

JOURNAL OF THE  
COLOMBO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Volume VII

2011

Editor  
Prof G P V Somaratna  
Research Professor, CTS



**CTS Publishing**

Colombo Theological Seminary  
Sri Lanka

Copyright © 2011 Colombo Theological Seminary

First published by Colombo Theological Seminary  
189 Dutugemunu Street, Kohuwela, Sri Lanka

All rights reserved.

Printed in Sri Lanka.

## CONTENTS

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>The Church as God’s Work of Art</b> <i>Simon Chan</i>	<b>7</b>
<b>Turning Shame into Honour: The Pastoral Strategy of 1 Peter</b> <i>David A deSilva</i>	<b>21</b>
<b>Old Testament Paradigms of Mission</b> <i>Roger E Hedlund</i>	<b>57</b>
<b>Biblical History and Archaeology in Conversation: The Case of Ancient Shechem at Tell Balatah</b> <i>Ivor Poobalan</i>	<b>71</b>
<b>As We Forgive Them: Facets of Forgiveness in the New Testament and Today</b> <i>Mano Emmanuel</i>	<b>83</b>
<b>Hebrews and Wandering Arameans: Exploring the Roots of the Jewish Diaspora</b> <i>Ted Rubesh</i>	<b>107</b>
<b>The Christian Church in Sri Lanka In the First Three Decades of the Nineteenth Century</b> <i>G P V Somaratna</i>	<b>125</b>
<b>A Guide to Articles in Volumes 1-6 of the JCTS</b>	<b>157</b>

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Simon Chan**, PhD

Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College Singapore, and editor of the *Trinity Theological Journal*.

**David A deSilva**, PhD,

Trustees' Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary.

**Roger E Hedlund**, DMiss

Editor of *Dharma Deepika* – the South Asian theological journal.

**Ivor Poobalan**, BA, ThM

Principal of Colombo Theological Seminary.

**Mano Emmanuel**, FCCA, BTh, MA, DMin (cand)

Academic Dean of Colombo Theological Seminary.

**Ted Rubesh**, BA, MMiss, DMiss (cand)

Adjunct faculty member of Colombo Theological Seminary. Co-Founder and (formerly) pastor of Kandy Bible Fellowship Church Sri Lanka.

**G P V Somaratna**, BA (Hons), MA (Missiology), MA (Theology), PgDip (Demography), PhD

Research Professor at Colombo Theological Seminary.

## EDITORIAL

This is the seventh volume of the *Journal of the Colombo Theological Seminary* (JCTS). Until 2010, the *JCTS* was published biennially. We have decided to publish it annually in order to allow evangelical scholars affiliated to CTS to express their views and so enhance Sri Lankan theological thinking and help students enter scholarly discussions. This year, we have received several contributions from outstanding, internationally recognised scholars such as Simon Chan, Roger Hedlund, and David A deSilva, in addition to the contributors from the Colombo Theological Seminary.

A dictionary definition of a Christian would be “a person professing belief in Jesus as the Christ or in the religion based on the teachings of Jesus.” Nevertheless, like many dictionary definitions, it falls somewhat short of really communicating the biblical truth of what it means to be a Christian. The word “Christian” is used three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Followers of Jesus Christ were first called “Christians” in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because their behaviour, activity, and speech which reflected the character of Christ. The word “Christian”, therefore, means “belonging to the party of Christ” or a “follower of Christ”.

According to the contemporary usage of the word, “Christian” has lost a great deal of its significance. It is often used of someone who is religious or has high moral values but who may or may not be a true follower of Jesus Christ. Many people who do not believe in Jesus Christ consider themselves Christians simply because they go to church or they are a part of a “Christian” family. However, going to church, serving those less fortunate than us, or being a good person does not make anyone a Christian. Neither does being a member of a church, attending services regularly, or giving to the work of the church make any one a Christian. Sri Lanka’s evangelicals are growing more moderate – and more vocal and visible and are in a position that cannot be disregarded any more. Their presence has become an accepted factor in every branch of the church in Sri Lanka.

## *EDITORIAL*

Most of the theological journals published in Sri Lanka emanate from the liberal schools of theological thinking. Therefore, it is our intention to fill this lacuna in our journal and to make the Christian of Sri Lanka aware of modern theological thinking. The *JCTS* directs its attention to the evangelical school of Christianity. We have endeavoured to maintain the highest academic standards while giving attention to the evangelical issues of Christianity. Our main focus is Sri Lanka. But we publish articles pertaining to global evangelical subjects as we cannot disregard the global issues since they impact our country.

**G P V Somaratna**

July 2011

# THE CHURCH AS GOD'S WORK OF ART

SIMON CHAN

## INTRODUCTION

The presence of the Spirit in the church makes the church a “holy temple”. Holiness is essentially a form of beauty. The church manifests the “beauty of holiness” most supremely in its liturgical celebration. In its worship of the triune God the church is being transformed into a work of art, an object of exquisite beauty.

### **The Triune God as Beauty**

According to Aquinas, something is beautiful when it meets three conditions: wholeness, harmony and radiance. Similarly, Jonathan Edwards describes the nature of beauty as something possessing a certain harmony, symmetry or proportionality.

One can see that the basic paradigm for beauty is taken from the visual arts, but by analogy these features of beauty could also apply to music, literature, and ethics. The connection between beauty and ethics has come to play a very important role in the history of Christian thought. Thus, Duns Scotus could say that moral goodness is a kind of beauty:

One could say that just as beauty is not some absolute quality in a beautiful body, but a combination of all that is in harmony with such a body (such as size, figure and colour) and a combination of all aspects (that pertain to all that is agreeable to such a body and are in harmony with one another), so the moral goodness of an act is a kind of décor it has, including a combination of due proportion to all to which it should

be proportioned (such as potency, the object, the end, the time, the place, and the manner)....<sup>1</sup>

Along the same lines, Edwards employs the concept of “the beauty of holiness” as one of the indubitable signs of genuine religious affections (see below).

In Scripture, the term that most closely approximates the concept of beauty is the word ‘glory’. More specifically, the glory of God in the New Testament is associated with the revelation of the triune God. The Trinity itself is beautiful because the relationship manifests the harmony of relationship. Christ being the expressed image of God is the revelation of God’s glory, and hence is the revelation of divine beauty.<sup>2</sup> But it is the Holy Spirit who plays a key role in “creating” the divine beauty. According to Balthasar, the Spirit who is the bond of love between the Father and the Son gives the Trinitarian relationship a certain “form” or harmony: He “is the locus of the Beauty of God.”<sup>3</sup> Or, putting it in more linear fashion characteristic of the Orthodox East, the Holy Spirit, who always glorifies Christ, shines his light on the manifest beauty of God the Father who is the original “form” of beauty.<sup>4</sup>

Christianity transfigures the meaning of beauty by revealing another kind of beauty: the glory of the Trinity revealed especially in Christ’s death on the cross. For Balthasar, the drama of the cross is the manifestation of God’s glory and hence of His beauty. Thus, theological aesthetics has to do with the whole mystery of God’s glory manifested supremely at the Cross.

---

<sup>1</sup> Duns Scotus, *On the Will and Morality*, translated with introduction by Allan B. Wolter, edited by William A. Frank (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press 1997), p.167. The concept that moral goodness is something beautiful appears to be quite central to Scotus’ philosophy. See Mary Elizabeth Ingham, *The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T and T. Clark, 1982), I: pp.463-525.

<sup>3</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, I: p.494.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, p.90-99.

This is seen most clearly in John's Gospel, where the cross is portrayed repeatedly as the revelation of God's glory. John 12:23-33 is one of a number of passages:

<sup>23</sup>Jesus replied: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

<sup>24</sup>I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

<sup>25</sup>The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

<sup>27</sup>"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name!' "

Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

<sup>31</sup>Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup>He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The "hour" for Christ to be glorified is the hour of his death, here pictured as the kernel of wheat falling to the ground. There is a word play in v. 32: "lifted up" has the idea of exaltation; but Jesus is lifted up on the Cross. The cross is a kind of enthronement.

The event, which is ugly in its visible form, has an inner beauty, namely, the vicarious suffering revealing the love of God. Yet, in what sense can we speak of the divine character as beautiful? The beauty of divine love is seen in the fact that this love is not a sentimental kind of love, but the love of a holy God. On the cross we see both divine love and holiness, love for sinners and judgment on sin. We see, here, a kind of symmetry that Edwards talks about. St. Paul speaks in similar terms with respect to the calling of Israel: "Consider the kindness and sternness of God" (Rom 11:22).

Balthasar aptly captures the beauty of the “pathos” of Christ in these words:

His is a love which, in its fatigue, preaches and works miracles (John 4:6), in the peculiar tension between the fact that his hour has not yet come and the fact that the hour (of suffering) has already come for Mary and, therefore, also for him (John 2:4f.). For the light to be in the darkness always means that the love of God pours itself out extravagantly in the midst of dire need, as is evident in the miracle of the bread (John 6:5-13). Concretely, it means that God gives of Himself in the midst of unbelief, of grumbling, of covert and open threats of death. The discourse of promise reveals the inner state of passion: He offers Himself (as food and drink) to the very limit of indignity, of throwing Himself at people. His is a love that breaks out of its security into defencelessness, and that yet immediately (and by the same token) must threaten as a judgment (“Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man...”), a love which rejects those it had impulsively drawn to itself just as abruptly: “Will you also go away?” (John 6:53, 67). In like manner, his discourses in Jerusalem are a constant provocation in every possible direction, and their effect is soon felt: those who are accused of lusting for murder (John 7:19; 8:40; 10:32f.), and of adultery against God (John 8:42) themselves, in turn, accuse him of premeditated suicide (John 8:22), madness (John 10:20), and possession (John 7:20, 8:48f., 52). What is portrayed by the Synoptics as the inner drama of the Lord’s unopposable will, as it exists in the midst of opposition, is portrayed by John as the Son’s will, which from the outset has entered by suffering into the Father’s will to deliver him over.<sup>5</sup>

### **Church as the Reflected Beauty of God**

The redemptive work of the Trinity results in the creation of the church which exists to reflect the divine beauty. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). In the Jerusalem Bible the verse is rendered: “We are God’s work of art.” How is the church a work of art, an object of beauty?

---

<sup>5</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, I: pp.519-20.

In the preceding verses, Paul speaks of the work of God in transforming us in Christ. We were once dead in trespasses and sins (v. 1). But God has made us “alive with Christ” (v. 4), raised us up and made us sit in the heavenly realms in Christ. The work of redemption involves a radical re-positioning of people existing in the realm of death to being made alive “in Christ.” But the work of actualizing what was objectively accomplished in Christ belongs to the Holy Spirit. In the divine economy, the Holy Spirit who is the “locus” of divine beauty is sent to indwell the Church. The Spirit’s indwelling the Church transforms it into a “holy temple”. The beauty of the Church is the “beauty of holiness” imparted by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does it by transforming the Church into the Body of Christ. By his indwelling, the Church takes on the “form” of Christ and manifests the unique beauty of Christ: the beauty of holiness.

Holiness has this characteristic balance: the God who is essentially “Other” is also “with us”. He is holy or “wholly other,” yet He is also God-with-us in love. In traditional theology, we call this his divine transcendence and immanence, or in the terms made famous by Rudolf Otto, *tremendum et fascinans*: God not only strikes us with fear (cf. Moses at the burning bush) but also attracts us.

The divine beauty of holiness is reflected in creatures as the character of “beautiful symmetry and proportion,” according to Edwards. This is discussed in his Tenth Sign of true religious affections in his *Religious Affections*. The true saints have this “proportion” because “[t]hey have the whole image of Christ upon them”. In the true saints (holy persons), Edwards continued, there is balance, e.g., between “holy hope” and “holy fear”, whereas “hypocrites” may display “confident hope” but “are void of reverence, self-jealousy and caution”. In the saints, “joy and holy fear go together”. Joy and comfort are balanced by sorrow for sin, etc.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. Paul Ramsey (WJE Online vol. 2), 365ff.

<http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZSS5ZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmpY3QucGw/cC4xOjM2MC53amVv>. Accessed 24 March 2011.

The Spirit is the Spirit of communion (2 Cor. 13:14), and in indwelling the Church, he creates a communion of saints. The beauty of the church is the beauty of communion brought about by the Spirit.

What is it about the Church as the communion of the Holy Spirit which reveals its divine beauty? To answer this question is to specify the nature of ecclesial communion.

### **The Interplay of Personal and Corporate**

It is the Spirit of the Church who ensures the healthy interplay between the personal and corporate dimensions. This is seen in his role as the "giving gift". As the gift of the Father, he unites the Church in one body through baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), and as the giver of gifts, he diversifies his operations in each member of that body giving "to each one" (*hexastō*) a distinct charism for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7-11). The very idea of communion which the Spirit effects in the body of Christ necessarily involves the dialectic between the personal and the corporate. Communion requires each person to be a distinct "other" to another person. If I am not who I am by virtue of my being called by a unique name at my baptism and my being given a unique gift by the Spirit, then I am only a member of a herd; I cannot be a distinct member of the body of Christ. Only as distinct and different members of one body is there true communion of persons in the Church. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the only two places in the Roman missal where the "I" occurs are at the beginning where each member of the church confesses his or her sins to God and to one another: "I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters..."; and toward the end, in response to the invitation to the Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." In communion each person is truly himself or herself before the divine and human "other". If I am to be truly myself, I must be in communion with others, and I cannot be in communion without first confessing my sins to my brothers and sisters and confessing my own unworthiness to receive the invitation to the Supper apart from Christ's own word of healing and restoration. At worship, I stand as a responsible member of the body of Christ, a person made capable of responding to God and other

persons. This is quite different from the narcissistic preoccupation seen in the “contemporary worship” of evangelical-charismatic churches today where there is hardly any objective and corporate proclamation of who God is, and hence, no objective personal and corporate response to God’s revelation. Worship is largely the expression of the individual and collective feelings about how good God is to me.

### **An Ecstatic Communion**

The communion of the Holy Spirit is highly exclusive: only those who are “baptized into Christ” are in actual communion with one another. This is why the Eucharist is given only to the baptized. At the same time, it is not a self-enclosed communion but is always moving outward. The Church in the communion of the Spirit is never satisfied with being a cozy fellowship. It is constantly moving out of itself. This outward movement may be called an ecstatic movement.

The Spirit moves freely and ecstatically as the “common fruit” of the Father and the Son, being sent out as gift of God to the Church as the recipient. In indwelling the Church, the Spirit, too, transforms the church into an ecstatic movement, a community that goes out of itself into the world. Ecstasy is much more than having some euphoric experience, a feeling of being beside oneself with joy. Spiritual ecstasy, like glory, is paradoxical. There is both joy and pain in the ecstatic movement of coming out of oneself to be united with another. In union with the “other” one loses oneself—just like in marriage, when the two become one, each one loses one’s former self, and out of the ecstasy of union, the third party (the child) emerges. In the communion that the Spirit accomplishes at our baptism, each person is no longer an individual but an “ecclesial self.”<sup>7</sup> The ecstatic communion of saints in the Holy Spirit is not just coziness; it also involves losing ourselves in order to find new life as members of the Body of Christ. Koinonia is not about polite talk and exchange of pleasantries, nor is it for my own personal spiritual benefit, although these might well be the outcome of true koinonia. It is always for

---

<sup>7</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1993), pp.49-65.

the edification of the Church as each commits to the "other" even to the point of death to self. The ecclesial communion, if it is truly governed by the self-effacing Holy Spirit, will have the same self-effacement or self-forgetfulness (Phil. 2:1, 3). But in losing one's life, one finds it.

This ecstatic movement of the Spirit also defines the nature of the *missio Dei*. The mission of the Spirit, of course, cannot be understood apart from the mission of the Son. Just as Christ's mission is pneumatically conditioned, the Spirit's mission is christologically conditioned both in its basis and outcome. In its basis, because the mission of the Spirit presupposes the mission of the Son, Jesus' "departure" through the cross, resurrection, and ascension back to the Father is the precondition of the Spirit's coming as the "other Paraclete" (John 16:7).<sup>8</sup> It is also christologically conditioned in its outcome because his mission as the Spirit of truth is to reveal Christ the Truth, to glorify him and testify about him (John 16:14). He is the spotlight that shines on Christ, while he himself remains hidden and unseen. Christ who is glorified by the Spirit in turn glorifies the Father (John 5:41; 7:18), while the Father glorifies the Son (Eph 1:10-12; Phil 2:9-11). The whole Trinitarian relationship is marked by the pneumatic ethos of turning away from oneself to the "other". The communion of the Spirit always turns outward. As Balthasar puts it: "The selfless transparency of the Spirit of love holds sway over the whole Trinity and only in this way discloses the ultimate meaning of the creation".<sup>9</sup> Such is the mission of the Spirit and such is the mission of the Church if the Church indeed images the Spirit. As long as there is "the world", the Church as the communion of the Spirit is never satisfied with being an introverted fellowship. It always looks beyond itself to transform the world into the Church, to call those who are not God's people to become the people of God. Thus the Church prays, at the end of the Eucharistic celebration:

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to

---

<sup>8</sup> This point is repeatedly stressed in *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 11, 13, 14, 22, 27, 30, 61, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar, *Creator Spirit*, p.111.

be a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise

## **A Holy Communion**

The communion of the Holy Spirit both unites us to one another and separates us from the “world”.

The holiness of the church is the holiness of communion. It is a way of life with one another in Christ. This is seen most clearly in the letter to the Ephesians where unity is seen “as a necessary correlative to purity”.<sup>10</sup> Keeping the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3) includes the cultivation of certain relational virtues: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (4:1-2). Similarly, the Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20) who, with evangelists, pastors and teachers, are Christ’s gift for the continuing building up of the church “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:12-13). The sign of this mature faith and knowledge is that Christians are no longer destabilized by false teachings, but become competent in “speaking the truth in love” as they grow to become a unified body (vv. 14-16). The same juxtaposing of unity and holiness can be seen in Philippians 2:1-4, where union with Christ and fellowship with the Spirit (v. 1) are the basis of Paul’s appeal for a certain way of life with one another: doing nothing out of selfish ambition and considering others better than oneself, putting the interest of others before self (vv. 3-4). All these appeals for a certain way of being with one another are founded on the unity of the Church—one body sharing one hope, one faith, one baptism—in the unity of God—one Spirit, one Lord, one God (Eph. 4:4-5).

Holiness also has a negative dimension: separation from all that is unholy. The holiness of the community of the Spirit makes the Church stand out in sharp contrast to the world and its ways, which elicits the world’s opposition. This theme of the world’s opposition to Jesus and his community is one that

---

<sup>10</sup> Congar, *The Mystery*, p.169.

runs through the Gospel of John. Even in the Prologue we already have an intimation of it (1:5, 10). Perhaps what is more significant is how this theme is linked to the work of the Spirit as Paraclete in John 14-16. Beasley-Murray has argued that the common feature that runs through the five Paraclete sayings (14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11; 12-15) is his work as advocate or legal advisor who comes to defend the truth against the world "in the greatest trial of history".<sup>11</sup> As the Spirit of truth, he reveals the truth set forth in the life and teaching of Jesus to the disciples whose task is to testify to the same truth (14:26; 16:12-15), since they are witnesses of the truth "from the beginning" (15:26, 27). And, like Jesus, the testimony of the Paraclete who lives "with" and shall be "in" the disciples will be rejected by the world (14:17). The world may repudiate the claims of Jesus, nonetheless when the Paraclete comes to indwell the Church, he will convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11) concerning the truth of Jesus. The Paraclete sets the Church apart from the world, but its being set apart is also the very condition for the conversion of the world, for making the world cease to be the world.

Thus, the Church as a holy communion manifests the balance between unity and separation. It reaches out ecstatically to the world while remaining holy, set apart from the world.

### **Liturgy as Enactment of Beauty**

How does the Church actualize the beauty of holiness? It does so in the liturgy. Theologically, the liturgy ("the work of the people") is the work of the Holy Spirit due to his indwelling presence. It is through the liturgy of the Word and the sacrament that we become the Church: we are what we eat. As Augustine reminds us, we consume the body of Christ in order to become the body of Christ. In the liturgy, we "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2).

---

<sup>11</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), p.72.

The beauty of the liturgy can be seen in two basic ways:

1. First, in the content of the liturgy. The liturgy enacts the Paschal Mystery thus showing forth the cruciform glory of the triune God.
2. Second, in the form in which it is presented. The liturgy enacts the divine beauty by juxtaposing a number of paradoxical elements.

### **The Liturgy as the Content of Divine Beauty**

The liturgy enacts the revelation of the triune God with the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as its centre. Both the East and the West are united in making the triune revelation the basic content of their liturgies.

The Trinitarian content of the liturgy can be seen right at the start of the Orthodox liturgy and the Roman Missal. The Orthodox liturgy begins with "Blessed by the kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit..." while the Roman Missal begins with the triune Pauline benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you".

Their liturgies are punctuated with Trinitarian allusions and prayers, such as the oft-repeated trisagion of the Orthodox Church, and various doxologies, the Gloria in Excelsis, Gloria Patri, and collects in most Western liturgies.

Finally, the liturgy culminates in the Eucharistic celebration where the work of the Trinity is recalled in the Eucharistic Prayer which essentially consists of three parts:

1. Recalling the work of the Father in creation and sending the Son in the world;
2. Recalling the work of the Son culminating in his death, resurrection, and coming again (the Memorial Acclamation)
3. Invoking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to the Church and upon the bread and wine so that they "may be to us the body and blood of Christ".

In the liturgy is revealed the beauty of the Trinitarian glory, especially the cruciform glory that Jesus Christ reveals in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again. The liturgy not only portrays the redemptive drama but draws the worshippers into the drama as active participants.

### **The Liturgy as the Form of Divine Beauty**

The liturgy enacts the divine beauty by juxtaposing a number of paradoxical elements. In so doing, it portrays the symmetry and proportionality of divine beauty. According to Lathrop, the primary pattern of worship is marked by two sets of contrasts which he terms "liturgical dualisms": 1) the Sunday-Week; and 2) the Word-Table.

### **The Sunday-Week**

Sunday is the first day of the week. That is the way the old creation (Gen. 1) is reckoned. But the Christians also call Sunday the eighth day: the day of the new creation that breaks out of the old seven-day pattern. Sunday worship is a reminder that with the resurrection, the old creation which still exists is interrupted by the New Creation. In the liturgy, the Old and the New are juxtaposed.

### **The Order of Word and Table (Sacrament)**

The word pointing to the meal, the meal fulfilling the word—this back and forth reference of Word and Sacrament constitutes the dynamic of Christian worship. We may say that in Christian worship, synagogue and temple have become one rather than separated as in Jewish worship.

The meal set next to the texts deepens and focuses the breaking that should occur in the Christian word service. The religious meanings of ancient scriptures are found to have surprising [sic] new referents when set beside a meal of thanksgiving in which Christ's death is experienced as life-giving. The body and blood of the crucified, made available as life-creating food, call the community to read all texts according to the

hermeneutic of Sunday, according to the spirit of the one who was dead but whose life enlivens the meeting.<sup>12</sup>

For Christians for many centuries, worship means the gathering of God's people on Sunday for the liturgy of Word and Table. From this primary pattern other patterns are derived:<sup>13</sup>

1. praise-beseeking
2. teaching-bath
3. pascha-year

### **Praise-Beseeking**

"Biblical prayer is the lively juxtaposition of praise and beseeking".<sup>14</sup> In praise we acknowledge who God is; in beseeking we acknowledge our own need.

### **Teaching-Bath**

"We teach and then we wash. The Christian faith includes a tradition that must be learned, scriptures to read, questions to ask about one's life, names with which to interpret the world, prayers to pray, an ordering or scheduling to take on as one's own. All of this precedes the bath."<sup>15</sup>

### **Pascha-Year**

"What the eighth-day meeting is to the seventh day, the Easter festival is to the year."<sup>16</sup> In other words, like the previous pairs, it is drawing from the old and giving it a new direction. The word 'pascha' suggests this juxtaposition of new and old: it is a Christian word for 'pesach' (Hebrew for Passover). Pascha

---

<sup>12</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p.50. Italics mine.

<sup>13</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Things*, p.55.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

is the Greek form of the Aramaic word for both the Passover festival and the Passover lamb.<sup>17</sup> The old Passover (the Exodus) finds its fulfillment in Jesus the Paschal Lamb slain for the redemption of the world. Here again, we see the old and the new symmetrically juxtaposed.

This pattern of balancing, symmetry, or proportionality, is reflected throughout the liturgy: e.g. singing is juxtaposed with silence; joy with contrition, praise with confession, the Kyrie with the Gloria. These contrasting elements set side-by-side are grounded in the cruciform glory of the triune God. Thus, the liturgy, when done well, reveals and actualizes the divine beauty of holiness. It transforms the church into God's work of art. It is the primary means by which God's eternal purpose is fulfilled in time. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the Church today is to cultivate a liturgical spirituality. The question of whether the Church should be liturgical is not to be regarded as a matter of taste or preference. The Church has no other choice but to enact the liturgy of Word and Sacrament, or more precisely the gospel of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament, if she is to reflect the triune beauty of holiness.

---

<sup>17</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Things*, pp.69, 74.

# **TURNING SHAME INTO HONOUR: THE PASTORAL STRATEGY OF 1 PETER**

DAVID A DESILVA

## **INTRODUCTION**

When we read through 1 Peter for clues about the situation of the addressees, and particularly those features of their situation that most concern the author, we find repeated emphasis on the addressees' experience of socially-imposed shame.

In this [hope] you rejoice, though for a little while it is necessary for you to be grieved by a variety of trials. (1 Pet. 1:6)

Keep living honourably among the Gentiles in order that, although they slander you as though you were evildoers, they may observe your honorable deeds and glorify God in the day of God's visitation. (1 Pet. 2:12)

This is a gift – if for the sake of his or her mindfulness of God a person endures affliction, suffering unjustly. (1 Pet. 2:19)

Even if you should suffer on account of what is just, you are privileged.... Keep your conscience clean in order that, when you are slandered, those who keep on abusing your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:14, 16)

They are put off because you no longer run along with them into the same flood of disgraceful behaviour, and so they slander [you]. (1 Pet. 4:4)

Beloved, do not be put off by the fiery trial taking place among you as a test.... Instead, rejoice to the extent that you are sharing Christ's

sufferings.... If you are reproached in Christ's name, you are privileged.... If any one among you [suffers] as a Christian, don't be ashamed, but give God honour because you bear this name. (1 Pet. 4:12-16)

Let those who are suffering in alignment with God's will entrust their lives to a faithful creator as they continue to do good. (1 Pet. 4:19)

After you have suffered for a short while, the God of all favour ... will himself restore, raise up, strengthen, and establish [you]. (1 Pet. 5:10)<sup>1</sup>

The frequency and pervasiveness of these references to the painful, disconfirming experiences of slander, reproach, and even physical affront – and the effects these experiences have on the addressees' ability to persevere in the direction they have chosen – establishes this aspect of their situation as central to the author's concern and pastoral agenda.<sup>2</sup>

This essay explores the social dynamics of shaming at work in this situation and the rationale behind the non-Christian neighbours' responses to the Christians in their midst. It then focuses on several strategies by means of which the author seeks to insulate the addressees against the experience of shame, with the result that the hearers can find sufficient grounds for self-respect and sufficient affirmation of worth within the Christian group to persevere in the beliefs, associations, and trajectory to which they chose to commit themselves in response to hearing the message about deliverance in Jesus Christ. It concludes with reflections on how the word of 1 Peter both empowers and challenges Christians living as a minority group within a majority culture in which the dynamics of honour and shame remain active, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translations of 1 Peter throughout this essay (and, here, the emphases) are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The frequency with which an author returns to a particular topic is underscored as one indication of its importance in the landscape of the community being addressed in John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case" (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 [1987] 73-93), 73-93. Throughout this essay I will simply refer to the "author" without engaging the question of whether or not this involved the historical Peter. Readers may review discussions of authorship in critical commentaries. These positions and supporting literature are briefly surveyed in D. A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp.844-847.

***Shame on You!***

The first-century Mediterranean world was a complex, multicultural environment. We can speak broadly of a dominant culture – the culture of those with power and resources – composed of deeply Hellenized and increasingly Romanized elites throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. In this regard, Herod Antipas had far more in common with Pontius Pilate than with his fellow Jews, Jesus of Nazareth, or James of Jerusalem. We may also speak broadly of majority cultures in various regions that tended to accept rather than challenge dominant-cultural values and the traditional values and practices of their particular region and ethnic background. For example, Roman imperial ideology as promoted by the “dominant culture” of the provincial elite and the Roman imperial government appears to have largely gone unchallenged, and even to have been supported and reinforced, by the majority of people living in the cities there. The support rallied for “Artemis of the Ephesians” in Acts 19 is another example of the overlap of “dominant culture” (the elites who paid for the maintenance and festivals of, and held priesthoods in, the Artemis cult) and “majority culture” (the artisans who profited from tourism, the general population who identified the cult as part of their own civic pride and, therefore, personal status). We could also identify numerous minority cultures throughout the Roman Empire. The Jewish subculture was itself such a minority culture, the pressures upon it being the more keenly felt in the Diaspora. Philosophical groups like Stoics and Cynics, Jewish sects like the community at Qumran and the various branches of the early Christian movement, are all minority cultures insofar as their adherents are numerically far fewer than adherents of the majority culture and their resources and access to power far inferior to that of representatives of the dominant culture. Often, these cultures held to conflicting values and promoted practices that would be variously viewed by members of other groups, and these other groups would use whatever resources they had at their disposal to defend the values and enforce the practices that *they* held dear or deemed important for the ordering of their lives.

The author of 1 Peter presents Christians living throughout five Roman provinces in what is today the Western half of Turkey – Pontus, Bithynia,

Asia, Galatia, and Cappadocia (1:1) – as persons subjected to their neighbours’ verbal and physical abuse. They are insulted, slandered, and, at the very least in the case of Christian slaves in the houses of non-Christian masters, beaten or otherwise physically affronted. All of these actions have a common goal – to shame the Christians, even more specifically, to make these people ashamed of being Christian, saying the things that Christians say, doing the things that Christians do, avoiding the things that Christians avoid. They represent social sanctions aimed at “correcting” those whom the more powerful group regards as deviating from acceptable ways of living in their midst. This was a common experience of Christians from the very inception of the movement.<sup>3</sup> Notably, insults, reproach, getting beaten up, suffering financial ruin, even being thrown into prison are frequently mentioned as part of this shared experience, but lynching or execution only rarely. The Christians’ neighbours were trying to reclaim, not destroy, these wayward members of their society.<sup>4</sup> Their words and actions conveyed a simple message with a simple agenda – “Shame on you! Shape up!”

Shaming is an essential tool of social control within groups. As a subjective experience, shame has its roots in external factors that press themselves upon and into the consciousness of an individual, negating the individual’s worth, warping the individual’s self-image into something that the individual himself or herself comes to reject as worthless, as something either to be changed to conform to what the external voices celebrate or, if that is impossible for one reason or another, to be hidden and covered up. Shame is imposed within a social system in an attempt to rehabilitate some member or members within that system who have transgressed what is valued, expected, or required within that system. If rehabilitation is not possible, shame becomes significantly debilitating.

Shame was a particularly potent mechanism of social control in the Greco-Roman world, where, as one native informant put it: “The one firm conviction

---

<sup>3</sup> Many first-century Christian communities endured similar verbal and physical assaults on their honour (see, for example, Phil 1:27-30; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:13-14; 3:1-4; 2 Thess 1:4-5; Heb 10:32-34; Rev 2:9-10, 13). It is therefore no surprise, and probably no exaggeration, that the author of 1 Peter can address this phenomenon across so widely distributed an audience.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, rightly, John H. Elliott, “Disgraced Yet Graced. The Gospel according to 1 Peter in the Key of Honor and Shame” (*Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 [1994] 166-178), 170.

from which we move to the proof of other points is this: that which is honourable is held dear for no other reason than because it is honourable” (Seneca, *De beneficiis* 4.16.2). “Bottom line” reasoning – the basis for the ancient “cost/benefit analysis” if you will – proceeded in this environment by inquiring whether a course of action would lead to the securing or loss of honour, esteem, face.<sup>5</sup> Their neighbours had been seeking to convince the addressees of 1 Peter that adherence to the Christian group and perseverance in its practices was disadvantageous, to make them feel deeply the loss of face that came as a consequence of their altered allegiances and behaviours. There was a way to escape this shame: rehabilitation.

The non-Christian majority and dominant culture’s complaint against the Christian movement was far from trivial. To the majority of people in the cities through which Christianity spread, the effects of the “proclamation of the good news” looked something like this: some wandering preacher blows into town and talks about a crucified revolutionary from the middle of nowhere who came to life again and is about to return to overturn the present world order and set up a new empire in which his followers will come out on top. This is not good news to the elites, who are very comfortable with the Roman peace, and neither is it good news to many of the non-elites, who are generally the most vulnerable during times of social and political upheaval.

Some people are attracted to this message and begin to meet together at night in one another’s houses to hear more, to sing hymns to this crucified criminal as if to a god, and to engage in some new kinds of rituals. They stop participating in traditional rites and refuse categorically to give honour to any of the gods they used to honour, upon whose favour and gifts the majority

---

<sup>5</sup> For fuller discussions of ancient texts attesting to honour and shame as primary, though by no means not the only, considerations in decision-making, see D. A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (rev. ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 39-85; idem, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999; reprint ed., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 14-26. As meta-level reflections by insiders on the hierarchies of their own socio-cultural values, the classical rhetorical handbooks (i.e., textbooks on *persuasion*) have been especially instructive in this regard.

thinks the wellbeing and secure ordering of their families, cities, indeed empire, depend.<sup>6</sup> They go so far as to say that those gods are *no* gods at all, which makes them not monotheists so much as atheists in the public eye, for they do not believe in the gods. Honourable people were *pious* people,<sup>7</sup> and those neighbours who were getting mixed up in this Christian movement were fast becoming the most *impious* people in town.

Their strict avoidance of anything that smelled of an idol meant that the Christians withdrew their presence from most every civic gathering and even private social event or dinner, for some acknowledgment of the gods accompanied every such event, and the social life of the city was organized in large measure around public sacrifices and festivals.<sup>8</sup> Roman historian, Ramsey MacMullen, correctly observes that “there existed ... no form of social life ... that was entirely secular. Small wonder, then, that Jews and Christians, holding themselves aloof from anything the gods touched, suffered under the reputation of misanthropy.”<sup>9</sup> The non-Christian neighbours of Christian converts are indeed “surprised,” “estranged,” even

---

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch regarded piety toward the gods (and the belief in their rule) as the bedrock of government: “it would be easier to build a city without the ground it stands on than to establish or sustain a government without religion” (“Reply to Colotes” 31; *Moralia* 1125E; translation mine. See the whole paragraph in *Moralia* 1125D-E).

<sup>7</sup> Isocrates advises his student: “Revere the gods, both by performing sacrifices and keeping your vows. Honor the gods at all times, but all the more at public festivals. This will give you the reputation for being pious and law-abiding” (*To Demonicus* 13; translation mine).

<sup>8</sup> The early Christians struggled to justify participation in idolatry so that they would not have to sever so many important connections with their networks of friends and patrons, their involvement in government, and their good name. This is reflected in 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:14-22; Rev 2:14-15, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1981), 40. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) says that Nero was able to scapegoat the Christians for the great fire due to the general unpopularity of the Christians for their “hatred of the human race.”

“alienated” (*xenizontai*) by the antisocial behaviour of former friends, associates, and otherwise reliable citizens (1 Pet 4:3-4).<sup>10</sup>

The converts’ change in behaviour and way of thinking aroused feelings of rejection and even indignation among their neighbours, who also no doubt, felt their own worldview and ethos threatened by the converts’ withdrawal from supporting the same and their promotion of an alternate and incompatible worldview (polytheism and exclusivist monotheism do not make good neighbours). Those who are not won over to this new group (i.e. the vast majority of the population) respond predictably. They express their disapproval for their neighbours’ abandonment of the cherished values of piety and civic solidarity under the umbrella of the gods and the *pax Romana*, and apply all the pressure they can to get them to shape up and return to an acceptable way of thinking and living.<sup>11</sup>

The Christians were forced into a position to conduct a new “cost/benefit analysis” of their options. They could yield to the social pressures of shame and re-engage in those practices that their neighbours required of them to regard them as worthwhile and supportive members of the larger system. This would have the benefit of relieving them of the experience of “slander”

---

<sup>10</sup> The non-Christian Jewish population also had strong reasons for attempting to dissolve through erosion of commitment the sect that had grown up in its midst, but we restrict our attention here to non-Christian Gentiles as they seem to be primarily in view as the aggressors (so also Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* [New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990], 8; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* [Word Biblical Commentary 49; Waco: Word, 1988], xlvi; John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* [Anchor Bible 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 96-97). 1 Pet 4:3-4, for example, speaks of the converts’ former way of life – and the aggressors’ continuing way of life – as characterized by idolatry, a certain freedom in sexual behavior, and parties involving immoderate eating and drinking, all of which tends to characterize Gentile life rather than typical Jewish practice (even if the author does caricature Gentile life here). Also, no Christian author otherwise speaks of the Jewish heritage as a “futile way of life inherited from one’s ancestors” (1 Pet 1:18) or as an “ignorant” way of life (1 Pet 1:14). Paul, who seems quite ready to discard his pre-Christian life, nevertheless maintains that the Jews were always in a privileged position vis-à-vis Gentiles specifically because of their knowledge of, and interaction with, the One God (see Rom 3:1-2; 9:4-5).

<sup>11</sup> This appears to be the goal even of officially sanctioned persecution (or “deviancy-control”), as Pliny, a governor of Bithynia and Pontus writing some time after 1 Peter (in 110-111 CE), expresses a deep satisfaction when his prosecution of those charged with being “Christians” causes a revival of traditional Greek and Roman religion in his province (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96).

and “various [other] trials,” but it did carry a cost. At the very least, they would need to relinquish their insights into, and moral choice concerning, the life that they had lived within the majority culture (or, in the case of Jewish Christians, within the Jewish ethnic subculture), and to betray that moral and spiritual faculty within them that led them to move out from that way of life and into a new direction. If, on the other hand, they chose against *rehabilitation*, they would need to find ways in which to come to grips with their experience of shame so that the latter should not become *debilitating*, quenching the fire of their new life in Christ.

It is to this complex of considerations that we find the author of 1 Peter speaking, giving us a window into how a leader within a minority culture deflects the majority culture’s attempts to impose shame as a “corrective” measure, thus nurturing the continued life and witness of the minority culture. He insulates his audience against their neighbours’ attempts to shame them by explaining why the judgment of outsiders is fundamentally flawed and not a reliable indicator of a person’s true worth. He further insulates them by reinterpreting their experiences of shaming and rejection in such a way that continued resistance and endurance emerges as the noble response. He contributes positively to their identity formation by speaking at some length about the basis for and affirming the group members’ genuine (if popularly unrecognized) honour, as well as by directing their focus to those “others” whose opinion truly matters when it comes to assessing

honour or disgrace.<sup>12</sup> By means of such strategies, the author of 1 Peter equips the converts to withstand the social pressures of shame inveighed against them so as to empower them to continue in the Christian associations, convictions, and practices which they have chosen as their new life matrix.

### **Consider the Source**

The author of 1 Peter reminds the hearers that they made a conscious decision to disassociate themselves from their former way of life, the ongoing lifestyle of the people around them. They had rejected “doing what [their fellow] Gentiles like” for what they considered to be a better, more honourable way – “doing what God wants” (4:2-3) – which they understood to involve pursuing the personal and community formation nurtured in the environment of the early Christian movement. If they left their old life behind for good reasons, why should they so value their neighbours’ evaluation of them as to desist from their new commitments when those neighbors are still mired in the less honourable life the Christian converts left behind?

It was a commonplace that not everyone could form reliable judgments concerning what was honourable or disgraceful, so that a person ought not

---

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of how these techniques are employed by a wide spectrum of Greco-Roman period minority cultures (the Jewish ethnic subculture, Stoic and Cynic philosophical cultures), see deSilva, *Despising Shame*, 86-155; for a discussion of how these techniques are employed across the early Christian movement as represented by select New Testament texts, see deSilva, *Hope of Glory*, 34-202 (chapters on Matthew, John, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Corinthians, Hebrews, and Revelation); John H. Elliott, “Disgraced Yet Graced: The Gospel According to 1 Peter in the Key of Honor and Shame,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25 (1995) 166-178; Robert Jewett, *Saint Paul Returns to the Movies: Triumph Over Shame* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” pp. 25-66 in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); Halvor Moxnes, “Honor, Shame, and the Outside World in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” pp. 207-218 in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism* (ed. Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, E. S. Frerichs, and Richard Horsley; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Halvor Moxnes, “Honour and Righteousness in Romans,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988) 61-77; Jerome H. Neyrey, “Despising the Shame of the Cross,” *Semeia* 68 (1996) 113-137; idem, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

to feel shame in regard to the opinion of just anyone.<sup>13</sup> Some people are ignorant of what is truly virtuous and valuable, and their own conduct shows them to be shameless. Whether such people heap praise or abuse on an individual says nothing meaningful about that individual's worth, and the latter would be led astray from what is truly honourable if he or she were to conform to the social pressures of the shameless. The author of 1 Peter uses this insulating strategy in a number of ways.

First, he speaks of the converts' neighbours as people who live dishonourably. Those outside the Christian movement are still indulging in "impure acts, desires, drunken spells, feasts, revels, and unseemly idolatries" (4:3). Their lives can be described as "a flood of debased living" (4:4). The source of these neighbours' hostility and shaming speech is their feeling of alienation (*xenizontai*, 4:4) from the Christian converts, who have withdrawn from joining them in these practices. Unlike the converts who, while treated like deviants by their neighbours, have now fallen into alignment with God through obedience to God's word (1:2, 14), the converts' detractors are headed for a fall on account of their "disobeying the word" (2:8), refusing to respond to God's summons. The latter are the ones who are ultimately deviant and "out of line."

This strategy is further reinforced wherever the author characterizes the converts' former way of life as one of ignorance and degrading behaviours. By responding to the "good news" as they have, the converts have moved out of "darkness," a standard image for ignorance, into the "marvelous light" of acquaintance with the One God (2:9). This locates the converts' neighbours as being still in the dark, and therefore, without the necessary illumination to see clearly to make an informed evaluation concerning what is honourable and what censurable. The converts have left behind "the empty way of life inherited from their ancestors" (1:18), the way of life that still holds their non-Christian neighbours in its grasp. That way of life involved being conformed to one's passions and desires (rather than mastery of the

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the comments made in Aristotle, *Rh.* 2.6.15, 23; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 77/78.21, 25; Plato, *Cri.* 44C, 46C-47D, 49D; Seneca, *De Constantia* 11.2-12.1; 13.2, 5; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.22.1-10; 2.24.19; 4.5.22.

same), passions and desires aroused, moreover, in ignorance rather than on the basis of reliable knowledge of what was truly valuable, desirable, or good (1:14). Their neighbours, then, are attempting to shame them back into a less honourable, more limited way of life. Their censure is mere “slander” (4:4); it is the “ignorance of foolish people” (2:15) that the nobility of the converts’ lives shows up.

Minority cultures, by definition, had to face the problem that sheer numbers were on the side of the majority culture. The positions taken and evaluations imposed by the latter would weigh upon members of the former by simple virtue of the fact that so many people were in agreement about the majority cultural values. How could so many people be wrong about the nature of the divine, the expectations of honourable people, and the identification of what was acceptable and what was deviant behavior? The author of 1 Peter subtly touches upon this topic in reference to the precedent of the Flood. Then, only “a few, that is, eight persons” (3:20) were rightly aligned with what is ultimately honourable and disgraceful, and the overwhelming majority of humanity mired in ignorance and vice apart from any knowledge of God’s perspective on, and evaluation of, their way of life. Since God’s judgment did not depend on majority opinion, but only upon God’s opinion and will, it proved in the end to be far more expedient to be among the few than to allow the opinion of the majority to weigh upon one’s mind and commitments, so as to be swayed thereby and consequently swept away by the flood!

### ***Who’s On Trial Here?***

In a manner reminiscent of contemporary Cynic and Stoic philosophers, the author helps the converts turn the tables, as it were, on their neighbours, such that the non-Christians’ responses to the Christians says more about the non-Christians themselves than the converts. Epictetus provides a fine example of how the low esteem in which the non-philosopher holds the sage reveals the wisdom or ignorance of the non-philosopher, rather than reflecting the actual honour or shame of the sage:

If the one who has power over you says: "I hold you to be impious and profane," what has happened to you? You have been pronounced "impious and profane," and nothing more. If this person had passed judgment upon some syllogism and had declared: "I judge the statement, 'If it is day, there is light,' to be false," what has happened to the syllogism? Who is being judged in this case? Who has been condemned? The syllogism, or the person who has formed a false judgment about it? ... Should the sage, then, pay attention to an uninstructed person when the latter passes judgment on what is holy and unholy, and on what is just and unjust? (Diss. 1.29.50-54)

If the non-initiate evaluates the sage – or the Christian – to be worthless or to be acting shamefully, when in fact the sage or the Christian is showing proper piety to God and living in accordance with what divine knowledge has revealed to be honourable and advantageous, who is really being judged by that display of contempt?

The example of Jesus provides definitive proof that the evaluation human beings form about a person can be dead wrong in God's sight. The story at the centre of the church's faith is one that forces a decision about the reliability of the world's estimation of honour and shame. Jesus suffered crucifixion, nailed up naked at a crossroads like a human billboard advertising the consequences of serious deviation from the dominant culture's values.<sup>14</sup> Coming to faith in Jesus and joining the Christian movement necessitated first and foremost accepting that God's perspective on what kind of behaviour merits honour can differ substantially from the perspective of human beings.

The author of 1 Peter describes Jesus as the "living stone, rejected as worthless by human beings but choice and precious in God's sight" (2:4). The author brings together two authoritative texts from the Scriptures, using the interpretive method of *gezera shawa*, the linking word between the two texts being "stone" (*lithos*):

---

<sup>14</sup> Martin Hengel (*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977]) provides a detailed description of the humiliation involved in crucifixion; see also Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross."

“the stone (lithos) which the builders rejected – this stone has become the head of the corner” (LXX Psalm 117:22);

“Look! I set in Zion a stone (lithon) – a choice, precious cornerstone, and the person who depends on it will never be put to shame” (Isaiah 28:16).

The first text provides an authoritative statement that the estimation of human beings (the “builders”) is not the last word on a person or thing’s worth. The second text expressly identifies the prevailing estimation of this stone as God’s estimation (the “I” of the prophetic oracle) and God as the agent of the stone’s move from toss-off reject to cornerstone. When God raised Jesus from the dead, God vindicated Jesus’ honour over against the evaluations of Jesus imposed by his detractors. Blended together thus, these texts pit the estimation of humans against the estimation of God, affirming the triumph, and therefore, the greater importance, of God’s approval. If human beings regard as worthless the person who is “choice” and “precious” in God’s estimation, this shows the inability of those human beings to form a reliable judgment about what is honourable and valuable.

The author addresses the converts as people who know right from wrong, and who know that there are substantial areas of overlap between what the Christian community affirms as noble and avoids as vicious and what the non-Christian majority culture should be able to recognize as noble or vicious as well. So the author calls the hearers to counter feelings of shame by developing a healthy self-respect based on the embodiment of ideals and virtues they *know* to be held in esteem both within the Christian subculture and the dominant culture, the culture of their primary upbringing.

He draws, for example, on the familiar ethical topic of mastering one’s desires and cravings, rather than being mastered by the same, so that one could live a consistently virtuous life: “I exhort you to abstain from the fleshly desires that wage war against your soul, keeping your conduct among the

Gentiles honourable” (2:11-12).<sup>15</sup> Self-controlled, just, beneficent conduct is honourable in the sight of all people. If the outsiders shame the converts now over “disputed” matters, like whether or not to worship one God or many, whether to affirm the kingdom of the Caesars or await the kingdom of the one God’s Son, the converts will be better able to resist both the rehabilitating and debilitating power of shame to the extent that they cultivate – and affirm in one another – this solid basis for self-respect *in terms outsiders should be able to understand*. If the outsiders continue to degrade and reject the Christians, the latter will be in a position to consider this to be a reflection of their neighbours’ ignorance, and so nullify the social pressure of shame rather than internalize and act upon it.

The author’s instructions to Christian slaves of non-Christian masters provide a radical case in point. Such slaves were completely under their masters’ authority. The latter were not reticent to demean and physically punish slaves of whose behaviour they disapproved. Christian slaves were to act as the guardians of their own conduct, making sure that they did not behave in such a way as offered any unnecessary (or even genuine) cause for punishment. The author would encourage Christian slaves, however, to continue to resist the significant pressures that their masters could put upon them to compel them to participate in domestic rites or to perform services that would compromise their commitment to obey God’s commandments. In such cases, “submission” does not preclude resistance. If a slave endures some form of degradation as a result of his or her commitment to maintain a pure conscience before God, God recognizes their pious loyalty and they continue in God’s “favour” (2:20).

The slave is empowered hereby to formulate an evaluation of the human master: to the extent that the latter abstains from degrading the Christian slave for his or her commitment to Christian values and practices, the master

---

<sup>15</sup> The topic of “mastery of the passions” as an ideal of philosophical ethics is widely attested in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish literature. See Plato, *Resp.* 431A; *Gorg.* 491; *Phaedo* 93-94; Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 2.22; 3.22; 4.10-11; Plutarch, *Virt. mor.* 1-4 (*Mor.* 440D-443D); *Ep. Aristeas* 221; 4 Maccabees. This was an ideal that the Christian movement was quite intent on fulfilling (see, for example, Gal 5:13-25).

is “good and gentle,” but to the extent that the master seeks to inflict shame and pain upon the Christian slave for the same, the master is “crooked” or “perverse” (2:20). The disgrace the master inflicts in that instance becomes a measure *not* of what is wrong in the slave and needs to be rehabilitated, but what is wrong with the *master*, for which the master himself or herself stands under God’s judgment. Since the slave suffers “unjustly” (2:19), the inflicting of disgrace should cause not the slave, but the master, to blush – and this knowledge is put in the hands of the slave, to empower him or her to resist internalizing the externally-imposed shaming.

Several paragraphs later, addressing all converts, the author poses the rhetorical question: “Who is the person who will hurt you if you are an enthusiast for the good?” (3:13). The commonsense answer is obvious. No one in his or her right mind would wish to abuse such a person. The author poses this rhetorical question knowing full well the reality of the hearers’ situation. He thereby makes a bold statement: the non-Christian neighbours are acting out of line with any rational expectation for human behavior. There may be many of them, but that does not make them any less the truly “deviant” ones. He follows this with a conditional sentence – one of a very rare class in the Greek New Testament called the “future less vivid,” reserved for improbable future conditions: “Even if you should happen to suffer on account of justice, you would be privileged” (*makarioi*, 3:14). But again, against all rational expectations, the Christians *are* suffering disgrace and abuse for righteousness’ sake. This does not signal that something is wrong with the converts, but rather that something is defective in their neighbours who respond thus to their change of lifestyle. Because of this, the believers should not “harbour fear of, nor be troubled by, their intimidation” (3:14), their attempts to derail the converts’ progress in virtue and piety.

The author positions the hearers to regard their neighbours’ slander as unjust, since the converts do, in fact, live in line even with Greco-Roman society’s highest ideals, such as mastery of the passions (2:11-12; 4:2), and assiduously avoid the vices and foibles common to so many (2:16, 20a; 4:15). Nevertheless, the converts are being reproached and disgraced as if they were “evil doers.” But, as even Plato would affirm, committing injustice is far

more dishonourable than suffering injustice (thus explicitly in 1 Pet 3:17: “It is better to suffer for doing good, if God should thus will it, than for doing evil”). The author puts the hearers in a position to determine whether or not shame, reproach, or any other social sanction is being justly imposed upon them. If they know they have not committed any act that is truly censurable – for example, murder, theft, evildoing in general, or meddling (4:15) – then they know that the shame imposed upon them is wrongly imposed, for it is imposed as a result of their obedient response to God’s Son (4:15-16), and therefore is no cause for shame at all. A similar strategy appears in Seneca’s treatise *De Constantia*:

Both schools [i.e. Stoic and Epicurean] urge you to scorn injuries and, what I may call the shadows and suggestions of injuries, insults. And one does not need to be a wise person to despise these, but merely a person of sense – one who can say to himself or herself: “Do I, or do I not, deserve that these things befall me? If I do deserve them, there is no insult – it is justice; if I do not deserve them, he who does the injustice is the one to blush.” (Constant. 16.3)

Similarly, the author of 1 Peter assures his hearers that their neighbours will eventually blush at how they have treated the virtuous Christians in their midst (3:16). Their rejection and abuse may constitute hardships for the Christians, but there is no cause for them to provoke shame within these Christians.

## Reinterpreting Experiences of Shame

As is also common in minority cultural literature from the Greco-Roman world, the author of 1 Peter offers alternative interpretations of, and perspectives upon, the addressees' experiences of shame and rejection that are more conducive to promoting perseverance *through* those experiences rather than backing down in the face of those experiences. Successful continued endurance, rather than yielding, becomes the honourable path and the path to an honourable end.

First, at the outset of his letter, the author interprets the "various trials" that beset the addressees (their varied experiences of being shamed) as the proving ground of the genuineness of the believers' trust and commitment to God (1 Pet 1:6-7). He returns to this topic toward the conclusion of his letter, speaking of the "fiery trial" that they face "coming upon you as a test" (4:12). The author draws on the well-established philosophical tradition of the "probative" value of suffering, according to which God uses hardships to prove the worth of the righteous or the wise person and test the reality of their virtue.<sup>16</sup> Their neighbours' censure and rejection no longer constitute an actual assault upon their honour, but an opportunity for them to attain greater "praise and glory and honour" when Christ returns in glory (1:7, 14) to the extent that they maintain their public identification with God and the way of life into which God has called them. This is a stunning re-orientation — *resistance* to the pressures around them becomes the path to honour, whereas society would have them regard *yielding* to those pressures as the road to recovering honour.

---

<sup>16</sup> The author of the Wisdom of Solomon, for example, writes of the pious Jew who held firm in the face of persecution and humiliation by the ungodly: "Though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them" (Wis 3:5-6). The end result of perseverance is to enjoy rewards in God's presence. The author's words resonate also with the Stoic tradition as reflected in Seneca: the wise person "counts even injury profitable, for through it he finds a means of putting himself to the proof and makes trial of his virtue" (*De constantia* 9.3; also *De providentia* 5.10). For a rich introduction to Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions about suffering, see N. C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77-162.

Second, the author defines liminality as the “new normal.” The people outside the Christian group were shaming the Christians in an attempt to make them feel abnormal, deviant, out of place and out of line. By pushing them, socially speaking, into a place of uncomfortable abnormality, the converts’ neighbours hoped that the converts would cross back into the place of “normality” by returning to their former way of life, falling back in line. The author of 1 Peter, however, turns the experience of being despised and rejected into something “normal” for the experience of believers as long as they are in the world. He seeks to protect the converts from experiencing alienation from their new way of life (“do not be surprised,” “do not be put off,” 4:12) on account of the resistance and disapproval with which they have met, lest their mental and social discomfort shake their resolve and detach them from their new commitments.

The example of Jesus, once again, plays an important part. He is the new norm that renders the trials Christians experience “normal,” and not “something strange” (4:12). The pattern of Jesus is a pattern of attaining honour through rejection, scorn, and suffering: the foreordained plan of God foretold through the prophets involved “the sufferings that would befall Christ and the glories that would follow” (1:11). His experience both “normalizes” the disciples’ experience of society’s deviancy-control techniques as well as provides an historical precedent for the positive, honourable consequences of persevering in the face of shame.

Throughout the letter, then, the author will invite the addressees to fall in line with the pattern of Jesus. “It is better to suffer for doing what is right, if God so wills, than for doing what is wrong” explicitly “because Christ also suffered once for all on account of sins, the just person for unjust people” (3:17-18). Slaves in particular are urged to regard being punished for doing what is right in God’s sight as giving them “a place of favour before God” specifically because “Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving behind an

example for you, in order that you would follow in his footsteps” (2:20-21).<sup>17</sup> Following Christ’s example, the converts could steel their minds and wills to embrace the experience of their neighbours’ rejection as the crystallization of their commitment to separate themselves from ignoble vice, that is, from all that is *truly* dishonorable in *God’s* sight: “Since Christ, then, suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves as well with the same mindset. The person who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, in order to live for the remainder of his or her time in the flesh no longer for what people crave but for what God wants” (4:1-2).

The converts are urged to keep their focus fixed on Christ’s example, assured that, as they share now in Christ’s experience of enduring shame and rejection for the sake of God, they would come to share also in his honour and vindication before God: “Rejoice insofar as you share in Christ’s sufferings, in order that, when his glory is manifested, you may exult exceedingly” (4:13).<sup>18</sup> Because the pattern of Christ is the God-ordained path for bringing the disciples through this upside-down world to a place of honour in God’s presence, those who are “reproached” or “shamed on account of Christ’s name” are actually the “privileged” ones (*makarioi*, 4:14).<sup>19</sup> The same God who “raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory” (1:21) is “the one calling [the converts] into glory, after suffering for a short

---

<sup>17</sup> The author does not make it completely explicit, but he says enough for the first-century hearer to *infer* that, because Jesus suffered on behalf of the hearers, and specifically “for their sins” (2:24; see also 3:18), the hearers also ought to be willing to endure shame and suffering for the sake of Jesus’ name. This would be part of making a fair return to Jesus for his costly beneficence and faithfulness toward them. On reciprocity as a cardinal social value, and the deployment of these topics in early Christian literature, see D. A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000, 95-156.

<sup>18</sup> This was a common topic in the early church (see also Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10-11; 2 Tim 2:11-12).

<sup>19</sup> Rev 20:6 and 22:14 also pronounce “blessed” or “honorable” those who have suffered the world’s shaming most intensely (execution in 20:6; those who “wash their robes” are those who endure the “great ordeal,” the beast’s campaign against godliness, Rev 7:13-14). See the rich discussion of the meaning of *makarios* in K. C. Hanson, “How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew’s Makarisms and Reproaches,” *Semeia* 68 (1996) 81-111; see also D. A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 274-84.

while” (5:10). Slipping away from the group and back into the embrace of their neighbours would mean *losing* this significant privilege, not restoring face.

The author does not hereby dismiss the real difficulties and sense of displacement that the converts potentially face. He knows that they are now living as people who are no longer at home in their communities, who no longer “belong.” He speaks of them as “resident aliens” and as people who are “sojourning” or “living as foreigners” now in their home cities (1:1-2, 17; 2:11).<sup>20</sup> But they are not merely “resident aliens”: they are “*chosen* resident aliens,” “resident aliens chosen according to God’s foreknowledge” (1:1-2; see also 5:13). Though now pushed to the margins in disgrace in their social networks, they stand at the centre of God’s focal concern.

There was a prominent figure in sacred history who identified himself as a “resident alien” and a “foreigner” as well – Abraham (see Gen 23:4; 24:37). In response to God’s choice of him as the recipient of a special promise and inheritance, Abraham left behind the comfortable places of his homeland and embraced the liminal status of a resident alien and foreigner for the remainder of his life. Abraham is subtly recalled here as a prototype for the believers, further “normalizing” their experience. The identity of “resident alien” within the “Diaspora,” the scattering of the historic people of God from their native land beginning in the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, and the author’s identification of his location as “Babylon,” holds up yet another normalizing lens to the addressees’ experience. The people of Israel, God’s elect, are scattered resident aliens in this world (irrespective of the fact that some, at least, became fully enfranchised citizens in their locales). Displacement in this world is *normal* for the people of God, who look to a future gathering by God into their true home. The converts’ displacement within their host society, therefore, is appropriate for people who have been gathered into the elect people of God (cf. 2:4-5, 9-10).

---

<sup>20</sup> I disagree here with Elliott (*1 Peter*, 101, 312-313), who regards this as a sign of the legal status of the addressees rather than a metaphorical depiction of their displaced, but unofficial, status. There were, no doubt, actual “resident aliens” among the Christian communities, but these communities would not be comprised exclusively of people of this status.

Third, it was important to help the believers understand that the resistance they encountered and losses they endured were *not* a sign that they were out of favor with God, but rather assured them that they were moving in precisely the direction that God was leading. As people who “are suffering according to the will of God,” they are invited to entrust their lives to the faithful creator as they continue in doing what is good (4:19). This is a potentially difficult verse. That these believers are “suffering in accordance with God’s will” means that their obedience to God’s will and alignment with God’s cause has resulted in suffering, not that God delights in abusing God’s faithful ones nor that God seeks to make life difficult for those who are trying to leave behind death-bound and inauthentic ways of life. The believers might all too easily interpret the experience of loss, pain, and suffering as a sign of divine displeasure. The author, however, is assuring them that God is not in the reproaches and abuse of the unbelievers who are shaming the believers, but *with the believers* in the midst of their experiences of hostility and resistance. It was God who provided for their redemption from a futile way of life, dissociation from which is the cause of their present suffering (1:19). Their suffering “in accordance with God’s will” means they are moving in the direction that God wants for them, even though their neighbours are responding to them with hostility (as they had responded to Jesus).

Further, in the midst of the reproaches and insults that they endure, God associates himself with the converts by means of God’s own Spirit: “If you are insulted on account of the name of Christ, you are privileged, because the spirit of glory, which is God’s Spirit, rests upon you” (4:14). Far from separating them from God, their endurance of trials confirms their intimate connection with God, for they experience precisely what God’s own Son experienced. This strategy appears throughout the letter, as first slaves and then the whole community are assured that their experience of shame, pain, and marginalization does not mean the loss of God’s favour, but is, on the contrary, a *proof* that “you stand in favour with God” (2:19-20; 3:14a).

The convert enjoys God’s favour because the hardships he or she experiences are endured on account of association with Jesus and the Jesus movement (i.e. “as a ‘Christian’,” 4:16). In embracing the cost of loyalty to Jesus and of

obedience to the One God, the convert is actually giving God his proper honour (4:16), for he or she is bearing witness to the value of God's friendship and promises before the eyes of his or her neighbours. The convert is therefore encouraged not even to *feel* shame (*mē aischynesthō*, "do not be ashamed," 4:16), not to internalize the social pressure from outside so as to reject that aspect of himself or herself that the disapproving members of the system find objectionable.

Finally, the author also sets the hearers' struggle with being shamed against another interpretative backdrop – the cosmic framework of the spiritual war over their lives: "Be sober; watch out! Your enemy, the Devil, is walking about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, remaining firm in your trust, knowing that your sisters and brothers throughout the world face the same kinds of suffering" (5:8-9). The enemy of God, Satan himself, stands ultimately behind the experiences of shame, suffering, and "correction" imposed upon the disciples and upon their brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the inhabited world. The addressees should see not merely their neighbours' faces in these assaults, but Satan's face: he is the one attempting to trip them up – indeed, to swallow them up – by undermining their commitment to Jesus, thus depriving them of experiencing the "praise and glory and honour" that shall crown those who persevere through these trials (1:7). This interpretative frame orients the Christians quite differently to shame. Their neighbors' attempts to "rehabilitate" them become their cosmic Enemy's attempts to disqualify them. They are thereby repositioned to see resistance to these social pressures as the honorable path to victory, and acquiescence ("rehabilitation") as a disgraceful defeat at the hands of God's enemy.

### Defending Your Honour

Cultural anthropologists working in Mediterranean villages have observed a social interaction that they have termed a "challenge and riposte".<sup>21</sup> If an honourable person is subjected to insult or to some other challenge to

---

<sup>21</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," pp. 21-77 in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J. G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 27.

honour, that person is culturally conditioned to retaliate, offering a “riposte” that will counter the challenge and preserve honour in the public eye intact. It falls to the bystanders to decide whether or not the challenged person has successfully defended his (and, indeed, usually “his”) own honour.<sup>22</sup> Christians confronted with such attacks on their honour as verbal challenges, reproachful speech, or even physical affronts might be sorely tempted to respond in kind, playing out the challenge-riposte game before the onlookers. Beginning with Jesus, however, Christian leaders sought to cultivate a specifically Christian riposte. The follower of Jesus will meet challenges to his or her honor, but not by using the same currency of insult or violence that the outside world throws at them.

Once more, the example of Jesus is the starting point for the author’s reflection. Specifically in his trial and passion, Jesus did not allow his honour to be engaged by the assaults of his detractors. “When he was reviled, he did not riposte with more reviling in kind,” but instead “committed himself to the One who judges justly,” that is, to God (2:22-23). The author calls *all* Christians, and not just the slaves who would lack the power to respond in kind anyway, to respond to their detractors following Christ’s example, “not returning injury for injury or insult for insult, but, on the contrary, extending blessing – for to this you were called, in order that you might inherit a blessing” (3:9).<sup>23</sup> The Christian is challenged to answer the hostile challenge with generosity, the violent challenge with the courageous refusal to use

---

<sup>22</sup> The gospels contain many such exchanges, often initiated by Pharisees, Sadducees, or other religious officials against Jesus, whom they regard as an upstart threatening to steal their place in the esteem of the people, and winningly answered or met by Jesus. See, for example, Luke 4:1-13; 5:29-39; 6:1-5, 6-11; 7:39-50; 10:25-28; 11:14-20; 11:37-54; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 16:14-18; 19:39-40; 20:1-19; 20:20-26, 27-40; 20:41-47. For an analysis of such exchanges in Matthew’s Gospel, see Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 44-52.

<sup>23</sup> Elliott (“Disgraced Yet Graced,” 171) helpfully compares 1 Peter’s advice to the similar course promoted by Plutarch: “‘How shall I defend myself against my enemy?’ ‘By proving yourself good and honorable’” (“How to Profit by One’s Enemies” 4; *Moralia* 88B). It will distress the enemy more than being insulted, Plutarch writes, to see you bear yourself with self-control, justice, and kindness toward those with whom you come in contact. The insulted person must use the insult as an occasion to examine his life and rid himself of any semblance of that vice (“How to Profit” 6; *Moralia* 89 D-E).

violence, the challenge in the form of a curse with a blessing from God's inexhaustible resources of goodness and kindness.

The author maintains the hope that, eventually, the converts' ongoing commitment to "do what is good" and to live as respectful, respectable citizens, to "keep [their] conduct noble among the Gentiles," will overturn the reproach that their neighbours attach to the name of "Christian" and thus "silence the ignorant slander of foolish people" (2:13-15). Their neighbours may yet come to acknowledge the virtue and nobility of the Christian way of life and, therefore, give honour to the God whom the Christians proclaim,<sup>24</sup> even if this indeed takes until "the day of visitation" (2:12).

Rather than *either* yield to the feelings of shame *or* riposte in a manner that would antagonize, the Christians are called to be ready to give a gentle but committed verbal defense (an *apologia*, 3:15) for their new commitments and practices. The author wants them to know why they themselves have made their choices (and thus why they are not going to give up continuing in the same direction) and to use this, moreover, as an opportunity to bear witness to their hope as Christians. In this context the author returns again to the conviction that, sooner or later, the virtuous conduct of the Christian group will win over their neighbours to their witness and make those who now shame the Christians ashamed themselves (3:16).

### **Honoured in God's Sight**

While giving extensive attention to the addressees' experience of being shamed by their neighbours, the author also approaches the issue of their identity – and the challenges to their worth – from a completely different angle. Moving out from their former way of life into the fellowship of the Christian movement may have brought them shame in the eyes of those who

---

<sup>24</sup> The author returns to this hope in his advice to Christian wives of non-Christian husbands (3:1-6), which ought to be read thoroughly within the context of the author's agenda for appealing to non-Christians by embodying broader social ideals as far as possible without compromise on "essential" matters like idolatry.

remain “in the dark,” but it has also brought them greater honour than they could ever have hoped to attain in their old way of life. Their neighbours do not recognize this honour, but it is recognized in the most important court of opinion – the court of God and those who have been illumined by God’s light, namely one’s fellow believers.<sup>25</sup> This is the court whose judgment about the honourable and the shameful is truly reliable, for it is derived from God’s superior knowledge of what is truly and lastingly valuable, and it is a value judgment that lasts for eternity rather than the short span of this mortal life.

Those who currently heap shame upon the Christians “will give an account to the One who stands prepared to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). God, who stands at the centre of the “court of opinion” whose verdict matters ultimately, will hold all people accountable for their commitment or their failure to give God his due. The converts are not, therefore, ultimately accountable to their neighbours, nor to their neighbours’ evaluations of honour and shame. Indeed, if they were to act as people accountable to their neighbours’ attempts to shame them into “rehabilitation,” they would move themselves into a place of danger and disgrace in regard to God’s judgment. They would forsake obedience to “the will of God” for them (4:2) in favour of returning to chasing after “what the Gentiles want” (4:3).

As they continue to live as members of God’s household, the converts enjoy an immensely privileged position vis-à-vis the outsiders to the Christian group, who overtly disobey the One God (4:17-18). The testing that they now endure, in which they are called to prove their faith toward God genuine, may be difficult, but the sifting that awaits those outside the Christian group is far more severe and its outcome far more dire. Honour, and the clear manifestation of their worth in the eyes of all, lies ahead of the converts: the genuineness of their faith, manifested through their tests, will redound “unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). This is the

---

<sup>25</sup> On the symbolic and social dimensions of the “alternate court of opinion” and its importance for empowering a minority culture to maintain its distinctive values and practices in Greco-Roman philosophical and early Christian literature, see D. A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 171-74; *Despising Shame*, 86-155, 299-340.

divine gift that awaits them at Christ's coming (1:13), for the sake of which they are to persevere (5:12).

The author cites an authoritative oracle of God – “whoever believes in him will not be put to shame” (Isa 28:16) – as proof of the certainty of the converts' ultimate vindication: “Honour, then, is for you who believe” (2:7)<sup>26</sup> just as honour came to the One who had been “rejected by mortals” but was “chosen and precious” in God's estimation (2:4). Even though their neighbours seek through reproach and abuse to imprint feelings of shame upon the converts, the converts' trajectory is ultimately one of honor and vindication, as all the psalmists who put their trust in God and prayed not to be put to shame eventually discovered on the far side of their trials.

Honour, however, is not merely a future promise for the converts. The author of 1 Peter devotes significant attention to the honour and privilege into which they have already entered by virtue of their obedient response to the call of God in Christ. He counters the socially-constructed identity of shame that their neighbours seek to impose upon them by reminding them of their identity in Christ and of the ground for self-respect and mutual esteem within the group that this provides.

“God ... gave us a new birth to a living hope” (1:3). This new birth is superior in every way to their physical birth and its legacy: they have joined a new, more honourable family, God's own family. They are reborn to an unending life, rather than a life subject to death and decay (1:23). The legacy of this new birth is “an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who are being guarded by God's power through trust

---

<sup>26</sup> 1 Peter 2:7 is commonly mistranslated, “To you then who believe, he is precious” (NRSV; see also the KJV, JB, RSV, and NIV), as if the author were continuing to speak about the believers' perception of Jesus, the cornerstone. Translators have tended to read the adjective “precious” (*entimon*), which occurred in verses 4 and 6, into verse 7. The author has deliberately shifted away from the adjective to a related noun “honour” (*tim*), which is the subject of this sentence: “Honour is for you who trust” (compare the CEB: “God honours you who believe”). In 2:7a, the author is drawing an inference from the end of the quotation of Isa 28:16 in 1 Pet 2:6: “whoever believes in him [here, “Jesus”] will not be put to shame.” Honour will be the reward for the Christians' trust and commitment, while their detractors will come to shame (they will “stumble” and “fall,” 2:7b).

for a deliverance that is ready to be revealed in the last season” (1:4-5). If their neighbours set little value on them now because of their changed practices and commitments, they are reminded of their value in God’s sight, a value demonstrated in the price God paid (“the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless, unblemished lamb,” 1:18-19) to buy back the disciples from their former life with its “futile ways.” As people who have “purified their souls by their obedient response to the truth (1:22), they enjoy a better standing before God now than prior to their conversion, even if they now have a lower standing in the eyes of their non-Christian peers.

As they gather like “living stones” (*lithoi zōntes*, 2:5) around Jesus, the “living stone” (*lithon zōnta*, 2:4), they share in the honour of the “choice, precious cornerstone” as they continue to be fitted together around him into “a spiritual house.” They are invested with the high dignity of being named a “holy priesthood,” a company set apart for special service and access to the Almighty God. Priests were held in honour in both Jewish and Greco-Roman environments. In the former, the honour came through genealogy; in the latter it often came as a reward for beneficence or extraordinary civic service. In both, “priesthood” was a recognized claim to honour. The “sacrifices” they are offering in connection with Jesus, they are assured, are well pleasing to God (2:5). God looks approvingly on the changes they have made and continue to make in their lives to conform themselves to a new way of living in obedience to the teachings of and message about Jesus. God accepts and esteems as suitable gifts to himself their acts of loyalty, brotherly or sisterly love, and hospitality, as well as the “sacrifices” that they are making in terms of their commitment to virtuous conduct even in the face of mistreatment, insult, and slander.

The author lets loose an avalanche of honorific titles as he closes the opening section of his letter: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s special possession” (2:9). They have moved from a shameful place (“darkness” [2:10], non-identity as “no people” [2:10], a “futile way of life” [1:18], a life “conformed to the desires [one entertains] in ignorance” [1:14], running along with their neighbours “in a flood of dissipation” [4:4]) to a new frontier of nobility, a basis for self-esteem and

moral courage rooted in their relationship with God and one another (“God’s marvelous light” [2:10], identity as “God’s people” [2:10], a life of “purification” through “obedient response” to God [1:2, 22], abstaining from the “carnal passions” [2:11], running after “the will of God” rather than “human cravings” [4:2]). In every way, their new identity and the honour it affords them is worth being preserved intact rather than being relinquished for the sake of a return to the esteem of people who continue in the mind set and way of life that the converts weighed in the balance and found wanting.

### **The Social Matrix of Perseverance**

If shame was a socially-imposed phenomenon, honour (“worth”) was also a socially-maintained phenomenon. Rejection by friends, family, and society, and the subsequent loss of personal, emotional, and material support from those connections, left a dark vacuum that powered the shame that led either to rehabilitation or debilitation. Members of a minority culture like the early church had to make up for these losses, providing the social support and personal affirmation that could keep individuals from crossing back into their former way of life and their former networks of support.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the author urges the hearers to show one another “an unfeigned brotherly and sisterly love ... constantly from the heart” (1:22; see 3:8), shaping their relationships within the church according to the ethical ideal of family at its best.<sup>28</sup> They were to seek harmony and unity (3:8), to display ungrudging mutual support and hospitality (4:8-11), and to bear themselves with that gentle humility that nurtures solidarity and harmony (5:3, 6) – much needed qualities in the midst of a hostile environment.

This latter attitude is rather countercultural, as, for example, the church in Corinth shows. There, Christians engaged in competition for honour within the congregation, and sought to display their honour in ways that violated

---

<sup>27</sup> On the importance of social reinforcement of individual commitment to a particular worldview and ethos, see Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociology of a Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>28</sup> See, further, deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 165-73, 212-26 and the literature cited therein. An especially important primary text is Plutarch’s essay, “On Fraternal [and Sororal] Affection.”

the spirit of unity within the group. In so doing, they had brought the majority culture's ethos into the church. The author of 1 Peter proscribes this, supporting his exhortation with a citation of Proverbs 3:34: "God opposes the arrogant, but gives favour to the humble." Their humility in their interactions, perhaps together with their acceptance of humiliation in the eyes of their non-Christian neighbours, becomes the ground for hope of exaltation: "Humble yourselves under the powerful hand of God, so that in due time he may exalt you" (5:6).

The relationships of Christian husbands and wives receive special attention in regard to the affirmation of believers' honor. Speaking to the husbands, the author writes: "in your living together, give consideration to your wives as to the weaker gender, offering honour to the woman as to someone who is also a joint heir with you of the gracious gift of life" (3:7).<sup>29</sup> While the author accepts the commonplace that women were "weaker" in the sense of having a more vulnerable constitution,<sup>30</sup> and agrees with other Greco-Roman ethicists that the woman's "weakness" called for consideration, not domination, here he is especially calling attention to another dimension of the wife's identity – "co-heir" of God's gift of life along with her husband, calling upon the husband to reinforce her awareness of her honourable status in this regard in their domestic dealings, rather than live merely from the more hierarchical model of husband and wife relations taught outside the Christian culture.

---

<sup>29</sup> English translations tend to miss the mark here as well. The NRSV, for example, reads: "Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life – so that nothing may hinder your prayers" (3:7; so also the KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV, but contrast the CEB). The verse contains two commands ("show consideration toward your wives" and "give her honour") and two motive clauses ("as a weaker vessel" and "as a fellow heir of life-giving grace"). These translations mistakenly link *both* motives to the second command, which has the effect frankly of making the husband's act of respecting or honouring the wife an act of condescension toward her physical weakness. The Greek clearly links the first motive with the first imperative, and the second motive with the second imperative.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.22-28.

## Embodying 1 Peter Among Sri Lanka's "Elect Resident Aliens"

The author addresses people who have encountered resistance, insult, censure, and even physical abuse because of their commitment to respond to Christ and to do what God commands.<sup>31</sup> The author clearly has an agenda. He *wants* to see the addressees continue in the path of discipleship and remain connected to the Christian minority group. But his use of the rhetoric of honour and shame cannot be reduced to manipulation. He is not attempting to steer the hearers in a new direction not of their choosing. The hearers had made a conscious decision against continuing in the lifestyle of the people around them. They had rejected that lifestyle – “doing what the Gentiles want” – for what they considered to be a better, more honourable way – “doing what God wants” (4:2-3). The author employs an array of strategies by means of which to help them to arrive at the goal they have set *for themselves* in their conversion – or, as the author would prefer to put it, that they may arrive at the goal that *God* has set before them in calling them.

The author of 1 Peter attempts to empower them to maintain the new direction that they had chosen in the face of the pressures they are experiencing from without (and potentially internalizing and heeding *within* themselves) that aim to subvert their commitment and make them betray their former insights into what was really true and valuable in life. He stands in a well-attested tradition of philosophical and religious resistance against the tyranny of the majority, and against the coercive pressures the majority (or the dominant culture's representatives) can bring to bear against the will of members of minority cultures. He helps them to find the symbolic and social resources they need to maintain their own moral choices in the face of their neighbours' contrary pressure. Embodying the word and strategies found in 1 Peter would most reliably begin where we find similar social dynamics facing the community of faith.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> It is their obedience to the commandment to avoid worship of other gods that, in the main, has led to the pressures being brought to bear on them in the household (in the case of wives and slaves) and in the street. The author is *not* speaking about suffering in general, encompassing all disease, chronic illness, domestic abuse, and oppression.

<sup>32</sup> For more extensive reflections on the applicability of the strategies found in 1 Peter, see deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, 84-93.

Christians in Sri Lanka are no strangers to the social dynamics reflected in 1 Peter. Interwoven throughout the majority and dominant cultures in Sri Lanka are religious rites involving the acknowledgment of many gods and the veneration of their visible representations in the form of idols. While Classical Buddhism admits of no deity, the pious majority of Buddhists attend to images of the Buddha in ways that are essentially indistinguishable from the ways in which Hindu devotees attend to the images of their deities. Buddhist and Hindu rituals adorn important family events (for example, weddings, funerals, and commemorations of the deceased). Buddhist sacred sites are a prominent focus not only of the majority of the people on the island, but also of the nation's most prominent leaders.

Sri Lankan Christians coming out of non-Christian backgrounds and family systems face many of the same difficulties as did the early Christians addressed by 1 Peter as they attempt to discover a way to live out their witness to the existence of one and only one God in the midst of their families, friends, and nation continuing to express their piety through various rites directed to other gods and their carved representations. To the extent that Christians remove themselves from all participation in idolatrous rituals that would call them to acknowledge an idol or the spiritual figure represented thereby, they run the risk of being perceived as anti-social, acting hurtfully toward non-Christian family and friends, even being seen as anti-patriotic, embracing a "foreign" religion – a religion associated with centuries of colonization – rather than a native, patriotic religion. If the erection of Buddhist shrines throughout the recovered northern and eastern territories signified the re-unification of the island after decades of civil war (though a highly problematic sign to the Hindu population dominating those areas), what message is sent by Sri Lankans who withdraw from Buddhist shrines in order to worship the God of Jesus Christ and him alone?

The author of 1 Peter is concerned that any experience of being slandered or otherwise shamed by non-Christians be rooted in their fidelity to the call and example of Christ, and not in any behavior to which non-Christians might legitimately object. That is, the author challenges Christians to be sure that the sources of tension between themselves and their neighbours and

surrounding society reside fully in behavioural shifts that Christians *need* to make in order to be faithful to Christ's call and example or the fundamental demand of worshipping only the One God, and nothing else. The offense Christians give should be only the unavoidable offenses inherent in "turning to God from idols" (to borrow a phrase from 1 Thess 1:9), transferring their allegiance to this God and the kingdom of God's Son – not the avoidable offenses of, for example, disturbing a neighborhood with excessively loud, Western-style worship bands or visiting a sacred archaeological site and failing to remove one's shoes out of respect not for the divinity of Buddha, but for the sanctity of that space for those who still regard Buddha as a divinity (or else, not to frequent such spaces).

Although there was a Christian presence in Sri Lanka prior to the colonization of the island by Western powers, Christianity has been viewed as an instrument of colonization and, more recently, as an instrument of Westernization. For many reasons – some of them quite right – it is regarded still as a foreign religion, one that is not native to Sri Lanka, nor possible to naturalize within Sri Lankan soil. Since the forms, practices, music, and other trappings of Western expressions of Christianity are not, properly speaking, essentials of following Christ or responding to the call to worship and serve the one and only God, the author of 1 Peter might challenge Sri Lankan Christians to examine the extent to which their adoption and ongoing importation of Western Christian music, theologies, strategies for congregational growth and development and the like present an unnecessary obstacle to the acceptance of Christianity as a naturalized religion.

Western fashion, music, expectations of entertainment and the like are, of course, popular throughout Sri Lanka, particularly in its urban centres. But what would be the perception of the Church if, for example, young people who were brought into Christian environments actually learned to value not only the possibilities of new life in Christ, but also to value indigenous forms of music and religious expression more? Is there a call to develop ways of singing the psalms and to write new hymns that could be sung to tunes and with instrumentation more closely representative of indigenous musical practice? Is there a call to develop a theology that, while firmly grounded in

Scripture, places the pressing issues of Sri Lankan existence at the centre of concern to that emerging theology? Is there a call for churches to pay greater attention to the values inherent in Sri Lankan culture (e.g., community and relationship) and develop congregational life around those values rather than pattern congregations after Western patterns (which tend to be more “program-centered” than “people-centered,” which tend to think in terms of marketing the church, hence in more “commercial” than “community” terms)? The underlying challenge from the author of 1 Peter is here, again, for the Church to listen to the majority culture’s or dominant culture’s critique of the Christian presence, and make sure that the Church attends to anything in that critique that is legitimate.

On the other side of this spectrum, the author challenges hearers to embody those ideals and virtues they *know* to be held in esteem both within the Christian subculture and in the eyes of the dominant culture. While Christians in Sri Lanka may attract censure and ill feelings on account of breaking with ancestral religions, they have distinguished themselves in doing good for those in need. In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, Christians brought honour to the name by being in the forefront of bringing relief to the dispossessed and the refugees and by investing their energy and resources in helping people rebuild in the areas hardest hit. The realization of *metta* demonstrated in timely, self-sacrificial acts of care for other human beings through ongoing investment in coming alongside and helping the refugees, the homeless, and the displaced is precisely the sort of activity to which the author of 1 Peter would impel a Christian audience in Sri Lanka. It is, moreover, precisely the sort of activity toward which Christ would impel us in any land. As dedication to Jesus brings about the visible transformation of our lives into agents of beneficence and *metta*, the probability increases that such witness to the consequences of following Jesus will, “by doing good, silence the ignorant slander of foolish people” (1 Pet 2:15).

Where Christians have examined their own conduct and practice, so as to be sure that any shame imposed upon them is unjustly imposed on them for some essential facet of their obedient response to God’s Son, the author’s many strategies for reinterpreting the experience of being shamed apply.

He would first invite us to remember why we moved in a particular direction or took a particular course of action. Did Christ's example draw us to take a particular action or change our lives in that direction? Then there is no cause to feel shame, and certainly not to yield to shame, even if we encounter attempts to shame us. Were we trying to align our lives more closely with the values and practices encouraged by Scripture or the heritage of the Christian churches? Then, again, there is no cause to feel shame. Living under Christ's lordship always has been, and always will be, countercultural in some (if not most) respects. People nurtured to live under the lordship of the values, roles, and customs of any secular society will respond to genuine Christ-followers as square pegs that need to be pushed back into their round holes. The experiences of shaming other opposition are opportunities to refine and deepen our commitment, and for this commitment (our "faith") to be proven genuine before God (1:6-7). It signals our identification with Christ in the shame that preceded his entrance into glory (1:10, 21).

Second, the author would invite us to consider those people who are attempting to shame us because we no longer fit in with their expectations, assumptions, and practices. What have we come to know, that has led us out of fitting into the old systems? What experiences have we had that have taught us that our old way of living was futile and fruitless, or at least unduly limiting? Are those who are trying to shame us identifying something genuinely shameful in us, or are they making an unreliable judgment about us because they haven't experienced what we've experienced in God and in Christian community?

Third, the author would caution us about how we respond to those who attempt to shame us. The temptation – indeed, a well-established cultural pattern in many settings – is to respond to insult with insult, to deflect shaming by shaming in return. The author of 1 Peter, however, holds us Jesus' example (and, indirectly, Jesus' teaching as well) as a support for his exhortation not to return like for like, but rather to strive to come to the place where God's generous love and acceptance so fills us that we can return blessing for curse, the gift of toleration, patience, understanding, even love for hostility and shaming (compare Matt 5:44-48).

Fourth, the author would remind us of the importance of finding – and thus, reciprocally, of offering to other disciples – the social support we need to persevere in following where Christ leads. Are we finding, and are we offering, appropriate affirmation and encouragement as we move out into those marginal places where following Jesus and heeding the apostolic teaching takes us?

A critical corollary of all that has been said is this: Christians must take special care not to impose shame on those who are moving in the direction toward which Christ is calling them. Non-Christians will be quick enough to express disapproval toward those who are leaving their ranks; Christians must not also shame those same people! If a prostitute or homeless person works up the courage to come to a morning service, he or she will probably stand out from the typical churchgoer, and we will probably be in a position to guess what walk of life he or she comes from. Will our welcome make that person feel like God's honoured guest, or like the scum of the earth who shouldn't show his or her face among respectable people? If an alcohol addict or a repentant adulterer wishes to move in the direction of restoration and victory over sin and addiction and therefore makes his weakness known, will we restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, humbly mindful of our own frailty, or will we make of them opportunities to preen ourselves for not having fallen (or not getting caught), to put them in their place, or to bar them from further service in the church? If a successful, single man opens up his oversized home to shelter a mother and her children seeking temporary refuge from domestic violence, do we support him in his endeavor or make him feel ashamed as if he's misbehaving or doing something improper? And if the latter, do we offer to take the mother into our own homes to relieve him of the semblance of impropriety? If we shame people in any of these situations, we are joining ourselves with the non-Christian society, using shame to impede an individual's obedience to God's call.

Just as 1 Peter provides resources for Sri Lankan Christians individually and communally that can help them disarm the power of shame imposed upon them by non-Christians, such that this shame does not blunt or completely undermine their commitment to follow where Jesus leads, so 1 Peter

challenges us also to discover ways in which to help support fellow Christians who suffer similar or worse shaming and social sanctions than we ourselves. This is in keeping with the author's own attempt, as a believer writing from one region (Rome) to Christians at a fair distance from himself (Asia Minor), to express the commitment of every part of the global Church to all its members. With global communication being increasingly immediate and accessible, we can put ourselves in contact with those who face more stringent pressures because of their commitment to the faith, encouraging them in their noble contest, making the reality of the Church Universal as a social matrix for perseverance felt more keenly through prayer, personal support, and material assistance (particularly when the primary supporter of a family is jailed or removed, or when economic privations are a principal means of coercion). We can ask the questions that will give them opportunity to articulate and remember their own reasons for moving out from their former way of life and its association, so as to support their moral faculty of choice in the face of their neighbors' or government's bullying.

As we become involved with them and learn to value their struggles, we will become a voice that lets them know how valued they are by their sisters and brothers in another part of the globe, and we can seek out ways to affirm their dignity. By investigating and telling their stories, spreading the fame of these heroes of faith, we can let them know that their struggle does not go unnoticed, but brings them the admiration of their sisters and brothers throughout the world. As believers who live within a culture that is sensitive to issues of shame and honour ourselves, we can perhaps better understand than our sisters and brothers in the West how meaningful this kind of support can be for fellow believers meeting with disgrace and abuse in their countries. Because Christians in Sri Lanka share more authentically in the experience of encountering shame and social pressure on account of their confession, they can say to other Christians facing such and greater pressures more genuinely and with greater empathy, "Resist [Satan], firm in faith, knowing that your sisters and brothers throughout the world are facing the same kinds of sufferings" (5:9).

# OLD TESTAMENT PARADIGMS OF MISSION<sup>1</sup>

ROGER E HEDLUND

## INTRODUCTION

If one follows David Bosch,<sup>2</sup> there are no mission paradigms in the Old Testament because you do not find 'mission' in the Old Testament. The late David Bosch is a leading authority, and it seems common practice to quote Bosch to support one's favourite theory. If Bosch were alive, he might be surprised at the opposites he is supposed to have propounded.<sup>3</sup> From Bosch theologians seem to have discovered the word "paradigm" which Bosch borrowed and adapted from secular science. For the past three or four decades "contextualization" was the buzz-word, and these days everyone feels obligated to talk about paradigms and paradigm *shifts*, with or without understanding the genesis and meaning of the term.

Bosch's work is important; and Bosch cites well-known Old Testament scholars to support the point that there is nothing of mission in the Old Testament. At the same time, however, this does not square with the other contemporary construction of mission as the *missio dei*. For *missio dei* is essentially Old Testament. Bosch was very aware of the *missio dei* concept, which has been variously characterised as an American invasion and an ecumenical Trojan horse.<sup>4</sup> Bosch's point appears to revolve around the origins of the concept of mission as *sending*, which is assumed to be New Testament and more specifically Johannine. If so, were there then no such

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the North East India Mission Consultation at CBCNEI, Guwahati, 13-16 December, 1995, sponsored by Serampore College.

<sup>2</sup> Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Much like Bonhoeffer: "everyone has a different Bonhoeffer," a German pastor and theologian confided, "one for the secularists, another for the pietists..."

<sup>4</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.390-392.

expressions in the Old Testament? Is the New Testament totally discontinuous without Old Testament continuity? Bosch himself suggests a continuum when he argues that the first paradigm shift took place at the coming of Jesus. This in itself implies the prior existence of an Old Testament mission paradigm.

### **Mission in the Old Testament?**

There are several reasons why a study of Christian mission should be rooted in the Old Testament.

- 1) *Because Jesus himself recognized the authority of the Old Testament.* The Christ-event is a fulfillment of what was promised in the Old Testament. Mission did not begin with Jesus, but was initiated at the beginning of human history. To start with the Old Testament is to go back to the earliest source materials.
- 2) *Because mission is grounded in the character and nature of Yahweh.* The Old Testament reveals the heart of God who yearns after those made in his image.
- 3) *Because mission is rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant.* In Romans 3:21 – 5:21 and Galatians 3, Paul shows that Abraham's justification was grounded in faith. The principle of *justification by faith* roots the Gentile mission in the Abrahamic Covenant and opens the door for the Gentile world to be received into the Kingdom of God.
- 4) *Because the premise of world mission is grounded in resolving the dialectic of the Fall.* Divine mission embracing the whole world was initiated in Genesis 3. In Genesis 12, it was formulated as covenant. In the Incarnation and the Cross, the gospel was actualized. In Acts and Romans, the mission was instituted, and in Revelation it is consummated.
- 5) *Because the Church has a vocation which first was given to Israel.* However, Israel's vocation failed. Lest history repeat itself, the Church in

mission has a sacred responsibility to learn from past events so as not to repeat the errors of their forbears in mission.<sup>5</sup>

It may moreover be argued that *sending* is an Old Testament concept. DuBose, whose quest for a fresh understanding of mission is an exposition of the Biblical meaning of *sending*, devotes an entire chapter to a survey of theological sending passages beginning with the Pentateuch and including the historical and poetical books and the Old Testament prophets.<sup>6</sup> There are more *sending* passages in the Old Testament than in the New. Moreover, the New Testament term *apostello* has Old Testament roots and is used some 700 times in the Septuagint.<sup>7</sup>

To limit the concept of mission to the New Testament is to truncate the meaning of mission and to deprive mission of its theological roots. According to Kähler,<sup>8</sup> mission is the mother of theology. If so, what becomes of Old Testament theology if the Old Testament is devoid of mission? As Bosch himself affirms, the Old Testament is fundamental to our understanding of the New.<sup>9</sup> The popular assumption that mission derives purely from the New Testament is a misconception.

Popular preaching not infrequently begins and ends its exposition of mission with a fragment of the Great Commission. This tendency fails to appropriate the riches of the Old Testament which forms the essential background for the giving of the Commission. Pioneers in the missionary movement were essentially *movers*. Mission was shaped by its active participants, not by philosophers, nor by its spectators and critics. Early missionaries included

---

<sup>5</sup> The preceding is expanded in the first chapter of the author's textbook, *God and the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Mission in the Asian Context*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1997 & 2002, pp.1-3.

<sup>6</sup> DuBose, Francis M., *God Who Sends, A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission*, Nashville: Broadman, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Rengstorf, K.H., "Apostello" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, abridged in one Volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, p.68.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.16, and by Braaten, Carl E., *The Flaming Center, A Theology of the Christian Mission*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977, p.13.

<sup>9</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.17.

brilliant “theologians of the road” (Bosch’s phrase in an earlier book). Most would fail to qualify as “task theologians.”<sup>10</sup>

Bosch together with G E Wright<sup>11</sup> recognized that the Old Testament centres upon *God* who acts, whereas the New Testament focuses upon the sending of the *people* of God as God’s representatives to the nations. This at least is part of the picture.

The newness of the New Testament centres in Jesus Christ. Jesus, however, is linked with the Old Testament and based his teaching upon the Law and Prophets. The Commission embodies this newness while retaining the heritage of Old Testament teaching and practice. The Commission, especially the Matthew rendition, reflects an Old Testament precedence, particularly from Isaiah. The paradigm shift therefore takes place with the advent of Jesus in the New Testament. Glasser, opting for a future role for Israel, noted that “this future is not unrelated to God’s redemptive purpose for the Gentile nations” and that the “revelation of the love of God in Christ cannot be fully grasped apart from the Old Testament.”<sup>12</sup>

We do not look for *shifts* in the Old Testament model of mission. Rather, we try to identify the concept and practice of mission (if any) during the Old Testament period. The starting point must be in God Himself. Bosch hints at an Old Testament notion of mission when he refers to the *action* of God in history. This activity is seen in *history*. It is the history of Israel, yes, but that history is set in the context of the nations. “The entire history of Israel unveils the continuation of God’s involvement with the nations.”<sup>13</sup> Israel’s position may be defined in terms of her missionary role as the agent of God – and the locus of the presence of God – among the nations. Yet, the primary focus is upon God who acts in the world of the nations.

---

<sup>10</sup> “Task theologian” is Arthur Glasser’s expression to describe the Pauline model used in lectures at Fuller Seminary, 1970-1973.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, G. Ernest, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, London: SCM Press, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, p.21.

<sup>13</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.18.

***Missio Dei***

The *missio Dei* means that God Himself does missionary work. In the early chapters of Genesis we see His work in creation. Creation expresses the personal will of God. The Bible shows not a personification of nature, but a Person creating a suitable world. The sea monsters, sun, moon and stars are not deified (Genesis 1:14, 15, 21), but exist at the command of God and under His Lordship. Creation is demythologized!<sup>14</sup> Creation is good; the world therefore is a good world. The universe is real, not illusion. The created order is a vehicle for pronouncing the goodness of the Creator. God blesses what He has created (Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3). God rests. Creation is to share in that rest (Exodus 20:8-11). Here are implications for ecology. God, the Gardner, is concerned for the total creation. He is interested in all His creatures (Job 12): cattle (Jonah 4:11), sparrows (Matthew 10:29)....

The crowning event was the creation of men and women (Gen.1:26-31). The creative act establishes the unity of the human race (a common ancestor, Adam), human dignity (created in the image of God), race and gender equality (no hierarchy). Caste is heinous to the Biblical doctrine of creation. According to Genesis, God created all of humanity in His own image and for fellowship. There is no high and no low. All humans are equally high, reflecting the image of the Creator. All are equally low – and in need of redemption. Genesis also records the disruption which followed the intrusion and rebellion.

Alienation from God has societal ramifications. Humans were given responsibility to be brother-keepers as well as earth-keepers. Given dominion over the animals, humans are charged with ecological responsibility (Gen. 2:15). The Creator established the family relationship; humans have mutual obligations to serve the creation and each other. Human creativity – the likeness of the Creator, expressed, for instance, in the naming of the animals (Gen. 2:20) – implies moral responsibility. Obedience is required. Through disobedience innocence was lost: humanity became shameful and deceitful. Family relations were disrupted. The earth became cursed, barren (Deut.28).

---

<sup>14</sup> Dyrness, William A., *Let the Earth Rejoice! A Biblical Theology of Holistic Mission*, Westchester: Crossway Books, 1983, pp. 21,22.

Expelled from the Garden, Paradise is lost. An explosion of evil follows (Gen. 4 & 6).

The tragic results of disobedience make mission necessary. God intervened. God entered the Garden. He is a seeking God (Gen. 3:8-9), on His own initiative sent to seek and to save the lost. In the Garden, He seeks and finds and restores. Here is the gospel in the Garden. Here is mission: God acts. God Himself is the missionary.

The *missio Dei*, says Vicedom, is the work of God through which He offers the fullness of the Kingdom to humanity.<sup>15</sup> God's primary objective is to save mankind. Mission is soteriological and redemptive. The broad scope of the *missio Dei* includes the social dimension. The Kingdom of God envisions a society of the redeemed.

God's mission is to the world. The first eleven chapters of the Bible embrace the entire world of the nations. God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3) is a covenant with the world. God's purpose is to bless the nations. God's grace is for all. God has the world and its peoples in His care. Ultimately, everything God does in Israel is for the good of the nations. Israel's "kingdom" points to the kingship of God. The Kingdom of God reaches beyond Israel to encompass the peoples of the world. All are the objects of His care.

There is much more: the exodus and the exile, God's dealings with Egypt and with the Assyrians, the Davidic Kingdom, the wisdom literature of the Bible and the wisdom of the nations, the remnant and the return – all these are major manifestations of God's missionary activity.

Around the time of the publication of Bosch's *opus magnum*, another book appeared, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, by Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller (1984). The first half of the book, by Stuhlmueller, is devoted to the Old Testament; the second half, by Senior, to the New. Stuhlmueller begins with Genesis and Exodus, and concludes with Israel's Prayer and

---

<sup>15</sup> Vicedom, Georg F. *The Mission of God: An Introduction to a Theology of Mission*, Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965, p.45.

Universal Mission, drawn from the Psalms and the Prophets. “The prayers of Israel reached outward to the nations principally in the hymns of praise.”<sup>16</sup> The authors conclude that the Old Testament, far from presenting a centripetal movement, show an opposite centrifugal direction to the non-elect nations outside the Israelic covenant.<sup>17</sup> Essential elements, themes and issues crucial for mission are an integral part of the Old Testament record, even if a full-blown missionary engagement of the People of God awaits the New Testament.<sup>18</sup>

### People of God in Mission?

Stuhlmüller begins his study with the promise to the nations (Gen. 12:3), which is coupled with Israel’s calling and election (Exod. 19:3-6). If one must speak of a paradigm shift in the Old Testament, it is perhaps here in the new focus upon the role of Abraham and Israel in the *missio dei*.

Part of our difficulty in grasping the missionary significance of the Old Testament has to do with the methodology of conquest and the politics of violence in Israel's history – e.g. in the conquest of Canaan. Destruction of the Canaanites appears to us a barbaric act – yet ordered by the God of Revelation, Love and Light. We are embarrassed because in moments of her history the Church, too, has embraced the rhetoric and methodology of oppression and conquest. With shame we remember the Portuguese inquisition of Goa, the massacre of the Waldensians, the murder of the anabaptists, suppression of dissenters by the State Churches of Europe, etc. In our present world context, as we face the threat of Islamic *Jihad*, the question arises: Is violence justifiable in the pursuit of a just cause? God, in the Old Testament, sanctioned the use of violent means for accomplishing His just purposes.<sup>19</sup> Can we, therefore, justify use of violence? But this shifts the focus to an issue beyond the scope of this paper. The question itself

---

<sup>16</sup> Senior, Donald and Carroll Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984, p.135.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.315.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.318.

<sup>19</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p.43.

introduces a subtle direction change. What bearing has the climate of God-directed violence on the Old Testament meaning of mission? An earlier Liberationist theology – preceded by a theology of revolution – advocated the use of violence to obtain justice for the oppressed. It is true that violence in many forms is part of the long history of Israel in the Old Testament – from her pre-history (the patriarchal period) through the period of conquest and into the exile and beyond the exile. This violence, states Stuhlmüller, is beneficial and willed by God. “Violence ought to be considered a charism or gift put to the service of God’s people and God’s providential plan, just as truly as any other quality, like pacifism or prayer.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps. But I think it does not justify our appropriating violent methods for accomplishing *our* “just” causes. God, one assumes – being all-wise and all-knowing and full of compassion – is vindicated in what He does. We dare not assume the same for our private wars and petty agendas.

The situation surrounding the conquest of Canaan was far more complex than what a superficial reading would suggest, as biblical scholars have pointed out.<sup>21</sup> The exodus event is hailed as liberative and salvific – the central redemptive act in the Old Testament. The accompanying destruction of the Egyptian armies – instruments of violent oppression – may be viewed as an aspect of the judgmental action of God. The death of the first-born is less easily reconciled to our image of a God of righteousness and a religion of love. The act must be set in its context as an expression of God’s demand for truth and holiness. The destruction of the Canaanites is to be viewed from a similar perspective. God’s act of judgment is not vindictive but prescriptive: “it was necessary if Israel was to survive in the new land of Canaan.”<sup>22</sup>

Cultic (worship) aspects of Israel’s existence also related to the preservation of the Faith which was intrinsic to Israel’s existence as a missionary people. “Symbolically, the exodus-motif demanded that the ark of the covenant must always move with the people” – and to counteract the sensuous Canaanite

---

<sup>20</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p.43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

fertility cult ceremony.<sup>23</sup> Later, this symbolic presence was enshrined in the Temple.

Mosaic legislative details concerned with worship--cult and sacrifice – carry the same essential concern. On one hand, cultural patterns including religious practices are absorbed from the surrounding peoples, but these must not compromise the revelation of Yahweh. Israel's mission consisted, at least in part, in her presence among the nations as a worshipping community. The careful regulation of Israel's worship was a basic aspect of her witness among the nations. Prophetic denunciations of idolatry and other irregularities aimed at a restoration of the worship and Faith of the People of God, and hence a renewal of their (all too unconscious) missionary vocation.

Religious rituals were but one part of Mosaic legislation. A larger concern related to social obligations. Every aspect of life in the land would be regulated as befitting a model Kingdom of Yahweh in Canaan at the crossroads of the nations. A complete social system provided justice for the widows and orphans, relief for the poor and needy, safety for the accused, equality for the alien, liberty for the slaves, and renewal of the ecology through controlled use of land and protection of the environment and its endangered species including birds and trees. The model Kingdom would reflect the Creator and Provider-God.

### Prophetic Pointers

Resolution of the violence-contradiction ultimately is found in Isaiah's Songs of the Suffering Servant. Salvation is extended to the world by a *suffering* Servant.<sup>24</sup> Here, more than anywhere else we see the missionary dimension of Israel's election. It is an election to service<sup>25</sup> – for the salvation of the world. Particularism is at the service of universalism. Biblical particularism is never a closed exclusion on nationalistic or ethnic grounds. Yahwistic Faith is saved from ethnocentric exclusivism by its missionary vocation. God, in the

---

<sup>23</sup> Senior and Stuhlmüller, *Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p.46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>25</sup> Rowley, H.H., *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, London: Lutterworth, 1952.

Old Testament, desires the obedience and worship of the nations. To that end He sends His prophets and His People, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

Contrary to the opposite conclusions of some scholars, an explicit missionary dimension is found in Isaiah. Is this the basis for Jesus' Commission to the Church in Matthew's Gospel? The Book of Jonah likewise serves a missionary purpose, a rebuke to Jewish ethnocentrism which was the antithesis of mission. Events in the Book of Jonah took place during a time of spiritual degeneracy in Israel when self-righteous priests and people denied the missionary spirit of the Old Testament law and covenant. Gentiles were shunned as unclean, viewed as enemies to avoid. A distorted doctrine of election decreed that God had chosen the Jews to be saved and consigned the Gentiles to damnation. The Book of Jonah teaches that God cares for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and he wants Gentiles to know His loving concern. As Paul asks in Romans 3:29: "Is He not the God of Gentiles too?" The Book of Jonah reveals the willingness of Nineveh's people (Gentiles) to learn of Israel's God (Jon. 1:6; 3:5). Mission was possible, logical, desirable, reasonable. Salvation was available if they would repent, believe, obey. Such is the amazing message of Old Testament grace.<sup>26</sup>

The inherent missionary character of the Old Testament is important to us in India in the search for a theology both indigenous and biblical. In an article a few years ago, Victor Premasagar urged the Church in India to appraise their heritage in order to find continuity between pre-Christian deities and biblical revelation "through a theology of the gods of our fathers, and build a bridge between the gods of the nations and the faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup> Premasagar raises an important issue: What should converts do with their heritage? Was the God of the Old Testament also disclosed to our forefathers? Premasagar no doubt reflects the background of the syncretistic practices unearthed in

---

<sup>26</sup> An expansion of this theme is found in chapter 12, 'Jonah the Reluctant Missionary', in the author's textbook, *God and the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Mission in the Asian Context*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1997 & 2002, pp.130-138.

<sup>27</sup> Premasagar, P. Victor, "The Gods of our Fathers--Towards A Theology of Indian Religious and Cultural Heritage" in *Asian Expressions of Christian Commitment* edited by Francis T. Dayanandan and Franklyn J. Balasundaram, Madras: Christian Literature Service, 1992, p.146.

the landmark study of the Medak Diocese, conducted by Luke and Carman in the 1950s,<sup>28</sup> which revealed the continuation of the pre-Christian cult of the mother goddess in tandem with the churches. Converts had accepted Jesus whom they worshipped as the God who forgives sin; but at harvest, they are drawn to the worship of the goddess – who was seen as benevolent to their ancestors. Functionally, Jesus became *one* among many deities.

The background of Israel in Canaan was not dissimilar. They worshipped Yahweh, but also turned to Canaanite fertility deities. According to Premasagar, Israel freely assimilated Canaanite ideas because there was no fear of syncretism on the part of Hebrew theologians.<sup>29</sup> Some biblical scholars, however, may dispute that assumption. It can be shown that popular village practice was far from the norm and was never condoned by the Old Testament prophets. Cultural assimilation was accepted, but religious syncretism was resisted and attendant social evils condemned, not tolerated. Biblical research has shed considerable light upon the Old Testament pluralistic religious context which reveals a tension between the exclusivistic Yahwism of the prophets and the Baal fertility cult during the time of Ahab.<sup>30</sup> The former was the official, legitimate posture; the latter, entailed a wholesale importation of a foreign cult and its imposition, which was regarded as illegitimate in Israel. Other compromises included the toleration of the state deities of other nations and participation in their cult by Israel's rulers. At the popular level while Yahweh was recognized as the Supreme God and official deity, the people turned to local Canaanite deities in dealing with practical issues.<sup>31</sup> Toleration does not however equate with legitimization in practice and theology. Nor do points of convergence, e.g. similarities between Yahweh and El or Baal, imply valid alternatives. Although

---

<sup>28</sup> Luke, P.Y. and John B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture: Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh, South India*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Premasagar, "The Gods of our Fathers," p.142.

<sup>30</sup> Hess, Richard S. "Yahweh and His Asherah? Epigraphic Evidence for Religious Pluralism in Old Testament Times" in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism* edited by Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter, Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p7.

God accommodated His activities to Canaanite cultural forms and names, this does not endorse every aspect of Canaanite religion, as has been pointed out.

The purpose of God's particular action in the history of Israel is ultimately that God, as the saving and covenant God Yahweh, should be known fully and worshipped exclusively by those who as yet imperfectly know him as El. The end result of what God began to do through Abram was of significance for the Canaanites precisely because it critiqued and rejected Canaanite religion.<sup>32</sup>

Appropriation and adaptation from the diverse traditions of the Near East is part of the creative genius of the Biblical authors, states Fr. Thomas Emprayil.<sup>33</sup> Inclusion of the Cain and Abel scandal is part of the Bible's inerrent testimony to the salvific plan of God.<sup>34</sup> The abominable child sacrifice is transformed into the substitutionary ram offering.<sup>35</sup> Seductive rites of Baalism were displaced by cultural adaptations and festivals linked to the Passover and Exodus.<sup>36</sup> The Old Testament writers not only contextualized, they reconceptualized their borrowed sources so that the distinctive elements of Old Testament faith were preserved "in sharpest conflict with the larger religious environment in which the Old Testament literature emerged"<sup>37</sup> The role of the prophets throughout Israel's history was to call the people back to covenant-obedience. Israel was custodian of the Faith among the nations.

---

<sup>32</sup> Goldingay, John E. and Christopher J.H. Wright, "'Yahweh our God Yahweh One': The Old Testament and Religious Pluralism" in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism* edited by Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter, Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991, p.39.

<sup>33</sup> Emprayil, Thomas, "Cultural and Ideological Conditioning of the Old Testament" in *Bible and Mission in India Today* edited by Jacob Kavunkal and F. Hrangkhuma, FOIM Series 1, Bandra, Bombay: St. Pauls, 1993, p.19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>37</sup> Glasser, Arthur F. "Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and Its Environment" in *The Word Among Us, Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* edited by Dean S. Gilliland (32-51). Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989, p.39.

## Conclusions

Rather than a series of paradigm shifts, mission in the Old Testament may better be perceived as a process of development or, as Fr. Joy Thomas puts it, stages in an evolution of the concept. A dawning awareness may be seen in the Covenant idea which is relational with implications for mission. Joy Thomas suggests, however, that the mission was not so much active as passive, i.e. the faithful witness of the people by their life-style was an instrument to attract the nations to God.<sup>38</sup> But it is God Himself who is the missionary.

As with other aspects of Old Testament history and theology, mission awaits its full expression in the New Testament culmination of Old Testament experience in Jesus Christ and the New Testament Church.

---

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, Joy, "The Evolution of the Concept of Mission in the Bible" in *Bible and Mission in India Today* edited by Jacob Kavunkal and F. Hrangkhuma, FOIM Series 1, Bandra, Bombay: St. Pauls, 1993, p. 40.



# **BIBLICAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN CONVERSATION: THE CASE OF ANCIENT SHECHEM AT TELL BALATAH**

IVOR POOBALAN

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Bible refers to the place name Shechem 44 times, of which it occurs only once in the New Testament (in Stephen's speech in Acts 7:16). The references are concentrated: in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis (excluding the Isaac narratives), in land allotment, and in the renewal-of-the-covenant in Joshua, and in a single major narrative involving Gideon's son, Abimelech the Shechemite, in Judges 9. If frequency is anything to go by, Shechem features most prominently in the period from Abraham to the period of the Judges, i.e. from Middle Bronze IIB to Iron I.<sup>1</sup> However, there are two significant references in 1 Kings (12:1 and 12:25), and one in Hosea (6:9), that underlines Shechem's continuing importance, albeit diffused, in the period of the monarchy.

Shechem means "shoulder" and this may be a reference to its topography with Mt. Gerizim and Mt Ebal as its flanks. The site (Tell Balatah) has been the subject of attention among archaeologists for a little over one hundred years, and so we are in the privileged position today of being able to compare, the historical features regarding Shechem as implied in the Biblical narrative, with the scientific data unearthed through the various expeditions beginning in 1903.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> That Shechem was a well-established city-state at least by the nineteenth century BC is corroborated by references to it in a stela of Sen Usert III (1880-1840), and in pottery bowl fragments termed the "Berlin Fragments" dating back to the Middle Kingdom Period. On this see, James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1950), pp230 and 329.

<sup>2</sup> William G Dever calls it "the dialogue between texts and artifacts" on which see, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), pp53-95.

## THE SITE

Until the turn of the twentieth century, Bible geographers had been unanimous in their view that modern Nablus was the location of biblical Shechem. Nablus is the carry-over of the name of the Roman city Neapolis, which was built during the reign of Vespasian in AD72, ostensibly as a replacement for Shechem.<sup>3</sup>

Our discussion takes place a little over a century after the more accurate identification of the site of ancient Shechem by Herman Thiersch. On June 26, 1903 Thiersch wrote in his diary:

The horses are still too tired from yesterday to go any further. Therefore a day of rest. The question of old Shechem discussed. On the small hill of ruins which the English map shows directly north of Balata near Kubr Yusuf ... we discovered to our great joy and surprise a piece of 'cyclopean' wall, lying exposed for a distance of some 8m and to be traced further to a distance of 30 m. ... Though the hill at first seems unimportant and not very striking, yet its extent is considerable and its situation remarkable. It controls the plane of Askar and at the same time straddles the pass. These two together are not true of modern Nablus. *From this the situation of old Shechem is fixed with certainty and the earlier supposition (Nablus) is refuted. All historical conditions are satisfied completely by this point.* Here in any case the investigation must begin... (Emphasis added)<sup>4</sup>

Tell Balatah (Shechem) is located at the eastern end of the pass between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim<sup>5</sup> some 40 miles north of Jerusalem.

---

<sup>3</sup>Edward Campbell, 'Shechem' in Ephraim Stern (ed.) *New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land Volume 4* (NY: Simon & Shuster 1993) p1345.

<sup>4</sup>G E Wright, *Biblical Archaeologist* 20 (1957) p.20

<sup>5</sup>The location highlights Shechem's central importance in the covenant-traditions of ancient Israel as reflected in Deut 27:11-13

## EXCAVATIONS AT TELL BALATAH<sup>6</sup>

### The First Expedition

Shechem was first excavated in 1913 and 1914 by Ernst Sellin of Austria. He followed up on the Thiersch discovery of the city-wall, which he exposed to a distance of some 100 meters until it ended at a city gate. He next found a second, inner circumvallation that also ended at the gate. By the use of 5-metre-wide trenches from the edge of the mound to the centre, Sellin discerned four major periods, which he thought to be: Hellenistic, Late Israelite, Early Israelite, and Canaanite. [Note: This was later corrected to: Hellenistic, Israelite, Middle Bronze and Early Bronze/Chalcolithic].

### The Final Austro-German Expeditions

After the interruption of World War I, Sellin returned to Tell Balatah from 1926-27. His attention was mainly given to discovering what he could of the city's fortification. As a result, he was able to unearth a three-entryway city gate on the northwest, bonded to a wall that was of the 'leaning' or 'sloping' type called *Boeschungsmauer* in German. Unlike the typical freestanding fortification, the inner face of this type of wall leans on the mound, thereby making it almost impregnable. This kind of construction may be dated to between 1650 and 1200 BC. The discovery helps us realize that Shechem had 'one of the strongest fortifications of [the] period' which, as G E Wright supposes, may have been the reason for the 'almost truculent' tone of Laba'yu, the king of Shechem, to his suzerain Amenhotep III in the Amarna Correspondence.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> This and the following section, 'Historical Horizons,' constitute a summary of information gleaned from the following articles: Edward Campbell, 'Shechem' in Stern (ed) *New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land Volume 4* (1993) 1345-54; G E Wright, *Biblical Archaeologist* 20 (1957) 19-32; Joe Seger, 'Shechem' in Eric Meyers (ed) *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997) 19-23; and articles from several publications of *BASOR*: 144 (1956) 9-26; 148 (1957) 11-28; 161 (1961) 11-54; 169 (1963) 1-60; 180 (1965) 7-41; 216 (1974) 31-52

<sup>7</sup> See Wright, *BA* 20, pp.22-23; "Lab'ayu (whose name meant approximately "lion-like" in Canaanite) was prince of Shechem in the central hill country and was constantly raiding the territory and caravans of his neighbors on all sides." Pritchard, *ANET*, p.485-487, note 5.

Sellin also identified a large building (68 ft. long and 84 ft. wide with 17 ft. thick walls at the foundations), which he thought to be a temple. He also identified the structures extending on either side of the Northwest Gate as the 'palace'.

The work of the German Archaeological Institute unfortunately ran into serious difficulties due to conflicting personnel and poor record-keeping. Consequently, very little can be found of the work of G Welter (who replaced Sellin from 1928-33), while much of the final phase of E Sellin's work (1934-43), being unpublished, was lost in the bombing of Berlin. However, his discovery in 1934 of a broken piece of limestone with ancient Canaanite letters (counted among the earliest specimens of alphabetic writing), and two large (4ft.) storage jars, is worthy of mention.

### **The American Expedition**

The joint expedition of Drew University, New Jersey, and McCormick Seminary, Chicago, continued the excavations at Shechem from 1956 to 1973. Persons of the calibre of G E Wright, R Bull, L Toombs, and William Dever contributed significantly to the exposure and analysis of the site. Their work has led to the conclusion that, in all, twenty-four strata may be discerned at Tell Balatah during a period from 4000/3500BC to 128/107 BC! The analysis shows four periods of abandonment: 3300-1900; 1540-1450; 1150-1125/975, and 475-331 BC.

A total of nine seasons were undertaken, and "the excavation at Shechem was the first to introduce cross-disciplinary research."<sup>8</sup> Some of the more significant finds of the Drew-McCormick efforts are:

1. Three scarabs, 15 copper coins of Ptolemy I (305-285BC) and one unique silver/gold coin from Macedonia or Thasos dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

---

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, 'Shechem', p1347; J Seger, 'Shechem' p21. The Drew-McCormick expedition employed 'newer methods of stratigraphic and ceramic analysis'.

2. A piece of pottery with *qoph* and *yodh* written on it. The style of the *qoph* may suggest a date around 800BC (the time of Jeroboam II).
3. The courtyard of the Temple and the palace of the city with its own street and enclosure wall.
4. A burial store-jar containing the skeleton of a four to six-year-old.
5. An Iron II granary.
6. Hellenistic houses.
7. A bronze Baal figurine 18.4cm in height. This was considered the 'prize find' of the fifth campaign at Balatah.

In 1963 Lawrence Toombs and G.E. Wright wrote:

We have been led to the surprising conclusion that the west side acropolis of Shechem was actually a sacred area for some 700 years, and that the structures in use there between 1800 and 1100 BC served a religious purpose<sup>9</sup>

After his extensive and renowned study in 1973/74 William Dever wrote:

Putting these structures together with the other contemporary elements in the Northwest Gate area, we see for the first time all the basic architectural elements of the "Agora" of a MB Age Palestinian city-state: city walls, gate, barracks for the garrison, plaza and shrine, public temple, palace, royal shrine.<sup>10</sup>

## HISTORICAL HORIZONS

As we have noted, Shechem shows five clear periods of occupation before the site is finally abandoned around 128/107BC. The Early Bronze period showed up in probes under the Migdal Temple and certain other buildings. In another field (IX), evidence of an earlier (Chalcolithic) settlement was seen in a pebbled surface of a curved tent floor. For reasons unknown, the site is unoccupied for the next 1400 years. The next stratum is dated to around 1900BC (MB IIA), on the basis of the pottery. Two platforms from this period had houses built on them in the later MB IIA period.

---

<sup>9</sup> *BASOR* 169 (1963) p25.

<sup>10</sup> *BASOR* 216 (1974) p48.

The city's more impressive remains date from the MB IIB/IIC period (1750-1540). Here, we see the construction of the acropolis and its 'temenos' wall (separating it from the rest of the city), the massive *boeschungsmauer*, domestic housing, the great *migdal* (tower) temple with the *massebot*-flanked entrance, Dever's 'chapel' sanctuary, and some 'fine' houses. These two hundred years of greatness end with massive destruction uniformly evident in the last MB IIC stratum – destruction attributed to the Egyptians who were recapturing territory lost during the Hyksos period.

After the destruction around 1540 BC, resettlement is evident again only from about 1450 BC. The gates mentioned earlier were rebuilt. So was the temple, with a further sacred place including an altar and *masseba*, being erected in the town area. The male deity figurine and two cuneiform tablets (one of a teacher asking for a better salary!) are from this period. Recovering after being destroyed in 1350BC, the city is abandoned after another major destruction in 1125BC (Iron IA, see 'Abimelech' below). A modest recovery is followed by destruction under Shishak of Egypt in the late tenth century BC.

During the period of the divided monarchy of Israel, Shechem was rebuilt and occupied until the Assyrian invasion in 723BC. The house walls during this period are narrower, and the foundations provide evidence of two-floor structures. There appears to be more careful planning in the constructions. One 'four room' house has a large hearth in the main living-room, suggesting that the family was involved in some industry of sorts. Some other industries, such as fruit processing or dyeing are also evident.

The Assyrian-Persian Period for Shechem shows up in hardly a significant manner, and ends in the site being abandoned from 475-331BC.

During the Hellenistic Period, Shechem was rebuilt for a final time and regained its status as a fortified city. The architecture, coinage, and pottery show that Shechem had prospered until it was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 107BC. G E Wright proposed that the Samaritans had obtained permission from Alexander the Great to build a temple on Mt Gerizim. Thereafter, because of their rebellion, Alexander destroyed the temple and posted a garrison there. Consequently, the Samaritans had to seek another location

for their centre. Ancient Shechem with its rich Samaritan traditions and abandoned fortifications offered the best alternative until John Hyrcanus.<sup>11</sup>

## BIBLICAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN CONVERSATION

The question that ultimately concerns the student of the Bible has to do with whether there is any point of convergence between the biblical narratives and the historical reconstruction of archaeologists. In this regard, the story of Shechem, while not answering every question, corresponds to a remarkable degree with the narratives and tenor of the Bible.

### The Patriarchal Narratives

Of the patriarchs, the only one not associated with Shechem is Isaac. Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph lived in Canaan in the MB II era (1750-1600BC). When Abraham first entered the land of Canaan, he “passed through the land” until he came to Shechem (Gen 12:5-7). We know that during the period not only was Shechem a well-established city, but also that it was a cultic centre. It would only be natural for Abraham to present himself at such a place of sacred space to offer the required sacrifices or vows to the God who had called him. The fact that Abraham went “to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh,” suggests such an intention. Archaeological evidence for the presence of a ‘sacred area’ (the implication of the “oak of Moreh”), over a period of 700 years, corroborates with the biblical account.

Many years later, Jacob returns from Haran “safely to the city of Shechem” and “he camped before the city” [NRSV]/“within sight of the city [NIV]” (Gen 33:18). Jacob, too, makes it a point to erect an altar on a land in the vicinity of Shechem. In Genesis 34:20 and 24, “the gate of the city” is mentioned. As we have seen, excavations show that such a well-fortified gate (with associated buildings) did exist at the time. Later, the massacre of a number of the men of Shechem by Simeon and Levi (in connection with the rape of their sister Dinah) makes Jacob odious to the Shechemites. He is instructed by God

---

<sup>11</sup> See E Campbell, J Ross, ‘The Excavation of Shechem and the Biblical Tradition’, *BA* 26 (1963) pp25-26.

to leave the area, on account of which he gathers his entire household and commands them: “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes...” (34:2). He sees this action as prerequisite to him approaching his God at his next destination in Bethel (v.3). “So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.” It is difficult to miss the solemnity of a moment so pregnant with meaning within the patriarchal narratives. Jacob had left Haran blessed in numbers and endowed with wealth, and yet *Haran would not leave him* until he “put away” the gods. Similarly, centuries later Joshua recognized the significance of Shechem for the descendents of Jacob (Israel) to face the very same decision and thereby renew their covenant with Yahweh. He, thus, echoes the words of Jacob: “Now, therefore, *put away the gods* that your ancestors worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt” (Josh 24:14). We may surmise that beginning with Abraham, the patriarchs and later-Israel, viewed Shechem as the gateway to the Promised land; the place where they had to leave behind their former allegiances so as to dedicate themselves fully to their covenant with Yahweh for their life in Yahweh’s land!

Joseph’s embalmed remains were buried in Shechem (Josh 24:32). It is intriguing that Egyptian texts from the reigns of Thutmose III, Amenophis II, Thutmose IV, Amenophis III, Haremhab, Seti I, Rameses II, Rameses III and Shishak I make reference to a number of cities *in the region of Shechem*, but not Shechem itself. However, the fact that there are three occurrences of ‘Jacob-el’ and two of ‘Joseph-el’ makes it plausible that the patriarchal traditions provided such alternative designations for Shechem.<sup>12</sup>

We noted that Thiersch’s identification of Tell Balatah was aided by the traditional location of the tomb of Joseph (Qubr Yusef). In addition, the traditional site of Jacob’s well is a little east of the Tell.

---

<sup>12</sup> Walter Harrelson, ‘Shechem in Extra-Biblical References’, *BA* 20 (1957) 4

## Shechem as a Levitical City of Refuge

In the allotments of cities to the Levites (Josh 21), Shechem is designated as a ‘city of refuge’. Neither the biblical account nor the archaeological data suggests that the Israelites ever destroyed the city when they took it over. Consequently, we may assume that the fortifications which fired Labayu’s confidence before Amenophis III (1406-1370 BC)<sup>13</sup> were still largely intact, and would certainly make the inadvertent ‘slayer’ *feel* Shechem was indeed a city of refuge. It is this latter identity that aids the reader to understand Hosea’s description of the moral collapse of the Northern Kingdom:

‘As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the road to Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime’ (6:9)

The very *location* and *community* that had been provided as the means of safeguarding justice had been transformed, respectively, to become the *protector* and *perpetrator* of the gross violation of all justice!

## Shechem as the Ideal Site for Covenant-Making

In Joshua 24:1, the conqueror of the Promised Land – now elderly and close to his death – gathered together the whole of Israel, and urged that they *renew* their covenant with Yahweh. For this purpose Joshua chose Shechem, and the reasons for this become more apparent when we piece together the archaeological record.

In the ancient world, Shechem was famous on two counts: its impressive fortifications and the security they provided, as well as its impressive temple, *migdal* (or tower) and cult, and the religious associations they had created. In fact, in the later Abimelech narrative (Judges 8:29 – 9:57) the Israelites worship *Baal Berith* (Baal of the *Covenant*, Judges 8:33). The temple in Shechem is called *El-Berith* (the God of the *Covenant*, Judges 9:46). This unusual use of *berith* (covenant) suggests that Shechem was strongly associated with covenant-making and the reason why it became an ideal

---

<sup>13</sup> Harrelson, 6. But see alternative chronologies of the pharaohs in K Kitchen, ‘Egypt, History of (Chronology)’, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* II, p329.

place to enter into agreements, both religious and social. The latter fact we see amply demonstrated in the Bible: from Abraham building his altar to Yahweh (Genesis 12:7), the agreement between Jacob and his sons and the Shechemites (which Simeon and Levi reneged on, Genesis 34), and the intended-coronation of King Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1). The most outstanding such event, however, was the Covenant Renewal under Joshua (Joshua 24).

### **Abimelech the Shechemite (Judges 8:29-9:57)**

Of Gideon's numerous sons, Abimelech was the offspring of a concubine from Shechem. Following the death of Gideon, Abimelech (with the support of Shechem) massacres all but one of Gideon's descendents and becomes king of Shechem. A few important historical notes in the narrative pertain to our archaeological reconstruction. First, it seems almost banal to point out that Abimelech aspired to a *throne* in Shechem, on which score excavations have indeed revealed remains of an impressive city-state inclusive of palace, garrisons and temple. Second, the specific mention of *the temple of Ba'al-berith* – 'Ba'al of the Covenant – 8:33; 9:4, cf.9:46) and *migdal (tower of) Shechem* (9:46, 47,49) corresponds remarkably with our further knowledge of Shechem – its associations with covenants during the time of the patriarchs and Joshua (hence the prominence of the *massebot*), as well as the dominating presence of the *Migdal* Temple within the city.

### **Shechem as the Historic Site of the Division of Israel**

The concern in biblical studies for the causes and effects of the division of Israel often sublimates any consideration of the theological import of the location of the historic event. In 1 Kings 12:1 Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon, goes to Shechem to be crowned.<sup>14</sup> The city had slowly

---

<sup>14</sup> "While Shechem was not a flourishing city in Stratum X, that by no means negates its status as a famous central sanctuary location from the early confederacy period, to which Rehoboam would come in anticipation of being crowned king of 'all Israel'. What he came to was a *location* in the narrow valley between Mts. Gerizim and Ebal, which was redolent with covenantal associations", (269) R Boling and E Campbell, 'Jeroboam and Rehoboam at Shechem' in L Perdue, L Toombs, G Johnson (eds.) *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation - Essays in Memory of D Glenn Rose* (Georgia: John Knox, 1987) 259-72

reestablished itself after the Abimelech destruction in 1125. The major narrative of the series of conferences between Rehoboam (and his advisors) and Jeroboam I and the leaders of the Northern tribes is set here. The story ends with Jeroboam I and ten tribes seceding forever from the kingdom of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam had already been promised the Northern tribes through prophecy (1 Kings 11:29-39) *because of the idolatry of Solomon*. It was on the mountains flanking Shechem (Ebal and Gerizim) that Moses had commanded the tribes to recount the blessings and the curses of the covenant (Deut. 27:11-26). The very first of the Twelve Curses to echo over the city of covenant would have been: ‘Cursed be anyone who makes an idol or casts an image, anything abhorrent to the Lord, the work of an artisan, and sets it up in secret’ (Deut. 27:11).

Surely when Rehoboam had to flee for his life (12:18), the curse had come in earnest!

1 Kings 12:25 informs us: “Then Jeroboam *built* Shechem ...and resided there”. We have already made note of the fact that the archaeological story does concur with the idea that Shechem was in fact built and occupied as a city during the early to mid eighth century BC.

## CONCLUSION

Biblical archaeology is a relative newcomer to the field of biblical studies, having a history of less than two centuries. The renaissance (14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), with its dictum *ad fontes* (back to beginnings) had already set off the scientific impulse into the examination of the biblical text and its message in its original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This quest for scientific enquiry intensified with the European excursions into the ancient Near East from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the work of Napoleon’s cartographers in 1798-99, and the visits to Palestine of the biblical scholar Edward Robinson in 1838. The conditions were thereby created for the **development of Biblical Archaeology** which, for the first time, provided the opportunity to examine

the biblical record with the geographical and artifactual evidence now available.<sup>15</sup>

Given the level of skepticism that had been generated around the reliability of the Bible by the middle of the nineteenth century, many felt it was just a matter of time before the hard evidence on the ground placed the final nail on the coffin of the historicity of the Christian Scriptures.

What has transpired, however, in case after case is that, while it is rarer to find artifactual and extra-biblical evidence for the existence of Bible persons such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua or Isaiah, the archaeological record has overwhelmingly corresponded to the historical, geographical, and cognitive environment described in the Bible to such an extent that, in less than two hundred years, this specific reason for historical skepticism has very nearly expired.

---

<sup>15</sup> See, William G Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), p54f.

# **AS WE FORGIVE THEM: FACETS OF FORGIVENESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TODAY**

MANO EMMANUEL

Forgiveness looms large in the religious consciousness of Christians. After all, the gospel that makes us believers is all about forgiveness. God's nature is to forgive: and because God forgives us, we know are required to forgive others. Martin Marty suggests that if there is a distinctiveness about each major religion, then Christianity's distinctive would be forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the general understanding about the importance of forgiveness, there is a certain amount of confusion about what forgiveness is, to whom it is due and what it does. This essay seeks to set out some areas of contention or confusion, primarily with regard to the interplay between theology and psychology, with some suggested areas for further study.

Anthony Bash points out that "the astonishing fact is that there is relatively little about forgiveness in the New Testament".<sup>2</sup> He goes on to state that Paul mentions forgiveness rarely; of the gospel writers, Luke writes the most about it but this is still relatively sparse, and Matthew and Mark write hardly anything. John says nothing explicitly about forgiveness.<sup>3</sup> Yet forgiveness is central to Christian faith and practice. While Bash is right in that the word 'forgiveness' in terms of interpersonal relationships may occur less than we would expect, as we will see below, the New Testament speaks often of forgiveness-related concepts. Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is strong and

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin E Marty, 'The Ethos of Christian Forgiveness,' in Everett L Worthington (ed), *Dimensions of Forgiveness*, p11 (Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998). He 'equates', with qualification, Islam with submission, Buddhism with suffering etc.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p79.

<sup>3</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p80.

clear (Matt. 6:12-15; Matt. 18:21-35). The importance of living in harmony, loving enemies, returning good for evil and pursuing peace is mentioned frequently (Matt. 5:44; Eph. 4:3; Rom. 12:15, 18, 14:19; 2Cor. 13:11; Jas. 3:18; Heb. 12:14; 1Pet 2:20ff, etc.), all of which are closely entwined with forgiving. It is when we come to the dynamics of forgiveness, the emotions, the methods, and the words, that psychology often fills in the gaps. The question is: are we being true to the teaching of scripture as we make use of the insights of psychology?

### **Vagueness about What Forgiveness Is**

To start with, not everyone is agreed on what forgiveness is. One major contribution to the confusion is the fact that forgiveness has become the focus of a great deal of psychological study in recent years. As we shall see below, this discipline has tended to provide what has arguably become the popular view of forgiveness. According to a survey carried out by psychologists Nathan Frise and Mark McMinn, comparing the views of theologians and psychologists, psychologists tend to define forgiveness with relation to letting go of resentment and hatred towards someone who has wronged them. They largely agree that reconciliation and forgiveness are two separate processes which can occur independently and can be unrelated to each other. Some of them add that in forgiveness, those feelings will gradually be replaced with more positive thoughts such as compassion and understanding and the desire for the wrongdoer's wellbeing. Forgiveness is generally thought to be a unilateral act which does not require the repentance of the wrongdoer. The main benefit is that the victim is set free from the mental, physical, and psychological consequences of harbouring resentment and hatred.<sup>4</sup> In the same survey, most theologians agreed substantially with the psychologists, though a good percentage wanted to emphasise that reconciliation was the goal of forgiveness and should not be treated as completely separate.<sup>5</sup> Pastoral psychologist David Augsburg differentiates between varieties of forgiveness. In his view, what is called

---

<sup>4</sup> Nathan R Frise and Mark McMinn, 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Differing Perspectives of Psychologists and Christian Theologians', *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol 38.(2010). pp83-90.

<sup>5</sup> Frise and McMinn, 'Forgiveness', p88.

‘unilateral forgiveness’ is actually better called acceptance or love which works best in an individualistic culture where one expects and asks for nothing from the other.<sup>6</sup> In his view, forgiveness cannot be unconditional, only love can.<sup>7</sup> A more communal society, like that of the Bible, he says, would see forgiveness differently, as something that required mutual justice, repentance and restored relationship because that was what sustained community. There would be expectations placed on both parties.<sup>8</sup> A third kind of forgiveness he posits is that which works for reconciliation, going through the complexities of restoration and justice and looking forward not just to restored relationships but a new relationship which is better and stronger than before.<sup>9</sup> Everett Worthington says forgiveness and reconciliation are two different though related things, “joined at the hip” as he calls it. We can do one without the other.<sup>10</sup> Forgiveness is internal and is made up of two types. One is decisional forgiveness where we agree to control our negative response to evil and are willing to reconcile. The second is emotional replacement where we replace the negative emotions we feel with positive emotions like empathy, compassion and love.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this concurs with what Frise and McMinn conclude by suggesting that theologians’ and psychologists’ views of forgiveness can be placed on a spectrum. At one end is ‘subjective forgiveness’ (where most psychologists tend to be), related to the process of inner healing; and at the other end, is ‘relational forgiveness’ (which most theologians tend to be closer to), which emphasizes restoration and reconciliation.<sup>12</sup>

With this wide variety of views, there seems to be a need to clarify to the church what forgiveness is before we begin to teach that it is necessary and

---

<sup>6</sup> David W Augsburger, *Helping People Forgive*, (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) p14.

<sup>7</sup> Augsburger, *Helping*, p16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Everett L Worthington Jr., *Forgiving and Reconciling*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2003) p170.

<sup>11</sup> Everett Worthington, *Forgiveness*, pp41-42.

<sup>12</sup> Frise and McMinn, ‘Forgiveness’, p88.

how it can be done. A good place to start would be to recognize that when we speak of forgiveness it might mean different things to different people.

### **Forgiveness as a Self-Help Technique**

Theologians like L Gregory Jones argue that there are many dangers with our theological vagueness about forgiveness and its close association with the field of psychology. Jones critiques what he calls this ‘therapeutic’ model of forgiveness which transplants forgiveness outside its original theological milieu. He argues that forgiveness is now being seen in primarily therapeutic, individualistic, and privatistic terms.<sup>13</sup> It is therapeutic in that it focuses on making the forgiver feel better; it is privatistic in that it becomes a subjective choice not particularly based on shared moral values; and it is individualistic in that it affects the forgiver alone and does not spill over to the offender. This is not just an overemphasis (which could be righted), he says. Therapeutic language has increasingly “distorted the grammar of Christian forgiveness”.<sup>14</sup> Although therapeutic elements can certainly be incorporated and psychological insights integrated, he says, there are crucial differences between them and the theology of forgiveness. We have not been discerning enough in evaluating those differences.<sup>15</sup>

In the USA, says one writer, forgiveness has become another self-help technique to free us from hang-ups and feelings that would hold us back from being all we could be. It is “one more tool in the distinctively self-absorbed US culture of self-actualization and the pursuit of happiness”.<sup>16</sup> It is easily removed from its connectedness to the forgiveness sinners receive from God, which is the source of our own ability and our mandate to forgive. It is disconnected from talk about the seriousness of sin and the importance of community. David Augsburg talks of the ‘salvation’ offered in therapy: “Moral judgments get reduced to issues of subjective personal taste; social behaviour is guided by technique, relational skills, and conflict management,

---

<sup>13</sup> L Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, (Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans, 1995) 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, 39

<sup>16</sup> Pamela Cooper White, ‘Forgiveness, Grace not Work, *Journal for Preachers, Lent* (2009)

not by moral principle”.<sup>17</sup> It is a framework in which being nonjudgmental is vital – “objectified moral goodness turns into subjective goodness; being good becomes feeling good”.<sup>18</sup>

Jones adds that Western Christians have increasingly secularized the language of the church. Even within the context of worship, we have replaced theological language with the non-theological. Teaching and talk about the rich theological concepts of sin and grace and forgiveness are replaced by ‘accepting that you are accepted,’ ‘handling difficult people,’ etc. “We have become immunized against the use of theological language in general and that of forgiveness in particular.”<sup>19</sup>

This is not just confined to the West. We have to evaluate if, in our local churches (even those which posit a high view of scripture and emphasise preaching), biblical literacy is generally low; and preaching, though given great importance, not particularly aimed at transformation of life and challenging cultural norms. Considering that many of our fastest growing churches comprise first-generation Christians, this is an alarming tendency. Christianity is often seen in very pragmatic terms – i.e. What do I do to get what I want? Regular attendance at small-group Bible study, close accountable relationships, and grappling with serious life issues is not as common as one would hope. Evangelicals in particular are certainly busy about their faith, but whether they are busy with projects or with personal growth is the question. Even in Sri Lanka, assumed to be a communal culture, Christianity is in danger of becoming an individualistic, consumerist endeavour, with the emphasis being on meeting one’s own needs. What effect does this have on our willingness and ability to forgive? Will we, as Jones suggests, end up with a pale imitation of Christian community, a watered-down version of sin, and a therapeutic, individualistic view of forgiveness?

---

<sup>17</sup> Augsburg, *Helping*, p104.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p105.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, p37.

## Forgiveness is for Getting

Everett Worthington asks the question “Is forgiving for getting or for giving?”<sup>20</sup> Therapeutic forgiveness tends to emphasise that it is for getting.

We have already seen that the average person talking or writing on the topic generally takes for granted that forgiveness is the ‘refusal to hold on to retributive emotions such as anger, hatred, or resentment’.<sup>21</sup> The ‘letting go’ has become what the forgiver does to his or her own emotions, rather than having anything to do with the offender. Psychology usually advocates forgiveness as a virtue because of the good it does the forgiver. “...forgiveness is indeed good for us. But like other virtues, forgiveness must be valued for its own sake, or else it begins to become less than what it is.”<sup>22</sup> For instance, it runs the danger of demonstrating an apparent indifference both to the evil done and to healing of relationships. Forgiveness becomes an action entirely personal, a change wrought in oneself as one seeks to get over the wrong we have suffered. It does not deal with the perpetrator or with the deed that has been done to injure. There is neither an offer of restoration nor a confrontation and demand to change made of the offender. What seems the most magnanimous of gestures might in fact be offering and expecting too little.

When we look at the New Testament, we find a different idea of ‘letting go’. The most frequent words that the New Testament writers use to express the concepts ‘forgive’ and ‘forgiveness’ is the Greek verb *apihemi* and its cognate noun *aphesis*.<sup>23</sup> The usual meaning of the term is ‘to leave’ or ‘to abandon’. In pre-Christian secular Greek, the term has no religious overtones, but in biblical and biblically influenced writing, it has.<sup>24</sup> In secular Greek, the words usually have a juridical sense, for example to discharge someone from a legal

---

<sup>20</sup> Everett Worthington, *Forgiving and Reconciling*, (Illinois: IVP, 2001), pp23-25.

<sup>21</sup> Jesse Couenhoven, ‘Forgiveness and Restoration: A Theological Exploration,’ *Journal of Religion* (2010), pp148-170.

<sup>22</sup> Couenhoven, ‘Forgiveness,’ p155.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, ‘Early Christian Thinking’ in Fraser Watts and Liz Guilliford (ed), *Forgiveness in Context*, (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004) p30.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash in Watts, ‘Early’, p30.

obligation or relationship, like a debt or a punishment. This seems to lend support to the notion that what is let go or abandoned at the time of forgiveness is the wrongdoer's guilt or debt.

Luke also uses another term, *apoluo* in Luke 6:37. It is the same word that is used of Barabbas' release from custody (Lk. 23:16-25).<sup>25</sup> Once again, this seems to explain what being forgiven is about. It is release from sin and entry into the Kingdom. In Luke 4:18, Luke records the beginning of Jesus' ministry, where Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 and proclaims 'release' to captives. The same word *aphesis* is used. In this context, the release Jesus promises is more than the release from sin. It refers to release from the old order of things and entry into the eternal order Jesus inaugurates. "Forgiveness and release are one and the same, and both are part of the hope of the Kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup>

While letting go of negative emotions like hatred, bitterness and vengeance is important for the wronged person's healing and wholeness, we must also tell believers that letting go is also for the purpose of setting the wrongdoer free.

### **Forgiveness Is a Moral Duty**

The Lord's Prayer includes the supplication that God will forgive our sins "as we forgive those who sin against us" (Matt. 6:12). In fact, Jesus goes on to say that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us (Matt. 6:14; Lk. 6:37).

Matthew's gospel emphasises the moral duty to forgive. Forgiveness comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus and he explicitly states that believers must forgive. The fact that this is a command implies that we will be able to obey it.

Bash, however, disagrees that forgiveness is a duty. He argues that it is not a moral obligation to forgive.<sup>27</sup> He seems to base this on the argument that Jesus' forgiveness of people was given freely and not as a duty. If forgiveness

---

<sup>25</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, 'Early', p31.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, 'Early', p32.

<sup>27</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p99.

were a moral obligation, Jesus would have declared people forgiven based on the peoples' repentance as demonstrated by their undergoing John's baptism – but he did not. Instead, he freely bestowed forgiveness on people like the woman with the alabaster jar, who sought God's grace. Forgiveness is a moral virtue, says Bash, but not a duty.<sup>28</sup> He goes on to say that there are times when it is not morally right to forgive and we should not claim to do it – for example, when we forgive because of apathy or moral weakness; times when it is impossible to forgive because we are so emotionally and psychologically damaged. He also says that it cannot be a moral duty to impart a gift because a gift is by definition a voluntary act.<sup>29</sup> Bash finally concludes: "Although, almost certainly there is not a moral duty to forgive in the New Testament, there is I suggest, a moral duty to do all that one can so that one is able to forgive if it is possible – and this includes even the unrepentant.... The moral duty is to strive to forgive and God will respond, not according to whether one has forgiven but according to whether one has sought to forgive as best one could".<sup>30</sup> One feels that Bash is splitting hairs here though his motive in doing so is noble. He utters a warning to ground forgiveness in an ethical framework and also to safeguard the victim from being pressurized to declare forgiveness he or she is not ready to give.

### Forgiveness Is a Lavish Gift

Jesus teaches his disciples to forgive a repentant brother seven times a day (Lk. 17:3). When Peter asks Jesus, no doubt after some difficult encounter, how many times he should forgive his brother, Jesus answers seventy times seven (or seventy-seven times), without making a distinction between those who repent and those who do not.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' teaching contrasts Lamech's 'unlimited vindictiveness' in Gen. 4:24 with unlimited forgiveness.<sup>32</sup> Forgiveness is not to be exercised to a limited and measurable extent. It is to

---

<sup>28</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p86.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p102.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p105

<sup>31</sup> Some rabbis had suggested that a person should forgive three times. Bash states that Jesus' answer is seven times a day. Seven being the number of perfection, Jesus' answer indicates that a person should keep forgiving a wrongdoer as many times as required (Bash, *Forgiveness*, p96).

<sup>32</sup> R T France, *Matthew*, (Leicester: IVP, 1985) p277.

be ‘unbounded and lavish’ and sincere (Matt. 18:21f, 35).<sup>33</sup> In Mark 11:25, there is a similar lavishness in Jesus’ teaching that “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have *anything against anyone*; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses”.<sup>34</sup>

Jesus tells a parable of a king whose servant owes him money (Matt. 18:23-35). The sum that the man owes his king is incredibly large and impossible to repay in several lifetimes.<sup>35</sup> The king immediately waives the debt. The servant who himself is owed money, a microscopic amount in relation to his own debt, refuses the plea of his debtor, a fellow-servant. The king, when he hears this, demands that the servant be thrown in jail and left there until he repays the debt in full, which will be impossible.

What is this parable meant to teach? Does God forgive us only if we forgive others? If, as Jesus says, God does not forgive us if we do not forgive others, does it mean that we earn the right to be forgiven when we forgive? Some scholars suggest that in Matthew’s gospel at least there is a clear teaching that only those who offer forgiveness will receive it (Matt. 5:7), and that those who do not forgive will not be forgiven (Matt. 6:14).<sup>36</sup> Is God’s forgiveness conditional? Then, it is not based on his grace but our merit. Does God give forgiveness and take it away if we don’t forgive? Then, his forgiveness is conditional. Volf suggests there does not need to be a one-to-one correspondence in the parable. Rather, he suggests, that when we forgive we show we have received God’s forgiveness. When we do not forgive it reveals we have not opened ourselves to His forgiveness.<sup>37</sup>

“Those who experience God’s forgiveness and who become forgiving people will continue to experience divine forgiveness. Jesus’ parables warn that those who have experienced forgiveness but do not forgive others (or whose forgiveness is grudging, reluctant, or insubstantial) will receive from

---

<sup>33</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, ‘Early’, p35.

<sup>34</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Bash cites Josephus who says the tax on Judea for a whole year was 600 talents. This is more than 16 times that amount.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, ‘Early’, p35.

<sup>37</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2005) pp155-156.

God no greater forgiveness than they have received.... Their experience of divine forgiveness will be deficient.”<sup>38</sup>

Those who claim to have received forgiveness from God but fail to practise forgiveness, receive a stern warning that we must not ignore (Matt. 18:35). It is by receiving forgiveness ourselves that we are healed of our hurts, regenerated, *and* transformed into forgiving people. To live a lifestyle of forgiveness is a characteristic of Kingdom people. To live a lifestyle of unforgiveness casts doubts on our own reception of God’s forgiveness.

God’s forgiveness is lavish and undeserved. In the New Testament, the reception of such a gift is “regenerative, transformative, and paradigmatic”.<sup>39</sup> Zaccheus releases his hold on his ill-gotten gains, Stephen prays for his murderers, Paul stops his jailer killing himself, the Early Church went to martyrdom with no thoughts of revenge. Forgiveness experienced should lead to a transformed lifestyle. Or, as Todd Pokrifka-Joe puts it: “God’s forgiveness is a gift – with strings attached”. Our forgiveness of others is what makes us capable of receiving the gift of forgiveness. It is not, however, a sufficient condition for receiving it. We do not earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. Although the parable suggests it, it is not that one act of unforgiveness robs us of our ability to receive God’s forgiveness. The parable describes a servant whose lifestyle is one of unforgiveness. His act is “a manifestation of a heart that is fundamentally alien to the reception and consequent enactment of God’s grace”. In such a case, the sinner “wilfully steps out of the circle of grace and mercy into which God had brought him”.<sup>40</sup> The failure of the servant, whose ten thousand talent debt was cancelled, was not only that he did not forgive but that “he failed to *want* to forgive and that he failed to *try* to forgive”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p100.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p94.

<sup>40</sup> Todd Pokrifka-Joe, ‘Probing the Relationship between Divine and Human Forgiveness in Matthew’, pp165-172 in Alistair MacFadyen and Marcel Sarot (ed). *Forgiveness and Truth: Explorations in Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh/New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 2001), pp170-171.

<sup>41</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p94.

“The first slave had every legal right to insist on the repayment of the sixteen-dollar debt. But he had no moral right, given the overwhelming mercy he had been shown by the king. In the same way, when other people wrong us, they owe us a real debt. They may deserve divorce, prison, or even death. We may have a logical case to the repayment of that obligation, but not a moral case if we have been the recipients of God's forgiveness. Why not? The difference between how much someone has wronged us and how much we have wronged God, is the difference between sixteen dollars and five billion dollars. Forgiveness is the obligation of the forgiven.”<sup>42</sup>

“Forgiveness mirrors the generosity of God whose ultimate goal is neither to satisfy injured pride nor to justly apportion reward and punishment but to but to free sinful humanity from evil and thereby re-establish communion with us.”<sup>43</sup> Jesus’ teaching to his disciples, his answer to Peter, and this parable all go to demonstrate that forgiveness in all circumstances should be generous – ‘impossibly’ generous – if the number seven implies perfection.<sup>44</sup>

Paul’s choice of words for forgiveness also emphasizes its gratuitous nature. It is a gift of grace we offer one another. That the concept of gift and giving are central to forgiveness is shown in the word itself (forgive). The word Paul uses most frequently, *charizomai*, is related to *charis* and means ‘to give’ or ‘to grant’ (2Cor. 2:7, 10, 12:13; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32). In contrast to the idea of liberation or release, this word carries connotations of the cancellation of a debt and also the idea of grace.<sup>45</sup> In New Testament usage, it also means ‘undeserved kindness’. It is used of God’s grace (Eph .4:32; Col. 2:13, 3:13). The same word is used to refer to the kindness and generosity in the action of forgiving between Christians<sup>46</sup> Be kind to one another, says Paul, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.(Eph. 4:32).

---

<sup>42</sup> Jeffress, Robert. ‘Developing the Lost Art of Forgiveness.’ *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 45, no. 3 (June 1, 2003): pp6-17. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 4, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Volf, *Free*, p161.

<sup>44</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p96.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p98.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, (London: SPCK, 2011), 43.

If forgiveness is an act of grace, then wrongdoers may not demand or even expect forgiveness, though they may ask for it. Bash argues that someone who is truly repentant would expect to pay the penalty for his or her wrongdoing.<sup>47</sup> Even repentance does not ‘earn’ the right to mercy and forgiveness. Repentance does not atone.<sup>48</sup> We cannot manipulate or use emotional blackmail to force the person we have offended to forgive us. Muller Fahrenholz describes two reasons why forgiveness has become so cheap a notion – its triteness and its inconsequentiality.<sup>49</sup> He says we have come to say “sorry” for so many minor things that we do not wait for pardon. We assume that our asking for it is the guarantee of receiving it. We are expected to be ready to forgive as easily as the request is made and as unthinkingly. Forgiveness has become a matter of politeness, a technique for making life work smoothly. It costs us nothing to say “pardon” and receive it so we do not spend any time working out how to avoid situations for which we need pardon. We get to the point where we assume that rude or offensive acts are normal.<sup>50</sup> The reason for this is that the element of guilt has disappeared from this kind of forgiveness. We assume that forgiveness is ours and we have no conception of how the victim feels. Yet when we receive forgiveness, we have to accept the accusation of guilt as well as receive the release from the debt. If we fail to confess, forgiveness becomes an insult. It declares us guilty when we have refused to accept that accusation. If we refuse to accept the accusation, we are incapable of receiving forgiveness.<sup>51</sup> If forgiveness is a lavish gift, there are also ways in which that gift may be accepted.

### **Forgiveness Is a Craft to be Learned in Community**

L Gregory Jones, reviewing the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, concludes that Bonhoeffer understood forgiveness as a craft that must be learned in community.<sup>52</sup> Forgiveness is more than an emotional judgment or

---

<sup>47</sup> Bash, *Just*, p45.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Geiko Muller Fahrenholz, *The Art of Forgiveness* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).pp3-4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp3-4

<sup>51</sup> Volf, *Free*, pp153

<sup>52</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, p13.

declaration uttered, or action performed, though it includes all these. It is a way of life to be embraced.<sup>53</sup> He describes learning to be a forgiving person as a craft to be learned as an apprentice learns from those who are experts at it. We learn both by reading of stories of forgiveness from Christians of the past and also from watching and practising.<sup>54</sup> In community, we must unlearn all that divides and destroys community: for example, lying, gossiping, face-saving (in which we have delighted), and learn to delight in truth-telling, listening, compassion, and love. We learn to face and acknowledge the sinfulness in and around us but we also offer the hope of the Christian gospel to transform both people and the future. We learn to be forgiving people as we grow in holiness, as we learn to value the type of virtues that make forgiveness easier – humility, empathy, gratitude, love. Worthington cites research which shows that people in small groups help each other forgive. The reasons could be that as people encourage and help one another grow in these virtues, they may hold one another accountable. Worthington also suggests that there is a mystical element to the work of God in these close-knit communities of faith.<sup>55</sup> The early Methodist class groups served this purpose. The sacraments of baptism and Eucharist remind us of our connectedness. They remind us that we have already received forgiveness, and that we are born again into a community for whom and to whom we are accountable.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer considered communal confession an essential element in learning to forgive. He bemoaned the fact that its loss created a vacuum that has now been filled by psychiatrists.<sup>56</sup> Firstly, he said, all secret sins will be brought to light on the last day. Confession to a brother or sister now, eliminates the danger of that last judgment. “He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone....” The more isolated a person, the more destructive the power of sin over him.<sup>57</sup> Bonhoeffer felt that forgiveness was only assured when it was spoken by a brother or sister who had heard our confession. Mutual confession not only protects us from self-deception to which we are prone,

---

<sup>53</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, p163.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp227-228.

<sup>55</sup> Worthington, *Forgiveness*, p64.

<sup>56</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (London: SCM Press, 1954) p17.

<sup>57</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life*, pp86-87.

but also assures us of God's forgiveness. The practice of confession, "not as self-flagellation but as grace" was at the heart of the community he led at Finkenwalde. "It is central," he said, "to the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence..."<sup>58</sup> Confession also was a means to break down the pride which has its stronghold in us.<sup>59</sup> The practice of confession helps cultivate in us a sensitivity to our own sin and gratitude for God's forgiveness. This in turn makes us more likely to empathize with and have compassion on those who sin against us.

The Reformation gave ordinary Christians' access to the assurance of forgiveness from God through faith alone, without the need for a human advocate. Where it erred was in giving the impression that forgiveness was restricted to the relationship between the divine and humans, leaving out interpersonal relationships. "The sinner became the centre of theology and spirituality, not the victim." What mattered was what sin does to God, not what it did to other humans. This led to the privatization and spiritualization of sin and forgiveness. This, in turn, led to a spiritualization or a 'dematerialization' of what sin and forgiveness imply.<sup>60</sup> We do not learn to grieve over what our sin does to others. We confess to God alone and claim his forgiveness. It is so much harder to confess to one another.

### **Forgiveness as Seeking Justice**

Forgiveness is not giving up on justice. When we simply define forgiveness as letting go of our own anger and resentment, forgiveness becomes dangerously like ignoring, excusing, or overlooking an evil. Bash lists five reasons to challenge those who advocate putting the past behind them and ignoring justice. Firstly, such an action implicitly condones the wrong and encourages more wrongdoing; secondly, it reinforces the feelings of hurt, shame, and exploitation felt by the victim; thirdly, it causes victims to suppress rather than deal with their anger and loss; fourthly, it desensitizes

---

<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life*, p16.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Jones, *Embodying*, p18.

<sup>60</sup> Muller Fahrenholz, *Art*, p13.

people in the community to wrongdoing; and finally, it allows the wrongdoer to feel that what he or she has done is not so bad.<sup>61</sup>

And yet, forgiveness and justice seem to be incompatible. We find it hard to hold both in tension. If an offender has been brought to justice and has to 'pay' for his or her crime, does he/she need forgiveness? In what way is forgiveness a gift if someone has already paid the penalty for their own sin? If a person is forgiven, how can we demand justice? Worthington describes what he calls an 'injustice gap,' which is the gap between the way things are and the way I would have liked them to be after the transgression against me.<sup>62</sup> Even when we receive justice, we rarely find the injustice gap completely closed. Even knowing the transgressor has been sent to prison for a hit-and-run accident or has paid back the money he took or issued a public retraction of a false allegation, some pain can never be assuaged. Justice does not restore a loved one back to life, or go back in time to undo the pain already lived through, or restore the relationships that have been scarred. There is still an injustice gap. Forgiveness closes it.

Forgiving is not shrugging one's shoulders and saying "that's alright". To do so makes forgiveness a weak and morally questionable pursuit, which seems to justify the attitude of philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who said: "One who makes himself into a worm cannot complain afterwards if people step on him," and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who argued that forgiveness was immoral because it exalted weakness.<sup>63</sup>

This is to confuse forgiveness with overlooking. Overlooking is what one does when the offence is not serious enough, or not of moral significance to warrant forgiveness. For example, one might overlook the fact that a colleague walked past without responding to a morning salutation. Overlooking is excusing behaviour for which there is an excuse. Augsburg

---

<sup>61</sup> Bash, *Forgiveness*, p60.

<sup>62</sup> Worthington, *Forgiving*, pp50-54.

<sup>63</sup> Cited by Bash *Just*, p6.

argues that in the context that is devoid of shared values or moral tolerance, indulgence or denial take the place of forgiveness.<sup>64</sup>

To overlook a serious moral wrongdoing, however, is wrong. Wrongdoing must be named for what it is before it can be forgiven. “When we praise forgiveness we praise a way of addressing evil, not overlooking it.”<sup>65</sup> When we overlook, we make forgiveness *impossible* because we make it *unnecessary*.<sup>66</sup> In doing so, we actually dehumanize the wrongdoer by assuming him or her to be “a morally handicapped being” incapable of being held responsible for his or her actions.<sup>67</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the term ‘cheap grace’ to describe the context in which he found himself in Nazi Germany. He sought to understand why the church in Germany was so passive against the encroaching evil of Nazism. “Cheap grace,’ he said, was the reason. It was “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance; baptism without church discipline; communion without confession, absolution without personal confession”.<sup>68</sup> Cheap grace “justifies the sin instead of the sinner” says Jones, and so made forgiveness irrelevant and required no change in lifestyle.<sup>69</sup> It “anesthetized people” so they were incapable of understanding the cost of forgiveness.<sup>70</sup>

However, forgiveness calls for some sacrifice, some measure of bearing loss, which is not ‘fair’.<sup>71</sup> The victim chooses to live “with the moral scales unbalanced”.<sup>72</sup> He or she has let go the right (whether such a right exists or not, it feels like it does), to have the injury avenged, to hurt as he or she has been hurt. The wrong may not be righted. In that sense, the forgiver must be willing to bear a cost.

---

<sup>64</sup> Augsburg, *Helping*, p114.

<sup>65</sup> Couenhoven, ‘Forgiveness’, p150.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis Smedes, ‘From Forgiveness to Hope’, in Worthington (ed) *Dimensions*, p344.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p344.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Jones, *Embodying*, p13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*., 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*., p14.

<sup>71</sup> Couenhoven, ‘Forgiveness’, p168.

<sup>72</sup> Smedes, ‘From Forgiveness’, p345.

“To endure what one does not deserve means only that one has the opportunity to forgive. Actually to forgive means to exhaust in one’s own being the consequences one has suffered so that those consequences will not cause further damage ... to the victimizer; or to determine that even given the opportunity to cause retaliative damage to the victimizer, one would not do so.”<sup>73</sup>

Anthony and Melanie Bash suggest that one reason people find it hard to forgive is to do with power. In some ways, forgiveness acknowledges and underlines a victim’s powerlessness.<sup>74</sup> But it is in this powerlessness that God’s power to forgive can be experienced in the life of the one who forgives. The cross is a powerful reminder that forgiveness is costly. The resurrection reminds us that God brings life out of death, that the risen one is Judge of all the earth. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead empowers us to live overcoming evil with good. Our eschatological hope strengthens, telling us that there will be an eternity in which our suffering will be seen as momentary and where wrongs will be righted. Meanwhile we are encouraged to work with the God who tells us to love our enemies and offers costly forgiveness to all who will repent, to work for reconciliation.

### **Forgiveness is Not Forgetting**

For many people the oft-repeated maxim “forgive and forget” reinforces their belief that forgiving is only forgiving if we have forgotten. Then, we find that even if we have decided to forgive, we do not forget. So we assume that we have not forgiven and feel guilty. But forgiving does not mean forgetting. In fact, our attempt to forget can be merely to avoid confronting reality, or to deny what has happened.

Forgiving is actively aware. It recognizes the sin, accepts the pain, and reaches out to rebuild or re-create the future. As Miroslav Volf explains in his writing, remembering is both inevitable and necessary for all kinds of

---

<sup>73</sup> Paul Jensen, ‘Forgiveness and Atonement’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 46, p154.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony and Melanie Bash, ‘Early’, p45.

reasons. Memories of the past are part of our identity.<sup>75</sup> They are part of what has made us who we are today. Remembering can mean we work to ensure the offender does not commit the same offence to hurt us or others.<sup>76</sup> Remembering our own pain causes us to empathize with others who have suffered like us.<sup>77</sup> Remembering helps us to heal, so we don't suppress the emotions that overwhelm us.<sup>78</sup> Volf does however warn us that there are right and wrong ways of remembering. We need to remember truthfully, not embellishing the facts or demonizing our enemy.<sup>79</sup> We remember the good as well as the bad about the one who has offended us.<sup>80</sup> We remember with a commitment to use those memories for good and for reconciling. Volf argues that it is only when we reach an eternity with no more sin and suffering that we can finally forget.<sup>81</sup>

Corrie Ten Boom, famous for her endurance of the Nazi concentration camps and her willingness to forgive was once apparently finding it hard to forget an incident she had forgiven. A Pastor helped her by giving this illustration: Imagine you are pulling on a rope that rings the huge church bell in the belfry. When you stop pulling the rope, the bell keeps ringing but the peals get softer and softer and eventually die away. So it is with forgetting. When we forgive, we let go of the rope but if the rope had been tugged for many years, the reverberations continue for some time. "They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."<sup>82</sup>

Forgiving is not one act but a process. As Bash says, sometimes it is a never-ending process.<sup>83</sup> We might genuinely forgive and yet the memories of the wrongdoing come back and with it the attendant feelings of anger, bitterness

---

<sup>75</sup> Miroslav Volf, *End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 2006), p24.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp28-29.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p30.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p44ff

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p15.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p196ff

<sup>82</sup> Attributed to Corrie Ten Boom, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/forgiveness.htm> accessed 4th July 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Bash, *Just* p8.

or even thought is revenge. Forgiveness is something people typically have to revisit if they live with continuing loss from the wrong done to them.<sup>84</sup> This is why to equate forgiving with forgetting, as many do, is a misunderstanding.

Christians can sometimes do more harm than good by telling those who have been wronged that they must forgive immediately. This has two consequences. Firstly, it does not take into account the fact that we should distinguish between those who will not forgive and those who find they want to and cannot because the injuries they have suffered have damaged them psychologically or have caused them to be too broken or de-humanized to forgive. These people need to be helped to get to the point where they can forgive but they must not be forced to commit to an act they do not understand or are not ready to undertake.

Secondly, what can happen in our churches is that the demand to ‘forgive’ is made of victims while wrongdoers are shielded from the consequences of their actions. One area in which this occurs is spousal abuse where the wife is told to ‘forgive’ while the husband is not required to repent or change. What is required of her by the church in this case is not forgiveness because the sin is not named for what it is. The church is asking her to overlook the abuse. There have also been instances where a woman has been told to reconcile with her abuser, perhaps because of the misunderstanding of what forgiveness is.

### **Forgiveness as a Step towards Reconciliation**

As we have seen, some people blur the lines between forgiveness and reconciliation. Others distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation. We would suggest that forgiveness is an act that can be undertaken by the offended alone, though ideally it should be followed by every attempt to reconcile. Reconciliation requires both parties, the wrongdoer and the injured party, to participate fully. The wrongdoer, to repent and seek forgiveness; the injured party, to give the gift of forgiveness. This is the ideal and goal of Christian forgiveness. For the Christian, forgiveness is not

---

<sup>84</sup> Bash, *Just*, p8.

primarily absolution from guilt: the purpose of forgiveness is the restoration of communion, the reconciliation of brokenness.<sup>85</sup>

In one sense, forgiveness is an unfinished act; it will be completed when reconciliation happens. Jesus warns his disciples about anger, and then goes on to say that if believers, about to offer a sacrifice, remembers that someone has something against them, they are to go and be reconciled first and then come back to worship (Matt. 5:23-24). Worship, an expression of obedience and love for God, is incompatible with broken interpersonal relationships which we have made no attempt to heal. We cannot feel we have done everything expected of us until we have explored and exhausted all the avenues available for restored relationships.

However, to the extent that the wrongdoer does not repent, there can be no reconciliation. In some cases, even if the wrongdoer repents, reconciliation may not be possible in the sense that a previous relationship be restored. The obvious example would be in the case of a repentant abuser (who is still unable to control his habit), and the victim of his abuse. To the extent that we cannot be reconciled to those we forgive, forgiveness in a sense is an incomplete act.

Bash describes the relationship that arose between Eric Lomax, a prisoner of War in Burma during the Second World War and his captor. Forced to work on the Burma railway and treated with great cruelty by his captors, Lomax nursed thoughts of vengeance against them. Many years later, however, he had changed and when he met one of his former captors who expressed deep contrition and remorse and who had spent the intervening years attempting to make reparation, Lomax forgave him. Lomax wrote his captor, Nagase Takashi, a letter spelling out his forgiveness and explained each paragraph to him. He said he wanted Takashi to know “the binding and loosening force” of his decision. Lomax bound himself to loosen his anger and hate. Takashi was loosed from the hold of shame and guilt and also from the psychological burden of being unforgiven.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, p5.

<sup>86</sup> Bash, *Just*, p51.

## CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is desperately needed by our divided and hurting communities. Yet, there are so many barriers to forgiving. Volf suggests that today's culture is a culture stripped of grace, in which we relate to one another in one of two ways – either in business-like terms, buying and selling at the right price; or as thieves, stealing what we want from those who are weaker. We are steeped in self-interest. We feel that to give or to be generous is to be a loser.<sup>87</sup> In such a context, forgiveness seems out of place. Added to that, tolerance is seen as the greatest virtue. Morality and ethics are seen as divisive and to be kept private. If there is no right and wrong, there is no reason to repent or forgive. We have to excuse, overlook or get even. In an increasingly individualised culture, where we are content with shallow relationships, there is no need to do the hard work of reconciliation. Relationships are expendable. In an honour-shame culture, admitting we are wrong, or even that we are hurting is difficult. Jones would add that our lives are fragmented, made up of a series of isolated acts. We do not look for integrity of character displayed within a consistent lifestyle. Forgiveness as a lifestyle which demonstrates a quality of character is relatively insignificant.

88

We have seen forgiving is not easy. So, often we pay lip service to it, not thinking too much about what it really is, and the mechanics and morals involved. Or, as Bash says “the who, what, when, why, where, and how” of it. Sometimes we do not forgive, we just learn to live around our conflicts and hurts, trying to forget.<sup>89</sup> Sometimes we may say we forgive, but for the wrong motives – because we fear protracted conflict, we are ‘pathologically passive,’ or even because our moral compass is under-developed and we cannot see the enormity of the wrongdoing and the reparation needed.<sup>90</sup>

Forgiveness when the evil done to us is incredibly deep, like the murder of one's child seems impossible. Those of us who have not experienced such

---

<sup>87</sup> Volf, *Free*, pp14-15

<sup>88</sup> Jones, *Embodying*, p38.

<sup>89</sup> Bash, *Just*, p3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p4.

tragedy feel we cannot speak of forgiveness to those who have undergone such suffering. Yet, there are sufficient testimonies to show us that God enables those who seek to forgive to overcome the 'natural' feelings of hate and revulsion and replace them with supernatural forgiveness and love. The language of forgiveness is multifaceted in the New Testament, and yet, these truths shine through. Forgiveness is possible for us fallen human beings to offer one another because of the lavish, undeserved forgiveness given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we have recognized our own sin, and the need for forgiveness, repented and received salvation, we enter into the Kingdom of God where generosity and forgiveness are characteristics of its citizens. To the extent that we revel in our forgiveness, so we will extend that forgiveness to others. We may need help to do that, the community of believers will support us as we hold one another accountable, weep with one another, give each other space and time to forgive, and long for reconciliation. Forgiveness is not an isolated act, a word, or a feeling. Rather, it is a way of life to be lived. We learn to live it by cultivating certain character traits. For example, a keen sensitivity to sin which allows us to make moral judgements about what can be overlooked and what needs to be forgiven. This sensitivity must extend to our sinfulness. As we recognize our own need for forgiveness, we learn to empathize and offer a compassionate hearing to another's story (even if that involves his or her sin against us), to confess our own sins and repent of them. It requires us to cultivate a deep gratitude for the forgiveness we have received in Christ so that gratitude can "create a path where God's life-giving waters of forgiveness can flow" through us to others.<sup>91</sup> It requires that we learn to embody virtues of forgiveness and let go patterns of unforgiveness.<sup>92</sup> Forgiveness indicates the ongoing priority to offer the "endlessly creative and gratuitous gift of new life in the face of brokenness and sin".<sup>93</sup>

"For Christians, the logic of forgiveness is not essentially a logic that says that everyone deserves a second chance, that bitterness hurts the victim more

---

<sup>91</sup> Worthington, *Forgiveness*, 62.

<sup>92</sup> Worthington offers a path to forgiveness which he calls REACH to help people learn to forgive. *Forgiveness*, 73-145.

<sup>93</sup> Jones, *Embodying*.5.

than the sinner, or that time heals most things. The logic of forgiveness has no foundation other than the Resurrection. Resurrection knows the power of death, yet loves with the force of life. This is the only logic that truly sustains forgiveness".<sup>94</sup> Desmond Tutu's famous dictum: "There is no future without forgiveness," tells us how important forgiveness is if we want a better future with those around us. In another sense, for us as believers it is also true to say there is no real forgiveness without the future God has promised.

---

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Wells. 'A Friend Like Peter: The Logic of Forgiveness'. *Christian Century* 124, no. 3 (February 6, 2007), pp24-25. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 4, 2011) p29.



# **HEBREWS AND WANDERING ARAMEANS: EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF THE JEWISH DIASPORA**

TED RUBESH

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the roots of the Jewish diasporic experience in the Old Testament as it emerged in the foundational patriarchal era. In the process, I will attempt to show how these diasporic antecedents relate to the larger diasporic milieu that characterized much of Israel's Old Testament history. In closing, the paper will also suggest the relevance of this study to the ongoing discussion of the global diaspora environment today.

The movement and migration of peoples around the world is scarcely a recent phenomenon. From the dawn of human history, the story of mankind has been shaped by the multiplication and spread of nations, cultures and ethnicities to the farthest reaches of the inhabitable globe. Man's tendency to both settle and scatter is perhaps nowhere more evident on a macro scale than in the phenomena of global and historical diasporas.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, inherent in the very term 'diaspora' is the idea of scattering and dispersion.<sup>2</sup> A diasporic community is one that by definition has shared the experience of dislocation and uprooting from its place of origin. And yet, wherever

---

1 While acknowledging the ongoing debate about the precise content and meaning of the word diaspora as currently used, in this paper I will follow Robin Cohen's leading in describing diasporas as communities with shared identities such as "language, religion, custom or folklore", that "have settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories", and that maintain some sort of loyalty and emotional links with "the old country". See Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: an Introduction*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997) p. ix.

2 Diaspora is in fact a word found in the Greek translation of the Bible, and derives from the verb "to sow" and the preposition "over"; that is, to sow over a wide area, or "to scatter". See Cohen, pp. 2, 197.

diasporas go, packed in their bags is a human longing for settledness that inevitably finds expression in transplanted and rooted communities around the world.

### **The Global Diaspora and Its Relation to the Jewish Diaspora Experience**

Without a doubt, the study of the modern global diaspora phenomena takes its cue from the diasporic experience of the ancient Jewish community. Indeed, some would argue that such a starting point is almost universally accepted. As Cohen says, "... it is impossible to understand the notions of diaspora without first coming to grips with some central aspects of the Jewish experience".<sup>3</sup> He goes on to add: "All scholars of diaspora recognize that the Jewish tradition is at the heart of any definition of the concept."<sup>4</sup> Contributing to the discussion, Boyarin says: "Diaspora...may be the most important contribution that Judaism has to make to the world...".<sup>5</sup>

This is scarcely surprising. Until recently, with the exception of its more theological use in the New Testament, the very word 'diaspora' was used with almost exclusive reference to the Jewish diaspora.<sup>6</sup> To speak of one was essentially to speak of the other.<sup>7</sup> This, of course, has changed radically in recent years. The diasporic landscape today encompasses a truly global breadth, the word itself now being common currency to describe scattered communities from many ethnicities and nations around the world. Yet, there is no denying its initial Jewish ambience. The simple fact is that the Jewish experience of diaspora has

---

<sup>3</sup> C Robin Cohen, p2.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p21.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel and Jonathon Boyarin, *Generation and the Ground of Diaspora* in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana E Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) p110.

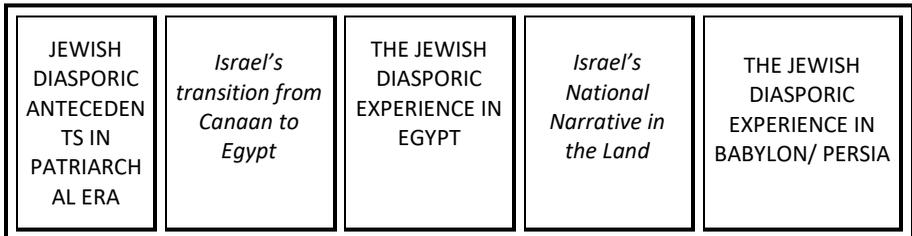
<sup>6</sup> See Narry F. Santos, *Diaspora in the New Testament and Its Impact on Christian Mission*, *Torch Trinity Journal*, (13.1–2010) for a discussion of the New Testament usage of the word diaspora.

<sup>7</sup> In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX), the technical term, diaspora, is found in a dozen passages, generally referring to the "dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles" or "the Jews as thus scattered". See Narry F. Santos, p6. While the specific term has limited employment in the Old Testament text, the fact is that the concept of diaspora and the complex of ideas, events and cognate terms that cluster around it are significantly represented in the Old Testament and make "diaspora" a major theme in the Hebrew Bible.

framed the diaspora discussion and continues to significantly pervade it. Furthermore, it is one of the earliest known, and certainly one of the earliest to be documented in written form as articulated in the Old Testament. For all these reasons it takes a formative place in diaspora studies.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarly study of the Jewish diaspora typically begins with the exile of the Jewish community at the time of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the later part of the sixth century BC.<sup>9</sup> This, however, fails to take into consideration the considerable diasporic import of the nation’s initial experience in Egypt at the beginning of its national narrative.<sup>10</sup> It also tends to bypass the very roots of the community’s diasporic experience at the time of the patriarchs, in particular, in the person of its “founding father”, Abraham himself. The trajectory of the Jewish diaspora experience in the Old Testament in its entirety thus unfolds around three primary sources rather than one: the Jewish diaspora experience in Babylon/Persia at the end of the Old Testament narrative, the Jewish diaspora experience in Egypt at the commencement of its national history, and Jewish diasporic antecedents that preceded these and first emerged in the patriarchal era<sup>11</sup> (cf. Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. THE OLD TESTAMENT TRAJECTORY OF ISRAEL’S EXPERIENCE OF DIASPORA



<sup>8</sup> See also James Clifford, (Diasporas. *Current Anthropology* 9 (3) 1994) p303; B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, (*Spaces of Dispersal*. *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3) 1994) p340; J. Boyarin, (Powers of Diaspora. Paper presented to a panel on diaspora at the International Congress of the Historical Sciences, Montreal, 1995) p5.

<sup>9</sup> See Robin Cohen, p3.

<sup>10</sup> This narrative is found in the last chapters of the book of Genesis and the early chapters of the book of Exodus.

<sup>11</sup> For a full discussion of the ways in which Israel’s experience in Egypt and later in Babylon contribute to the diaspora discussion, see Ted Rubesh, Diaspora Distinctives: The Jewish Diaspora Experience in the Old Testament, Torch Trinity Journal, (13.2 - 2010).

## **Jewish Diasporic Antecedents in the Patriarchal Era**

In Genesis 1-11, we are given a sweeping Biblical vision of the unfolding of human history from the creation of the universe to the global dispersion of humankind at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The dispersal and diversification of humanity into incipient peoples and nations finds its initial expression in Genesis 10, in what is commonly known as the Table of Nations. In this chapter are traced the immediate descendants of the three sons of Noah, whose seventy resultant families and clans become the forbears of the world's developing disbursement of nations in embryonic form.<sup>12</sup>

From the multinational "wide-angle" perspective of the first eleven chapters, the writer of Genesis surprises his readers by suddenly constricting his focus in Genesis 12 to the experience of one man and his wife. The diasporic macro-narrative of human history is reduced to the diasporic micro-narrative of a single couple, Abraham and Sarah. While it is clear that the shift, and the resultant unfolding narrative is driven by the writer's theological concerns, there is much that spills over into the arena of diasporic investigation, for as we have noted above, the Jewish diasporic experience finds its roots and its antecedents in the life of its patriarch. Looked at from this perspective, what does the story of Abraham contribute to the discussion of Jewish diaspora?

## **Patriarchal Diasporic Descriptives**

In the Old Testament books of Genesis and Deuteronomy, two interesting descriptives attach themselves to Israel's patriarchs, each one lending itself to helpful diasporic associations. In Genesis 14:13, Abraham is given the ascription "Abram the Hebrew". In Deuteronomy 26:5, his grandson Jacob is described as a "wandering Aramean". As Jacob clearly inherited his Aramean identity and his wandering lifestyle from his grandfather, we will allow this ascription to be used here as a helpful cipher for Abraham himself, and as an

---

<sup>12</sup> In a broad sense, one could well argue that the diaspora impetus finds its ultimate Biblical origins in God's commands to both Adam and Eve and to Noah and his extended family to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen.1:28; 9:1), as well as to God's sovereign interference in proactively instigating global human dispersion at the time of the tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-7). For further discussion of this see Ted Rubesh, Foundations for the Nations: The Nations in Genesis 1-12 (publication forthcoming).

expression of the diasporic elements of his story (cf. Figure 2). We will discuss each ascription in turn.

FIGURE 2. ABRAHAM: DIASPORIC ASCRIPTIONS AND FOCUS

	ASCRPTION	FOCUS
Deuteronomy 26:5	Abram (Jacob): “a wandering Aramean”	Diasporic Ethos and Disposition
Genesis 14:13	Abram: “the Hebrew”	Diasporic Ascriptions and Associations

### A Diasporic Ethos: Abram the “Wandering Aramean”.

It is nothing but intriguing that the national history of Israel in the Old Testament, bracketed as it is by two major diasporic experiences, should find its catalyst in the personal history of a roving Aramean named Abram.<sup>13</sup> When the reader is first introduced to him in Genesis 11, Abram and his extended family are settled Semitic citizens happily ensconced in the ancient Sumerian city of Ur. Settledness in this cosmopolitan urban centre, however, turns to uprootedness when Abram experiences a divine encounter and is asked to “go forth from (his) country, and from (his) relatives and from (his) father’s house” to “a land” which his God would show to him (Gen.12:1).<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Aram was the Hebrew term for what we know as Mesopotamia, and the general area from which Abram originally came. Thus *Aram-naharaim*, Aram of the Two Rivers (referring to the Tigris and Euphrates), also often called *Paddan-Aram* in the Genesis narratives (Gen. 25:20; 28:1-7; 31:18).

<sup>14</sup> While Abram’s uprooting involved a lengthy sojourn in the city of Haran, it is clear from Acts 7:2-3 that the initial impetus to uproot began in the city of Ur.

In this command, the harbingers of a much broader diasporic experience lie close to the surface, albeit reduced to the level of a fledgling clan. Trans-migration from the natal land, and trans-location into an alien one, together with all of the uncertainties, risks and adjustments inherent in such a move, are recognizable diasporic themes. These were clearly the lot of Abram and his family. His little band eventually finds itself encamped in distant Palestine<sup>15</sup>, vulnerable aliens in a world of indigenous Canaanites, and an Amorite population that had recently migrated from northwest Mesopotamia and settled in the central hill country.<sup>16</sup> Armed with little more than the hope of a divine promise to bless him and make him a great nation, Abram (now Abraham) exchanges his former sedentary lifestyle in urban Ur for that of a semi-nomadic wanderer and ruralist. Living in tents, and pitching them in turn in Shechem, Bethel, Ai, Egypt and Mamre, he and his growing clan and his multiplying livestock move gingerly and (for the most part) diplomatically as newcomers through the length and breadth of the land. Little wonder that the “wandering Aramean” ascription readily affixes itself to Abraham and his progeny.

All the while, like many diasporas that will follow him, Abraham and his immediate descendents steadfastly refrain from thorough social and cultural integration with their host neighbours, stubbornly maintaining their unique ethno-religious identity<sup>17</sup> and proactively preserving filial relations with kinfolk

---

<sup>15</sup> Note that the term “Palestine” used here is a relatively modern ascription for the geographical area lying between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The normative Old Testament ascription for the area is “Canaan”.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) p29. See also Keith Schoville, *Canaanites and Amorites, Peoples of the Old Testament World*, eds. Hoerth, Mattinly, Yamauchi; (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994) p166.

<sup>17</sup> Abraham’s unambiguous refusal to accept the proffered gifts and rewards of the grateful King of Sodom following his victory over the marauding kings of the east (Genesis 14:1-24) is a clear indication of Abraham’s reticence to exchange his distinctive ethno-religious identity for the convenience of moving into mainstream Canaanite culture. The pressure on the patriarchs to do so is also clearly seen in the story of the massacre at Shechem (Genesis 34) when Jacob and his clan are urged by the local Canaanite community to intermarry with them, and to live, trade and acquire property in the land (34:10).

back in the Mesopotamian natal land.<sup>18</sup> And thus to the end, while he and his clan are far from being a nation that can lay claim to diasporic credentials, Abraham projects an ethos of diaspora that casts a catalytic shadow into a diasporic future. It is an ethos that he will pass on to his son Isaac, to his grandson Jacob, and to his twelve grandsons who will eventually provide the tribal framework for the promised nation to come. It is also an ethos that will come to be one of the most enduring characteristics of the Jewish experience throughout history. As Davies puts it:

“...exile has been the distinctive characteristic of Jewish life ... Certain historic facts are fundamental. The Land of Israel was not the birthplace of the Jewish people, which did not emerge there (as most peoples have on their own soil). On the contrary, it had to enter its own Land from without; there is a sense in which Israel was born in exile. Abraham had to leave his own land to go to the promised land.”<sup>19</sup>

In short, the Jewish nation is birthed from the start in a diasporic ethos. Abraham’s experience almost seems to function as a midwife for a far greater experience of diaspora that was in fact to characterize the majority of the Jewish nation’s Old Testament history.<sup>20</sup> Many years later the men and women of Israel and Judah would still be confessing: “I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were” (Psalm 39:12), and “... we are strangers before you, and sojourners like all our forefathers”. (I Chronicles 29:15) An enduring ethos of diaspora is echoed in such statements and often seems a part of the nation’s social “DNA” in the Old Testament.

---

<sup>18</sup> The account of the effort to which Abraham went to seek a wife for his son from amongst his own people is an example of this (Genesis 24). However, the accounts of Esau and then Jacob’s son Judah taking wives from the local Canaanite population are examples of the difficulty the Abrahamic clan faced in maintaining this distinctiveness (Genesis 26:34-35; 38:2ff).

<sup>19</sup> William D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension Of Judaism*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) p63.

<sup>20</sup> If one assumes the history of Old Testament Israel begins with Abram in roughly 2,160bc and ends at about the time of the prophet Malachi in roughly 400bc, this encompasses a period of about 1,760 years. If the years of the patriarchal narratives are defined as “diasporic”, and are then combined with the periods of both the Egyptian and Babylonian/Persian diasporas up to 400bc, this would yield a figure of roughly 960 years of Old Testament Jewish history that were shaped by primarily diasporic experience ... some 54% of the timeline of Israel’s Old Testament story.

This is significant, for while the concept of a Promised Land and its occupancy has always been fundamental in Jewish thought, and indeed was of great importance in maintaining the later cohesiveness of the Jewish diaspora, it is evident that core Jewish identity has never been at the mercy of the vagaries of an actual physical political hegemony over land. The record of Jewish history from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans in AD70 is ample evidence of this. For most of the last 2,000 years, Jewish history has been diasporic history. Referring to the scattering of the Jewish people from the time of the Babylonian exile, Davies remarks:

Disaster at the center did not spell the end of Judaism, but could be, and was, offset and cushioned by its existence elsewhere. From this point of view, exile (*and diaspora* – parenthesis mine) may be regarded as having been the historical condition for the survival of Judaism and Jewry.<sup>21</sup>

Surely the roots of such diasporic tenacity can be traced to Abraham, the “wandering Aramean,” whose legacy of faith, hope, calling and identity bequeathed a vibrant diasporic ethos that enabled his descendents, the “sons of Abraham”, the “children of Israel”, to survive – and thrive – through many difficult and scattered years to come.

### **Diasporic Ascriptions: “Abram the Hebrew”**

The ethos of diaspora that emerges from the Abraham narratives is underlined and heightened by a second descriptive that attaches itself to the patriarch’s name. Not only is Abraham a “wandering Aramean”; he is also Abraham “the Hebrew”.

It is in Genesis 14:13 that the Bible first makes use of the word Hebrew. A great deal of scholarly ink has been spilt in trying to trace the origins of the word and elucidate its associations. At the outset it seems clear that the word is an ethnic designation that finds its etymological origin in the name of Eber, the ancestor of

---

<sup>21</sup> William D. Davies, (*italics mine*) p63.

Abram (Gen.10:2, 25).<sup>22</sup> Thus Abram and the extended clan he came from were “Hebrews” in as much as they were ethnic descendents of Eber their forefather.

The term “Hebrew” (or “the Hebrews”), however, clearly took on wider social associations as the story of the Israelite nation developed. A major reason for this was the ubiquitous presence in the ancient near east of a group of people known variously as the “apiru”, “hapiru” or “habiru” – an ascription strikingly similar to the term Hebrew, and one which virtually all scholars agree shares at least some measure of association with it. The impact, spread, and distribution of habiru clans extended from the Hittite kingdoms in the north to the Egyptian empire in the south, and is extensively attested to in numerous Ancient Near Eastern texts.<sup>23</sup>

The question, of course, is who these habiru were, and in what way they may have been associated with the Hebrews of the Old Testament narratives.<sup>24</sup> The consensus of scholarly opinion thus far is that the habiru were, in fact, not an ethnic group but a marginal social stratum or class that tended to live in bands or clans on the edges of society, and were generally to be found in a broad swath of societies and nations around the ancient near east.<sup>25</sup> Bright describes them well.

The term apparently denoted a class of people without citizenship, who lived on the fringes of the existing social structure, without roots or fixed place in it. At times pursuing a pastoral existence, living either peacefully or by raiding, as occasion offered they settled in the towns.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1981), p94. See also Eugene Merrill, p38.

<sup>23</sup> John Bright, pp94-95.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of the relationship between the two terms, see Moshe Greenberg, *The Hab/piru* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1955). See also Nadav Na'aman, *Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere*, (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, 1986), pp278-85; also Julius Lewy, *Origin and Significance of the Biblical term 'Hebrew'*, (*Hebrew Union College Annual XXIV*, 1957) pp1-13. More recently see Robert Wolfe, *From Habiru to Hebrews: The Roots of the Jewish Tradition*, (New English Review: October 2009) <[http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/fm/48464/sec\\_id/48464](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/fm/48464/sec_id/48464)> accessed 27 May 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Michael B Rowton, *Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the apirû-ibrîm*, (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Jan. 1976) p17.

<sup>26</sup> John Bright, p95.

As such, the habiru are sometimes described negatively as bandits, brigands, mercenaries, fugitives or runaway slaves. They often tended to be viewed as problematic or disruptive elements in society. More kindly, they might be known as rootless refugees, itinerant wanderers, temporary migrants, or displaced people with scant local ethnic affiliations. Negatively or positively, they were seen to be a class of people who tended to live outside the mainstream of settled Ancient Near Eastern society.

As perennial outsiders the habiru undoubtedly shared many of the traits that have characterized diasporas throughout history. Shunted about by circumstances often beyond their control, vulnerable, stateless and often landless, they, like Abraham and his descendents, carried with them a distinctive diasporic ethos. Like him, they were a people apart, seeking to survive by fair means or foul, as strangers in an often dangerous and risky world.

It should come as no surprise then that many scholars have long suspected some kind of connection between the ancient Hebrews and the habiru who were coincident with them. Certainly the diasporic ethos of the patriarchs described above, as well as the often difficult diasporic experiences of the Hebrews later on in Egypt, both bear marked similarities to what we know of the experiences and lifestyle of habiru bands; so close in fact that many are tempted to simply identify the two groups as one and the same. A simple equating of the two, however, is not tenable. The habiru ascription is attested to repeatedly in ancient records in far broader periods of time and in more far-flung places than the Hebrews could ever have occupied. The habiru were a socioeconomic class that was represented by many different races, languages and ethnicities in many different times and places.<sup>27</sup> The Hebrews on the other hand were by definition a contained and well-defined ethnic group, the physical descendents of Eber and Abraham. (c. Gen.10:21; 11:10-26)

However, while one cannot then say that the habiru were necessarily all Hebrews, it can well be argued that the Hebrews, particularly in their formative years, were generally looked on by outsiders as being habiru. In other words, it is likely that the Hebrews were seen by others, as one particular expression of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., Robert Wolfe

larger habiru phenomenon. As we have noted above, the similarities between the two groups were often striking. The two ascriptions themselves are so phonetically similar, it is not difficult to imagine that over time, a considerable merging in the understanding and the use of the terms developed, and that the term “Hebrew” gradually took on some of the more disparaging and negative associations that came with the habiru “package”.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament’s initial ascription of the term “Hebrew” to Abraham in Genesis 14:13, the context is that of Abraham’s mustering of 318 “trained men” (v.13) to pursue the invading forces of four Eastern kings who had plundered five local cities, taking Abraham’s nephew Lot captive in the process. Abraham’s unilateral armed actions, together with his migratory lifestyle and apparent reticence to join “mainstream” Canaanite society, would clearly have been in concert with the image of the quasi-independent roving mercenary that was part of the habiru ethos, undoubtedly solidifying his perceived image as a local habiru chieftain.

The negative associations that typically came with the habiru ascription are never more evident than in the numerous and remarkable references to the habiru found in a large collection of clay tablets discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt towards the end of the 19th century. Many of these tablets consist of letters written during the 14th century BC and sent to the Pharaoh in Egypt from various Egyptian vassal rulers in Canaan. The “Amarna correspondence” as it is called, is filled with complaints about troublesome habiru, who are accused of leading a rebellion against Egyptian rule in Canaan, nominal though it was, and plundering the cities of those local rulers who still remained loyal to the Pharaoh.<sup>29</sup> If one allows the relevant chronological data of the Old Testament narratives to be taken seriously, it is highly possible that some of the habiru mentioned in the Amarna tablets can be identified with the Hebrew conquerors of Canaan under

---

<sup>28</sup> Rowton convincingly demonstrates the dynamic change and interchange of the meanings and content of many ethno-socio ascriptions in history. Some terms, initially used as social descriptions, he argues, evolved into ethnic ascriptions and vice versa. Thus, he posits that the term “*habiru*”, initially a socio-economic ascription, took on ethnic connotations that eventually produced the ethnonym “Hebrew”. See Rowton, pp13-20.

<sup>29</sup> Op. cit., Robert Wolfe.

Joshua.<sup>30</sup> If this is indeed the case, it is not difficult to imagine that to battered Canaanite communities, the two groups were perceived as one and the same. As Merrill says: “To the Canaanites ... ‘apiru were Hebrews and Hebrews were ‘apiru’”.<sup>31</sup>

From this perspective, it is interesting to note the way in which the word “Hebrew” is used in the Old Testament. The first observation is that the word itself is surprisingly seldom used, appearing only 33 times in the Hebrew Bible as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, when it is employed, it is very rarely used by the Hebrews to describe themselves: the term “Israelites” or “children of Israel” clearly being their preferred self-designation. Rather, it is generally found in the biblical text as an epithet on the lips of non-Hebrews in reference to ethnic Israelites, and frequently in a disparaging sense.<sup>33</sup> Nadav Na’aman points out that the use of the term “Hebrew” is especially prevalent “in the stories of the book of Exodus, in which it is applied to Israelites who were enslaved and exploited by the Egyptians for hard labour”.<sup>34</sup> The fact that Egyptian history of the same period also makes frequent reference to the presence of *habiru* slave labour lends weight to the idea that the two terms, phonetically so similar, may frequently have been confused, interchanged or purposely merged as an expression of disparagement by those hostile to the Hebrews.<sup>35</sup> This may well explain the seeming Hebrew reticence in using the term to describe themselves.<sup>36</sup> Thus while the two ascriptions do not appear to be etymologically related, a strong sociological link, pregnant with cultural and historical associations, seems

---

<sup>30</sup> Eugene Merrill, p102. Merrill’s discussion places the date of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan squarely in the period of the Amarna correspondence. See pages 100-108 for his very helpful perspective on the issue.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Robert Wolfe.

<sup>33</sup> Michael B. Rowton, p18. See Genesis 39:14,17; Exodus 2:6; 1 Samuel 4:6,9.

<sup>34</sup> Nadav Na’aman, *Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere*, (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, 1986), p270.

<sup>35</sup> See James Hoffmeir, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp113, 115 for strong evidence of Semitic presence, and specifically *habiru* presence in Egypt during this time.

<sup>36</sup> The *habiru* nuances that attached themselves to the term “Hebrew” apparently faded in later Jewish history, as “Hebrew”/“the Hebrews” gradually became a generalized expression for the people of Israel.

eminently plausible. The habiru, like the Hebrews, were forged in a diasporic milieu. As noted above, they shared many of the same kinds of struggles and challenges diasporas have experienced throughout history.

Thus, to the diasporic ethos that “wandering” Abraham bequeathed the incipient Hebrew people, the habiru loaned the diasporic associations, positive and negative, that came with the habiru name and lifestyle. It was an association that apparently did not die easily. In the mid 8th century BC, some 17 centuries after the time of Abraham (the first Hebrew and “wandering Aramean”), we are introduced to another wandering descendent of Abraham, this time a runaway Israelite prophet named Jonah. Caught “on the run”, at sea in a life-threatening storm, far from the shores of his natal land, he faces a bobbing raft of suspicious interrogators and frightened fellow travellers. Anxious to determine if it is Jonah who has incurred the divine displeasure that has placed them in their predicament, they demand: “Tell us now, what is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” (Jonah 1:8)

Significantly Jonah does not answer by laying claim to a specifically Israelite pedigree. Rather he replies: “I am a *Hebrew* (emphasis mine), and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” (1:9). And, with this rather unusual and atypical self-designation Jonah identifies himself with the diasporic ethos, ascriptions and associations – not to mention the diasporic faith – that are his inheritance as a son of Abraham. It is an identity he shares with multitudes of his fellow Israelites, past, present and future, whose very history in the Old Testament would be shaped and bracketed by major national diasporic experiences in both Egypt and Babylon.

### **The Jewish Diasporic Ethos and the Global Diaspora Today**

It is intriguing that Jonah’s diasporic inheritance is one that he shares not only with his Hebrew ancestors and descendents, but one that he shares with other scattered and far-flung diasporas around the world throughout history. The diasporic legacy of Father Abraham, it is evident, did not stop with the Jewish nation. The ethos that the “wandering Aramean” left to his Hebrew descendants became in fact part of a bequest that has coloured and shaped the larger

phenomenon of diaspora to this day. Every diaspora springs from its own unique complex of historical ethno-social circumstances, and thus may carry little or none of another diaspora's physical or historical "DNA". Certainly the experience of most diasporas around the world would evidence few direct historical links to the Jewish archetype. However, there is no denying that the legacy of Abraham and his scattered Jewish descendents left their mark on the notion or the conception of "diaspora". As has been pointed out in the introduction, the Jewish tradition is at the heart of any understanding of the concept of diaspora. (see pages 1-2).

What this means at the very least is that, while the Jewish diaspora may not have lent specifically historical roots to other diasporas, it has surely lent its ethos to many of them. The spirit of the wandering Aramean and his diasporic descendents pervades. This is evident in the way the language, symbols and stories that have congealed around the Jewish diaspora experience through the years, particularly as expressed in the Old Testament, have often been requisitioned and pressed into service by subsequent diasporas from vastly different origins and eras. Struggling to find metaphors and inspiration to express their own experience of scatteredness, disenfranchisement, and marginalization, they have often found a wellspring of resources in the diasporic ethos inherited from the children of Abraham.

Perhaps no example is clearer than that of the African and Caribbean diasporas in history. Growing out of the horrific experiences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade of the 17th and 18th centuries, the cultures of these diasporas easily found in the Jewish experience, motifs and themes that deeply reflected their own.<sup>37</sup> The lyrics of the negro spirituals that peppered the early black American experience for instance, constantly dipped into Jewish diasporic roots, using Old Testament language of redemption and making symbolic references to "Zion", "Canaan", "Egypt", "the promised land", and "crossing over the River Jordan". "I am a poor wayfaring stranger", sang one plaintive piece, with words that could have come from Father Abraham himself.

---

<sup>37</sup> Robin Cohen, pp31-32.

In his discussion of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, Cohen makes frequent reference to the cross-identification of elements of the Jewish diaspora with movements such as Jamaican Rastafarianism and “Ethiopianism”.<sup>38</sup> Early black advocates such as Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, Cohen notes, thundered in tones reminiscent of the exilic prophets. “No one knows”, Garvey once said, “when the hour of Africa’s redemption cometh. It is in the wind. It is coming. One day, like a storm it will be here”.<sup>39</sup> More recently, one need go no further than many of the speeches made by Martin Luther King Jr. at the height of the American civil rights movement to find such associations. On the night before he was assassinated in Memphis Tennessee, King’s words were ripe with the biblical imagery of an ancient diasporic people being led to freedom by Moses. King said:

(God) has allowed me to go up to the mountain, and I have looked over and I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. ... My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly the vision King had for the scattered and struggling African-American community found its roots in the vision of hope Moses had had for the wandering Hebrew diaspora in his charge. It was a vision that ultimately traced its pedigree to the covenant promises given to a wandering Aramean named Abram and to the tenacity of the diasporic ethos he left in his wake. That ethos continues to colour and give expression to the world of diaspora today.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have sought to explore the roots of the Jewish diasporic experience in the Old Testament as it emerged in the patriarchal era. We have seen how this foundational period contributed both a diasporic ethos and diasporic ascriptions that influenced the shape of the larger Jewish experience of diaspora in the Old Testament narrative. In conclusion we have suggested that the Jewish diasporic ethos, finding its roots in the experiences of Abraham

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp38-39, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Robin Cohen, p41. Quoting R Ottley, *Black Odyssey: the Story of the Negro in America* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1948).

<sup>40</sup> Martin Luther King Jr as quoted by Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001) pp39-40.

himself, has given vision, expression and energy to many struggling diasporas of modern times.

In the seminal covenant that God initially made with Abraham (and often reconfirmed to his Hebrew descendents) the “bottom line” had always been that this was being done in order that “in (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; see also 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Is it possible that included among those many families God envisaged blessing the scattered clans and spreading diasporas that inhabit so many distant lands today? Is it possible that in the God of Abram the “Hebrew”, in the God of Abram the “wandering Aramean”, the scattered nations too, may find their ultimate blessing, belonging, and shalom? Speaking on God’s behalf, the prophet Micah says: “In that day”, declares the Lord, “I will ... gather the scattered ... I will make the outcasts a strong nation” (Micah 4:6,7 personal paraphrase). If that is so, perhaps Abraham’s God may yet be the answer to the leanness and the longings that lie in the heart of the world’s diasporas.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Boyarin J. Powers of Diaspora. Paper presented to a panel on diaspora at the International Congress of the Historical Sciences, Montreal, 1995.
- Boyarin, Daniel and Jonathon. "Generation and the Ground of Diaspora" in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana E Braziel and Anita Mannur, Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1981.
- Clifford, James. *Diasporas*. *Current Anthropology* 9 (3) 1994.
- Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Seattle, Washington, University of Washington Press, 1997.
- Davies, William D. *The Territorial Dimension Of Judaism*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Greenberg, Moshe. *The Hab/piru*, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1955.
- Hoffmeir, James. *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. *Spaces of Dispersal*. *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3) 1994.
- Lewy, Julius. *Origin and Significance of the Biblical term 'Hebrew'*, Hebrew Union College Annual XXIV, 1957.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books 1996.

- Na'aman, N. Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, 1986.
- Rowton, Michael B. Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the 'apirû-ibrîm, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) January 1976.
- Rubesh, Ted. Diaspora Distinctives: The Jewish Diaspora Experience in the Old Testament, *Torch Trinity Journal*, 13.2, 2010.
- Rubesh, Ted. Foundations for the Nations: The Nations in Genesis 1-11, unpublished paper, 2008.
- Santos, Narry F. Diaspora in the New Testament and Its Impact on Christian Mission, *Torch Trinity Journal*, 13.1, 2010.
- Schoville, Keith. Canaanites and Amorites, *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, eds. Hoerth, Mattinly, Yamauchi; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.
- Wolfe, Robert. From Habiru to Hebrews: The Roots of the Jewish Tradition, *New English Review*: October 2009, <[http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/48464/sec\\_id/48464](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/48464/sec_id/48464)> May 27, 2010.
- Yancey, Philip. *Soul Survivor*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001.
- Thomas, M. M., *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1976

# CHRISTIANITY IN SRI LANKA IN THE FIRST THREE DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

G P V SOMARATNA

The early nineteenth century was a period of evangelical awakening in England and America. As colonialism brought increased knowledge of Africa and Asia, the European, British and American churches directed their attention to these areas for evangelism. The movement that became known as Evangelicalism began within the Church of England in the latter part of the 18th century. The start of the 19th century saw an increase in missionary work and many of the major missionary societies were established around this time. The outstanding result of the Evangelical Revival was the formation of several Protestant missions. In 1793, Carey went to India as a missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society. His first letter to England contributed to the creation of the London Missionary Society (1795). The Scottish Missionary Society (1796) and the Netherlands Missionary Society (1797) also appeared soon. Anglican evangelicals set up the Church Missionary Society (1799).

## **Colonial Background**

Colonialism provided legal standing and protection for missionaries. Sri Lanka entered a new period of history in 1796 with the transfer of power in the Maritime Provinces from the Dutch East India Company to that of the British East India Company. The revolt in 1798-9 against the Company administration terminated its rule in the country abruptly. In 1802, the administration of the island was taken over by the British Crown. Therefore, the restrictions on missionary activity prevalent in India in the early years of the East India Company control did not apply to the island. On the contrary,

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of an earlier article published in the *Direction Magazine*, May and June 2011.

the early British rulers were sympathetic to the missionary cause and did whatever was within their capacity to introduce and maintain Christianity in the Island.<sup>2</sup> The termination of the independence of the Kandyan kingdom in 1815, which brought the entire island under the British administration, opened up an area hitherto largely unaffected by Christian missions under laissez-faire missionary activities. The suppression of the abortive war of independence, led by the Kandyan chiefs in 1817-18, placed the British rule in the country on a firmer footing.

### **The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms**

In 1829, the British Colonial Office appointed a Royal Commission of Inquiry to assess the administration of the island. This commission under the leadership of Colebrooke and Cameron, initiated reforms opposed to mercantilism, state monopolies, discriminatory administrative regulations and any state interference in the economy of the colony from 1833. The commission worked to end the administrative division of the country along ethnic and cultural lines into low-country Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese, and Tamil areas. These recommendations affected the Christian missionary work in a significant way. The missionaries could now go to Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, who would normally have been hostile to missionary work among them. Therefore, we have confined this study to the period preceding the introduction of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833.<sup>3</sup>

### **Christianity**

At the time of the British conquest, there were in the island two brands of Christianity, fanatically opposed to each other, both of which were relics of the colonial past. The previous Dutch rulers who controlled the Maritime Provinces had been successful in revoking the gains of the Catholic Church in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, yet they were not able to contribute in a positive way to establish their own Reformed brand of

---

<sup>2</sup> W M Harvard, *A Narrative of the Establishment and Progress of the Missions to Ceylon and India* (London: 1823), p156.

<sup>3</sup> Vijaya Samaraweera, "The Colebrooke Cameron reforms," in K M de Silva (ed.) *University of Ceylon: History of Ceylon*, Vol. III, pp778-88

Christianity in the island. Religion was of secondary importance to the VOC. Profit was its prime objective. In fact, there was a clandestine rise of Buddhism and Hinduism at the turn of the century despite the Dutch laws opposing them. Because of the Dutch administrative policies, there was a group of pseudo-Christians who were in fact Buddhists, Hindus, and Catholics, against whom the Dutch *plakaarts* were especially directed.<sup>4</sup> The bloated statistics of the numbers of baptised Reformed Christians, which claimed almost the whole population of the Maritime Provinces, came to nothing once the Dutch rule ended.<sup>5</sup>

The British administrators were tolerant of all religious affiliations. In fact, they brought in legislation in 1806 to give religious freedom to the Roman Catholics even before England passed such legislation.<sup>6</sup> They added their own Anglican High Church through the Colonial chaplains. The Anglican High Church was represented in the island by a Senior Colonial Chaplain and several other Assistant Colonial Chaplains stationed in Trincomalee, Galle, and Jaffna. After the conquest of the Kandyan kingdom, an additional chaplain was stationed in the city of Kandy.<sup>7</sup> St Paul's Church, which stands at the Dalada Maligawa premises, was opened for Anglican worship in 1817, with George Bisset, the brother-in-law of Governor Brownrigg, as its chaplain.

The task of carrying the Gospel of Jesus to the people of Sri Lanka in the early years of the nineteenth century was a difficult one. The Dutch policy of the previous century had created an irreligious attitude among the people of the Maritime Provinces. Their devious methods of getting converts and the extreme hostility to Roman Catholic Christians created an atmosphere of dishonesty regarding Christianity. Pseudo-Christians were everywhere.<sup>8</sup> This

---

<sup>4</sup> L W Balding, *One Hundred Years in Ceylon* (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1922), p 3.

<sup>5</sup> Van Goor, *Jan Kompanie as Schoolmaster: Dutch Education in Ceylon, 1670-1795* (Wolters-Noordhoff, Groningen, 1978), pp138-140.

<sup>6</sup> V Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The British Period, Vol. 1, 1795-1844: The Colombo Vicariate* (Dehiwela, 1992), pp 63-65. (hereafter Perniola)

<sup>7</sup> C N V Fernando, "Some Aspects of Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Early British Period," *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. VIII, (1950), pp264-271.

<sup>8</sup> *The Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, Volume 1, edited by John Holt Rice, p141.

undermined the seriousness of the Christian faith as a viable solution to the issues facing the people in that period.

### **The Anglican High Church**

The Senior Chaplain and other enthusiastic British leaders paid intermittent visits to various parts of the country, where they were able to assess the religious situation at first hand. In their travels they found a large number of baptised Christians' all over the Maritime Provinces. The Chief Justice, Alexander Johnston (1775–1849),<sup>9</sup> and Senior Colonial Chaplain, T James Twisleton (1770-1824), got first hand information of the religious situation of the country during their routine tours. Claudius Buchanan (1766–1815), a Scottish theologian and ordained minister of the Church of England, in his visits to South Asia in 1806-8, was disturbed by the vast number of Christians in the island who did not have proper pastoral care. Returning to England in 1808, after a period of residence in India, Buchanan published, in 1811, the notes of his travels in South Asia. He stated: "The Ceylon Christians in their present state ... are left to flourish by themselves under the blessing of heaven, without those external and rational aids which have been divinely appointed to nourish the church of Christ."<sup>10</sup> This made the enthusiastic Christian officers of the early British era clamour for missionary presence in the country to look after the spiritual welfare of these 'Christians'. The statistical evidence of the so-called Christians in Sri Lanka encouraged the keen evangelical Christians in England to believe that there was a large population of genuine Protestant Christians in the Island. They also were envisaging using Sri Lanka as a springboard to send missionaries to India, which at that time was closed for missionary endeavour.

---

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Johnstone became a Judge in Sri Lanka in 1806. *The Baptist Magazine* has published a Letter from him dated October 3, 1816. He proposed a Bible Society and other religious societies in 1809 when he went to England. *Baptist Magazine*, p196; *National Monthly Review of Ceylon*, p148.

<sup>10</sup> The Works of the Rev. Claudius Buchanan, LLD, p162

There were sixteen Indian Oratorian fathers serving the Catholics in Sri Lanka in the first decade of the nineteenth century. This remained steady even in 1830.<sup>11</sup> The removal in 1806 of the restrictions placed by the Dutch in the eighteenth century regarding the activities of the Catholics brought freedom to the harassed Catholic community. Governor Maitland wished to secure the support of the Roman Catholics in the planned conquest of the kingdom of Kandy. The Catholics looked up to the British as tolerant administrators who were sympathetic to their cause. However the Indian Oratorian priests of this period were ill-equipped to reap the benefits of the new-found freedom. Their resources and knowhow were suitable to a period where the church was acting clandestinely under the repressive Dutch administration. When they faced open competition from other religious denominations, they were not able to survive and could only blame others for their dismal plight.

Freedom of conscience enabled the Catholics to aspire to hold government jobs. For this purpose, they needed a good knowledge of English. The Oratorian priests were Goans by birth and by training. They were not able to adapt to the change in the local situation after the British conquest.<sup>12</sup> They could not offer an education in English. The Portuguese Burghers, who were Catholics, claimed an elite status among the Catholic population; and, in their petitions to the church authorities abroad called themselves European by descent. The Vicar Apostolic of Calcutta noted that the Lankan Burghers were causing division. Some of them married Protestant partners and lived according to Protestant principles and sent their children to Protestant schools<sup>13</sup>.

### **The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)**

There were three Dutch Predikants remaining in the country even after the British conquest. However, Governor North did not permit them to resume their work as ministers. In the early years of the British era, there was a view

---

<sup>11</sup> A C Dep, *The Oratorian Mission in Sri Lanka, being A History of the Catholic church 1796-1874* (Colombo, 1987), p12.

<sup>12</sup> Perniola, op.cit. pxi.

<sup>13</sup> Bede Barcatta, *A History of the Southern Vicariate of Colombo, Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Montefano Publication, 1991), p35.

that the colony would be handed back to the Dutch when the Napoleonic wars were over. The Treaty of Amiens in 1802, however, eliminated that possibility as Britain decided to retain the ownership of Sri Lanka, which they considered as strategically valuable for their eastern empire.

### **Missionary organizations**

The first missionary organization to assume responsibilities in Sri Lanka was the London Missionary Society (LMS), which was a non-denominational Protestant missionary society formed in England in 1795 by evangelical Anglicans and Nonconformists, largely Congregationalist in outlook and with missionary motives.

The first missionaries sent to Sri Lanka were M C De Vos, J P M Ehrhardt, and J D Palm. The latter came with his wife. They arrived in separate vessels in 1804 and 1805.<sup>14</sup> The LMS missionaries were welcomed by Governor North, who appointed them to serve in the ecclesiastical department under the Senior Colonial Chaplain in areas assigned to them. They were offered a stipend by the government. De Vos was removed from the island on the orders of the governor in 1807 on charges that he was marrying young people without parental consent.<sup>15</sup> Palm and Ehrhardt were transferred from place to place at the orders of the governor. They were placed in charge of government schools rather than assigned evangelistic responsibilities. This curtailed their ability to acquire language skills in Sinhala or Tamil. Later, when the Governor transferred Ehrhardt to Cochin in South India, only J D Palm remained to serve in Sri Lanka until his death.<sup>16</sup> LMS being a non-denominational missionary society had frequently failed to raise the necessary finances for their work in the mission fields. They belonged to many different denominations and churches; all too often their missionaries could only reach a small group of local people and became hard to sustain.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *The Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, Volume 1, edited by John Holt Rice, p141.

<sup>15</sup> C N V Fernando, "Christianity in Ceylon in the Portuguese and Dutch Period," *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. VI, 1948, pp267-288.

<sup>16</sup> S D Franciscus, *Faith of Our Fathers: The Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Pragna Publishers, 1984), p23.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, William (1844), *History of the London Missionary Society* (London: John Snow)

### **The Ceylon Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society**

The religious awakenings in Britain and America fostered the original back to the Bible movement, forsaking all the man-made, man-added religious trappings. The Protestant missionaries needed the Bible in the vernacular languages. In the wake of this environment the Ceylon Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society was inaugurated in Colombo on 1st August 1812. It was an interdenominational organization involved in the translation, publication, and distribution of the Scriptures. The Bible Society was helpful in bringing all the Protestant missionaries to a common table not only for Bible translation work but also to co-operate in other evangelical ventures. As soon as they set up the Society in 1812 they tried to prepare Bibles in the vernacular languages. For that purpose, they made arrangements to get the 1782 Sinhala translation of the New Testament by the Dutch reprinted at William Carey's press in Srirampur (Serampore) in India. In the meantime, the Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist missionaries got together to prepare their own Sinhala version of the New Testament in 1817, and the whole Bible in 1823.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Baptist Missionary Society**

The Baptist Mission began work in Sri Lanka in 1812 with the arrival of James Chater (d.1829). The next missionary, Thomas Griffith, who arrived with his wife in Sri Lanka in 1816, was stationed in Galle, but returned to England in 1817 after opening some schools there. The lack of sufficient personnel was a great drawback to the Baptist Mission. There was a short period without a Baptist missionary in Sri Lanka after the death of Chater in 1829. The next Baptist missionary, Ebenezer Daniel, who served from 1830 to 1839. The Baptists, who had only one missionary in the country for the greater part of this period, confined their activities only to Sinhala-speaking areas.

---

<sup>18</sup> Celestine Fernando and G.P.V.Somaratna, *180 years of God's Word in Serendib*, Colombo: Ceylon Bible Society, 1992, p. 21.

## **The Wesleyan Methodists (WMMS)**

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) originated with the District Auxiliaries, the first of which was founded in Leeds on 6 October 1813, and formed spontaneously for the support of overseas missionary work. This was done without the sanction of the Methodist Conference. They were the third missionary society to arrive in Sri Lanka. The team was headed by Dr. Thomas Coke (1747-1814), who planned to use Sri Lanka as the springboard for his ambitions to evangelize the Subcontinent of India. However, he died on the voyage, and the rest of the team arrived in Sri Lanka in June 1814. Of the remaining team members, James Lynch and Thomas Squance were assigned to Jaffna; William Ault was sent to Batticaloa; Benjamin Clough to Galle; and, George Erskinem to Matara to serve in those mission stations. Other batches of Methodist missionaries began arriving in the island: John McKenny came in 1815, and Samuel Broadbent, John Callaway, Robert Carver, and Elijah Jackson came in 1816. Another batch arrived in 1817. They were Buckley Fox, Robert Newstead, Thomas Osborne, Alexander Hume, Samuel Allen, and Daniel Gogerly. There were other English missionaries who eventually joined the team in the island. This enabled the Methodists to have 73 schools and stations in most of the important towns in the country by 1830.<sup>19</sup>

## **The American Board of Foreign Missions**

The seeds for the American involvement in Jaffna were sown by The Rev Samuel Newell in 1813. Although he spent most of his career in India, particularly Bombay, he was instrumental in starting up the American missionary involvement in Jaffna. The main team of American missionaries arrived in 1816, four years after the founding of the American Board of Commission for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), in Boston. It is interesting to note that missionary activities were allowed in the island while the wounds of the Anglo-American War of 1812 were still fresh in the memory of both nations.

---

<sup>19</sup> W J T Small, *A History of Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964* (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1974), p49; Nimal Mendis, *A History of the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka, 1814-2008* (Colombo: Wesley Press, 2010), p2.

The first missionaries to Sri Lanka were Daniel Poor (1789-1855), James Richards (1784-1822), and their wives, together with Edward Warren and Horatio Bordwell. Governor Brownrigg (11 March 1812 – 1 February 1820) welcomed them with enthusiasm.<sup>20</sup> However, he instructed them to confine their mission to the Jaffna peninsula. The Americans were the most affluent of the Protestant missionaries, and their missionary policies did not display the inhibitions of the English missionaries who were directly related to the colonial power. In 1819, the mission received John Scudder, Miron Winslow, Levi Spaulding, and Henry Ward. John Scudder was their first medical missionary.

The American Mission, throughout its history, restricted its evangelistic and educational work to the Tamil-speaking Jaffna Peninsula. “Both through the variety of its missionary work and through the enterprise with which it overcame the problems that assailed this work, the mission gave promise to the very fruitful contribution it was to make in the course of its history to the religious, cultural and social life of the Tamils in Ceylon.”<sup>21</sup> They founded a Seminary at Vaddukodai in 1823. It became the first college in Sri Lanka which prepared students for university degrees. The American Mission was able to place Jaffna a step above the rest of the country in cultural achievements through their schools and philanthropic work. By 1848, 105 Tamil schools and sixteen English schools were founded. Mission centres were soon opened in nine locations.

### **The Church Missionary Society**

The Church Missionary Society (CMS), founded in 1799, was a group of evangelistic societies working with the Anglican Communion and Protestant Christians around the world. Most of its founders were members of the Clapham Sect, who were an elite group of active evangelical Christians. The first group of five missionaries to Sri Lanka arrived in 1818. They included Samuel Lambrick, who was stationed in Colombo; Benjamin Ward, who was

---

<sup>20</sup> American Missionary Register, Vol. 4, 1823, pp. 257-264; S. Jebanesan, *The American Mission Seminary (1823-1855) and Modern Education in Jaffna*, Colombo: Jochithra Printers, n.d., pp152-177.

<sup>21</sup> C N V Fernando, “Christian Mission,” *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. IX, 1951, p200.

given charge of Kalpitiya and Mannar; Robert Mayor, who was sent to Galle; and, Joseph Knight, who was assigned to Jaffna.<sup>22</sup> In 1826, the CMS had four principal mission stations in Nallur, Kotte, Baddegama and Kandy.<sup>23</sup>

## **Early Missionaries**

These early missionaries shared a number of common characteristics. All of them were individualistic in their views of salvation. They were very friendly and open to working with the people and their fellow missionaries. These missionaries were the pioneer missionaries; as such, within a short time after their arrival in the country, they were separated from the team and sent to various parts of the island. All of them came from English-speaking countries: England and America. If the Protestant missionaries had anything more in common, it was that they were all anti-Catholic. This was significant in Sri Lanka, where the majority of the Christians were Catholics. Most of the first converts to Protestant churches were also from Catholicism.

The main aim of the missionaries of this era was the conversion of the people of the country to their particular brand of Christianity. While there are occasions of cooperation among the Baptists and Methodists in the south, and the Anglicans and the Americans in the north, the converts were normally taken to their own churches. The creation of separate Christian communities under these missionary organizations restricted Christian unity and the ability of the small Christian community to expand. They created divisive tendencies within the small body of protestant Christians. This kind of fragmentation of the Christian faith became a stumbling block to the growth of the Gospel in the soil of the land. They were even ready to fight for petty issues caused by denominational differences. The small number of converts to these brands of Christianity curtailed the ability of the local Christians to find marriage partners within their form of Christianity which the missionaries insisted on. The duplication of resources continued to be a luxury in a period where united action was needed to embark on a successful

---

<sup>22</sup> L W Balding, op. cit., p56; 208

<sup>23</sup> L W Balding, op. cit., p56.

evangelization programme in a country where the majority was non Christian.

### **Tools of Evangelism**

The early missionaries used three, four in the case of Americans, methods to introduce the Gospel to the people in Sri Lanka. The first was preaching. They used this method in churches, schools and public places, initially with the help of interpreters. Preaching in public places was a method introduced in England in the period of the Evangelical awakening which was later introduced to America in a bigger way. It was with this method in mind that the missionaries mastered the languages of the island. The main languages that they encountered in the cities were Sinhala, Tamil, and Indo-Portuguese.

The second method was teaching, and for this purpose they set up schools in all parts of the island. All the missionary societies opened schools even before they set up churches in various parts of the island. They were mostly vernacular schools except in the case of the Americans, who introduced English education from the very early years. Christian missionary societies became active in the field of education. The Church's monopoly of education in the island continued even after the Colebrooke reforms. It was accepted without question that the aim of education was primarily the conversion of the people to Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

The third method was the publication of Biblical and evangelistic literature. For this purpose, they set up printing presses and embarked on their own translations of the Scriptures into native languages. Sinhala, Tamil and Indo-Portuguese translations were attempted with some success. The four Gospels were translated into the Pali language for evangelism to the Buddhist monks. An Indo-Portuguese translation of the New Testament was published in 1827. The Tamil work was assigned to the Bible Society in Madras (1820) while the Colombo Auxiliary gave the first place to Sinhala translations.

---

<sup>24</sup> K M de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organization in Ceylon 1840-1855* (London, 1965), pp29-137; Swarna Jayaweera, "Religious organizations and the state in Ceylonese education," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Jun., 1968, pp159-170.

The Dutch printing press which functioned from 1737 till the end of the Dutch rule in 1796 was defunct by this time. The Methodists were the first to start a printing press in 1815, in Colombo. Next was the CMS Mission in Kotte, in 1822. The Americans who brought a printing press could not use it till 1830, as Governor Barnes (18 January 1824 – 13 October 1831) ordered the missionaries who brought the press to leave the country. The press was handed over to the CMS Mission in Jaffna. The Baptist printing press was set up much later in 1840 in Kandy. On the other hand the Roman Catholics were able to acquire a printing press only in 1869.

The Americans, in addition to these three methods, used medicine as an evangelistic tool. Their first missionaries had one year's medical training. The first fully qualified medical missionary was John Scudder (1793-1855) who arrived in Jaffna in 1829.<sup>25</sup> These missionary groups found better acceptance as they came with Western technology, medicine, education, and other facilities to develop Sri Lanka's infrastructure.

In addition, these missionaries held religious crusades in several towns to attract people to Christianity. Giving gifts was also a proven method of securing religious allegiance in this period. The American missionaries even went to the extent of offering dowries to the girls who were educated in their boarding schools in 1820s.<sup>26</sup>

### **Women's Work**

The Evangelical movement, which dominated Anglo-American societies during the nineteenth century, had a profound and complex influence on the life and worldview of women in the mission field. It was believed that women were more religiously inclined. Extensive activities of women missionaries took place in the second part of the nineteenth century. The missionaries realised very early that the work among women had to be performed by women, and could be liberating and empowering both for Western women

---

<sup>25</sup> Waterbury Jared Bell (1870) *Memoir of the Rev. John Scudder, M.D.: Thirty-six Years Missionary in India*, Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, New York, retrieved 7/19/2007

<sup>26</sup> Chales R A Hoole, *Modern Sannyasins; Protestant Missionary Contribution to Ceylon Tamil Culture* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1995), p246.

going out as missionaries and for the women being exposed to mission education. Single women missionaries were rare in this period. There is no instance of a single woman missionary in this period in Sri Lanka. However, the missionary wives were able to carry their religious influence beyond the realm of their families. Many of them made a great impact on society. They were able to take care of children and to take part in female education. Bible Women functioned as teachers, interpreters, Bible readers and evangelists.<sup>27</sup> As most of them were nationals, their impact on evangelism among women who were not accessible to others was commendable. Bible Women were usually employed by the branches of the Ceylon Auxiliary Bible Society and local mission stations. They worked under the guidance of the the missionary wives of the area.<sup>28</sup>

Missionary wives came to Sri Lanka with their missionary husbands to serve. Many of these ladies died on the mission field long before their husbands. Daniel Gogerly was bereaved four times. There were others who outlived their husbands and continued in Sri Lanka as single women missionaries after the death of their husbands. Although missionary wives served in a multitude of capacities in the mission work with their husbands, their first responsibility was to their husbands as wives, and to their children as mothers. Most women missionaries of this period made a great contribution to female education.

The American missionaries also took important steps to provide educational opportunities for women. Harriet Winslow founded the Uduvil Girls School in 1824, the first girls' boarding school in the Island.<sup>29</sup> Eliza Agnew from Pennsylvania was a teacher there for 42 years. Their first aim was to train Christian wives and mothers and to bridge the intellectual gap between

---

<sup>27</sup> R L Rajapakse, "Christian Missions, Theosophy and Trade: A History of American Relations with Ceylon, 1815-1915," Ph.D Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1973, p243; Fernando and Somaratna, *180 Years of God's Word in Serendib*, p13.

<sup>28</sup> James L. Barton, "Bible Women in Ceylon and India," *Life and Light*, 32, May 1902, pp107-108.

<sup>29</sup> Miron Winslow, *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil* (Madras: P R Hunt, 1862).

husbands and wives. The impact of the missionary enterprise is, even today, considerable on girls and women in Sri Lanka.

### **Difficulties**

The story of Protestantism in Sri Lanka is one of meagre success in this period. The first missionaries faced several problems at the start. Unlike Catholic missions and the Catholic Christian community, which formed a somewhat whole community, Protestantism was as divided in the island as in Europe and America.<sup>30</sup>

The first missionaries came from Europe in several batches. Many of them did not expect to return to their motherland in this period of hardship of travel and pioneering work. Prior to the opening of the Suez Canal, ships travelling between Europe and Asia had to sail around the Cape of Good Hope. This journey was often a perilous one, spanning the duration of 120 days. Ships could not sail during certain periods of the year as winds were not always favourable. Many of the missionaries who had desired to serve in Sri Lanka died during this travel to and from the island.

Early missionaries did not have the advantage of the knowledge that later exploration and research brought. They lacked an adequate knowledge of local culture and religions. European research on Buddhism and Hinduism came later. In fact, some of these missionaries were among the pioneers in studies of these religions. Daniel Gogerly, who arrived in 1818, became the pioneer of Buddhist studies among Europeans.

### **Tropical Climate**

The local climate and other hazards were new to these missionaries. Yet, they ventured into an unknown world because of their enthusiasm for evangelism. Among the problems that the early missionaries faced were the tropical climate and disease. Difficult terrain and uncharted territory along with the ever-present danger of encountering hostile people made spreading the

---

<sup>30</sup> K M de Silva, *Religion, Nationalism and the State in Modern Sri Lanka* (University of South Florida. Monographs in Religion and Public Policy (No.1) 1986). p116.

Gospel very challenging. The perils of their position, as well as its solitude, seem to have greatly and painfully affected them. They were affected by unhealthy anxiety. There was no society in Sri Lanka that was congenial to them. The English residents were kind, but most of them had little sympathy with their work, or belief in it. The missionaries who had to reside in rural areas often lost their babies at birth. Letters from England came, but with long lapses of time.

### **Married Men**

At first the missionaries were married men who brought their families along. It was in the twentieth century that single women came as missionaries, as at that time the mission agencies were willing to accept single women as missionaries. Married missionaries had to look after their families. The wellbeing of their children and wife was their priority. Some missionaries had to leave their ministries at the point of success because of the ill health of a family member. Many missionaries were shattered by the death of their family members as a result of tropical illnesses.

### **Nominal Christians**

In 1805, the records state that in Sri Lanka: "One hundred thousand of who are called Christians, because they are baptized, need not go back to heathenism, for they never had been anything but worshippers of the Buddha."<sup>31</sup> The missionaries stated that nominal Christianity was the chief enemy of the Christian faith. The Baptist Missionary Society was informed in 1813 that there were about 280,000 nominal Christians<sup>32</sup>.

At the beginning, the missionaries were misled by the vast numbers shown in the Dutch statistics. Alexander Johnston and other British officials were keen on getting missionaries to work among these "Christians" who were without instruction and sacraments<sup>33</sup>. On his visit to England, in 1809, he conferred with William Wilberforce to consider Sri Lanka as a field of mission. The

---

<sup>31</sup> C N V Fernando, op. cit. p200

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p203.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid , p201.

missionaries were disturbed by nominal Christians, who tried to hold onto both religions together, taking part in Buddhist or Hindu ceremonies. This system of duplicity was perceived by the missionaries as hypocrisy.<sup>34</sup> For the Hindu and the Buddhist, on the other hand, it was another way of collecting good karma.

When, in 1826, Clough of the Methodist Mission asked what religion they professed, a villager replied him: "I am a Buddhist of the Christian religion."<sup>35</sup> According to Clough, 999 out of every 1000 "Christians" would be of this category. This was a result of the Dutch administrative policy, where everyone had to be registered as a baptised Christian in order for their offspring to inherit property. Baptism became a symbol of citizenship. The Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century were disturbed by this phenomenon since they expected a personal faith in every Christian believer. On the other hand, false profession of Christianity dispelled the chance of introducing the true faith.

In 1819 when there was a smallpox epidemic, the parents of the Methodist church in Wellawatta took their children to make offerings to the goddess Pattini. The *kapuwa* organized a group of villagers to harass the Christians in the area.<sup>36</sup> On several occasions many schoolmasters were dismissed from the employment of the mission for professing heathenism.<sup>37</sup> They found that in "some places discarded schoolmasters are making more evil than all other influences united."<sup>38</sup> Even in places like Moratuwa, many so-called Christians continued their traditional religious practices.

---

<sup>34</sup> C N V Fernando, op. cit. p76

<sup>35</sup> W J T Small, *History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, 1974, p78.

<sup>36</sup> Small, op. cit, p. 53; Nimal Mendis, *A History of the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka, 1814-2008*, Colombo: Wesley Press, 201, p7.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Spence Hardy, *Jubilee Memorials of the Wesleyan Mission, South Ceylon: 1814-1864* (London: The Wesleyan Mission Press), 1864, p193; Small, op. cit. p57.

<sup>38</sup> Hardy, op. cit., p193.

## Great Opportunities

The missionaries often reported to their headquarters of the vastness of the opportunities before them and requested more missionary personnel. The conquest of the kingdom of Kandy opened a huge area which had not had experience of Christianity in any considerable way. However, there was lack of proper transport in many parts of the country. Wild beasts and natural calamities like floods prevented their movements. Therefore, the service that a minister could offer was curtailed in this period. It was only when the roads for transport were improved after the Colebrooke reforms that the interior of the country was open for outside influence.

## Conversions

Conversions in this period were very slow and few. There is no evidence of any mass conversions in this period comparable to the Portuguese era. Protestant missionaries insisted on the conversion experience; therefore, individuals rather than groups were attracted to the faith. Such individuals were rare and even when they came they often had motives other than religious faith. The local elite, which included some Kandyan nobles, who were guardians of Buddhism in the Kandyan kingdom, had prestige and power in their mind in seeking baptism within a short period after the British conquest.

## Apathy

The first missionaries were perplexed by the apathy of the "Protestant" population in Colombo.<sup>39</sup> Rev Chater of the Baptist Mission wrote: "Indeed, from among men whom I expected my congregation chiefly to count, we have scarcely any hearers at all."<sup>40</sup> When Hendrick Siers, the assistant pastor of the Baptist Mission visited Biyagama in 1816, he found that the people were not disposed to listen to him even in places where five to six hundred

---

<sup>39</sup> Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p198.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

were nominally Christian. The people supposed “to be of the Reformed Religion” did not respond to him. Referring to an event in Hanwella, in 1832; Rev Ebenezer Daniel of the BMS reports: “Sometimes, in answer to invitations to attend, the Singhalese ask: ‘What will you pay us to do so? Will you give us arrack, if we listen to you?’ If not thus coarsely insolent, they will invent some excuse to get away; and if sent to ask their friends to attend, they go, but do not return.”<sup>41</sup> The attitude of the people to Christianity was, thus, at a low level in this period.

### **Early Converts were Catholics**

After several years of service in the country, Rev. Chater could perform only three adult baptisms. One of them was Hendrick Siers of the Dutch Reformed Church. Of the other two, one was a Roman Catholic, and the other was a Buddhist monk. The first converts to Methodism also came from the Roman Catholic background. In Negombo, the conversion in 1826 of two Roman Catholics, Don Daniel Pereira and his son Daniel Henry, opened the door for Methodism in this Roman Catholic stronghold. The Methodist strongholds of the twentieth century such as Katunayaka and Moratuwa and Chundikuli in Jaffna were in traditionally Catholic areas.

The Protestant missionaries regarded Roman Catholic belief and worship as superstitious and idolatrous, “only one degree above heathenism”.<sup>42</sup>

### **Buddhist Monks**

There are several reports about the conversion of Buddhist monks to Christianity in this period in all Christian missions serving the Buddhist area of the country. Missionaries made a sensational issue of such events and gave such conversions every possible publicity. They also reported these events to their mother churches with much enthusiasm. This was because of the impression that the conversion of monks would lead to the fall of Buddhism. The missionaries expected much from the converted monks. They believed that their conversion would encourage others to follow them, and therefore,

---

<sup>41</sup> J E Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, London, 1850, pp281-82.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p82.

made these conversions very public. Petrus Panditasekara who was a monk of the Siam Nikaya, was baptised in the Anglican Church in 1814, a year before the conquest of Kandy. Therefore, he had connections with the Kandyan Goyigama community. The next prominent conversion was that of Kapugama Dhammakanda Thero, who was baptized in 1815 as George Nandoris de Silva. He was the founding father of the Amarapura sect of Buddhism.<sup>43</sup> The next, in 1819, were Muniratana and Dhammarama who received the baptismal names Adam and Alexander. The Buddhist monk who received baptism under Rev. Chater was named Theophilus. He died in 1822. Another monk was baptized in 1824.<sup>44</sup> In 1826, Sutherland of WMMS baptized a bhikku named Sri Buddharakkhita who took the name of John Cornelius. Several other Buddhist monks received baptism from Baptist, Methodist, and CMS missions. The Methodist Chapel at Kalutara was crowded on March 27, 1827 when an ex-monk was baptised.

As monks they had commanded the respect and veneration of the Buddhist laity. The absence of this respect frustrated them once they became lay persons. Formerly, while in their clerical robes, they did not have the ability to associate with women. When they became Christian, they made full use of the opportunities to compensate for the restrictions that they had undergone earlier. As a result, the character of many of them with regard to females became an embarrassment to the missionaries. The Methodist missionary, Thomas Hardy, mentioned that the behaviour of a certain ex-monk "added one more to the long list of baptized priests over whom the church was called upon to weep."<sup>45</sup>

The conversion of preeminent monks made Buddhists hostile to Christianity. They abandoned the tolerant attitude they had maintained at the beginning of the British rule.<sup>46</sup> The Methodist church at Dadalla, the seat of Kapugama Dhammakkhanda Thera, had to be abandoned as a result of hostilities from

---

<sup>43</sup> Young and Somaratna, op.cit, pp 57-58.

<sup>44</sup> *Lankalankaraya*, p13.

<sup>45</sup> R S Hardy, *Jubilee Memorials Of The Wesleyan Mission, South Ceylon: 1814-1864*, (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1865), p206.

<sup>46</sup> Paranavitana, 'Conversion of Kapugama Dhammakkhanda' JRAS(B)NS, 1983: 123.

the villagers after the conversion of their monk.<sup>47</sup> Contrary to the expectations of the missionaries the dividends derived from the huge investment on conversion of monks was a failure. In fact, missionaries repented of their attempt to convert monks because of the ill repute it brought to them. When they were ostracised by their relatives, they became a burden to the mission compound. As monks, they lacked any economically valuable skills, other than the knowledge of Sinhala and Buddhism. Even there some monks did not live up to the mark. Some of them received employment in the ecclesiastical department of the government. Some were trained as assistant pastors of Christian missions.

### **Caste Conflicts**

The Sri Lankan caste system describes the system of social stratification and social restrictions in which social classes were defined by several endogamous hereditary groups. The two communities, Sinhala and Tamil shared a common caste system in this period. In fact, the two censuses of 1811 and 1827 indicated caste rather than ethnicity as the distinguishing factor. However, the Sinhala community lacked the top and the bottom of the Hindu caste system; that is, they did not have groups equivalent to Brahmins or outcastes. This social stratification was a hindrance in the eyes of the missionaries with regard to their evangelistic purposes.

Even before the arrival of the Protestants, the Catholic priests had complained that in their ministry they had to contend with situations arising out of caste differences. Since most of the Oratorians were Brahmins they were acceptable to all. These disputes created problems for them. In 1809, a Goyigama Catholic objected to the publishing of banns of a Salagama couple on the grounds that they used the honorifics *Appuhamy* and *Hamine*. Even in the same village, separate congregations had to be maintained in order to avoid caste disputes.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 59.

<sup>48</sup> Malalgoda, op. cit., p45.

American missionaries had to face the caste problem in their schools and churches, at the beginning. The situation was worse in their boarding schools. The Vellala caste objected to the presence of “low caste” people not only in schools but also in churches. Since the Americans wished to evangelize the high echelons of the society, they later, in 1832, began to confine their missionary activity to the Vellala caste, abandoning the other castes, which were really in need of social as well as spiritual emancipation. Missionaries faced difficulties in their schools when they appointed lower levels of the caste ladder to serve the higher ones. There were riots and disturbances caused by this action. Manifestations of caste in the church were several although they varied in number and degree in some denominations and congregations more than in others. It tended to divide congregations and stunt their growth by keeping out members of other castes as unwelcome. The Christians who lived in an environment dominated by the caste-minded Hindus also refused to eat beef as it would make them lose status with the Hindus. Due to the pressure of the dominant Vellala caste, who formed the majority of their converts, the American missionaries were ready to betray their Christian principles in exchange for a growing membership.<sup>49</sup> They employed the Koviya caste as cooks, in keeping with the Tamil caste tradition. They maintained separate kitchens based on caste for day-schools. In 1825, the American Mission took the decision “that they would admit only girls of good caste who have some property; such girls would make suitable companions for the boys in Batticotta” who were of high castes. It seems that this flexibility, which was adopted with a view to acquiring more converts, was accompanied by a visible deterioration of the values of Christianity. In 1847, the admission of an untouchable student in the Wesleyan Central School in Jaffna, caused nearly half the student body as well as some members of the teaching staff to leave the school and to join Arumuga Navalar’s Hindu school which only catered for Vellalas. This Hindu Vellala school also took the chief Tamil teacher of the Wesleyan school who was a Christian, to be its headmaster. In the face of such severe opposition on the part of some Christians and of practically all the Hindu community, caste

---

<sup>49</sup> R L Rajapakse, op.cit., pp188-200; Piyaratna, *Education in Jaffna*, Ph.D. Thesis. At the time of the census of 1827, the population in the Maritime Provinces was 505,105 as against 290,469 in the Kandyan Provinces. The total population of the country was 885,574.

observance continued to be tolerated in Christian institutions.<sup>50</sup> However, all denominations officially offered a kind of lip service against the caste system in their policy statements.

Although there is no official sanction of caste system in Buddhism, the caste problem in the church remained unsolved in the Sinhala areas as well. In fact, the Buddhist sangha had become custodians of the caste system by segregating their orders (nikaya) to certain castes. There are reports of high caste pupils boycotting Christian schools which were manned by schoolmasters of lower castes.

### **The Education of Girls**

Tamils as well as Sinhalese of this period did not consider the education of women as useful. In fact, there was a belief that literate women were rendered useless as wives. This caused negative effects in the marriage market. Since most clerks and workers in this period were Christian men, the need for educated women was an issue that the missionaries encountered. However, the missionary wives and Bible Women gained entry into conservative houses as teachers, where they read stories, taught needlework, and attempted to convert the women to Christianity.<sup>51</sup>

The education of women would be counter-productive if they were sent back into a society which condemned female education. The prejudices had to be eradicated with the growth of schools for girls. The first school for girls was opened by the ABCFM in 1819, at Jaffna. Another school which was opened in 1821 had to be given up as a result of opposition. The Americans had two types of schools for women in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first was the day-school and the second was the boarding school. In the day-schools the girls were taught reading, writing and Christianity. However, at the beginning, neither the “master nor girls could endure the ridicule and reproach of the people.” Soon, however, the prejudices began to disappear. In 1823, a day-school for girls was established in Jaffna without much

---

<sup>50</sup> R L Rajapakse, op.cit., pp188-200.

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Tucker, *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp40-343.

opposition. In 1827, there were 13 day-schools exclusively for girls. In 1824, the Female Central School at Uduvil was opened to play a major role in the female education in the peninsula. The institution was to isolate girls from their non-Christian environment and socialize, educate and convert them. The American missionaries recognized the need for the education of women much more than their British colleagues. However, there was a dire need for female teachers where there were none.

Those admitted around 1824 to the female schools were poor, or of low caste, and did not enjoy any prestige in the community. Missionaries recognized that education alone was an insufficient basis for a respectable life. Each girl in the school was supported at the expense of some benefactor in America, and the girl was named after them. In 1826, the mission also decided to give a dowry to each graduate of the institution upon marriage. The male graduates of the Vaddukoddai College were encouraged to marry the girls of the Uduvil Girls School. In 1832, a change in the caste structure at the Uduvil School was observed. From that year onwards there were candidates for school admittance from “respectable families” only.<sup>52</sup>

There were no avenues for employment of educated women in the early stages. The role was still that of wife and mother. According to the social customs prevailing at that time, education would make them unfit for these traditional roles. In 1837, the mission resolved to employ the graduates of the Uduvil institution as teachers on its staff. From 1834, the mission tried to train the girls to prepare them to be teachers in addition to their roles as wives and mothers.

The combined efforts of the Wesleyan, Baptist, CMS, Roman Catholic, and the Government schools towards female education in Sri Lanka were not equal to the achievements of the American Mission. Their contribution to the education of females in the north in the nineteenth century made the Vellala community of Jaffna the most sophisticated class of Sri Lanka in this period.

---

<sup>52</sup> C.R.A. Hoole, *Modern Sannyasins: Protestant Missionary Contribution to Ceylon Tamil Culture*, Berne: Peter Lang, 1994, p.261.

### **Division among Christians**

At the beginning of the British period, because of the freedom of religious conscience granted by the British, the division of the Christian church became visible to the people in Sri Lanka. The Protestant missionaries treated Roman Catholics almost as non-Christians, and made every endeavour to convert them to their brand of Christianity. There was cooperation among the Protestants in areas of Bible translation and pulpit sharing. However, when converts were gained they made every attempt to keep them within their denomination. Sometimes, these denominational lines reflected the caste divisions among the people. Therefore, traditional social divisions continued with a subtle finesse.

### **The Facility to Register Marriages**

Following the Dutch practice, Governor North ordered all Protestant parents to send their children to the schools maintained by the government. The local teachers who served the Dutch Church were entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out these orders. A register of marriages, births, and deaths continued to be kept in each school. Preachers conducted divine services in the churches in major cities, while the Christian activities of the rural areas fell within the orbit of the school masters. However, this facility was confined to the Anglican establishment in this period.

The Baptists and Methodists were very much interested in the civil registration in their churches. But they had to get their marriages registered in an Anglican church. The Anglicans were not willing to dispose of their monopoly lightly. The power of registration gave them an advantage over other Christian groups in the matter of converting people to Christianity. There was no civil registration till the introduction of the Registration of Marriages, Births and Deaths Ordinance No 6 of 1847. Therefore, it was necessary to resort to the registers of the Anglican Church.<sup>53</sup> Very often the national assistants of the Anglican establishment took advantage of this procedure to persuade people to attend Anglican churches.<sup>54</sup> The Baptists,

---

<sup>53</sup> K M de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon*, 1965:53.

<sup>54</sup> R S Hardy, *Jubilee Memorials*, 1847:14.

Methodists and the American missionaries had a grievance against this existing system. They could solemnize marriages, but could not publish banns of marriage or register marriages and baptisms.

### **Problems from the Government**

The early British officers were, in principle, sympathetic to missionary activities. However, views differed from time to time depending on the conviction and motives of the governor of the period. The first, Governor Frederick North (1798-1805), was helpful to Christian activities. He tried to resuscitate the schools that the Dutch government had maintained, which had fallen into decay after the British conquest. However, he did not allow the missionaries to function freely. In fact, he prohibited the three Dutch predikants remaining in Sri Lanka to take part in the religious work which they did under the Dutch administration. The second British Governor, Thomas Maitland (1805-1811), did not have the enthusiasm that North had; therefore, he stopped offering financial aid to the government school system for economic reasons. The government school system again went through a period of neglect.

It was in the period of Governor Robert Brownrigg (1812-1820) that the Baptists (1812), Methodists (1814), and CMS (1818), as well as the Ceylon Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1812) began work in Sri Lanka. He also permitted the American missionaries of the ABCFM when they arrived in the island for missionary work in 1816, allowing them to minister to the people of Jaffna. However, the next governor, Edward Barnes (1824-1831), did not offer the same kind of tolerance to the second batch of American missionaries to work in the country. He confiscated the printing press they brought and handed it over to the CMS Mission. However, the British officers in the island were guided by the colonial office, which was heavily influenced by Anglican Evangelicalism in this period.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> K.M. de Silva, *Social policy and missionary organizations in Ceylon, 1840-1855*, London: Pelican, 1965, p 120.

## Pioneering Work

Missionaries of this period had to learn the local languages. The main languages of this period were Sinhala, Tamil, and Indo-Portuguese. Indo-Portuguese was the language in many urban centres of coastal Sri Lanka. Most of them had remained Roman Catholic in spite of the hostilities of the Dutch regime in the previous century. The early Protestant missionaries first encountered them because they lived in cities where missionaries went to work and reside. Indo-Portuguese was a dialect of the Portuguese language. Therefore, the missionaries could acquire it with ease. The New Testament was translated and published in this language in 1829, with a view to using it in Sri Lanka and other parts of former Portuguese Asia.

Language studies in Tamil were already familiar to missionaries as a result of the work done by the Roman Catholics in Madurai and the Danish Lutherans in Tharangambadi (Tranquebar). However, the missionaries who began ministering to the Tamils in the coastal towns in Sri Lanka were not familiar with such studies. Therefore, in order to learn Tamil they prepared dictionaries, vocabularies, and grammars of their own. The missionaries of the ABCFM also contributed to the growth of Tamil scholarship.<sup>56</sup>

Sinhala was the most difficult of the three languages. The missionaries found no vocabularies, dictionaries, or grammar books, which could help them in their work among the Sinhalese. Therefore, James Chater published a Sinhalese grammar in 1824. Benjamin Clough worked on Sinhala-English and English-Sinhala dictionaries. James Callaway also prepared a Sinhala vocabulary and published it in 1827. They had to work single-handed in these academic pursuits as Sinhalese workers who could help them as interpreters were rare. They used Indo-Portuguese interpreters, through whom they reached the Sinhalese at early stages. These pioneers of Sinhala studies had to grope in the dark to overcome the stupendous task ahead of them. Tools of language studies such as vocabularies, dictionaries and grammar books were not familiar to the people at that time.

---

<sup>56</sup> Winslow Miron. *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil*. (Madras: P R Hunt), 1862.

## Loneliness

As we noticed earlier, the missionaries were scattered immediately upon their arrival, in order to open stations among the people who were not evangelized. Very often, they were the only Europeans in those areas. They could not converse with the people until they could master the language. There were several incidents of misunderstanding of the missionary's Sinhalese by the local people, which often led to hard feelings. When a missionary stationed in a traditional Sinhala or Tamil village had a personal problem he had no one to share it with. The overpowering loneliness was one of the common issues that surface in all personal records of the early missionaries.

## Tropical Diseases

Stories of Christianity in this period show how missionaries risked their lives to fulfill their calling. This was a period where very little knowledge of tropical diseases prevailed among the Westerners. Therefore, many of them succumbed to diseases of the East. In addition, the work in the hot sun and in the rain also took a toll. The story of the Methodist mission is full of such calamities. Thomas Coke died on the voyage to Sri Lanka on May 2, 1814. Mrs. Ault died on the voyage at sea en route back to England on 9th February 1814. William Ault died on April 1, 1815 only a few months after his arrival at Batticaloa. John Callaway died in 1824 at the age of 28.<sup>57</sup> Richard Stoup (1801-1829) died at Galle in 1829 at the age of 28. In the same year, Samuel Allen lost a child; Hume lost his wife and child; and Gogerly lost his second wife. Clough lost his wife in 1828, a few hours after childbirth.<sup>58</sup>

The Baptist mission suffered due to lack of adequate personnel to man the mission field. Even the few that came to the island had a very short lifespan to offer their services to the country. James Chater suffered through the death of his wife and children. Ann Chater died in 1820 on her voyage to England. Chater himself died in 1829. Meraiah Daniel in 1835. Ebenezer Daniel died in 1840.

---

<sup>57</sup> Small, *op.cit.*, p 60

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p49.

Similar losses have been reported regarding the American and CMS missionaries as well.

One must not consider them as mere names and numbers. They gave up their families, friends, relatives and the comforts of their mother-country to embrace the East to serve their master. The percentage of casualties in the mission field was intimidating to an observer. Nevertheless the missionaries continued to pour their lives in to win the souls of the people of Sri Lanka to the Lord. Sometimes these high rate of missionary deaths was not compensated by the number of converts they could gain.

### **Ill Health**

Clough went on furlough in 1822 due to prolonged illness. He came back in 1825 and served for twelve years with difficulty. Ill health compelled him to return permanently to England in 1837.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Oxley, who came to Sri Lanka in 1823 to function as the head of the Wesleyan Missionary Academy, had to return to England as his health compelled it.<sup>60</sup> Thomas Kilner and Elijah Toyne who arrived in 1830 were forced to return to England as a result of illness in 1840. A severe outbreak of fever in 1820 in Ritigala hampered the missionary work. Richard Stoup, who arrived in 1824, died after five years at the age of 28. John McKenny lost his wife in 1832.<sup>61</sup>

### **Returning Home**

Most missionaries, who could not continue work in Sri Lanka because of their bodily reactions to the tropical climate, decided to leave the country. They often did it rather reluctantly. Rev Joseph Bott arrived in 1819 and returned to England in 1824; Benjamin Clough came in 1814 and returned in 1837. George Erskine (b. 1781) came in 1814 and left in 1821. William Buckley Fox came in 1817 and left in 1823. John George arrived in 1826 and left in 1838. William Harvard came in 1815 and returned in 1819. Elisha Jackson came in 1816 and returned in 1817. James Lynch came in 1814 and returned in 1824.

---

<sup>59</sup> Small, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

John Kenny came in 1816 and returned in 1834. Newstead came in 1817 and returned in 1824. Joseph Roberts came in 1819 and returned in 1831. Ralph Scott came in 1819 and returned 1847. Abraham Stead came in 1819 and returned in 1827. Elijah Toyne who came in 1830 returned in 1840. Of the Baptist Mission, Baptist Griffith came in 1816 and left in 1817 under similar circumstances. Perhaps the most difficult issue an early-returning missionary had to face was that they really had not been able to complete what they committed to do.

## Disputes

During the period between 1819-1824, many a misunderstanding arose between the Methodist missionaries and the missionary committee in England. Missionaries were reprimanded for extravagant maladministration of funds, lack of success and for taking unauthorized decisions.<sup>62</sup> The chairman of the northern Methodist district, Lynch, offered his resignation from missionary work and eventually left the country in 1824 on account of the criticism of his work by the mother mission. Similarly, Fox the chairman of the southern district also retired and returned to England in 1823; Thomas Quince in 1822; Newstead in 1824; and Callaway in 1826. James Sutherland, who came to Sri Lanka in 1820 resigned to prevent facing a charge of extravagance and misappropriation of mission funds.<sup>63</sup> In 1827, Clough was accused of “surreptitious and fraudulent dealing” for using mission premises for a private fee-levying school. D L A Bartholomeusz, a Burgher from Jaffna, who served for a short time as an assistant missionary was dismissed in 1827.

William Harvard of the Methodist mission received a copy of a sermon written by a Church of England priest accusing Methodists of heresy. His reaction was: “I am, and ever have been, a member of the English Church. I am a Methodist likewise.”

Disagreement arose when S Lambrick of the CMS wanted to make a change in the Sinhala translation of the Bible. He wanted certain changes which were

---

<sup>62</sup> Small, *op.cit.*, p47.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

not in agreement with Sinhala usage. Therefore, CMS missionaries translated their own version, rejecting the cooperation of the other missionaries, which was eventually rejected by the people.

## Visiting People

The missionaries realized the importance of visiting people in their homes. This was made difficult as many people were often away from home during daylight hours. The missionaries were also disappointed that their Sunday congregations showed no great interest in the class meetings of the Methodist Mission.<sup>64</sup>

## Philanthropy

Evangelicals were also concerned with social reform during this period. In England, the Clapham Sect included figures such as William Wilberforce who successfully campaigned for the abolition of slavery which had positive repercussions in Sri Lanka.<sup>65</sup>

## “Native” Assistants

All missionary organizations made every attempt to train local leaders to preach the gospel to the people in their heart language. Rev. Chater was able to train some local leaders to assist him; therefore, the Baptist mission with despite the small number of missionaries, could continue their missionary establishment. Similarly, Methodist ministers took assistants from the local population to continue their work. The CMS had a place in Kotte from 1816 to train assistant ministers. The Americans, by 1831, had 3 “native” preachers and 38 “native assistants”.<sup>66</sup> All these missions had institutions for vernacular education.

---

<sup>64</sup> Small, op.cit., p57.

<sup>65</sup> R I Rajapakse, *Christian Missions, Theosophy and Trade: A History of American Rations with Ceylon 1815-1915*, Ph.D Thesis, University Pennsylvan in, 1973,p116.

<sup>66</sup> Bertram Bstiampillai, ‘The American Missionary Enterprise in Norther Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in its early decades,’ *Indian Church History Reviv*, Vol, 3, No, 2, December 1996, p104.

## CONCLUSION

Missionaries were also accused of being the agents of the hated colonialism. However their primary agenda was to spread Christianity through the conversion of as many people as they could reach with their message. Therefore the goals of Christian missions were independent from the colonial agenda. The European and North American missionaries who came to Sri Lanka in the early years of the nineteenth century were directly attached to the Christian revivalist movements that occurred in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the USA and England. One purpose of the nineteenth century missionary endeavour was a call for proselytization. They had the encouragement of the Christians of their mother countries to spread the Christian message to all regions of the world.

The European colonialism facilitated the work of Christian missionaries. Many critics have pointed out that the missionaries of this era believed that God had given the privileges offered by the presence of colonialism as permission for them to Christianise the land. Therefore, the mission was clothed in a European or an American garb. It is true that they believed that the knowledge of God should come clothed in their own culture.<sup>67</sup> One must remember the fact that these missionaries did not come to Sri Lanka because they were invited by colonial governments. Like many people of that age they believed that their culture was Christian and that the Gospel could be offered through that culture to the non-Christians in Sri Lanka. Many missionaries considered the cultures and religions in the island to be devilish, idolatrous and pagan. Consequently, these missionaries tried to force Sri Lankan Christians to reject most of their cultural and religious beliefs and practices. It was the lens through which many missionaries interpreted their missionary work in Sri Lanka.

Some missionaries accepted the popularly held notion that Sri Lankans were not intellectually or culturally equal to Europeans, while others had a very high opinion about the capacity of the people of Sri Lanka.

---

<sup>67</sup> W R Shenk, "The Great Century Reconsidered," in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. W R Shenk, (Scottsdale, Pa. Herald, Press 1984), p163.

It is relevant to quote Miron Winslow, a missionary of the ABCFM, who arrived in Ceylon in 1820; he had these words to say in 1835 regarding their attitude to the Christian mission in the island:

“Profit by the experience of those who have gone before you. Enter readily and humbly on the most humble and self-denying labours.... Let your precepts be embodied in your actions. You should stand before the Hindoos more in the character of witnesses for the truth, giving your simple testimony in its favour, than as champions for it by the weapons of argument.... They will be quick to discern your character; and they will give weight to your testimony in proportion to the holiness of your life.”<sup>68</sup>

Other missionaries had the same kind of attitude to the service they performed in Sri Lanka. Five missionaries gave their lives for the Gospel and the power of that Gospel has since changed the lives of millions in Sri Lanka. They believed that the Gospel has power. “No greater love is there than this, that one would lay their life down for another. Jesus loves you and Jesus can make a difference in your life. What do you want to do with that message? When you estimate the cost, is it worth it?”

They played an important role in introducing the Christian faith on a new and firm footing. They brought technological and social developments from the mother-country to Sri Lanka. From their early days, they were concerned about economic, educational, health and social development, in addition to the spiritual development that they put their hearts and souls into. They were the pioneers who faced tremendous odds to bring the Gospel to this land. It was the next generations who benefited from their sweat and labour. It is true that they made some mistakes in their pioneering endeavours. A critic may find that their achievements were inadequate. Yet, they certainly introduced high social ethics, respect and equality in treating women, and orderly family and social lives – which brought radical changes to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is now the best-educated country in South Asia. Sri Lankan women enjoy a social status that can be compared with the best courtiers of the West because of the contribution made by these missionaries. Sri Lankans as a nation are indebted to them for the high social status that we enjoy today because of the sweat and labour of the missionaries who did not seek worldly reward.

---

<sup>68</sup> Miron Winslow

## **Guide to Articles in Volumes I–VI of the *Journal of the Colombo Theological Seminary (JCTS):***

### **Volume 1 (2001)**

Lost Divehi Gospels (*Simon Fuller*)

The God of Hope: A Look at the Book of Ruth through Sri Lankan Eyes (*Mano Emmanuel*)

On Infomercials (*S K Xavier*)

The Use of Music in Cross-Cultural Ministry (*Dawn Remtema*)

“Hero of the Cross”: The Mission of Colonel Arnolis Weerasooriya – 1857-1888 (*G P V Somaratna*)

The Colossian Heresy Reconsidered (*Ivor Poobalan*)

### **Volume II (2003)**

Groaning and Accountability in a Christian Worker’s Life (*Ajith Fernando*)

“Oh God, You Have Deceived Me”: The Confessions of Jeremiah—A Model for Us? (*Mano Emmanuel*)

Who is ‘The God of This Age’ in Corinthians 4:4? (*Ivor Poobalan*)

The Superficial Success of the Reformation and the Trials of the Catholic Church (1658-1796) in Sri Lanka (*G P V Somaratna*)

### **Volume III (2005)**

Another Ancient Christian Presence in Sri Lanka: The Ethiopians of Aksum (*Prabo Mihindukulasuriya*)

The Nature of Rewards in the New Testament (*Mano Emmanuel*)

The Period of Jeroboam II with Special Reference to Amos (*Ivor Poobalan*)

Sri Lanka, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam at the Dawn of the Sixteenth Century (*G P V Somaratna*)

Understanding ‘Paradise’: A Survey of Historical and Theological Reflections (*Ravin Caldera*)

Christian Education for Secular Society (*Vinodh Gunasekera*)

Some Thoughts on the Reception of Protestantism by the Tamil and Sinhalese Communities in Sri Lanka (*Napoleon Pathmanathan*)

#### **Volume IV (2007)**

What Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals Can Teach Us Today: An Exposition of Deuteronomy 6:1-17 (*Ajith Fernando*)

The Construction of a Political Ecclesiology: Yoder and Hauerwas' Community of Non-Resistance (*Jonas Kurlberg*)

An Exposition of the Warning Passage of Hebrews 6:1-8 (*Vinodh Gunasekera*)

The Story of Hagar in Genesis 16 and Its Function within the Patriarchal Narrative (*Ivor Poobalan*)

Imagining the Future: A Look at Zion and Paradise as Symbols of Hope (*Mano Emmanuel*)

The Roman Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: 1505–1658 (*G P V Somaratna*)

#### **Volume V (2009)**

The Importance of the Study of India's New Christian Movements (*Roger E Hedlund*)

A Biblical View of 'Results' with Emphasis on 1 and 2 Peter (*Ivor Poobalan*)

The 'Ceylon Controversy': The Struggle of Tamil Christians (*Napoleon Pathmanathan*)

Christianity and the Transformation of a Subaltern Community in Sri Lanka (*G P V Somaratna*)  
Church as the Image of Trinity (*Jonas Kurlberg*)

The Fragrance of Life: Cinnamon in the Bible (*Prabo Mihindukulasuriya*)

A Study on the Origin and the Role of the New Testament Synagogue (*Ravin Caldera*)

#### **Volume VI (2010)**

On Virginity (*Ajith Fernando*)

Exegetical and Interpretive Issues Involved in Some Texts in Genesis 1–3 (*Ivor Poobalan*)

Methodology in Missiology (*Roger E Hedlund*)

A Brief Examination of Medical Missions in Sri Lanka (*G P V Somaratna*)

Without Christ I Could Not Be a Buddhist: An Evangelical Response to Christian Self-Understanding in a Buddhist Context (*Prabo Mihindukulasuriya*)

Hindu Attitudes toward Christianity in Western India (*Atul Y Aghamkar*)

The Irish in Sri Lankan Methodism (*Norman W Taggart*)

Leaders as Servants: A Resolution of the Tension (*Derek Tidball*)

**Available for reference at:**

The CTS Library

189 Dutugemunu Street, Kohuwela, Sri Lanka

[library@cts.lk](mailto:library@cts.lk)

**For purchase, contact:**

CTS Publishing

189 Dutugemunu Street, Kohuwela, Sri Lanka

[publishing@cts.lk](mailto:publishing@cts.lk)

+94 11 5524257