarities and Contrasts

1. Similarities

There is no doubt that Jesus and Muhammad share some common ground despite their theological differences. This common ground needs to be welcomed if Christian engagement with Islam is to be positive, fair and informed. We will draw a comparison between the following two texts:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Matthew 6:12).

Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity or in adversity, who restrain anger, and forgive (the offences of) people—for God loves those who do good (Surah 3:134).

Both texts share the didactic character of the context. They use terminology that denotes human forgiveness. They address behaviour in the realm of personal relationships, not in the context of a court of law. They greatly encourage human beings to forgive others their wrongdoing, thus stressing the reality of evil and human sin, the need for putting relationships right and the human capacity to do so.

Human forgiveness is seen as a very positive concept that includes all people, no matter what their religious affiliation is. It is an ethical imperative (that addresses everyone), a step towards reconciliation (that does not compromise the concept of justice) and a contribution to a peaceful coexistence (that treats all individuals created by God with the dignity proper to

²⁵ Saritoprak, *Reconciliation*, 83.

²⁶ Mahdi Allam, 'The Concept of Forgiveness in the Qur'an', *Islamic Culture* 41, no. 3 (1967). 139–153.

²⁷ Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Ilham Nasser, 'Forgiveness in The Arab and Islamic Con-

texts', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 3 (2013), 474–494.

them). Both verses make it clear that God loves human forgiveness. It represents a beautiful action. Indeed, the texts and their nearer contexts establish a strong connection between divine and human forgiveness.

Not only the Gospel but also the Qur'an presents God as the most forgiving one. He forgives human wrongdoing. The extension of his forgiveness is an act of mercy. Therefore, both Jesus and Muhammad point to the *imitatio Dei* as the way to offer forgiveness and mercy. Both protagonists subsequently become the paragon of forgiveness for believers.

2. Contrasts

'Exploring another tradition should bring contrasts, not just similarities to the surface: and this is what making comparisons means.'²⁸ This statement by Ninian Smart will set the agenda for the following remarks. We will look at different referents, i.e. the context, the foundation and the motivation for human forgiveness.

Matthew 6:12 is set in the *context* of worship in general and prayer in particular. Jesus teaches his followers that their relationship to God directly affects their relationship to their neighbours. God's forgiveness always precedes human forgiveness. The latter is a consequence of the former. Thus, God's gracious action stands at the beginning of ethics.

Surah 3:134 on the other hand has to be understood in the context of social ethics. The verse lists a series of

good deeds, among them the act of human forgiveness. We may deduce from the passage that God not only loves this good behaviour but also promises a reward for it—God's eschatological forgiveness. This suggests that human forgiveness may influence God's forgiveness. The former can be seen as a claim for the latter. Ethics arises out of God's revealed law.

In both texts, there is a strong link between divine and human forgiveness, suggesting that the former provides the *foundation* for the latter. Even though with the exception of Surah 9, all 114 Surahs begin with the statement, 'In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful', the theme of God's forgiveness in the Qur'an is peripheral to its key topics which are God's oneness and his justice. For Jesus, however, this theme lies at the heart of his message.

In a recent article on a Christian Trinitarian worldview, J. Scott Horell discusses the framework of forgiveness both in Christianity and in Islam: 'Because the God of the Bible is Trinity, he is "big" enough to be both perfectly just and perfectly forgiving to all who trust in the Son.'²⁹ On the other side, in Islam believers have to cast themselves on divine mercy without knowing whether they receive it or not. Horell makes the point that 'all Muslims believe God forgives, but the question is how?'.³⁰

When Jesus met a paralytic, he said

²⁸ Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural explorations of human beliefs* (New York: Scribner's, 1983), 19.

²⁹ J. Scott Horell, 'In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Toward a Transcultural Trinitarian Worldview', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38, no.2 (April 2014): 135.

³⁰ Horell, 'In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', 134.

to him, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'³¹ The audience rightly understood this statement as a claim for being God, whereas the paralytic heard it as an absolute assurance of God's forgiveness in the here and now. Muhammad, on the other hand, introduced a God whose forgiveness may (or may not) be received in the future only. Surah 3:136 illustrates this point well: 'For such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing underneath, an eternal dwelling: How excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)!' Because of God's absolute sovereignty, humankind cannot predict what will happen and may not prescribe God's behaviour. But the God of the Gospel has committed himself to forgive people immediately who turn to him in faith.

The striking difference lies in the ground on which God forgives sin. In the Qur'an he does so because of his power and omnipotence, but in the gospel God forgives sin because of his atoning self-sacrifice which demonstrates the perfection of both God's justice and God's mercy. The just God demands that sin be atoned for, and then, in the person of his only Son, makes atonement for the sins of the world himself. For this reason he has shown himself to be a merciful God.

The Qur'anic position instead holds that atonement for sin is 'what men and women do with their own sin through repentance and through expiation, through prayers, fasts, sharing their wealth with the poor, and so on.'³² Another striking contrast seems

to be the reason for forgiveness. The God of the Gospel forgives out of love, whereas the God of the Qur'an offers forgiveness out of his sovereign power.

We may notice another marked difference in the *motivation* for human forgiveness. According to Matthew 6:12 the person who has been granted forgiveness from God will forgive the offences of other people out of generosity, gratitude and an awareness of his own indebtedness. Jesus elaborated on this in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35). In a recent exegesis of this parable Jesper Tang Nielsen points out that the servant, despite the cancellation of his huge debt, still remains in the debt of the king, for now indeed he has received his whole existence from him.³³

In the kingdom of generosity the gift of forgiveness is meant to be passed on out of gratitude and not to be traded out of calculation. When the servant initiates the breakdown of their relationship the king demands justice. In other words, the person who withholds forgiveness from others or treats it as a trading object has broken the chain of generosity. We see that the unconditional forgiveness among people is rooted in the unconditional forgiveness of God.

Surah 3:134 suggests that human forgiveness is an expression of human kindness, piety and power. The semantic field indicates a virtue which arises out of a good human character. Human

Muslim view of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2007), 94.

³³ Jesper Tang Nielsen, 'Das Gleichnis vom Schalksknecht. eine Ökonomie der Generosität', *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 16, no.31 (2013), 31–9.

³¹ Mk 2:5.

³² Mahmoud Ayoub and Irfan A. Omar, *A*

forgiveness is considered to be a good deed practised by pious people (not sinners), a commendable action and an exemplary behaviour. It promises reward in the here and now. Such a beautiful action does not only enjoy the gratitude and appreciation of fellow humans but also may hold the prospect of God's approval and forgiveness. Surah 3:135-136 goes even further and suggests that all believing Muslims do receive forgiveness and entrance into Paradise if they turn to God and ask his pardon:

And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except God? and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done. For such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing underneath, an eternal dwelling: How excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)!

Other Medinan verses that associate God's forgiveness of human beings with their forgiveness of others also promise reward on the Day of Judgement for those who practise forgiveness and punishment for those who commit evil.

2:109 Quite a number of the People of the Book wish they could turn you (people) back to infidelity after ye have believed, from selfish envy, after the Truth hath become manifest unto them: But *forgive* and overlook, till Allah accomplishes his purpose:³⁴ for Allah hath power over all things.

³⁴ The Arabic word *amr* is better translated as 'final decision'.

24:22 Let not those among you who are endued with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in want, and those who have left their homes in Allah's cause: let them *forgive* and overlook, do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

In this way human forgiveness is an essential prerequisite for God's forgiveness in the future. This idea finds expression in the Hadith:

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, a man used to give loans to the people and used to say to his servant, 'If the debtor is poor, forgive him, so that Allah may forgive us.' So when he met Allah (after his death), Allah forgave him.³⁵

To sum up, apart from mercy the main motivation for human forgiveness seems to be the desire for divine forgiveness.

III Contemporary Reflections

1. In Christianity

a) Roman Catholicism—Josef Ratzinger

Josef Ratzinger (born 1927), a German priest of the Roman Catholic Church, was made a professor of theology at several German universities before he was appointed Archbishop and cardinal. In 2005 he was installed as Pope

³⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, book 56, number 687 <<http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/056-sbt.php>> accessed 9 July 2014.

Benedict XVI and remained the head of the Roman Catholic Church until 2013. Previously a liberal theologian, Ratzinger turned conservative and stood up for Catholic doctrines and fundamental Christian values. In view of the increasing secularisation in the West he set out to grapple with the problem of reason and faith. This journey culminated in the publication of a trilogy about Jesus of Nazareth.

In his exposition of the fifth petition (from the Lord's Prayer)³⁶ he sees the overcoming of guilt as the central question of every human existence. Guilt can be overcome only by forgiveness, not by retaliation which would lead to a destructive spiral of violence and evil. According to him, because of the reality of evil, human forgiveness has to be more than just ignoring or forgetting. Guilt must be dealt with, be healed and be overcome. Forgiveness costs the one who forgives, for he has to suffer, absorb and redeem the evil in himself.

Ratzinger lays emphasis on the incapacity of humankind to expiate guilt effectively, on the one hand, and the ability of God to overcome evil by offering up himself, on the other. The cross of Christ is the only effective means of overcoming evil. Because of mankind's inability God takes the initiative in repairing relations, meeting the perfect demands of 'unconditional' mercy and justice.³⁷ For Ratzinger the concepts of forgiveness and sacrifice are closely re-

lated. The petition for forgiveness calls us primarily to be grateful for God's forgiveness and then to be willing to suffer and overcome evil through love.

b) Evangelical Protestantism— John Stott

John Stott (1921-2011) was an English Bible teacher, mission-leader, author and Anglican priest, serving as Rector of All Souls Church, London, for 25 years. He became internationally famous for his leading role in the worldwide evangelical movement and was the architect of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974.

A clear exposition of Jesus' teachings is laid out in his book, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*.³⁸ Commenting on the fifth petition Stott explains that 'debt' is used as a metaphor for sin because it deserves punishment. God's forgiveness consists in the cancellation of the penalty and the charge against human beings. The relation between God's forgiveness and ours (... as we also have forgiven our debtors) is reflected upon in verses 14 and 15 which follow the Lord's Prayer:

This certainly does not mean that our forgiveness of others earns us the right to be forgiven. It is rather that God forgives only the penitent and that one of the chief evidences of true penitence is a forgiving spirit. Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offences of others, it

36 Joseph Ratzinger—Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth 1* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007), 192-195.

37 Joseph Ratzinger—Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth 2* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 153.

38 Stott, *Sermon on the Mount*.

proves that we have minimized our own.³⁹

In his book, *The Cross of Christ*, Stott notes a difference between human and divine forgiveness even though the fifth petition draws an analogy between the two. The difference relates to the basis of forgiveness. He contrasts the universal God with private individuals as well as sin in the sense of rebellion against God with personal injuries. According to him, Jesus highlighted ‘the impossibility of the unforgiving being forgiven, and so the obligation of the forgiven to forgive, as is clear from the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant’.⁴⁰

In the context of overcoming evil with good, Stott elaborates his thoughts about human forgiveness. In his view forgiveness reconciles the retributive and the reformatory, for then it simultaneously accepts the reality of evil and the punishment it deserves and seeks to offer a new beginning and therefore change:

On the cross, by both demanding and bearing the penalty of sin, and so simultaneously punishing and overcoming evil, God displayed and demonstrated his holy love; the holy love of the cross should characterize our response to evil-doers today.⁴¹

Overall, for Stott human forgiveness is a moral responsibility human beings have towards each other, includes minor to major offences, and should be modelled on God.

c) Liberal Protestantism—Hans Dieter Betz

Hans Dieter Betz (born 1931), served as a German Reformed pastor until he moved to the United States in 1963 to take on a teaching position at the School of Theology in Claremont. In 1978 he was appointed Professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago where he became emeritus in 2000. He made his name as researcher on the letters of the apostle Paul, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew as well as early Christian literature and the Greco-Roman. Betz also led a number of international research and publication projects, especially as editor-in-chief of the lexica *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (4th ed. 1998-2007) and *Religion Past and Present* (2007-2014).

His commentary *The Sermon on the Mount: A commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain* represents the received wisdom of historical-critical research. As already stated, Betz conceives of human forgiveness in the sense of disposing those obligations that others owe to us. Petitioners ask God for the cancellation of their debts because they are completely unable to make good on them. In presenting this petition, they expect God to show mercy and grant forgiveness which is part of his righteousness.

As a result, petitioners must practise their righteousness too. Without declaring null and void all debts owed to them by other people, petitioners would appear before God in a state of unrighteousness. And this, in turn, would nullify the effects of their peti-

³⁹ Stott, *Sermon on the Mount*, 149-150.

⁴⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 88.

⁴¹ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 310.

tion.⁴² For Betz human forgiveness is the unconditional responsibility of human beings, an act people must do, amounting to an oral declaration.

2. In Islam

a) Islamism—Sayyid Quṭb

Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966), an instructor, literary critic and journalist, probably was Egypt's best known Islamic activist of the twentieth century. His devotional commentary on the Qur'ān, *Fī ṣīlāl al-Qur'ān (In the shade of the Qur'ān)*, targeted a wide readership and promoted an understanding of Islam as a timeless body of beliefs and practices with solutions to all aspects of life. Quṭb's reading of the Qur'ān as God's word ignored the heritage of past interpretations. Furthermore, this form of Islamism was set against western Colonialism, Judaism and Christianity.

Quṭb's exposition of Surah 3 takes the setback at Uhud as a point of reference:

The all-ranging advice given here is not altogether removed from the context of the battle. People do not triumph in war until they prevail in emotional, moral and organisational struggles... Suppression of one's anger and forgiving others are essential for victory, because self-control, solidarity and kindness are highly potent forces in a tolerant society.⁴³...The prize is forgiveness by God and admission to heaven. It

is there to be won, and the believers are invited to make their race and vie with one another in order to win. The prize is set for those who fear God.⁴⁴

Commenting on Q 3:134 he states:

The Qur'ānic verse emphasises that the God-fearing do not allow their anger to become a grudge. They forgive others and do not harbour any ill feelings. When anger is deliberately restrained it becomes a burden, a fire which burns internally sending its smoke over man's conscience in order to blur his vision. Forgiveness, however, ensures a release from that burden. It gives peace of heart and conscience, as well as an easy movement in a more sublime world.⁴⁵

Quṭb's concept of forgiveness in human relationships constitutes a spiritual struggle, namely an act of jihad (of the heart) that leads to a greater jihad (of the battle), resulting in the triumph of Islam. It is a rewarding behaviour for those who fear God. At the same time it is a healthy concept that has to do with anger management.

b) Main stream Sunni Islam— Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī

The Egyptian Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (born 1926), has been described as global mufti because he has built up a presence on al-Jazeera television, through his works and in several organisations, which allows him to spread his message globally.⁴⁶ His views place him

42 Betz and Collins, *The Sermon on the mount*, 380.

43 Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī ṣīlāl al-Qur'ān (In the shade of the Qur'ān)*, trans. M. A. Salahi (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999-2003), 158.

44 Quṭb, *In the shade*, 178.

45 Quṭb, *In the shade*, 179.

46 Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Pe-

inside the mainstream of Sunni Islam, sometimes called moderate Islamism. In his approach to Islam in general and to the formulation of fatwas in particular Qaraḍāwī tries to keep a balance between justice and mercy. He calls this concept *wasāṭiyya* (*middle way*) which he derives from Surah 2:143: 'We appointed you a community which stands at the centre.'

On islamonline.com, the influential website associated with him, a 2011 fatwa by an Islamic scholar of the Fatwa Department Research Committee about forgiving others rules that forgiveness 'would be of great benefit to you. However, it is not obligatory on you to forgive a person if that person has wronged you and refuses to make amends by restoring to you your rights.'⁴⁷ In a posting from 2013 on the occasion of the month of Ramadan the correlation between God's forgiveness and ours is illustrated well:

A friend of mine recently sent text to everyone which said: 'I want Allah to forgive all my sins in the month of Ramadan but before I ask him for forgiveness I will ask my sisters to forgive me if ever I hurt them intentionally or unintentionally. By forgiving me you will feel spiritually uplifted and will Insha'Allah gain reward from Allah.' A very simple yet meaningful text which makes us realize that both the forgiver and the person asking for forgiveness

are rewarded by Allah.⁴⁸

Human forgiveness is conceived of as an optional act that benefits the person in the present and in the future.

c) Reformed Sunni Islam— Mouhanad Khorchide

Mouhanad Khorchide (born 1971), is a Palestinian sociologist who specialized in Islamic theology and religious education and currently chairs the Centre for Religious Studies at the University of Münster, Germany. He became famous for the publication of his books *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit* and *Scharia—der missverstandene Gott*.

Based on a contextual approach in reading the Qur'ān, he develops a theology that emphasizes God's love and compassion as the key principle of the Qur'ānic message and applies it to Islamic ethics. The Qur'ān is read as a love letter from God to humanity. In a way similar to the prophet Jeremiah, Khorchide can compare the relationship between God and men to the love and compassion of a mother to her child. Such a notion of God will empower humankind to act out of love and compassion too.

Indeed, the definition of a Muslim is someone who accepts God's invitation to love and compassion, whether he believes in God or not, and therefore becomes a channel for it. The realisation of human needs—both a condition and an expression of love and compassion—is the focus of the Qur'ānic message. Human needs concern all sorts of

tersen. *Global mufti: The phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 12.

⁴⁷ Forgiving others <<http://www.islamonline.com/news/articles/153/Forgiving-others.html>> accessed 9 July 2014.

⁴⁸ Let us open our hearts in Ramadan <<http://www.islamonline.com/news/articles/2/Let-us-open-our-hearts-in-Ramadan.html>> accessed 9 July 2014.

personal, emotional, social, economic, political and medical human interests.⁴⁹

Human forgiveness is considered to be a necessary response to the experience of God's forgiveness. A person who withholds forgiveness from others puts himself outside of God's forgiveness. Human forgiveness is not only the fulfilment of God's commandment but also a prerequisite for God's forgiveness. It is the fruit of a transformative process that leads to fellowship with God. Man's willingness to forgive is also a consequence of his own experience of sinful behaviour.

According to Khorchide human compassion reaches a climax in human forgiveness towards enemies—an idea he borrows from the Christian theologian Edith Olk.⁵⁰ For him the verses in Surah 3:134-136 describe the character and the actions of the pious. These are seen as signs of faith and the result of self-reflection, self-conquest and self-awareness. Human forgiveness should not be practised for opportunistic reasons (in view of reward and punishment which Khorchide understands as pedagogical metaphors) but according to Kant as a self-commitment, out of love, in the sense of *imitatio Dei*. Human forgiveness aids in the process of character formation and perfection.⁵¹

49 Mouhanad Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit: Grundzüge einer modernen Religion* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 170.

50 Khorchide, *Islam*, 113.

51 Mouhanad Khorchide, *Scharia—der miss-*

IV Substantial Differences Remain

Even though we may acknowledge formal similarities between Jesus' and Muhammad's view of human forgiveness in Matthew 6:12 and Surah 3:134 respectively (e.g. they use similar words providing a good starting point for interaction), on closer examination there are important substantial differences. For Jesus human forgiveness is a consequence of God's forgiveness, whereas in the Qur'an the former is a claim for the latter. The theme of forgiveness lies at the heart of Jesus' life and message because it demonstrates God's dealings with us.

In the Qur'an, however, it is peripheral in comparison with God's oneness and his justice, that is to say reward and punishment. For Jesus the unconditional forgiveness among people is rooted in the unconditional forgiveness of God. The same cannot be said of the Qur'an which has an ambivalent attitude towards forgiving others.

This paper could cover only a few aspects of Jesus' and Muhammad's perception of human forgiveness. Future research should investigate their teachings on a broader level. It should further explore their concept of sin, the forgiveness of God and justice with regard to human forgiveness as well as the condition, the scope and the performance of human forgiveness.

verstandene Gott: Der Weg zu einer modernen islamischen Ethik (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2013) 196.

Review Article: Why Ethics needs accurate church history— reflections on books on Constantine the Great

Thomas Schirrmacher

Peter J. Leithart (PhD Cambridge, President of Trinity House, Birmingham, Alabama) has written an important book to defend the honour of Emperor Constantine, *The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8308-2722-0 Pb pp373). It is above all directed against the thesis of the American Mennonite John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), for whom Constantine was the epitome of Christianity's falling away from its pacifistic origins and who stands for the centuries-long evil of the state church and for the persecution of heretics.

I Twilight of an Empire

Leithart does not set out to make an original contribution to research. Rather, he seeks to present the much more positive description of Constantine found in specialized literature as well as the shift in the view of Constantine found in scholarly circles instead of the deeply held prejudices of many present-day Christians. With enormous diversity, he unfurls research literature in the footnotes from the last hundred years and demonstrates that the actual Constantine has neither to do with the acclaimed Christian emperor of the Middle Ages, nor with the bogeyman of the Enlightenment, but also not with the bogeyman of free church authors. Constantine can be understood only in light of the reality of the 4th century and could not have known what the future would bring.

Measured against that, in Leithart's

opinion, Constantine was a convinced believer in Christianity who found a path between advancing the Christian faith and offering religious freedom to the majority of the non-Christian population. In the process, one always has to take the entire spectrum of results from research into consideration. Thus there are unmistakable and noteworthy influences from the side of Christianity upon his legislation and, on the other hand, there are completely uninfluenced areas as well.

Let us for instance take architecture (pp. 112-125) as an example of the 'complexity' (p. 113) and 'ambiguity' (p. 114) of Constantine's actions. On the one hand, the Emperor built a large number of public buildings which were thoroughly adorned with Roman and Greek religious art. On the other hand, the building of churches in Rome and then in Byzantium stood at the

centre of his personal interest. A typical example is the Arch of Constantine in Rome. At first it may not appear as if it differs from other such structures. Apart from what are in part Christian military emblems, a direct Christian connection is lacking.

On the other hand, nowhere are the Roman gods thanked, most notably Jupiter as was common up to that time. An image of Jupiter is indeed visible, but Constantine is turning his back to it. Instead, the great God who revealed himself to Constantine is thanked. Christians understood this from a Christian point of view, while for others it was not automatically an affront.

Christian symbols are also a good example. For a longer period of time after 312 A.D., they were on coins and standards in addition to older religious symbols. Gradually, Christian symbols replaced older religious symbols up to the point when pagan deities represented by human depictions finally served only as mythical decoration (pp. 71-79).

Was Constantine's conversion to Christianity a 'true' conversion? Leithart correctly emphasizes that the question is really to ask what was meant *at that time*? Constantine took the Christological decision made at Nicea personally (pp. 89-90), which is more important for us today than at that time. Leithart could have at this stage pointed out more clearly—as Girardet did in the works that are discussed below—that conversion above all else meant giving up idol worship. What should have been worked out much more intensely is the central role played by renouncing sacrifice to Jupiter after the victory over the co-emperor (pp. 66-67). Leithart quotes a 1955

German source at this point, which, however, he was arguably not able to read. He is not aware of the comprehensive German studies on this subject (see below).

Leithart is also on the right track with respect to other questions. However, he could have had better supporting documents to cite in the form of German sources and would have been able to point out more strongly the significance of his results. Leithart thus assumes that Constantine's actual vision of the cross took place in 310 A.D. in Grand in the Vosges Mountains (today in France), probably as a halo (pp. 77-78). However, he does not cite the newest evidence for this.

Fortunately, Leithart labels the Edict of Milan a 'fiction' (pp. 98-99). Both Emperors Constantine and Licinius indeed agreed after a meeting in Milan via a letter dated June 313 A.D. from Nicomedia stating that confiscated church property would be returned and religious freedom for Christians granted. However, it did not establish their leading position, let alone Christianity's position as a state religion (pp. 99-100). As a matter of fact, Constantine did not limit the freedom of non-Christians.

Leithart is increasingly concerned not only with saving Constantine's honour. He is also concerned to present Constantine as a model for Christian politics. From Leithart's point of view, the following applies: 'Constantine provides in many respects a model for Christian political practice' (p.11). The statement that in many respects Constantine stands for Christian political action goes far beyond that which Leithart documents and especially what he refutes.

It is indeed to be acknowledged that Constantine humanized law and ended brutal elements of Roman culture due to Christian motivation. Constantine also accomplished the fostering of Christianity without limiting the religious freedom of others. But is that sufficient for him to function as a role model? Would one not have had to discuss more carefully whether it is simultaneously possible to promote Christianity as a religion desired by the head of state and religious freedom as well? Would one not have to discuss the degree to which a Christian as a leader of state can and should shape the political scene?

Leithart comprehensively documents the one-sided nature of the viewpoint held by Yoder and others that the early church was completely pacifistic, that it did not change its point of view until with or after Constantine, and that serving in the Roman Army was not allowed. The fact of the matter is that there was a broad discussion in the early church regarding this question. Also, Christians served as soldiers and officers in the Roman army (pp. 255-278), which simultaneously held police powers, already prior to Constantine and all the way back to the time of the apostles.

However, one also has at this point a long way to go before seeing Constantine in the position of a role model, which in the absence of pacifism would have to clear up the question of how the relationship of the Christian church to legal institutions within the state monopoly on power should look.

I would have personally wished for a clearer division in Leithart's book between an historical section on Constantine and an ethical segment on the

relationship between the church and state. Since Yoder mixes both questions beyond recognition, Leithart follows him, even if it is much simpler to separate Leithart's thoughts on one point from the other.

For me it involves four complex issues which become blurred: 1) What can reliably be said about the biography of Constantine? 2) How much of Christianity from the late Middle Ages is traceable back to Constantine and how much is not? This is to ask whether the Constantinian Age is correctly so-called or not. 3) What is good and right—that means, what is biblically and theologically ideal? and 4) How is Constantine and the later development of the Middle Ages to be evaluated in light of the ideal, or is such an evaluation not even able to be made?

Given the strong fixation the book has on Yoder, above all in the latter section (pp. 254-342), and the announced transition from biography to polemics in the course of the book (pp. 10-11), this work is unfortunately tailored to the American market and especially in the latter part is not relevant for Christians in Europe or in the Southern hemisphere.

II A German View

Let us juxtapose Leithart's book on Constantine with the books by the German researcher Klaus Girardet.

A) Klaus M. Girardet, *Der Kaiser und sein Gott: Das Christentum im Denken und in der Religionspolitik Konstantins des Großen* [title translation: *The Emperor and his God: Christianity in Constantine the Great's Thought and Religious Politics*] *Millenium-Studien* 27. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), p. 212.

B) Klaus M. Girardet (ed.), *Kaiser Konstantin der Große: Historische Leistung und Rezeption in Europa* [title translation: *Emperor Constantine the Great: Historical Achievements and Their Reception in Europe*] (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 2007), in part, Klaus M. Girardet, "Das Christentum in Denken und in der Politik Kaiser Konstantin d. Gr." [title translation: "Christianity in the Thought and Politics of Emperor Constantine the Great"], pp. 29-54.

C) Klaus M. Girardet, *Die konstantinische Wende: Voraussetzungen und geistige Grundlagen der Religionspolitik Konstantins des großen* [title translation; *The Constantinian Turn: Preconditions and Spiritual Foundations of the Religious Policies of Constantine the Great*] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006.1; 2000.2).

The reason for the intensive amount of research on Constantine from the German side is, among others, that Trier was for a time his capital city.

Girardet differentiates three fields of research (A, pp. 22-24): 1. A basic approach that Constantine was already innately Christian, or that between 310 and 312 A.D. or over a longer period of time he turned towards Christianity. 2. Perceptions that Constantine turned towards monotheism and/or a solar cult with certain Christian elements but did not become a Christian according to standards of that time or the present. 3. The notion that there are no indications for either the first or the second interpretation.

In one of his articles, he answers the question, 'Were there Christian Emperors before Constantine?' (C, pp. 13-38) very convincingly with a negative answer by reference to every individual emperor and his family prior

to Constantine. Girard also tellingly rejects modern standards for whether Constantine's conversion was 'real' or 'correct' and whether Constantine was 'orthodox' (C, p. 59). He assumes that the preeminent sign of being a Christian and of becoming a Christian in antiquity and in the 4th century was the 'renunciation of the cult of the gods' (C, p. 60).

Thus what has to be asked above all is whether Constantine carried this out. 'The refusal to sacrifice to idols' is something that is well documented with respect to Constantine. (C, pp. 60-71, A, pp. 78-88). This is due to the fact, among others, that after the victory over his co-emperor, Constantine moved directly into his palace following his victory procession in Rome on October 29, 312 A.D. (which strictly speaking was not one since it was the co-emperor and not enemies who had been defeated). Also, and for all to see, he did not present the normal sacrifice to Jupiter Optimus Maximus at the capitol.

Girardet finds many pieces of evidence for this. The heathen historian Zosimos (II 7.2) sees the act of omitting the thank offering to Jupiter as the reason for the beginning of the political decline of Rome (C, p. 70). The thank-offering to Jupiter is also missing on the Arch of Constantine erected in 315 A.D., where instead of thanks to Jupiter one sees *instinctu divinitatis*, an expression of thanks to the inspiration of the Godhead. It is striking that in accounts beginning in 312 A.D., or even on the Arch of Constantine, God, who brought about the victory, initially has no name. Rather, God is generally referred to as *summa divitas* or something similar (C, p. 68).

Shortly after the refusal to present the thank offering to Jupiter in 312 A.D., the first coins appear with a Christogram (B, p. 42). Everything speaks for there already being an emblem of Christ on the helmet of the emperor and on standards (A, pp. 64-67), on which the emblem of Christ was arguably not the familiar cross but rather the Chi-Rho.

Girardet elaborates extensively on the three central texts regarding the vision of the sign of Christ at the Milvian Bridge (A, pp. 30-40). Nowhere is it said, according to Girardet, that the vision first occurred at the bridge (A S. 49-51). Constantine is instead supposed to have seen a so-called 'halo' in Grand in what is today the French Vosges Mountains. His accompanying military escort command was also then able to see it. A halo is an atmospheric light effect caused by the refraction or reflection of light by ice crystals. It can take the form of a small inner sun with four rays going in all directions like a cross.

Furthermore, Girardet provides a lot of evidence from Constantine's early speeches beginning in 312 A.D. that demonstrate his partisanship for Christianity (A, pp 89-123). Constantine's late baptism is a normal thing from Girardet's point of view and was at that time common, especially since Constantine apparently assumed that he would no longer be able to wear the imperial purple clothing afterwards (A, pp 106-107).

Girardet's account, 'Nichtchristen im Denken und Handeln Konstantins' ('Non-Christians in Constantine's Thought and Actions,' C, pp. 113-133, see also A, pp. 137-139) is also interesting. Constantine forced Christian-

ity upon no one and allowed heathens their freedom. Like Leithart, he sees in Constantine a measure of the element of religious freedom not found in Roman emperors prior to that time.

III Essays

Let us now take a look at a number of essays published by Girardet. Tiziana J. Chiusi ('Der Einfluß des Christentums auf die Gesetzgebung Konstantins' [title translation: 'The Influence of Christianity on Constantine's Legislation'], pp. 55-64 in: Klaus M. Girardet [ed.], *Kaiser Konstantin der Große* [title translation: *Emperor Constantine the Great*], op cit.) shows Constantine's legislative ambivalence. More strict laws against the flight of slaves stand next to laws calling for humane treatment of slaves and the favouring of their release (B, p. 60). Clear Christian influence is seen in the abolishment of the death penalty by crucifixion, the prohibition of facial branding, the prohibition of gladiator games (B, p. 61), and the introduction of Sunday as a day of rest, a clear promotion of and publicity for Christianity (B, p. 63).

I find the three foundational changes within Christianity brought about by Constantine and listed and explained by Karl-Heinz Ohlig to be groundbreaking ('Strukturelle Auswirkungen der Konstantinischen Wende auf das Christentum' [title translation: 'Structural Repercussions of the Constantinian Turn on Christianity'], pp. 75-86 in Klaus M. Girardet [Hg.], *Kaiser Konstantin der Große* [title translation: *Emperor Constantine the Great*]): the sacralization of Christianity, the Hellenization of Christianity, and the provision of a legal basis for Christianity.

The sacralization of Christianity had above all to do with the role of the church, its offices and the sacraments, since from that time on ritualistic practice led by sacral men has been central (B, p. 81). The legal basis for Christianity has been maintained in the Catholic Church until today and is foundational within it (B, p. 82). According to Ohlig, however, the most far-reaching consequences are attributed to the Hellenization of Christianity (B, p. 85). These are all issues which Leithart does not address.

These are all stimulating studies which highlight the importance of Constantine not only in Christian history but also his relevance for today as we grapple with many serious ethical and political issues. This makes it clear that religious freedom research is more

important than ever. There needs to be an examination of the present reality worldwide as well as the background history of previous centuries. There also needs to be discussion about the various philosophical and theological arguments employed in discussion of religious freedom. This includes going well back in history—for example, to the Reformers, and asking, for instance, why John Calvin proposed religious freedom in theory but failed to bring it about in reality; it also means going further back to the Middle Ages, and finally to the beginning of Christianity. The books reviewed and the thesis connected with Constantine prove that what happened then still counts today and that deeper research needs to be done to evaluate the factors involved in those early times.

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Church and the World: Understanding the Relevance of Mission

J. Andrew Kirk

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J. Andrew Kirk is a Mission Theologian, Educator, and Author

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Review Article:

Defending Orthodox Christology

Frederik Herzberg

David S. Nah: *Christian Theology and Religious Pluralism: A Critical Evaluation of John Hick*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, ISBN 978-1-60899-768-8, Pb pp 242

‘Is there just one true religion? Did Jesus really claim to be God? Is the traditional notion of a “God-Man” a contradiction in terms?’ There is no need to stress that these questions are not just of import to academic theology; they touch upon the very foundation of the Christian Faith. The late Professor John Hick (1922–2012), once an orthodox evangelical Presbyterian minister according to his 2003 *Autobiography*, has gained fame by arguing, over the course of his immensely productive and successful academic career, for negative answers to the above questions—in stark contrast, of course, to all major currents of the Christian tradition. The book under review, *Christian Theology and Religious Pluralism: A Critical Evaluation of John Hick*, is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation at Claremont Graduate University and engages in a critical discussion of Hick’s mature theology of religious pluralism.

Before discussing Dr Nah’s criticism thereof, I shall first give a short summary of Hick’s position and reasoning as it is presented by Nah. To be sure, Nah’s discussion of Hick’s views seems fair and accurate to me, and apparently Hick did get to see some of this work (based on Nah’s thesis), Nah being his student. However, I would prefer not to take a stance about the adequacy of

Nah’s presentation as I am not a Hick scholar. Rather, I will briefly comment, at the end of this survey, on some philosophical and historico-theological points that might be taken into account when reading Nah’s monograph.

Hick’s ‘positive’ contribution, having gone through several stages, but fully developed in his most mature writings (*The Myth of God Incarnate*, 1993; *The Rainbow of Faiths*, 1995; *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 1996), consists of a theology of religious pluralism according to which none of the various world religions has a privileged understanding of ultimate reality. Some may be more or less conducive to salvation, which Hick in his late work defines as overcoming self-centeredness, but humanity lacks sufficient data and objective criteria to actually make such comparisons in any concrete instance. Nor is it possible, according to Hick, for human beings to make any comparative judgement among the competing truth claims of the world’s religions, if understood literally. They simply lack epistemic justification.

Applied to the Christian claim of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, Hick cites New Testament scholars from the very liberal end of the theological spectrum to cast doubt on the New Testament’s assertion that

Jesus claimed divinity for himself and instead reduces the dogma of the incarnation to an invention of the early church which is at best metaphorical.

Hick proposes to interpret the religious traditions of the world in a non-literal, Bultmannian mythological way. This, in turn, permits—what might be called—an alethic latitude in approaching the world's religions and thereby a comprehensive reconciliation without privileging any particular faith. For example, on Hick's account, Jesus is only an incarnation of God in so far as he consistently walked in God's presence and allowed others to experience God through him; however, such a weak notion of incarnation, can according to Hick, be applied also to other great religious figures of human history, such as Buddha or Mohammed!

In addition to his historical claim that Jesus never claimed divinity for himself, Hick also raises a conceptual objection to traditional Christianity: He rejects the orthodox Christological dogma of the incarnation of God in Christ the God-Man with two natures (promulgated in the second article of the Nicene Creed and expounded by the Chalcedonian symbol) on the grounds that none of the explications given to it seems convincing to him. In particular, he dismisses Thomas Morris' Christology along with the kenotic theories of Thomasius, Stephen Davis and Frank Weston as incoherent.

Nah's 'critical evaluation of John Hick' is, as already highlighted by Professor James F. Lewis in his recommendation to the publisher, indeed very irenic in tone. This evaluation proceeds along the following stages: The first chapter discusses the soteriological position of pluralism and the

prominent role John Hick has played in elaborating it. Following Hick, Nah introduces religious *pluralism* as one more (probably final and decisive) step away from the traditional soteriological *exclusivism*, the doctrine expressed in St Cyprian's dictum, *nulla salus extra Ecclesiam*, and in that sense a further development on soteriological *inclusivism* (e.g. Rahner's view that the Holy Spirit might illuminate people who never heard the name of Christ to accept essentials of the Christian faith and thus become 'anonymous Christians').

For the mature Hick, of course, inclusivism is just a mere 'epicycle', a provisional and (by dialectical historical necessity) merely temporary compromise devised to avoid the 'Copernican revolution' of removing Christ from the centre of discourse on the world's religions. Inclusivism, on Hick's account, thus ultimately needs to be overcome. It is quite helpful that Nah includes a brief intellectual vita of John Hick, which shows that such a movement from exclusivism via inclusivism to pluralism is biographically reflected by John Hick himself: He went through several intermediate stages before he arrived at his final pluralist position.

The second chapter presents John Hick's philosophical presuppositions, especially his epistemology and ontology of religion. Hick's epistemology draws firstly upon the Kantian distinction of *phenomenon* (a thing as it appears) and *noumenon* (a thing in itself), the latter being fundamentally inaccessible, and secondly upon an extremely narrow Cartesian-like conception of knowledge. Applied to God, Hick sees the various world religions as mere phenomenal responses to an unknown numinous *noumenon*. As a corollary,

there can be no absolutely and objectively reliable revelation. Not even 'revelation as history' (Pannenberg) can be reliable because according to strict Cartesian standards, we cannot know anything about the past with certainty.

Concerning ontology, Hick no longer refers to God in order to avoid a theistic (let alone monotheistic) conceptual bias, but merely to the Real. This ultimate Reality has been captured mythologically by the various religions of the world, and salvation means being transformed by the ultimate Reality into a life that is no longer self-centred—and can be reached through all of the world's faith traditions, even though they might not be all equally effective at this.

Nah questions this assumption by pointing out the extreme diversity of the world's religions, in terms of their theology (in the narrow sense of the word), their anthropology and their soteriology. Quoting Keith Ward, Nah reminds us that there are traditions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, that deny the existence of any transcendent, absolute Being. Quoting Harold Netland and William J. Wainwright, he points out the utter implausibility of treating all concepts of salvation in the world's religion as the 'transition from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness' (explicitly, Netland mentions Pauline justification, Hindu *moshka* and Zen *satori*).

In the third chapter, Nah presents an account of Hick's theology of religious pluralism. As Hick's philosophical presuppositions rule out the orthodox Christian Faith (in the sense of *fides quae*) as divinely revealed Truth, it is not surprising that he finds himself at odds with church dogma. In-

stead Hick subsumes his theological stance under liberal Christianity and in particular in the tradition of Reimarus and his followers. He rejects most of the New Testament as written by church theologians who, many decades after Jesus' earthly ministry, in a Feuerbachian projection imposed their own views, hopes and speculations upon the historical figure of Jesus and thereby created most of Jesus' testimonies, sermons and parables, including all those in which Jesus makes implicit claims of divinity for himself.

Assuming the historical priority of St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (at least in its earliest layers such as the confession of 1Cor 15:3–8) over the earliest layers of the post-Easter accounts in the canonical Gospels, he claims that the early church went to ever greater lengths in turning mere ecstatic experiences of appearances of the resurrected Jesus into claims about an objective bodily resurrection. The 'deification process' for Jesus went through several stages, according to Hick, and Jesus' divine sonship was first of all a honorific title that then went on to evolve into adoptionism and ultimately Nicene trinitarianism. (Nah makes a convincing case against this reasoning of Hick, as we shall see presently, in the fifth chapter.)

In the same third chapter, we also learn about Hick's arguments against Chalcedonian Christology. Hick explicitly rejects several promising candidates for explicating the Chalcedonian dogma: the two-minds theory of Thomas Morris (which draws upon concepts from contemporary psychology, in particular Marvin Minsky's *society of mind* theory) as well as the Christological (kenotic) theories of Thomasius, Davis,

and Weston. Hick also attributes anti-semitism, patriarchalism and Christian arrogance to the incarnational dogma. Moreover, Hick vigorously criticises the doctrine of the atonement. Hick's own position is that we should view the incarnation as a metaphor and that there have been multiple incarnations, metaphorically understood. Echoing an idea already expressed by Troeltsch, Hick thinks that Christ is the supreme Lord for Christians, but not necessarily for others.

Hick's criticism of the doctrine of atonement, as presented by Nah, is unconvincing. He enlists the support of the Eastern church in his rejection of that doctrine and giving preference to a transformational soteriology (*theosis*). But then it is one of the most eminent contemporary philosophical theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Richard Swinburne, whom he attacks for his exposition of that dogma. Moreover, Hick's criticism directed towards Swinburne seems to involve a *petitio principii*: Hick rejects Swinburne's explication due to its invocation of the idea of a personal God; however, the notion of a personal God becomes problematic only if one already has established—rather than seeking to argue for—the inadequacy of the incarnational dogma.

The fifth chapter provides a detailed analysis and ultimate refutation of Hick's historical arguments against the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nah points to Hick's relatively narrow reception of New Testament scholarship which takes into account only very sceptical positions and ignores the more recent scholarship, including what has become known as the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. Moreo-

ver, an assessment of Jesus' self-understanding has to take into account the fact that at his time, when Jews referred to God, they meant the Father in Heaven. We should therefore not be surprised if Jesus did not make claims to divinity that are as explicit as the Nicene definition. However, even many critical scholars do accept the testimony of the New Testament concerning implicit claims by Jesus to divinity. Under the double pressure of having to rebut heresies as well as the responsibility to explain the Faith to inquirers (1 Peter 3:15), the church simply made explicit what Jesus taught implicitly (Michael Ramsey, Gerald O'Collins).

In conversation with more critical scholars such as E.P. Sanders and Edward Schillebeeckx (on whom Hick bases many of his arguments), Nah recalls that implicit claims by Jesus to divinity include the following: his use of *abba* for God (citing Joachim Jeremias), his attitude towards the Mosaic Law (citing Jacob Neusner), his claim to have the authority to forgive sins (citing among others Günther Bornkamm, Walter Kasper, N.T. Wright), his reference to himself as the 'Son' (citing Ben Witherington and Raymond Brown), and his use of the title 'Son of Man' (citing W.G. Kümmel). Nah also reminds us of the surprising number of critical scholars accepting the empty tomb, as quantified for instance by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona.

It is in the evaluation of this literature that Hick's Cartesian epistemology comes to bear. Since there is for Hick, citing liberal scholars, room for legitimate disagreement about Jesus' self-understanding, one has to abandon any hopes to know enough about the historical Jesus to claim divinity

for him. But this, of course, is a much more narrow concept of knowledge than what is viewed as knowledge by most epistemologists (an exception being the late philosophy of Laurence Bonjour),¹ let alone scholars outside theoretical philosophy.

Nah further evaluates Hick's view that the dogma of the divinity of Christ was an invention by the early church. He presents a survey of the literature on Christ's resurrection appearances. In particular, the controversy surrounding St Paul's claim to apostolicity (e.g. Gal 1–2) and his eagerness to claim a resurrection appearance for himself in 1 Cor 15 is best explained by the fact that the early church was all too aware that his experience of the risen Christ was of a different quality from that of the other apostles (citing William Lane Craig—and John Dominic Crossan as a sort of crown witness). Moreover, Nah emphasises (quoting Oskar Skarsaune) that the incarnational dogma is precisely a rejection of dualistic Hellenistic philosophy and therefore cannot be explained as a result of Hellenization (as von Harnack or Bultmann would have it). According to Martin Hengel, there are good reasons to view the dogma of the early church merely as a faithful rendering of the beliefs of the Jesus Movement in Hellenistic language and thought-forms, which was the natural contemporary setting for the increasingly non-Jewish church.

The sixth chapter examines Hick's arguments against several orthodox Chalcedonian christologies. Nah disagrees with Hick about the logical as-

pects of Morris' two-minds Christology (in which Morris distinguishes between 'merely human/divine' and 'fully human/divine' predicates). He concurs with Hick, however, that Morris' account seems psychologically implausible, as the free-will problem becomes particularly acute on such an account.

Regarding the kenotic theories of Thomasius, Davis and Weston, Nah concedes that even one of the most mature Christological theories, that of Frank Weston, does not provide a full, rational explanation of the incarnational dogma and thereby leaves some room for mystery. However, he makes a convincing case that this does not render the explanation irrelevant or worthless. In particular, Nah highlights that Weston, being an Anglican rather than a Lutheran, does not subscribe to the exhaustive Lutheran notion of incarnation according to which the second person of the Holy Trinity was entirely confined in the historical human being Jesus of Nazareth. Allowing for a manner of existence of the Son of God that is focussed on, but transcends the human Jesus, Weston helps us to understand how a self-imposed and always reversible self-limitation of the divine nature of Christ in his human nature might be conceived of.

Weston's account should qualify as one satisfactory explanation of the two-natures Christology, even though it does not answer all possible questions one might raise regarding the incarnation. To be sure, any theologian who is not staunchly apophaticist would seek as much explication of the church's teaching as is possible for human reason, including the church's teaching on the incarnation. This, however, does not mean that we should expect the

¹ 'The myth of knowledge', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 24 (2010), 57–83.

ability of or even aim at removing all mysteries from theology. For traditional Christian theology, contending for the Faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), even while admitting one's own cognitive incapacities, is always preferable to rationalistic innovation.

All in all, the book provides a powerful, yet irenic defence of two-natures Christology, is well-researched and surveys various academic discourses that are of crucial importance to the integrity of our Faith. As such, it can even be used as the scholarly basis of apologetic endeavours.

Still, there are some points that might be considered if and when the author should get the chance to prepare a second edition.

First of all, Nah writes: 'Furthermore, since the church's doctrines of atonement have traditionally presupposed the doctrine of incarnation, Hick's attack on the former, if successful, would be devastating to the latter' (p. 109). Here, the logic is reversed: Of course, the church's teaching on the atonement is dependent on her doctrine of incarnation. As it has been said, 'The Nestorian Christ is the fitting Saviour of the Pelagian man.'²

Then, Nah writes that 'no one would argue that the doctrine of the Trinity was explicitly developed by Paul's time' (p. 184). However, if the baptismal formula of the Matthean Great Commission is an authentic saying of Jesus, it seems not very plausible that the Lord did not teach at least the fun-

damentals of the doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps in a form that was passed on by oral tradition and later developed into the *regula fidei*.

Furthermore, one of Hick's chief complaints about Morris' two-minds Christology—which otherwise is a beautiful explication of the orthodox Christology of St. Maximus the Confessor in terms of the society-of-mind idea from contemporary psychology—is that it appears to raise the free-will problem in a particularly sharp form (p. 196). However, the Augustinian, Thomist and Reformed solutions of the free-will problem (in terms of a weak notion of free will that is compatible with divine providence and predestination, based on the Johannine and Pauline teachings in the New Testament) are sufficient to solve this problem of Morris' Christology, too. The reason is that Nah's (and Hick's) claim that freedom is the 'power to do otherwise' is philosophically and theologically very controversial.³

Finally, Nah gives the impression of subsuming the kryptist (Nah: 'cryptist') position among kenotic theories (p. 197). However, at least in the Gießen–Tübingen controversy, kryptis and kenosis were rival accounts.

Nevertheless, these are relatively minor weaknesses which do not in any substantial way lessen Nah's remarkable achievement: a defence of orthodox Chalcedonian Christology in the face of one of the most eloquent and learned contemporary challenges, that of Hick's theology of pluralism.

² Charles Gore, 'Our Lord's human example', *Church Quarterly Review*, 16 (1883), 282–313, 298; cited according to Alister E. McGrath, *Christian theology: An introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell 2007), 293.

³ See, for instance, Peter van Inwagen's survey article, 'How to think about the problem of free will', *Journal of Ethics*, 12 (2008), 327–341.

Books Reviewed

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John D. Currid

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Book Reviews

ERT (2015) 39:1, 88-89

**Against the Gods: The Polemical
Theology of the Old Testament**
John D. Currid

Wheaton (IL), Crossway 2013
ISBN 978-1-4335-3183-5
Pb 153 pp

*Reviewed by Thomas Schirrmacher,
Executive Chair of the Theological
Commission, World Evangelical Alliance,
Martin Bucer Seminary, Bonn, Germany*

Can a book of 150 pages make a difference in the field of Old Testament Studies? It can! Sometimes a groundbreaking thesis can be presented better in a short introduction, than in a massive volume. Currid's book is one of those rare examples.

Did the Old Testament writers borrow ideas from their pagan neighbours? And if they did so, was it done uncritically and unintentionally? For long it was a major criticism of the OT that it is a copycat religion. And it was a given that

copying the mythology and legends of its neighbours and predecessors prove that the result are myths and legends themselves. Now a respected author of OT commentaries, an expert on Near Eastern texts, and an experienced archaeologist engages with this controversial question by carefully comparing the biblical texts with other ancient Near Eastern documents. John C. Currid is the Carl McMurray Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the author of several books and Old Testament commentaries. A PhD graduate in Syro-Palestinian archaeology (University of Chicago), he has extensive archaeological field experience from projects throughout Israel and Tunisia.

Well-researched and thoughtfully nuanced, Currid presents a clear and well argued thesis, which turns the relationship of OT and its neighbours upside down. The OT uses the so-called parallels to argue polemically against them and describe what is unique about Jewish religion and revelation.

His understanding of the primary purpose of 'polemical' theology is 'to demonstrate emphatically and graphically the distinctions between the worldview of the Hebrews and the belief and practices of the rest of the ancient Near East' (25). At the end, Currid qualifies the role of his thesis: 'Polemical theology certainly does not answer every question about the relationship of the Old Testament to ancient Near Eastern literature and life. ... At times, however, polemical theology can serve as a solid and reliable interpretive lens by which one can properly see the significance of a parallel. In addition, and of utmost importance, is the truth that the biblical writers often employed polemical theology as an instrument to underscore the uniqueness of the Hebrew worldview in contrast to other ancient Near East conceptions of the universe and how it operates' (141).

Currid's book is, as he describes it himself, 'introductory', 'exemplary', and not exhaustive (9-10). The texts or themes Currid uses as examples are Genesis 1 (creation accounts), Genesis 6-9 (flood accounts), Genesis 37-50 (Joseph and the 'Spurned Seductress Motif'), Exodus 2 (Moses and 'The Birth of the Deliverer'), Exodus 2 (Moses and the Flights of Sinuhe), Exodus 3 ('I Am that I Am' and Egyptian Book of the Heavenly Cow), 'The Rod of Moses', Exodus 14 ('The Parting of the Waters of the Red Sea'), and finally 'Canaanite Motifs'. In depth he describes the Near Eastern parallels, summarising the differences in well-arranged tables, e.g. for Genesis 6-9 under headings, 1. 'Theology', 2. 'Morality', 3. 'Covenant', 4. 'Genre', 5. 'Details' (57-59).

Famous Old Testament scholar, Gordon Wenham, gives an excellent summary of the book, with which I fully agree: 'This is a splendid introduction to the use that

the Old Testament makes of the religious ideas of Israel's ancient neighbours.

Currid compares the biblical accounts of creation and the flood with the versions from neighbouring cultures and shows how the Bible puts down and rejects the theological ideas of Babylon, Egypt, the Hittites, and the Canaanites. This process, which Currid terms 'polemical theology', serves to demonstrate the unique sovereignty of the God of Israel. This is a very positive approach to the issues raised by the extrabiblical parallels and is greatly preferable to seeing the parallels as showing the Bible as simply borrowed pagan ideas and myths.'

ERT (2015) 39:1, 89-91

The Ethical Vision of the Bible: learning good from knowing God

Peter W. Gosnell

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014
ISBN 978-0-8308-4028-1
Pb, pp410, bibliog, index

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

This book takes a vastly different line on biblical ethics from many others which typically try to crystallise the teaching of the Bible on particular ethical issues, or as an overall ethical system. The author fears attention to particular issues 'develops moralism' or 'soft legalism' (p. 312), which is a 'denial of [saving] faith' (p. 292). Being strongly opposed to the 'divine command' theory of ethics (e.g., pp. 159, 172 etc), he endeavours instead to cover the entire biblical narrative to let the reader see its 'ethical vision' which, if followed, will provide instruction on how to make ethical decisions.

The material does not, in fact, cover all of the Bible—not even all sections or

types of literature, but only selections from Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus (Torah), Proverbs (Wisdom), Isaiah (Prophets—the shortest chapter of all), Luke and Matthew (Gospels—but out of canonical order to avoid letting ‘stereotypes of Jesus dominate our views of Jesus in a particular Gospel!’ p. 206) and I Corinthians and Romans (Pauline letters—also out of order)

The selected sections of these books are presented in the form of a lengthy paraphrase of the content with a running commentary, supported in many cases by material explaining the historical and literary background of the passage (as if the reader has very minimal knowledge of these areas). Although the passages as a whole are summarised, it is conceded that some of the material covered has less *ethical* content or relevance than other parts (p. 168), although some may have *moral* content (p. 151).

The style is extremely verbose (there are about 300 pages of text), reading almost like a verbatim transcript of the author’s lectures, with lots of repetition and charts to ensure that the main points are not missed. There are extensive endnotes (about 60 pages which are said to be optional for student readers!) to provide documentation and further background to the biblical text and the author’s chosen interpretation of various points of scholarship.

This book is described as ‘written for students’ (p. 9), but the elementary level of much of the biblical commentary suggests that it is aimed at an audience which is hardly familiar with the Bible at all. However, its length, the detailed nature of the explanations and much of the commentary would make it less than ideal as a text book. Yet the constant reiteration of the main points do reflect the imprint of a passionate teacher.

Central to the author’s ideas is the distinction between morals and ethics—‘Morality is simply about knowing what is right and what is wrong’, whereas ‘Ethics involves both the reasoning for distinguishing right from wrong and the motivations for doing what is right and hindering what is wrong’ (p. 151). Another point, as alluded to above, is a firm, even polemic, rejection of a moralistic interpretation of the Bible as if it were merely a book of laws and regulations. The author similarly rejects the view that the content of the Bible can be applied more or less without adaptation to the modern reader’s situation—a common catch phrase is that ‘we are reading someone else’ mail!’ Yet, in some unexplained way, even if ‘This letter [1 Cor] was not written *to us* It is certainly *for us*’ (p. 242).

Also noticeable is the repeated assertion that the ethical insights in the Bible mostly refer to the micro-situation of the individual and close personal and family contacts, rather than the macro-situation of the wider community, state or nation. This therefore limits the applicability of the Bible’s ethical vision to many situations in which readers might find themselves, and seems to rule out the possibility of biblical social ethics.

The book is centred on the idea that biblical ethics is based on a relationship of the individual believer with God (through creation, covenant, redemption and transformation)—ie., it is an ‘ethics of relationship’ (p. 255); believers are to live out the implications of this relationship by understanding the nature of the behavioural decisions they make as they reflect the character of God, or in Pauline terms, ‘become what you are in Christ’. The subtitle sums it up: ‘learning good from knowing God’. This makes the whole exercise almost one of spirituality rather than ethics as com-

monly understood (alluded to in references to holiness in Leviticus, p. 88).

While this theme is repeatedly shown to be central to the various biblical passage chosen for discussion, it is hard to understand why there needs to be extended pages of summary of those passages (eg. Romans takes 20 pages; I Corinthians, 26), especially when the author concedes frequently that not all the Bible is about ethical matters, and accordingly, ethical guidance should not be forced from it. It seems that the main themes that the author wanted to present in this book could have been covered in considerably fewer pages with much less verbosity, which would make it a far more effective presentation, especially as a text book.

Further, the author's extended explanations and statements show that he thinks that the reader of the Bible needs a considerable degree of knowledge and skill in biblical backgrounds and hermeneutics in order to understand its ethical vision, which raises questions about how the 'ordinary reader' can be expected to use the Bible for ethical guidance. There is further doubt cast on the practical value of Scripture to the ordinary reader when the author places emphasis on the 'hazards' of reconstructing the full circumstances of the Pauline epistles where we have 'only one side of the discussion' (p. 243).

Given the amount of attention to biblical content and interpretation, it seems that this book would be more suitable as a textbook in the biblical studies department rather than in Ethics. This would fit with the author's academic background, and with his statement that he is approaching 'biblical ethics first as a descriptive task, then a prescriptive one'. As a starting point, this is commendable, but there is little guidance

given on how to make the transition from one field to the other!

ERT (2015) 39:1, 91-92

**The World's Religions in Figures:
An Introduction to International
Religious Demography**
Todd M. Johnson and
Brian J. Grim

Chicester (UK), Malden (MA): Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

ISBN: 978-0-470-67454-3

HB 376 pp. Index, Glossary,
Appendix.

*Reviewed by Thomas Schirrmacher,
Executive Chair of the Theological
Commission, World Evangelical Alliance,
Martin Bucer Seminary, Bonn, Germany*

This book is a comprehensive introduction to religious demography, both by way of method and by way of data and results. The first of the three sections offers an introduction to the discipline by describing the religious composition of the world in 1910 and 2010, by trying to rank religious diversity in countries, and by the projecting of religious populations from 2010 to 2050. This section is of prime interest for those who want to study the major result, statistics and tables.

The second section provides a discussion of the methodology both for the data of the 'World Religions Database' (WRD) and for the results drawn from it. It includes discussion of terms like 'religion' or 'religious identity', discussion of the sources for the data and also the dynamics of change in existing religious populations.

The third section is made up of 'case studies', even though most topics are so broad, that the term seems to be an understatement. The largest example is

the counting of the global Muslim population, the changes of those in recent history and the future change rates as well as the possible reasons for those changes and the rise of the number of Muslims. China's religious populations and the situation of the two Sudans are much shorter 'case studies'. This last section ends with an extended discussion of migration of religious minorities and the resulting religious diasporas in the world.

The book abounds in well-done statistical charts, tables, graphs and figures, always with concise but clear comments going with them. If one wants to discuss the data undergirding the whole book, one would have to review the 'World Religion Database' (WRD, see pp. 198-204). Even though the book explains a lot about this database and its methodology, the WRD itself is accessible on the Internet at a price affordable only by institutions. There are many researchers that back the numbers, there are those that use them because often no others are available, and there are those like Philip Jenkins who criticize them in principle and do not use them. Everyone will easily find figures that will raise questions about how they were researched, especially when one knows the specific topic or country well; e.g. if I look at my native country Germany: how is it possible to know that there were 44,100 atheists in Germany in 1910 (p. 43)?

A comprehensive review by a top researcher not connected to WRD has not been done by anyone, as far as I know, even though Robert D. Woodberry ('World Religion Database: Impressive—but Improvable', *International Bulletin for Missionary Research* 34 [2010] 1: 21-22) has done a great job already. Jennifer Dekker, ('World Religion Database', *The Charleston Archives* January 11 [2009] 3. p. 57-60, <http://eprints.rclis.org/16890/>), concentrates not so much on the validity of the data but on weaknesses of the website, e.g. search functions. She also lists alternative databases. This desideratum cannot be filled by my review.

I would just like to make one remark concerning a very specialized topic, that centres on an unsolved debate. The authors count 285,479,000 Evangelicals for 2010, because they do not include the 583,371,000 Pentecostals and Charismatics (pp. 16-17). There might be reasons for distinguishing non-Charismatic Evangelicals and Pentecostal/Charismatic Evangelicals. But in reality it is more and more difficult to distinguish them, as the Pentecostals/Charismatics are more and more in line with a traditional Evangelical theology, while at the same time non-Charismatic Evangelicals take over style, music and ideas from the other camp. But even more important, both camps more and more work closely together and are in the main represented by the bodies such as the national alliances, the regional alliances and the World Evangelical Alliance, that has approximately 600 million Christians in its churches, thus having the same size as the World Council of Churches.

At the Global Christian Forum, the Pentecostal World Fellowship and other Pentecostal associations were asked to which confessional meeting they would like to go, the Evangelical or their own Pentecostal one. Without any hesitation, they voted for a common meeting with the Evangelicals, thus seeing themselves as Evangelicals. At the leadership level of national, regional alliances and the WEA, it is no longer possible to distinguish between both camps and most leaders would no longer say that they belong to either or, but that they just have a certain leaning to the one or the other side.

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**The Future of the Global Church:
History, Trends and Possibilities**

Patrick Johnstone

Downers Grove, IVP: 2011

ISBN 978-0-8308-5659-6.

Hb, pp 240 bibliog.

*Reviewed by Roger E. Hedlund, Mylapore
Institute for Indigenous Studies, Chennai,
India.*

This review first appeared in *Dharma Deepika*, January-June 2012, 96-97, and is used with permission

Patrick Johnstone's vision of the global Christian church comes to us in vivid detail in this amazing book. Sceptics who wonder whether there is a future for religion, let alone Christianity, will find an answer in Johnstone's comprehensive data. Twentieth century predictions of a demise of religion have proven false. Already in the 21st century religion has taken the place of western political ideologies as a significant influence 'fundamental to the world's future' (65). Religious nationalism as well as 'a large, biblically-oriented indigenous Christian church is already impacting our world deeply' (65).

Johnstone raises a crucial question as to how world leaders can be helped to understand the implications of globalization and the dangers of religious extremism in order to develop realistic and benevolent policies (65). Six major religious streams in 2010 reveal the following: Christian 1,973 million (32.5%), Muslim 1,279 million (21.1%), Non-religious 938 million (15.5%), Hindu 820 million (13.5%), Buddhist 400 million (6.6%), as well as other ethnic and smaller religions clubbed together. The compiler acknowledges the contributions of David Barrett and Todd Johnson

in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and in their *World Christian Trends*, of Todd Johnson's *Atlas of World Christianity* as well as use of the World Christian Database together with his own statistical work in various editions of *Operation World*.

The challenge of Islam is a recurring theme in *The Future of the Global Church*. Christianity during its first six centuries—at the cost of two and a half million martyrs—had won a fifth of humankind and had spread as far as the Atlantic in the West and to China in the East. 'This growth ended as Islam swept through most of the major areas of Christian power... Muslims collectively became the world's new superpower..., while Christianity became a fringe religion until the 16th century' (34). Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria came under Muslim rule. 'The Mediterranean had become virtually a Muslim lake' (36).

Over 40% of all Christians came under Islamic rule and were subjected to *dhimmitude*, i.e. taxation of non-Muslims who are reduced to inferior status. 'Islam's goal was total world conquest, as it remains in the 21st Century' (36). Persecution of non-Muslim minorities has caused millions—especially Christians—to emigrate (74). Huge biological increase of Muslim populations is expected for example in Pakistan and in Yemen. 'The most over-populated countries are often the ones with the most influential Islamist movements, with potentially serious consequences for the world' (75).

The present world situation calls for solutions. Johnstone probes: What can be done to deal with the issues which fuel the resentment of young Muslims being recruited for jihad? (75) One of the merits of this book is its probing questions

together with an awareness of world trends. Islam itself has historic divisions and internal conflicts. Failure of Islamist ideology is creating a backlash and quest for change among Muslims (77). Today there is 'unprecedented openness to the Gospel among Muslims' (78).

Change of religious affiliation is more likely in India than in any other region of the world (79). The world's largest Hindu populations are in India with 775 million, Nepal with 18 million, and Bangladesh with 12 million. Other countries with substantial Hindu populations include Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Malaysia, USA, UK and Mauritius. Hindu ideas have wide acceptance and global influence, particularly due to India's prominence as the world's largest democracy. Defections to other religious faiths are likely 'as Dalits and low-caste Hindus increasingly reject social discrimination and poverty' (79). 'Discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal but socially pervasive', and is crippling India's social and economic development (81). Large numbers of Dalits and low-caste Indians seem likely to embrace Buddhism 'in protest against Hindu casteism' (84). Adherents of traditional ethnic religions in China also are expected to become Buddhists, but many Chinese are secular and increasing numbers are becoming Christians. 'China will soon become the world's evangelical superpower' (86). The author predicts the dynamic ascendancy of 'Asian input into every aspect of Christian philosophy, theology and practice' by the middle of the 21st Century (95).

Recent Christian growth in Africa, Asia and Latin America more than compensates for losses in the West. Growth of new Independent Christian movements, mostly Evangelical and Charismatic, is impressive. 'Christianity has rapidly become indigenous to many cultures

through these new denominations' (100). 'Asia will be the major growth area for the Church in the 21st Century' (102). The Orthodox Church celebrates 2,000 years of history in India. 'Significant Protestant growth in India is likely as the oppressed poor turn to Christ' (108). The Anglican Church is expected to be transformed from 'an Anglophone denomination into a global, largely non-Western family of churches' predominantly African and decidedly evangelical (111).

Charismatic Christianity is likely to continue to grow and increasingly influence the worldviews and politics of African and Latin American countries as well as parts of Asia including India (125). 'Charismatic and evangelical Christian renewal movements are the only religious movements in the world today that are growing through conversion' (129). South Asia could see massive growth if Christians welcome the Dalit-Bahujan protest movements against casteism (158). An example is given of the Chamars (India's second largest caste) at the forefront of the movement 'to liberate the 300 million poor Dalits and Bahujan' (210). During the past 30 years Pentecostal and Independent churches have multiplied, 'almost all of them among tribal peoples and Dalits' (207).

Whether or not one agrees with all of Patrick Johnstone's interpretations and conclusions, his findings are awesome and represent a monumental contribution to the task of world evangelization. The stated aim of the book is that 'Christians should be better prepared for ministry in the 21st Century' (21). A major focus is on Evangelicals (139). An entire section of the book (chapter six) is devoted to the Evangelical explosion and global distribution. A much larger section (chapter seven) is devoted to

the Evangelical task—evangelization—in which Johnstone develops a methodology for measuring the extent of evangelization world wide. Here one finds definitions of evangelized versus unevangelized, designations of the least evangelized, descriptions of peoples and languages, as well as a summary of 15 affinity blocks, 247 people clusters and their constituent people groups. All kinds of exciting discoveries follow.

A copy is indispensable for every Evangelical thinker, the purchase price exceptionally cheap. Colour charts and graphs enliven every page of this engaging text. This book is an essential tool for all students of world Christianity, for mission strategists and researchers. A copy belongs in the church library of every Christian congregation that views itself as a sending agency in today's complex world.

ERT (2015) 39:1, 95-96

Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why it Matters

Thomas H. McCall.

Downers Grove (IL), InterVarsity Press, 2012

ISBN 978-0-8308-3958-2

Pb, pp171

*Reviewed by Thomas Schirrmacher,
Executive Chair of the Theological
Commission, World Evangelical Alliance,
Martin Bucer Seminary, Bonn, Germany*

This book poses the following questions with respect to the cry of 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?', which Jesus made upon the cross: Did God the father kill his son? What happened to the Trinity on the cross? Was the Trinity broken or ruptured at that moment?

Thomas H. McCall, Associate Profes-

or of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, seeks to justify the traditional view that reigned until the beginning of the 20th century. That view said that the Trinity was never interrupted and that the separation from God had to do only with the human nature of Christ. Furthermore, he seeks to defend this view over against the predominant understanding held at the present time.

Above all, he investigates Jürgen Moltmann's view which has strongly influenced the theology of all denominations. According to Moltmann's view, everything can be understood only in light of his idea of contradiction, such that God is revealed as God only when God's forsakenness reveals what happened on the cross (15-18). God becomes the enemy of God, and God's fatherhood and Jesus' state of being a son temporarily die. The Trinitarian relationship has to be broken for God to truly be God. This is simultaneously the heart of so-called 'Social Trinitarianism'.

McCall investigates this view from passages within both OT and NT, as well as from the perspective of Church History and comes to the conclusion that Jesus was never separated from the Father in terms of his divinity. However, with respect to his humanity he experienced alienation from God coming from sin, whereby one cannot literally interpret his cry, as Moltmann does, but rather understand it as part of what was quoted from Psalm 22.

In the second chapter, McCall turns to the doctrine of 'impassability'. This is traditionally rendered as the 'Leiden-sunfähigkeit Gottes' in German (literal translation: God's inability to suffer), which is quite inappropriate. The teaching of the ancient church is morally objectionable for Moltmann and his suc-

cessors. In his defence of the classical view (67-73), McCall empathises with the words of Richard A. Muller that the exclusion of suffering never meant an exclusion of feelings in themselves ('the exclusion of "passions" from the divine being never implied the absence of affections,' page 68) What is not involved is the stoic *apatheia*. To be sure, it is a question of God's care, love, goodness, compassion, etc. Perfect love demands, however, that God not be subject to emotional swings such as we experience as people and according to which he would love us more at certain times and less at other times. Rather, God's emotions remain the same and are reliable. Additionally, McCall asserts, along the lines of St. Thomas Aquinas, that Jesus suffered with respect to his human nature and not with respect to his divine nature.

What should one think of the book?

McCall's defence of the classical view is welcomed, since it is arguably still held by the silent majority and yet seldom soundly justified. This classical view has been lost more ecclesio-politically than exegetically and doctrinally. What McCall says about Jesus' cry from the cross is very conclusive and well documented.

McCall also repeatedly goes into the complementarity of God's love and anger and sees the two jointly. Love, however, is superordinate.

One could have wished for a better exegetical foundation for his view of 'impassability', such as, for instance, provided by Norman Geisler in his *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2, Chapter 5, pp. 112-136) with the utmost simplicity. Indeed, McCall quotes the important defences of the classical position, for instance Paul L. Gavrilyuk's *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, in a presentation of the view held by the Church Fathers, Richard E. Creel's *Divine Impassibility* from a philosophical viewpoint, and Thomas G. Weinandy's *Does God suffer?* from the theological viewpoint. The enormous spectrum of opinions can be seen there, whereby there is naturally still plenty of room available for contributions to be made.

Where McCall is very successful is in clearly setting forth the idea that the question he addresses from Mark 15:34 counts as one of the central and basic decisions to be made with respect to doctrine. Moreover, it is much too often deemed to have already been completely sorted out.

Atonement as Gift: Re-Imagining the Cross for the Church and the World

Katie M. Heffelfinger and Patrick G. McGlinchey (eds)

This volume grows out of the conviction that the central Christian doctrine of the atonement has wide reaching, life-giving, and practical implications for some of the deepest pastoral and theological questions individuals and communities face today. It asks the question, what difference does the atonement make for ecumenics, pastoral care, theodicy, gender, ecology, and social division? The answers given by experts in their fields point to the considerable potential of the doctrine to renew Christian theology and spirituality.

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