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EDITORIAL

Launched in 2001, the Journal of Colombo Theological Seminary (JCTS) publishes articles on all aspects of theological studies, providing an opportunity for younger scholars making an important debut as well as publishing the work of scholars with international standing. The journal publishes original research articles in full-length. These contributions are aimed both at specialist scholars as well as those who are non-specialists.

The JCTS has maintained a high academic standard from its inception. It covers topics especially relevant to the Christian Church in South Asia. In our selection of material we give special attention to evangelical Christianity. Our authors come mostly from the Colombo Theological Seminary as the JCTS journal wishes to encourage our colleagues to keep up with modern developments in academic research in their fields of expertise.

Divergent views of the writers which may sometimes appear as disagreements may occur in these papers. However, we have not made any attempt to ask the authors to smooth them over to present a monolithic interpretation. The authors come from different denominational backgrounds, and the themes presented in this issue of JCTS display a variety of subjects from ethics and theology to history.

The Editor is thankful to contributors for their valuable papers which they had to prepare amidst a busy schedule of teaching and administration.

We are happy to publish in this issue eight well-researched articles.

Tidball deals with the doctrines of the Kingdom of God and the atonement, which are often kept in separate departments while the gospels ranged over against the writings especially of Paul. However, there is a healthy growing interest in how these doctrines relate to each other and are necessary for each other. This paper examines three recent contributions to the discussion by Prabo Mihindukulasuriya, Jeremy Treat, and N. T. Wright. Each explores the relationship from a different perspective and

together provides rich insights into the indispensable link between God's dynamic rule and Christ's atoning death. In offering a mild critique of their contributions, it encourages the further exploration of this vital subject with a view to gaining a more wholesome and unified biblical theology of the gospel.

Poobalan explores the curious prevalence of sexually explicit language in the counsel offered by the implied parental figures in Proverbs 1–9. He focuses on Proverbs 5:15–23 which has the distinction of being the most explicit celebration of marital sex in the entire Bible, especially noting that out of a total of eighty-four verses in its co-text (chapters 5–7), sixty-five verses are dedicated to a discussion of sex and sexuality. In addition to the fact that Proverbs 1–9 makes repeated overtures to Israel's young men to embrace 'Lady Wisdom', it also cautions them severely about the catastrophic consequences of courting the 'Strange Woman'. In the context of intense scholarly debate about the referent to this latter motif, Poobalan offers a compelling novel interpretation of **אִשָּׁה זָרָה**.

Mihindukulasuriya's article addresses current debates in evangelical theological circles dealing with the doctrine of the atonement. He proposes a new understanding of Christ's death on the cross in direct relation to the Kingdom of God. This requires a re-interpretation of longstanding atonement theories, particularly penal substitution. An earlier version of this article was published in the WEA journal *Evangelical Review of Theology* (July 2014). We reproduce it here with permission of Paternoster Periodicals, and the author's subsequent expansions, for the benefit of Sri Lankan readers.

Hakel-Ranasinghe's article "Who are the 'friends' in Luke 16:9?" explores the significance of this verse as the key to understanding the parable of the Dishonest Steward, specifically exploring the minority view that "the friends in v. 9" refers not to the poor but to God. Using the tool of socio-rhetorical interpretation, the article presents an exegesis of Luke 16:1-15, with a special focus on the elements of friendship and mammon in Graeco-Roman

Palestine of the 1st Century AD, as well as the significance of the phrase ‘eternal tabernacles’, drawing the conclusion that the emphasis of Luke 16:9 is on developing friendship with God through an ‘honest’ heart-attitude towards ‘dishonest mammon’.

George in his article contends that a postcolonial reading of Paul’s allegory in Galatians 4:21-31 reflects his subversive intent in order to articulate a liberative space “in Christ”. Paul by intentionally employing allegory, a disputed form of argumentation, attempts to subvert the Roman colonial discourse and the Jewish nationalistic discourse carried forward by the Jewish-Christian mission originating from Jerusalem. He, in the then politically charged hybrid cultural context of Galatia, articulates Christian identity in ambivalent assimilative-abrogative terms. However, while Paul as a postcolonial subject re-imagines Christian freedom in a trans-cosmic, transcultural, and trans-historical sense, he also reflects a tendency, at least to some, to imitate the colonizing self in himself.

Emmanuel’s article explores the topic of forgiveness by considering a hypothetical case of sexual abuse in the Church. The article questions some commonly held understandings of concepts such as grace, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration and asks if, in cases like this, forgiveness can be the wrong response. Having previously written on the importance of forgiveness, the author now challenges the Church to be counter-cultural in its approach to discipline for Church leaders and in its pastoral care for women who are victims of abuse.

DeChickera in his article explores the ramifications of Romans 13:1-7 for government in general and ‘good governance’ in particular. At the crux of the issue for him is whether Paul’s *paraenesis* is an imperative for faithful followers of Christ in the 1st Century AD Roman Empire; or whether the Apostle’s teaching has a wider scope of application for Christian praxis – in successive ages, under sundry governments. The pressing question dominant in the background of his research engine is whether simple, straightforward, readings of these Pauline

EDITORIAL

exhortations suffice to guide Christian citizens in their engagement with respective governments of their time – good, bad, and ugly – or whether a scrutiny of the scholarship on this seminal passage on the Christian and the State must necessarily yield strategic as well as subversive interpretations. An analysis of the gamut of scholarly valences on Paul’s position reveals not only a challenging spectrum of interpretative nuances, but also a kaleidoscope of values that can be assigned to the respective stances taken – by Paul as well as his interpreters. In the final analysis, from the panoply of responses, ranging from simplistic to subversive, only one position from the major valences discerned and developed is argued as being the most logical for application across all types of government and down the ages for Christians under oppressive empires as much as modern democratic republics.

Somarathna makes a study of the methods of evangelism introduced by the India Oratorian Fr. Jacome Gonsalves to revive the Roman Catholic faith in the kingdom of Kandy in the first half of the 18th Century. He faced opposition from the Dutch rulers of the Maritime Provinces as well as the Buddhists in Kandy who were offended by the presence of Catholic priests in the kingdom. He is regarded as the father of Sinhala Catholic literature and the single writer who prepared the most amount of Tamil Catholic literature in Sri Lanka. The article covers his literary and other cultural contributions, and its impact on contemporary Sinhala literature and drama. The article includes the current knowledge including substantive findings on the subject, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to missionary work by Fr. Gonslaves.

It is our hope that this journal will be a valuable contribution to evangelical Christian scholarship.

G P V Somaratna

August 2016

THE CROWN AND THE CROSS
RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD
AND THE ATONEMENT¹

DEREK TIDBALL

INTRODUCTION

Tom Wright speaks for a growing number when he comments critically on “...the way in which we have been conditioned to read the gospels as though the themes of the kingdom and the cross could be held at arm’s length from one another”. But, as is increasingly recognised, there was never a kingdom message without a cross, and Jesus’ crucifixion never carried a meaning divorced from the existence of God’s kingdom.² This paper explores some recent contributions to the debate.

On the surface the New Testament itself introduces a divide between the two themes. The synoptic gospels make the kingdom of God their major focus and while they describe the death of Christ they do not appear greatly to theologize about it. On the other hand, the New Testament letters, especially those of Paul, focus on the atoning death of Christ and develop ideas of

¹ A draft of this paper was originally given to the Doktor Club at SAIACS, Bangalore, in February 2015. I am grateful to Prabo Mihindukulasuriya for his comments on the original draft.

² Tom Wright, *How God Became King* (London: SPCK, 2012), 211.

justification, righteousness, redemption and reconciliation, with little apparent mention of the kingdom of God.

This division was reflected in and reinforced by twentieth century evangelical scholarship. George Eldon Ladd, for example, although he writes about “the essential relationship between Jesus’ death and the coming of the kingdom” mentions the cross only twice in his seminal work on the kingdom of God, *The Presence of the Future*.³ As an evangelical scholar Ladd was unusual in focusing on the kingdom of God since in his day the field had largely been conceded to those who taught ‘a social gospel’, while evangelicals, as epitomised by Leon Morris, championed the doctrine of the atonement with hardly a mention of the kingdom of God.⁴

If anything, the division widened at the turn of the century and is often evident in contemporary church life, at least in the West. Some who emphasised ‘the kingdom’ demonstrated a very great commitment to ‘incarnational’ mission, to a socially oriented action outreach programme, and to working for social justice. Justice in this world, they said, is of the essence of the gospel. This is certainly preferable to the way in which the term has, in fact, often been used (or abused) as a symbolic marker of all sorts of human activity including various political projects and business enterprises like the kingdom bank, kingdom car sales, and kingdom hairdressers. Others, especially of a reformed theological background, emphasise that the heart of our gospel is found in Romans and Galatians and is about our relationship with

³ George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1974), 324. The other reference is on p. 157, which refers to the cross as “an essential fact in the coming of the kingdom”. I owe this point to Jeremy Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 26.

⁴ E.g. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* London (Tyndale Press, 1955); *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1965).

gracious yet holy God who justified us through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Jim Wallis nicely illustrates the current scene in reporting a debate he had with Dr Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, on 'What is the gospel?' Wallis says, he "spoke about the 'gospel of the kingdom' outlined in Jesus' initial proclamation in Matthew 4 and Luke 4", whereas Mohler, while agreeing with the biblical imperative of social justice saw this as "only an implication of the gospel and not the gospel per se".⁵ Wallis argues that, "Jesus' gospel of the kingdom is much more than the gospel I was raised with, which I will call an atonement-only gospel..."⁶ Wallis is representative of many and shows the urgent need to address questions concerning the meaning of the kingdom, and not least in relation to the church's mission.⁷

⁵ Jim Wallis, *On God's Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 53-54.

⁶ Wallis, *On God's Side*, 43.

⁷ For a very recent discussion of this question see Scott McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014). McKnight makes "an appeal that we learn to see the word 'kingdom' in its fullness: it refers to a people, to a people ruled, and to a people ruled by a king. There are at least three elements of the word 'kingdom' and it makes no sense to reduce them to just one. ...kingdom refers to a people governed by a king" (p. 74, see also p. 76). In the light of this he connects the church much more closely to the kingdom than evangelicals have often done and argues strongly that "good works are not the same as kingdom work" (p. 118, see also p. 115). "An evangelical social gospel and an evangelical social liberation theology," he writes, "are natural expressions of kingdom citizens...Kingdom mission takes root in the church...and spills over into the public arena because those who follow Jesus will share his moral vision for the poor and marginalized" (pp. 118-119). But this is not to be confused with any and every fight or work for social justice.

This paper addresses one factor in the debate, that of the apparent divorce between a kingdom and an atonement theology, asking essentially not only why there appears to be such a shift of emphasis but also how deep or real it actually is. It concludes that the rift can never be legitimate since, in Wallis' words, "Kingdom theology... must be redemptive, or it is not kingdom theology. When kingdom is divorced from redemption, it ceases being kingdom and becomes social progressivism, social conservatism, progressive politics and the betterment of the world and culture. But kingdom is a redemption-based reality."⁸ But equally we may say that atonement theology must be kingdom-oriented, or it is not atonement theology.

Here we review three scholars who have discussed the relationship recently.

1. Prabo Mihindukulasuriya

Reacting against those who wish to restrict the metanarrative of scripture to that of personal salvation, Mihindukulasuriya, a Sri Lankan theologian, in an extraordinarily rich paper, seeks to establish that the Scriptures "provide us with a consistent narrative, with its own inherent logic, of how the death of Christ brings about God's acknowledged rule, which accomplishes his redemption and judgement upon his creation". In fact, he argues, "Christ's atoning work can be *most meaningfully articulated* in terms of the kingdom of God, as the culmination of the whole biblical narrative of Israel and the nations, in and through Christ."⁹ His argument is constructed on five levels. The first level defines what a kingdom is. It must consist of a covenant between a king who rules and citizens who are subject to that ruler.¹⁰ On

⁸ Wallis, *On God's Side*, 143.

⁹ Prabo Mihindukulasuriya, "How Jesus Inaugurated the Kingdom on the Cross: A Kingdom Perspective of the Atonement" (*Evangelical Review of Theology* (2014) 38:3), 196-213.

¹⁰ Others, such as Scott McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of*

the next level, Jesus is presented as both the perfect king and the perfect citizen. Above that, Jesus is viewed through the lens of the images of salvation. On the fourth level, theories of the atonement are introduced before the whole edifice is all capped off with a discussion about the kingdom and the gospel.

A kingdom, at the very least, is a covenant between a king and its citizens and Mihindikulasuriya proposes that Jesus fulfils in his own person "God's requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen". The cross demonstrates he loves God's subjects to the fullest extent and similarly obeys God's will completely even in the face of hostility and rebellion. He argues that "by fulfilling both the requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen...on the cross...Jesus inaugurates God's redemptive rule on earth...and reconstitut[es] a new covenant community around his own mediatory personhood"¹¹ into which he invites sinners to enter through repentance. This is a profound insight into the relationship between the cross and the crown, and when one thinks of it, an obvious one. Nonetheless it is not a point often made.

Mihindikulasuriya then examines each element of his scheme as to its biblical credibility but not always in the most obvious of ways, which partly accounts for the depth of his paper. To illustrate: in presenting Jesus as king he examines John's portrayal of Jesus as the good shepherd, voluntarily laying down his life for the sheep. The Old Testament context for this¹² shows that it is a Davidic, ruling, shepherd that is in view. This is no ordinary shepherd, but one who will restore Israel to covenant faithfulness and do so by a 'contrastive way of ruling', that is, by serving and laying down one's life rather than ruling over the sheep for one's

the Old Testament (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1981), add law and a place where the rule is manifest to these two essential features. Mihindikulasuriya regards them as derivative rather essential.

¹¹ Mihindikulasuriya, "How Jesus", 198. Italics mine.

¹² Jer. 23:1-6; Ezek. 34; 37:24-28; Zech 9-14.

own ends.¹³ A further illustration is seen in his presenting the biblical support for seeing Jesus as the perfect citizen. Evidence is not only drawn from the gospels but also from the way in which his obedience is highlighted as vitally instrumental in his redemption of others in Romans 5:18-19; Philippians 2:7-9; Hebrews 5:7-10. He cites Calvin saying that God looks kindly towards us and abolishes sin, “by the whole course of his [i.e. Jesus’] obedience”.¹⁴ Jesus fulfilled these roles “uniquely, supremely, and with finality”.¹⁵

The next level of Mihindikulasuriya’s argument is to examine Jesus through the multiplicity of salvation images of priest, prophet, wisdom-teacher, and kinsman-redeemer,¹⁶ – Old Testament community functionaries which highlight both love and loyalty, which he argues, “make sense within the two broad categories of perfect king and perfect citizen”.¹⁷ Priests were required to offer perfect sacrifices. Prophets both kept the covenant themselves and suffered, often becoming martyrs, for doing so and for calling Israel back to obedience. There is ample evidence of Jesus as a wisdom teacher, leading to Paul’s affirmation that Christ Jesus has “become for us wisdom from God”.¹⁸ Like the wisdom figure Job, Jesus was “facing the accusations of those who should have known better” but remained faithful even in “the crucible of seeming abandonment”.¹⁹ Finally Jesus serves as the ideal Israelite kinsman-redeemer, which is primarily an economic metaphor for rescuing a family member from debt or slavery. His own words in,

¹³ Mihindikulasuriya, “How Jesus”, 201.

¹⁴ Ibid., 203-204.

¹⁵ Ibid., 207.

¹⁶ Ibid., 204-207.

¹⁷ Ibid., 207. His argument is drawn from Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 1:30.

¹⁹ Mihindikulasuriya, “How Jesus”, 206.

for example Mark 10:45, are subsequently expanded by later New Testament writers to present Jesus as a redeemer.²⁰

The next layer of Mihindukulasuriya's argument is to explore the use of atonement theories which are often culturally determined and as he says are never clearly delineated in the New Testament, since the New Testament contents itself with drawing "on familiar biblical motifs which were readily understood..."²¹ He acknowledges the usefulness of such theories but states "they cannot offer a comprehensive historical-theological account of Christ's death".²² This variety of interpretations, however, is not left without a 'baseline' of 'the atoning act itself' because a focused explanation of it is found in Romans 5:1-21. In that passage, Jesus 'obedience' and his 'one act of righteousness' supports Mihindukulasuriya's kingdom scheme. It is from this baseline that the multiplicity of images emerges.²³ The kingdom perspective, he claims, "explains how the cross simultaneously addresses all the constituent elements of the atonement: a justly angered yet loving God, a sinful and lost humanity, a creation subjected to futility, and an incorrigibly evil adversary". It also combines the objective and subjective elements of the atonement, setting out what God has done for us and how our lives should be transformed as a result.²⁴

In his final level, Mihindukulasuriya confronts the fears of those like Don Carson who, understandably, are apprehensive that expressing the gospel in kingdom terms "tends to reduce its message to a nebulous and moralistic 'social gospel'".²⁵ But, Mihindukulasuriya rightly asserts, an understanding of the

²⁰ Mihindukulasuriya, "How Jesus", 207 cites 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

kingdom that is “ontologically dependent on the cross” cannot be used in that way and cannot but address the need for forgiveness and God’s provision of salvation. There is no kingdom, nor kingdom gospel, apart from the cross. Viewed in this way, Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Saviour are brought into close connection and the one makes no sense without the other. It also leads “more naturally to missional discipleship”. He died, and calls us to die with him.²⁶

While the use of kingdom language may not be necessary to contemporary evangelistic preaching, any more than it was for Paul, kingdom concepts are essential since the gospel is about “the all-encompassing new reality of God’s redemptive rule”, and “God’s new initiative in Christ to include within his transforming sovereignty a creation otherwise lost”.²⁷

Mihindukulasuriya has given us a fresh, sophisticated, and creative way of addressing the question of the relationship between the crown and the cross that brings a wide sweep of scripture and theological concepts into play. We will see as we review other approaches that there is more that could be brought into play and perhaps Mihindukulasuriya could from time to time integrate the various stages of his argument more closely. But it offers a stimulating basis for further reflection.

2. Jeremy Treat

Whereas Mihindukulasuriya’s approach is broadly theological, albeit firmly rooted in scripture, Jeremy Treat’s more extensive contribution is a twofold one, grounded in the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology. *The Crucified King* is the published version of his doctoral thesis at Wheaton College and, I think, the most significant publication in this area for a considerable time. To Treat, the kingdom and the cross are inseparable, although some theologians and many practitioners

²⁶ Mihindukulasuriya, “How Jesus”, 211.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 213, 212.

seem to have managed to do so. His central argument is that, “one need not choose between the kingdom and the cross, for the cross is royal and the kingdom is cruciform”.²⁸

How does he set about establishing this claim? First, both kingdom and cross are the culmination of themes developed throughout the Old Testament. God had designed his creation as a kingdom in which he would not only reign over his people but reign through them as his ‘servant-kings’ or vice-regents. It should be noted that the kingdom is never some utopian society or abstract thing, divorced from God who intimately and actively reigns over it. Biblically, it is always the kingdom *of God*.²⁹ After the fall, God’s reign remained ‘an eschatological goal’ but was now one that it was necessary to accomplish redemptively. That redemptive kingdom was one where victory would be gained over evil, sin would be forgiven, atonement would be made and people would be delivered from oppressors and released into God’s new creation.³⁰

From the beginning, God’s plan of redeeming his people for their royal task involved suffering,³¹ as the words ‘you will strike his heel’ in Genesis 3:15 demonstrates. Subsequently, this plan was unfolded through the prophets, with the suffering servant of Isaiah, who is none other than the messianic and divine king, providing “the greatest potential in all of scripture for connecting atoning suffering and the coming of God’s kingdom”.³²

²⁸ Jeremy Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 141.

²⁹ See R. T. France, ‘Kingdom of God’, *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 420 and *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SPCK, 1990), 8-25.

³⁰ This is taken from the summary in Treat, *Crucified King*, 42-50.

³¹ Treat, *Crucified King*, 57.

³² *Ibid.*, 68.

But what was a promise then becomes a reality in Jesus. Treat turns to Mark's gospel as the basis of his exposition. There we have no need to choose between Mark as a kingdom manifesto or as a passion narrative because both themes 'coalesce' in Jesus who brings in the kingdom by way of the cross.³³ Indeed, time and again Jesus redefines the kingdom by the cross. Take Mark 8:27-10:52 as an example. Here Jesus rebukes Peter for his not understanding that Jesus 'must suffer' and for his thinking merely in human terms, and he rebukes James and John who desired to share the limelight of the kingdom with Jesus without understanding the suffering involved.³⁴ In an interesting passage, Treat contrasts Jesus' appearance at the transfiguration and on the cross. There was light *versus* darkness, luminous clothes *versus* no clothes, two OT saints *versus* two criminals, Elijah mentioned in both, disciples present *versus* disciples absent, God speaking *versus* God silent.³⁵ Then, he notes that Mark particularly highlights Jesus as the king of Israel in his account of the crucifixion and structures his account around six uses of the word 'king'.³⁶

The same themes are found in the later writings of the New Testament. Colossians, especially 1:15-20 and 2:13-15, and Revelation 5:5-10 are chosen by Treat as his primary witnesses, although others could have been called to give evidence.³⁷ While in the former text the two themes may be jostling for attention, Treat quotes Eduard Loshe as explaining the connection: "the sovereign rule of Christ is present where there is forgiveness of

³³ Treat, *Crucified King*, 88 and 110.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106, is dependent on Frank Matera's *The Kingship of Jesus*, SBLDS (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982), 4, 61. The references are Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32. He also draws attention to three mockery scenes, 15:16-20; 27-32; 35-36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111-127. He subsequently refers to Heb. 2:5-10 and 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

sins”.³⁸ In the latter text, the significant fact is that the lion (the ruling beast) is redefined by the lamb (the suffering victim).

The kingdom remains the goal of creation and the cross is “the *decisive* moment in the coming of God’s kingdom” but this is not meant to imply that it is not the *only* moment.³⁹ It is the decisive moment in that “*God’s reign is irreversibly fixed on earth as it is in heaven*, within the broader movement of the coming of God’s kingdom in Christ’s life, death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost and the second coming”.⁴⁰

Treat’s systematic section is too full to unpack in this paper. He emphasises Jesus is the king who finds exaltation *in* humiliation, not *through it afterwards*.⁴¹ It is the place where the logic of the world is turned on its head and shame is transformed into glory.⁴² I want to pick up just one element of his systematic contribution that concerns the theories of *Christus Victor* and Penal Substitution. He believes we should avoid the opposite errors of reductionism, on the one hand, whereby we reduce our understanding of the cross simply to one theory and forget the others, and relativism, on the other hand, whereby any theory is as significant as the others.⁴³ The *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement is often associated with the kingdom of God. He believes that they can and should be integrated and proposes the view of ‘*Christus Victor through penal substitution*’.⁴⁴ How so?

³⁸ Treat, *Crucified King*, 114, Eduard Loshe, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Hermenia, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 140, italics mine.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 150-165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 177-188.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

The problem that the atonement seeks to answer is the problem of sin, which is multi-faceted and has far-reaching effects. Having rejected God as king, people have come under the reign of Satan, the death-bringer and parasite who is given a continuing foothold in God's world by our conspiring with him through our continuing to sin. The shalom of creation has been shattered.⁴⁵ People are both victims and violators in God's world – we do not need to choose between these descriptions of our plight.⁴⁶

Three quotes explain Treat's argument and how the two models of atonement can be integrated.

First, he writes,

Theologically, if the God-human problem is the root of the Satan-human problem, then resolving the former must be the means of dealing with the later. How is Satan defeated? Christ defeats Satan (*Christus Victor*) by removing the ground of Satan's accusation, which Jesus does by paying the penalty for sin (penal substitution).⁴⁷

Then he explains the difference between them:

The basic point is that penal substitution and *Christus Victor* are doing different things in the explanation of the cross. Penal substitution explains the means of victory – or how Christ's suffering disarms Satan – and is usually depicted in cultic and/or forensic terms. *Christus Victor* explains the effect of Christ's accomplishment on Satan and his dominion over sinners. These two aspects of the atonement need not compete, for they are explanation of different (yet inseparable) aspects of Christ's work.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Treat, *Crucified King*, 194-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 197-203.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

Or again, “Conceptually, penal substitution addresses the ‘how’ of the atonement and *Christus Victor* addresses its effects on Satan, demons, and death – both within the broader aim of reconciliation for the glory of God”.⁴⁹ Genesis 3:15 has been fulfilled and the problem of the Edenic kingdom has been overcome.

Finally he sharply defines the difference between Satan and Jesus and how the cross is crucial for the establishing of God’s throne. “Satan is the serpent-king who rules through temptation, deception, and accusation – resulting in death. Jesus is the servant-king who rules through obedience, truth and suffering-resulting in life.”⁵⁰

3. N. T. Wright

The omnipresent Tom Wright has written on several occasions about this theme, mostly, but not exclusively, from the viewpoint of the gospels where the emphasis is on the kingdom and the place of the cross within it. If Mihindukulasuriya’s approach is primarily theological, and Treat is concerned about both biblical and systematic theology, Wright’s contribution is primarily that of a biblical scholar. His book *How God Became King* gives a good idea of his more recent approach.⁵¹

In this book, Wright suggests that a good starting place is to look at the bookends of Jesus’ life, that of his baptism and his cross. At his baptism the voice from heaven declared, “You are my son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased.”⁵² The words, “You

⁴⁹ Treat, *Crucified King*, 223.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31, suggests that Wright’s early writings (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996, chap. 12) on this topic were more concerned about the quest for the historical Jesus and mindset of Jesus rather than the wider topic. See also, *inter alia*, Tom Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000, 18-34).

⁵² Mk. 1:11; Matt. 3:17; Lk. 3:22.

are my son” echo Psalm 2:7, which records the evident pleasure of the father in his son but which is transparently a Psalm about God’s sovereignty in the world. The words “in whom I delight” are found in the Servant Song of Isaiah 42:1. Both of these establish his mission as a kingdom mission since both of them are about God asserting his just reign in contrast to the reigns of the arrogant kings and authorities who rule unjustly. The claims are political. As Wright claims, this shows that the focus of Jesus’ mission is not on securing personal salvation but justice for the world.⁵³ Both also connect the mission with conflict and suffering.

The other bookend is the title Pilate had displayed on the cross, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews’.⁵⁴ John’s reporting of the trial and execution of Jesus displays much interest in the theme of kingship, as Jesus’ conversation with Pilate illustrates⁵⁵ and Wright suggests that between John’s much discussed incarnational theology and his redemption theology is a ‘middle term’ of ‘*kingdom-theology*’.⁵⁶ He points out that Jesus’ death is explicitly spoke of as a ‘royal’ death in 1 Corinthians 2:8.

The theme of God’s kingly power being re-established through the suffering of Jesus occurs in a multitude of places in the gospels between these bookends.⁵⁷ When Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah (a royal person), Jesus immediately talked to them of his suffering, rejection ‘and that he must be killed’, and instructed them in the way of the cross.⁵⁸ The way in which ruling

⁵³ Wright, *How God*, 214-246. See also N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: SPCK, 2013), 734, where he comments, “When [Paul] speaks of Jesus as God’s son, Psalm 2 is never far away.”

⁵⁴ Jn. 19:19-22; Matt. 17:37. Luke does not record the title but kingdom language is present in that the dying thief asks Jesus to remember him “when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23:42).

⁵⁵ Jn. 18:33-40.

⁵⁶ Wright, *How God*, 219 and 231.

⁵⁷ In this respect, Wright covers very similar ground to that we have already seen in Treat’s exposition of the theme in Mark.

⁵⁸ Mk. 8:27-9:1.

and suffering were combined was clearly puzzling to the disciples,⁵⁹ even so Wright concludes, “What the four gospels are eager to tell us, then, is that the messianic kingdom that Jesus is bringing will come through his suffering and indeed through the suffering of his followers.”⁶⁰ Furthermore he argues that Jesus’ comment that, “some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God has come with power” is not a reference to the second coming of Christ, as often believed, but, rightly interpreted, a reference to his death, resurrection, and ascension. A correct interpretation of Daniel 7:9-14, to which this and several other gospel texts allude, sees the Son of Man ascending into heaven rather than descending from it, having establishing God’s ‘everlasting dominion’ through conflict and suffering.⁶¹ Everywhere you look you see the same connections. When James and John request the adjoining thrones to Jesus’ when he comes in ‘glory’, Jesus immediately replies in terms of their drinking the cup of suffering that he would drain to the dregs.⁶² Suffering is the only way to enter into leadership in God’s kingdom. Although often ignored, the gospel accounts of crucifixion are, Wright says, “theologically freighted” since in “...all four gospels bring the kingdom and the cross into the closest possible combination”.⁶³

A further strand that creates this strong cord binding crown and cross is seen in Jesus’ teaching about the temple. The temple was not only a religious house but also a political throne room – it was there that the seat of God’s rule on earth was to be found. Malachi had prophesied, “then suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to his temple...”⁶⁴ Jesus did this although, as Luke 19:44 says, ironically they did not recognise him. When he

⁵⁹ Wright, *How God*, 221.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 224-226.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 229, 232.

⁶⁴ Mal. 3:1.

‘cleansed’ it, Jesus said the present temple would be destroyed and “I will raise it again in three days”.⁶⁵ Mystified by him, the people did not understand that he was himself to be the new temple.⁶⁶ The point is that the temple must be seen in kingdom/power terms.

Wright concludes his discussion in *How God Became King* by saying that the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus and radically redefined by suffering was also ‘*emphatically* [a kingdom] for this world’.⁶⁷ “The gospels are there,” he says, “waiting to inform a new generation for holistic mission, to embody, explain and advocate new ways of ordering communities, nations and the world”.⁶⁸ As a result our questions about atonement theology have “been wrongly put, because they haven’t been about the kingdom. They haven’t been about God’s sovereign, saving rule coming on earth as in heaven”.⁶⁹ This sheds new light on penal substitution. His death does answer the question of guilt but not in the ‘de-Judaize[d] or dehistoricized[d]’ sense to which we often resort. Substitution and representation don’t need to be played off one another.⁷⁰ Rightly understood, cross and kingdom do not lead to individuals rejoicing they are secure on the path to heaven so much as to a forgiven people being put to work.⁷¹

The integration of crown and cross is found elsewhere in Wright’s writings. In an early devotional work, *The Crown and the Fire*, he says that the battle for the kingdom of God that Jesus had fought all his life, “now”, on the cross, “rages around him in full

⁶⁵ Jn. 2:19.

⁶⁶ Acts 7:48-53.

⁶⁷ Wright, *How God*, 240-242. Quotation from p. 241.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 243. On the kingdom in its Jewish context see Wright’s succinct summary in *The Challenge of Jesus*, London: SPCK, 2000, 18-34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

strength".⁷² He had stood for the kingdom of God but was now crushed by the kingdom of Caesar.⁷³ The rulers of this world were not acting alone but acting out Satan's revenge upon this one who dared to raid the strong man's house and plunder his goods take away his power, his dignity and life. They dared to do away with him in the most humiliating and degrading of ways.⁷⁴ The theme of Christ's power *versus* Caesar's power is one to which he often returns in subsequent writings, and is one of the many elements of Wright's proposals which some believe to be exaggerated.⁷⁵

The fullest and most complex articulation of the relationship between the crown and the cross in Wright's writings is found in *Jesus and the Victory of God*. He argues that the mission of Jesus, which could never be devoid of political implications, was to bring Israel out of exile, bring full meaning to the religious symbols of Israel and restore God to his temple. In explaining how this was to happen, Wright makes use of the martyr-tradition of Israel that taught that Israel would be vindicated through suffering. In his sayings, for example, Jesus bound "the fate of the nation to his own fate". Wright's conclusion makes the connection between the cross and the kingdom clear:

The 'messianic woes' tradition indicated that this suffering and vindication would be climactic, unique, the one-off

⁷² N. T. Wright, *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁵ E.g., N. T. Wright, 'Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans', 'Paul as Preacher: The Gospel Then and Now' and 'Paul and Empire' in *Pauline Perspectives, Essays on Paul 1978-2013* (London: SPCK, 2013), 237-254, 317-331, 439-451. For a critique of his and other's advocacy of the importance of the imperial theme in the New Testament see, *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating the Empire in New Testament Studies*, eds. Scott McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2013.

moment when Israel's history and world history would turn their great corner at last, when YHWH's kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it was in heaven. The central symbolic act by which Jesus gave meaning to his approaching death suggests strongly that he believed this moment had come. This would be the new exodus, the renewal of the covenant, the forgiveness of sins, the end of exile. It [Jesus' death] would do for Israel what Israel could not do for herself.⁷⁶

In his popular commentaries Wright also points out how the cross is implicit in all aspects of Jesus' kingdom work. In the healing of the demonically infested man, in Mark 5:1-20, for example, Wright believes Mark is telling us 'the bigger story'. He writes,

At the climax of Mark's story Jesus himself will end up naked, isolated, outside the town among the tombs, shouting incomprehensible things as he is torn apart on the cross by the standard Roman torture, his flesh torn to ribbons by the small stones in the Roman lash. And that, Mark is saying, will be how the demons are dealt with. That is how healing takes place.⁷⁷

Similarly, as Mark 5 unfolds, he heals an unclean woman from a long-standing internal haemorrhage by himself becoming unclean on the cross, and he raises Jairus' daughter through his own encounter with death and resurrection.⁷⁸ So, in the gospels, crown and cross are inseparably linked.

But what happened to 'the kingdom of God' in Paul and later writers? Why is it mentioned so little, or, for that matter, preached so little by him and others in the rest of the New

⁷⁶ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 596-7.

⁷⁷ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2001), 56-57.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

Testament?⁷⁹ The theme is most definitely present even if the language is somewhat modified. For our purposes the statement about the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 is the most significant reference:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

His vision is of a world put to rights because all God's enemies have been vanquished, all God's people have been vindicated and transformed, and God himself assumes his rightful place in the creation, reigning supreme, "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). The same vision is expressed in different language in Ephesians 1:10 when what God has purposed in Christ will "be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ". Similar thought forms are found in Colossians 1:20 where Paul, having just mentioned, in verse 13, that Jesus 'has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, now looks forward to "all things" (which, since the context is that of creation is in no way restricted to a few individuals going to heaven) being reconciled to God because of the peace Christ has made "through his blood, shed on the cross".

Even so, the focus shifts from the kingdom of God to concepts such as justification. Wright's primary explanation, supported by others like Thisleton, is that the idea of the kingdom of God was readily intelligible in a Jewish context but needed re-imagining for

⁷⁹ Outside of Acts, Paul's only references are Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:24; 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5. Wright (*PFG*, 480) says that the theme, "the kingdom of God, seldom appears on the surface of Paul's text, but when it does, it is quite significant".

a Gentile audience. They weren't speaking or thinking in kingdom of God terms in the Roman world, but they were thinking about issues of justice and who was the true Lord of the world. It was still a Jewish message about a Jewish Messiah, but re-imagined.⁸⁰ Israel's God had always been seen as a God who reigned in righteousness, or justly. God's reign, justice, law, judgment and justification are all of a piece.

In the gospels, "Israel's God [was] the creator coming to set up his rule' and he is doing so through the Messiah and by judgment. 'Judgment' is in fact a positive thing. It is what restores health to a society, a balance to the world. It replaces order with chaos."⁸¹ Currently the Messiah reigns, so the kingdom is a "present reality", but it is also a future reality when God's people will also reign and God will finally become "all in all".⁸² So the question becomes who are God's people, working to restore God's reign? The answer is, those who are justified, those who are 'in' the Messiah rather than 'in Adam'.⁸³ So the vision of the kingdom and the teaching of justification are inextricably bound up together. And neither the kingdom, nor justification, occurs apart from the cross of Christ.

CONCLUSION

From three different angles, these writers agree that the crown and the cross, although distinguishable, are inseparable. They give us three different approaches to answering the question. No doubt other approaches could be added. Their work is not exhaustive but it is persuasive. The crown and the cross are closely intertwined and it is impossible to have the one without the other. There is no kingdom apart from the atonement, since

⁸⁰ N. T. Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London, SPCK, 2005), 156-157. See also, p. 137 and Antony C. Thiselton, *The Living Paul: An Introduction to the Apostle and his Thought* (London: SPCK, 2009), 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁸² *Ibid.* and 1 Cor. 15:28.

⁸³ Rom. 5:12-6:14.

without the cross God has not defeated his enemies, dealt with the problem of people's alienation from his rule and its cause, that is sin, nor re-established his reign in the world he has made. But equally atonement is much bigger than the individualistic message about heaven (if it is about "going to heaven" at all⁸⁴) to which we have often reduced it. Atonement is about God's universal kingship being established from here to eternity. By that cross "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ". And if that saying in 2 Corinthians 5:17 which is echoed in Colossians 2:13-14 is clearly, given the context, about the forgiveness of people's sins, then in Colossians 1:20, the reconciliation spoken of is equally clearly about more than the forgiveness of individuals. There, God's pleasure through Christ is to "reconcile to himself *all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross". There, emphatically, the context is that of creation itself, restored to its state of perfection once the alien thrones, powers, authority, and rulers have been defeated.

The crown and the cross are inseparable and together form the only pathway that leads to forgiven sinners and a renewed creation. Since that is our destination, it is incumbent on us now as citizens of the king to both preach the good news and work for justice and righteousness in the present world.

⁸⁴ See, Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007) and J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 2014).

WISDOM AND SEXUALITY
THE INTRIGUING ASSOCIATION OF EXPLICIT SEXUAL
LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY IN THE SAPIENTIAL
TRADITIONS OF PROVERBS 1–9¹

IVOR POOBALAN

INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of sexually explicit language and imagery in the biblical tradition of Wisdom is curious. What could prompt the sages of ancient Israel to include the erotic in their extensive discourses aimed at exhorting young Israelite males to live circumspect lives? This feature takes on an unmatched prominence in Proverbs 1–9. In his brief yet incisive article, “Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1–9,” Roland E. Murphy observes:

When one considers the general tone of the first nine chapters of Proverbs, the extraordinary emphasis given to sexual conduct is striking, even oppressive. One would have thought that the brief reference in 2:16-19 might have been adequate. But the subject is taken up again and expanded in some 65 verses. More lines are given to the topic of the strange woman than to any other figure,

¹ First published in Prabo Mihindukulasuriya, Ivor Poobalan, Ravin Caldera, eds., *A Cultured Faith – Essays in Honour of Prof. G. P. V. Somaratna on His Seventieth Birthday* (Colombo: CTS Publishing, 2011), 67-90.

even to Lady Wisdom (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6). The emphasis seems out of all proportion to the importance of sexual conduct.²

Murphy's perplexity is the common response of the thoughtful reader, and this warrants the further exploration of this theme. We shall do this by critically examining a representative text (Proverbs 5:15-23) in its literary, canonical and historical contexts, in order that we might listen better to the argument of Proverbs, and discern what the particular text perceives to be the function of sexual language and imagery in instruction about wisdom.

Proverbs in the Canonical and Ancient Near Eastern Context

Although Proverbs comes to mind as the typical book on Wisdom in the Bible, it is just one within a corpus of such literature within the field of biblical studies. This includes *Job* and *Qohelet*, and in the apocrypha, *Sirach* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*.³

Clifford however presents two characteristic features that bind the 'wisdom' books together: 1) the relative absence: of covenant or cultic language, of the notion of kingship, and of any reference to the Hebrew patriarchs. 2) the strong didactic tone and the pervasiveness of the term 'wisdom' in the entire corpus; "Forty-two times in Proverbs, eighteen times in Job, twenty-eight times in Qohelet, sixty times in Sirach (σοφία, *sophia*), and thirty times in the Book of Wisdom."⁴

The study of Wisdom Literature suffered a serious setback during the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation, which marked the 'dawn' of modern historical-critical study of Scripture. The great interest within Reformation Theology in historical roots,

² Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988), 600.

³ Richard J. Clifford, "Introduction to Wisdom Literature," in *The New Interpreters Bible* vol. V (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 1.

⁴ *Ibid*, 1-2.

and the impetus toward freedom from hierarchical and static systems, led both to the exaltation of studies pertaining to the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, Prophets and Psalms, and to the corresponding neglect of the Wisdom Literature, especially Proverbs. This was in contrast to the great interest shown by both Jewish and Christian exegetes during the many preceding centuries.⁵ Significant advances in Proverbs-studies the twentieth century have helped to redress the balance. At the same time the recent, marked, interest in Proverbs shown by numerous authors employing a feminist interpretive stance, could partly be explained by the previous scholarly lacuna, as much as one might by the *feminine* personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9.

In comparison to her surrounding cultures Israel's Wisdom Tradition was a relative newcomer within the ancient Near Eastern milieu.⁶ Archaeological discoveries of a number of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom-texts (some belonging to the 3rd millennium BC) not only confirm the previous point, but suggest a closer link between them and the Old Testament that at one time would have been considered unthinkable.⁷ Scholars are

⁵ Clifford, "Introduction to Wisdom Literature", 2.

⁶ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 17: "The book of Proverbs belongs to an international Wisdom tradition that began some two thousand years earlier in Egypt." This fact should not, however, obscure the distinctive character of Israelite Wisdom, on which see Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (Waco, Texas: Thomas Nelson, 1998) xxvii: "The initial discoveries in the nineteenth century of Egyptian texts brought on exaggerated claims of Israelite dependence; this has been called a 'ma'atizing' of biblical wisdom in general." For a comprehensive compendium of essays on Israelite Wisdom in the ancient Near Eastern context, see John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and The Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

⁷ Fox, *Proverbs*, 19-23, provides a summary of the most relevant Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian texts. See also John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2006), 74-78 and 287-311.

now more likely to distinguish between Israel's sapiential tradition and her prophetic traditions. Whereas the latter was developed in radical discontinuity from non-Israelite cultures, the former appears to have welcomed, and even collaborated with, the traditions of Israel's neighbours.⁸

What provided the impulse for the spontaneous development of wisdom traditions in the ancient world? One might generalize that wisdom speculation is the inevitable by-product of the universal human curiosity regarding how "to live optimally in a world [humans] found only partially understandable."⁹ Proverbs, more specifically, focuses this "optimal living" on the issue of *character formation*. In fact one might say that all of biblical wisdom holds up character, not mere pragmatism, as its chief concern: "Indeed of all the books and genres of biblical literature, it is the wisdom corpus that most explicitly addresses the character and praxis of both the individual and the community."¹⁰ Brown further comments, "the idea of character constitutes the unifying theme or centre of the wisdom literature, whose *raison d'être* is to profile ethical character."¹¹ This no doubt will be a significant factor in elucidating the interplay of Wisdom and Sexuality in Proverbs 1–9.

Sex and Sexuality in the Old Testament Canon

The Old Testament is surprisingly candid in its discussion about sex and sexuality. This is surprising because of the cloud of suspicion and disapproval that has accompanied much of the

⁸ Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 17: "[The Old Testament] can speak of the gentile sages with a respect it never shows towards their priests and prophets . . . Israel's wise men were ready to sift and assimilate some of this imported wealth."

⁹ Clifford, "Introduction," 16.

¹⁰ William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

discussion on sexuality in the history of the Church. The latter was largely due to the fact that neo-natal Christianity found herself placed early in the incubator of Platonic philosophy; the pitting of the spiritual against the material and sensual.¹² Consequently, although the Bible speaks openly about a wide range of subjects pertaining to human sexuality, Christian and even Jewish interpreters have all too often commented only on the Bible's condemnation of inappropriate sexual behaviour, saying little or nothing of its positive teachings. This has led to the long-held popular notion that the Bible assesses sex negatively, and endorses the repression of such urges.

Nowhere is the Bible more explicitly erotic in its genre than in the *Song of Songs*, and it is precisely the history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation of this biblical text that best illustrates the muting of Scripture in its openness and celebration of human sexuality. Tremper Longman notes that until as late as the nineteenth century the book was "unquestioningly treated as some sort of allegory."¹³ Thereafter there occurred a 'shift' away from allegorizing, to literary readings of the text as love poetry. He sees four contributing factors for this shift:

1. The larger cultural transformation when Western Culture moved from a pre-modern to a modern worldview.
2. The archaeology of the Near East that yielded ancient documents including several love poems from Egypt and Mesopotamia that parallel *Song of Songs*.
3. An awareness of modern Middle Eastern cultures that evince customs similar to those alluded in the *Song of Songs*.
4. The new appreciation for the body one finds in Western Culture, even in religious circles.¹⁴

¹² See Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), 36.

¹³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-38.

Introductory Comments on Proverbs 1–9

Proverbs 1–9 in the Canonical Shape of the Whole

The book of Proverbs is composed of eight ‘collections,’¹⁵ of which 1–9 “is the most aesthetically composed and theologically incisive.”¹⁶ Most scholars are also of the opinion that this is the latest of the units that make up the book. The view is that after much of the present Proverbs had been assembled together, Proverbs 1–9 had been composed to function as a fitting Introduction to the whole.¹⁷ The bulk of Proverbs 10–31 is made up of the “literary proverb;” the familiar “two parallel lines of poetry.”¹⁸ These present down-to-earth advice on how one could be successful in life. One could argue, however, that 1–9 has a very different emphasis. It is not providing a set of ideas that *lead a person to wisdom* as much as it is arguing that the literary proverbs of 10–31 would be incomprehensible and futile if they are not appropriated by one who has already possessed, or begun a relationship with Wisdom. The unique feature of this section – with its personification of Wisdom as a lady-figure, and of its counterpoint Lady Folly – shows the use of a device for attracting the attention of the implied audience, the inexperienced young men of Israel, to this very priority.

Structure

In his essay, “The Formation of Proverbs 1–9,” Fox helpfully summarizes the diverse scholarly opinions on the textual history of the section. These views may be placed within a spectrum ranging from B. Lang’s assertion that this is “an unsystematically compiled piece of school literature without a planned structure,

¹⁵ See Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2000), ix-xi; Kidner, *The Proverbs*, 22; Fox, *Proverbs*, 4-5, however, analyses the book into six sections with four subsections to section VI.

¹⁶ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 55.

¹⁷ See Michael V. Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/4 (1997), 613; J. Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the Outsider Woman,” *Biblica* 72 (1991), 461.

¹⁸ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 28.

without unity of thought, and without progression in content,” to P. Skehan’s argument that “the entirety of Proverbs 1–9 was precisely crafted.”¹⁹

Fox takes a mediating position, and argues for both “considerable cohesiveness” and multiple-authorship. The latter does not lead Fox to suggest that a later redactor merely assembled together self-contained literary units. On the contrary he proposes a more dynamic, evolutionary process of growth, whereby “later authors read, learned from, and elaborated the themes of the earlier texts.” He therefore posits four developmental stages:

1. A Base Text (including the Prologue and cycle of poems termed ‘the ten lectures’).²⁰
2. The insertion of five poems (‘the interludes’).
3. Minor scribal insertions.
4. The continued process of expansion in the Septuagint tradition.²¹

Social Setting

Determining the social context of Proverbs 1–9 is no mean task.²² This is largely due to the paucity of specifically historical clues such as personal names, place names and historical events, in the

¹⁹ See Fox, *Proverbs*, 322-323; Also Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), 15: “Evidence is presented that suggests that the book of Proverbs in its present form is a ‘composition’ exhibiting a fairly high degree of literary intentionality.”

²⁰ This general outline was first proposed by R. N. Whybray who preferred to call it “The Ten Discourses,” in *Wisdom in Proverbs* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1965), 33-37.

²¹ Fox, *Proverbs*, 323.

²² See Leo Perdue, “Wisdom Theology and Social History in Proverbs 1–9,” in Michael L. Barré, ed., *Wisdom You Are My Sister* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 79: “Any attempt to provide some social and historical background to Proverbs is fraught with peril.”

text.²³ The only personal name is that of Solomon in the superscription which, most scholars agree, functions more as a literary device than as a literal-historical piece of evidence for the authorship of Proverbs 1–9.

We have already considered the suggestion that this collection is the latest in the book of Proverbs. The mention of the court of King Hezekiah provides a *terminus ad quo* to the composition because we know that Hezekiah ruled from 715–687/6 B.C. Fox prefers to place the text at a time after the Macedonian conquest, and hence the Hellenistic Period.²⁴ The general consensus however seems to be that Proverbs 1–9 was compiled early in the post-Exilic period (538-332 B.C.) when Judah was ruled as a colony of the Persian Empire.²⁵ We find the arguments for an early post-Exilic date sufficiently plausible, and we shall employ this implied social context as a working hypothesis for elucidating the text we have chosen for exegesis.

²³ But for welcome efforts to shed light on the possible social context, see R. N. Whybray, “City Life in Proverbs 1–9,” in Herausgegeben von Anja, A. Diesel, Reinherd G. Lehmann, and Andreas Wagner, eds., *Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 243-250; Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, eds., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

²⁴ *Proverbs 1–9*, 48-49.

²⁵ Perdue, “Wisdom Theology,” 80; Blenkinsopp, “Social Context,” 461 refers to “the two centuries of Iranian rule;” Christl Maier, “Conflicting Attractions: Parental Wisdom and ‘The Strange Woman’ in Proverbs 1–9,” in Athalya Brenner and Carol Fontaine, eds., *Wisdom and Psalms* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 103, prefers a stage later in the period: “the first half of the fourth century B.C.E;” Harold C. Washington, “The Strange Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה/נִכְרִיָּה) of Proverbs 1–9 and Post-Exilic Judean Society,” in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 159: “early post-exilic period.”

Canonical Connections

The discovery of other Wisdom Texts belonging to the world of the ANE, and especially documents such as the Egyptian *Instructions to Amenemope*, which showed a striking resemblance to the book of Proverbs, directed Proverbs-studies from the mid-1920s in the line of comparative studies.²⁶ Scott Harris demonstrates the dominance of this approach through his analysis of the writings of R. N. Whybray, Christa Kayatz, and W. McKane.²⁷

Harris, on the contrary, argues that the most immediate hermeneutical key for reading Proverbs 1–9 may be provided by the Hebrew canon itself. The burden of his work is to show that “portions of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs draw upon earlier traditions from the Torah and the Prophets for their form and content.”²⁸ With the development of canonical criticism and more recent literary readings of the OT, there has been a greater emphasis on intertextuality in interpreting texts. Harris explains the advantages:

We are not dependent upon extra-biblical traditions to provide us with comparative models for interpretation into which Proverbs is made to fit. Instead we take our cues from the numerous internal markings within the traditions of the book of Proverbs which locate it primarily as another member of canonical scripture and not primarily as a wisdom text in an international context.²⁹

In addition to Genesis and Jeremiah, Proverbs 1–9 has a relationship with Deuteronomy, Isaiah 40–66, Malachi, Qohelet,

²⁶ See Scott Harris, *Proverbs 1–9: A Study of Inner Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), 3f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

The Song, and Ezra-Nehemiah.³⁰ The relationship may be based either on a shared historical milieu, or on the deliberate, redactional reshaping of Proverbs on the basis of prior canonical texts. In any case the exegesis of passages in Proverbs will gain in richness to the extent these connections are assumed and explored within the warrants provided by the texts themselves.

A Translation of Proverbs 5:15-23

Drink³¹ water from your cistern;³² flowing water³³ from the midst of your well.

Your springs³⁴ will scatter outside; channels of water in the broad open places.³⁵

They will be for you, you alone; and not for strangers³⁶ with you.

³⁰ On this see Perdue, *Proverbs*, 52; Camp, *Wisdom*, 99; Blenkinsopp, "Social Context," 458-460.

³¹ Qal impv. 2.m.s. שָׁתֵּה. The imperative occurs in sixteen verses. The only other time in Proverbs 1–9 is 9:5 (Lady Wisdom's invitation). Sometimes used negatively as in Jeremiah 25:27; Hab. 2:16. Used in the context of a marital relationship in Qohelet 9:7-10; Songs 5:1. The collocation of שָׁתֵּה and בְּוֹר (cistern) in 2 Kings 18:31 (cf. Isaiah 36:16), however, may provide a firmer background to its use here (see discussion below).

³² בְּוֹר, "cistern, pit." Used some sixty times in the Massoretic Text (MT). In a region where access to fresh, potable water was highest in priority, the cistern would have been a symbol of security. Also see Deut. 6:11.

³³ Qal pl. ptc. נוֹלַל, "trickle, drop." This continues the positive metaphor of water; see Numbers 24:7; Deut. 32:2. Songs 4:15, a passage with significant connections to Proverbs 5, also uses נוֹלַלִּים.

³⁴ מַעְיִן, "spring." Found also in Songs 4:12, 15. In Joel 4:18 it contributes to eschatological discourse.

³⁵ See BHS text critical note to v. 16. The Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus prefix the negative particle μη, "Let not." Nevertheless the Syriac follows the MT reading, which is also the stance of the present translation.

Let your fountain³⁷ be blessed;³⁸ and take pleasure³⁹ in the wife of your youth.⁴⁰

A loving doe, a graceful gazelle,⁴¹

Let her breasts⁴² satisfy⁴³ you at all times. Be lost⁴⁴ in her love always.

Why would you be lost, my son, with the Strange Woman,⁴⁵

³⁶ זָרִים. The closest antecedent is 5:10, which must therefore be considered as the mutually interpretive text (see discussion below).

³⁷ מִקּוֹר. Found seventeen times in MT, although only here with the 2.m.s. suffix. See Leviticus 20:18 which uses מִקּוֹר as a euphemism for the female reproductive organs.

³⁸ בָּרוּךְ, Qal pass. ptc. Is this an allusion to fertility or sexual joy? See the discussion in Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 202f.

³⁹ Qal impv 2.m.s. שָׂמַח usually rendered “joy,” but here following Fox, p. 109. See also the parallel with שָׂחָה in v. 15.

⁴⁰ נְעוּרֶיהָ, cf. מֵאִשְׁת׃ נְעוּרֶיהָ (2:17), “partner of her youth.” These are the only two occurrences of נְעוּרִים in Proverbs.

⁴¹ “Gazelle” and “deer” are terms used as love-expressions; see Songs 2:9, 17; 4:5.

⁴² May more accurately be translated “nipple” or “teat.” Considerable confusion reign over the textual witness to this phrase. In the parallel text, 7:18, the MT clearly uses דָּרִים, “lovemaking.” LXX translates ἡ φιλία. The relative paucity of דָּר in the OT (the other occurrences only in Ezekiel 23:3, 8, and 21) gives weight to the variant reading. On the other hand דָּר in this context is not out of place. In addition the 3. m.p. imperfect יִרְדֵּךְ better explains breasts than lovemaking.

⁴³ רוּה, “be saturated, drink one’s fill;” found in fourteen verses. In Proverbs 1–9 again only in 7:18.

⁴⁴ שָׁגָה, “go astray, err.” Murphy, *Proverbs*, 31: “indicates reeling from intoxicating drink.” In our passage the verb is used twice more (vv. 20 and 21) and never again in Proverbs 1–9.

⁴⁵ זָרָה, feminine form of the adjective “strange.” In Proverbs the particular form occurs four times; all in chapters 1–9 (2:16; 5:3, 20;

And embrace⁴⁶ the bosom⁴⁷ of the foreigner?⁴⁸

For⁴⁹ the ways of a man are before the eyes of Yahweh; He observes all his paths.

His iniquities capture the wicked; he is caught by the ropes of his sin.

He will die when there is no discipline, and in the abundance of his folly he will be lost.⁵⁰

Exegetical Considerations on Proverbs 5:15-23

Structure and Coherence

Proverbs 5:15-23 is composed of nine bi-colons (A: 15-18; B: 19-20; C: 21-23) with the phrase **אֵילָה אֲהַבִּים וַיַּעֲלֶתְחִן** (v. 19a) functioning as a linking string between A and B. John Goldingay proposes the following analysis of the passage: vv. 15-19, v. 20,

7:5); the first and last references as **מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה**, “from the strange woman.” The adjective appears only eight times in the MT, and has sparked a vigorous debate in recent times. For a survey of scholarly opinions and a proposal for elucidating the use of **זָרָה** in Proverbs see later discussion.

⁴⁶ **חָבַק**, “embrace, clasp.” Significant parallels in 4:8; Qohelet 3:5; 4:5; Songs 2:6; 8:3.

⁴⁷ **חֵיק**; also in 6:27.

⁴⁸ **נְכַרְיָה** like **זָרָה** in the previous colon, has been the subject of intense speculation. Its use in Proverbs as a technical term bearing a much richer meaning than referring merely to a woman from a non-Israelite culture, must be conceded at the least.

⁴⁹ The use of the subordinate conjunction **כִּי** demonstrates that vv. 21-23 *explain* vv. 15-20.

⁵⁰ This section (vv. 21-23) uses a number of forensic terms that serve the theology of the OT – **עוֹן** – **רָשָׁע**, **חַטָּא**, **מוֹת**, **מוֹסֵר**, and **אוֹלָה** – and nuances the comparison with the antecedent text, 5:15-20, with moral overtones.

and vv. 21-23.⁵¹ He argues strongly for considering v. 20 as being deliberately dislocated from an original position between v. 2 and v. 3. The motivation for this, he opines, could be the thematic connections of vv. 19–23 that is created by the recurrence of *שָׁגָה* in v. 19, v. 20, and v. 23.⁵² His survey of three diverse approaches (R. B. Y. Scott – P. W. Skehan, R. N. Whybray, and W. McKane) to the structure of Proverbs 5, in addition to his own reconstruction, goes a long way to show that the jury is still out on the matter.⁵³

The position taken in our translation is that sections A, B, and C are self-contained units that have been arranged by the redactors of the MT on the basis that they share the common theme of *marital fidelity*. Whereas A and B are linked by the use of a key phrase (see above), B and C are linked by the repetition of the key verb *שָׁגָה*. Each section shows its own unity either by a structural balance (A and B) or by theme (C).

The Unity of Section A (5:15–18)

5:15 and 5:18

- The first and last colons in this section (15a and 18b) use the only two imperatives (*שָׁתֵּה* and *רִשְׁמָה*).
- They also place “your cistern” (v. 15a) in a parallel position to its referent “the wife of your youth” (v. 18b).
- “Your well” in v. 15b finds its parallel, “your fountain,” in v. 18a.
- The latter two bicolons also use the only two participles in the section: *נֹלֵים* and *בְּרוּךְ*.

⁵¹ John Goldingay, “Proverbs V and VI,” *Revue Biblique* 84 (1977), 81-83.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 85-87.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 83-85.

5:16 and 5:17

- The central two verses, vv. 16 and 17, speak of the benefits that accrue from sex within marriage.
- The use of the 3.m.p. imperfect verbs **יִפְרֹצוּ** and **יִהְיוּ** point to the *consequences* of the actions commanded in the framing sections; vv. 15 and 18.
- We understand – as will be argued below – vv. 16-17 to be alluding to the common *expectation of children* in any discussion about sex in marriage.

The Unity of Section B (5:19b–20)

Here the unit is held together by a chiasmic arrangement of imagery:⁵⁴

- “Her [the wife’s] breasts” (v. 19b) balances with “bosom of the foreigner” (v. 20b)
- The verb **יִרְנֶה**, “they will satisfy you” (v. 19b) balances with **וְהִתְחַבֵּק** “you will embrace” in v. 20b.
- At the centre of the chiasm is the theme of total engagement; the enduring idea of “being lost” (**שָׁגָה**) in love. Thus, “be *lost* in her [the wife’s] love” (v. 19c) balances with “why be *lost* in a strange woman” (v. 20a).

The Unity of Section C (5:21 – 23)

This section holds together three distinct sayings that “may have existed as independent proverbs before being combined and applied to the lesson at hand.”⁵⁵ The destructiveness and folly of

⁵⁴ Few scholars have concerned themselves with a detailed structural analysis of vv. 15-20. As a result the work of Gale Yee, “I Have Perfumed My Bed With Myrrh: The Foreign Woman (*‘iššâ zārâ*) in Proverbs 1–9,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43 (1989), 53-68, is most helpful. Although the scope of her discussion does not include 5:15-20, her identification of chiasms in related passages serves as a model for what we have proposed.

⁵⁵ Fox, *Proverbs*, 204.

marital infidelity may be seen as the binding theme. Here שגה is used a final time to demonstrate that to choose the “strange woman” above the “wife of your youth” (therefore by implication to opt for עוץ, רשע, חטא, the absence of מוסר, and the increase of אולת) is to *surrender total control*, as is the common experience in sexual engagement.

How the Passage Functions in the Context of Proverbs 5–7

Fox argues for the uniqueness of our text because “it is the only passage in the Bible that celebrates the pleasures of marital sex,” whereas in the case of the Song of Songs the latter describes the relationship between a couple that is yet intending marriage.⁵⁶ Despite the uniqueness of 5:15–20, its meaning and function cannot be fully appropriated outside of a consideration of its literary co-text, and Proverbs 5–7, in which “proper sexual conduct is the main theme,” provides this.⁵⁷

Out of the eighty-four verses found in these chapters, a total of sixty-five (5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27) are dedicated to a discussion on sex and sexual behaviour. Based on the fact that the bulk of this material has to do with *warning the young son about the dangers of illicit alliances*,⁵⁸ we suggest that our passage was meant to function as a corrective to what appears to have been the normative behaviour of young Israelite males during the implied period.

The chief burden – on a surface-reading of Proverbs 5–7 – is the allurements of sexual temptation. In chapter 7 this is illustrated using the cameo of the “woman decked like a prostitute” (vv. 6–23); her *modus operandi* (vv. 10–17) and particularly her speech are presented in colourful detail. Similarly, it is the woman’s “lips

⁵⁶ Fox, *Proverbs*, 207.

⁵⁷ Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros,” 600.

⁵⁸ See the references to: “the strange-woman” (5:3, 20; 7:5), “the foreigner” (5:20; 6:24; 7:4), “the evil woman” (6:24), “the wife of another” (6:26).

that drip honey,” and “speech that is smoother than oil,” in chapter 5 (v. 3), as it is the “smooth tongue,” “beauty,” and “[captivating] eyelashes” of the adulteress in chapter 6 that describe the real problem for the wisdom teachers of Israel.

And so, through 5:15–23, the sage intends to address the youth positively. Sexuality is far too much a natural and ubiquitous human phenomenon (and the strongest at that), for it to be regulated by mere prohibitions of illegitimate sexual activity. For the wise parent establishing a proper context and right attitudes towards sex is the necessary prerequisite to help young people make wise choices. It is for this reason that the parent offers his son a broader view of marital sex; as a chief source of pleasure and benefits, along with the privilege of its call to filial responsibility. By this means the parent-figure is confident of winning the young man’s attention.

The Affirmation of Exclusive and Unmitigated Sexual Expression in Marriage

The Christian community was shaped, as we said, by Greek philosophical dualism, which later developed into the mediaeval ecclesiastical onslaught on sexual pleasure. In recent centuries, Puritanism and the British Victorian era contributed to seal the fate of sex-talk in the public arena of western culture as essentially a non-religious and worldly discourse. Christians, if they must speak about it, should do so in highly controlled environments using a liberal amount of euphemistic language. Certainly parents are rarely the first to educate their children in the rudiments of this most natural aspect of human life and society. Given this background, the twin *commands* by the parent in 5:15 and 5:18, “*Drink water* from your cistern. . . *Take pleasure* in the wife of your youth,” followed by the wish, “Let her breasts satisfy you at all times, and be lost in her love always,” sound strange and radically unreal.

It was a similar response to the Song of Songs that has contributed to centuries of misunderstanding and debate about

its meaning and purpose. Nevertheless, we noted with Tremper Longman above that one of the factors that aided the western world to see the Song in a more literal light was its introduction to Middle Eastern cultures, in which attitudes and practices pertaining to marriage and sexuality (even into contemporary times) show striking similarities to the implied world of the Songs or Proverbs 5:15-23.

In this respect Raphael Patai's *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* published in 1959 remains one of the finest resources for correlative study of Scripture and culture.⁵⁹ The more common form of this latter method is to study the Bible against the cultural background of *its own time*, using archaeology and historical research as a tool. Patai's study presents an alternative method: to read aspects of the Bible (in this case its allusions to sex and family) *against the backdrop of the nineteenth to twentieth century Middle Eastern cultures* (especially tribal groups), and to compare the prevalent customs and values in both contexts. By using ethnographic research, scholars are able to determine the antiquity of certain features of the culture, which may then help in elucidating the meaning of a particular text of Scripture. Given the paucity of sources for this highly specific subject it may be best to set out some extensive quotes about sexuality in tribal Middle Eastern cultures:

Licit sexual activity is a sacred duty. It is the greatest joy.⁶⁰

Judging from the great preoccupation of Middle Eastern cultures with sex, in both its positive and negative aspects, one is driven to the conclusion that the Middle East has always been a world area of high and intense sexuality.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

The following provides a most interesting insight for understanding the positive commands found in Proverbs 5:15 – 23:

The strong sexuality of the Middle Eastern populations, both ancient and modern, is expressed in the positive, affirmative attitude toward sex within marriage, its only legally and morally approved context. Man and woman are not only allowed, they are commanded to marry. They are not only permitted, they are supposed, to enjoy the sexual act in each other's legally sanctioned embrace. They are, by religious law as well as by social expectation, bound to procreate many children. In brief, what the Middle Eastern mores say to the individual is not only, "You are forbidden, under the penalty of death, to indulge in sex in these and these ways!" but also, "You are commanded to engage in frequent and intensive sexual activity in this approved way."⁶²

Longman's other point about why scholars today are more likely to see the Song of Songs as primarily about human sexuality was that archaeology from the nineteenth century has yielded thousands of documents including several Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and other love poetry.⁶³ The parallels between these and the Bible are too direct to suggest any longer that the more ancient a culture, the more inhibited it would have been in its sexual discourse. On the contrary, using metaphors and similes these sample, ancient love poems give vivid expression to the subject:

The best girl of your firstborn offspring; whose goodness is like that of 'Anatu, whose beauty is like that of 'Atiratu; The pupils (of whose eyes) are of pure lapis-lazuli, whose eyes are like alabaster bowls, who is girded with ruby . . .⁶⁴

⁶² Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible*, 164.

⁶³ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

If you see to handle my thighs together with my breasts . . .
would you leave when you remember food?⁶⁵

Take my breasts. Abundant for you is their offering.⁶⁶

The Water-Imagery in Proverbs 5:15–23: Its Multi-Valence and Potential for Application

Our text chooses “water” as the primary metaphor to drive the authorial intention. Out of the forty-two words that make up the MT of 5:15-20 a surprising twelve are directly associated with the imagery of water: מַיִם, מַעְיִינֹתַי, בְּאֵרַי, וְנֹזְלִים, מִבְּוֹרַי, שְׂתֵה־מַיִם, פְּלִגִּי (twice).

In the Middle Eastern setting, where the lack of water constitutes the single greatest threat to one’s survival, water becomes one of the most commonly used figures of speech. But this very familiarity also means that the metaphors and their associated imagery become capable of multi-valence in their figurative use. Most scholars simplify Proverbs 5:15 -23 to the suggestion that the entire passage is about the *satisfaction* or *pleasure* the young male is to gain from sexual intercourse with his wife. Granted vv. 19-20 has this as its main thrust, but to assume this to be the full meaning would run the risk of missing the nuances inherent to the language of vv. 15-18, for instance.

Our approach rather is to first examine the several metaphors in the light of their historical and canonical use. Thereafter we shall consider their most immediate referents and therefore their most likely meanings. Finally these ‘meanings’ will have to be tested for coherence, specifically within the argument of the text, and with the canonical context in general. This approach allows for the reality of ambiguity as a “linguistic obstacle in communication:”

⁶⁵ John B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978), 101.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Ambiguity is not a characteristic of language but of speech. It occurs when an utterance may bear more than one meaning and we are left in doubt which of the possible meanings is intended. Language is not ambiguous in itself, though it supplies the raw material for ambiguity; it becomes ambiguous in use, when neither context nor tone provide adequate clues to the speaker's intention.⁶⁷

In Proverbs 5:15-23, as may be said to be true of the whole Hebrew Bible, the ambiguity arises from "associative thinking."⁶⁸

This kind of associative link was particularly important in the exegesis of Scripture. Jewish exegetes had a name for it, *g^ezerah sh^ewa*, which signified the explication of one text by cross-reference to another which had some verbal link with it . . .⁶⁹

While agreeing with most interpreters that 5:15-23 is in the main a reference to sex within marriage, we propose that the associative ambiguity of the various figures of speech (cistern, well, spring, channels of water, fountain, intoxication, etc.) allude to a more holistic vision. We discern at least *three* associated ideas incorporated *within* the notion of sexuality in marriage; ideas that present themselves in the natural divisions of 5:15-19:

Sex in Marriage as the Place of Security and Well-Being

"Drink water from your cistern; flowing water from the midst of your well" (5:15)

The implied emphasis in this command is not on the terms "water" or "flowing water," but on the fact that these issue from sources or reservoirs that are the exclusive property of the auditor; מְבוֹרֶךְ and בְּאֵרְךָ, "your cistern" and "your well." Most

⁶⁷ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster, 1980), 95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

translations bring out this emphasis by adding “your own cistern,” and “your own well.”

The scarcity of water made the possession of cisterns and wells (in good repair) a matter of great import. In Deuteronomy 6:10-11 the idyllic nature of the Promised Land is described in terms of fine large cities, houses filled with goods, vineyards, olive groves, and *hewn cisterns you did not hew*. In Jeremiah 2:9-13 the unprecedented folly of Israel in abandoning the security of the relationship with Yahweh for her idols is described as follows: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and *dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*”

The closest parallel however to 5:15a is found in 2 Kings 18:31. This is in the context of the Rabshakeh’s offer to the Judahites experiencing Sennacherib’s siege on Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah. To tempt the people to rebel against the king, the Assyrian promises that each man would, “eat from his own vine and fig tree, [and] drink (imperative) water *from his cistern;*” וְשָׁתוּ מִי־בֹרוֹ. This latter occurrence confirms the suggestion that to drink water from one’s own cistern was idiomatic for security, prosperity, and well-being. The argument is strengthened by the fact that in the Bible, access to, and the usage of, wells was the cause of great friction and disputes (see the patriarchal narratives for instance). To possess a well or cistern was to have security.

How does this connotation apply to the sexual relationship in marriage? The modern reductionism that exaggerates the purely physical and sensational aspects of sex ignores its fundamentally relational emphasis. In Genesis 2: 24 the sexual union in marriage was the means by which two individuals would become “one flesh.” This indicates that the act of lovemaking was primarily intended to deal with the situation of human loneliness (cf. Genesis 2:18). This function of sex is illustrated in Genesis 24:67 when Isaac brought his new wife, “into his mother Sarah’s tent . . . and was comforted after his mother’s death.”

Marriage, in Hebrew culture, was meant to be the building block of a stable society, and as such was intended to be a place of trust and security. In Proverbs 31:11 the husband of the wife of noble character (אשת חיל), “trusts (בטח) in her, and he will have no lack of gain (שלל).” In Proverbs 3:5 בטח is used to describe the attitude the young man ought to have towards Yahweh. The noun בוח (security) is used in 1:33; 3:23, to explain one of the key benefits in listening to, or keeping, Wisdom. In 1:13 שלל is what the corrupt youth offer the young man as an enticement to join them in their violent life of crime, but it is what the husband in chapter 31 can have by simply *finding* (מצא) a good wife (cf. 3:13; 8:17, 35; where Wisdom is to be found).

Marriage then is portrayed as the locus of both security and well-being, which is the point of Proverbs 5:15. At the same time this image of sexuality in marriage is employed in a transferred sense by Lady Wisdom to show the benefits of security that accrue when one enters into a similar relationship with her.⁷⁰

Sex in Marriage as the Promise of Posterity

“Your springs will scatter outside, channels of water in the broad open places. They will be for you, you alone, and not for strangers with you.” (5:16-17, 18a)

The idea that marriage in general, and sex in particular, could be envisaged without the corresponding expectation of children is a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Beginning in the nineteenth century, life in industrialized societies fostered the formation of cities that drew many thousands – both men and women – away from traditional communities and extended families in pursuit of employment. This new, fast-paced lifestyle in which both the husband and wife found themselves employed outside the home, increased the demand for greater control in the planning of families and led to the contraceptive revolution.

⁷⁰ See Proverbs 3:13-18; 4:5-9; 8:1-21.

In the biblical context, as in most non-industrialized societies to the present day, the procreation of children was one of the most obvious purposes of sex. In fact it would be somewhat redundant to speak of marriage without assuming the prospect of children. The ability to bear children was understood as specific evidence of God's favour; barrenness was viewed as proof of his judgement.⁷¹

Our text does not specifically mention children, but the allusions to the subject are strong in the context. We have chosen to translate the enigmatic text following the MT and the Syriac, and therefore see v. 16 as a positive statement of fact; the man's "springs" will scatter outside, and his "channels of water" in the broad, open places.⁷² It becomes immediately apparent that although the text still employs water-imagery, the referent has changed from that in v. 15. Earlier "cistern" and "well" connoted the security and well-being found in the context of marital sex, but here "springs" (מַעְיָנוֹתַי) and "channels of water" (כְּנָתוֹת מַיִם) most probably allude to "male reproductive powers," "semen," and "sperm."⁷³ This particular interpretation in history is helpfully summarized by Fox:

The husband's sexual fidelity will be rewarded by numerous legitimate children of his own (thus the Qimhis and the Hame'iri). These will be reckoned to his name (thus

⁷¹ Tom Horner, *Sex in the Bible* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1974), 133: "Barrenness was a curse, fertility a blessing. Or it could be stated: children were a blessing for a married couple, *the lack of them was a curse.*" For a useful comparison of ANE parallels in texts from Babylon, Nuzi, Egypt, and Assyria, see John Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968), 401-8. Also see Psalms 113:9; 127:3-5; 128:3-4; cf. Deuteronomy 28:4, 18.

⁷² Contra Fox, *Proverbs*, 200-201.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 200.

Immanuel of Rome). Furthermore just as channels of water branch out, so will his offspring proliferate (Radaq).⁷⁴

This interpretation of v. 16 is supported by the likely translation of v.17: “They will be for you alone, and not for strangers with you.” In Proverbs יַרְיָם masc. pl. of the adjective יָרַי occurs only in two places, both in chapter 5 (v. 10 and v. 17). This strongly suggests that the use of “strangers” in 5:7-14 is closely tied to its meaning in 5:15-23. In the former, the young man is warned to keep far away from the “strange woman,” else: “you will give *your honour* to others, and *your years* to the merciless, and *strangers* will take their fill of *your wealth*, and *your labours* will go to the house of an alien” (5:9-10).

Fox asks, “What will the youth be forced to turn over to others to own and enjoy?”⁷⁵ One possibility would be his sexual vigour, in which case, “the meaning would be that he surrenders his offspring and the wealth they will produce to the man whose wife he impregnates.”⁷⁶ Further Fox compares four parallel-passages in Wisdom literature (Job 31:9-10; Ben Sira 26:19-21; Proverbs 31:3; Ptahhotep II. 160-174) which share the theme of *sexual vigour and wealth*, and concludes:

Allusions to offspring and wealth, in particular agricultural produce, intertwine in these four passages. The ambiguity in Proverbs 5:9-10 too is probably a deliberate play on the two types of “strength.” The most natural reading of this passage is that adultery threatens both types of productivity. *In an agrarian society, a man’s sons had economic value for him and provided him with security in his old age. Wealth generated by an adulterer’s sons would accrue to the cheated husband’s benefit. To have one’s*

⁷⁴ Fox, *Proverbs*, 200.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

offspring reckoned as another's means losing some very concrete benefits. (Emphasis added).⁷⁷

So the point of vv. 16-17 when taken as a whole is that the man who maintains sexual fidelity in marriage will have the satisfaction of seeing his posterity multiply and flourish in the public arena (בְּרַחֲבוֹת, חוּצָה), and can hope for exclusive economic returns with no fear of losing his future to “strangers” and “foreigners” (see the later discussion on v. 20).⁷⁸

Our understanding of vv. 16-17 as referring to children may be further supported by the thought-flow that spills over into v. 18: “Let your fountain be blessed; take pleasure in the wife of your youth.” The first colon is בְּרוּךְ הַיִּמְקוֹרֶךָ בְּרוּךְ in which *fountain* is a biblical metaphor for “the female reproductive organs,” and *blessed* “shows that the reward promised in v. 18 is fertility rather than erotic pleasures. . . The word never refers to the gratification of sensual desires of any sort, including sexual.”⁷⁹

Sex in Marriage as a State of Preoccupation

“Let your fountain be blessed, and take pleasure in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful gazelle, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be lost in her love always.” (5:18-19)

⁷⁷ Fox, *Proverbs*, 197.

⁷⁸ See Leo G. Perdue, “The Israelite and Early Jewish Family,” in Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins and Carol Meyers, eds., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 189: “The household’s concern for children was based not only in the fact that they were future contributors to its labour force but also in that they provided the lineage for preserving the patrimony and perpetuating the ancestral name. In addition, they provided the care network for sustaining older parents. These factors may explain in part why there is no reference in scripture to intentional abortion or infanticide.”

⁷⁹ So Fox, *Proverbs*, 202.

This passage provides the most categorical corrective to the misunderstanding that sex in biblical times was purely a matter of duty, serving the pragmatic intention of bringing forth children. Here the husband is urged, even commanded, to find intense pleasure in sexual relations with his wife. The entire passage is supercharged with erotic language and promotes unmitigated abandonment to the delights of sensuality. Such an effect is achieved by: the choice of verbs (שָׂמַח, רוּה, שָׂגָה); the allusion to youthful vigour in the use of מֵאִשֶׁת יְעוֹרֶךָ (“the wife of your youth”); the imagery of the *doe* and the *gazelle*; and the reference to the wife’s *breasts* or *lovmaking* (דָּד or דִּוּד, on which see the translation above and the discussion below), and *her love* (בְּהִבְחָה).

As we noted earlier, Middle Eastern cultures even today do not compartmentalize sex from other aspects of marriage. This explains the implication of Paul’s advice to couples in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Here he assumes that sex has to be regular and often so that, if there was to be a break, it had to be “by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer.” Following this temporary diversion, the couple was commanded to “come together again!”

Fox notes that words derived from שָׂמַח often refer to sexual pleasure, and so paraphrases v. 18b: “Enjoy erotic pleasures from your wife alone.”⁸⁰

The verb רוּה “be saturated, drink one’s fill,” is used fourteen times in the OT but never in the Pentateuch or historical literature. The NRSV uses a variety of terms (feast, abundance, satisfy, delight, drench, drunk, soak) to effectively render it in the various contexts. In Proverbs 1–9 the verb occurs only twice: 5:18 and 7:18. In the latter case it is the strange woman who extends the highly suggestive invitation, more dramatically rendered in

⁸⁰ Fox, *Proverbs*, 202.

the LXX: “Come let us enjoy affections until dawn; come let us roll ourselves in love.”⁸¹

The verb שגה “go astray, err,” is used in nineteen verses, and on all occasions other than Proverbs 5:19 it bears a negative connotation. In Proverbs 1–9 it is found only thrice, and each time in our passage (vv. 19, 20 and 23). The latter two uses revert to the idea of moral lostness, which suggests that when the parent advises the young son to “be lost in lovemaking,” the recommendation is to completely surrender control to passion! In fact the word can also be translated “be intoxicated” or “stagger” like a drunken man, and certainly creates a vivid impression.

“The wife of your youth” (מֵאִשֶׁת נְעוּרַיִךְ) is somewhat enigmatic if it is to be understood in a temporal sense because the addressee is in fact the *young* male! So it is not unreasonable to read “your youth” as a reference to sexual vigour, although the parallel phrase אֶלְנֵי נְעוּרֶיהָ within the bi-colon of 2:17 (“She has abandoned the *partner of her youth*, and forgotten the covenant of her God”) has a strong temporal nuance.

The image of the *doe* and *gazelle* is standard language to connote the gracefulness and intense excitement that are associated with sexuality. In the Song of Songs 2:9 and 17 the girl calls her lover a gazelle and deer. He, in turn, in 4:5 exclaims: “Your two breasts are like two fawns; twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies.” In Egypt too the gazelle metaphor conveyed “the desire of the lover for the beloved:” “Terror has entered into its [the gazelle’s] limbs. Hunters are after it.”⁸²

The phrase אֵילַת אֲהָבִים can be translated “a doe of lovemaking” or “a love-doe,” and this too has strong sexual connotations. In fact Fox further argues that אֲהָבָתָם designates a sexual

⁸¹ Fox, *Proverbs*, 406.

⁸² White, *A Study of the Language of Love*, 111.

relationship, and notwithstanding the loving nature of the relationship, the term “refers only to its sexual aspect.”⁸³

In our translation we noted the difficulty with the use of דְּרִיָּה “breasts” in the MT. The parallel text, 7:18, has גְּרוּה דְרִים הַבְּקָר “Come let us slake our thirst on love till dawn.” This phrase also uses רוּה and there is no textual difficulty with דְרִים. In any case the fact that both *breasts* and *lovmaking* have sex as the common referent makes the intentions of the author plain in the context. At the same time the closeness in sound and meaning may point to the propensity of Hebrew writers to pun, rather than to any textual confusion.

The thrust of Proverbs 5:18-19, then, licenses a certain preoccupation with the sexual delights of marriage. The use of the terms בְּכָל-עֵת (at all times) and תְּמִיד (continually) confirms this emphasis.

Summary

Our study of Proverbs 5:15-19 has helped us to see that it is fundamentally a discussion about sex in marriage, but that this discussion was not limited to just one aspect alone. On the contrary we have argued that the highly figurative speech, when carefully unpacked, alludes to three aspects that naturally obtained in the Hebrew mind with regards to any discussion on marital sex: security and well-being, the wealth of posterity, and passionate preoccupation.

In Proverbs 1–9 what is most arresting is how the image of the sensuous and desirable wife coalesces with the image of personified Wisdom. In fact in 3:13-18 (cf. 8:11, 19-21) she provides security (happy are those who find Wisdom), wealth (better than silver, gold, jewels, long life, riches and honour), and delightful preoccupation (pleasantness, peace, a tree of life and happiness to those who “seize” and “hold fast” to her). In

⁸³ Harris, *Proverbs 1–9*, 202.

Proverbs 4:5-9 Lady Wisdom is to be gained, not forsaken, loved, prized, and embraced (cf. 8:17 and 9:1-6).

About 5:15-23 Murphy asks, “However, is there a larger issue than sex here, viz., the pursuit and even marriage with Lady Wisdom?”⁸⁴ Our response is affirmative without compromising the literal meaning of the advice about marital love. In other words Proverbs 1–9 presents:

- I. A discussion about the danger of sexual temptation that threatens to destroy the lives of young Israelite males and indeed the familial stability of society.
- II. A danger about the danger of naïve, undisciplined (foolish) living that threatens to mislead the young males (and thereby the whole of society) into death and *Sheol* itself.

Since one is not a pretext for the other, and if both concerns are addressed in tandem, are they related? We advance three reasons to argue that the compilers of Proverbs intended Wisdom and Sexuality to be understood in relation to one another:

- a) Proverbs 1–9 uses paired imagery and symbolism extensively: for example the two ways, the two hearts and the two companions.⁸⁵
- b) There is a deliberate attempt in Proverbs 1–9 to forge links between the implied women (“stranger,” “foreign woman,” and “wife”) and the feminine personification of Folly and Wisdom respectively.
- c) There is a convergence of the image of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 with the portrait of the Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10-31.

⁸⁴ Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros,” 602.

⁸⁵ The detailed study of the subject is Norman C. Habel, “The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9,” in *Interpretation* (April, 1972), 131- 157. The paired categories are his.

Excursus: The Strange-Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) / Foreigner (נִכְרִיָּה) as the *Crux* of Proverbs 1–9

“Why would you be lost, my son, with the strange woman, and embrace the bosom of the foreigner?” (5:20)

Introduction

The two terms זָרָה and נִכְרִיָּה have been the subject of vigorous debate for some time now. They occur together in 2:16; 5:20 and 7:5. In 5:3 זָרָה is used alone, and in 6:24 נִכְרִיָּה is found as a parallel to אִשָּׁה זָרָה.

At the outset we observe that of the two terms זָרָה takes a somewhat *controlling* function, in that it is capable of standing on its own, and whenever it is used with נִכְרִיָּה, the latter follows it in order. נִכְרִיָּה is always only one of a pair in Proverbs.

Although 5:15-23 itself is emphatically about the importance of sex in marriage, chapter 5 as a whole (as indeed all of 1–9) is a response to the figure of אִשָּׁה זָרָה, “the Strange Woman.” The motif of a female figure that threatens to destroy the future of the young son punctuates the argument of 1–9. The whole section is constructed as the parental counter to this danger. It could in fact be argued that the feminine personification of Wisdom arises as an engaged-polemic against the feminine nature of the challenge faced by inexperienced youth in Israel. It is less likely that the זָרָה / נִכְרִיָּה is modelled after Lady Wisdom. Who exactly does the former then refer to? What implication does this have on our reading of Proverbs 1–9?

A tendency among earlier commentators was to interpret this figure of the Strange Woman in allegorical terms.⁸⁶ From the twentieth century however there has been a dramatic

⁸⁶ See the brief summary in Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 254-256.

increase in interest in this outstanding figure in Proverbs. Several important studies have appeared, of which a number lean towards explicitly feminine readings.⁸⁷ These, though mutually sympathetic, display a marked variety of conclusions indicative of the strongly subjective element endemic to reader-response strategies in hermeneutics.

⁸⁷ Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in Norman K. Gottwald, ed., *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 149-165; _____, "To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry Into an Old Testament Metaphor," in Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1989), 75-94; J. Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context," 457-473; Athalya Brenner, "Some Observations on the Figurations of Women in Wisdom Literature," in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion*, 50-66; _____ and Fokkeliën Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1993); Claudia V. Camp, "What's So Strange about the Strange Woman?" in David Jobling, Peggy L. Day and Gerald T. Sheppard, eds., *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrims Press, 1991), 17-31; _____, "Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman: Where is Power to be Found?" in Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn, eds., *Reading Bibles Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 116-131; _____, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); _____, "Wise and Strange: An Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in the Light of Trickster Mythology," in Brenner, *Feminist*, 131-156; Johann Cook, "אִשָּׁה זָרָה (Proverbs 1-9 Septuagint): A Metaphor for Foreign Wisdom?" *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 106 (1994), 458-476; Carole R. Fontaine, "The Social Roles of Women in the World of Wisdom," in Brenner, *Feminist*, 24-49; Meike Heijerman, "Who Would Blame Her: The Strange Woman of Proverbs 7," in Brenner, *Feminist*, 100-109; Christl Maier, "Conflicting," in Brenner and Fontaine, *Wisdom*, 93-108; Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in Day, *Gender*, 142-160; Washington, "Strange Woman," in Brenner, *Feminist*, 157-184; Gale Yee, "I Have Perfumed," *JSOT* 43, 53-68.

A Social Context for the Strange Woman / Foreigner

We have seen that in general Proverbs is one of the more difficult books to date. Nevertheless on the basis of the text itself, and its relationship to other sections of the canon, one may be able to reconstruct a plausible social context for Proverbs 1–9.

Blenkinsopp argues that the notion of the “Outsider Woman” arose first among the “socially superior lay and priestly families of Babylonian origin who formed the controlling elite of the province under Achaemenid rule.”⁸⁸ There was an insistence at this time on *endogamous marriages* as a means to preserve the integrity of the dominant elite. He summarizes:

The anxieties of this elite to preserve its social status and economic assets may therefore have been an important factor in generating the language in which the Outsider Woman is described and her activities denounced.⁸⁹

Harold Washington posits that the *אשה זרה* and *נכרייה* represent women who did not belong to the *גולה*, community, in the early, post-Exilic society. They posed an *economic* threat:

Since genealogical lineage, land tenure and cultic membership were linked in the post-Exilic period, the prospect of exogamous marriages brought the danger of outside encroachment upon the landholdings of the Judean congregation.⁹⁰

He concludes:

The attack on the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1–9 thus belongs to a social milieu in which an ideology of descent

⁸⁸ “Social Context,” 472.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁹⁰ “Strange Woman,” 160-161.

preserved the socio-economic integrity of the community by branding outside women as נכריה / זרה.⁹¹

Christl Maier does not focus so much on exogamous marriages, as on the problem of “adultery or sexual intercourse with unfamiliar women.”⁹² In the context it is adultery that threatens family, social status, and property. She prefers the first half of the Fourth Century as a historical setting, and suggests that Proverbs 1–9 was written to “urban, upper-class groups of the Judean community with traditional values that highly influence social mores.”⁹³

Scholarly Conclusions about the Stranger and Foreigner

In this section we shall look at a sampling of scholarly conclusions regarding the identity of the Strange Woman, before venturing a proposal about how this literary feature might function within the argument of נכריה / זרה of Proverbs 1–9.

Gale Yee presents a persuasive argument to support her thesis that the “foreigner,” “harlot woman,” (6:26), “married woman,” (6:26) and “foolish woman,” (9:13) all refer to our figure: the זרה אישה. “I prefer to think of one woman, the *išša zārâ* who is described variously, rather than presuming different women.”⁹⁴ On the basis of a rather detailed study of the speeches in 1–9 she suggests that, “the *išša zārâ* embodies all that is evil and antithetical to the son’s object of pursuit, viz. Lady Wisdom.”⁹⁵

Carol Newsom’s treatment of the Strange Woman is imbued with an *a priori* assumption about the patriarchal misrepresentation of women in ancient discourse. This

⁹¹ “Strange Woman,” 183.

⁹² “Conflicting,” 102.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹⁴ “I Have Perfumed My Bed,” 54.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

assumption provides for Newsom's colourful and imaginative free-play in her reading of Proverbs 1–9:

In patriarchal thinking it is woman's lack of a phallus and the privilege that the male associates with its possession that grounds woman's inferiority. In the father's phantasm the danger is that behind the reassuring smoothness, that visible absence of a phallus, there lurks something "sharp as a two-edged sword" (5:4). The fantasy is that she not only possesses a hidden super potency but that it is a castrating potency as well. She threatens to reverse the body symbolism on which the father's authority is established.⁹⁶

Meanwhile Claudia Camp sees the Strange Woman as a figure shaped on a "trickster motif" which appears in some North American and West African tribes. The fact that these cultures have almost no bearing on the cognitive environment of the biblical text, and the fact that the "tricksters" within these narratives are always male not female figures, does nothing to forestall Camp's determination to read Proverbs 1–9 "through the lens of the trickster," and later to invite her readers to read the Bible as tricksters ourselves!⁹⁷ It is our contention that by the imposition of such categories that are quite strange to the world of the text, Camp undermines some of her otherwise valid insights. In her companion article, "What's So Strange About the Strange Woman?" she concludes that the *אִשָּׁה זָרָה* is used as a metaphor of the idea that *Woman* is a *stranger*! Here again, after much patient exegetical discussion, Camp capitulates:

The language of deviant sexual behavior is being used symbolically, but not as a mere cipher for deviant worship. Rather, it is a symbol of the forces deemed destructive of

⁹⁶ "Woman and the Discourse," 153.

⁹⁷ See Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 72-89.

patriarchal control of family, property, and society. Because control of women's sexuality is a *sine qua non* of the patriarchal family, it is no accident that the forces of "chaos" are embodied in a woman who takes control of her own sexuality.⁹⁸

It is surely an outstanding irony that in a discussion of the one text in the OT that most explicitly exalts the feminine through the literary construct of Personified Wisdom, Camp should see instead a text that is so decisively derisive of femininity that "it will ultimately split the religious cosmos of Judaism and Christianity into a dualistic moral system in which women can come out only on one side." For Camp that "side" can be described as "the quasi-human, quasi-mythical incarnation of evil."⁹⁹

A Proposed Novel Approach to Apprehending the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1–9

Our survey of the discussion has shown that the Strange Woman or Foreigner in Proverbs 1–9 has increasingly become an enigma in the academy, with most recent proposals simply imposing contemporary gender issues on to the text. The

⁹⁸ Camp, "What's So Strange," 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-31; On the above, see the helpful critique in Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 156-162. The difficulty Camp has in conceding her position in the light of exegesis is possibly illustrated again in, "The Female Sage in the Biblical Wisdom Tradition," in Gammie and Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel*, 194: "In sum, the female imagery in Proverbs most likely reflects a relatively high status for women in society during the Persian period (especially early on), and the possibility of real social influence for women of experience and wisdom. However, once a symbol like Woman Wisdom becomes established in society, it may well persist even when the conditions that nurtured it change. *Because this symbol – like all those accepted into the mainstream of religious orthodoxy – was controlled by the male hierarchy, it was possible for it to become as oppressive of women in a later period as it was supportive in the era just considered*" (emphasis added).

matter, however, warrants our pursuit because in our opinion the subject of the Strange Woman forms a crux in the shaping of the text as a whole and, more specifically, has the potential to explain the preponderance of sexual connotations in Wisdom discourse. Is there another approach to apprehend the meaning of the “Strange Woman?”

In the excitement and flurry of advancing creative readings of this unique literary feature, scholars have failed to exploit the full potential of the Old Testament canon itself for elucidating the meaning of the “Strange Woman” and the “Foreigner.” As noted previously, the two terms appear to bear a weight of meaning which is not obvious to the modern reader. In any case, given the polemical tenor of the context, these terms are not merely referential; they clearly function in a technical or rhetorical manner.

In Hebrew נְכַרְיָה simply means “foreign woman,” but on account of King Solomon’s misadventures the term took on a sharp, negative nuance in subsequent Israelite history.¹⁰⁰ One of the great burdens of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative is the failure of the Judahites in safeguarding their fidelity to Yahweh by disavowing racial compromise, which was especially brought about through marriage-alliances with non-Israelite peoples. The manner in which Proverbs 1–9 is deliberately connected to Solomon (1:1), the son of David, suggests to the reader that what follows is meant to be interpreted through the grid of a full-blown understanding of this significant figure in Israel’s history.

The adjective זָרָה (strange) holds out more promise for interpretation in view of its highly specific use. The term occurs only four times in Proverbs, and in every instance in chapters 1–9 (2:17; 5:3; 5:20; 7:5). In the whole of the OT the feminine singular adjective only occurs on four other

¹⁰⁰ See for instance, 1 Kings 11:1-8; Nehemiah 13:26.

occasions, and all within the Pentateuch;¹⁰¹ the section of the canon that without dispute constituted the Scripture for the Judahites of the fifth century BC. The occurrence of זרה in sets of four exclusively in the Pentateuch and Proverbs 1–9 is curious in itself, and naturally begs the question between coincidence and intentionality. A closer examination of the phenomenon suggests that this arrangement is in fact deliberate, and that even in this feature the authors of Proverbs 1–9 were shaping Wisdom upon the template of the Mosaic Law. How is this manifested?

The sequence in canonical use begins with the laws concerning the purity of the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1-10). One of these laws – the command against offering “strange incense” (קִטְוֹת זָרָה) – is only mentioned here. Nevertheless the theme reappears in the Pentateuch because of a related narrative involving Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, the founder of the priesthood (see Leviticus 10:1-20). The narrative explains why these young men met with a tragic end by being incinerated under the judgment of Yahweh. They had been guilty of offering “strange fire” (אֵשׁ זָרָה) on the altar of incense to Yahweh. The fact that the reader is spared the details that explain the exact nature of the sin, and the reasons for God’s judgment, heightens the impact of the central thrust of the narrative: the uncompromising nature of the holiness of Yahweh and how it is to be acknowledged in the community of God’s people. The point of Leviticus 10:3 is striking (“Through those who are *near* me I will show myself holy”), and it must not be missed: *the holiness of God will be most clearly manifested among the people of Yahweh, not by the punishment of those who are least aware of His nature, but by holding accountable those most closely associated with Him!*

¹⁰¹ Exodus 30:9; Leviticus 10:1; Numbers 3:4; 26:61.

The incident involving Nadab and Abihu was burned into the collective memory of Israel and perpetuated with intention by the shaping of her genealogical histories. The record is careful to point out on two occasions: “Nadab and Abihu, however, died before Yahweh when they made an offering with *strange fire* (אֵשׁ זָרָה) before him in the desert of Sin” (Numbers 3:4; cf. 26:61).

In its original context neither the Pentateuch nor Proverbs 1–9 were received through silent reading; the Scriptures and parental wisdom were received *orally*. The impact was auditory not visual, and this fact further complements our view about the relationship of the use of זָרָה in only these two corpuses of the canon. To a Hebrew audience that had been accustomed to hearing about the monumental tragedy that befell the young sons of Aaron because of אֵשׁ זָרָה, there could not but be tremendous significance to the warning about the dangers of the אֵשׁ זָרָה. The *phonological connections* would have been far too obvious for a society of oral-learners to ignore. Such a possibility for the interpretation of this outstanding phrase in Proverbs is based on strong canonical connections, but has not previously been advanced.

As far as the parents are concerned, the alliances that the son is likely to be enticed by and warned against (as highlighted in the Ezra–Nehemiah accounts) are not simple distractions; they threaten to consume the very life of the individual and the community. Just as Nadab and Abihu, בְּנֵי־אֹהֶרֶן, *the sons of Aaron*, experienced death by their association with זָרָה אֵשׁ, so will the post-Exilic *sons* of Israel’s noble elite experience death (מָוֶת) and sheol (שְׁאוֹל) should they attach themselves to the fiery stranger woman, אִשָּׁה זָרָה.

By the same token, just as Solomon בֶּן־דָּוִד, *the son of David*, squandered the heritage of his father and planted the seeds

that would ruin the kingdom and introduce its rampant idolatry, because of his *love* for the נכרִיָּה, the foreign woman, so would the young men of Judah forfeit and ruin their inheritance of a post-Exilic future.

CONCLUSION

Among the most insidious dangers facing the post-Exilic community of Judah (which had most successfully safeguarded her racial and ritual purity through over a century of her exile) was the widespread practice of marriages with people from the surrounding cultures. This problem occupied the attention of eminent leaders such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, and was no doubt high on the agenda of parental instruction to young people. What was most needed by the naïve was Wisdom (חֵכְמָה) tested in the crucible Israel's communal history.

In the fairly long period during which this particular problem was being addressed, the parental generation would have developed various didactic devices to help make their teachings more effective. One of these would have been to explain the folly of inter-racial marriages and other similar alliances *in terms of the foolishness of King Solomon*, and then more graphically portrayed in terms of *the reckless and ill-fated actions of the priests Nadab and Abihu*.

Our reading of the "Strange Woman" and "Foreigner" holds out more tantalizing potential when we consider what Solomon and the Sons of Aaron represented in Israel. These personae within the corpus of Proverbs 1–9 represent the loftiest institutions within Israel's socio-political history: the *monarchy* and the *priesthood*. They are both strangely absent as positive points of reference from the text of Proverbs 1–9. Is this not a critique by silence? The fact is that both the priesthood and the monarchy had eventually failed the covenant people of Yahweh. And, how had this happened when the nation had been gifted both a cult and a monarchy, a temple and a king? The burden of Proverbs

1–9 is the argument that what the people of God had lacked in her past, and desperately needed in the present, was Wisdom (חִכְמָה; this, and not rituals or kingship, would be the only dependable means by which to honour and safeguard their commitment to the covenant with Yahweh. Consequently, the young men who are enticed sexually to *break their covenant of marriage* are in fact choosing intimacy with Woman Folly and so breaking covenant with Yahweh.

On the other hand what might be the most powerful and relevant metaphor that would convey the security and delight of being intimately caught up with the Wisdom of Yahweh and therefore with their covenant-relations with him? The parents find their recommendation of passionate and lasting enjoyment of sexual expression and love in the context of divinely ordained marriage serves both to safeguard Judah racial and religious purity, as well as to strengthen the resolve of the next generation to make Wisdom, and thus the “fear of Yahweh” (Proverbs 1:7) its most desirable pursuit. The ideas coalesce when the book ends (Proverbs 31:10-31). The smart husband there represents the really smart Israelite who has embraced Lady Wisdom; at the end of the day it has become patently obvious to everyone that he is in fact the successful husband of a Wife of Noble Character.

The figure of the Strange Woman merges with Dame Folly. Hence the emphasis on proper sexual conduct has in fact a double meaning: sexual fidelity is also a symbol of one’s attachment to Lady Wisdom. The strange woman offers more than sex to the youth; she is the epitome of all that Lady Wisdom is not. Unless Lady Wisdom is pursued as the beloved, all the advice of the sage is in vain.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros,” 603.

**HOW JESUS INAUGURATED THE KINGDOM
ON THE CROSS
A KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE OF THE ATONEMENT¹**

PRABO MIHINDUKULASURIYA

INTRODUCTION

Connecting Cross and Kingdom

Two topics that are dear to the heart of Evangelical theology have been vigorously debated in recent years. The first debate concerns *what* constitutes the core content of ‘the gospel’: is it about salvation from sin through faith in Christ (which is apparently the emphasis of Paul’s epistles), or is it about the coming of the kingdom of God (which is the dominant theme of Jesus’ own proclamation in the Gospels)?² The second debate has

¹ First published in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38:3 (July 2014) 196-213. Reprinted with permission from Paternoster Periodicals. Since then, I have rewritten the opening paragraph and incorporated into this version my engagement with two very significant books subsequently published. The first is Jeremy Treat’s Wheaton College doctoral thesis, which was published as *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014). I am very grateful to Dr. Derek Tidball for alerting me to this fine book. The second is Peter J. Leithart’s *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016).

² See D. A. Carson, “What Is the Gospel? – Revisited” in Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Eds.), *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in*

been about which model of the atonement best explains *how* Jesus' death on the cross makes salvation possible. Contending theologians have either challenged or defended the logic and ethics of the 'penal substitution' model, asking whether an alternative model of the atonement, or all the different models together, make better sense of how the cross works.³ While orthodox Christian faith has always affirmed *that* God's redemptive rule on earth was — in some decisive way — inaugurated by the sacrificial death of Jesus, yet Christian theology has not satisfactorily explained *how* this was accomplished. Theories of the atonement have certainly highlighted central aspects of the instrumentality of the cross for human salvation. However, they do not relate explicitly to the kingdom of God. As a result, the conversations attempting to relate Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom and Paul's expositions of the cross continue to run in entrenched, even mutually suspicious, circles. There has been no meeting of minds and an enlarging of the frame.

Honor of John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2010), 147-170; Kevin de Young and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Crossways, 2011); Justin Taylor, "The Relationship between 'the Gospel of the Kingdom', 'the Gospel of the Cross'," accessible at: <<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/09/03/the-relationship-between-the-gospel-of-the-kingdom-and-the-gospel-of-the-cross/>>; Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2011); N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (NY: HarperOne, 2012).

³ See James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Eds.), *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006) and Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, Justin Thacker (Gen. Eds.), *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement 2006* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

J. I. Packer, for example, has acknowledged that,

In recent years, great strides in biblical theology and contemporary canonical exegesis have brought new precision to our grasp of the Bible's overall story of how God's plan to bless Israel, and through Israel the world, came to a climax in and through Christ.⁴

However, Packer has located the central message of the NT in terms of Luther's quest for personal redemption, and therefore cautioned,

And to the extent that modern developments, by filling our horizon with the great metanarrative, distract us from pursuing Luther's question in personal terms, they hinder as well as help in our appreciation of the gospel.⁵

Responding to Packer's ambivalence, Christopher Wright has stated,

I simply fail to see how gaining the widest possible biblical perspective, from the whole biblical narrative, can hinder our appreciation of the gospel – unless it is accompanied by denial of the personal and substitutionary nature of Christ's death...⁶

He goes on to say,

But I am disturbed that it is possible for the reverse to happen – namely, that some theologians and preachers are so obsessed with the penal substitutionary

⁴ J. I. Packer, "Introduction: Penal Substitution Revisited" in J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 26. Quoted in Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 156 (fn. 1).

⁵ Packer, *In My Place*, 27.

⁶ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 156, fn. 1

understanding of the cross that they either ignore or seem scarcely aware of the total biblical story in which it is set and the vast cosmic and creational dimensions of the cross that the New Testament itself also spells out so clearly.⁷

I believe these questions have remained unresolved mainly due to an inadequate understanding of how the kingdom of God relates to the cross of Christ. As long as the ontological connection between kingdom and cross remains vague, our understandings of both the declarative content and the effectual process of the gospel will remain largely determined by personal theological preference. We will not be able to hold together the gospels' focus on the kingdom and the epistles' explications of the cross. Neither will we be able to understand the nature and necessity of the New Testament's multiple salvation images.

The point of this essay is to propose that the scriptures do provide us with a consistent narrative, with its own coherent logic, of how the death of Christ brings about God's acknowledged rule, which accomplishes his redemption and judgment upon his creation. We may call it a 'kingdom perspective of the atonement,' as it holds as its basic premise that Christ's atoning work can be most meaningfully articulated in terms of the kingdom of God, as the culmination of the whole biblical narrative of Israel and the nations, in and through Christ. This, I believe, is the non-negotiable vantage point for understanding the atonement.

A Kingdom Perspective of the Atonement

Schema

The proposed perspective may be outlined quite simply as follows:

⁷ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 156-7, fn. 1

- In covenantal terms, a kingdom (*basileia*, understood as ‘rule’ or ‘reign’) is constituted by the relationship between two parties: a king and a citizenry. One without the other is not a kingdom in that sense.
- Jesus brings about God’s acknowledged rule on earth by simultaneously fulfilling, in his own person, God’s requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen.
- Christ becomes the God-approved king by proving his love for his subjects to the fullest extent by his self-sacrifice for their rescue and restoration. He proves his God-approved citizenship by becoming obedient to his Sovereign to the fullest extent by submitting completely to his authority and demonstrating his loyalty in the face of creaturely (satanic and human) usurpation, rebellion, and compromise.
- Jesus accomplishes this supremely on the cross because it is by the kind of death he suffered that both the love (for fallen creation) and obedience (to his sovereign Lord) which he had consistently demonstrated throughout his life and ministry, reach their climactic result.
- Therefore, by fulfilling both requirements of perfect king and perfect citizen, in his own person, on the cross, to God’s fullest satisfaction, Jesus inaugurates God’s redemptive rule on earth, recapitulating and reconstituting a new covenant community around his own mediatory personhood. He then invites repentant sinners to enter into that new sphere of communion with the triune God for their restoration to him and the redemption of all creation.

Theological Antecedents

Each component of this perspective is entirely unoriginal. They have venerable antecedents spanning the length of church history. For example, the covenantal shape of God’s engagement with creation is one of the greatest recoveries of the Reformed

tradition.⁸ The essentially political nature of God's mission is persuasively argued by Oliver O'Donovan.⁹ The constituent elements of a kingdom were most notably proposed by Alexander Campbell, who posited not two but five elements:

What then are the essential elements of a kingdom as existing among men? They are five, viz.: King, Constitution, Subjects, Laws, and Territory. Such are the essential parts of every political kingdom, perfect in its kind, now existing on earth... Although the constitution is first, in the order of nature, of all the elements of a kingdom (for it makes one man a king and the rest subjects,) yet we cannot imagine a constitution in reference to a kingdom, without a king and subjects. In speaking of them in detail, we cannot then speak of any one of them as existing without the others—we must regard them as correlates, and as coming into existence contemporaneously.¹⁰

More recently, Graeme Goldsworthy proposed a simpler model: “[T]here is a king who *rules*, a people who are *ruled*, and a sphere where this rule is *recognized* as taking place.”¹¹ That Jesus is the perfect or ideal king has been acknowledged, of course, from NT times; but lately substantiated by such scholars as Jamie Grant¹² and Julien Smith.¹³ That Jesus fulfilled the ideal of Israelite

⁸ J. I. Packer, ‘On Covenant Theology’, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

⁹ Oliver O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

¹⁰ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, (4th ed., Cincinnati: H. S. Bosworth, 1867), 148.

¹¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Biblical Classics Library, 2nd ed., Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1981, 1994), 47. (Original italics).

¹² Jamie Grant, *The King as Exemplar: the Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

covenant citizenship was argued most notably by T. W. Manson.¹⁴ Summarising his view of how the cross and kingdom are connected, N. T. Wright states that,

God himself will come to the place of pain and horror, of suffering and even death, so that somehow he can take it upon himself *and thereby set up his new style theocracy at last*. The evangelists tell the story of Jesus in such a way that this combination of Israel's vocation and the divine purpose come together perfectly into one.¹⁵

This proposal seeks to articulate what that undefined 'somehow' entailed.

That Jesus unifies many salvific roles in his person and work, traditionally categorized as the *munus triplex* of priest, prophet, and king, was suggested by Eusebius¹⁶ and famously elaborated on by Calvin.¹⁷ That Jesus brought the kingdom into being by being the kingdom as *autobasileia* (self-kingdom) was an insight of Origen's that the church endorsed.¹⁸ More recently, Carl F. H. Henry gave fresh articulation to the idea, stating,

Jesus in his own person is the embodied sovereignty of God. He lives out that sovereignty in the flesh. He manifests the kingdom of God by enthroning the creation-will of God and demonstrating his lordship over Satan. Jesus conducts himself as Lord and true King, ruling over demons, ruling

¹³ Julien Smith, *Christ the Ideal King: Cultural Context, Rhetorical Strategy, and the Power of Divine Monarchy in Ephesians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

¹⁴ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Its Form and Content* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935), 227-28.

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *How God Became King* (London: SPCK/ NY: HarperOne, 2012), 196 (original italics, bold type mine).

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, I.3.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.15.

¹⁸ *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 14.7.

over nature at its fiercest, ruling over sickness, conquering death itself. With the coming of Jesus the kingdom is not merely immanent; it gains the larger scope of incursion and invasion.¹⁹

Again, Goldsworthy summarized it well:

We have defined the Kingdom of God as God's people in God's place under God's rule. Now we discover that the New Testament sees the primary point of reference for each of these aspects in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the true people of God, the true kingly sphere, and the true rule of God.²⁰

Hans Boersma has carefully examined the emphases of divine violence (against the evil powers) and divine hospitality (for excluded sinners) in the historical theologies of the atonement, and commends the metaphor of hospitality as "the soil in which the various models of the atonement can take root and flourish."²¹ He further concludes that "God's hospitality is like the soil in which the process of reconciliation is able to take root and flourish."²² Accordingly, God's hospitality is the distinct characteristic of his redemptive rule.

Therefore, any newness in the present schema is due entirely to the way these affirmations have been aligned.

1. Kingdom as King and Citizens

As the late R.T. France helpfully reminded, "the kingdom of God' is not making a statement about a 'thing' called 'the kingdom,'

¹⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, "Reflections on the Kingdom of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35:1 (March 1992), 42.

²⁰ Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 96.

²¹ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 18.

²² Boersma, *Violence*, 112.

but about *God*, that he is king. Thus, ‘the kingdom of God has come near’ means ‘God is taking over as king,’ and to ‘enter the kingdom of God’ is to come under his rule, to accept him as king.”²³ This theocracy though is covenantal in nature, a pledge between king and subjects, enunciated repeatedly in Scripture by the ‘covenant formula’: ‘I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God’ (Ex. 6:7; elaborated in 19:5-6; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:12-13). The other components of Israel’s nationhood such as territory (e.g. Lev. 18: 24-28; 25:23), laws (e.g. Deut. 4:5-8), and institutions (e.g. Deut. 17:8-20), though necessary, were entirely contingent upon and derived from the primary relationship between king and subjects.

The bipartite covenant formula is evoked extensively in the prophetic tradition (e.g. Jer. 7:23; 11:4: 30:22; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech. 88:8, etc.). The promised ‘new covenant’ was framed in these same relational terms (Jer. 31:33; cf. 24:7; 32:38), and is explicitly instituted as such by Jesus at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:15-20). The bipartite formula is used also to foretell the inclusion of those formerly excluded (Hos. 1:9-10 and 2:23), and appropriated in the NT in reference to the full citizenship of Gentiles in Christ’s kingdom (Rom. 9:25-26; 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

OT historiography too assumes that a kingdom was held together by the mutual acknowledgement of king and subjects. Israel’s demand for a human king (1 Sam. 8:7) introduced the new factor of that human king’s relationship with, and representation of, his Divine King. This was the basis of Saul’s rejection (1 Sam. 13:14) and David’s confirmation (2 Sam. 5:12). This is most plainly evident when “Jehoiada then made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they would be the Lord’s people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people”

²³ R. T. France, “Kingdom of God,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al (eds.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/London: SPCK), 420 (original emphasis).

(2 Kgs. 11:17). The extended metaphor about Israel's shepherds and sheep (e.g. Jer. 23:1-4 and Ezek. 34; see sec. 2, below) reflects the same bipartite combination. It is encapsulated by the proverb, "A large population is a king's glory, but without subjects a prince is ruined" (Prov. 14:28; cf. 20:8). The same assumption lies behind Jesus' rebuttal that "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand," which was made in response to the Pharisees' accusation that "By the prince of the demons he casts out the demons" (Mk. 3:22-24). Therefore, that a kingdom consists of a king and a citizenry is a demonstrably biblical idea.

2. Jesus as Perfect King

While all the Gospels announce Jesus' kingship, the *connection* between his royal function and his death is most poignantly highlighted in John.²⁴ Mark narrates that when Jesus saw the crowd, "he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34); Matthew adds the explanation, "because they were harassed and helpless" (9:36). In John, Jesus assumes the heroic role of the "good shepherd" (10:11a, 14) in damning contrast to the thief who "comes only to kill and steal and destroy" (10), and the hired hand who "runs away because [he] does not care for the sheep" (13). The self-sacrificial defense of the sheep is presented as the natural and definitive test of the role: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (11b). The voluntary nature of Jesus' self-sacrifice in loving obedience to the Father is obviously important for the narrator. The point is repeatedly made: "And I lay down my life for the sheep... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father" (15, 17-18).

²⁴ For a recent treatment of this nexus see Mavis M. Leung, *The Kingship-Cross Interplay in the Gospel of John: Jesus Death as Corroboration of His Royal Messiahship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

The OT background of Yahweh's promised judgment against Israel's cruel and self-serving "shepherds" and his intervention through the provision of a Davidic "shepherd" (Jer. 23:1-6; Ezek. 34; 37:24-28; Zech. 9-14) constitute the unmistakable and directly relevant context of Jesus' explanation of his ministry to "seek and save the lost" who have drifted away from covenant faithfulness (Lk. 19:10; cf. 5:31-32; 15:4-7 and parallels). More relevantly, the "shepherd of Yahweh" texts informed Jesus' understanding of the *extent* to which this contrastive way of ruling will require of him: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, *even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mt. 20:25-28 = Mk. 10:42-45). At the beginning of the Passover narrative, John connects Jesus' love for the disciples and his impending death when we are told that "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *to the end*" (13:1). Finally, in the Upper Room Discourse, the test of love in death is most clearly stated: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (15:13).

The counter-intuitive manifestation of God's/Christ's love for, and redemption of, sinners is expressed in the Pauline epistles. The efficacy of Christ's sacrificial love is described collectively as "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). It is also described personally as "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20; cf. 1:4). Christ's death is also described as an act of love for humanity as well as devotion to God: "as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2).

The Revelation begins with the assurance that Christ “loves us and...has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1:5a-6). It goes on to acclaim the Lamb’s universal authority as achieved by his self-sacrifice:

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

...Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing! (5:9-10, 12)

Jesus’ amalgamation of the exalted ‘Son of Man’ of Daniel 7 and the suffering-and-vindicated ‘Servant’ of Isaiah in his prediction that “the son of man must suffer many things...” (Lk. 9:22; cf. 24:7; Mk. 9:12) reveals his self-understanding of this complex role. The enthronement of “the one like a son of man” to whom is given “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:13-14, 27) is an entirely triumphant vision, with no hint of suffering. Such claims as “All things have been handed over to me by the Father” (Mt. 11:27; cf. Jn. 3:35; 13:3; 17:2), “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28:18), and “He has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man” (Jn. 5:27), all go back to Daniel 7, and perhaps to certain Royal Psalms (2, 110, 118, etc.). As evident in his prayer in John 17:4-5, Jesus appears to have fully understood that serving his appointed mission to bring God glory on earth will necessarily entail humiliation and death but will, with equal certainty, lead to his own glorification. Philippians 2:6-11 is a remarkable synthesis of this *anabasis-katabasis* (descent and ascent) movement, whereby Jesus becomes the perfect king by being the self-emptying servant.

3. Jesus as Perfect Citizen

The OT presents several virtue lists and character vignettes that illustrate God's expectations of an 'ideal Israelite' (e.g. Deut. 10:12-19; 1 Sam. 2:26; Job 29, 31; Ps. 1, 15, 24, 112; Is. 66:2; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 18:5-9; Mich. 6:8, Zech. 7: 9-10, etc.). Such godly dispositions as righteousness (*tsēdāqâ*), justice (*mišpāt*), mercy (*hesed*), love (*ahabah*), faithfulness (*emunah*), and the "fear of the Lord" (*yir'at YHWH*) are upheld in every genre of OT writing. The ideal covenant citizen was one who demonstrated these qualities in ordinary and extraordinary situations out of wholehearted loyalty to *Yahweh* and the community. Therefore, to love *Yahweh* with one's entire being (Deut. 6:4-5) and one's neighbour as oneself (Lev. 19:18b) became the epitome of *torah*-obedience, transcending even the sacrificial cult.²⁵ When a scribe once agreed with Jesus that "to love [God] with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," Mark witnesses that "Jesus saw that he answered wisely, [and] said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (12:28-34). It is also remarkable that Nathaniel, whom Jesus recognized as "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47) is the very first disciple to declare his recognition of Jesus as "... the King of Israel!" (49).

The first petition of the 'Lord's Prayer' is arguably the simplest and clearest NT definition of the kingdom of God: "...Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). Jesus repeatedly stated that doing God's will was the all-embracing purpose of his life and mission. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (Jn. 4:34; see also 5:30; 6:38; 8:26; 9:4; 10:37-38; 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). At the beginning of his public ministry, when Satan "showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," this was the very thing that Jesus had

²⁵ For citations in Intertestamental Jewish literature see "Mark 12:29-31" in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 219.

come to accomplish. The critical factor was how and for whom he would accomplish it. Therefore, to Satan's conditional offer, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me," Jesus is resolute in his response "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (Mt. 4:8-10; para. Lk. 4:5-8; citing Deut. 6:13). At the end, the same resolve carried him through the most agonizing decision of his incarnate life: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Mt. 26:39, 42 para. Lk. 22:42).

Therefore, when NT writers explain the instrumentality of Jesus' death (from the perspective of his human participation), they consistently identify his creaturely obedience as the turning point.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's *obedience* the many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:18-19).

...but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming *obedient to the point of death*, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name... (Phil. 2:7-9).

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned *obedience* through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:7-10).

When pressed to explain the instrumentality of the cross, John Calvin stated,

Now someone asks, how has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us. To this we can in general reply that he has achieved this for us by *the whole course of his obedience*.²⁶

Christ's perfect compassion was the decisive factor of his kingly intervention. His perfect obedience was the decisive factor of his submission to God's rule as the true citizen. The kingdom is established by the unique combination of these two critical factors embodied and enacted by Christ, and climactically manifested on the cross. Yet there is much *communicatio idiomatum* between the categories of king and citizen. According to the Deuteronomic ideal, the king *is* the ideal citizen, diligently studying the *torah* for the sake of his fellow Israelites (Deut. 17:14-20). In performing his kingly role Jesus was ever conscious of his subordination to the Father and his royal mission being one of obediently carrying out the Father's mandate (Jn. 5:19; 14:10b, 31; 12:49-50; 15:10, etc.). On the other hand, as we shall see, the Israelite citizen was ethically inculcated *inter alia* in the royal paradigm. To be of Adamic descent, bearing the image of God, was to participate in the rule over creation (Ps. 8). Therefore, although the proposed schema is easily comprehensible, it preserves the mystery of the atonement. If anything, it takes us deeper into it.

Implications of the Kingdom Perspective

So how does a kingdom perspective of the cross account for the diversity of salvation images in the NT? How does it relate to traditional theories of atonement? How does it define the core message of the gospel?

²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.5 (emphasis mine).

1. The Kingdom and Salvation Images

A kingdom perspective of the atonement is able to account for the variety of salvation metaphors employed by Jesus himself as recorded by the Evangelists and by the other NT writers. This is because these images reflect the multiplicity of functions inherent in Christ's roles as king and citizen.

As the late Waldemar Janzen convincingly demonstrated, the OT offered ethical 'paradigms' modelled on identifiable community functions such as priest (priestly), sage (sapiential), king (royal), prophet (prophetic), and kinsman-redeemer (familial), for the moral formation of ordinary Israelites.²⁷ A covenant citizen was thereby oriented to act instinctively in the spirit of the *torah* in any given situation. Jesus' perfect covenant citizenship was demonstrated in his unique excellence of fulfilling these ethical paradigms. Here the 'offices' traditionally assigned to Jesus must be expanded to include the fuller range of community functions in scripture. To the *munus triplex* of priest, prophet, and king (which includes the functions of 'judge' and 'warrior') need to be added the categories of wisdom-teacher²⁸ and kinsman-redeemer.²⁹ Others such as exorcist and charismatic miracle-worker could be understood as belonging to a particular prophetic tradition (i.e. of Elijah and Elisha).³⁰

²⁷ Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). I am grateful to Dr. Chris Wright for introducing me to this book.

²⁸ See Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2000).

²⁹ See D. A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Go'el Institutions in the Old Testament with Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1974); Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., "The Go'el in Ancient Israel: Theological Reflections on an Israelite Institution," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991), 3-19.

³⁰ See for example, Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1973); Graham H.

Jesus uniquely exemplified the priestly paradigm of holiness and mediation towards God.³¹ His incarnation of God's holy presence among his suffering people transcended the holiness of both Temple and priesthood (Mt. 12:1-8). The most explicit identification in the NT to Jesus' priestly function is his High Priesthood in the Order of Melchizedek as expounded in Hebrews 5:6 and 7:1-17 (citing Ps. 110:4). Jesus is upheld as superior to the Levitical high priesthood because he is empathetic yet sinless (Heb. 4:15), made perfect in obedience (5:8-10), and forever accessible (7:23-25). But most supremely Jesus transcends the priestly paradigm by becoming the perfect atoning sacrifice *himself* (9:11-14, 26; 10:19-31; 12:14-17; 13:1-17). While it was always understood that obedience *is* the perfect sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:6-8 (quoted and expounded in Heb. 10:4-10); 50:9-15; 51:16-17; Prov. 21:3; Ecc. 5:1; Is. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:21-24; Hos. 6:6 (quoted in Mt. 9:13 and 12:7); Mich. 6:6-8; Mk. 12:33; Rom. 12:1), only Jesus was capable of perfect obedience, and therefore, offer in himself *the* perfect sacrifice. The connection between Jesus' sacrifice of perfect obedience and the receiving of kingship is clearly made in Hebrews:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (10:12-14).

The prophetic paradigm was more overtly part of Jesus' self-understanding (e.g. Mk. 6:4 para; Mt. 23:37-39, para; Lk. 13:33). That Jesus was the "prophet like Moses" predicted in

Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), and *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), etc.

³¹ See Gerald O'Collins SJ and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is affirmed in John 6:14; 7:52; Acts 3:22 and 7:37. The prophets were ideal Israelites because they not only kept covenant themselves, but called their fellow citizens back to repentant reconciliation with God and righteous responsibility towards their weaker neighbours. Their loyalty to God, demonstrated in subversive words and actions, often ran the gauntlet of public scorn and state retribution. However, Jesus saw his own impending suffering as more than that of an exemplary prophetic martyr. He repeatedly claims for himself the enigmatic role of the Isaianic suffering servant, whose faithfulness not only leads to suffering (all too familiar), but whose suffering is substitutionary and leads to the restoration of the unfaithful (utterly astonishing!). Isaiah 52:13-53:12 reports how the one whom God calls “my servant” bears the punishment of sins upon himself in suffering and death, and in his ‘resurrection’ bringing forth the forgiveness and restoration of the guilty. What the Good Shepherd is to the royal paradigm, the Suffering Servant is to the prophetic.

In the category of wisdom-teacher, Jesus’ public ministry provides ample examples of his creative and didactic efforts to alert ordinary people to God’s decisive new initiative of grace.³² His own experience was something like that of Job, facing the incredulity and accusations of those who should have known better. His ‘fear of the Lord’ was tested in the Qoheleth-like crucible of seeming futility, and the Job-like crucible of seeming abandonment. Psalm 22 with its cry “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (1) is not technically a ‘wisdom psalm’, but it voiced the existential anguish of the righteous in a cynical world well enough to become the most quoted psalm in the gospels. In it the faithful sufferer complains, “All who see me mock me... ‘He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’” (6-8). The psalm concludes with a hopeful declaration of God’s rule over the nations (25-31). Elsewhere, salvation itself is linked to the faithfulness of the wise: “By

³² See Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*.

steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil” (Prov. 16:6; cf. Is. 52:13). In this Jesus was not only “something greater than Solomon” (Mt. 12:42, para.) in the extent of his wisdom but the very manifestation of God’s wisdom. As Paul proclaims, “Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. 28; Jn. 1:1-5f.; Col. 2:3). By acting wisely Jesus confronts and confounds the conniving powers of evil and undoes their arrogance and rebellion.

Although the term ‘redeemer’ is hardly thought of in connection with its original OT clan function of *go’el*, the kinsman redeemer, that is exactly what it means. The *go’el* epitomized heroic familial duty and sacrificial hospitality in the Israelite socio-economy, stepping in, often at risk to his own well-being, to rescue distressed family members from debt and slavery. ‘Redemption’ is primarily an economic metaphor and the ‘redeemer’ is often portrayed as liberating the debtors, slaves, and captives of sin requiring a ransom for their release (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14). Once again, Jesus perfectly embodied the ideal Israelite. The psalmist humbly acknowledged that “Truly no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit” (Ps. 49:7-8). Therefore, he trusted that “...God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me” (15). Jesus not only paid the ransom for indebted and enslaved sinners, he did so by becoming the ransom *himself* (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6).

As Janzen summarizes,

Obedience to God’s word and suffering on account of the inevitable opposition to it became central to this prophetic paradigm. It became foundational for the suffering yet vindicated Servant Jesus Christ and the suffering yet redeemed servant community founded by him. Though Jesus Christ also embraced paradigmatically the offices of king, priest, and sage, these were qualitatively transformed

by the attributes of the suffering and redeemed servant. He was the lowly king; the self-sacrificing priest; the bringer of wisdom not of this world. Above all, he was the Son of God, as Israel had been God's son. In that role he was the embodiment of Israel. ... [T]hese components of the paradigm of Jesus Christ were not abruptly innovative, but deeply rooted in the Old Testament's paradigmatic pattern...³³

Therefore, when Jesus and his apostolic witnesses needed to expound the fullness of his saving work on the cross in specific contexts of proclamation, worship, and teaching, they did so by drawing on these very categories of loving king and obedient subject. Images of victory, judgment, liberation, rule, and reward proceed from the royal paradigm. The law-suit idiom of justification and the familial image of reconciliation are recognizably prophetic concerns. Purification, sanctification, expiation, and propitiation are priestly functions. Making the foolish wise and bringing the immature to maturity are sapiential goals. Redemption, release, restoration, hospitality, adoption, and inheritance are facilitated by the kinsman-redeemer.

Therefore, the variety of salvation images freely employed by Jesus and NT writers make sense within the two broad categories of perfect king and perfect citizen, both of which Christ fulfilled uniquely, supremely, and with finality.³⁴

2. The Kingdom and Atonement Theories

Michael McNichols makes a very pertinent observation about the current debate on the atonement when he states that,

³³ Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 176.

³⁴ But that is not all, he also did so 'capacitatingly,' that is, making it unprecedentedly possible for his faithful Spirit-empowered disciples to participate in the "filling up" of what he has left intentionally "lacking" in particular missional situations (Col. 1:24 in the sense of Phil. 2:30).

. . . the atonement is best viewed through the lens of the kingdom of God rather than through any one theological theory. In the atonement – the full expanse of Jesus’ life, death, and post-resurrection existence – the kingdom is launched into human history, the people of God are reborn and redefined, and the mission of God is made evident to the world. Viewing the atonement within the context of the kingdom of God expands the understanding of salvation to include the destiny of individuals without ignoring the biblical narrative’s inclusion of the whole of creation in God’s eschatological intentions.³⁵

While usefully highlighting vital theological truths about the cross, atonement theories cannot offer a comprehensive historical-theological account of Christ’s death. Even the ablest defenders of the centrality of penal substitution humbly concede that other images of the atonement are necessary to make up the fuller picture of what Christ accomplished.³⁶ The development of atonement theories within historical theology has been a more complex process than has sometimes been portrayed. They neither fall into neat chronological epochs, nor can they be uniformly attributed to particular cultural incubations. While cultural factors were more influential in the origin of some theories such as Anselm’s satisfaction theory, notions of penal substitution appear across the span of church history.³⁷ The metaphorical nature of atonement language is essential for theological construction and yet requires a foundation of

³⁵ Michael McNichols, *Atonement as Kingdom Reality* (paper presented to the Society of Vineyard Scholars, October 2010), 12-13. Accessible at http://www.academia.edu/470976/Atonement_as_Kingdom_Reality.

³⁶ See Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham: IVP/Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2007), 210. See also, Treat, *The Crucified King*, 176, 181.

³⁷ Jeffery, et al., *Pierced*, 161-204.

historical actuality to reflect upon.³⁸ Romans 5 illustrates the point excellently. This text is arguably the most paradigmatic delineation of the atonement in the NT (other examples would include Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 3:10-14; Col. 1:13-23; 2:9-15).

In the first half of the chapter, Paul enumerates the many—present and future—*benefits* of Christ’s saving act (Rom. 5:1-11): “justified by faith...peace with God” (1), “access by faith into this grace in which we stand...[the] hope of the glory of God” (2), “[ability to] rejoice in our sufferings...and hope [that] does not put us to shame..., God’s love [...] poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (3-5), “justified by his blood...saved [...] from the wrath of God” (9), “reconciled to God... [we shall be] saved by his life” (10), “now received reconciliation” (11). The fact that neither Jesus nor Paul nor any other NT writer provides an elaborate delineation of an ‘atonement theory’ but instead drew on familiar biblical motifs which were readily understood (if not believed) by their Jewish and Gentile contemporaries indicates that the presentation of the atonement in the NT as a whole corresponded plausibly with the narrative, ethical, and institutional framework of the OT. If later interpreters unfamiliar with that thought-world would see instead clues suggestive of transactional mechanisms that were plausible to their own socio-intellectual milieu, they would be missing the atonement’s richer theological context. ‘Justified by faith’ and ‘saved from the wrath of God’ would naturally resonate with minds shaped by Roman and Teutonic legal concepts. ‘Hope of the glory of God’ could likewise be comprehended as deification to intellects attuned to Greek mysticism. ‘Peace with God’ and ‘reconciliation’ would similarly resonate with feudal

³⁸ See Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), esp. 64, 88; and Henri Blocher’s defense of metaphors in understanding the atonement in ‘Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:4 (Dec 2004), 629-45.

notions of fealty and the restoration of honour. The point, of course, is to keep going back to the whole story of God's mission in the Bible.

Notice that Paul does not simply leave us with a multiplicity of images. He goes beyond the metaphors to locate the atoning act itself. This act embodies, and is therefore expressible by, the range of atonement images employed. Paul identifies the crux of the atonement in the second part of the chapter, revealing the *basis* of the salvation blessings he has just described.³⁹ He does this by contrasting Adam's act of sin and incurred death with Christ's reversal of that penalty by his act of salvation (Rom. 5:12-21): Adam's act is described as "one man's trespass" while Christ's is "the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ" (15). Whereas "the judgment following [Adam's] one trespass brought condemnation,...the free gift following many trespasses brought justification" (16). Because of Adam's trespass "death reigned" but "the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life" through Christ (17; also 21). What constituted this "free gift by the grace of one man" is then very clearly described:

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men,
so *one act of righteousness* leads to justification and life for all men.

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,

so by the *one man's obedience* the many will be made righteous (18-19).

Irenaeus' idea of 'recapitulation' (based on Rom. 5:12-21)⁴⁰ did not go far enough to understand that Christ's redeeming

³⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT: Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 317.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7; 3.21.9-10; 3.22.3; 5.21.1.

obedience not only undid Adam's sin to bring humankind out of Satan's power, but that Christ's obedience re-established God's acknowledged rule over creation which Adam was excluded from because of his act of betrayal.⁴¹ Paul's plain prose identifies the veritable 'baseline' of the atonement from the angle of Christ's humanity: Christ's righteousness which consisted in his obedience reversed the effect of Adam's disobedience which was his trespass, thereby enabling condemned sinners to become righteous and live. The one act of atonement is the wellspring of a multiplicity of metaphorical images. Therefore, a kingdom perspective of the atonement can account for the diversity of the Bible's salvation images. It spares us the Procrustean alternative of privileging one atonement theory over others, while constituting a common point of reference by which all the kaleidoscopic images are held together.

Jeremy Treat's major contribution *The Crucified King* (2014) is a welcome and powerfully persuasive demonstration of the inseparability of cross and kingdom. However, Treat does not carry through his reading of biblical theology into a reworking of the systematic theology of the atonement. Instead, Treat's approach takes the standard historical theories as given and tries to integrate them by order and rank within the set discourse of systematic theology, albeit masterfully. Thus he identifies, as others before him, the penal substitution model with the cross, and the *Christus Victor* model with the kingdom.⁴² He then ranks penal substitution as the real *modus operandi* of the atonement with *Christus Victor* as the result. Simply put, "On the cross, Jesus bears the penalty of sin by taking the place of sinners, thereby defeating Satan and establishing God's kingdom on earth."⁴³

⁴¹ Irenaeus believed that the kingdom of God would be inaugurated only at the second coming of Christ. See Denis Minns OP, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 140-148.

⁴² Treat, *The Crucified King*, 204-209.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 224.

This would be a satisfying argument if these models accurately represented what Jesus actually accomplished on the cross. The straightforward ‘exchange’ mechanism of the classic penal substitution model, for instance, makes for emotive homiletic effect. But its purported ‘logic’ does not bear out. If Jesus died physically to take our deserved punishment of physical death, then we ought no longer to face that consequence if we have been truly forgiven; for forgiveness must entail the cancellation of impending punishment. But, of course, we still die. Or, if it is to save us from spiritual death that Jesus died, then his death must have had to be spiritual also. But the spiritual death of eternal separation from God was not what Jesus suffered. His felt separation from God was momentary. If there was indeed a straightforward penal substitution, Christ would be suffering eternal conscious torment in hell for all eternity, so that we could be in heaven. But, gloriously, he does not.

So, in what sense does the ‘substitution’ happen? It must be situated in the narrative of the covenantal sovereignty of God over Israel and the nations, in the sense of Isa 52:13-53:12, the most explicit text conveying the idea of bringing restoration to others by bearing the punishment incurred by them. It is the suffering of the loyal citizen, identifying so completely with his fellows (“because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors,” v. 12b) that he is willing to suffer for their benefit (“yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” v. 12c). That is why the servant (of both his king and his fellows) bears the punishment “laid on him” by God (v. 6) and also “himself bore, and...carried” (v. 8). It is telling that Matthew does not interpret this latter verse in ‘penal substitutionary’ terms at all, but evokes the self-giving compassion of the Isaianic servant in reference to the healing ministry of Jesus (Matt 8:17).

Also, contrary to popular preaching and hymnody, the Father never “turned His face away” from the crucified Son.⁴⁴ As already stated, the cry of dereliction (Ps. 22:1) is the heart cry of the faithful when loyalty to God is tested by the felt absence of God’s vindicating presence. It is not evidence that God actually abandoned his faithful one even for an instant when, as is commonly inferred, He “made [Christ] to be sin” (2 Cor. 5:21) or of “becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). Psalm 22:24 explicitly declares that the exact opposite is true:

For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and *he has not hidden his face from him,*
but has heard, when he cried to him.

Peter Leithart’s *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission* (2016) is a major achievement in the right direction, going further than Treat’s commendable effort. Not only has Leithart brought cross and kingdom together (although that is not his primary aim) but also re-framed ‘penal substitution’ (with the necessary qualifications and cautions) as a “plot summary” which can only be meaningfully unraveled within the *context* of the biblical narrative’s perception of social order connecting God’s mission for Israel and all humanity.⁴⁵

Finally, a kingdom perspective of the atonement fulfils two criteria that a successful atonement theory ought to do. First, it explains how the cross *simultaneously* addresses all the constituents of the atonement: a justly angered yet loving God, a sinful and lost humanity, a creation subjected to futility, and an incorrigibly evil adversary. Second, it is both objective and subjective. In Christ’s kingdom-inauguration, we not only receive atonement by Christ’s kingly love and citizenly obedience which,

⁴⁴ Most memorably, Stuart Townend, ‘How Deep the Father’s Love for Us,’ Thankyou Music, 1995.

⁴⁵ Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World*, 161-169.

objectively, wins God's approval. We are also taught, *subjectively*, by the transformation of the whole orientation of our lives, how to live lives of serving love and filial obedience worthy of the kingdom. For we are not invited merely to be citizens of Christ's kingdom, but to be co-heirs and co-regents with him. We receive that reward only by persevering through the same trials and seizing the same opportunities of service that he demonstrated.

3. The Kingdom and the Gospel

The proposed kingdom perspective of the cross resolves the needless tension between the so-called 'salvation gospel' and 'kingdom gospel', because it establishes the inauguration of the kingdom as the necessary precondition for salvation of individuals and nations. This is the significance of references to the 'now' (in distinction to references to 'the past') in the earliest apostolic preaching, that God has begun to reclaim his world by exalting Jesus as Lord through the victory of his life, death and resurrection to save both Jews and Gentiles who repent and submit to his rule from judgment (Acts 2: 14-40; 3: 17-21; 10:34-43; 17:30-31). It is not merely what he *did* on the cross (inaugurating God's redemptive rule), but what he *became* for us (our exalted Saviour and Lord), as manifested by the resurrection, that makes Jesus the protagonist of God's kingdom.

Don Carson and others have expressed legitimate concern that the definition of the gospel in primarily kingdom terms tends to reduce its message to a nebulous and moralistic 'social gospel' as witnessed in early 20th century liberal Christianity.⁴⁶ The reason, however, for that flawed conceptualization of both the gospel and kingdom was precisely the denial that the cross of Christ had actually introduced a new *status quo* that altered the relationship between God and humankind. But an understanding of the kingdom that is ontologically dependent upon the cross of Christ cannot be sundered from the forgiveness and salvation it makes uniquely possible.

⁴⁶ Carson, "What Is the Gospel? – Revisited", 160-161.

The kingdom and cross are inextricably linked. The reign that God begins on the cross of Christ is indeed about the conversion of sin-ridden creatures and the renewing of our evil-riddled creation with judgment and re-creation. We are called to repent because God is already bringing humanity to account for our offensive ways of being, and called to believe because God is introducing a future existence already discernible within our present experience. We are embraced into the convicting and sanctifying communion of the triune God for the very purpose of devoting our energies to his mission in and for creation. The kingdom perspective of the cross recognizes the critical instrumentality of Jesus' death for the realization of God's redemptive rule. It makes the cross central for the kingdom, and the kingdom central for the cross. By clarifying for us that the basis of salvation is the inauguration of the kingdom, and that the purpose of salvation is the life of the kingdom, we are kept from the heretical tendency of choosing between the 'salvation gospel' or the 'kingdom gospel'.

Furthermore, a kingdom perspective of the atonement brings greater clarity to the interconnection between Jesus' lordship and saviourship. From this perspective we understand better why Jesus prays, "...glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, *since you have given him authority over all flesh* [i.e. lordship], *to give eternal life to all whom you have given him* [i.e. saviourship]" (Jn. 17:1-2). For it is by first establishing the reality of God's redemptive rule that Jesus brings people into it. The same kingdom authority is the *raison d'être* of the apostles' disciple-making mission: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...*" (Mt. 28:18-20). It is also Paul's all-compassing orientation for Christian ethics: "...So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, *that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living*" (Rom. 14:8-9).

A kingdom perspective of the atonement also draws us more naturally to missional discipleship, as it calls us to imitate the sacrificial love and loyal obedience of Christ. As became evident in the so-called 'lordship salvation' debate, for some at least whose Christian initiation was based on a deficient exposition of penal substitution, the realization that discipleship invariably demanded costly obedience apparently came as a subsequent realization.⁴⁷ The point is that Jesus does not simply die on the cross in our place, so that we do not have to die ourselves ('exclusive substitution'); nor even that in his death we have already died ('inclusive substitution'); but, more accurately, that Christ calls us to die on the cross with him, daily (Lk. 9:23). The NT resounds with the conviction that by the atonement Christ's disciples do not by any means escape the cross, but rather, are inexorably crucified to it (Mt. 10:38; 16:24-26; Mk. 8:34-35; Lk. 9:23; 14:25-33; Jn. 12:24; Rom. 6:1-7, 11, 14; 7:4-6; 8:12-13; 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:15, 17; Eph. 4:22-25; Gal. 2:19-20; 5:24; 6:14; Col. 2:12-20; 3:1, 3-7; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 2:11; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rev. 2:10b; 26-28, etc.).

Must the gospel then necessarily be articulated in explicitly 'kingdom' language? Yes and no. No, because we understand from the NT itself that there is flexibility here. While the Synoptics speak of experiencing atonement as "entering" (eg. Jn. 3:5), "seeing" (3:3), "inheriting" (Mt. 25:34), and "receiving" (Mk. 10:15) God's kingdom, John mostly prefers the corresponding expressions of "life", "eternal life", "in God", "in truth", and so on. Paul's use of "in Christ", "in the Lord", or "in the Spirit" also communicates a comparable sense. However, the underlying basis of all these expressions is the same: God's new

⁴⁷ See Michael S. Horton (ed.), *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Wipf & Stock, 2009).

initiative in Christ to include within his transforming sovereignty a creation otherwise lost.⁴⁸ As John Stott argued,

Of course the announcement of God's kingdom was the very heart of the message of Jesus, and to Jewish audiences steeped in the messianic expectation the apostles continued to proclaim it. But already in the New Testament the good news was expressed in other terms. In John's Gospel the emphasis is on eternal life rather than on the kingdom, and to Gentiles Paul preferred to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior. Yet all these are different ways of saying the same thing. If we are to preach the gospel faithfully, we must declare that through the death and resurrection of Jesus a new era dawned and a new life became possible. But we may speak of this new life in terms of God's kingdom or Christ's lordship or salvation or eternal life or in other ways. It is certainly not essential to refer explicitly to the kingdom; indeed in countries which are not monarchies but republics kingdom language sounds distinctly odd.⁴⁹

Similarly, Lesslie Newbigin made the following observations:

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and sent out his disciples to do the same. But that is not all. His mission was not only a matter of words, and neither is ours. If the New Testament spoke only of the proclamation of the kingdom there could be nothing to justify the adjective 'new.' The prophets and John the Baptist also proclaimed

⁴⁸ G. E. Ladd explored these terms in *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993). For kingdom language in the Synoptics see (54-67); for Johannine expressions (290-305); for characteristically Pauline idioms (521-537). See also Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁴⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Culture and the Bible* (Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; originally, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 16. And yet, republics are based on the notion of sovereignty too (that sovereignty rests with the citizens).

the kingdom. What is new is that in Jesus the kingdom is present. That is why the first generation of Christian preachers used a different language from the language of Jesus: he spoke about the kingdom, they spoke about Jesus. They were bound to make this shift of language if they were to be faithful to the facts. It was not only that the phrase 'kingdom of God' in the ears of a pagan Greek would be almost meaningless, having none of the deep reverberations that it evoked for someone nourished on the Old Testament. It was that the kingdom, or kingship, of God was no longer a distant hope or a faceless concept. It had now a name and a face—the name and face of the man from Nazareth. In the New Testament we are dealing not just with the proclamation of the kingdom but also with the presence of the kingdom.⁵⁰

Therefore, although 'kingdom' phraseology is not essential in evangelistic preaching the all-encompassing new reality of God's redemptive rule must necessarily be communicated. The appeal to each individual to repent and believe ('salvation gospel') is the necessary *response* to the reality of God re-taking charge of his creation through Christ ('kingdom gospel'). The first apostolic gospel proclamation at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40) is surely paradigmatic here. First, Peter concluded his message with the resounding declaration: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). To this, a response was inexorable. "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (37). Second, the appropriate response was urged: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for

⁵⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, rev. 1995), 40.

all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (38-39). Interestingly, the earliest evidence of Paul’s evangelization attests to the same gospel content. In 1 Thessalonians (written in the early AD 50s), Paul writes, “For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (2:11-12). The gospel consists of these two inseparable parts: (a) the proclamation that the *kingdom of God* was inaugurated by the *cross of Christ* and, (b) the appeal to repent and align oneself personally and corporately with that new reality.

CONCLUSION

A kingdom perspective of the atonement is able to hold together the many emphases that models of atonement attempt to convey. It demonstrates lucidly how the covenantal expectations of the Hebrew Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ in a consistent theological narrative. It encompasses the significance of Jesus’ life and ministry for the atonement, not only his death and resurrection. It connects seamlessly the central NT themes of the kingdom of God and the cross of Christ. The core salvific act, of which the diversity of salvation images are expositions, is identified. Through it we see how the message of personal salvation as well as cosmic renewal coheres. Consequently, a kingdom perspective of the atonement offers fresh insight for our ever-reforming understandings of the gospel, conversion, discipleship, church and mission.

**WHO ARE THE ‘FRIENDS’ IN LUKE 16:9?
AN EXPLORATION OF THE LINK BETWEEN
FRIENDSHIP, MAMMON, AND ETERNITY**

ROCHELLE HAKEL-RANASINGHE

INTRODUCTION

Luke 16:9 has been variously described as a ‘thorny verse,’ an ‘objectionable clause,’ and ‘the real *crux interpretationis* of the parable [of the Dishonest Steward].’¹ Depending on the focus of the exegetes, v. 9 has received some, much, or no attention. Scholarship over the centuries has contended with the many issues that have arisen as believers have attempted to unravel the enigma that is Luke 16:9. Even among those who consider v. 9 to be of significance, their interpretations are often at odds with each other.

¹ Dennis J. Ireland, “A History of Recent Interpretation of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13),” *WTJ* 51 (1989): 293-318, accessed June 22, 2014, https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/ntesources/ntarticles/WTJ-NT/Ireland-UnjustStewardLk16-WTJ.pdf; Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 246; Donald R. Fletcher, “The Riddle of the Unjust Steward: Is Irony the Key?” *JBL* 82 (1963): 15-30, 19.

1. *The Background*

The parable of the Dishonest Steward (also known as the Unjust/Unrighteous/Shrewd Steward/Manager) is only recorded in Luke 16. While commentators dispute over whether v. 9 is an integral element of the parable, or part of the sayings appended to the parable (either by Jesus, Luke, or the Early Church), or whether they ruthlessly jettison it, I have found no evidence of doubt regarding its authenticity. Much ink has been expended on analyzing various aspects of this parable.² Almost every commentator commences with the sentiment captured by Ireland: ‘There is little question that the parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13 is one of the most difficult of all Jesus’ parables to interpret.’³

2. *The Problem*

While this parable has attracted much attention over the centuries – and continues to do so – the common approach has been to interpret 16:9 in the light of the parable which precedes it (16:1-8) and/or the sayings which follow it (16:10-13); and sometimes, in the light of the parable which follows that (16:19-31). The weight of scholarly discussion has been concerned with the setting of the parable, the limits of the original story told by Jesus, the behaviour of the steward, the nature of the debts and the implications of the debt-reduction, the identity of the master in v. 8, and the master’s praise of the steward. However, most commentators rush past v. 9, with an uncomfortable cursory glance in its direction, and focus their

² Forbes notes: ‘Apart from the expositions given in general books on the parables, Kissinger lists 137 works in his bibliography (up to 1977), while Ireland surveyed 140 interpreters in his PhD dissertation’. Greg W. Forbes, *The God of Old: The Role of Lukan Parables in the Purpose of Luke’s Gospel* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 152.

³ Ireland, “Recent Interpretation,” 293-318.

attention on the *logia*⁴ that follow (vv. 10-13); others proceed straight on to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, often using it as a lens to interpret 16:9. As a result, the most common interpretation is that 16:9 is an instruction about using one's money to give alms to the poor, so that they will welcome one into eternal life (i.e. 'heavenly dwellings').

The problem with such a conclusion, however, is that '. . . self-interested philanthropy stands in jarring contrast to the general tone of Jesus' teaching.'⁵ Fletcher points out: '. . . [T]he central problem of the verse [is] Does Jesus actually mean to counsel one to use money to make friends in order in some way to assure one's admission to a heavenly dwelling?'⁶ Although most interpreters, from the Early Church Fathers onward, have answered that this is the case, they do not always seem comfortable with the answer.⁷

3. *The Proposal*

This article takes the position that 'the interpretation of the saying [i.e. v. 9] is vital for the interpretation of the parable, and *vice versa*.'⁸ For one, in it we have Jesus emphasising the key point of the parable he has just narrated in the form of an instruction to his disciples. For another, it presents a thesis in the form of a *chreia*, which invites further consideration. An 'unpacking' of the *chreia* reveals a radical connection between friendship, mammon, and eternal life.

⁴ Richard J Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis: Taking the Fear Out of Critical Method* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 172-175.

⁵ Fletcher, "Riddle," 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

This article addresses the question: If Jesus really meant that his disciples should 'buy' strategic friendships for their after-life,⁹ then what must Christ-followers in the 21st century be doing about it? At face value, such a directive sounds uncharacteristically self-serving and sits at odds with 'Jesus'-related insistence that giving be done freely, with no strings attached, without expectation of return.¹⁰ In this light, v. 9 bears extensive analysis.

In order to do so, I have chosen to expand the parameters of the immediate co-text of v. 9 beyond the traditional demarcation of 16:1-13 to 16:1-15. This allows for the inclusion of the reaction of non-disciples to Jesus' teaching, and affords the opportunity to consider the implications of v. 9 from a critical, external perspective.

The primary interpretative tool utilized for this purpose has been that of socio-rhetorical criticism. Through the use of categories such as inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and sacred texture,¹¹ I have sought to present a comprehensive exegesis of Luke 16:1-15.

In agreement with Fletcher, Williams, and Hiers,¹² I see Luke 16:9 as being central to unravelling the 'problematic parable' of the Dishonest Steward. Williams says: 'Any interpretation of the Unjust Steward, to be counted satisfactory, must explain the identity of the mysterious "friends" of Luke 16:9, who "receive"

⁹ Fletcher, "Riddle," 25.

¹⁰ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 590-594.

¹¹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 1996), 1-4.

¹² Richard H. Hiers, "Friends by Unrighteous Mammon: the Eschatological Proletariat (Luke 16:9)," *JAAR* 38:1 (1970), 30-36, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://tmcDaniel.palmerseminary.edu/UnjustSteward-Hiers.pdf>.

the righteous into “eternal habitations.””¹³ Hence, this exploration into who these ‘friends’ are and the relationship between them, mammon, and eternal life.

1. EXEGESIS OF LUKE 16:1-15

In the interests of understanding the enigmatic *chreia* that is Luke 16:9, this section explores the different ‘textures’ (i.e. inner, inter, and sacred¹⁴) of Luke 16:1-15.

1.1 Inner Texture

In order to ‘get inside the text,’¹⁵ six ‘textures’ most commonly found in narrative discourse can be analysed in turn. The ‘textures’ chosen for this purpose are: i) repetitive, ii) progressive, iii) narrational, iv) opening-middle-closing, v) argumentative, and vi) sensory-aesthetic. An analysis of the patterns formed by Luke’s use of vocabulary, syntax, and grammar reveals the following nine emphases in the 1-15 pericope:

1.1.1 Stewardship

On close examination, several patterns emerge through Luke’s repetitive use of nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, indicating a clear emphasis on four aspects of stewardship:

i) the master–steward relationship: By far the highest repetition is of nouns signifying the concept of stewardship (7x). A fairly close second is the word for ‘master’ (5x). The repetition of *κυριος* in v. 13 functions to thematically link Jesus’ statement to the parable.

ii) possessions: Of the total of four occurrences of the word ‘mammon’ (‘wealth’, ‘riches’) in the entire NT it is used three times in alternating verses from vv. 9-11.¹⁶ The one other use is in

¹³ Williams, “Almsgiving,” 293-297.

¹⁴ Robbins, *Texture*, 2-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ GRAMCORD search on *μαμμωνας* ‘Bible Companion 1.6.4; GRAMCORD Morphological Search Engine 2.4cx, 1988-98, Loizeaux

Matthew 6:24 and occurs within a discourse on material possessions. The references to material possessions increases to a total of five when the double use of ὑπαρχω ('goods', 'possessions', 'property'), in verses 1 and 14, is taken into consideration.

iii) deceitfulness/faithfulness: The concept of deceitfulness/unfaithfulness (ἀδικίας) is foregrounded through Jesus' use of it five times as an adjective. The contrasting concept of trustworthiness/faithfulness is brought out by the quadruple use of πιστός.

iv) prudence: The word translated as prudent/wise/shrewd (φρόνιμος) occurs just twice. Yet, it takes on significance because the repetition is within a single sentence (v. 8) – and the very sentence within which the transition from parable to direct teaching takes place. Interestingly, it is used in both instances by Jesus, and in connection with 'negative' characters – i.e. the 'deceitful' steward and the 'sons of this world'. The adverbial/adjectival use of the word is what serves to link the two distinct units of Lk. 16:1-8a and 8b-15. Thus, the concept of φρόνιμος occupies a pivotal position within this unit.

1.1.2. Intentionality

Three verbs stand out in the light of repetition: to do (ποιέω), to receive (δέχομαι), and to serve (δουλεύω). They are used in the active sense, strengthening the attitude of intentionality that pervades this pericope. For instance, three of the uses of ποιέω are in connection with the steward (i.e. 'What shall I *do*?'; 'I know what I *will do*'; and, the master praises the steward because of what he *did*¹⁷). Significantly Jesus uses this very word to command his disciples to 'make friends for yourselves'. The particular combination of the tense (aorist), voice (active), and mood (imperative) of the verb ποιήσατε in v. 9 emphasizes the

intentional mindset with which the disciples are meant to go about the business of friend-making.

1.1.3 Discipleship

Two repetitive patterns stand out with regard to v. 9. One is the triple pronominal 'you'.

ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω (you)
 ἑαυτοῖς ποιήσατε φίλους (yourselves)
 ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπη δέξωνται ὑμᾶς (you)

This accentuates the direct and personal nature of Jesus' utterances. In vv. 1-8a Jesus is in the role of narrator as he weaves the story of the deceitful steward; and, in v. 8b he makes a general statement. Luke 16:9, then, is the first instance when Jesus speaks directly to his audience. Significantly, this personal pronoun is not used again till v. 13 when Jesus concludes his instructions on mammon, with the emphatic *chreia*: 'It is not possible for you to be occupied in the service of God and mammon' (emphasis added). The very economy in the use of this word adds weight to its significance, especially when it is remembered that Luke specifies in v. 1 that Jesus was speaking to his disciples. As such, the teaching in this pericope is highlighted as being specifically for those who choose to follow Jesus.

1.1.4 Temporality and Eternity

The second pattern is a syntactical repetition of a clause:

v. 4	ἵνα μετασταθῶ ἐκ τῆς οἰκονομίας ὅταν	δέξωνταί με	εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν
v. 9	ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπη	δέξωνται ὑμᾶς	εἰς τὰς αἰωνίουσ σκηνάς

As the grid above illustrates, the syntactical similarities highlight the conceptual contrasts. For instance, ἵνα ὅταν introduces a point of time when a particular circumstance will come to an end: the stewardship (v. 4) and mammon (v. 9). The use of the subjunctive for both verbs (μετασταθῶ, ἐκλίπη) heightens the certainty of each occurrence. Similarly, εἰς signals that the steward/disciples will be received into specific dwelling-places: the former into the households of the debtors (v. 4) and the latter into the 'eternal tabernacles' of their 'friends' (v. 9). This repetition of syntactical structure holds in tension the contrasting concepts of that which is time-bound and that which is eternal.

An analysis of the repetitive texture of this pericope discloses a focus on a particular aspect of discipleship – namely, the stewardship of possessions. The text appears to have been crafted in such a manner as to emphasise particular aspects of stewardship, such as the relationship between master and steward, the requirement of faithfulness in the steward's handling of his master's possessions which have been entrusted to him, and the time-bound nature of the stewardship. On a second level, the text brings up for discussion the intentionality and prudence with which the 'sons of light' are required to make preparations for eternity.

1.1.5 Rational Argumentation

An analysis of the progressive texture illustrates an argumentative development in the discourse of Luke 16:1-15. The characters in the parable are shown to be those who act with thought and foresight, while Jesus' instructions and comments are undergirded by strong rationales. Thus, Jesus' listeners hear (emphasis added):

<p style="text-align: center;">The Parable (vv. 1-8a)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Comment or Instruction (vv. 8b-15)</p>
<p>The master saying: '... <u>for</u> you cannot be steward any further.' (v. 2)</p>	<p>Jesus commenting: '... <u>for</u> the sons of this world are more prudent than the sons of light . . .' (v. 8b)</p>
<p>The steward asking himself: 'What shall I do, <u>since</u> my master is taking the stewardship from me?' (v. 3)</p>	<p>Jesus advising: '... make friends for yourselves by means of deceitful mammon <u>so that</u> when it fails . . .' (v. 9)</p>
<p>The steward hitting upon a solution: 'I know what I will do, <u>so that</u> when I am removed. . .' (v. 4)</p>	<p>Jesus rhetorically questioning: '<u>If then</u> you have not become faithful with deceitful mammon, who will trust you with that which is true?' (v. 12); 'And <u>if</u> you have not become faithful with that which belongs to others, who will give you your own?' (v. 10)</p>
<p>The master's rationale for praising the steward: '... <u>because</u> he acted prudently . . .' (v. 8a)</p>	<p>Jesus stating: '... <u>for</u> what is highly esteemed by humans is an abomination in the eyes of God.' (v. 15)</p>

This weaves a sturdy fibre of purposefulness and rationality through the discourse. Tidball notes that 'throughout the preaching of Jesus and of the early apostles they sought to persuade people to respond to the gospel and reconstruct and

orient their lives around it'.¹⁸ This is clearly Luke's agenda here, as well.

1.1.7 A Didactic Narrative

In 16:1, Luke the narrator hands over the narration to Jesus with the phrase: Ἐλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς, and Jesus immediately becomes the chief narrator for the next thirteen verses. In the parable that ensues, four speaking-actors occupy the foreground: the master, the steward, and the two (representative) debtors. As Jesus narrates the parable, the spotlight shifts from actor to actor, affording the 'audience' four short, detail-packed scenes:

- 1) The master occupies centre stage in verses 1 and 2. At the very outset we learn that the master is a rich man, that he had a manager of his household, and that he received reports that this steward was mismanaging his possessions. We are then told that the master summons the steward, confronts him, and informs him that he is dismissed from service.
- 2) The spotlight then shifts to the steward's soliloquy. Over the next two verses, we learn of the steward's dilemma and the sole objective of his plan of action (i.e. to be welcomed into people's households after he is dismissed from his current position).
- 3) Two supporting actors are now brought into the scene and help to give us a quick glimpse of how the steward goes about putting his plan into action. This scene develops through the use of narration, and the dialogue between characters (vv. 5-7). Although both exchanges between the steward and the debtors signify the same idea, the reduction in the number of words used helps to heighten the sense of the steward's urgency.

¹⁸ Derek Tidball, "New Testament Theology: the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God" (course notes, *New Testament Theology*, Colombo, Sri Lanka: Colombo Theological Seminary, July 2014).

- 4) The parable takes a surprising turn when Jesus says that the master praises the steward for his prudent actions.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Jesus makes a special point of describing the steward as ἀδικίας ('deceitful').

Jesus now switches to the role of teacher. Using the ending of the parable as a springboard, Jesus teaches about principles, attitudes, and behaviour expected of his disciples. Although Luke the narrator hovers in the background, he refrains from commenting and Jesus holds centre stage for over five verses (vv. 8b-13). These verses are set out in a didactic form, introduced by Jesus' 'I tell you . . .' (v. 9).

At v. 10, Luke floods the stage with light revealing Jesus' secondary audience – and the readers are reminded that the Pharisees have been listening in. Just as Jesus subtly implicated the steward with the description 'deceitful', Luke slips in the description that the Pharisees are 'money-loving'. Being privy to the narrator's view of the Pharisees, it is not a surprise to learn that they are derisive of Jesus' revolutionary teaching on possessions. The scene approaches a resolution with Jesus giving perspective to the Pharisees' reaction. Luke, once again, relinquishes the narrator's role to Jesus with *καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς* (v. 15).

A closer look at the narrational texture affords another view into Luke's shaping of his text. In relegating himself to a place in the shadows, Luke accomplishes two ends: the first is that Jesus occupies centre stage as narrator and teacher right through vv. 1-15; and in this dual role, the key point of the parable is pointed out and elucidated by him – which undoubtedly makes the teaching immensely authoritative to Luke's audience. The

¹⁹ "...the text states explicitly in verse 8 that the master commended the dishonest manager 'because he had acted shrewdly'. No other point of comparison from the steward's behaviour need be in view." Blomberg, *Poverty Nor Riches*, 122.

second is that from the shadows, Luke is better placed to subtly editorialise the development of the narrative, thus ensuring that the thrust of the pericope is clear.

1.1.8 A Structured Narrative

The repetitive, progressive, and narrational textures considered above reveal interesting patterns that work together to weave a self-contained unit in Luke 16:1-15. Within this pericope, three clear units, fulfilling three distinct functions, can be distinguished:

- i. Illustration: the parable Jesus tells his disciples [OPENING]
- ii. Teaching: the instruction Jesus gives his disciples [MIDDLE]
- iii. Reinforcement: Jesus' strategy to deal with the response of detractors [CLOSING]

A further analysis will reveal that each of these self-contained units has a clear agenda, which contributes to the shaping of the teaching within the entire pericope.

This pericope could be located within a larger segment that commences in Luke 15:1, where Luke points out that the subsequent three parables are addressed to the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were muttering about Jesus' association with the tax collectors and sinners. The entirety of chapter 15 contains just three comments from Luke: the introduction (v. 1), 'Then Jesus told them this parable' (v. 3), and 'Jesus continued' (v. 11). Then at 16:1, Luke introduces a new section by pointing out a change in Jesus' primary audience: 'And, he said also to the disciples'. It is clear from 16:14 that the Pharisees are still on the scene: Luke makes a point of directing the reader's attention to the fact that they were listening in on what Jesus was teaching his disciples. It is noteworthy that he editorialises this and attributes a motive to the Pharisees' reaction, namely, 'those who loved money'. The Pharisees' cynical reaction seems to function as a

stimulus for Jesus to re-focus on the Pharisees.²⁰ In 17:1, Jesus is shown, once again, to address his disciples. Thus, 16:1-13 shows the disciples as Jesus' primary audience with the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and teachers of the law as the secondary audience. Thus, the 'ending' of this pericope is 'simply a new beginning.'²¹

1.1.9 A Persuasive Narrative

An investigation for signs of inner reasoning within the pericope reveals that Luke undoubtedly had a clear agenda 'to persuade the reader to think and act in one way rather than another.'²² Robbins states: 'The roots of analysis of argumentative texture in narrative texts in the New Testament lie in rhetorical analysis of the *chreia*.'²³ Within vv. 8b-15, Luke attributes seven such sayings to Jesus. A closer look at these *chreiai* reveals Luke's intricate weaving of logical and qualitative reasoning into his text.

Examples of syllogistic reasoning can be discerned in vv. 8, 9, and 15. In v. 8, the action of the master is shown to be logically valid. Oesterley, who argues that the main point of Luke 16:1-13 is to urge the virtue of consistency, says that the master's response is

²⁰ Oesterley holds that the stimulus for 16:14-31 is the Pharisees' reaction in 16:14, in Oesterley, W O E. *The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background*. Dig. Ed. Courtesy of HathiTrust. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936. Accessed February 3, 2015. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4508906>. Accessed 7/7/2016)

²¹ '...some endings really are simply new beginnings. In other words, some endings are really not endings at all. They do not really bring anything to a final conclusion. Rather, some endings simply introduce topics and events that provide resources for a new beginning when everything seemed to be coming to a dramatic, final end.' Robbins, *Texture*, 19.

²² Robbins, *Texture*, 21.

²³ Robbins, *Tapestry*, 61.

not at all surprising, because he is acting consistently in accordance with the ways of the 'sons of this world.'²⁴

Major Premise	'[T]he sons of this world are more prudent than the sons of light as far as their own kind'
Minor Premise	The deceitful steward acted prudently
Conclusion	The master praised him

V. 9 forges an unexpected connection between the making of friends, mammon, and eternal life, through rationalization:

Major Premise	Friends will welcome you into eternity
Minor Premise	The deceitful mammon will fail
Conclusion	'Make friends for yourselves by means of the deceitful mammon'

Thus, v. 9 points to the possibility of forward-planning for eternity by using time-bound possessions.

In v. 15, through the use of opposing assertions, the scoffing of the Pharisees is refuted and God's perspectives are reinforced:

²⁴ Oesterley, "Parables," 197-198.

Major Premise	' . . . what is highly esteemed by human beings is an abomination in the eyes of God'
Minor Premise	'You are setting up yourselves as good and just in the eyes of human beings'
Conclusion	' . . . but God knows your hearts'

The repetition of words and syntax structures along with two 'if...then' enthymemes signifies another instance of logical argument.

- v. 10:** He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much,
and he who is deceitful in little is also deceitful in much.
- v. 11:** If you have not become faithful in the deceitful mammon,
then who will entrust you in the charge of what is true?
- v. 12:** If you have not become faithful in that which belongs to another,
then who will give you what is yours?

However, unlike the previous syllogisms, these three *chreiai* are in abbreviated form. Oesterley, who argues for the undeniably Jewish flavour of the Luke 16:1-13 pericope, and for consistency being its key point, unpacks these three *chreiai* through the feature of parallelism that he sees at work here. An adaptation of

Oesterley's explanation (presented below) broadly sums up the general direction taken by interpreters with regard to vv. 9-13.

1.2 Sacred Texture

The study into the sacred texture²⁵ of Luke 16:1-15 affords insight into 'the relationship between the human and the divine', as well as into the interaction of 'holy people' (i.e. those who have a special relation to God) with one another. Robbins states that 'the interaction of these people with one another creates an environment in which subtle distinctions can be made between truly authentic religious thought and behaviour and beliefs and practices that are inferior.'²⁶

In vv. 13-15, Jesus takes his teaching to a higher plane with the introduction of God into the scene. The first reference to God shows God as a master who requires wholehearted love and devotion from those in His service (v. 13). The next two references reveal that God sees into the 'hearts'²⁷ of human beings and does make value judgements (βδέλυγμα ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ) about human attitudes. The final clause highlights that God's ways and human ways are at odds with each other, in an echo of Isaiah 55:8-9.

The 'holy persons' featured in this scene are Jesus and the Pharisees. 'In NT texts,' holds Robbins, 'the holy person *par excellence* is Jesus Christ.'²⁸ The Pharisees, on the other hand, are featured in an uncomplimentary light.²⁹ As such, the interaction here between Jesus and the Pharisees brings to the surface the

²⁵ Robbins, "Dictionary," accessed February 9, 2015, http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/SRI/defns/s_defns.cfm#sacred.

²⁶ Robbins, *Texture*, 121.

²⁷ 'Regarded as the inner and mental frame,' in Perschbacher, *Lexicon*, 219.

²⁸ Robbins, *Texture*, 121.

²⁹ Green, *Luke*, 600-602.

distinction between 'lovers of God' and 'lovers of money'. The former will demonstrate their love, loyalty, and commitment to God their Master through their trustworthiness in stewarding His resources given into their keeping – even at the cost of not earning the high-esteem of other human-beings. In contrast are those who pretend to serve God by engaging in religious practices and rituals and so earn the praise of human-beings, but in reality are serving mammon in their hearts. This insidious duality is a subtle but keen allusion to the repeated clarion call in the OT for service to God that is true, as seen in Isaiah 1:11-17 and Amos 5:21-24.

Jesus' comment in v. 8b points out two 'communities' of people – i.e. 'the sons of this world' and 'the sons of light'. In vv. 10-15, Jesus elucidates the key principle of how the 'sons of light' should go about the business of 'being prudent in keeping with the character of their kind' (v. 8b). Thus, the analysis of the sacred texture of this unit allows us to see how Luke has crafted his text in such a way that it highlights the ethical focus of Jesus' teaching: in effect, Jesus is re-defining 'religious commitment' by describing to his disciples how 'special ways of thinking and acting are motivated by commitment to God.'³⁰

1.3 Intertexture

The analysis of the intertexture³¹ of a text shifts the focus to how the language in the text interacts with the world outside the text. A closer look at the explicit or implicit references to artifacts, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems enables the interpreter to observe how the text 'configures' or 'reconfigures' the phenomena of the world in which it is set. A scrutiny of the particular language environment of Luke 16:1-15 shows evidence of interaction with phenomena outside the text.

³⁰ Robbins, *Texture*, 129.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 40-70.

For one, the unusual occurrence of τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς in v. 9 evokes a particularly Jewish tradition. The full significance of this phrase is delved into in section four, which shows how Jesus configures a cultural phenomenon by drawing on the cultural knowledge³² of his audience. This, in turn, helps support the argument of this article.

Secondly, the subtexture of social intertexture³³ surfaces through four categories of reference: social roles, institutions, codes, and relationships. The appearance of the master, steward, and debtors in the parable points to specific social roles that cut across the three dominant social identities of Graeco-Roman Palestine: the Greeks, Romans, and Jews. Further, these roles draw on the socio-economic institutions of households and tenant farming. These elements are picked up and alluded to in Jesus' ensuing comments and teachings. Similarly, the entire pericope is closely linked to social codes of honour and hospitality, and explores the dynamics of social relations such as master/steward, friendships, patron/client, and benefactors/beneficiaries. As further exploration will show, the unit draws on social knowledge commonly held by all three people-groups of Mediterranean Palestine of the 1st century AD, irrespective of their particular cultural locations.³⁴ For example, both Graeco-Roman and Jewish households included slaves, one (or more) of whom were entrusted with the management of the household and/or the estates of the master.³⁵ While the status, role, and responsibilities of such a steward seem to have differed in points of principles and praxis, the concept of stewardship was a common one in that world. Similarly, integrity with regard to his

³² Vernon K. Robbins, "Dictionary of Socio-Rhetorical Terms," *SocioRhetorical Interpretation*, Emory University, accessed February 11, 2015, http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/_robbins_/SRI/defs/c_defs.cfm#cultural-text.

³³ Robbins, *Texture*, 62-63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁵ Tidball, *Social Context*, 79-81; Oesterley, "Parables," 192-195.

master's property as well as unswerving loyalty to his master was commonly expected of a steward. Thus, in this light, the inclusion in the parable of such details as the steward squandering his master's property and the descriptor ἀδικίαζ would have alerted Jesus' audience to the finer meanings of the story.

The temporary boundaries drawn around Luke 16:1-15 have allowed us to explore the subtext of the discourse therein. While an analysis of the inner, sacred, and inter textures has elicited various observations along the way, the crucial factor that has surfaced is that Luke as author/narrator has a very specific conclusion that he is progressively directing the reader towards. It is specifically related to the nature and practice of stewardship of possessions as a disciple of Jesus. In order to proceed, it is necessary to take off the boundary-lines and consider the text within its particular social setting of the Graeco-Roman world of the 1st century AD.

2. FRIENDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

The word φίλος (or its derivations) – 'friend' – occurs a total of 29 times in the whole of the New Testament: and by far the highest usage is by Luke³⁶ (a total of 18x – i.e. 15x in the Gospel and 3x in Acts). The next highest occurrence (8x) is by John (Gospel 6x; 3 John 2x).³⁷ However, except in an entry by Stählin in the *EDNT*³⁸ this strikingly unequal distribution has received scant attention. Stählin gives an overview of the several dimensions in which the term is used by Luke: secular, political, hospitality, and mutuality.³⁹ It seems worth the while to consider the significance of an instruction such as 'make friends for yourselves' in a Gospel

³⁶ Some argue that James, too, has friendship with God/the world as a key theme of his letter on the basis of Jas. 4:4.

³⁷ John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, and James A. Swanson, *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 985.

³⁸ G. Stählin, "φίλος," in Balz and Schneider, *EDNT*, vol. 3., 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

where the theme of friendship seems to be a particularly strong one, and where the purported recipient is identified as Θεόφιλε ('friend of God').⁴⁰

2.1 Friendship and Hospitality in Luke-Acts

An analysis of the 18 references to friendship in Luke-Acts shows that the highest occurrence is in parabolic utterances (8x),⁴¹ with the rest equally divided between direct statements or instructions by Jesus (5x),⁴² and narrative statements by Luke (5x).⁴³ Thus, the weight of the friendship theme in Luke-Acts lies in Jesus' teachings, with a total of 13x.

The references to friendship can be seen in three broad aspects:⁴⁴

- i) It is located within a person's closest circle of relationships. In four of the references, 'friend' occurs in conjunction with another relationship or within a list of relationships of a very close nature (either biological or physical proximity): 'friends and neighbours' (Lk. 15:6, 9), and 'parents, brothers, relatives, and friends' (Lk. 21:16); 'relatives and close friends' (Acts 10:24);
- ii) It is a source of help at a time of need (Lk. 7:6; 11:5, 6, 8; Acts 19:13);
- iii) It is closely aligned to hospitality (Lk. 7:34; 14:10, 12; 15:29; Acts 27:3). In the OT, NT, and Graeco-Roman worlds hospitality is most frequently illustrated through commensality. As Smith points out: 'It is Jesus' table fellowship with them that allows him

⁴⁰ Brian Edgar, *God Is Friendship: A Theology of Spirituality, Community and Society* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Seedbed Publishing, 2013). Kindle, pt. II, chap. 4.

⁴¹ Lk. 11:5 (x2), 6, 8; 14:10; 15:6, 9; 29

⁴² Lk. 7:34; 12:4, 14:12; 16:9; 21:16

⁴³ Lk. 7:6; 23:12; Acts 10:24; 19:31; 27:3

⁴⁴ Only Luke 23:12 does not fit into any of the above categories. Stählin sees this as a reference to the political dimension of friendship (found in only one other instance in the NT – Jn. 19:12), G. Stählin, "φίλος," in Balz and Schneider, *EDNT*, vol. 3., 159.

to be called "a friend (*philos*) of tax collectors and sinners."⁴⁵

Balz and Schneider are of the opinion that Luke's usage of 'friend' corresponds to the common, secular use of the word at the time.⁴⁶ Brown points out that 'the verb φιλεῖν is a regular word used from Homer onwards to express the showing of affection, love, hospitality, etc.'⁴⁷ A fundamental cultural principle of this understanding of friendship was that of mutuality (which Jesus calls into question in Lk. 14:12). Thus, friendship in the NT world, as portrayed by Luke, encapsulated a concept of reciprocal love and concern: 'Φίλος is one who loves and is loved in return; this implies both shared joy and concern for the fate of the φίλος'.⁴⁸ Brown notes that 'in the NT a friend is one to whom one is under a basic obligation.'⁴⁹

Thus, the over-arching concept of friendship as seen in Luke-Acts is that of an ongoing, inner-circle relationship as distinct from one that is casual or sporadic.

2.2 Concepts of Friendship and Hospitality in the Mediterranean World of the First Century AD

Even a brief survey of sources will reveal that friendship and hospitality were complex concepts⁵⁰ that were not only an

⁴⁵ Dennis E. Smith, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," in *JBL* vol. 160.4 (1987): 636, accessed December 19, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3260823>.

⁴⁶ Balz and Schneider, *EDNT*, vol. 3., 427.

⁴⁷ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2. Eng. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 547.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 549.

⁵⁰ An informative overview of the variations among the different philosophical schools is provided in Alan C. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37," *JBL* vol. 111.2 (1992): 255-257 (including nn. 8-10), accessed December 19, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3267543>.

integral part of the fabric of society but also invited much discussion and debate in the Mediterranean world of the 1st century AD.

Stambaugh and Balch describe how, even though the three distinct civilizations of the time (i.e. Greek, Roman, and Hebrew) demonstrated different foci in their praxis of the concepts of friendship and hospitality, they shared a common foundation. This, they identify as the 'familiar fibre of personal contacts: of favours done, returns expected, allegiances owed.'⁵¹

Tidball⁵² describes how the household community (*oikonomia*) was a 'fundamental institution of the New Testament world'. Thus, a household would consist of a number of families 'bound together under the authority of the senior male of the principal family'. In addition, a household would count among its number friends, clients, and slaves. Some of these 'friends' could be former slaves who had voluntarily chosen to remain within the household even after they had been granted their freedom. In all these relationships within the household community there would be bonds of intimacy, reciprocity, and responsibility. Quoting Judge, Tidball affirms:

Friendship was not simply a spontaneous relationship of mutual affection. It was a status of intimacy conferred on trusted companions. . . . Friendship conferred authority and prestige. . . .⁵³

Edgar's⁵⁴ helpful overview of the key resources on friendship in Graeco-Roman literature shows that 'friendship was the basis of society'. He cites Plato's *Lysis*, from his series of dialogues on important themes, which explores the definition of friendship and

⁵¹ John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 63.

⁵² Tidball, *Social Context*, 79-86.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁴ Edgar, *Friendship*, pt. I, chap. 1.

the means of becoming a true friend. Aristotle dedicated two of the ten books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to how friendship related to ethics and the public life. Cicero in his *De Amicitia* presents a treatise on how friendship is based on virtuous love.

Smith⁵⁵ traces how 'friendship' was a popular topic of discussion at the Graeco-Roman symposia and how it was used as a primary principle for defining table ethics, such as what should be the proper topics for conversation, whether guests should be ranked, whether social barriers should be abolished, etc. For instance, Plato states that one of the goals of the 'symposium laws' was that of 'mak[ing] the participants friends rather than enemies'; and, Plutarch refers to 'the friend-making character of the table'. He says: 'A guest comes to share not only meat, wine, and dessert, but conversation, fun, and the amiability that leads to friendship'. Smith observes how Plutarch's remarks in the *Table Talks* indicate that 'friendship is central to the entire occasion'.

Plutarch's insights reveal that while the guests around the table were from the same privileged class, the relative distinctions between the elite and other guests were not ignored (hence the debates regarding 'ranking' at table, or accepted practices of serving different quantities or qualities of food).⁵⁶ Smith observes that at symposia-type meals,⁵⁷ there was certainly no mingling between the rich and the poor.⁵⁸ Mitchell speaks in terms of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' friendships, and says that the former was the norm.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Smith, "Table Fellowship," 619-634.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 635.

⁵⁷ Smith points out that though the symposia are Graeco-Roman in origin, there is evidence that the Jews engaged in similar practices. In "Table Fellowship," 634, n. 53.

⁵⁸ Smith, "Table Fellowship," 635.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, "Friendship in Acts," 264.

Mitchell also discusses the concept of ritualized friendship (*zenia*). He cites Gabriel Herman's study which explores the 'bond of solidarity manifesting itself in an exchange of goods and services between individuals originating from separate social units.'⁶⁰

Another form of friendship based on economic considerations and which allowed for a bond between the rich and the poor was that of the patron-client relationship. Neyrey notes: 'People in the New Testament world were constantly seeking patrons and clients in the standard game of securing a safe and steady supply of the limited and scarce goods of life.'⁶¹

2.3 *An Analysis of the Graeco-Roman Concept of Patron-Client 'Friendship'*

Green notes that Jesus' counsel to 'make friends' borrows on social conventions deeply embedded in the Graeco-Roman world, whereby friendship and economic considerations were inseparable.'⁶² DeSilva points out that the institution of patronage dictated the terms for the 'unequal partnership among patrons and clients', with the language of friendship still being employed.⁶³ The clients would be referred to as 'friends' to save them from social embarrassment.⁶⁴ In this relationship, the patron provided 'money, grain, employment, land, or even professional or social advancement', and as the recipient of such favour, the client would be in obligation to the patron – primarily owing 'gratitude – i.e. honour, obedience, and intense personal loyalty.'⁶⁵ Neyrey, too, points out the reciprocal quality inherent

⁶⁰ Mitchell, "Friendship in Acts," 265-266.

⁶¹ Jerome H. Neyrey, "Meals, Food and Table fellowship," in R. L. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 159-182, accessed December 19, 2014, <https://www3.nd.edu/~jineyrev1/meals.html>.

⁶² Green, *Luke*, 594.

⁶³ deSilva, *Hope*, 11.

⁶⁴ Green, *Luke*, 594.

⁶⁵ deSilva, *Hope*, 11-12.

in the patron-client relationship.⁶⁶ Green concludes: 'Using money to make friends, then, refers simply to the social reality. The exchange of money created, maintained, or solidified various forms of friendship.'⁶⁷

Moxnes,⁶⁸ although not referring to the patron-client relationship as a form of friendship, offers valuable insights: 'What results is a relationship with a paradoxical combination of elements. Inequality and asymmetry in power are combined with expressions of mutual solidarity.'⁶⁹ He helpfully outlines several characteristics of the patron-client relationship: a) interaction is based on simultaneous exchange of different types of resources, b) a strong element of solidarity linked to personal honour and obligations, c) possibility of a spiritual attachment, d) binding and long-range relationship, e) based on a very strong element of inequality and difference in power.⁷⁰

Moxnes presents a further dimension to the model by introducing the patron-*broker*-client relationship (emphasis added).⁷¹ He cites the episode of the centurion sending some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his slave (Lk. 7:2-10) as being particularly illustrative of how 'networks of favour could be used to allow one person to get what (it is believed) another has.'⁷² Such instances show Graeco-Roman socio-cultural systems, such as the patron-client 'friendship', at work in Jewish society. Moxnes points out how the dishonest steward, at a time of crisis, draws on the dynamic patron-client relationship to secure his future. The steward does

⁶⁶ Neyrey, "Table fellowship," 159-182.

⁶⁷ Green, *Luke*, 594.

⁶⁸ Halvor Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," in Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 241-268.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁷² *Ibid.*

this by playing the role of broker, and brokers a patron-client relationship for himself with his master's tenants. Through the 'favour' that he does them, he places himself in the position of a patron over the tenants.⁷³

While some may argue that the patron-client relationship of the Romans or the less-formalised ties of the Greeks cannot be applied to the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean basin, Stambaugh and Balch point out that 'the Gospels imply that some similar institutions governed the relationships between the classes in Palestine (as seen in the parables of the husbandmen and the importunate widow, and in stories of the rich and poor at meals together).'⁷⁴

Thus, an analysis of the Lukan concept of friendship shows that it implies a deep and involved relationship – certainly quite different from the modern-day concept of counting casual acquaintances as friends. Whether Jesus was teaching through a parable or addressing those around him as 'friends', there is a sense of people being in relationships of intimacy where availability, mutuality, hospitality, and reciprocity were intertwined. In this sense, it is reflective of how friendship was regarded in the wider Graeco-Roman world. It is noteworthy that in a two-volume work that has a clear strand of friendship woven through it, Luke has Jesus addressing anyone as 'friends' only once (12:4) – and that, his disciples.

Reciprocity is a vital feature of the friendship tradition.⁷⁵ However, many commentators see a lack of connection between the socio-cultural norm and the Lukan representation. Mitchell and Green sum up this line of reasoning. The primary thrust of Mitchell's article is that Luke has used the Graeco-Roman friendship traditions to contest the reciprocity ethic, as he

⁷³ Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations", 241-268.

⁷⁴ Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*, 64.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

challenges the rich within the Christian community to give without expecting a return.⁷⁶ Similarly, with reference to v. 9, Green sees that it could refer to the forging of a patron-client relationship, where the poor are required to serve/honour their rich benefactors. However, he finds that such an understanding cannot be sustained in the light of Jesus' general teachings about giving without expecting a return (6:32-35), and holds that "almsgiving" has as its consequence genuine social solidarity between rich and poor, who act toward each other as "equal friends."⁷⁷ However, Green does not proffer further explanations on how such solidarity might actually come about. Section 3.4 below presents an investigation of the dynamics of almsgiving in the Graeco-Roman world of 1st century AD Palestine.

With regard to the above position, v. 9 seems to prove a stumbling block on two counts. First, it cannot be ignored that this verse does contain a sense of reciprocity, for there is a specific purpose tied to the making of these friends – 'that they may welcome you into the heavenly tabernacles'. While it is true that the general ethos of Jesus' teaching on *giving* (emphasis added) is to do so without expecting an earthly reward, is there a possibility that v. 9 is actually not so much about giving but the making of friends?

The second obstacle is the assumption that this teaching is addressed to the rich. Yet, in v. 1 we are specifically told that Jesus is speaking to his disciples. While there may have been some rich followers (like Matthew and Zacchaeus, and possibly James and John), it is unlikely that all of Jesus' disciples could be classed as rich. Manson makes a case for the disciples appearing to be 'in possession of some kind of property' on the basis of 12:33.⁷⁸ A tenuous connection at best, it still begs the question of

⁷⁶ Mitchell, "Friendship in Acts," 255-272.

⁷⁷ Green, *Luke*, 594.

⁷⁸ Manson, *Luke*, 183-184.

whether vv. 1-13 can be justifiably shelved as being relevant only to the rich.

Thus, when Jesus asks his disciples to ‘make friends by means of unrighteous mammon’ it is unlikely that he was merely referring to the giving of alms or works of charity. It would not be unreasonable to infer that this instruction was a directive to disciples – rich and poor – to establish deep, intimate, and involved relationships. The question as to ‘with whom?’ needs to be left open till the other elements of the instruction are explored.

3. UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON

The interpretative framework of honour discourse⁷⁹ provides a fresh angle from which to consider Jesus’ teachings on how his disciples should use mammon. Sociologists, anthropologists, and Bible scholars concur that the Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures of the 1st century AD Mediterranean world could all be identified as honour cultures⁸⁰ – i.e. where an individual’s orientation would be towards desiring honour and avoiding disgrace. The Lk. 16:1-15 pericope is sufficiently peppered with references from the semantic field of honour and shame to warrant a deeper exploration of how Luke has used this specific social dimension to shape his text.

3.1 Honour Discourse in Luke 16:10-15

In vv. 10-13 Jesus can be seen defining the values that the ‘sons of light’ (i.e. disciples of Jesus) must orient themselves towards. The virtue emphasised in vv. 10-12 is that of faithfulness/trustworthiness with regard to μαμμωνᾶς (i.e. possessions, wealth, riches). Adjectival or verbal forms of πιστός and πιστεύω are used a total of five times within these three verses. It is shown in opposition to the vice of ἀδίκος (evil, sinful; dishonest, unjust, unrighteous, iniquitous, vicious; deceitful,

⁷⁹ deSilva, *Glory*, xi-33.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

fallacious).⁸¹ The focus here, then, is not on specific ways in which to utilize possessions but a specific heart-attitude towards wealth. The argument is developed through an introductory truism about the nature of faithfulness and deceitfulness (v. 10); two rhetorical questions follow, specifying what the disciples are expected to be faithful about – τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾷ, and that which belongs to another. By drawing parallels between being entrusted with the care of true riches and being endowed with wealth of one's own, Jesus brings into the picture the reality of the theocracy to come. That these verses refer to a transformed attitude towards possessions is reinforced by the analogy of the household slave and the quality of love that shapes his single-minded loyalty towards his master.

According to the model proffered by Malina and Neyrey,⁸² vv. 14-15 reveal a distinctive feature of the honour-shame discourse: that of acquiring or losing honour through a 'challenge-riposte' ('C-R'). For this honour-contest to be viable, the societal code only allowed it to be played between social equals.⁸³ The three fundamental phases of this form of recognized social communication are clearly present.⁸⁴ Phase 1 of the C-R is activated when the Pharisees challenge Jesus through their action of 'mocking' him. The narrative detail Luke provides – i.e. that they were 'listening' (ἤκουον) to Jesus' conversation with his disciples – reveals their intention to challenge. As v. 1 specifically indicates that Jesus was addressing his disciples, it could be inferred that the Pharisees were actually 'listening in' on this conversation – with the aim of trapping him or tripping him up.

⁸¹ Perschbacher, *Lexicon*, 7.

⁸² Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in Neyrey, *Luke-Acts*, 46.

⁸³ 'Thus from the perspective of the evangelists, when the various learned groups challenge Jesus [i.e. Pharisees, lawyers and scribes], they are implying that he is their equal.' Malina and Neyrey, "Honor," 31.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-32.

The act of verbally responding indicates that Jesus does perceive their mockery as a challenge (C-R phase 2). The nature of Jesus' response in v. 15 includes several components of a recognised riposte (C-R phase 3). Jesus cuts them down to size by labelling them as those who set themselves up as good and just before human-beings (ὁμεῖς ἐστε οἱ δικαιοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων); he then reminds them of the only One who could be called 'good-and-just', and points out that even though they may deceive people, God knows their hearts. In the punchline, Jesus uses two words (ὕψηλόν, βδέλυγμα) bringing the challenge round to what it really is: a tussle for honour. By aligning the concepts of abhorrence/high-esteem with God/human-beings, Jesus forces his detractors to pick sides – and clearly, by the very challenge they have issued, they are on the wrong side. This would have been clear to the audience witnessing this incident. Luke goes a step further to make it clear to his readers by inserting the description that the Pharisees were 'money-loving' (φιλάργυροι, v. 14).

An important feature of the challenge-riposte is that it had to be conducted in public – for, the winning or losing of it was evaluated by the observers.⁸⁵ In this case, the observers are Jesus' disciples and at stake is Jesus' standing as their teacher and leader. While Luke does not specifically state the outcome of this negative challenge, he does provide sufficiently strong clues to indicate that, once again, Jesus has not only successfully defended his honour but has put his detractors to shame. For one, the Pharisees fall completely silent after Jesus' riposte in v. 15⁸⁶ – they only reappear in 17:20 in a completely different

⁸⁵ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor," 29.

⁸⁶ Such a conclusion might be construed as reading too much into this episode, as v. 15 is arguably its end; and, it is unlikely that Luke would have recorded anything further if the climax of the episode showed Jesus losing the tussle for honour. It is, however, worth noting how this episode contrasts with Luke 10:25-37, where Luke records

context. Jesus' response is, in effect, a challenge to the Pharisees to defend their honour. According to the challenge-riposte formula, this pattern can be repeated till the party being challenged fails to respond, which gains them dishonour.⁸⁷

The second clue that Luke provides is in 17:5 when the apostles respond to Jesus' teaching by asking him to increase their faith. Thus, it is clear that this encounter with the Pharisees has served to consolidate Jesus' standing as a reliable and honourable leader who possesses the authority and knowledge to guide his disciples in their conduct.⁸⁸

The concept of the 'court of reputation' (i.e. a person's group of significant others who help to uphold the group values through their grants of honour and censure) and how it operates in the face of competing cultures,⁸⁹ sheds further light on vv. 10-15. DeSilva identifies the Jews as being an 'ethnic subculture' within the 'dominant, majority culture' of Hellenism in the Mediterranean world of the 1st century AD.⁹⁰ Similarly, the disciples who were choosing to align themselves with Jesus could be considered a voluntary group that was beginning to develop as a religious subculture within Judaism.

Malina details how the formation of small groups grows out from one (or more) individual's desire for change and with the purpose of accomplishing some extra-group task.⁹¹ In the case of the 'Jesus faction' the task was to 'have the Israelites get their lives in

several 're-matches' as Jesus' detractor attempts to best him (cf. Malina and Neyrey, "Honor," 51-53).

⁸⁷ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor," 31.

⁸⁸ deSilva, *Glory*, 27-28.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁹⁰ deSilva, *Glory*, 5.

⁹¹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 198-217.

order' for the forthcoming theocracy.⁹² Thus, successful accomplishment of the task involved a change from the status quo. Malina also points out that for every such social movement there is a countermovement, which opposes change.⁹³ In vv. 10-15, the Pharisees stand as the countermovement, seeking to discredit Jesus and his teachings which advocate change.

Within the dominant culture of Judaism, the Pharisees (along with the Sadducees, Scribes, and High Priests) can be seen as making up the dominant court of reputation.⁹⁴ DeSilva points out that the adherence of those in a minority culture to the group's values and ideals will only remain strong if the constituency and court of reputation are redefined.⁹⁵ A key means of achieving this is by 'including some supra-social entity in this group' (e.g. God) – so that the minority group is 'fortified by, anchored in, and legitimated by a "higher" court of reputation whose judgments are of greater importance and more lasting consequence than the opinion of the disapproving majority or the dominant culture' as well as to 'disregard the opinion of non-members about their behaviour.'⁹⁶

As the leader of this 'voluntary group' of his disciples, it would be expected that Jesus would 'arbitrate questions of value; . . . delimit what can be done or maintained without sacrilege; and define the unconditional allegiance of the members.'⁹⁷ Thus, it is particularly important that Jesus responded to and won the challenges of honour that his detractors keep lobbying his way.

⁹² Malina, *The NT World*, 206-208.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 212-214.

⁹⁴ It is important to note that 'the degree and manner of the Pharisees' influence over the Judean-Galilean populace in the times of Jesus and Paul is one of the most vigorously contested issues. Evans and Porter, *DNTB*, 786.

⁹⁵ deSilva, *Glory*, 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁷ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor," 40.

3.2 Honour Discourse in Luke 16:1-8

In the light of honour discourse, vv. 1-8 show the steward to be a dishonourable character, albeit one who is keenly conscious of the value of honour. The opening statement places the steward in a negative light: his master receives defamatory reports about him. His ratings drop further when we are told that he has been 'wasting' (δυσκορπίζων) his master's possessions (i.e. the very things he has been entrusted with protecting). Thus, at the outset we are presented with a character whose irresponsibility in his main task is highlighted. However, he is under no delusions as to his situation. V. 3 shows the steward acknowledging the reality that faces him – first, that he is going to be relieved of his position (stewardship). He quickly evaluates the two options available to him – to work as a labourer (for which he is not trained) or to beg. The latter is not a viable option for him because it impacts his honour ('ashamed'). Through his association with the 'rich man' his master, the steward holds a position of ascribed honour. It is this he draws on when speaking with the debtors ('ὁ κύριός μου'). As this is about to be taken away from him, he acts speedily to 'acquire' honour by placing himself in a position of patronage with the debtors,⁹⁸ with the sole aim of being welcomed into their households (v. 4). Thus, the steward uses the only currency available to him – his soon-to-be-lost position as household manager of a rich man – to preserve his status of honour. He goes about setting up a system, where the reciprocal structure of social engagement would ensure that he is welcomed into others' households even after he loses his position.

Bailey approaches the parable from a different angle. In his analysis, he argues that the steward's gamble was based on the master's appreciation of his (the master's) honourable standing. Thus, for the master to revoke the steward's reduction of the debts would seriously damage his reputation; while, to go along with the steward's scam would be to increase his own status of

⁹⁸ Halvor Moxnes, "Patron-Client," 241-268.

honour. Hence, the master's lack of further action against his steward – in addition to which he praises him.⁹⁹

In v. 8 we have the master's surprising response of 'praising' his crooked steward. Seen through the lens of an honour culture, the 'prudent action' that the master is praising could be the steward's recognition of what is important and his single-mindedness in restoring his honour. This would in turn probably help to make clear Jesus' comment about the 'sons of this world' being prudent in accordance with the 'code' of their generation – i.e. honour.

3.3 Wealth, Poverty, and Honour in the Mediterranean World of the 1st Century AD

Malina¹⁰⁰ provides valuable insights from cultural anthropology with regard to the accumulation, disbursement, and lack of wealth in the 1st century AD Mediterranean world. He identifies the society within which Jesus lived as being typical of a 'limited-good, closed society' which had a 'contentment and status-maintenance orientation'. In such a society, the accumulation of wealth was not a priority – rather, it would be something that an honourable person would strive to avoid.¹⁰¹ The patron-client relationship was one means through which those with wealth would seek to disburse it and maintain the community balance; the other would be through providing support to those within one's kinship networks.¹⁰²

With regard to poverty, Malina¹⁰³ points out that it did not serve to identify a social, class, or economic rank. This was because birth, and not money, was the determiner of one's social

⁹⁹ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 101-110. It is necessary to note, though, Green's reservations about Bailey's approach, in Green, *Luke*, 591-592, n. 272.

¹⁰⁰ Malina, *The NT World*, 97-98.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 8-83, 99-100.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

standing. As such, within each 'class' the members would consider each other equal and honourable. Malina sets out to explore what being 'poor' meant in such a culture. Examining its use in the NT, he concludes that it refers to those who have experienced 'some unfortunate turn of events or some untoward circumstance'. Thus, people experiencing poverty are those who 'cannot maintain their inherited status' because of some challenging situation that has befallen them. As such, it is not a permanent social standing; neither is it the opposite of rich.

3.4 The Function of Almsgiving in the Mediterranean World of the 1st Century AD

In the light of the claim being made here – that Lk. 16:9 is much broader than a directive to use one's money to give alms to the poor – it is necessary to briefly consider the nature and implications of almsgiving in the Mediterranean world of the time. Walker¹⁰⁴ points out that while the concept of benefaction was a part of the Graeco-Roman world, several keen distinctions existed between the Jewish and Graeco-Roman practices. For one, in the Jewish world, alms were offered by all people irrespective of economic standing, whereas in the Graeco-Roman tradition, it would be the wealthy and/or socially important people who would make benefactions. For another, within the Jewish community, individuals could be the recipients of alms, but in the Graeco-Roman society benefaction was a demonstration of public-spiritedness. In the latter instance, the reward would be public honour and acclaim, while for the former an eschatological reward supplanted it.

An interesting observation is that within the Graeco-Roman culture, the concept of 'charity' was virtually unknown.¹⁰⁵ In fact,

¹⁰⁴ D. D. Walker, "Jewish and New Testament Concepts of Benefaction/Benefactor," in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 157-159.

¹⁰⁵ Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*, 64.

it appears that neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a specific word for 'gifts for the poor'; yet, there are indications that they did practise the giving of alms – despite the fact that there was no particular merit in doing so.¹⁰⁶ Among the Jews, however, a tradition of giving of alms did exist¹⁰⁷ – undergirded by a religious ideology and motivation.¹⁰⁸ Stambaugh and Balch point out that, interestingly, the Jewish tradition of 'extending help and mercy to the poor is often phrased in a way that parallels the Greco-Roman concern for reciprocity.'¹⁰⁹

Thus, the giving of alms to the poor was a practice already entrenched in the fabric of the 1st century AD Mediterranean world – especially within the Jewish community. It could hardly have elicited the response that the Pharisees made to Jesus' teaching in 16:1-13. This implies that v. 9 is a radical instruction, which boded a disruption of the status quo.

Rohrbaugh points out that 'what Jesus seems to be doing . . . is rejecting the content of the honour code that was prevalent in the dominant society and asserting a new code that should characterize his own group'.¹¹⁰ The framework of honour discourse brings to the surface an aspect of the social interaction in Jesus' world that provides a dynamic context within which v. 9 can be understood.

¹⁰⁶ F. Staudinger, "ἔλεημοσύνη," in Balz and Schneider, *EDNT*, 28-429.

¹⁰⁷ Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, "Benefaction," 157-159.

¹⁰⁹ Stambaugh and Balch, *Social Environment*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "Honor: Core Value in the Biblical World," in Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris, eds., *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 2010), 118. Adobe PDF eBook.

4. ETERNAL TABERNACLES

As τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς is a hapax legomenon, it stands out in the NT corpus, defying being hurriedly passed over. In secular Greek, σκηνή is not an unusual word, and generally denotes some form of temporary shelter.¹¹¹ The accusative form of the adjective αἰώνιος signifies 'everlasting', 'eternal', with the implication of 'indeterminate as to duration.'¹¹² While there is no significant dispute with regard to αἰωνίους, the noun σκηνάς, however, has been translated and interpreted variously. This section undertakes a review and analysis of the significance of the phrase τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς in OT and NT thought, including references in the LXX.

4.1 Use of Tent/Tabernacle in the OT and the LXX

In the early history of the Israelites (i.e. the age of the Patriarchs and the wilderness wanderings), tent-dwelling was the norm (Gn. 12ff; Numbers). Even once they settled into a sedentary lifestyle, tents were used by shepherds (Is. 38:12), herdsmen (Jgs. 6:5), and armies (2 Kgs. 7:7-8; Jer. 37:10). All these references are to a nomadic lifestyle, and hence signified transitoriness. There are two other instances when tent/tabernacle is referred to in the OT: 1) the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths); and, 2) the tabernacle of God's presence. The NT use of σκηνή generally alludes to one or the other.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1985), 1040.

¹¹² Perschbacher, *Lexicon* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 10; J. Guhrt, "Time," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1978), 826.

¹¹³ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2007), 343.

According to Harris,¹¹⁴ σκηνή (tent, tabernacle, dwelling) and σκηνώμα (tent, dwelling) are used synonymously in the LXX, with a 430:80 ratio in favour of σκηνή. Both words are used to render three concepts referred to in the OT, signified by *'ohel* (a pointed tent), *miškān* (dwelling), and *sukkâh* (a matted booth, shed or hut).

The TDNT records that σκηνή occurs approximately 435x in the OT – mostly for the Hebrew *'ohel*.¹¹⁵ Harris notes that in the LXX the Tabernacle is never referred to as *sukkâh* – the word used to refer to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:39ff), where the Jews commemorate the exodus and wilderness wanderings by living in temporary shelters for seven days. Rather, *'ohel* and *miškān* are used to refer to ‘tent of meeting’ or ‘tent of testimony’ which began as a reference to ‘the appointed place where God meets his people’, yet in time came to be regarded as ‘the place where God resides’.¹¹⁶ Harris points out: ‘As a result of the LXX equation of *miškān* with *skēnē*, the Gk. word could surprisingly, refer to what was permanent . . . rather than impermanent.’¹¹⁷

A few poetic expressions refer to God’s dwelling in heaven or on earth as in a *skēnē* (Is. 40:22; Ps. 18:11; Job 36:29).¹¹⁸ Oesterley, while acknowledging the oxymoronic nature of αἰωνίους σκηνάς, points out that its sense is supported by Old Testament usage. He cites Psalm 61:4 (‘I will live in your tent for ever,’ HCSB) as an instance where the temporal and eternal are used conjunctionally.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Harris, “Tent, Tabernacle,” in *NIDNTT*, 811-812.

¹¹⁵ Kittel, *TDNT*, 1040.

¹¹⁶ Harris, 811; Kittel, *TDNT*, 1040-1041.

¹¹⁷ Harris, 811.

¹¹⁸ Kittel, *TDNT*, 1041.

¹¹⁹ Oesterley, “Parables,” 200.

4.2 Use of *σκηνή* in the NT

σκηνή (or its derivatives) is used a total of twenty times in the NT,¹²⁰ ten of which appear in the letter to the Hebrews. The next highest occurrence is in Luke-Acts (5x). It occurs thrice in Revelation, and once each in Matthew and Mark.

Three of the references (Mt. 17:4, Mk. 9:5, Lk. 9:33) are to the Transfiguration of Jesus, where Peter enthusiastically suggests setting up three *σκηνάς* for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. All three evangelists place this incident shortly after Peter's declaration of Jesus as the Messiah (Mt. 16:13-20; Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-20). Significantly, while Peter declares that 'it is good for us to be here', he does not suggest that they build *σκηνάς* for himself and the other two apostles: he only suggests it for the three who are shown in Luke to share in some way the divine glory (Lk. 9:31).¹²¹ In this light, Peter's proposal seems to allude to the concept of the gracious, abiding, and personal presence of God.¹²²

Green and Gooding offer different explanations for the phrase, in this particular context. Green notes that Peter's use of *σκηνάς* is a probable reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, referring to booths/tents.¹²³ Gooding's exposition of Lk. 9:28-36 offers valuable insight into the implications of the temporal world and the eternal one. He points out that the effects of the Transfiguration on the apostles would have convinced them of the real existence of the eternal kingdom, its concurrence with, though before and beyond our world; and that 'Christ had contact with both worlds simultaneously.'¹²⁴ Thus, while Green seems to see it as simply a temporal reference, Gooding sees it as

¹²⁰ Kohlenberger, Goodrick, and Swanson, *TECGNT*, 892-893.

¹²¹ Green, *Luke*, 384.

¹²² Kittel, *TDNT*, 1042; Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, abr. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 527.

¹²³ Green, *Luke*, 383.

¹²⁴ Gooding, *Luke*, 172.

a reference to eternity. In this instance, it is highly probable that Peter's use of σκηναίς alludes rather to its use in the OT as the dwelling place of God,¹²⁵ rather than to the Feast of Tabernacles.

In his speech to the Council, Stephen is shown to use σκηνη twice. In both instances, he uses it in reference to a manmade construction for the earthly dwelling of heavenly beings: in 7:43, to the portable temple¹²⁶ of a Canaanite god, and in v. 44 to the 'tent of testimony' in the wilderness, God's chosen space for meeting with Moses (Ex. 25ff).

At the deliberations of the Council at Jerusalem, James uses σκηνη in quoting the Amos 9:11 metaphorical reference to 'the booth of David' (δψωΔ τῶδ-τα) – which in its context is generally seen as a reference to the House of David.

The writer of Hebrews in referring to the 'true tabernacle' (8:2) uses it to refer to the place where Jesus the High Priest ministers in the presence of God. This is then contrasted with the tabernacle that Moses erected (8:5). The use of σκηνη in 9:2, 3, 6, 8 and 11 are all direct references to the tabernacle of Moses. In 9:11 and 13:9, the writer uses σκηνηςσκηνη as referring to Moses' earthly tabernacle in order to further his arguments regarding Christ's salvific ministry and its ramifications for His followers. The only use that is an exception, here, is in 11:9 where σκηναίς indicates the tents in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in Canaan.

In Revelation, John uses the term 'tabernacle' just three times, and in each instance it is in connection with the dwelling-place of God. The beast that rises out of the sea utters blasphemies against God and His tabernacle (τὴν σκηνην αὐτοῦ, 13:6); the heavenly tabernacle of testimony (τῆς σκηνης τοῦ μαρτυρίου,

¹²⁵ Harris, 811.

¹²⁶ Parallel Bible: New King James Version/Amplified (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012).

15:5) is the location for divine activity – the seven angels come forth from it, it is filled with the smoke of God's glory and power; and, the new Jerusalem is referred to as the tabernacle of God (ἡ σκηνή τοῦ θεοῦ, 21:3). Kittel and Friedrich see it as a vivid metaphor for God's eternal presence, with the emphasis lying on 'the close relationship between God and his people.'¹²⁷

The only use of it in the Pauline corpus is the figurative reference in 2 Corinthians 5:4, signifying the temporal body.

4.3 Significance of αἰωνίους

As a noun (αἰών) and an adjective (αἰωνίους) this term, which refers to the concept of time, is not an unusual one in the NT – it is used over 170 times.¹²⁸ The LXX used αἰών as the equivalent for the Hebrew *'ôlām*, to refer to a long time or duration; which when used in terms of the ongoing future can take on the meaning of eternity.¹²⁹ The OT idea of time – 'that lasting time is a property of God the Creator, whereas passing time belongs to man as creature' – is what has predominantly conditioned the NT concept of time.¹³⁰ Kittel and Friedrich pick up on the contradiction inherent in the phrase τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς, and see it as a reference to eternal dwellings 'with perhaps a suggestion of the indwelling of the divine glory.'¹³¹

Thus, a brief review reveals that in the OT, LXX, and the NT, the term σκηνή is most often used to signify the place in which God meets with His chosen ones: it is God's 'dwelling' on earth. However, it is also used in a secular and temporal sense, signifying a temporary dwelling-place. The descriptor αἰωνίους emphasizes the distinction that, in this instance, the reference is not to impermanent but permanent dwellings. Thus, this

¹²⁷ Kittel, *TDNT*, 1042.

¹²⁸ Verbrugge, *NIDNTT*, 26.

¹²⁹ Guhrt, 826-827.

¹³⁰ Verbrugge, *NIDNTT*, 26; Guhrt, 826-827.

¹³¹ Kittel, *TDNT*, 1042.

oxymoronic phrase serves to bring in an eschatological element to the instruction in v. 9; and, the unmistakable allusions to the OT anchor the sense of it being God who will be met within these tabernacles.

CONCLUSION

The over-arching question of this article has been: If Jesus really meant that his disciples should ‘buy’ strategic friendships for their after-life, then what must Christ-followers in the 21st century AD be doing about it? This query rose out of the disparate interpretations of Luke 16:9, which generally culminated in surmising that it was a directive to make friends with the poor through almsgiving and acts of charity so that one would be welcomed by them into eternal dwellings. While concern for the needy is certainly a strong theme in Luke-Acts, the self-serving spirit implicit in such an interpretation sits in harsh disparity with the general spirit of Jesus’ teachings. That ‘exegetes have not been able to agree, nor . . . to feel quite comfortable and secure in their conclusions’¹³² with regard to the response that Jesus was trying to evoke, was a spur to apply a fresh interpretative framework – that of socio-rhetorical interpretation – to this conundrum.

The research process brought to the surface further concerns, such as: Is the teaching in v. 9 applicable only to wealthy disciples? Is poverty a criterion for entering the eternal dwellings? If it is the beneficiaries of the disciples’ generosity who will welcome them into the eternal dwellings, then does a prudent use of mammon imply that disciples should be focusing on expending their wealth only on needy fellow-believers? The key proffered at the outset to unlock v. 9 (and by extension the parable of the Dishonest Steward) was that of understanding the link between friend-making, mammon, and eternity. The insights garnered through this study are summarized below.

¹³² Fletcher, “Riddle,” 15.

1. *Who are the 'friends' in v. 9?*

The exploration of the various textures of Luke 16:1-15, with special focus on the concept of friendship in Luke-Acts and the Mediterranean world of the time, disclosed that: a) friendship referred to a relationship of intimacy that included reciprocity, mutuality, and hospitality on multiple levels, including the economic and political; b) it was a relationship that had to be fostered by both parties – and was not casual by any means; and, c) the patron-client relationship, especially, provided a space for the building up of solidarity between those of unequal social standing.

The concept of making friends, then, in the Mediterranean world of 1st century AD Palestine was clearly a process that was intentional, progressive, and long-term. It required investment of resources and commitments of loyalty on both sides. Clearly, by its very nature, the practice of almsgiving/benefaction did not particularly focus on developing such a relationship; rather, it functioned to either relieve a specific difficulty of another or to benefit civil society.

On the other hand, the OT and NT are unequivocal about the possibility of friendship with God. One of the major thrusts of the entire NT is that God (i.e. the Trinity) has already invested in us. In this light, pursuing a friendship with God is our response to God's gracious initiative. Edgar, who explores this concept in great detail in his book, posits that developing a friendship with God is part of the natural progression of spiritual maturity. Basing his premise on the Gospels, he states: 'It is important to note the line of development in Jesus' own thought, which moved from *servanthood* as an early stage of ministry to *friendship* as the more mature form of relationship.'¹³³

¹³³ Edgar, *Friendship*, pt. II, chap. 2.

The exegesis detailed in section two makes it clear that the ‘friends’ and ‘they’ in v. 9¹³⁴ are one and the same. Based on the evidence presented in this article, it is tenable to hold that the identity of these ‘friends’ is none other than God.

2. *Honest Use of Dishonest Mammon*

The lens of honour discourse offers a perspective of the 16:1-15 pericope that highlights how Jesus’ teachings about the attitude towards mammon is not going to be held in high esteem by ‘sons of this world’ (or ‘lovers of money’). On the other hand, ‘lovers of God’ (or ‘friends of God’ or ‘slaves of God’) can be assured of God’s approval of their attitude of faithfulness towards Him – which, as vv. 10-13 spell out, translates into faithfulness in the use of possessions. As deSilva summarises it, this pericope sets out ‘. . . the proper use of possessions (9), the proper qualities to exhibit with respect to possessions (10-12), and the proper relationship one is to have with possessions (13).’¹³⁵

3. *Eschatological Implications*

Analysis of the narrational texture of 16:1-15 reveals the steward in the parable as the main actor; the master and debtors are merely supporting actors. Thus, the focus is on his situation and his actions, which are bracketed by the master’s criticism and praise. What surfaces as the core of the parable is that the steward was confronted with the end of his current ‘life’ and needed to urgently set things in place for his future. He does two things: evaluates his options and rejects those which are not viable; and then uses the resources at hand to carry out his plan.

¹³⁴ While the majority of English translations render v. 9b as ‘...they may welcome/receive you,’ a few versions (such as NIV) have opted to use the passive version and omit ‘they’, so that it reads, ‘. . . you will be welcomed’. However, the Greek utilises the subjunctive, aorist, middle deponent, 3 person plural of δέχομαι – which is more helpfully rendered in the active as ‘they will receive you . . .’.

¹³⁵ David A. deSilva, “The Parable of the Prudent Steward and Its Lucan Context,” *CTR* 6.2 (1993): 266, ATLAS.

These are the key elements Jesus highlights through the *chreia* in v. 9 – that the 'sons of light' should a) be cognizant about the transitory nature of mammon and its true value (i.e. as a means of making friends in heavenly realms); and, b) use that which is at hand, in the present time, to invest in eternal life.

4. *The link between friend-making–mammon–eternity*

Through the concept of friend-making, Jesus brings into one arena two different realities: the present world and eternal life. He shows his followers how they can straddle both worlds, until the temporary one comes to an end. He offers a foolproof way for them to safeguard against the lure of mammon – by recognizing that God is their only Master and that what is required is faithfulness in their stewardship of the possessions He has entrusted to their care. This teaching resonates with the spirit of Dt. 6:4, which is echoed in Mt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30-31, and Lk. 10:27. In the pericope under analysis, Luke highlights this feature by bringing into the frame a group that demonstrates what disciples should not be – 'lovers of mammon'.

In this light then, v. 9 is actually not so much about giving alms to the poor but the making of friends. Certainly, almsgiving and acts of charity are ways in which disciples should steward the mammon entrusted to them. Such practices will demonstrate their love for and friendship with God, which is what generates the desire to steward His resources according to His pleasure. The focus here is on faithfulness and obedience to God in regard to mammon. As Nolland states, what is required is a 'radical attachment to God' which works out to 'a loyalty of committed service to God that precludes any loyalty to money.'¹³⁶

Such a reading offers a broader interpretation and opens out its relevance to all disciples of Jesus – irrespective of economic positions. It also nullifies the conflict with the ethos of Jesus'

¹³⁶ Nolland, *Luke*, 805.

teachings which advocate giving without expectation of return and giving in secret.

Further, in this light, it negates the mercenary aspect of making friends with the poor through the use of mammon so that in some way one is assured of a welcome into the heavenly dwellings. As a result, disciples of Jesus are freed to employ possessions – be it in giving to the needy, carrying out acts of charity, or investing in missionary enterprises – as long as it is used in ways that God would want it to be used; and, to do so without any expectation of return from the beneficiaries. After all, is not this exactly what Jesus is shown to be teaching in an earlier section (Lk. 14:7-14)? It also frees believers to use possessions to reach out to fellow-believers as well as to those who are yet to believe. After all, is that not God's way (Lk. 14:15ff)?

Luke 16:1-15 highlights the urgent importance for disciples of Jesus to set their sites on 'making friends' for the life to come, through the use of mammon. For, just as we can 'store up treasures in heaven' (Mt. 6:19-20), v. 9 clearly indicates that we can also develop friendships in heaven while we sojourn on earth. Thus, through the emphasis of v. 9, Jesus is shown to be unequivocal in his directive that his disciples should be strategic in making friends by prudently employing the commodity of mammon. The identity of the friends, however, makes all the difference in the underlying ethos of the teaching.

**FEMALE CHARACTERS IN PAUL'S ALLEGORY
(GALATIANS 4:21-31)
*A POSTCOLONIAL READING***

ROJI T. GEORGE

INTRODUCTION

The 'worldliness' of a literary work is evident when it is read in its unique socio-historical context. The benefit of such an exercise is the opportunity to hear different voice(s) emanating from it than what has been often believed to be known through a literary or traditio-historical critical reading. Reading Galatians 4:21-31 from a postcolonial perspective implies prioritizing the post-coloniality of the producer of the text, like Paul, and makes a culturally-politically informed reading of it in order to unravel its sly tone. Paul, as a Jew turned Christian, appears to have a politically subversive intent in his use of religious language in the letter to Galatians. He defies the colonial binaries to articulate a liberative space 'beyond' them. He appears to imagine strategically the identity of his community in Christ by mimicking-mocking the dominant discourses of power.

This paper seeks to read Paul's allegory in Gal. 4:21-31 with the help of relevant postcolonial literary tools in order to exhume Paul's subversive tone. Such an effort may be legitimized in the light of Paul's strategic acceptance-rejection of a Christian's submission to any supernatural powers standing behind the human authorities by speaking about freedom from Jewish laws

and the elemental spirits that are not gods by nature (3:21ff and 4:3ff). At the same time, he does not reject the Jewish laws *per se* and human authorities in explicit terms. Thus, at first, an attempt shall be made to give an overview of the (post)colonial discourses criss-crossing each other discursively during Paul's time. It forms the larger discursive framework of which Paul's allegory appears to form a part. An overview is believed to provide a helpful background to undertake a postcolonial reading of the selected text from a postcolonial perspective.

The Colonized Galatia and the Female Bodies in Power Discourses

Galatia refers to a disputed land in the region of Asia Minor depending upon the particular historical period taken under discussion. In the modern Pauline studies, scholars are divided into two major camps – the North and South Galatia – concerning the readership of the letter.¹ Such discussions may bring clarity to the historical background of the letter, thereby enabling us to hear Paul's words in specific historical context which evoke significant contours of meanings. Unlike the traditional position favouring the North Galatian readership, an increasing number of scholars in current Pauline studies favour the South Galatian destination of the letter. It appears to have a better historical, archeological, and literary support from the first century Roman imperial context.² The South Galatian region was a Roman province governed directly under the strict Roman administration.

¹ For an introductory discussion, see D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 290-293; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Bangalore: TPI, 2004), 474-477; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Leicester: Apollos/Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1990), 465-472.

² See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), esp. 281-305.

The region of South Galatia which Paul visited during his first missionary journey was a Roman province. It is to them that Paul wrote the letter from Corinth, between 50-52 C.E.,³ where he stayed for eighteen months (Acts 18:11) during his second missionary journey. The region of Galatia, in general, included an extended boundary under Augustus: namely the ethnic district of North Galatia and in South Galatia places like Pontus, Phrygia, Lycaonia, Paphlagonia, etc.⁴ It inaugurated a period of multiple cross-fertilizations of cultures, languages, ethnic groups, and religions known as 'cultural hybridization'⁵ in postcolonial terms. However, it also implies that there were multiple religions that competed with one another for supremacy like the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures. It makes the situation in Galatia very complex, of which two important realities are pertinent to our reading of the letter: first, during Paul's time there were some who entered Galatia with a Judaizing mission, a form of cultural imperialism, due to the cultural-political upheavals taking place in the backyards of Judean political arena. They along with the support of some Galatians began to teach the non-Jewish population within the church to undergo Jewish circumcision in

³ Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1993), 8; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches in Galatia: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NICNT, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953), 31.

⁴ A. Souter, "Galatia," *The Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 311. Cf. Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus* (New York: Caratzas Brothers, 1979), 21.

⁵ In postcolonial discussions, 'cultural hybridization' is used to express a postcolonial cultural condition where both the colonial and colonized cultures merge together forming an interstitial space without becoming a third culture. Instead, it is a dynamic space of creolization where both the colonizer and the colonized meet each other mimicking-mocking without losing one's own individuality.

order to protect themselves from the Roman eyes.⁶ This caused confusion in the church which Paul vehemently opposed in his letter. For him, it enslaved the gentile Galatians under Jewish law, while the Jews themselves have failed to fulfil it perfectly.

Secondly, in Galatia, the (post)colonial discourses criss-crossed discursively under the Roman rule. While Rome aggressively propagated her divine mandate to rule over the human race through the religio-cultural literary discourses, she also employed effective visual tools, like male and female bodies, the subjugated, wounded, and humiliated images of the native mythical figures reflecting the features of the native gods, etc., in order to legitimise, naturalise, and authenticate subordination of the native subjects.⁷ In postcolonial discourses, the female bodies were used to articulate nationhood, nationalism, domination/subversion, and divine approval to the Roman colonial self-interest.⁸

During the Roman Empire, both the artefacts erected in public places and images engraved on the coins bore the theme of the

⁶ See A. E. Harvey, "The Opposition of Paul: in *The Galatian Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation*, ed. Mark D. Nanos (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 321-333.

⁷ See Larry J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World*, JSNTSup Series 134 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 31-39; Paul Zanker, "The Power of Images," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), 82-84; Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁸ Wong Wax Ching's discussion on women in nationalistic and colonial discourses in her article, "Negotiating for a Postcolonial Identity: Theology of 'the Poor Woman' in Asia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16/2 (2000): 5-23 sheds more light on it, especially in the modern (Asian) nationalistic thoughts.

victory of Rome over the colonized subjects.⁹ On the one hand, while Rome encoded her victory over the 'Other' in the image of the emperor, the engraved images of the goddess Roma, Victoria, Peace, etc., were also means of coercive propaganda and legitimization of her supremacy, rule, and superiority. On the other hand,

[t]he images of defeated people kneeling or put under/subdued by the Roman generals has been a common theme in both Roman statues/architectural structures and in coins. A recently discovered image representing the then existing power structure between Rome and nations (the 'Other') is well evident in the Julio-Claudian Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. This image depicts a naked man meagrely dressed in a cloak and a military helmet holding a woman down with his right knee over her legs and pulling her hair with his left hand. The woman, too, is clad in scanty dress with her breast bared and helplessly exposed to violence.¹⁰

According to Lopez, "[t]he couple is identified by an inscription: the man is the emperor Claudius; the woman is Britannia. She represents the territory and people of Britain—the islands north of the European mainland. She is an image of the nation called Britannia."¹¹ Similarly, the *Judaea Capta* coin series marks the "Roman victory and domination over the Jewish people and territory. An extensive series, the majority of the coin types show captured, bound, draped and seated female bodies, as well as

⁹ Cf. Edward M. Zarrow, "Imposing Romanisation: Flavian Coins and Jewish Identity," *JJS* 57/1 (2006): 50-53.

¹⁰ Roji T. George, "A Postcolonial Reading of Paul's Letter to the Galatians: A New Search for His Identity in the Epistle," D.Th. Dissertation, Senate of Serampore College (University), Serampore, India, 100. See also, Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission*, "Paul in Critical Contexts" (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 1, 43-44.

¹¹ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 1.

some captured, seated and/or standing, scantily-clad male bodies.”¹²

It is in this context of Roman imperial and aggressive Jewish nationalistic mission in Galatia that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians. Interestingly, in Galatians 4, Paul makes references twice to female figures/characters (Jesus born of a woman and defining his apostleship in feminine terms). Then, the quick reference to female figures in 4:21-31 may be read in this background where Paul’s idiosyncratic interpretive style subverts the claim of superiority by the Jewish cultural nationalists based on their ethnicity. In fact, Paul here redefines a national identity ‘beyond’ binary nationalistic discourses. Thus, Paul’s sudden evocation of the postcolonial theme of “freedom,” in 5:1, 13 becomes important. It not only embodies a quest for liberation from the oppressive religio-cultural systems but also the political liberty of all the Roman subjects from the colonial rule of Rome since the third century B.C.E.¹³ In concrete historical contexts, it came alive ambivalently in collaborative-contestationary religious language of the native colonized subjects. According to Martin Goodman, repeated peasant revolts and full scale civil wars witnessed in regions, like northeast Anatolia and Judea, are direct evidences of quest for freedom among the colonized subjects during the Roman colonial era.¹⁴

It is this historical and literary context that we seek to hear the subversive rhetoric of Paul’s allegory in Gal. 4:21-31. We ask:

¹² Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 36.

¹³ Cf. J. Briscoe, “The Antigonids and the Greek States, 276-196 B.C.,” in *Imperialism in the Ancient World: The Cambridge University Research Seminar in Ancient History*, ed. P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 145-157.

¹⁴ Martin Goodman, “Opponents of Rome: Jews and Others,” in *Images of Empire*, ed. Loveday Alexander, JSOTSup Series 122 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 225-227.

Why did Paul use allegory, a disputed form of argumentation in the ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric? How does he articulate the identity which promises freedom to all 'beyond' every form of binaries? Does Paul betray the tendency to replicate the dominant 'Self' in a different postcolonial context? In the remainder, these important questions shall be answered based on Gal. 4:21-31.

Paul's Subversion of the Dominant Power Discourses in Galatians 4:21-31

Paul articulates his quest for freedom "in Christ" in seemingly apolitical language against both the coercive Jewish cultural movement and Roman claim for divine mandate to universal rule. He appears to redraw the political scenario in which he resists a process of internal colonization by the Judaizers against non-Jews brought into the church, while ambivalently denouncing the Roman claim to domination in and through the deified persona of the Roman emperor. Thus, Paul articulates the 'selfhood' of the doubly colonized native Galatians (politically by Rome and culturally by the Judaizers) as free people within the *ekklēsia* and society, at large. In the remainder, we shall seek to understand: firstly, the subversive significance of allegory, a literary device, as a weapon of subversion in the hands of Paul, a postcolonial subject. Secondly, the ambivalent nature of new transformed identity articulated by Paul, and finally, the tendency in Paul to replicate the colonizing 'Self' in a different context, i.e., within the Galatian church by his exclusionary command, and so on.

1. Allegory: Paul's Weapon to Subvert the Master's Discourse

Allegory is primarily "a series of metaphors" and has its origin in Greek rhetoric.¹⁵ It is "almost always a relative, not an absolute, conception, which has nothing to do with the actual truth of the matter, and for the most part springs from the natural desire to conserve some idea which, owing to its age, has come to be

¹⁵ Johannes Geffcken, "Allegory," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980), 327.

regarded as sacred.”¹⁶ In this vein, for Paul, too, on the one hand, the truth he finds in the narrative is archaic and sacred which has been overlooked by his opponents and those Galatian believers who subject themselves to the Jewish Torah via circumcision. On the other hand, allegory as a relative conception allows Paul to re-imagine the “story from his Jewish prophetic tradition within and referring to his Roman imperial context to produce a political allegory for marginalized Jews and Gentiles alike in Galatia”¹⁷ who breathe under Roman domination. For him, apart from its political slavery to Rome, every nation is in slavery under the “elementary spirits” (Gal. 4:3, 8-9) that stand behind it, including Rome. The freedom from the enslaving Jewish Torah and the Roman laws that he envisages is “in Christ” beyond essentialist ethno-centric identities subverting the ghettoistic, violent, and valorizing tendencies. Thus, allegorical re-imagination of Paul is polyvalent. Within different contexts, it is potent to evoke multiple meanings in the minds of his auditors.

Among the students of Paul, it is widely consented that Paul adopted the story of the two women of Abraham from the Judaistic discourse¹⁸ propagated in Galatia which legitimized their cultural imperialistic mission. The Judaizers in Galatia understood “the seed of Abraham” in the literal sense valorising inter-ethnic relationship, both within and without the Church, in hierarchical terms as legitimate (physical descendents) and illegitimate children (the uncircumcised).¹⁹ By this, they sought to coerce the non-Jewish Christian population in Galatia to obtain a legitimate status by submitting to the Jewish religio-cultural rite of circumcision. In this context, although allegory was a

¹⁶ Geffcken, “Allegory,” 327.

¹⁷ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 158.

¹⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word Book, 1990), 207-208; C. K. Barrett, “The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians,” in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 161-162.

¹⁹ Barrett, “The Allegory of Abraham,” 161-162.

questionable tool of argumentation in the ancient world, Castelli maintains that allegory “may fruitfully function as a fruit of resistance.”²⁰ So, the same historical narrative when allegorized by Paul, it evokes veiled threat to the cultural-religious dominant Jewish propaganda. Paul’s idiosyncratic allegorical reading of the historical narrative is his unique weapon in turning the table at his opponents. Paul mimics the Jewish cultural imperialistic discourse with a twist added to it, quite mockingly, by his allegorical re-reading. Paul inverts the story to further his postcolonial interest of effecting liberation to the doubly colonized non-Jewish Christians in Galatia.

The resistant tenor of Paul is evident in the very beginning of his allegory. Here at the climax of his argumentation beginning at 3:1, Paul appeals to their common knowledge (4:21) which is very plain in the Scripture. On the one hand, the rhetorical question (“Do you not listen to the law?”) in 4:21, ironically, assumes their failure to hear the plain and explicit truth from the Scripture. According to Betz, the question implies that “if they would only listen to the Torah itself and understand what it says, the absurdity of their plans would become obvious to them.”²¹ On the other hand, it performs two important functions in the socio-historical and literary contexts: firstly, the question depicts Paul as the sole possessor and of the true meaning of the narrative. Thereby, he robs his opponents of their claims to represent the Jewish scripture in the right sense to the Galatian believers. Secondly, it inverts the meaning of the historical narrative and,

²⁰ Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Allegories of Hagar: Reading Galatians 4:21-31 with Postmodern Feminist Eyes,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, eds. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight, JSNTSup Series 109 (Sheffield: SAP, 1994), 229-230 cited from 229.

²¹ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 241.

thereby, deposes the traditional cultural-ethnic interpretation to set Paul's own re-reading in its place.²²

Further, within the larger political context, Paul's allegory of two women representing two nations in or outside of Christ is his "strategic imagination" that is a "counter-hegemonic discourse."²³ It imitates the colonial discourse in which the female bodies were used to communicate the secondary status of the colonized subject communities. According to Lopez,

[t]hrough the only explicitly named allegory in all of his extant rhetoric, Paul manipulates the Hagar-Sarah mother entanglement from Genesis to further his unnatural genealogical justification of alternative power alignment among the defeated. It is here, in Galatians 4:21-5:1, where Paul is most transparently attentive to a Jewish genealogical and prophetic framework as well as Roman political propaganda and imperial ideology, particularly personifications of lands and cities as female bodies.²⁴

The two women, for Paul, stand for two sets of lands ("Sinai"/"Jerusalem now" vs. "Jerusalem above") of which one is "slave" and the other "free." Within a colonial context, such polar opposite representations of the colonizing 'Self' and the colonized 'Other' is characteristic. Paul adopts the colonial logic of placing 'Self' in diametric opposition to the 'Other' but only to forge a fresh unity among the colonized 'Others' in transcultural, trans-ethnic, and trans-historical terms. Further, Paul's allegorization of the city called "Jerusalem," the actual homeland of every Jew (even those in Diaspora), is an act of decentring the Jewish discourse of nationalism. In the Jewish scriptures of the Second Temple Judaism, we find Jerusalem being addressed as "mother" (Is. 50:1; Ps. 86:5; 4 Ezra 9-10 cf. Is. 1:26). But later this idea in Philo was developed into calling Jerusalem a "mother-city" by

²² Castelli, "Allegories of Hagar," 241.

²³ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 154.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

imitating the language of colonization.²⁵ According to Pearce, Philo, a contemporary of Paul, had used the term “mother-city” for Jerusalem, as different from “father-city” (referring to the cities of Jewish Diaspora). He imitates the Greek colonizers’ use of the term in order to refer to the place from where they had set out to colonies (the “father-city”). In this sense, both Jews and Greeks refer to their city of origin as “mother-city” in order to express their loyalty to it without denying love and honour for the “father-city.”²⁶ If so, although Paul does not use the term “mother-city” for “Jerusalem above” in his allegory, his direct claim for “Jerusalem above” as “our mother” implies the transcendent belongingness of the Galatian believers from where they trace their origin. For Paul, the Christians as the children of God through promise/faith live in different cities like in Galatia or Jerusalem are living in colonies. By this he does not suggest dishonour or disloyalty to the Roman Galatia, in particular, and the Roman Empire, at large, but serves a reminder to his people that their real homeland is not a land under Roman occupation or Jewish laws in slavery.

In a nutshell, allegory enabled Paul to articulate his subversive language in encoded language that had strength to subvert the Master’s discourse in a subtle way. However, how did Paul articulate Christian identity in a hostile context?

2. Constructing Identity in Ambivalent Terms

Apart from Paul’s subversive intent in re-interpreting the story of Abraham and his two women (Gen. 16-21), another important by-product of his adventurous interpretation is to articulate a new transformed identity in ambivalent terms for the Galatian

²⁵ Sarah Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City’ in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria,” in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman World*, ed. John M. G. Barclay, LSTS 45 (London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 19-36.

²⁶ Pearce, “Jerusalem as Mother-City in the Writings of Philo,” 21, 29-36.

Christians. Paul begins to articulate identity based on the social status of the two mothers (slave and free) and the nature of birth of their sons (“according to flesh” and “through promise”). In fact, the entire specific details pertaining to the historical figures in Paul’s presentation are put in a “columnar pairs of opposites,”²⁷ like two begettings, two births, two covenants, and so on. To our interest, as a postcolonial subject, Paul too appears to caricature his opponents in negative terms against a positive depiction of his community identity. The expression “according to the flesh” defining Ishmael’s birth against Isaac’s birth as “through promise” is a negative way of defining identity. “Flesh” for Paul invariably stands for a carnal, lowly, and debased ‘Self’ that is diametrically opposite to the spiritual, superior, and moral being. In contrast, to say Isaac was born “through promise” or “according to the Spirit” is to assert space within God’s salvation activity in human history away from the Jewish cultural-political terrain and Roman imperialist discourse. Further, while “according to flesh” implies Abraham as the biological father of Ishmael, in the case of Isaac Abraham’s procreative potency is glossed over. The human agency, Abraham, is absent in the birth of the “free” people of God in contrast to the Jews who are strictly under the law in slavery. In other words, Isaac’s birth as the promised son born to a free woman is a divine initiative parallel to the Galatians’ who have received the Spirit not by “works” but by “faith” (3:2-5). Thus, the nation formed is “like Isaac” (4:28) who is not to be in slavery like the “Jerusalem now.”

However, what does “Jerusalem now” stand for, Judaism or the Law-observant Jewish Christian community? According to Martyn, in Paul’s letters (including Galatians) “Jerusalem now” refers to the *geographical location* of the church and the church

²⁷ J. Louis Martyn, “The Covenant of Hagar and Sarah,” in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 196.

in Jerusalem.²⁸ If so, politically the double enslaved status of the city named "Jerusalem" (both under Rome and Jewish law) and the Jerusalem church, as a 'slave-mother,' mothering, supporting, and legitimizing an enslaving mission in Galatia are equally alluded to in it.²⁹ In other words, Paul is not anti-Judaic but anti-enslavement of any sort. He opposes those in the Jerusalem church who carry out aggressively a Judaizing mission in Galatia by affiliating and furthering the Jewish Zealots in Judea. Perhaps, Paul saw the Jewish Christian cultural imperialistic missionaries in Galatia as proxy missionaries of the Jewish cultural nationalists in Judea. It must be borne in mind that during this time in Palestine, the Zealots were burning with the desire for an independent Jewish state. They kept the desire for political freedom alive in their anti-Roman armed revolution. This is, probably, implied in Paul's use of present tense with reference to the "Jerusalem now" in 4:24-25.³⁰ Then, Paul's articulation of a new transformed identity of the Galatian community in fluid terms, 'beyond' the Jewish cultural nationalism and Roman political hegemony, is strategic in nature.

Further, for Paul, while Hagar, an embodiment of slavery, represents Mount Sinai in Arabia, she is historicised/concretized both by specifically naming her "Jerusalem now" (4:25). Unlike this, the "free" woman is neither named nor associated with any geographical space under Roman domination. Both are to be understood by merely alluding to the historical figure (Sarah) or land (Jerusalem) but in transhistorical, transcultural, transethnic,

²⁸ J. Louis Martyn, "A Tale of Two Churches," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 25-36. Similarly, Dunn, *Galatians*, 250; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 9 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 177. Some, like Longenecker, view it simply as referring to a geographical location, Longenecker, *Galatians*, 213, whereas many commentators view it as referring to Jews. For example, Betz, *Galatians*, 246; Ernest de Witt Burton, introduction to *Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 261

²⁹ Martyn, "The Covenant of Hagar and Sarah," 205.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-204.

transgeographical, and transc cosmic senses. In other words, while Sarah is alluded to with her “free” status, the “Jerusalem above” transcends the military power and authority sphere of Rome. According to Lopez:

The free woman’s lack of name signifies that she is an unrecognizable place, owned by no one. Empire cannot claim this land, this nation: ‘Jerusalem above’ is out of the army’s grasp (both Jewish nationalist and Roman imperial), outside of territorial boundaries. She is beyond the inhabited world, beyond the margins. She is not captured and therefore unnamed. She does not produce children for the perpetuation of the master race, and neither should her Galatian children. The free woman is the co-mother, with Paul, of the new creation, in which the circumcised Jews and nations with foreskins are arranged in such a way that they no longer have any reason to imitate a divide-and-conquer approach to humanity. In relation to Roman imperial visual ideology, this Jerusalem is invisible and undetectable.³¹

In postcolonial studies, the visible-invisible elusiveness of a subject community threatens the symmetry of the colonial discourse, the absolute authority, and unflinching power of the colonial ‘Self.’ It is in this strategic location that Paul seeks to articulate the new identity of his community in Christ that defies the complete knowability of a colonized subject by the colonizer. (S)He remains known-yet-unknown to the colonial master, at the same time. It is a strategic self-articulation of a postcolonial subject that subverts the fixed colonial form of articulating subjecthood of the ‘Other’ while launching a subtle-yet-decisive assault on the colonial representation of the ‘Other.’³² Interestingly, Paul’s assertion that both he and the Galatian

³¹ Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 162 (Parenthesis added).

³² Simon Samuel cites similar example Arundhati Roy’s work, *The God of Small Things*. Simon Samuel, “Reading the Postcolonial Creative Discourses: Towards Modelling a Strategic Postcolonial Theology of/for the Marginalia,” *DTJ* 5/2 (2008), 178.

believers belonging to the “free mother,” that is the “Jerusalem above” (cf. 4:26, 29, 31), is a subversive way of articulating the new identity in ambivalent terms. While Paul does not appear to deny the Roman colonial presence, the implication of his claim is that even in the present the new transformed community in Christ transcends the colonial sphere of absolute authority. They belong of the transcosmic kingdom of Christ that neither culturally enslaves nor politically oppresses.

Finally, the closer connection of “Jerusalem above” with the “free woman” is attached with a taint of barrenness. Unlike the colonial hypocritical self-representation as unblemished, complete, and pure, the postcolonial ambivalent discourse does incorporate the reality of suffering, shame, and humiliation into self-articulation. Paul’s words while reaffirm the superiority of “Jerusalem above” over the “Jerusalem now,” it is not oblivious of humiliation experienced before overpowering the colonizer like Sarah’s barrenness turned into bearing the promised child. Interestingly, it follows the path of Jesus, the crucified Messiah in Galatians, who too, on the one hand, for Paul, is elevated above Caesar as the true Saviour only through his death upon the colonial cross and, on the other hand, he removes the curse of the (Jewish) law by his sacrificial death. For Paul, the present suffering of the Galatians involving their humiliation by the Judaizers and the Roman political masters is the undisputed evidence of their status elevation in Christ. It is proved twice (Jesus and Sarah) in the native historical narrative of the subjugated community. According to Asano, “Sarah goes through a form of humiliation by her barrenness, which is followed by a form of exaltation by her fruitful child bearing. The stigma of humiliation (barrenness) was a necessary step for elevation as the mother through whom the descendants enjoy the authentic heirship of Abraham.”³³ In other words, the freedom of the Christians to enjoy “in Christ” is

³³ Atushiro Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians: Exegetical, Social-Anthropological and Socio-Historical Studies* (London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 176-177.

coupled with humiliation and suffering which seemingly discredits them against their opponents, but they have a hope of restoration as “Jerusalem” in the prophecy of Isaiah (Is. 54:1). Interestingly, Isaiah too has spoken about the threefold imperatives (“sing,” “burst,” and “shout”) of hope and restoration to the humiliated Judah under Babylonian colonization and brutality. Paul applies the commands of the prophet directly to the Galatians implying a reversal of present suffering into shouts of joy (Gal. 4:27).

In short, Paul’s articulation of a new transformed identity is ambivalent in nature. It mimics the colonial discourse while celebrating the actual experience of humiliation in articulating a postcolonial identity. In this way, he subverts both Jewish and Roman dominant discourses of power, at the same time. However, does Paul’s postcolonial discourse betray his tendency to replicate the colonizer in a different context?

3. Tendency in Paul to Replicate the Colonizer

Paul in his desire to champion the cause of his people seeks to articulate an alternate space of emancipation by subverting the oppressive dominant discourses. However, is Paul ‘innocent’ and untouched by the ‘sin’ of essentialism? Perhaps, “No.” In recent years, scholars like Boyarin and Castelli have critiqued Paul on his tendency to advocate his own unique exclusive-inclusivism. While the former accuses Paul and his theology of being dangerous to the Jewish identity for turning the physical symbol of circumcision into abstract thing of one’s heart,³⁴ the latter has considered Paul’s appeal to the Galatians to imitate him in 4:12 as leading to coercive sameness for the apostle is the “privileged model”³⁵ for all to be like. A careful reading of his allegorical discourse in 4:21-31, too, betrays his ‘intolerance’ towards the Judaizers in

³⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 23-24, 52-56, 228, 234.

³⁵ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, LCBI (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 116.

Galatia in more than one way. They prove his tendency to replicate the colonizing 'Self' within his own community although he envisions a 'third space' of emancipation for the Galatian Christians. He is an ardent advocate of inclusive community identity when in conflict with his exclusivist opponents who come with a cultural imperialist agenda. But, in contrast, he himself, at times, replicates the colonizing 'Self' against Jews who advocate their cultural tenants within the community of predominantly non-Jews.

Firstly, Paul appears to affirm an irreconcilable gulf of difference between the progeny of the "slave woman" and the "free woman." While the former is caricatured by terms such as "law," "works," and "flesh" which in his letter(s) have negative connotation, the latter is defined by "faith," "promise," and "Spirit." The assertion of Paul in 4:28 that you "are children of promise" (cf. 3:29) implies differences from ones "born according to the flesh" (4:23) that cannot be bridged. From the outset of his argumentation in Gal. 3:1, Paul appears to retain differences between the two indissolubly while contending for an ultimate hybridized existence "in Christ" (3:28-29). For him, the divine "promise" to Abraham (4:8, 17-18) and "the promise of the Spirit" (4:14) are contrary to Jewish reliance upon the "works of the Law" (4:2-5, 9). Therefore, the "heirs according to promise" (3:29) are not to return under slavery by submitting to the "worthless elemental things" (4:9).

Secondly, Paul relies upon the later Jewish tradition than the biblical teaching itself. Asano argues that Paul simply adopts the later Jewish tradition that brings into the text (LXX) the idea of persecution of Isaac by Ishmael, whereas Gen. 21:9 simply means to say that "Ishmael was simply 'laughing' or 'playing'." If so, the addition is explained as a later Jewish insertion in order to explain "Sarah's harsh response to Ishmael or his conduct, i.e., 'Cast out this slave woman with her son'."³⁶ Here, Paul stands 'guilty' of

³⁶ Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians*, 177.

overlooking the textual support to his prescription by interpretation whenever it suits his interest. It is unlikely of Paul in previous two occasions when Paul in 3:16 and 19-20 pays extraordinary attention to the minute details of the texts (grammatical details) in order to disprove the arguments of his opponents. Then, was it an intentional act of Paul? There cannot be any answer given to it in univocal terms for we do not have any concrete evidence to term it as an “intentional” or “unintentional” act. For sure, some might provide contradictory evidence to argue it as an intentional dishonesty or ideological bias on the part of Paul. Much of that depends on the interest of the interpreter to paint the apostle in any particular hue of one’s own choice. However, in a postcolonial reading, neither the colonizer nor the colonized subject is viewed to be politically innocent. It is expected of Paul, a postcolonial subject, to argue for the liberative space of his people by gathering evidences from any credible source, especially common tradition(s), to argue his case. But here Paul appears to do so by replicating the colonial ‘Self’ in caricaturing the opponent in fixed categories for self-interest.

Thirdly, he without reluctance commands expulsion of the agents of enslavement and erection of a permanent dividing wall between the children of the “slave” and “free” women. Paul’s direct application of the Isaiahic prophecy into the Galatian context is an inhospitable command to “drive out” (4:30 cf. Gen. 21:10) those agents of enslavement. It safeguards the freedom of the uncircumcised Galatian Christians from double colonization but at the threat of Paul advocating exclusivism and not celebrating plurality in a subtle way. Instead, he appears to advocate tolerance by exclusion and expulsion in order to freely exercise Christian freedom according to his own understanding. For him, it is the sole way to retain the original intent of their existence by living as children of the free woman (4:31). Does it imply Paul’s anti-Semitic mindset? Does Paul’s identity reconstruction threaten Jewish identity *per se*? Surely, “No.” For Paul, to “drive out” does not marginalise the whole Jewish

Christian population due to their ethnicity. Instead, his struggle is upon those who seek to impose one's own cultural tenants upon others with a superior claim. Moreover, he himself claims to be a Jew by ethnicity by his use of "we" and "brothers" in 4:31. It proves that the scope of the command to "drive out" is directed towards the Jewish cultural imperialists who wanted to enslave others under their own cultural laws.

Thus, although Paul replicates the colonizing 'Self' to some degree by operating on an exclusionary basis and selectively gathering evidence to further his own interest, the community and its identity that he seeks to articulate "in Christ" includes mutual cultural transaction without reification of one culture over the other. In this social location Paul appears to envision an equal standing of all cultures without reifying one over the other. Thus, to him, a Jewish nationalistic agenda is to be resisted within the Church as it seeks to dominate coercively while every Jew is invited to retain his ethnic identity without any claim to superiority. In short, he rejects their conquering and dominating intent and not their distinctive cultural-ethnic identity *per se* (3:28-29; 4:12).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the climax of Paul's arguments in Gal. 3-4 against the Jewish cultural nationalists undertaking a Judaizing mission in Galatia and the Roman colonial discourse is quite subversive in nature. Paul intentionally chose a disputed style of argumentation (allegory) which helps him to appear insightful, authoritative, and combative amidst conflict, while imitating-with-difference the colonial practice of representing the 'Other' in female bodies. His strategic imagination articulates a complex identity to the Galatian Christians who were under threat of being doubly colonized, politically by Romans and culturally by Jews. For Paul, it helps them to acquire the promise of God through the Jewish patriarch, Abraham, and experience freedom in Christ, while resisting slavery under Jewish culture and Roman

domination. However, Paul though articulates a Christian identity in ambivalent terms within a transcultural hybrid context, he betrays a tendency to replicate the colonial 'Self' to a certain extent within a postcolonial context.

TO SUBMIT OR TO SUBVERT
A CRITICALLY GROUNDED READING OF ROMANS
13:1-7 FOR CHRISTIANS RELATING TO GOOD
GOVERNANCE

WIJITH DeCHICKERA

INTRODUCTION

Good governance is the flavour of the season in the Sri Lankan political sphere today. For every dozen people, there is a score of opinions on what it constitutes or portends. Many church leaders enjoy believing citizens to subscribe to its ethos as it is ostensibly discerned in the political leadership of our day. But the relationship between biblical teaching on the duties of Christian citizenship and the ethos of government can be a tenuous and stressed – or even a stormy and tortured – one. While the Bible is clear, straightforward, eternal (or seemingly so) about civics, governments do change and even ‘good governance’ can undergo a sea-change into something rich and strange. Democratically elected governments can sometimes be confused with administrations guaranteeing peace with justice for all – or, more often, be so complex in their coalition-necessitated ethics that conflating ambition with ability is a serious mistake a polity can make. There is – as can be seen – a veritable kaleidoscope of tones, tenors, and timbres, that the nexus between Church and State can take; and discerning what constitutes the most faithful interpretation of scriptural imperatives on the civic praxis appropriate to any age can be challenging.

My aim in this article is to discover Paul's rationale for civic obedience in Romans 13:1-7. I will attempt to do this by discerning the valences of a plethora of scholarly responses to this seminal passage. In comparing and contrasting the disparate thrusts of these comments and observations, I hope to determine a theologically reasoned and scripturally defensible praxis as regards Christian engagement with government. In grappling with seemingly straightforward biblical injunctions, while reflecting on the valences of scholarly responses to a subtler Pauline agenda, I expect to be able to address and answer some attendant issues as below:

- Is the Pauline exhortation in Romans 13:1-7 – that Roman Christians be subject to the governing authorities – a binding prescription for *all* Christians, in *all* nation-states, under *all* types of government, in *all* ages of human history?
- Or is its scope limited and applicable to the Roman Empire of Paul's time vis-à-vis the then burgeoning Christian movement; balancing as it did the missionary aims of this nascent faith with the ambitions of a widespread, entrenched, powerful, and oppressive regime?
- If so, is there space for Christians in our days, times, states, and in the face of the manifestly diverse ethos of sundry governments – good, bad, and ugly – to challenge and critique or even countermand the instructions and imperatives of our own governments – even if those particular governments are “good”? Or especially if they are “bad”? And how far do we dare to go to oppose demonstrably corrupt, arguably criminal governments, such “ugly” examples of which we have seen in the recent past?

Therefore, I will scan the essential and seminal literature on the text under scrutiny to discover what the basic responses to, and ramifications of, Romans 13:1-7 are. Then, I shall try to discern in

these scholarly responses the trajectory and spectrum of a range of readings that suggest diverse responses to Paul's exhortations. Given the fallenness of human nature and the corruption of human institutions – to the extent that they may be structurally evil and even demonically influenced – I expect to find that superficial readings of the text might necessarily be relativized by more subversive interpretations. My intention is to distinguish where, in a spectrum of readings, the most meaningful and significant interpretative applications lie for faithful Christian application of God's word on government.

Thus, I shall explore the ramifications of Romans 13:1-7 as the being key to unlocking the most important aspects of the nexus between Church and State for Christian citizens of any epoch. At the crux of the issue is whether Paul intended his paraenesis to be limited to being an imperative for faithful followers of Christ in the 1st.-c. A.D. Roman Empire, or whether his teaching had – and has – a wider scope of application for Christian praxis in successive ages under sundry governments. Will a simple and straightforward reading of the Pauline exhortations in this key passage suffice to guide solid Christian citizens in their engagement with the governments of their time... for isn't there an innate flaw in the nature of the government, the character of its magistrates, and the provenance of its authority – no matter the day and age?

That there is a gamut of interpretations as to how Paul in Romans 13 could or should be read hinders, not helps, my investigation. However, a closer scrutiny of valences of positions taken by the slew of scholars surveyed reveals that there is not only a satisfying categorisation of the seeming kaleidoscope of interpretations, but also a range of values that can be assigned to the respective positions taken or which these scholars see Paul as having taken. In the final analysis, from the gamut of responses, ranging from *simplistic* to *subversive*, only one position from the four major valences discerned and developed – and one at the not-so-surprising end of the spectrum, as will be demonstrated –

will be discovered to be the most suitable for application *across all types of government and down the ages* from the Roman Empire to modern democratic republics.

LENSES TO READ ROMANS 13 THROUGH

Why Paul includes Romans 13:1-7 in the eponymous book at all, and in-between a discussion on *love* (Rom. 12:9-21) and *love again* (Rom. 13:8-14) at that, is not immediately apparent. Many scholars think that “there must have been a situation in the church at Rome, of which Paul was aware,”¹ and so have proposed several scenarios to plumb Paul’s mindset as well as the mood of his audience. A summary of these positions is given by Moo in the *New International Commentary to the New Testament (NICNT)*,² from which this article draws some material as given below:

On the one hand, commentators such as Bammel, Borg, Culpepper, Calvin, Harrison, et al., cite the violent anti-Roman Jewish Zealot movement as a possible influence on the Christians in Rome – a tendency that Paul possibly felt Christians must resist if they were not to be identified, and condemned, together with the Jewish community there. On the other hand, Käsemann notes there is little evidence for Zealot or Zealot-like agitation in Rome at this date.³ Other writers like Moiser suggest that Claudius’ expulsion of Jews and Christians in 49AD might have led to resentment against the state and the temptation to rebel against it, thus prompting Paul’s opus.⁴ There are also those who argue that the most likely scenario is “the Roman Christians had been

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 792, hereafter *NICNT: Romans*

² *Ibid.*

³ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 350.

⁴ J. Moiser, “Rethinking Romans 12-15,” *NTS* 36 (1990), 571-582.

infected by their fellow citizens with a resistance to paying taxes to an increasingly rapacious Roman government.”⁵

Much scholarly ink has been spilled on discerning Paul’s purposes and the reception of his Roman interlocutors. Some of these have been stated, challenged, critiqued, and counter-interpreted, as follows:

- “Paul does not demand ... submission at all.”⁶ Rather, the text is a late addition to Romans, inserted when the original radical demands of the gospel had been ameliorated, and Christians were seeking accommodation with the world (*vide* Michel and especially Käsemann, who considered Rom. 13:1-7 an “alien body” inserted into 12:1–13:14.⁷).
- Paul is “naive” or “not so naive” about the doings and demands of government (the latter being emphasized by Schrage, in *Die Christen und der Staat*, pp. 52-53).⁸
- Paul was asking Christians to submit to the state only for a relatively short interval between Jesus’ Ascension and the Parousia, after which God’s Kingdom would be established in power. Dibelius first proposed this view in *Rom und die Christen*, p. 184, which was adopted as the ‘consistent’ view of early Christian eschatology and ethics propounded by Schweitzer; although Neugebauer,

⁵ Moo, *NICNT: Romans*, 792-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 807.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 791. But compare this with Bruce [in F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, rev. ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 218ff; and also in F. F. Bruce, ed., *New International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 1340]; who contextualises the text to Rom. 12, where, as part of the ‘living sacrifices’ which the Christian is to offer (12:1), Paul lays down what his or her general attitude should be towards the state.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 807.

particularly, in *Zur Auslegung*, pp. 160-66, has argued that such a view reads an “eschatological focus” into Romans 13:1-7 that does not do it – nor the rest of the New Testament – justice.⁹

- Paul demands submission to ‘authorities,’ who or which are interpreted as “both secular rulers and the spiritual powers that stand behind them,” but only as long as these authorities are themselves subject to Christ. This idea was first mooted by Dibelius; and although he later retracted it, his position was taken up and developed by Schmidt, Dehn, Cranfield, and most notably Cullmann and Barth. Moo avers that this interpretation is “linguistically impossible,”¹⁰ discussing four ‘fatal’ counter-arguments to the Barth-Cullmann hypothesis.

- Paul demands submission to “secular rulers only of the Roman Christians” and “only in the immediate situation they are facing,” such that “a universally acceptable norm” for Christian praxis is “simply an over-interpretation” that “fails to take into account the specific local nature of the text.” These ideas are culled from nuances of the positions of Michel, Wilckens, Leenhardt, Käsemann, Bammel, Heiligenthal, Hultgren, et al.¹¹ But others (Schlier, Kosnetter, Aland) have posited that “applications to situations beyond those in Rome in Paul’s day is entirely valid,” emphasising in their counter-arguments the overarching “divine ordination of government” (per Calvin) and “the universal applicability of the text”¹² that broaden the scope of submission to varying degrees under diverse states.

⁹ Moo, *NICNT: Romans*, 807.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ As cited severally in *NICNT*, 808ff.

¹² *Ibid.*

- Paul demands submission to government, but only as long as government functions *à la* Romans 13:1-7. If it doesn't, Christians can disobey it. This is a very common view: especially per J. Hering in 1950, one of the earliest scholarly commentators to explore the ramifications and dimensions of Christian civil disobedience.¹³
- Paul demands a "submission" that is more about "submissiveness" than "strict and universal obedience" (but see also Judge, who notes how the New Testament "encourages Christians to recognize the continuing validity of the socio-political order" – even if government does not have "absolute rights over the believer").¹⁴

N. T. Wright, however, would disagree that there is *any kind of submission* mandated, arguing that Paul was aware of "a more urgent task" and "certainly a more dangerous one" – "that of articulating his message in implicit, and sometimes explicit, subversion of the new ideology which was sweeping the Mediterranean world."¹⁵ Here, Wright has in mind the ideology of the Roman Empire. He shows that Paul insists, over and against normal Imperial rhetoric, that earthly rulers are not themselves divine, but are answerable to the one true God. They are God's servants; and as servants they can expect to be held accountable. Wright suggests that this passage actually represents a severe demotion of the rulers from the position they would have claimed to occupy.

There are several ways in which all of these responses above to Romans 13:1-7 can be categorised. These range from what I call "*Absolute Submission*" at one end of the purposive-interpretive-responsive spectrum to "*Absolute Subversion*" at the other. To be

¹³ Moo, *NICNT: Romans*, 808-809.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 809.

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 59.

found in-between are a gamut of other positions: from what we might label as “*Respectful Commitment*,” through “*Reluctant Cooperation*,” and “*Resigned Complicity*,” to “*Resentful Compliance*,” inter alia. These can be interpreted as being Paul’s purported intentions when essaying his famous piece, and also as discerned and nuanced by subsequent scholarly insights into his *Sitz-im-Leben*.

I will explore each of these positions in turn, citing scholars who supply possible insights into both Paul’s location and ostensible purposes, and the likely milieu that then prevailed in Rome among his Christian readership. Ahead of interaction with scholarly commentary in each section, a brief imperative definition and a short elaboration on the gravamen of each position or purpose is given.

A. Paul’s position #1: Absolute Submission

[“Obey the state unconditionally in all things at all times.”]

These are purposive-interpretive-responsive positions that demand, recommend, suggest, that Roman Christians unequivocally subject themselves to Imperial authorities. They may range from universal applicability to a limited local requirement.

Consider Barclay’s contention that “at first reading, this is an extremely surprising passage, for it seems to counsel absolute obedience on the part of the Christian to the civil power.”¹⁶ While it may be surprising, initially, Barclay subsequently sees that “in point of fact, this is a commandment which runs through the whole New Testament.” Examples of other biblical texts that may be pressed into service to bolster Barclay’s case include 1 Peter 2:13-17, which operates parallel to the passage under consideration. Barclay himself cites scriptural references such as

¹⁶ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 171.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Titus 3:1 which teach essentially the same truth.¹⁷

Others note that “Paul’s demand for submission to government [has] significant parallels with the teaching of Jesus [for example, in Mark 12:13-17], and with early Christian instruction”¹⁸ [as evinced in 1 Peter 2:13-17]. Several of these make a connection with Dominical utterances, treating Romans 13:1-7 as simply a commentary on what Christ had already said. For them, this passage is “Paul’s exposition of Jesus’ remarkable saying, ‘Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s’ in Matthew 22:20-1.”¹⁹ Hughes, for one, claims that “with this single sentence, our Lord established the validity of human government, while at the same time setting its limits:”²⁰ favouring a submissive response to the state, which is perhaps not surprising for a 20th-century American point of view from a reader in a mature, functioning, democratic republic.

Contrasting with this view, at least in terms of its limits, is Stott’s, another 20th-century Western Christian from a constitutional monarchy (Britain), who notes that in Romans 13:1a, “Paul begins with a clear command of universal application.”²¹ Showing that Paul underscores the reason for this requirement three times in the short space of two verses (cf. 13:1b, 1c, 2a), Stott seems categorical that “the state is a divine institution with divine authority,” adding definitively that “Christians are not anarchists or subversives.”²² To be fair by Stott, he urges the exercise of caution in interpreting Paul’s statements: “He [Paul] cannot be

¹⁷ Barclay, *Romans*, 171.

¹⁸ Moo, *NICNT: Romans*, 745.

¹⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 238.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Romans* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1994), 340, hereafter *BST*.

²² *Ibid.*

taken to mean that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God, that God is responsible for their behaviour, or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted.”²³

Diametrically opposed to this caveat of Stott’s is Barclay’s bland assertion that “a man has a duty to the state and must discharge it even if a Nero is on the throne.”²⁴ He would argue that Paul makes this point in Romans 13 with “such inclusive definiteness because he wished to dissociate Christianity ... from insurrectionist Judaism,” indicating that Barclay and others feel quite strongly that “Christianity and good citizenship went necessarily hand in hand.”²⁵ Others would agree with this submissive view, declaring that “the gospel is equally hostile to tyranny and anarchy,”²⁶ leaving little option but accommodation with government in one form or another.

Reading submission in Romans 13:1-7, but from a different perspective, are scholars who hold that “St. Paul is writing, primarily at any rate, with a view to the state of the Church as a whole, not to the particular circumstances of the Roman community.”²⁷ They note that unequivocal submission to the state is clearly enjoined, because “there is a complete absence of any reference to particular circumstances; the language is throughout general; there is a studied avoidance of any special terms; direct commands such as might arise from particular

²³ Stott, *BST: Romans*, 340.

²⁴ Barclay, *Romans*, 171.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Charles H. Hodge, *The Geneva Series of Commentaries: A Commentary on Romans* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), as quoted in Stott, *BST: Romans*, 343.

²⁷ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *International Critical Commentary: The Epistle to the Romans*, 1895; repr. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 369.

circumstances are not given; but general principles applicable to any period or place are laid down."²⁸

Explaining their rationale for a submissive reading, these commentators aver that "it must be remembered that when this Epistle was written, the Roman Empire had never appeared in the character of a persecutor."²⁹ However, they concede that "when St. Paul wrote, his experience might have induced him to estimate too highly the merits of the Roman government."³⁰

Submission: Seen as a virtue.

Paul's paraenesis: "Government is ordained by God. Therefore, submit without excuses."

(This is a NAIVE position.)

B. Paul's position #2: Respectful Commitment

["Obey the state with due regard to its nature as being God-ordained."]

Purposive-interpretive-responsive positions that encourage Roman Christians to recognise the God-ordained nature of government, and submit ungrudgingly to imperial imperatives. While believers' attitudes are considered important, so are the parameters (limits, extents) of obedience.

Questioning the 'superficial' purpose of the text, some scholars affirm that the "classic Pauline statement of this purpose in Romans 13:1-7 has, rightly, been regarded in Christian tradition as of special normative significance, but it is necessary to

²⁸ Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 369.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 370.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 371.

interpret it in the light of the whole biblical narrative.”³¹ They would argue that in both Old and New Testaments, “government is consistently seen as instituted, authorized, and circumscribed by God, and its legitimacy as dependent upon the proper exercise of that authority, the purpose of which may be formulated as the establishment of justice in the public realm of society.”³² It is the propriety of such an exercise of authority that warrants respect.

This recognition that God stands behind the authorised institution of government must engender a dutiful obedience or “*respectful commitment*” on the part of society, in the interests of law and order at the very least – and maybe even justice. There is, however, a tacit understanding in this position that the legitimacy of the very governments requiring, if not demanding, respect, depends on “the proper exercise” of state power to achieve the specified end that Atkinson and Field desire. Ergo, there are the interpreters such as Hodge who regard with seemingly naïve acceptance the assumed Pauline insistence in Romans 13:1-7 that “the believer is to fulfil his governmental obligations with a good attitude.”³³

Submission: Seen as a virtue.

Paul’s paraenesis: “Government is governed by God. Therefore, submit within limits.”

(This is also a NAIVE position.)

³¹ David J. Atkinson and David H. Field (Eds.), *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics And Pastoral Theology* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1995), 415, hereafter *NDCEPT*.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Charles Hodge, *Crossway Classic Commentaries: Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 244.

C. Position #3: Reluctant Cooperation

[“Obey the state because of fallen human nature, despite the state’s failings.”]

Purposive-interpretive-responsive positions which recognise that Roman Christians as much as the Empire they lived in and under were fallen entities, and therefore enjoining a resigned adjustment to reality. This is usually a pragmatic position taken for survival.

There is an intermediate position, somewhere towards an assumed centre of an interpretive spectrum ranging from ‘*Absolute Submission*’ and ‘*Respectful Commitment*’ above, to ‘*Resigned Complicity*’ and ‘*Resentful Compliance*’ below, in which the reality of fallen human nature is anticipated – and addressed – by the rationale of government. This is an unwitting admission of the state of affairs on both sides of the governor-governed nexus. Paul probably knew then, as Barclay later did, that “ideally, men should be bound together by Christian love; but they are not; and the cement which keeps them together is the state.”³⁴

Schreiner notes that because Paul is addressing “a genuine issue in the Roman churches,”³⁵ the application of the passage had an immediate local context, namely that Roman Christians at the time Paul was writing had to cooperate with the state to ensure that they survived in a crowded city, a competitive economy, and under a powerful and often oppressive regime.³⁶ Barclay brings it down to the ubiquitous domain of utilities, emphasising every citizen’s need of state-sponsored roads, public facilities, law and order – for which there was a commercial and civic price to be paid.³⁷ It often was not pleasant to admit such a need, nor

³⁴ Barclay, *Romans*, 172.

³⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2001; repr. (Secunderabad, India: OM Books, 2003), 447.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Barclay, *Romans*, 172.

sometimes in keeping with the mores and the consciences of Rome's Christian citizens to do so; but corporate and cooperative reliance was such that an unwilling admission of the status quo militating towards dutiful citizenship, or "*reluctant cooperation*" with the state, was practical and in many senses unavoidable.

Submission: Seen as a necessity.

Paul's paraenesis: "Government is imperfect, but necessary. Therefore, submit for the sake of creature comforts, as much as Christian charity and civic-mindedness."

(This is a PRAGMATIC position.)

D. Position #4: Resigned Complicity

["Obey the state despite reservations about its nature, but while recognising its potential."]

Purposive-interpretive-responsive positions which understand the powerlessness of subject peoples – Roman Christians included – living under oppressive regimes, and urging that they comply with magisterial imperatives (often, simply for safety's sake) to an unalterable situation. Often, in the background to submission is a missiological intent.

A slightly nuanced position from the one in '*Reluctant Cooperation*' above is that "Paul's main view of the state was one in which the Roman Empire was the divinely ordained instrument to save the world from chaos."³⁸ Barclay recognizes, as Paul arguably did, that "take away that empire and the world would disintegrate into flying fragments" [because] "it was the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace, which gave the Christian missionary the chance to do his work."³⁹ (Barclay may have had the *Pax*

³⁸ Barclay, *Romans*, 172.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Britannica in mind, too!)⁴⁰ And, there are those who would see the text as suggesting that Christian realists and pragmatists bow before the status quo, but only to go along with the prevailing government to further the larger purposes of the gospel which Paul had in mind.

Therefore, Christian interpreters today might intuit that Romans 13:1-7 is extant from a time when the Empire had not yet begun its persecution of Christians. And from other texts of the New Testament they would know (as Gibbon observed, which is quoted by Stott) that “the tribunal of the pagan magistrate was often the safest refuge against the fury of the Jewish mob” and that is why “time and again, we see Paul receiving protection at the hands of impartial Roman justice.”⁴¹ Thus, Bruce says Paul had a “very positive assessment of imperial administration which ... reflects his own happy experience ... in the provinces.”⁴² Schreiner confirms that many scholars add their weight to this argument, perceiving Roman rule at the time to be “beneficial and just” – “the genial part of Nero’s reign” – and concludes from his estimate of the timing of the writing of Romans 13 that it is a strong appeal to the moral and ethical rectitude of paying taxes on time and submitting ungrudgingly, being led “to subordinate themselves to ruling authorities.”⁴³ This is, at best, a strategic adjustment to reality or “*Resigned Complicity*”. But we need to note that those who see it that way, or claim Paul was advocating such a position, all hail from politically stable modern Western democracies where governments in general and magistrates in particular are for the most part servants of the common good!

Submission: Seen as a means to an end.

⁴⁰ I am in debt to CTS’s MA Programme lecturer Dr. Tim Bulkeley for this insight.

⁴¹ Barclay, *Romans*, 172.

⁴² Bruce, F. F., *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Carlisle, Cumbria: The Paternoster Press, 1977), 336.

⁴³ Schreiner, *Paul*, 448.

Paul's paraenesis: "Government is oppressive. Therefore, submit and trust God to work."

(This is a STRATEGIC position.)

E. #5: Resentful Compliance

["Obey the state strategically and out of largely practical motivations, despite strong personal misgivings about its nature."]

Purposive-interpretive-responsive positions which empathise with the mood of Romans in general and the mind-set of Christian citizens in particular, but advocate even resentful obedience to the rulers of the time with a view to maintaining the peaceful status quo. More important than good citizenship per se may have been the physical safety of citizens.

For Roman Christians, being practical meant having to overcome many personal feelings and prejudices. Roman taxation of the Empire's citizens, including Christians, was the subject of much controversy. Schreiner adduces that subjection to governing authorities was most evident in the tug of the purse-strings,⁴⁴ generating no small measure of resentment. Moo observes that "Rome at about the time Paul writes is rife with anti-tax fervour. Paul may be afraid that Christians may join in this movement, and so he reminds them of their obligations to government and of the need to pay their taxes."⁴⁵

Other commentators discern Paul speaking to the resentfully compliant Jewish psyche of the 1st Century AD in the Roman-governed provinces of the Levant. These were sporadically troubled by sundry rebellions, usually brutally suppressed by the

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Paul*, 447.

⁴⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *Encounter Bible Study: Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 184, hereafter *EBS: Romans*.

imperial legions. Yearning for a messiah – religious, political, cultural, and economic – they strained at the leash to throw off the Roman yoke. This points to Paul’s ostensible drawing from Jesus’ teachings “in the context of the subjugation of Palestine by the powerful Roman Empire [as a result of which] Jesus announces the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God.”⁴⁶ Paul was, in some scholars’ understanding, only too aware of the simmering resentment of his audience against Roman injustice. Roman Christians as much as Jews were likely to be strongly opposed to heavy Roman taxation, and therefore prone to potentially volatile rebellious gestures such as not paying taxes – if not open revolt. These scholars claim that “Paul certainly was not so naïve as to think such a situation would never occur,” elaborating that “he knew his people’s history, and he served a Lord who had been crucified unjustly by the governing authorities.”⁴⁷ Stott agrees, stating that although Paul “had himself experienced from procurators and centurions the benefits of Roman justice, he also knew about the miscarriage of justice in the condemnation of Jesus.”⁴⁸

With reference to this latent volatile Jewish resentment, other writers assert: “There is also sufficient ground for thinking that there was some urgent need for pressing home upon the believers at Rome the teaching which is given here representing the prerogatives of magistrates and the obligations of subjects in relation thereto ... [This was] a situation in which it was necessary for Christians to avoid all revolutionary aspirations or actions as well as insubordination to magistrates in the rightful exercise of their authority.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Atkinson and Field, *NDCEPT*, 416.

⁴⁷ Moo, *EBS: Romans*, 187.

⁴⁸ Stott, *BST: Romans*, 341.

⁴⁹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1959; repr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 146.

But some scholars remain agnostic about the existence of such hostility to Roman government. While they find it “conceivable” that Paul was writing with “constant disturbances” in mind, such as those which provoked the Emperor Claudius to order all Jews to leave Rome (cf. Acts 18:2), Stott for one feels that “we lack information about the causes of this unrest.”⁵⁰ In regard to whether some resentful Roman Christians regarded submission to Rome as not only distasteful, but contrary to the lordship of Christ and/or their Christian liberty, he suggests that “it seems idle to speculate.”⁵¹ Others confirm that “there was also within the Christian community the danger of perverted notions of freedom, especially in view of the kingship and lordship of Christ,”⁵² pointing to an ironic hostile servility or submissiveness – a “*Resentful Compliance*” – that bordered on revolutionary fervour.

Submission: Seen as a means to an end.

Paul’s paraenesis: “Government is imperfect, but necessary. Therefore, submit for the sake of safety and security.”

(Also a STRATEGIC position.)

F. #6: Absolute Subversion

[“Don’t obey, or in some way subvert, the state – despite or even because of its God-ordained nature, and because of its corruption.”]

Purposive-interpretive-responsive positions which recognise a higher authority than worldly powers: namely God, who institutes government; and who thus recommend a range of responses from active non-violent resistance to anarchy.

⁵⁰ Stott, *BST: Romans*, 340.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Murray, *Romans*, 146.

The same commentators as above recognise that for Jesus, as for Paul, the kingdom of God was superior to – and sovereign over – the kingdom of the Caesars. Clearly “this kingdom [of God] challenges Roman political authority by asserting its [the Roman Empire’s] wholly derivative character and by exposing its [the Roman Empire’s] authoritarian style of government.”⁵³ They would argue that for Jesus, as for Paul, “the injunction to ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s’ ... presupposes the existence of definite limits on what Caesar may legitimately claim.”⁵⁴ In a politico-religious climate where Caesars from Augustus demonstrably regarded themselves as not only Senate-appointed dictators but also self-designated ‘sons of a god,’⁵⁵ to bifurcate citizens’ loyalties by separating God from Emperor, Church from State (as Jesus did, and as Paul also did) was in itself a subversive act.⁵⁶ The common Roman coin of Jesus’ day was a denarius. On one side was the portrait of Emperor Tiberius and on the other the inscription in Latin: “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” The coin was issued by Tiberius and was used for paying tax to him. In distinguishing clearly between Caesar and

⁵³ Atkinson and Field, *NDCEPT*, 416.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Wright reminds us that “most of the early emperors were careful not to claim divine honours in Rome itself. ‘Son of God’ was quite sufficient.” [Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 78.].

⁵⁶ Interestingly, Jacques Ellul, in a ‘short supplementary note’ says: “I had, like everyone else, taught that since Augustus, the *imperator* was, in his lifetime, called ‘*divus*’ and after his death ranked among the gods. After an attempt, quickly rejected, by Domitian (84AD) to be called ‘*deus*’ in his lifetime, the title is in fact permanently assigned to emperors after Aurelian (270AD). However, this is less important than we think, and in any case has no impact on any of Paul’s epistles.” [Jacques Ellul, “Petite note complémentaire sur Romains 13, 1,” *Foi et Vie* no. 79 (6, 1990), 81-3, accessed on November 29, 2014, <http://www.foi-et-vie.fr/archive/article.php?code=2388>, translated by Tim Bulkeley.]

God, Jesus also protested against the false and idolatrous claims made on the coins (cf. Matt. 22:15-22).⁵⁷

For Jesus in the gospels, and Paul in this epistle, to condone such a loyalty, allegiance, and homage to Caesar was not only uncommon sense and eminently good politics, but it also had *subversion* streamlined into its *ostensible submission*. This is not only because, as Schreiner asserts, “the world is not transformed by revolutionary activity but by Christians living as good citizens.”⁵⁸ We might go a step further and assert that the world is transformed by Christians living as good citizens of two worlds – the [Roman] Empire or any one of numerous world empires (be they military-political, socio-cultural or economic-commercial) and God’s Kingdom – *concurrently and simultaneously*. So while some writers suggest that “we can legitimately infer that Paul would allow us to disobey rulers when they fail to carry out their divine mandate to reward good and punish evil,”⁵⁹ a more subversive response is *critical engagement* to the extent of obedience, but with the sovereignty of God and His purposes for government uppermost in mind. *Not* to rebel against the state, or *not* to mount a revolt against demonstrably crooked, corrupt, or even criminal regimes, is arguably far more subversive; for it raises the spectre of a Divine Superpower – not a despotic Caesar – appointing and holding accountable the powers that be.

A far less submissive view is that of the ultimate subversion of Christians when they challenge the prerogative of errant administrations who quote scripture, an idea which is explored at length by Draper.⁶⁰ His position sits well with some telling

⁵⁷ Kenneth L. Barker, Gen. Ed., et al., *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, 1985; repr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1504-5.

⁵⁸ Schreiner, *Paul*, 450.

⁵⁹ Moo, *EBS: Romans*, 187.

⁶⁰ J. A. Draper, “Humble Submission to Almighty God and Its Biblical Foundation: Contextual Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7,” *Journal of*

passages such as Acts 4:19f and Acts 5:29f that point believers to active disobedience when the authorities are opposed to God, good civic sense, and fundamental human rights.

Ellul, in a short piece, promulgates the view that since “the authorities are firstly servants of God’s will, and none can claim to be compared to our God,” they have to obey God, and “insofar as they are obedient, we must obey them.” His opinion is that “a statement such as [that made in] Romans 13 [vv. 1-7] was, properly, in view of the prevailing ideology, of Nero, sacrilege,” and, if Paul intended it as such, not only sacrilegious but highly subversive of the status quo.⁶¹

Others also argue that although “the commands to obey civil authority are clear,” there is a case to be made for “mandated disobedience” in the face of government’s commanding citizens to do evil, wherein “not only *may* a Christian resist, he *must* resist when any authority demands disobedience to God.”⁶² The position of Shaeffer on this, whom McQuilkin calls “the most articulate and widely read conservative advocate of civil disobedience,”⁶³ is extreme in its advocacy of Christian resistance, though McQuilkin himself does not agree that “the full range of civil disobedience advocated by Francis Shaeffer can be justified from Scripture.”⁶⁴

The least submissive view which endorses active resistance is the reading of Romans 13:1-17 by Christian practitioners in the Nazi era (Germany, 1933-45). While “preaching was one significant way that some pastors did resist” and some German theologians

Theology for Southern Africa 63 (1988): 30-38, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/trc/j63drape.htm>.

⁶¹ Ellul, “Petite note complémentaire sur Romains 13, 1,” 81-3.

⁶² Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1995), 483.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

confronted the National Socialist government – they “radically proclaimed the gospel against Nazi ideology with little or no thought of personal safety”⁶⁵ – other pastor-teachers such as German theologian Karl Barth, in successive editions of his commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans (1919, 1921, 1932) “challenged readers to hear the epistle as God’s word directly addressing the present moment.”⁶⁶ But there are difficulties with reading Romans 13 as if Paul was writing about Berlin and the Third Reich, and not Rome and its Empire. Thus one might smilingly suggest that the history of the interpretation of Romans (up to and including vis-à-vis the Nazis) showcases a series of attempts to see the text in every other way than qua its plain meaning! This is possibly because “the plain meaning” (evidently, submission) poses so many problems to Christian interpreters who hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper (with reportage on the shortcomings and sins of the state) in the other.

One such interpreter, Barth, in his famous commentary on Romans, neither legitimizes the state, nor calls the Christian to take up arms against it, but is “concerned to demonstrate the honour of God,” finding in this passage “an assault being made upon men, upon their *setting their mind on high things* ... upon their Promethean arrogance.”⁶⁷ In terms of a Christian response to the fallenness and failings of government, Barth is clearly “interested in a negative behaviour, in a human not-doing.” He discerns Paul’s plan of attack in this exhortation as “not upon secular authority itself, not upon the conduct of those who accept

⁶⁵ Dean G. Stroud, ed., “Editor’s Introduction,” *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), Kindle.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 477ff, accessed on December 15, 2014, http://books.google.lk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dCEDzQhI4R4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=karl+barth,+Romans&ots=lzB14EEsYr&sig=pTLqUOb13J-DV_KIB0pbAh6OYm4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=karl%20barth%2C%20Romans&f=false.

and keeps its ordinances, not upon ‘the duties of citizenship’ ... but upon the requirement that men should NOT break through these regulations.”⁶⁸ He argues against those who enjoin revolution against corrupt, decadent, states: “There is here [in Romans 13:1-7] no approval of the existing order; but there is endless disapproval of every enemy of it.” Challenging revolutionary, rebel, radical alike, Barth asks: “What more radical action can he perform than the action of turning back to the original root of ‘not-doing’ – and NOT be angry, NOT engage in an assault, NOT demolish?”⁶⁹ In this context of ‘non-doing,’ Barth demonstrates that while submission required by Paul in vv. 1ff “may assume from time to time many various concrete forms,” yet “as an ethical conception here it is purely negative.” From the point of view of Christians who oppose, resist, and deny the state the submission it demands, and which Paul requires, “it means to withdraw and make way.”⁷⁰

In an eloquent passage,⁷¹ Barth remonstrates with the Christian anarchist that the conflict in which the radical or revolutionary is immersed “cannot be represented as a conflict between him and *the existing ruling powers.*” Rather, “it is a conflict of evil with evil,” because “even the most radical revolution ... can be no more than a revolt.” For Barth, paradoxically,⁷² “the whole

⁶⁸ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 477ff, accessed on December 15, 2014, http://books.google.lk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=dCEDzQhI4R4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=karl+barth,+Romans&ots=lzB14EEsYr&sig=pTLqU0b13J-DV_KIB0pbAh6OYm4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=karl%20barth%2C%20Romans&f=false.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 481.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ In the author’s preface to the English edition, Barth acknowledges that his translator, Sir Edwyn Hoskins, “has performed his task with great skill.”

⁷² Ironically for a commentator who had once “been critical of the National Socialist Party when it assumed power in Germany in 1933,” seeing the Nazi movement as “a human attempt to posit itself as an

relative right of what exists is established only by the relative wrong of revolution in its victory; whereas the relative right of revolution in its victory is in no way established by the relative wrong of the existing order.” To him, “the rebel may be justified at the bar of history; but he is not justified before the judgment-seat of God,” because “the rebel has thoughtlessly undertaken the conflict between God’s Order and the existing order.” And “when men undertake to substitute themselves for God, the problem of God, His Mind, and His judgment, still remain, but they are rendered ineffective. And so, in his rebellion, the rebel stands on the side of the existing order.”⁷³ That is not simply subversive, but paradoxical!

With such an ironically conservative view, it is not surprising in some sense that Barth’s goal was to “affirm the text without criticism.”⁷⁴ Barth is perhaps not the only modern (or only post-WW II German, surprisingly) to read Romans 13:1-7 conservatively; submissively: *contra* subversion. But other moderns like Shaeffer, and not only Wright, read the passage critically and subversively. And unlike his compatriot Barth,

absolute that was in direct confrontation with the authority of God’s word,” being in 1934 the “chief architect” of the Barmen Declaration, which affirmed that “Jesus Christ in the one Word of God that the church must obey” [as quoted by Maico M. Michelin, *Karl Barth: A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (Ashgate Publishing, 2007), Preface, accessed on December 15, 2014, http://books.google.lk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=1qdIUCoNpswC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=karl+barth,+Romans&ots=enAjlyuztk&sig=PVtPpsMpu-iOK09n_HHBfgrnR4w&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=karl%20barth%2C%20Romans&f=false]

⁷³ Barth, *Romans*, 482.

⁷⁴ John B. Cobb Jr. and David J. Lull, *Chalice Commentaries For Today: Romans* (Chalice Press, 13), accessed on December 14, 2014, http://books.google.lk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ni0l851wtgwC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=lull,+Paul+and+Empire&ots=EJzGbwYitM&sig=ROIF9X1hLkLlmtnzwpJvFj29hsY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=lull%2C%20Paul%20and%20Empire&f=false.

German pastor-theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was engaged in espionage against the Nazi state, and was an active collaborator in the abortive bomb plot of July 20, 1944, for which he was arrested, tortured, and executed. He, among other Germans of his time, exemplify the most extreme examples of absolute subversion of government – despite, or because of, having read Romans 13:1-7 – right under Hitler’s nose.

Their blatant and desperate anarchy can be counterpointed, surprisingly enough, by Wright’s albeit subversive exhortation that, as a “community right under Caesar’s nose in Rome,”⁷⁵ “the church must live as a sign of the kingdom yet to come,”⁷⁶ demonstrating in its witness that “the true God has acted and will act to create a new version of humanity before which Rome’s attempts at uniting the world pale into insignificance.”⁷⁷ This is not least because the still-being inaugurated new Kingdom “is characterized by justice, peace, and joy in the Spirit”⁷⁸ and “cannot be inaugurated in the present by violence and hatred.”⁷⁹ However, Wright’s position – if fully understood – is far more subversive than it sounds, as explored more fully in H. below.

Submission: Seen as lack of virtue.

Paul’s paraenesis: “Government is God-ordained, but Satan-serving. Therefore, oppose or even actively resist (sometimes, albeit rarely, and *in extremis*, at that, to the point of anarchy).”

(This is a SUBVERSIVE position.)

⁷⁵ Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 78.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

INTERIM SUMMARY

In general, then, we might conclude that most readings of – and Pauline valences in – Romans 13:1-7 range along a continuum from what we might label “*absolutely submissive*” to “*absolutely subversive*.” This in itself suggests that interpretive responses are wide and varied, and can legitimise the contention that Paul was not attempting to lay down the law for all time on the relationship between the Church and the State, given diverse critical receptions. But there are those who take exception to the view that this text is a universal template for Christian praxis vis-à-vis the state. Schreiner, for one, wonders whether we are “inadvertently [treating] Romans 13:1-7 as if it were a treatise on the Christian’s relation to the state;”⁸⁰ perhaps as we do not have a comprehensive discussion on the relationship of believers to the state because of Paul’s relative paucity of commentary on it. Edwards, for another, hints that “it is inadvisable to consult this passage as a timeless theology of church and state. Rather ... Paul is admonishing the Romans not to pull the roof of Nero’s wrath down on their heads as they had under Claudius,”⁸¹ a view that falls into either the “*Resigned Complicity*” or “*Resentful Compliance*” camps.

Rather than such a ‘timeless theology,’ many interpretations of Romans 13:1-7 take the pragmatic *via media* view. One of the strongest arguments in favour of *any* response in the *Respectful Commitment* → *Reluctant Cooperation* → *Resigned Complicity* → *Resentful Compliance* → range of valences in reading Paul is that the powers that be afford a modicum of protection to individual citizens as much as to a missionary church. Schreiner and others observe that the state “has a responsibility to punish malefactors so that society is spared from anarchy,”⁸² adding that “even the most oppressive regimes generally punish the evils of ...

⁸⁰ Schreiner, *Paul*, 450.

⁸¹ James R. Edwards, *New International Bible Commentary: Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 303.

⁸² Schreiner, *Paul*, 447.

lawlessness.”⁸³ The stability that such a regime engenders bodes well for the spread of the Gospel, Paul’s driving ambition being to preach the Good News to all people everywhere.

INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, with Paul’s larger missiological purposes (to spread the gospel, using the state) as above in mind, it might be possible to suggest the inclusion of a seventh position that he thought Christians could take vis-à-vis their response to the state:

G. #7: Realistic Cohabitation

This is an unhappy recognition of the fallen nature of the state and its servants on one hand, and the humbling reliance of Christian citizens and Christian communities on it on the other.

Submission: Seen as a necessity.

Paul’s paraenesis: “Government is imperfect, but necessary. Therefore, submit for the sake of stability and sustainability.”

(A PRAGMATIC position.)

However, with Paul’s ultimate magisterial and ministerial purposes in mind (to subvert the state, in order to privilege God’s Kingdom) – per Wright and the ‘new interpretation’ – it might be permissible to relativize this seventh, seemingly tenable, via-media position with an eighth possibility:

H. #8: Religio-political Critical-engagement

A position short of “*Absolute Subversion*,” this attitude to government probes with the sharp tools of critical engagement the agendas of an overtly religious state with its claims that presents its governors as political messiahs, and offers quite subversive counter-claims in their place, such that Christ and not

⁸³ Schreiner, *Paul*, 447.

Caesar is God and Caesar is positioned as God's servant for the good of the Church and the world.

Submission: Seen as lacking virtue.

Paul's paraenesis: "Government is structurally evil, but redeemable. Therefore, critically engage with it with intent to challenge it and change it, keeping it true to its God-given mandate."

(A SUBVERSIVE position.)

Elaboration on "Critical Engagement"

Wright notes that "the cult of Caesar was not simply one new religion among many in the Roman world."⁸⁴ He adds that "by Paul's time it had become the dominant cult in a large part of the Empire ... and was the means whereby the Romans managed to control and govern such huge areas as came under their sway."⁸⁵ Ergo, "Who needs armies when they have worship?" Further, theologically, the 'gospel' functions for Paul "in a way that would have led naturally enough to a charge of sedition – as Luke notes Paul was accused of saying (cf. Acts 17:7) – belonging 'completely with Isaiah's ringing monotheistic affirmations that YHWH and YHWH alone is the true god, the only creator, the only sovereign of the world.'"⁸⁶ In a worldview where Caesar was the divine saviour and hailed as the giver of every good gift and the harbinger of a universal reign of peace – the Roman Empire's *euangelion* or "gospel"⁸⁷ – this was blasphemy, treason, heresy.

⁸⁴ N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," Centre for Theological Inquiry (2010), accessed December 16, 2014, http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Paul_Caesar_Empire.pdf, 1. PDF document.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Because, of course, “politically, it cannot but have been heard as a summons to allegiance of ‘another king’ other than Caesar.”⁸⁸

Practically, this meant that Paul [in announcing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the supremacy of His Kingdom] “was more like a royal herald than a religious preacher or theological teacher.”⁸⁹ As Wright argues, for Paul, “Israel’s king was always supposed to be the world’s true king.”⁹⁰ And so it is appropriate that in Romans, he should present the crucified, resurrected, and salvific Christos (or Messiah, now stripped of its purely Jewish overtones), as the Saviour of the world, especially “since Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and since the Gentile world was looking for a cult figure, a *Kyrios*, a lord” ... “who would bring the just and peaceful rule of the true God to bear on the whole world.”⁹¹ Subversively, while engaging with the good-news-bearing empire, “that is the burden of his song, the thrust of his euangelion.”⁹²

Wright elaborates⁹³ on how this makes the most sense in seeing Romans in general and Romans 13 in particular as pertinent to a subversive reading of Paul:

“The main challenge was to the lordship of Caesar, which, though certainly ‘political’ was also profoundly ‘religious.’ Caesar demanded worship as well as ‘secular’ obedience; not just taxes, but sacrifices. He was well on the way to

⁸⁸ N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” Centre for Theological Inquiry (2010), accessed December 16, 2014, http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Paul_Caesar_Empire.pdf, 3. PDF document.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 4.

⁹³ With a sideward glance at the “Parousia,” per Koester, in *Paul and Politics*, 158ff, which is also “replete with imperial/political overtones.”

becoming the supreme divinity in the Greco-Roman world, maintaining his vast empire not simply by force, though there was of course plenty of that, but by the development of a flourishing religion that seemed to be trumping most others either by absorption or by greater attraction. Caesar, by being a servant of the state, had provided justice and peace to the whole world. He was therefore to be hailed as Lord, and trusted as Saviour. This is the world in which Paul announced that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was Saviour and Lord.⁹⁴

And for Wright, it is significant that “Paul was announcing that Jesus was the true King of Israel and hence the true Lord of the world, at exactly the time in history, and over exactly the geographical spread, where the Roman emperor was being proclaimed, in what styled itself a ‘gospel’, in very similar terms.”⁹⁵

It is against this backdrop that Wright comments⁹⁶ more specifically on Romans 13:1-7:

“Within the broad-brush ethical exhortations of chs. 12-13, Paul argues that, however much the emperor may proclaim himself to be sovereign, without rival in the divine as well as the human sphere, he remains answerable to the true God. Reminding the emperor’s subjects that the emperor is responsible to the true God is a diminution of, not a subjection to, imperial arrogance. But if this is so, then the Christian owes to the emperor, not indeed the worship Caesar claimed, but appropriate civil obedience. The subversive gospel is not designed to produce civil anarchy.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Wright, “Paul and Caesar,” 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Alluding to Elliott, “Liberating Paul,” 214-26 (in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, ch. 11).

⁹⁷ Wright, “Paul and Caesar,” 6.

Rather, it encourages the dutiful Christian citizen to critically engage with the powers-that-be, marginalizing their imperial ambitions, imperatives, mandates; and relativizing their grandiose, at times God-opposed, claims.

Thus, we might modify our continuum of responses suggested initially, as discerned from scholarly commentary:

<u>Government Orientation/Character</u>	<u>Paul's position/ Valence of response</u>	<u>Christian response</u>
Godly/good	Naïve	<i>Absolute Submission</i>
Godly/flawed	Naïve	<i>Respectful Commitment</i>
Human/good	Pragmatic	<i>Reluctant Cooperation</i>
Human/flawed	Pragmatic	<i>Realistic Cohabitation</i>
Structurally evil/ has potential for redemption	Strategic	<i>Resigned Complicity</i>
Structurally evil/ is corrupt but tolerable	Strategic	<i>Resentful Compliance</i>
Satanically perverted/ has potential for transformation	Subversive	<i>Religio-political Critical-engagement</i>
Satanically perverted/ is corrupt and condemnable	Subversive	<i>Absolute Subversion</i>

I will discuss which of these is or are the most appropriate responses in the final section.

All things being equal, the eight positions presented above may well be thought to carry *similar weight* or *equal value* in terms of Christian responses to government. However, key words and concepts in the text shape our insights more sharply about *who*, *what*, and *why* Paul meant when he wrote Romans 13:1-7, thereby introducing textual and exegetical differentials to the equation.

INTERIM CONCLUSION

We might tend to see much sense and a muscular Christian response to the state in the position Wright espouses.⁹⁸ The servants of Caesar were as much Caesar's priests as Caesar himself was chief high priest of an imperial cult. Thus his ministers are to be seen as performing a liturgical service to the emperor in their very act of serving the empire's people. It is the position we will accept Paul as taking – quite subversively, *à la* Wright – for the purposes of this article.

CONTEXT IS KEY

Many readers treat the text we study in this paper as if God's good will and pleasure for the Christian vis-à-vis the state was written there in stone. Divine ordinances, however, are subject to diverse interpretations down the ages; some demonstrably reflexive, eventually calcifying as orthodoxy. Thus, "after so many centuries of interpretation we may inadvertently begin to treat Romans 13:1-7 as if it were a treatise on the Christian's relation to the state," forgetting that "the text is only seven verses long!"⁹⁹ and that Paul wrote no more on the topic.

So, was there a particular context prompting Paul to pen this pericope? Schreiner concludes that "inordinately high taxes may

⁹⁸ See his extended argument on 'Gospel and Empire' in N. T. Wright, *Fresh Perspective*, 59-79, esp. 63.

⁹⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 681, hereafter *BECNT*.

be one reason for its composition,” suggesting that Paul addresses a specific situation. But he also asserts, “we do not have a comprehensive discussion on the relationship of believers to the state,” adding, “Paul simply explains what believers should generally do: namely, obey the laws of the land.”¹⁰⁰ Affirming that “Paul assumes that believers will refuse to do what is evil,” Schreiner further asserts “Paul was aware that the state could go astray”¹⁰¹ (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-2). For him, “the admonitions in Romans 13:1-7 contain the general rule and the normal course of affairs in the Christian life. The text cannot be wrested from its context to support obedience to the law no matter what the government enjoins.”¹⁰² But it is not a call to resistance of the state or anarchy; “nor does Paul contemplate any form of violence, for such activities would be foreign to the very nature of the gospel.”¹⁰³ Discerning that “Paul does not endorse a private Christianity, where one’s individual salvation does not affect public living” and where “new life in Christ embraces and touches every dimension of the life of believers,”¹⁰⁴ Schreiner concludes, “Paul does not expect life in this world to be heaven on earth, but he does expect believers to be good citizens.”¹⁰⁵

But how can we ascertain this was in fact his mindset when, in Romans 12–15, “Paul returned to the life and community of the faithful in a practical and hortatory mood”?¹⁰⁶ We need to enter Paul’s life-situation and explore Rome (albeit briefly) at the time of his writing the letter from Corinth, then frame the text in the context of Paul’s theology, before we essay our response to it.

¹⁰⁰ Schreiner, BECNT, 681.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Cobb Jr. and Lull, *CCT: Romans*, 23.

Schreiner places Paul's call to submission (or obedience: Gk., "hypakouō") to authorities required by Romans 13:1-7 in a larger context of Pauline submission (Gk., "hypotassō"):

- Submission to God's law (Rom. 8:7)
- Submission to God's righteousness (Rom. 10:3)
- Submission to government (Rom. 13:1)
- Submission to leaders (I Cor. 16:16)
- Submission to Christ by spiritual powers (Eph. 1:22)
- Submission to Christ of all things (I Cor. 15:27, Phil. 3:21)¹⁰⁷
- Submission to one other is also in scripture (Eph. 5:21ff), unmentioned here by Schreiner

Wright, however, has Paul working at a grander purpose. Citing epigraphic and archaeological evidence, and building on Horsley,¹⁰⁸ he sees the apostle "as an ambassador for a king-in-waiting, establishing cells of people loyal to this new king, and ordering their lives according to his story, his symbols, and his praxis, and their mind according to his truth."¹⁰⁹ Wright perceives Romans 13 as not so much enjoining submission to emperor, but engaging subversively with empire, with the text being "a major challenge ... to imperial cult and ideology."¹¹⁰ For him, Pauline doctrines "could only be construed as deeply counter-imperial, as subversive to the whole edifice of the Roman Empire."¹¹¹ Wright is convinced "Paul intended it to be so construed,"¹¹² to which leitmotif we will return at the end of this piece.

¹⁰⁷ Schreiner, *Paul*, 423-4.

¹⁰⁸ Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), *passim*.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, "Paul and Caesar," 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

INTERIM SUMMARY

There are several ways to broadly categorise diverse conclusions reached by scholars as regards Paul's mindset, intention, and expected outcome in writing:

- i. Paul was (or can be read as) "naïve," enjoining orthodoxy in terms of obedience (Witherington)
- ii. Paul was (or can be read) as "pragmatic," encouraging obedience for the sake of peace/security (Schreiner)
- iii. Paul was (or can be read as) "strategic," expecting good citizenship for the sake of the Gospel/Kingdom agenda (Ridderbos)
- iv. Paul was (or can be read as) "subversive," engaging the status quo critically with purposes of undermining or opposing uppermost in mind (Wright)

Thus, several possible corresponding Christian responses from our options available in section one suggest themselves for appropriation and application:

- i. If NAÏVE: *"Absolute Submission," "Respectful Commitment."*
Government is God-ordained, and deserves Christian obeisance.
- ii. If PRAGMATIC: *"Reluctant Cooperation," "Realistic Cohabitation."*
Government is God-ordained but executed by humans and therefore flawed, yet Christians must obey in the cause of enlightened self-interest as must other citizens.
- iii. If STRATEGIC: *"Resigned Complicity," "Resentful Compliance."*
God-ordained government reeks of structural evil, corrupted by fallen human beings and possibly also by demonic influences, but can be tolerated for the

sake of the Kingdom of God and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- iv. If SUBVERSIVE: "*Religio-political Critical-engagement*," "*Absolute Subversion*."

Government is clearly evil and probably demonic, having been seduced into serving a structurally evil or even satanic agenda, and must be resisted, subverted, opposed.

INTERIM CONCLUSION

That Paul was simply being NAÏVE we can dismiss with some justification, as even during Nero's "golden years" Paul had experienced both the partiality and the impartiality of the *Pax Romana* and was unlikely to see Roman government through rose-tinted glasses. That he was purely and realistically PRAGMATIC is not good enough, because his exhortations seem neither tired nor at all resigned to the status quo. While he was no doubt STRATEGIC, as evinced from his desire elsewhere in the epistle to go to Rome – and from there to the ends of the earth for the sake of the gospel – he was more. He was SUBVERSIVE; seeing in the established world order a status quo that needed to be *challenged* on its own ground, *critiqued* by its own terms, and subverted in its own "might is right" milieu. So we tend to agree most strongly with Wright's 'new interpretation' of Romans 13. For Paul, and for us, per Wright, "*Religio-political Critical-engagement*" was – and is – truly paramount, most significant and quite satisfactory, and more importantly faithful to Paul's intentions.

But is subversion – perhaps a "critical engagement," but not quite "active resistance" – the *only possible Christian* response? We now address this question.

GOSPEL AND EMPIRE

We see above that in response to diverse readings of Romans 13:1-7 there are eight positions (from "*Absolute Submission*" to "*Absolute Subversion*") taken by Christians engaging with the

reality of government and the teaching of Paul. In the Pauline context that Roman believers are requested to be subject to the governing authorities, and in the overarching scriptural context that all believers are similarly required to be submissive to their respective governments, we might analyze these positions as regards their valences (NAÏVE, PRAGMATIC, etc.) towards *submission* in order to determine their validity, value, and priority for praxis. The eight positions posited by us align themselves along four major valences, *vis-à-vis submission*, with each position being distinct in terms of its scope, limits, and extents, as given below.

A. The positions revisited

- I. *Submission is seen as a virtue* [the NAÏVE positions]:
 1. **Absolute Submission:** Government is ordained by God, and therefore Christians are called to submit to the ruling powers without hesitation, excuse, or protest.
 2. **Respectful Commitment:** Government, though fragile, is still ruled over and overruled if, as, and when needed, by God; so believers are required to submit, but only to a certain extent and within specific limits.
- II. *Submission is seen as a necessity* [the PRAGMATIC positions]:
 3. **Reluctant Cooperation:** Government is not quite as it should be in a fallen world, but it is also needed in a world that offers few other viable options of established rule. So believers are to submit – perhaps, more to the point, accept – government for the sake of safety and security, thereby making the most of a not-so-ideal situation.
 4. **Realistic Cohabitation:** Perhaps the most practical of responses to the existence of governmental authorities, in which the Christian community –

realizing the imperfections of government, yet recognizing its ubiquity as well as its usefulness – decides to exist peaceably alongside it, for the sake of mutual stability and in the interests of the sustainability of even the so-called secular nation-state.

III. Submission is seen as an undesirable means to achieve desirable ends [the STRATEGIC positions]:

5. **Resigned Complicity:** There is no real choice about obeying often oppressive governments; believers are asked to submit – not only hoping by their example and attitude in His people that God might bring about change in the powers-that-be, but also help them use the opportunities provided by their putative complicity in even misrule to make the most of the reality to which they are resigned – especially in terms of the Gospel and Kingdom agendas.
6. **Resentful Compliance:** Christians are to accept, not necessarily fully submit, for the sake of keeping the peace and ensuring their own safety, which are the greater needs to be pursued in avoiding the consequences of resistance.

IV. Submission is seen as lacking in virtue [the SUBVERSIVE positions]:

7. **Religio-political Critical-engagement:** Christians are enjoined not to even accept – let alone submit – because government, which owes its allegiance to God, has been corrupted and sidetracked by structural evil and taken hostage by less-than-holy agendas. Believers are urged to critically engage with the state; and work to get it back on the right track for the sake of good governance. However, the

required critical engagement may stop short of active or violent resistance that may cause anarchy; for the Church must not destroy – rather, engage and critique and change – the State in the process of attempting to rescue and/or reform it.

8. **Absolute Subversion:** God is sovereign, but government has been seduced by Satan and shanghaied by demonic forces, and is now working against God; so Christians are at liberty to oppose and even resist the powers that be – even to the point of anarchy.

But which of these positions – if any – is *best*? is *right*? Is most appropriate for any given government? Or are *all* positions equally viable options?

B. The possibilities reviewed

A superficial reading of the options available above to Christians might suggest that *any one* of these eight options – indeed, *each one* of these eight options – is a potentially viable response to government. In fact, a case may be made – depending on whether government is “good” or “bad” or “ugly”, or is seen to be such – for each one of the positions. But we would do well to remember that there was *a specific context* in which this paraenesis was penned and its enshrouding epistle circulated for ‘reading, marking, learning, inwardly digesting,’ and application. Paul was influenced by both his own circumstances and the prevailing milieu among the Roman Christians of his time. This is a unique matrix of circumstances, with a correspondingly unique appeal to Christian praxis.

There is also the challenging truth of the matter that nowhere else – or not much elsewhere, with the exception of 1 Timothy 3:1 (where, again, submission to the state is recommended) – does Paul embark on a voyage on the ship of state and address which winds it sails in response to, leave alone demanding a response from those Christians who sail on it together with him

and other citizens of the Roman Empire. So, while we don't necessarily treat Romans 13:1-7 as a timeless treatise on government that has been set in stone, we must read it as a brief but significant teaching in the New Testament canon on how Christians are to engage with the nation-state of which they find themselves a small but integral part. The most faithful reading of this teaching would necessarily sail closest to Paul's original intention as regards its interpretation. That it stands unqualified in the Pauline canon and indeed in the New Testament (with the singular and sharply contrasted passage in Revelation 13, which sharpens the relevance of *critical engagement*) tends to favour its 'default interpretation' as being the most faithful in any day, time, ethos, under *diverse* governments.

C. The pertinence sharpened

Our reading of Paul's interlocutors shows that the Apostle was influenced by his *Sitz-im-Leben* as much as by the predilections of his Roman Christian audience to the extent that he was not submitting a simply naïve or even purely strategic response. We present below the salient factors that might militate in favour of a more discerning reading of Romans 13:1-7, towards determining a more convincingly or even concretely *subversive* reading (if one such exists).

- i. Rome was an opulent city at the omphalos of an oppressive commonwealth.
- ii. Paul was not quite persuaded by its decadent charms or deity-opposing claims.
- iii. Corinth, where he was located at the time of writing, offered some attractive insights into how government could – and did – function – when engaged Christian praxis was aligned to good governance (whether it recognized its divine mandate, or not).
- iv. Paul's previous experience of the clemency of Nero's early reign would have underscored how even potentially evil emperors or the demonstrably

- structurally evil shape of governments could be pressed into serving the empire's citizenry impartially for the common or greater good.
- v. However, the Apostle to the Gentiles was only too painfully aware that the best of governments was partial to its own propaganda, couching the services it rendered in the language of "good news" (*euangelion*) for the empire, and lauding and crowning the emperor as a political saviour, deliverer, redeemer (*messiah*).
 - vi. Keen to safeguard Roman Christians, Paul sees critical engagement as the only (in the end) safe way to ensure that Christians are not only safe from the self-righteous powers that be in Rome by subscribing to good governance, but also being on the right side of the one true Sovereign Power from whom all authority ultimately devolves.
 - vii. Jealous of God's sovereignty over not only Gospel and Kingdom but also Empire, Paul cloaks the subversive nature of his epistle by seemingly enjoining submission, but subversively encouraging marginalization of worldly or even diabolical would-be messiahs by presenting them as if servants of the Most High God (their authority established/instituted by Him, their sword wielded in His service Rom. 13:1, 2, 4).

D. The preferential option restated

In the light of this, it appears that the subversive positions elucidated above are the chief contenders for being the most 'orthodox' (i.e. meaningful given their context, significant for the widest range of applications) response to government that remains faithful to Paul's discerned intention and ambition in writing his paraenesis. How successive generations of Christians did read – and have read – Romans 13:1-7 will be dictated to by their own circumstances and the conditions and character of their respective governments – but even those cannot contradict the

fact that there was an original, obligatory, overarching, intention on the part of the epistle-writer.

So in asking and answering the question, “What happens when we line up Paul’s gospel with Caesar’s empire?” in a world in which “Caesar not only held sway but exercised power through his divine claim,” we see N. T. Wright develop five points of application, of which the last is the most pertinent for this piece.¹¹³ He argues that Paul presents the Kingdom of God – “Jesus’ empire” – as a counter-empire to the empire of the Caesars in which Christians were yet to be *submissive* and still pay taxes, while critically engaging the rulers of their time. Wright’s quite *subversive* alternative may be best expressed and its essence captured in this quote:

“If Paul’s answer to Caesar’s empire is the empire of Jesus, what does that say about this new empire, living under the rule of its new lord? It implies a high and strong ecclesiology, in which the scattered and often muddled cells of women, men and children loyal to Jesus as Lord form colonial outposts of the empire that is to be: subversive little groups when seen from Caesar’s point of view, but ... an advance foretaste of the time when the earth shall be filled with the glory of the God of Abraham and the nations will join Israel in singing God’s praises. From this point of view, therefore, this counter-empire can never be merely critical, never merely subversive. It claims to be the reality of which Caesar’s empire is the parody; it claims to be modelling the genuine humanness, not least the justice and peace, and the unity across traditional racial and cultural barriers, of which Caesar’s empire boasted. If this claim is not to collapse once more into dualism, into a rejection of every human aspiration and value, it will be apparent that there will be a large degree of overlap. ‘Shun what is evil; cling to what is good.’ There will be affirmation as well as critique, collaboration as well as critique. To collaborate

¹¹³ Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” 1.

without compromise, to criticise without dualism—this is the delicate path that Jesus’ counter-empire had to learn to tread.”

In short, Wright is advocating a position closest to the religious- and politically-orientated *critical engagement* we developed above as being one of – and now, evidently, the most faithful and pertinent among – Paul’s purported positions. We wrote that “*Religio-political Critical-engagement*” is a position short of “*Absolute Subversion*,” but probing with the sharp tools of *critical engagement* the agenda of an overtly religious state with its claims that presents its governors as political messiahs, offering quite subversive counter-claims in their place. In describing it, we asserted that submission was seen as lacking virtue. In developing it, we discerned Paul’s paraenesis to be that government is structurally evil, but redeemable; and that, therefore, Christians are called on to critically engage with it with clear intention to challenge it and change it.

It is, in its ambit and ambition, our penultimate – yet, in the final analysis, the only ultimately tenable – subversive position. It is obedient in spirit and in truth to Christian civic-mindedness (and so, faithful to Paul’s injunction to submit). It is *critically engaged* as regards seeing the continuum between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ as an intricately intertwined and intimate nexus in any day and age, down the ages (thereby faithful to Paul’s – and Wright’s – thesis that everything ‘political’ is ultimately ‘religious’). It is *subversive* in terms of submitting to the established political powers while religiously positioning them as being subservient to God (thus, faithful to Paul’s view of the powers as God’s servants, instituted and established by Him).

E. The other positions reconsidered

But what of the “NAÏVE,” “STRATEGIC,” and “PRAGMATIC” positions; and the other SUBVERSIVE position of ‘*Absolute Subversion*’?

As for the latter, we take refuge in the position of McQuilkin¹¹⁴ on this, quoted before, who sees Shaeffer¹¹⁵ as being extreme in his advocacy of Christian resistance. We would agree as above that active resistance entailing violence and possibly anarchy cannot be justified even in the instance of engaging the Satanic manifestation of government in Revelation 13 – for even there the Christian believer or community is presented as weak, not violent; as suffering injury, not inflicting it; as being overcome, not overcoming (Rev. 13:1-18, esp. vv. 4, 7, 10, 12, 15, 16-17). Thus we can reject ‘*Absolute Subversion*’ as being outside the gamut of what Paul intended when he wrote Romans 13:1-7. For not only is God a God of order and peace, and not chaos and anarchy, He wants the fallen world to be ruled even by fallen human beings than not ruled at all. And so, we would be hard-pressed to fit submission into the image and likeness of Christian citizenship that entailed violence or active resistance, no matter such incarnations in history.

As for the three former groups of positions elaborated on at some length in the chapters above, they seem to major on the submission-*to*-authority aspect of Paul’s paraenesis without noticing – or making enough of – the submission mandated by God (and Paul) *for* the authorities. The “NAÏVE” positions leave no room for the possibility that governments – though God-ordained – are fragile, being human, and subject to human vagaries and therefore needing to be critically engaged. The “PRAGMATIC” positions countenance Christian cooperation or compliance to some degree for the sake of being realistic about good or bad governments alike, or simply being resigned to the reality of indifferent or apathetic ones, short of critical engagement. The “STRATEGIC” positions encourage believers to make the most of a bad situation for the sake of Gospel and/or Kingdom agendas, not taking sufficient stock of Paul’s (and God’s) desire that Empire,

¹¹⁴ McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics*, 486.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

too, be part of the Kingdom and/or Gospel project; and that Empire, too, be subject and submissive to a sovereign God.

Thus, there is much value in Wright's paraenesis that biblically solid Christian praxis vis-à-vis government – *any* government – entails "affirmation as well as critique, collaboration as well as critique." And we might rightly agree with his conclusion that good citizenship for the believer is "to collaborate without compromise, to criticise without dualism" – this being, in his opinion and ours, "the delicate path that Jesus' counter-empire had to learn to tread."¹¹⁶

F. The orthodox praxis

If Wright is not wrong, and we are on the right track, how shall we encourage the Church today to critically engage with the State: good, bad, ugly? For not only is "Romans 13:1-7 ... a provocative text, judging by the seemingly endless streams of readings over the centuries ... [reflecting] a remarkably wide sphere of influence, including fields of law, political philosophy, public administration, education, politics, and many others;"¹¹⁷ but it is also "the main arena, where pragmatic consequences of this text remains a hotly debated issue ... the relationship between church and state."¹¹⁸ Or, to ask the question of *what is the most appropriate Christian response to a government that is neither good nor bad in and of itself, but thinks it is good because of its good deeds*, we might ask: "How does the church interpret Romans 13 when it finds itself in disagreement with the policies

¹¹⁶ Wright, "Paul and Caesar," 1.

¹¹⁷ Patrick J. Hartin, Jacobus H. Petzer, *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament: Volume 15* (Brill, 1991), 153, accessed December 18, 2014, http://books.google.lk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=0KHI60Ygr4kC&oi=fnd&pg=PA145&dq=Bultmann,+Romans+13&ots=kpymNmJchC&sig=eRfGu70X_sURu8vmkBWzpsHkcY8#v=onepage&q=Bultmann%2C%20Romans%2013&f=false.

¹¹⁸ Hartin, Petzer, *Text and Interpretation*, 153.

and actions of the government of the day?” Or, simply, the self-righteous attitudes underpinning those policies and actions – especially when “this is one of the most frequently quoted passages by those in authority when their own legitimacy and authority are questioned.”¹¹⁹

And more to the point, how can the Church interpret Romans 13 even when it finds itself in agreement with the government du jour, and especially when the same powers-that-be see (and present) themselves as *good* and *in the right* to all intents and purposes? Hartin and Petzer provide part of the answer: “If the reader perceives his situation as being a democracy (e.g. Du Toit), he reads [Romans 13:1-7] in a specific way. If the situation is perceived to be undemocratic (Kairos), a different reading [of Romans 13:1-7] follows. Although it is generally accepted that Romans 13:1-7 is written under and referring to a non-democratic situation, it can be read under ‘democratic presuppositions’ (Jüngel, Nürnberger).”¹²⁰ Paul was writing about Caesar’s reign, but Romans 13:1-7 can be subversively interpreted to apply to the most benevolent Tsar or the most enlightened Shah or even the most bullying Churchill-like regime or Clinton administration.

In short, *a subversive reading of Romans 13:1-7 enjoining critical engagement with government – good, bad, or ugly – is arguably the most faithful way to interpret Paul’s paraenesis.*

In conclusion, then, Christians desirous of discerning the right way of responding faithfully to Romans 13:1-7 might consider this:

“What is desired is ‘a model for churches and theologians to contribute to the ordering of society, without being Christianly imperialistic.’ Equally, we need a model for churches and theologians to contribute to the critique of society, without being Christianly dualistic. Paul points the

¹¹⁹ Hartin, Petzer, *Text and Interpretation*, 153.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

way to this finely balanced agenda, and we who live with the legacy of two thousand years of the church getting it sometimes right and often wrong would do well to return to our roots to learn fresh wisdom.”¹²¹

Be Wright’s “Christian imperialism” (Jesus’ empire challenges, trumps, subsumes Caesar’s empire) and “Christian dualism” (Jesus’ empire and Caesar’s co-exist in myriad matrices) as they may, we are persuaded that his (and Paul’s) “finely balanced agenda” is the need of the hour – and always was – in “two thousand years of the church getting it sometimes right and often wrong.” We need to “return to our roots” (and Paul’s) and “learn fresh wisdom” (Paul’s original agenda) for our times. The NAÏVE, PRAGMATIC, and STRATEGIC positions are “often wrong” because no state under heaven is truly ever good by the standards of God, or even the world. That “Christians should submit to ... authority and carry out its statutes, unless the state commands believers to do that which is contrary to the will of God”¹²² – and a range of responses along the NAÏVE → PRAGMATIC → STRATEGIC spectrum miss the point that Paul was making, albeit subversively.

There is some truth in Luther’s assertion that “there is no government that is not (divinely) instituted. Governments (at times) are only usurped and managed in ways not ordained (by God).”¹²³

However, this may be accurate but not complete. Albeit the full truth of the matter being that *there is no government that is not (humanly, structurally, satanically) fallen, evil, perverted, corrupt in some measure*. Such governments are not to be naively submitted to, pragmatically lived alongside with or strategically

¹²¹ Wright, “Paul and Caesar,” 12.

¹²² Schreiner, *BECNT: Romans*, 688.

¹²³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications/Zondervan, 1954), 181.

tolerated and even used – but critically engaged with as regards their “politics” which is the Christian’s “religion.”

WHEN FORGIVENESS IS THE WRONG RESPONSE

MANO EMMANUEL

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Forgiveness should characterize Christians who show they have grasped the enormity of God's grace in forgiving sin, by forgiving others. But can there be times when forgiveness is the wrong response?

Consider the following case in a church in Sri Lanka: a church leader has been accused of sexually assaulting a woman in the congregation. When confronted by the leadership, he first denies the charge but when further evidence is produced and the questioning continues, he eventually admits it, breaking down in tears before his senior pastor. He says he will never do such a thing again. The church leadership decides to transfer him to another location. The leaders tell the woman that the man repented and has been forgiven. There is no communication between the offender and his victim.¹ The rationale for the transfer is that after repentance, the power and grace of God will surely ensure the offence never recurs. In another church it is discovered that a pastor has molested a series of young women in the various churches he has pastored. Eventually one woman reports one such assault to a fellow believer who happens to be a

¹ For ease of identification, I shall use terms such as "victim", "offender", "abuser." However, this type of reductionism is not ideal and will be commented on in the essay.

lawyer. The lawyer advises the woman to go to the police and informs the church leadership of the matter. The leaders of the church are outraged at the lawyer, whom they believe is making trouble. The man is suspended from duty. He asks to be allowed to be called “pastor” even during the suspension in view of his many years of service. The man’s family criticize the woman who complained. The senior pastors advise the woman who has been assaulted to forgive the man and to think of his family and reputation. The lawyer is told that God’s grace must be extended to the man. He is eventually re-instated. Meanwhile, rumours circulate about the character of the woman who was assaulted. The church is divided between those who blame the woman, and those who believe the church should remove the offender from his position as a leader and prevent them ever holding such office again. The woman eventually leaves the church. The events described are sadly not uncommon. They are not confined to Sri Lanka, or to a single denomination.²

When we hear stories like this, we are bound to stop and question the meaning of familiar words such as “forgiveness” and “grace” as they are applied in these sad situations. Why is it that the church leaders in these situations take the stand they do? Are they correct? Should the women forgive their abusers? And what, if any, is the place of justice or discipline in these cases?

Forgiveness: a noble virtue or ignoble passivity?

The women are being advised by their spiritual leaders to forgive and think of the well-being of the abusers. As Christians we are taught, and take for granted, that forgiveness is always the right response to being sinned against, whether or not the offender

² As evidenced by the recent Hollywood film *Spotlight* dealing with the issue of paedophilia in the Catholic Church. See also the article by Christine A. Scheller, “How Far Should Forgiveness Go?” *Christianity Today*, (October, 2010), for a personal reflection as a survivor of abuse, written from a Western perspective.

repents or makes restitution.³ Forgiveness is the way to demonstrate that we have been, and will be, forgiven by God (Mt. 6:12, 14-15, Col. 3:13, Eph. 4:32). The New Testament teaching seems clear. Furthermore, this forgiveness means, as these church leaders say, that we no longer desire the offender be punished, but rather, set free. When we look at the Greek words translated as “forgive”, we find that forgiveness is after all a gift (*charizomai*) bestowed on the offender, releasing them from their debt (*aphiemi*). Worthington et al. say firmly, “Jesus’ teaching is clear. We are to forgive – unilaterally.”⁴

We admire and extol the virtue of those who in the face of great evil, choose to forgive those who inflicted such evil on them. People like Corrie Ten Boom, Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II and Gordon Wilson spring to mind. Wilson and his daughter Marie were the victims of an attack on Enniskillen in 1987 by the Provisional IRA. Marie Wilson died from injuries sustained in the bomb blast. Her father’s response was televised and captivated a nation. “. . . But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life . . . She’s dead. She’s in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight

³ Anthony Bash lists five commonly held beliefs about forgiveness, which he argues need re-examination and qualification in his “Forgiveness: a Re-appraisal” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24, no. 2 (2011), 134.

1. Those who forgive show nobility of character and moral virtue.
2. Forgiveness is one of the greatest moral goods.
3. It is morally virtuous to forgive someone who has not repented.
4. It is better to forgive than not to forgive.
5. Jesus is a great example of someone who forgave the unrepentant.

⁴ Worthington, Everett L., Constance B Sharp, Andrea J Lerner, and Jeffrey R Sharp. 2006. “Interpersonal forgiveness as an example of loving one’s enemies.” *Journal Of Psychology & Theology* 34, no. 1 (2006), 32.

and every night.”⁵ Pope John Paul II visited him would be assassin Mohammed Agca in jail and forgave him (though Agca was still imprisoned for his crime).

The greatest example, we are told, is Jesus, who prayed for forgiveness for those who were crucifying him. Jesus “is the supreme example of forgiveness as an altruistic example of loving his enemies, who were literally in the process of killing him as he forgave them”.⁶

In the case studies above, this is the view held by the church leaders who advise the women to forgive their abusers. However, there are others, like the lawyer and some church members, who question whether forgiveness, understood in this way, is always the right response to moral evil, especially in the case of those who are unrepentant.⁷ What about justice? The popularity of modern thrillers and superhero films is evidence that people are generally in favour of evildoers meeting their downfall, preferably at the hands of their victims.

Why this wide difference in opinion, even in the church, about something as basic to Christianity as forgiveness? One reason, it seems, is that the term “forgiveness” means different things to different people. The transference of the concept from its religious roots to secular society, to be commented on by psychologists, ethicists, politicians and the like, has further muddied the waters. Stories, like those mentioned above, and

⁵ See Johann Christoph Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven: The Power of Forgiveness*, (East Sussex, UK: The Plough Publishing House, 1997), for moving examples of forgiveness, including that of Gordon Wilson.

⁶ Worthington, Sharpe et al. “Interpersonal Forgiveness”, 33. Note that these scholars equate forgiveness with love of enemy.

⁷ See Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, (London: SPCK, 2011) and Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995).

high profile exercises like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa mean that victims are often expected to and pressured to pronounce forgiveness and “feel it” immediately, or are deemed unforgiving and graceless, storing up nothing but grief for themselves.

A plethora of definitions

Forgiveness is many things. It is a virtue we extol.⁸ It is a duty we owe.⁹ It is a commandment to obey (Mt. 18:22). Many scholars argue that it is therefore obligatory, especially if there is repentance.¹⁰ But is Bash right to say that it is a “qualified” duty, not always expected of us?¹¹

In Paul’s writings, forgiveness is described as a gift (*charizomai*) (Eph. 4:32, Col. 2:13, 3:13), both from God to us and from us to each other.¹² The verb *aphiemi* translated “forgive” in the New Testament, literally means “to let go,” “release”, or “cancel.”¹³ But who lets go of what? And what is the gift? It has become a widespread teaching that forgiveness is offered for the sake of the victim’s own well-being and peace of mind.¹⁴ Forgiving is prescribed as the only way to feel better, to rid oneself of

⁸ David Augsburger, 1995. *Helping People Forgive*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press), 115ff. See 13-14 for Biblical metaphors of forgiveness.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), 160.

¹⁰ Stephen Gormley, “The Impossible Demands of Forgiveness.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 22:1 (2014), 29. Gormley cites writers like Charles Griswold, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Trudy Govier.

¹¹ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴ William Meninger, “Why Unconditional Forgiveness is Needed.” *Tikkun* (March 2008).

corroding emotions, to set oneself free, and to move on.¹⁵ Arnold, recounting stories of forgiveness, writes of a woman forgiving her abusive husband “realizing that bitterness is wasted energy”, and another whose daughter was murdered recognizing that forgiving was the “only way” to cope with her loss.¹⁶ In this “therapeutic” view of forgiveness, as Jones calls it, the person being set free is the forgiver and the gift is the gift of a future without the weight of bitterness and hatred.¹⁷ Lewis Smedes, one of those whom Jones cites says “forgiving is real even if it stops at the healing of the forgiver) and in forgiving “you set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself).¹⁸

To some, then, forgiveness is something that is purely internal, in the mind or heart of the forgiver. It is a change of attitude, with intelligible reasons, or even “a moment of non-knowledge, which could not be rendered fully intelligible.”¹⁹ This view of forgiveness renders it a unilateral decision which does not involve the offender.

Worthington has distinguished between two types of forgiveness – decisional and emotional. Decisional forgiveness is an act of will by which the offended party decides not to take revenge and, if safe to do so, to resume a relationship with the offender. Emotional forgiveness entails the replacement of negative emotions towards the offender with more positive emotions ranging from empathy and compassion, to love.²⁰ Garrard and McNaughton point out that removing negative feelings might not necessarily mean forgiveness - it could just be apathy or

¹⁵ L. B. Smedes, *Forgive and forget: Healing the Hurts we Don't Deserve* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

¹⁶ Arnold, *Seventy Times Seven*, 47-48.

¹⁷ Jones, *Embodying*.

¹⁸ Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*, 70, 133.

¹⁹ Gormley, “The Impossible Demands”, 45.

²⁰ Worthington, et al., “Interpersonal Forgiveness”, 33.

indifference to the offence.²¹ Therefore, a more meaningful definition of forgiveness will entail more than overcoming negative feelings. It will include replacing them with positive feelings and, eventually, positive actions.²²

According to Wolterstorff, to forgive is to no longer treat the offender as if he had committed the act.²³ It is to liberate both parties from the identities into which they have become locked as “victim” and “perpetrator.”²⁴ Therefore, forgiveness that is merely an internal transaction that is aimed at making the victim feel better and able to move on, that is, to deal with their well-being and autonomy, is not complete forgiveness.²⁵

So what do the church leaders mean when they ask these women to forgive the men who abused them?

Forgiveness as a spectrum

According to Bash, we ought to be speaking of types of forgiveness rather than assuming there is only one type of forgiveness.²⁶ Human forgiveness is “enormously variegated.”²⁷ Bash helpfully explains the depth and complexity of forgiveness using terms borrowed from philosophy. At one end of the spectrum is “thick” forgiveness. “Thick” forgiveness is layered and rich, whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, “thin” forgiveness is much shallower.²⁸ “Many different kinds of

²¹ Eve Garrard and David McNaughton, *Forgiveness* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “After Injustice: What Makes Forgiveness Possible.” *The Christian Century* 130:23 (2013), 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 37-38; “Forgiveness: A Reappraisal”, 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* Bash credits philosopher R. A. Sharpe with this terminology.

forgiveness lie between the “thickest” of “thick” forgivenesses and the “thinnest” of “thin” forgivenesses.”²⁹ Forgiveness then can also flow from one variety to another- for example, an offence which is accompanied by an offhand apology might elicit a “thin” forgiveness, which is a grudging acceptance. But this might grow deeper (thicker) with a more sincere repentance offered over time. So, forgiving can be synchronic, that is, something that happens at one point in time, as well as diachronic, that is, developing over time.³⁰ Bash suggests that when Paul refers to forgiving in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:1, he is referring to a “thin” forgiveness, “one of several virtues to do with getting on with people”, more like an attitude of tolerance and goodwill).³¹ Even Meninger, who supports unconditional forgiveness, refers to it as “imperfect forgiveness”, necessary for the victim to keep her from becoming vengeful and bitter.³² In Bash’s terminology, this would be a “thin” forgiveness.

God’s forgiveness and ours

In many places, the New Testament links God’s forgiveness of our sins to our forgiveness of others. We are to forgive as we are forgiven, we are to forgive to demonstrate that we have been forgiven (Mt. 6:12, 14, 15, 18:21, 27; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; 11:4, 25; 17:34; 2 Cor. 2:7, 10; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-15). We are often told God forgives us unconditionally and we must forgive others

²⁹ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 37.

³⁰ Bash, “Forgiveness: A Reappraisal,” 145. Augsburg describes forgiveness as lying on a continuum, with unilateral forgiveness at one end and mutual forgiveness at the other. In *Helping People*, 15.

³¹ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 47-49. Bash in his analysis of 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, argues that Paul cannot be asking for true forgiveness from the church, because the church has not been directly hurt by the offender. Therefore, what is being asked of them is kindness and compassion and a “quasi-forgiveness”. If there is anything to forgive, it might be a sense of shame or awkwardness that the church has indirectly suffered through the man’s sin. See *Just Forgiveness*, 46.

³² Meninger, “Why Unconditional Forgiveness.”

in the same way. In the case studies we are discussing, this seems to be the advice of the church leaders.

How does God forgive? God's forgiveness is a deep ("thick") forgiveness. It involves treating us as if we had not committed those acts (Rom. 8:1), choosing not to remember them (Isa. 43:25-26, Heb. 10:17), restoring us to son-ship (Rom. 8:15) and inheritance (Rom. 8:16-17) and transforming us (2 Cor. 5:17). However, his forgiveness is conditional on our repentance (Mk. 1:14-15, Lk. 24:46-47).³³ It is when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and repent (Acts 3:19) that we receive his forgiveness. In fact, according to Bash, he requires of us confession, repentance *and* restitution (2011a, 20).³⁴

Why then do we so often talk of God's "unconditional" forgiveness for all?³⁵ God's forgiveness is certainly offered to all. It is accepted by some. Romans 2:1 says God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Those who speak of God unconditionally forgiving everyone may hold a Universalist position, which we shall not pursue in this article. Others, who need to explain how unconditional forgiveness co-exists with final judgment and eternal separation, explain it like Volf who declares that God's forgiveness is given unconditionally but if we do not accept it, "it is stuck somewhere in the middle between us."³⁶

The New Testament clearly states that there are some whom God cannot forgive because they refuse to acknowledge him

³³ There is a debate about the difference between "believe" and "repent", with some claiming that it is belief that is necessary for forgiveness. An extended argument on this topic is outside the scope of this article. We take the view that belief is used synonymously with repent, so that where "believe" is used it is linked to changing one's mind (*metanoia*) about oneself, God and salvation.

³⁴ Such as in the story of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

³⁵ Volf, *Free*, 181ff.

³⁶ Volf, *Free*, 182.

(Mt. 25:31-45, Rom. 2:5-6).³⁷ God prohibits our vengeance but promises his own on our behalf (Rom. 12:19). God only forgives the repentant. So, argues Bash, to claim that we humans are to forgive the unrepentant is to claim that our forgiveness is more generous and far reaching than God's.³⁸

God's forgiveness is not the same as human forgiveness. God is the ultimate lawgiver and all sin is sin against God. God's forgiveness operates as the "nullification of an act that violated the moral order", whereas our forgiveness cannot do that.³⁹ Person to person forgiveness deals only with the "relational consequences" of the offence.⁴⁰ In other words, while God will not expect the forgiven human to atone for their sin against him, because of Christ's atoning sacrifice, humans have to face the consequences of their actions within the sphere of human relationships, because even forgiveness cannot erase the ongoing consequences, or the cost of maintaining ongoing relationships.

The women

Self-respect and resentment

Forgiveness is often equated with the overcoming of resentment and other ignoble feelings, such as the desire for revenge or retribution, bitterness and hatred. This widely quoted definition is taken from the sermons of Bishop Joseph Butler in 1827, primarily Sermon VIII. "Upon Resentment and Forgiveness of injuries---Matt. v. 43, 44."⁴¹ There is great debate over the validity

³⁷ Those who hold a universalist view would argue that God's forgiveness is unconditional. For example, Duff and Mikoski state: "we do not have to wonder" if the perpetrator of abuse will join in the heavenly banquet. The answer, they say, is yes, based on their reading of 1 Corinthians 15:22. See Nancy J. Duff and Gordon S. Mikoski, 2013. "On the Complexities of Forgiveness." *Theology Today* 69:4 (2013), 383.

³⁸ Bash, "Forgiveness: A Reappraisal", 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ <http://anglicanhistory.org/butler/rolls/08.html>

or otherwise of resentment and whether, in fact, Butler has been misunderstood. Garrard and McNaughton, for example, state that sentiments like malice and ill-will need to be overcome, but distinguish that from indignation which, they say, is a legitimate reaction.⁴² (The initial reaction to being violated, as these women have been, is to feel anger and outrage at the abuse of power, the attack on their bodies and the damage to their sense of personhood and identity. There would be shame, fear, disillusionment and confusion. Initially, at least, it is hard to imagine that women in these circumstances can distinguish between the deed and the perpetrator. There is no indication that this process has been recognized by those who advise the women. The senior leaders err in two ways that Jones states Christians often do. By moving immediately to call for forgiveness they trivialize the sufferings of the women, and they fail to “acknowledge the moral force of anger, hatred and vengeance.”⁴³ Forgiveness offered by the church leaders seems like a betrayal of those who have been wounded.⁴⁴

What has happened is a sin. Only a wrong can be forgiven. That is why forgiveness is not the same as excusing or condoning.⁴⁵ While it is generally right to admire the strength of character and nobility of those who readily forgive, there are times when forgiveness, especially if given too quickly, displays a lack of self-

⁴² Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 23.

⁴³ Jones, *Embodying*, 244.

⁴⁴ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 5.

⁴⁵ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*; Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”. Wolterstorff helpfully lists the conditions which form the proper context within which forgiveness can take place. Some person, say A, has wronged B. B rightly holds A responsible. B feels resentment at the deed and anger at A. B cannot forget the deed. If A were not properly responsible or there were mitigating circumstances, B might excuse the offence. If B could easily forget the deed, or if B felt no resentment or anger, B might overlook it or dismiss it. See “After Injustice”, 26.

worth, a passivity in the face of evil that is not noble but pitiful.⁴⁶ In the case of these women, anger is a “moral protest” at what has happened to them.⁴⁷ The Bible does not forbid anger - as long as this anger does not lead to sin (Eph. 4:26). Righteous anger ought to be the church’s response to evil. God does not turn a blind eye to evil, neither should we.

Whatever forgiveness means from a Christian point of view, surely it means that over time we Christians have to come to terms with the rage within us—sorting out that rage that is holy and of God (the rage that remembers evil) from the rage that is unholy and motivated by revenge and retribution—and letting some of that unholy rage go so that there is space, once more, for love.⁴⁸

Griswold points out that the common understanding of Butler’s definition of forgiveness as the forswearing of resentment does not do justice to the nuances of his sermon. Butler does not condemn resentment, a passionate response, but the excess of resentment which leads to revenge and other abuses of that passion.⁴⁹ How is proper resentment to be displayed? One way might be to channel that passion into helping the proper authorities administer justice.⁵⁰ Butler therefore lays the

⁴⁶ Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche are well known for their disdain for Christian forgiveness which they see as impotence masquerading as strength and which suppresses natural resentment and leaves bitterness in its wake.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Embodying*, 246.

⁴⁸ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, “The Gospel We Don’t Want to Hear (Or Preach): Gen. 45:1-15; Luke 6:27-36; 37-42.” *Journal for Preachers* 23:3 (2000), 28.

⁴⁹ Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.

⁵⁰ In his book *Peacemaker*, Ken Sande shows that even a legitimate concern like justice can become an “idol of the heart”. Beginning as a legitimate desire, when thwarted it becomes a demand which if refused causes one to seek to punish the one who has stood in the way.

groundwork for the now popular understanding that forgiveness is a “private matter” between the individual and the wrongdoer and not incompatible with judicial punishment.⁵¹ There are, of course, dangers with too readily accepting the validity of resentment. Resentment flows easily into stronger more dangerous emotions, like a desire for revenge.

Govier warns against accepting a desire for revenge as natural, saying that is dangerous and simplistic to do so. While the desire to defend oneself is a natural response, revenge is “too conceptually complex” to be attributed universally. Also, as she states, even if the desire for revenge was a universal, “natural” desire, it does not mean it should be indulged.⁵² From a Christian perspective she is right. Revenge is forbidden to Christians. But, interestingly, this is because vengeance is attributed to God (Rom. 12:19).

Butler’s sermon was based on Matthew 5:43-44, which is the command to love enemies. He states that loving enemies can be done in conjunction with resenting the evil they have done. Love is not about feeling affection but ensuring the enemy is treated fairly and as a human being.⁵³

So if resentment and anger at evil are justified, but revenge and hatred are not, how can we help the women in this case process these emotions in a Christian way? The psalms of lament show us the process people go through as they work out their feelings and attitudes towards their enemies. They voice anger, a desire for justice and even revenge, disappointment with God and feelings of being abandoned and alone (e.g. Psalms 17, 35, 58, 79, 83, 129, 137). If these feelings are not allowed a voice, they more easily become repressed bitterness and anger. No true

⁵¹ Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 32-33.

⁵² Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 13-14.

⁵³ Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 33.

forgiveness can come out of coercion by others and untreated bitterness.⁵⁴ These psalms are preserved to show us there is a safe, even sacred space to give vent to our feelings. When these emotions are faced, dealt with and overcome, then forgiveness can be real. Forgiveness, even if a noble virtue is a process.⁵⁵ This process sometimes, if not always, begins after the wrong doing has been acknowledged, ideally not just by the women but by the community.

The limits of unconditional forgiveness

The church leaders in the first case convey to the women the message that the offender has repented. But from the women's point of view, this cannot be very satisfactory. The men who have offended do not speak to the women. In a shame-oriented culture like Sri Lanka's, this might have been because the senior leaders wanted to protect the women from the further shame of facing their attackers. But it might just as likely be in order to protect the men, who are respected religious leaders, from the humiliation of confession and apology. In Sri Lankan culture, leadership is so often viewed as unassailable, above any form of criticism or call to accountability, especially from the weak or marginalized. Who would take the side of a woman against a religious leader? Let us consider from the women's viewpoint if they should then forgive unconditionally, since they have had no apology or "justice" in terms of disciplinary action or prosecution. In fact, they have been twice offended – first by the men who physically abused them and secondly by the church leaders who have trivialized the evil actions.

The church leaders urge the women to forgive because it is not just a virtue but a moral imperative. So, some Christians would

⁵⁴ Jones, *Embodying*, 241; Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 29.

⁵⁵ Jeffrie G Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21. Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 43.

argue, we must forgive unconditionally because the Bible commands it. Those not looking for a biblical basis would suggest other reasons. Some suggest that we do so because we ought to be empathetic. Understanding leads to forgiveness. When we truly understand the circumstances and background story of our offenders, we can find reasons to forgive.⁵⁶ But, as Garrard and McNaughton point out, even if there are reasons that explain why these men committed these acts, they do not give us a reason to forgive. In a case of sexual assault, accepting there were reasons is the equivalent of excusing not forgiving.⁵⁷ As said before, it is only a sin that can be forgiven. Others argue that we forgive because we recognize that we too are fragile creatures who could have done the same thing under similar circumstances. Forgiveness is thus a recognition of our shared human frailty.⁵⁸ Certainly, we should recognize that the women too are sinners, whose lives hold thoughts, words and deeds that need forgiveness. However, we cannot assume a “moral equivalence.” between their amorphous guilt and the specific guilt of these men.⁵⁹ If the women were to sexually assault someone, surely, they should be held responsible for that. To assume that everyone is capable of sexual assault under certain circumstances, and so the men need to be forgiven would be to condone, not forgive. “The background thought here seems to be that if there is a way of behaving that everyone or nearly everyone, would adopt, then it is pointless to regard it as really wrong.”⁶⁰ If we are to treat the perpetrators as morally responsible agents, then we must hold them culpable, not excuse or condone.⁶¹ “Forgiveness can occur only when the deed and its

⁵⁶ For a discussion of these views, see Gormley, “The Impossible Demands”, 36ff.

⁵⁷ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 47ff.

⁵⁸ Gormley, “The Impossible Demands”, 34-40; Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 50ff.

⁵⁹ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 52.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

doer are treated with moral seriousness.”⁶² Also, an important factor is the relative power distance between a woman in the congregation (especially if she is poor, single or otherwise disadvantaged) and the relative power wielded by a member of the clergy.

We have seen that God does not, in fact cannot, forgive the unrepentant, so why should we? Worthington, Sharpe et al. give three reasons. Firstly, God is omniscient and therefore can perfectly know a person’s motives whilst humans cannot. Therefore we are to forgive rather than try to perfectly understand the reasons behind a particular offence. This would hardly apply in this case. It is very similar to the argument that understanding all leads to forgiving all, which we have already looked at. Secondly, and even less convincingly, they claim that since a victim’s forgiveness from God depends on their forgiveness of others, “an ill-spirited offender could deny a victim Divine forgiveness by failing to repent” (Worthington, Sharpe et al. 2006, 33). It seems highly unlikely that such a consideration is uppermost in the minds of these offenders! Neither is it compatible with the gospel to state that a believer’s relationship with God can be hijacked by an offender refusing to repent. Thirdly, forgiveness is a means of blessing our enemies as required by Romans 12:14. As we shall see below, while a forgiving disposition is a characteristic of the Christian, discernment is needed when deciding how best we can demonstrate our love for our enemies.

Wolterstorff on the other hand says that Jesus nowhere commands us to forgive the unrepentant sinner.⁶³ We are called to love our enemies, which includes the unrepentant sinner, but

⁶² Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 26.

⁶³ Scholars who hold this view tend to interpret Jesus’ injunction to forgive seventy times seven (Mt. 18:22) in the light of Luke 17:3 (“if he repents”).

this is not the same as forgiving them.⁶⁴ He questions whether it is morally permissible, or emotionally possible to forgive someone who does not repent).⁶⁵ To forgive an unrepentant sinner would display a worrying disregard for the moral seriousness of the deed. As we have said, sin should arouse indignation and anger against the deed. Secondly, such “easy forgiveness”⁶⁶ seems to disregard the moral responsibility of the offender as an independent moral agent. And finally, it devalues the victim.⁶⁷ In fact, offering forgiveness to those who have not sought it cheapens forgiveness. Jesus does not forgive his enemies who do not repent, says Klassen.⁶⁸ Jones, in a similar vein, says that there are some circumstances which make forgiveness not just impossible but morally unjustified. He adds two more reasons why forgiveness in such cases is impossible, both of which are relevant to our case – the use of forgiveness as a tool against the weak by the strong, and the likelihood that the unrepentant offender will re-offend.⁶⁹

Bash cites Norman Tebbit as an example of someone who responded quite differently from Gordon Wilson to a similar incident. Tebbit and his wife were among hundreds injured in a bomb blast. Tebbit has refused to forgive Patrick McGee, who planted the bomb which killed five people, injured Tebbit and made Mrs Tebbit a wheelchair-bound tetraplegic. McGee remains defiantly unrepentant. To Tebbit, forgiveness in these circumstances would “make a mockery of forgiveness.”⁷⁰ In Bash’s analysis what Tebbit means is that forgiveness in this case

⁶⁴ Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ A phrase used by a Rwandan victim of the carnage that ravaged her country (Jones, *Embodying*, 2ff).

⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 28.

⁶⁸ William Klassen, *Love of Enemies*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 91.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Embodying*, 241.

⁷⁰ Bash, “Forgiveness: A Reappraisal”, 136.

provides a licence to commit atrocities in the knowledge that victims are morally bound to forgive.⁷¹

Unconditional forgiveness can also be called unilateral forgiveness, since it involves only one party. But as its name suggests, it cannot achieve the goal of forgiveness, if that goal is reconciliation.⁷² If the goal is one's own well-being, it might achieve that.

The abusive church leaders

Repentance

We are told that the men repented. Jesus says in Luke 17:3-4, if your brother repents, you must forgive. Let us consider what repentance looks like. In the first case, the offender first denied the charge and only when further questioned, admitted his guilt. In the second case, the offender asks to be spared the humiliation of being removed from the pastorate. Does that sound like repentance? Repentance (*metanoia*) is a change of heart and mind. So what happens when the person who has offended repents?

Bash points out that those who are truly repentant will understand that they have to live with the consequences and even a deserved penalty. They will be disinclined to justify their actions or ask for leniency. The actions of the men who ask for concessions for themselves, with little regard for the reputation

⁷¹ Bash, "Forgiveness: A Reappraisal", 136. Interestingly, Bash questions if we are right to see Gordon Wilson as an example of unconditional forgiveness, noting that Gordon did not use the term "forgiveness." (Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 135). His query highlights the lack of consensus over what forgiveness really means. If the word forgiveness does not appear, can forgiveness be present? Is the declaration of a renunciation of revenge, a promise to pray, and hopeful look to the eschatological end not forgiveness?

⁷² Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 64.

of the women or the well-being of the church is reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's well known definition of "cheap grace."

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.⁷³

"Repentance does not atone for wrongdoing."⁷⁴ He does not elaborate on his statement but what it seems to mean is that repentance is a first step towards restoration. It is not an automatic reversal of status from guilty to innocent. Repentance is an acknowledgment of moral failure. It does not make up for or put right what has been damaged or destroyed, especially in a serious case like this.

Repentance ought to make the offender more forgive-able. Wolterstorff explains it thus: the person has now distanced themselves from the offending moral act and aligned themselves with the victim, condemning the act.⁷⁵ Repentance changes the offender's moral condition and invites the offended party to forgive.⁷⁶ In this case, the senior leaders would do well to help the offenders to see their sin and grieve over it. Surely a truly repentant person will also feel an overwhelming need to let their victim know their sorrow over the suffering they have caused.

⁷³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1949), 36.

⁷⁴ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 44-45.

⁷⁵ Wolterstorff, "After Injustice", 27.

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, "After Injustice", 27. Gormley ("The Impossible Demands", 33) argues that if this happens, the offender is no longer the same person and therefore forgiveness is inappropriate. However, although we might describe someone as "a changed person", the person is the same but has grown in maturity of character.

However, while repentance invites forgiveness, it cannot demand it.

Restoration

The prodigal son was restored to sonship when he made his way home (Lk. 15:11-32). Peter, after his betrayal, was still given authority over the church (John 21:15-19). This in spite of the fact that he did not explicitly ask forgiveness, at least in the narratives available to us. Does this story provide us with evidence that the offending church leaders should be restored to leadership and pastoral responsibility in the church?

People are far more complex than the leaders of these churches seem to assume. We rarely fully understand ourselves, let alone someone else. That is a warning to the church not to be too quick to condemn, judge and write off another believer. But neither are we infallible in our generosity of mind. Jesus knew Peter in a way Peter did not know himself, or these church leaders know their erring pastors. Up to the time Peter denied Jesus, he was confident that his courage and loyalty were inviolable, but Jesus knew differently (Mk. 14:28-29). Even at his restoration after the resurrection, Peter is hurt by Jesus' repeated questioning. Wells asks if it is not Jesus who should be hurt. "It is a feature of reconciliation that the person offering forgiveness cannot expect the other party fully to understand the depths of their offense."⁷⁷ Peter's public reinstatement or restoration is a call to lead by following Jesus (John 21:19). It comes after Peter is forced to recognize that he cannot be as confident in himself as he once was (John 21:17). Restoration is possible. We are all objects of grace. But not all forgiveness can be followed by restoration to the same position. It is an accepted principle of hermeneutics that narrative in the Bible cannot be assumed to be paradigmatic.

⁷⁷ Samuel Wells, "The Logic of Forgiveness: A Friend like Peter", *Christian Century* (February, 2007), 24.

The church leaders in the first case assume that a man who has repented of the sin of sexual violence will be kept from sinning in that way again because of the power of the Spirit. However, this same man, if he was a believer had already received the Holy Spirit at the time he sinned. If his conversion (which was repentance from sin) was no guarantee of his moral conduct, is his present repentance a greater guarantee? It is worth remembering that church leaders like William Booth and John Wesley who ministered to men who had been converted from alcoholism refrained from using wine at communion in order to safeguard their flock. They did not assume that repentance automatically freed the men from the possibility of falling in an area where they had a previous weakness. It would be wise for the church to research the likelihood of a sexual offender re-offending when women's safety was at risk.

The church

Justice and grace

The church leaders are outraged at the suggestion that the offenders be taken to the police. What is the Biblical basis for such a position? In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul does urge Christians to sort out their own problems rather than go to court (1 Cor. 6:1-11). He even says it is better to be wronged than to bring disrepute and disharmony to the body (1 Cor. 6:7). Does this teaching apply here? It appears not, because Paul goes on to say:

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

We also have to balance what Paul says here with his injunction in Romans 13:1-5 to submit to the authority of governments. In the case of an accusation of rape, a criminal offence, it is right for

the police to be notified, even while the church offers pastoral care and support for the offenders. The senior leaders are concerned to protect the reputation of those who have offended, to offer them grace and a second chance. What then of justice?

A longing for justice is “hardwired into us.”⁷⁸ The institutionalization of justice is a sign of society’s commitment to take evil seriously and to deal justly with offenders and victims. A desire for justice is a legitimate concern.⁷⁹ Just as forgiveness may sometimes be therapeutic, justice can be too – as can revenge.⁸⁰

The relationship between justice and forgiveness is hard to explain. If a person has forgiven, how can they then insist on punishment? If there is punishment, the crime is paid for, so what need is there of forgiveness? The church leaders in this case, insisting on forgiveness, cannot then see any need for criminal proceedings. In fact, there is not much in the way of church discipline. Grace, for them, means the abusers get to start again with a clean slate. Their repentance has won them that. But forgiveness always comes at a cost. All human forgiveness is rooted in the forgiveness God offers us. The cost of that forgiveness was the blood of Jesus. When we offer one another forgiveness, we pay a price. Is it right that the church offers grace at the women’s expense? How can the church do right by both the men and the women in these cases?

Punishment conveys to society what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. It acts as deterrent but ideally should aim for restoration.⁸¹ Volf, a proponent of unconditional forgiveness says

⁷⁸ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 5.

⁷⁹ Jones, *Embodying*, 242.

⁸⁰ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 31.

⁸¹ It is understandable that the system of justice and punishment in Sri Lanka might provoke a desire in the church to protect its own. However this is another area for the church to seek to bring

forgiveness “cuts the tie of equivalence between the offense and the way we treat the offender.”⁸² We do not demand an eye for an eye. Volf would say we do not demand anything, but instead, “absorb” the offence. Forgiveness precludes pursuing retributive justice but, having said that, he still considers that justice or discipline administered by the proper authorities is compatible with forgiveness.⁸³ Wolterstorff who also considers forgiveness a duty towards those who repent, concludes that “correction” is appropriate. Such correction could also include incarceration if the public need to be protected from the offender.⁸⁴ This is not the same as “punishment”, which seeks to inflict some penalty for past actions. Instead, this action seeks to rehabilitate the offender so that there is hope for the future.⁸⁵ Repentance might mitigate or even prevent punishment. Generally speaking, we might not seek to impose, or to support punishment on a repentant offender. But there may be cases, where such punishment, which Wolterstorff labels “retroactive” might be appropriate. In those cases, Wolterstorff states that forgiveness “is and should remain incomplete.”⁸⁶ His recommendation that punishment be waived for the repentant together with the qualification gives us an indication of the difficulty in making generalizations where justice and forgiveness interact in complex cases.

Legal punishment can be vindication of the value of victim.⁸⁷ It is different to revenge in that it is carried out by people other than the victim and its main aim is not to make the victim feel

about change and cannot be the grounds for refusal to prosecute in these cases.

⁸² Volf, *Free*, 170.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 168-170.

⁸⁴ Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 19.

vindicated.⁸⁸ Revenge inhabits the personal and private realm of the offended. It usually seeks to inflict a disproportionate amount of suffering and relishes it. Justice is public, and is constrained to act in ways that are socially accepted as fair and balanced. It is a “profoundly moral concept,” as moral as forgiveness.⁸⁹ If the women choose to forgive, they will be glad to see the perpetrator repent and be allowed a lighter sentence. If justice is denied, on the other hand, it can stir up a desire for revenge.⁹⁰

In the case of sexual assaults, even if the offender repents, it is likely that he will re-offend unless he is helped to change. Forgiveness is consistent with ensuring that correction is enforced. In 2 Cor. 2:7-10 Paul deals with the case of a man who has been disciplined by the Corinthian church. Paul is concerned that the man may be discouraged and overwhelmed by sorrow at his situation. He therefore urges the church to “forgive and comfort” him. Is this what is required here? Firstly note that the church has disciplined him and the whole church knows about it. The sin has not been swept under the carpet. It is after the proper process of discipline has taken place that Paul asks the church to deal gently with him. He is restored to the fellowship. Secondly, the man is not a pastor and his restoration does not include restoration to office.

Pronouncing forgiveness

It is commonly accepted that only victims can forgive.⁹¹ The famous book *The Sunflower* explores the quandary of Simon Wiesenthal who is asked by a dying German soldier for forgiveness for his part in the atrocities committed against the Jews. Wiesenthal withholds his forgiveness and many who

⁸⁸ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 15.

⁸⁹ Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 33-34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹¹ Bash, *Just Forgiveness*, 7.

responded to his story applauded him for his decision.⁹² It seems as if the church leadership has taken on themselves the privilege of granting forgiveness in the victims' place. Do they have Biblical warrant for that?

In John 20:23, Jesus says to the disciples, "if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain those of any they are retained." Biblical scholars suggest that in John's gospel, "sins" are the sin of unbelief in the face of Jesus' ministry. Therefore what Jesus is saying is that as the disciples proclaim him, they will pronounce forgiveness on those who believe in Jesus while retaining the sins of those who remain unbelieving.⁹³ This passage is paralleled in Luke 24:46-49 where the disciples are given the ministry of the gospel.⁹⁴ The disciples are given authority to proclaim the gospel and with it the forgiveness of sins. Those who accept the disciples' message, accept God (Luke 10:16). It is possible that the use of the plural broadens the scope of the sin beyond unbelief to include other sins. The sins they forgive are not sins against themselves but sins of unbelief in particular and every kind.⁹⁵ Fee points out that these disciples include those other than the apostles. This means the authority given is given not to leaders, not even to individuals, but to the church.⁹⁶ In that case, the church leaders, if they are convinced of the repentance of the men, may convey to them that God has heard their

⁹² Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1998).

⁹³ Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: Continuum, 2005), 500.

⁹⁴ Lincoln, *John*, 501. Scholars also note a link to Matthew 18:18. However the context is slightly different: pre-resurrection, not post and in the context of the Christian community rather than the world (Michaels, J Ramsey, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 1013-14.

⁹⁵ Lincoln, *John*, 500; Michaels, *John*, 1015.

⁹⁶ Gordon Fee, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 749.

confession and seen their repentance and that they can be assured of God's forgiveness. However, they may not grant them the forgiveness which they ought to seek from those they have abused.

Reconciliation

"Reconciliation is the good we expect or hope that forgiveness in response to repentance will bring about."⁹⁷ Tisdale cites Augsburg who uses the metaphor of "turning" rather than "returning" for forgiveness in cases where there is no repentance. In such a scenario, there is no push for victims to return to an abusive situation. The impulse of forgiveness is aimed at "turning" the situation around, not maintaining the status quo. Tisdale muses that as she looked at the story of Joseph and his brothers, an aspect she had never noticed stuck out. Joseph is often referred to as a model of one who forgave the grievous harm inflicted on him by his brothers. But the balance of power had shifted from the time when Joseph was a vulnerable youngest brother to when Joseph was the powerful ruler of Egypt. In this new situation, Joseph could forgive without fear of being forced to return to his situation of vulnerability.⁹⁸

Perhaps we in the church have been preaching the Joseph story to the wrong people. Rather than preaching Joseph to victims, telling them they should repent and forgive, we should be preaching Joseph to the powerful, encouraging them to embrace God's new way of mercy and compassion, rather than the world's way of vindictiveness and retribution. Joseph is no model for enslaving servitude. Rather, Joseph models servant leadership, the kind we ultimately see revealed in the one from Nazareth whose own words about forgiveness continue to haunt us.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Wolterstorff, "After Injustice", 27.

⁹⁸ Tisdale, "The Gospel", 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Tisdale recounts a sermon on the parting of Jacob and Laban.¹⁰⁰ After a relationship marked by deceit and vengeance, Laban commits the two of them to God with the words “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other” (Gen. 31:39). There is no going back to a relationship of trust. Just a decision to end the cycle of vengeance (Gen. 31:52) and an acknowledgment that God must ultimately take care of the situation that neither can handle (Gen. 31:50).

Forgiveness restores moral equality but not equality in every sense. The relationship that once included trust may not do so again.¹⁰¹

“Some crimes are so terrible that they leave something like a stain on the soul which even human forgiveness cannot wash away.”¹⁰² These women will most likely feel that the attacks on them fall into this category. Can we talk of reconciliation in this case? “There are some journeys from which there is no full return.”¹⁰³ This is not to say that the offenders are forever unforgivable. They are “conditionally unforgiveable” because they have not repented or acknowledged their wrongdoing.¹⁰⁴

The difference between forgiving the unrepentant and loving your enemy

Jesus commands his followers to love their enemies (Mt. 5:44, Lk. 6:27-28, 35-37). If the men in these case studies do not repent, they can be classified as the “enemy.” Is loving one’s enemy the same as forgiving him or her?¹⁰⁵ Carter says the command “is a command in search of elaboration, dialogue, discernment. It provides direction but leaves the itinerary to the

¹⁰⁰ Tisdale, “The Gospel”, 29.

¹⁰¹ Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 22.

¹⁰² Garrard and McNaughton, *Forgiveness*, 60.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 117.

¹⁰⁵ Worthington et al., “Interpersonal Forgiveness”, 32.

travelers.”¹⁰⁶ Jesus does elaborate on the command to some extent. To love our enemies, he explains, means praying for them (Mt. 5:44) being good to them, and blessing them (Lk. 6:27-28). Paul likewise says in Romans 12:17-20 that Christians should not take vengeance on their enemies. Instead, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head” (Rom. 12:20). The rationale Jesus gives is that “you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt. 5:45). Such unexpected treatment of enemies will show “you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk. 6:35-36). The rationale is the character of God and the close family resemblance that his children ought to bear to their father. It is noteworthy that Paul mentions in Rom. 12:18 that we live at peace with others “if it is possible”, suggesting that that there are those with whom it is not possible to live at peace, such as those who do not repent.¹⁰⁷

To some, this “love” is the motivation for the purest form of forgiveness, arising from a desire to bless the offender; an altruistic love which does not wait for apology, repentance or restitution.¹⁰⁸ Forgiveness, is, as Wolterstorff says, an aspect of love.¹⁰⁹ But the love of God is not an indulgent love – but a holy one. It is a love that accepts the sinner as he or she is, but refuses to leave them as they are. Does it truly show Christian love to forgive the unrepentant? Or should that love cause the victims of evil, like these women, to pray for their abusers to repent and

¹⁰⁶ Warren Carter, “Love your enemies”, *Word & World* 28:1 (2008), 15. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 1, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ I am grateful to Dr Craig A. Smith for pointing this out and for other helpful comments on this paper.

¹⁰⁸ Worthington, Sharpe et al., “Interpersonal Forgiveness”, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 36.

seek proper discipline that will keep them from re-offending, to see them as human beings created and loved by God, and seek their highest good, which is not that they preserve their status in the community but that they be kept from sin. Wishing them well might include recognizing that for safety's sake they must keep away from them. "We also learn to love them by engaging in lament, by prophetically calling them to account, by showing them an alternative way of life."¹¹⁰ Bash, in his study of Biblical forgiveness, concludes that Jesus did not forgive the soldiers carrying out the sentence of crucifixion. He prayed for their forgiveness. He modelled what it is to love your enemies, rather than that the unrepentant should be forgiven.¹¹¹ When we cannot (yet) forgive our enemies, we may show that we love them by praying that they will find forgiveness from God. For we are then praying that they will repent. Augsburgers puts it well:

Love may be unconditional, forgiveness is not. There may be no demands as conditions for seeing the other as worthwhile and precious, but many demands for trusting, risking, joining in relationship – no demands for loving; many demands for living.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The problem with talk about forgiveness is that it is often done in the abstract and assumed to be a "one size fits all" solution. The arguments we have considered above give weight to the possibility that there are different "forgivenesses" of various depth (or thickness, to use Bash's terminology). The church leaders in these cases have a particular view of forgiveness which others in the church do not share. Another problem is caused by the proliferation of voices which address the topic of forgiveness from a secular standpoint, which leaves out the work of Christ on the Cross and of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Christians on the

¹¹⁰ Jones, *Embodying*, 264.

¹¹¹ Bash, "Forgiveness: A Reappraisal", 137.

¹¹² Augsburgers, *Helping*, 16.

other hand may bombard us with proof texts without a properly thought through theology of forgiveness.

It seems that the Bible has a more holistic view of forgiveness than we often do. Just as the process of conversion in the New Testament is a “package” which involves conviction, repentance, faith, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, baptism, *and* transformation (which often goes along with restitution) so inter-personal forgiveness is also part of a package. This package includes repentance, confession, restitution, forgiveness and restored relationships and may be called reconciliation. Forgiveness has a goal. It is offered with the hope of a restored relationship.¹¹³ Just as we have tried to separate the elements of conversion and argue about the order and necessity of each (e.g. baptism, the gift of the Spirit etc.), so we have tried to separate the elements of reconciliation and the result is an impoverished view of forgiveness.

What is the best we can hope for the offenders? The church, especially its leaders owes them truth as well as grace. Truth that confronts sin for what it is- whether it is abuse, pride, or corrupt systems. Truth that confronts cultural biases and fears- biases that place the blame for rape on women rather than their attackers, fears that close ranks to safeguard position and prestige, cultural pride that refuses to allow that a leader who sins must ask forgiveness . The best we can hope for is not that they are given a ministry but that they are ministered to, so that they do not lose their souls.

What can we hope for the future? That those involved in the theological training of Church workers and pastors constantly evaluate their training programmes – their explicit curricula as well as their hidden curricula for the impact they have on the spiritual formation of students. Students should learn about integrity, humility and defying cultural norms in revolutionary and

¹¹³ Wolterstorff, “After Injustice”, 27.

rigorous holiness. Are there role models, mentors and friends for those who undertake pastoral duties? Are ordinands properly prepared for the long haul of ministry?

What is the best we can hope for, for the women? That they are, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the church, able to achieve a measure of wholeness, restored dignity and assurance of their status and worth as beloved children of God. They need to be allowed to lament and weep for their pain, shame and disillusionment and be helped to see God is on their side. They need the dignity of having the wrong done to them acknowledged, ideally by their abusers, but also by their pastors. Yes, they do need to be set free from bitterness and from a victim mentality. By refusing to take revenge, by praying for the good of their enemies, including for their repentance, and by allowing God to use their suffering to deepen their own understanding of God, themselves and the world, they can become more than conquerors. We should assume that they will benefit from doing what is right because God's laws are given for our good (Deut. 6:24). But if this is forgiveness, this is a "thin" forgiveness, a personal, internal decision, which cannot result in a restored relationship of pastor-congregant.

God's grace meets us where we are and as we are. Hence, even though forgiveness and justice are both required of Christians, the particular combination, order, and living out of that combination will look different from one situation and person to the next: *by the grace of God* some Christians are able to forgive the worst sins without condition, and *by the grace of God* some Christians are able to forgive after seeking justice. By that same grace of God, some Christians have to rely on God to forgive when they themselves simply cannot do so.¹¹⁴

To forgive (in whatever form) under the prevailing circumstances would be heroic. We hear tales of many heroic deeds in our

¹¹⁴ Duff and Mikoski, "Complexities", 383.

newspapers – of sacrificial rescues from burning buildings and flooded rivers, of donated organs and lives laid down protecting civilians from guns and bombs. We admire them and remember them but we cannot demand those deeds. Forgiveness in this case, where there has been a terrible crime perpetrated upon a woman and no real repentance or justice, comes into this category of heroic deed.

MISSIONARY METHODS OF THE INDIAN ORATORIAN JACOME GONSALVES¹

G. P. V. SOMARATNA

INTRODUCTION

It is said that the possibilities of the heroic are there in almost all men. However, there are men whose courage and great deeds have been remembered because they are seen as men that many of us would like to imitate. Anecdotes of such people have often encouraged other men to be strong and brave in the face of great hazards and responsibilities. Men of the calibre of Jacome Gonsalves (1676-1742) are outstanding in that they will not only pass on the distinction of the heroes of the past but help make heroes in the present.

Jacome Gonsalves was an Indian priest of the Oratory of the Holy Cross of Miracles in Goa which followed the tradition of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri.² Joseph Vaz (1651-1711) was the founder of the Goan Oratory. It was a society of priests and brothers who lived together under a disciplinary rule. They did not take religious vows, unlike most other religious orders.

¹ This name is differently spelled by various writers: Goncalvez (S. G. Perera), Gonsalves (V. Perniola), Gonçalves (Boudens and K. M. de Silva).

² Philip Romolo Neri (1515-1595) was an Italian priest who founded a society of secular clergy called the Congregation of the Oratory.

Gonsalves was one among a number of missionaries from Goa who saved the Catholic Church at a time when the Catholics in Sri Lanka were being persecuted by the oppressive Dutch Calvinist authorities. These Oratorians who came from India saved the Catholic Church from possible extinction in the Dutch period of Sri Lanka (1640-1796). Their services continued until the religious orders were suppressed in Goa in 1834; the last Oratorian priest continued to serve in Sri Lanka till his death in 1874.

Background

The Catholic presence was completely banned after 1658 when the last Portuguese fortress in Jaffna was surrendered to the Dutch. Roman Catholic worship was prohibited by law.³ Their priests were *persona non grata* in the Dutch territories in Sri Lanka. Catholicism was very firmly put down, since the existence of this faith was regarded as a political threat.⁴ The Dutch expelled Catholic priests and forbade their presence in the island under pain of death. All Catholic churches were taken over and converted to Dutch Reformed churches or put to secular usage. Nevertheless, a substantial number of Roman Catholics remained steadfast amidst persecution. The people were forced to accept the Dutch Reformed faith. Catholics in Sri Lanka were deprived of access to the sacraments for over 40 years. Joseph Vaz (1651-1711) came from Goa to Sri Lanka in 1687 when the Catholics in Sri Lanka were longing for the sacraments of their religion.

³ SLNA (Sri Lanka National Archives), 2438:46-48; V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, Vol. 1 (Dehiwela: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1983), 198, hereafter VP-D I; Boudens, Robrecht, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1957), 4-5; K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 195.

⁴ Philippus Baldaeus, *A True and Exact description of the most celebrated East India Coasts of Malabar, Coromandel and also the Isle of Ceylon* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 2000), xviii.

Various *plakkaarts* (edicts) issued in 1658 forbidding the activities of Roman Catholic priests continued. Public assemblies and private conventicles were prohibited. Administration of the sacraments of baptism and marriage was also banned. The persecution was severe in the period that Jacome Gonsalves was serving in Sri Lanka (1705-1742). The anti-Catholic laws were republished in 1733 and 1745 during the ministry of Gonsalves. These anti-Catholic *plakkaarts* remained on the statute books till the end of Dutch rule. However, the persecution of the Catholics proved ineffective; therefore its implementation was abandoned sometime after 1762.

With more missionaries from Goa, Joseph Vaz was able to resuscitate the faith of the Church which was dying due to the absence of priests and many hardships imposed by the Dutch Calvinists. With the arrival of the Oratorian priests there came about a marked change in the nature and composition of the Catholic community. These were not European missionaries working under the patronage of a Catholic colonial government. These Indian missionaries from the Oratory of Goa not only saved the faith, but also built it up on a new foundation. The Church of the Portuguese period was Western, but Vaz made use of the customs and culture of the people of Sri Lanka for Catholic worship. Joseph Vaz and his fellow Oratorian priests, being Indians, were in a better position than Portuguese missionaries of the Portuguese times to appreciate indigenous culture. Being South Asians, they were able to mingle with Sri Lankans easily. The Oratorians were accepted by the people without any reservations, as they took on the Sri Lankan way of life. The fact that their missionary work was not connected with an imperial power ruling Sri Lanka became an advantage.

Jacome Gonsalves served in Sri Lanka from 1705 to 1742. He was born on 8 June 1676 at Divar, Goa, and died at Bolavatta, Sri Lanka, on 17 July 1742. He was the eldest son of Thomas Gonsalves and Mariana de Abreu, Konkani Brahmins, living in the parish of Piedade, Divar, in Goa. His family had been Christians for

more than three generations. Their family had been among the first converts at the beginning of Portuguese rule in Goa.⁵

He entered the Oratorian Congregation of Goa and later studied at the Jesuit College of Goa. Eventually he enrolled in the University of Goa, and obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts. In 1696 he began theological studies at the Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas in Goa, where he also held the post of organist.⁶ This seems to have led him to develop a taste for poetry, prose, and music. He was ordained a priest of the Oratorian Order in 1700. He was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the University of St. Paul's in Goa. He took up this post in January 1705, but relinquished it in the same year to come to Sri Lanka. He left Goa on 9 May 1705 and reached Sri Lanka on 30 August 1705, arriving at Talaimannar.⁷

Personal appearance

He was a tall person with 'proportional limbs and fair skin'.⁸ Customarily the Oratorians were of a humble appearance. This has enhanced their acceptance as holy persons. According to Robert Knox, even the Buddhists venerated the Catholic priests as holy persons.⁹ Their simple dress and frugal living made them look like the Hindu *sadhus* that the Sri Lankans were familiar with. As religious personnel the Goan Oratorians were accorded the respect and honour due to Buddhist priests. They could sit in

⁵ J. Sturrock, *Madras District Manual*, Vol. 1 (Madras; Government Press, 1884), 1851.

⁶ Anthony Fernandopulle, *A Critical Study of the Sinhala Works by Jacome Gonsalves, 1876-1742*, thesis submitted to degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of London, 1999:8-13.

⁷ Talaimannar is about 29km East of Dhanushkodi (southernmost point of Idian).

⁸ OMR, 1957:19; VP-D II, 1983:351.

⁹ J. H. O Paulusz (ed.), *An Historical Relation by Robert Knox together with his Biography* (Dehiwela: Tisara, 1989), 221; Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. VI (Colombo, 1956); VP-D II, 471.

seats on equal terms with Buddhist monks. As Brahmins they were highly respected in Sinhalese as well as Tamil societies. Gonsalves' close association with the king in the major part of his stay in Kandy undoubtedly commanded the respect of the people. All these enabled him to present the Catholic religion to the people. He gained a considerable reputation in the country because of his saintly appearance.

It is also reported that his personal and communal prayer life was significant. The missionaries annually met for a week for prayer and contemplation in a place decided by them. They made it a point to be equipped with prayer in situations of demon possession and other spiritual battles.

Period

The Dutch administration of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka lasted from 1658 to 1796. They did not tolerate the presence of Catholic priests; therefore the Dutch officials and *Predikants* were keen on finding them if they were in the Dutch territory where most of the Catholics lived. Ministering to people by a Catholic priest had to be undertaken with utmost secrecy. Most of the time ministering was done under cover of night.¹⁰ Due to the hostile attitude of the Dutch rulers, Gonsalves had to make pastoral visits in the low country in disguise. It was not advisable for him to remain in one place long.

After more than forty years of an absence of Catholic priests the large number of Catholics scattered in all parts of Sri Lanka had to be given proper religious instruction. Joseph Vaz, who pioneered the Oratorian mission to Sri Lanka, was unable to do the work alone. The Catholics had to be educated in the faith. He revived the Jesuit practice of the Portuguese period of appointing *annavis*

¹⁰ Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780-1815* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 48.

and *mooppus*.¹¹ They were to be in charge of local church affairs and read the Mass in the absence of a priest. These local leaders were Tamils and Sinhalese, with a few Portuguese speakers. They had to be educated in the Catholic religion. The number of priests coming from Goa was limited. Before the arrival of Gonsalves there were only four priests to assist Vaz.

Joseph Vaz therefore resolved to set apart one of his missionary companions to provide written material to teach the Catholic lay leaders in the country. The person he chose for the task was Jacome Gonsalves. Vaz died in 1711. Gonsalves, with other missionary colleagues, had to continue the work begun by Vaz. He was unable to attend to much pastoral work after his jaw was dislocated in 1707.¹² He had before him the formidable task of learning the local languages. He had learnt Tamil while en route to Sri Lanka. Yet the knowledge of the language had to be sharpened in order to express the religious concepts. Sinhala was a totally new language. There were no tools for an outsider to learn the language. In fact he had to prepare vocabularies for these two languages to express subjects relevant to the Catholic faith.

Support

Vaz had a great reputation among the ecclesiastical authorities in Lisbon and Rome as a result of his missionary work in Sri Lanka. The king of Portugal granted a subsidy of 25 *xerafins*¹³ to each missionary serving in Sri Lanka.¹⁴ As the Oratorians were not a

¹¹ *Annavi* refers to those who served the church as sacristans and catechists. *Mooppu* was a native warden of the local church who was in charge of temporal affairs.

¹² S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1962), 113; VP-D I, 41.

¹³ Xerafim was a coin used in Portuguese India before 1871. It was worth two Goan rupias.

¹⁴ Carmo da Silva, "Goan Oratorians", in Charles J. Borges, Oscar G. Perera and Hannes Stubbe (eds.), *Goa and Portugal: History and Development* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2000), 280.

religious order which took the vow of poverty they were allowed to own money and dispose it at will.

In April 1731 the missionaries had their annual retreat at Puttalam. As superior vicar general Gonsalves proposed that “all the offerings received from the faithful would form a common fund from which the missionaries would receive what they needed, sharing, as it were, a common bread”.¹⁵ This further united the missionaries not only in mind and heart in the faith but also in charity. They all agreed to transfer all the funds they received as stipends and other offerings of any kind to the common fund maintained by the superior of the mission. He in turn distributed them equally among the missionaries in the country for the expenses in the missionary work as well as temporal needs.¹⁶ The island was divided into districts according to the number of missionaries available at that time. This arrangement freed them from attachment to money. Yet there were still requests of the Oratorian priests regarding financial help from the Goan authorities.

Jacome Gonsalves and Ignacio de Almeida were given permission by King Vira Parakrama Narendrasinha (1707-1739) of Kandy for missionary work in his kingdom.¹⁷ It is reported that the king ordered that those two priests should be treated with the same honour as the chiefs of high rank of the kingdom (*senhores*

¹⁵ V. Perniola, *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, Vol. 2 (Dehiwela: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1983), 223, hereafter VP-D II.

¹⁶ Bede Barcatta, *A History of the Southern Vicariate of Colombo Sri Lanka being also The History of the Apostolate of the Sylvestrine-Benedictine Monks in the Island. I.* (Ampitiya – Kandy – Sri Lanka: Montefano Publications, Vol. I, 1991), 109; Arasaratnam, S. “Oratorians and Predikants; Catholic Church in Ceylon under the Dutch Rule”, *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 4, no 4 (1958), 217-222.

¹⁷ K. M. de Silva (ed.), *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II (Dehiwela: Sri Devi, 1995), 207, hereafter UPHSL.

titulares).¹⁸ “In the reign of that king our religion had every liberty and many churches were built and feasts were held in public with processions and other ceremonies without the least opposition but rather with all permission and favour.”¹⁹ Therefore Gonsalves had every liberty to introduce many ways of propagating the Catholic faith in the kingdom of Kandy, as the public display of Catholicism was permitted in the kingdom.²⁰

Methods

The main purpose of Goan Oratorians coming to Sri Lanka was to revive the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka and to regain ground lost after the Portuguese power ended. The first groups of these priests dedicated their heart and soul amidst innumerable hardships to achieve this purpose. They did not neglect the desire to convert non-Catholics to their faith. Among the many books of Gonsalves, some were intended for that purpose.

Amidst the pressure of writing, evangelical tours, and the disability caused by his locked jaw, he never neglected preaching and administering sacraments. He created a Catholic centre in Bolavatta outside the jurisdiction of the Dutch but close to the Dutch territory. This was in addition to his main church at Bogambara in Kandy. He could not attend to the ministry of the people in the Dutch-controlled areas except under cover of night. Even when he could gather groups for ministry it had to be a small group at a time. Sacraments had to be administered in haste to prevent the risk of being caught by the Dutch authorities. No priest could remain in one place too long due to vulnerability of being caught.

At the same time his low-country headquarters in Bolavatta were far from the centre of the Kandyan kingdom, and therefore did

¹⁸ L. S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707-1782* (Colombo: Lake House, 1988), 84.

¹⁹ VP-D II, 24.

²⁰ Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 84.

not attract much attention when anti-Catholic forces emerged in the city of Kandy towards the end of his work in Sri Lanka.

Bolavatta being in the territory of the king of Kandy, Gonsalves could gather Catholics in large numbers at least once a year on the feast days. The Catholics could attend to their week-long Chariot Festival, in which the Virgin was taken through the town on a chariot, and perform religious duties in peace and quiet in a province away from Dutch vigilance.²¹ It was one occasion when they could organize all liturgical activities with high mass, choirs, processions, sermons, and passion plays. Such activities were possible at Puttalam, Vanny, and Mantota, which were not within the Dutch territory. The faithful came to Bolavatta from places as far as Kalutara, Galle, and Matara, for the Holy Week as well. Many of them came on Palm Sunday and remained till Easter. Necessary arrangements for the long stay of a large crowd were made.²²

Language learning

Missionaries who came from foreign lands had to work in a language that was not theirs. This required that they study a new language. However, nearly all the missionaries of the Portuguese period preached and did most of their work in the Portuguese language. It is very rarely that a priest was comfortable in the Sinhala or Tamil languages. Missionaries were satisfied with what they could obtain through their interpreters.²³ Portuguese priests did leave behind some tools for the study of local languages but they were not available at this time. The studies of grammar in the Tamil language by Henrique Henriques (1520-1600) and

²¹ R. L. Stirrat, *Power and Religiosity in Post-Colonial Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14.

²² Perera, *Historical Sketches*, 118.

²³ Don Peter, *Studies in Ceylon Church History* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1963), 153.

others in South India also were not available for use in this period.²⁴

Oratorians were happy to find the Portuguese language spoken by the people in most Catholic areas as Catholicism was introduced through that language to the people. However, in the kingdom of Kandy where they found asylum, the languages used were Tamil and Sinhala. Therefore they had to be proficient in those languages. Joseph Vaz sent Gonsalves to Kandy to learn Sinhala, which was the major language of the country.

Gonsalves was nearly 30 years old when he embarked on the study of these languages. He had the knack of learning languages well. At the time he arrived in Sri Lanka, he knew Konkani, Portuguese, Latin, and Spanish. During the long journey from Goa to Sri Lanka he studied Tamil and mastered it during his first assignment on the island in Mannar, Arippu, Musali, and other places in the Mannar district. He also learnt Dutch in order to be able to communicate with the government officials. Gonsalves studied Sinhala under Buddhist monks at the Malwatta Chapter, known for their high and elegant Sinhala. In addition, he studied Sinhala classics under scholarly laymen like Pedro de Gascão (Pirre de Gascogne).²⁵

Most of his language learning took place in real life situations. There were no dictionaries in Sinhala and Tamil to refer to. The

²⁴ S. G. Perera, *The Jesuits in Ceylon* (Madura: De Nobili Press 1941), 19.

²⁵ Pedro Gascon was the son of a French naval officer, who came to Sri Lanka with the French squadron under admiral de la Haye. The fleet anchored in Trincomalee harbour in March 1672. He was capable of winning the confidence of king Vira Parakrama Narendrasinha (1706-1739) therefore rose position of *Maha-adikaram* (Chief Minister of the Royal Court). It is believed that he learnt Portuguese from Fr. Jacome Gonsalvez. He was executed by the orders of the king in 1725 (Vevaraja, Kandy Kingdom, 70) for having an intimate relation with one of the king's concubines.

list of available words in any given language was potentially endless. He had to seek out high-frequency word lists. For this purpose he prepared dictionaries to help those who wanted to study the local languages. He prepared a Portuguese-Sinhala dictionary (1720), a Sinhala-Portuguese dictionary (1730), a dictionary of select phrases in Tamil (1731), and a trilingual dictionary of Portuguese-Tamil-Sinhala (1735).

The copies made out of these works were sent to the Oratorian missionaries serving in the country. These dictionaries could be useful in the Tamil as well as Sinhala areas of the Island. One can glean the folklore and language usage in the contemporary society in Sri Lanka in his works.²⁶ His ability to use the existing forms of folk literature has enabled him to give an indigenous expression to Christianity in a meaningful way. The words had been collected from people of every rank. These dictionaries show a large number of words that were current in various parts of the island in his period.

Indigenous culture

The attempts made by Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in India and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China, who made use of poetic and literary traditions of the local setting, were well known to the Catholic scholars in this period. However, the missionaries were usually less disposed to make compromises in territories directly subject to Portuguese political power, such as Goa and the maritime provinces of Ceylon, than they were in territories which were not subject to their control. In the territories under colonial powers, the missionaries expressed clearly their opposition to local religions, and their attempts at conversion were consciously directed to the people under colonial control. After conversion the Sri Lankan Christians were expected to make a clean break with their pagan (Hindu and Buddhist) past. Even their personal names were changed. In addition, food habits, social customs,

²⁶ P. B. Sannasgala, *Sinhala Sahitya Vamsaya* (Colombo: Lake House, 1961), 726.

and even costume, had to conform to the way of living of Portuguese Christians. The Indian Oratorians, however, did not have that privilege in Sri Lanka.

Therefore the attitude of the Oratorians was one of respect for the social and cultural traditions of Sri Lanka. They had no ability to change the customs of their converts in the way Portuguese missionaries who worked under the colonial umbrella did. They were forced to foster association of Catholics with their non-Catholic fellowmen. It was rarely that they changed the names of converts. Joseph Vaz and Jacome Gonsalves are reputed to have been different from European missionaries because of their respect for local cultural elements and vernacular languages.²⁷ Gonsalves' contribution to the promotion of Sinhala literature is commendable. His works show a remarkable attempt towards indigenization of Christianity in Sri Lanka. In fact this was possible because he was willing to become acclimatized to the local culture for successful missionary work in Sri Lanka. On the other hand the religious affiliation that the people had towards the Dutch Reformed Church was due to political and material benefits rather than faith.

Catholic priests were aware of the fact that there were bridges between their religion and the Hindu and Buddhist religious practices on the popular level. The Oratorian missionaries realized that the external resemblance of the rich ceremonialism that distinguished Catholicism was similar to the religious systems found in Sri Lanka. Gonsalves found this similarity and derived assurance and encouragement from it. In this regard it is relevant to quote Abbe J. A. Dubois (1765-1848) who was a French Catholic missionary in India in the first decade of the nineteenth century. This observation may be applied to the Buddhists as well.

²⁷ Anthony Fernandopulle, *A Critical Study of the Sinhala Works by Jacome Gonsalves, 1876-1742*, thesis submitted to degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of London, 1999, 14.

“If any of the several modes of Christian worship were calculated to make an impression and gain ground in the country, it is no doubt the Catholic form which you Protestants call an idolatry in disguise: it has a *Pooga* or sacrifice; (the mass is termed by the Hindoos *Pooga*, literally, sacrifice;) it has processions, images, statues, *tirtan* or holy water, fasts, *tittys* or feasts, and prayers for the dead, invocation of saints, etc. , all of which practices bear more or less resemblance to those in use among the Hindoos.”²⁸

His proficiency in the languages of Sri Lanka and his travel to various parts of the island provided Gonsalves with an incomparable opportunity to come into contact with local people of all social classes. He could speak to anyone from the king to the humble illiterate villager. His stay in houses while on mission tours gave him personal acquaintance with the day-to-day activities of the people. His writings reflect a personal knowledge of the simple folklore of the people. Phrases peculiar to villagers can be gleaned from his writings.²⁹ He utilizes the local proverbs and adages used by people in their everyday activities. His polemical writing, *Agnana-aushadaya*, is full of such local idioms and proverbs.

His familiarity with Buddhist literature and folk religious practices enabled him to speak to the people through their own vocabulary. His book, *Pratiharyavaliya*, bears a resemblance to the popular Sinhala work, *Saddharmaratnavaliya*. This is a storybook. Therefore he had used a simple and spoken style of language, even disregarding the accepted norms of grammar. At the same time, his selection of words is pertinent and the reader is made to literally experience the events narrated. This is

²⁸ J. A. Dubois, *Letters of the State of Christianity in India* (London: Longmans, 1823), 18.

²⁹ Fernandopulle, *Sinhala Works by Jacome Gonsalves*, 239.

strongly felt in the sorrowful feelings evoked in the *Dukprapti Prasangaya*.

Preaching

Dissemination of the Word of God daily was one of the essential marks of the Goan Oratory. Gonsalves used preaching as a missionary tool to teach the Catholic faith. It was useful for literate as well as illiterate people in the country. Preaching has its roots in the Scripture and throughout the history of Christianity. Preaching was regarded as a necessary part of the propagation of the faith in this period.³⁰ During this period a "popular sermon" in vernacular was added to the mass. Semons were delivered on Sundays, Feast Days, all of Lent, sometimes during the Advent season, at funerals and at church dedications. They were short sermons and included elements which the people could relate to or find interest in.

His sermons were preached not only in churches but also on ritualistic occasions. The dislocation of his jaw while yawning continued to bother him. No physician was able to do anything to set the dislocated jaw right.³¹ This happened in 1711. He was unable to preach as forcefully as he used to; therefore he devoted more time to writing books in Sinhala and Tamil.³² Gonslaves is regarded as the writer who produced the largest number of Sinhala and Tamil books by any single author.³³

During Lent and Advent extra sermons were preached in the afternoon in addition to preaching at Mass. According to the traditional practice of the post-Trent period he had to fulfil the three duties of an orator: namely, to prove, to please, and to

³⁰ Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 202.

³¹ VP-D I, 464.

³² VP-D I, 545.

³³ UPHSL, II, 481.

move the hearer in his sermons. Often funeral orations were occasions for preaching a salvation message to wider groups of people which included non-Catholics. He had the habit of quoting scripture and from the lives of saints from memory.³⁴ In 1733 a great number of people accepted Catholic baptism and became members of the church at Kammala where he delivered sermons (Perera, 1962:79). His writings show that in his preaching he used the language of the people in that particular cultural setting. The Oratorian priests had the habit of using Sinhala and Tamil prayers during the Mass together with Latin.³⁵

The Catholics in this period had no permanent structures as churches. Most of their worship was undertaken secretly in the Dutch Territory. Mass was the time where prayer, worship and instruction were offered. S. G. Perera writes regarding a visit from Kandy to Colombo by Gonsalves in 1708:

“All religious exercises in Colombo had to be done in secrecy and under cover of night, and the priest was not to venture out on the streets except in disguise, and never remain long in any part of the town: and the house in which service is held was not to be known to any, even to the Catholics, save those who were to be summoned thither on a given day. At nightfall the priest enters a house in disguise; a hall is arranged for service and dismantled before dawn; all Catholics in the vicinity receive notice in time to assemble there in the course of the night without attracting attention, when other citizens are abed. Then with closed doors and sentinels posted, the priest begins to hear confessions, administer baptism, if necessary, give instruction in one or other and often in two languages, after which he says Mass, preaches and before daybreak goes into hiding in another house known only to a few of the trustiest Catholics, where he is carefully guarded and gets ready to go over the same

³⁴ Perera, *Goncalvez*, 89

³⁵ Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (New York: Wipf & Stock Pub., 2004), 103

programme next day in another house, generally at some distance from the former.”³⁶

Teaching

Systematic schools could not be maintained during this period due to insufficiency of funds and limited facilities within the Kandyan kingdom. There was never an adequate number of missionaries to embark on a programme of the setting up of schools. The meagre facilities and inadequate freedom curtailed any such hope.

The Dutch Reformed Church by this time had a thriving seminary in Colombo where their schoolmasters were trained for ministry.³⁷ However, the resources available for the Oratorians were not conducive to attempt any venture of educational establishment. Any formal teaching had to be short and concise. Because of his interest in saving souls, Gonsalves' constant topic of conversation was Christ. When he met a person on the road he turned the conversation to religion. Occasionally he was successful in winning converts. At other time people smiled and went away. Gonsalves considered that the knowledge of Christianity he gave was enough to germinate the Christian faith in the hearer's mind.³⁸ He had a habit of explaining the Christian doctrine as he walked with fellow pedestrians. His first Sinhala work *Satya Upadesa* was on catechism. Its Tamil version was *Sattya Vedagama Sanksepam*. It was intended to teach the basic tenets of the faith to the ordinary masses. In this period the Catholics gathered in groups for worship. These catechisms became very useful on such occasions. In addition catholic gatherings created some solidarity among those who professed the faith in one locality.

³⁶ Balasuriya, Eucharist, 25-26.

³⁷ J. van Goor (Jan Kompenie as schoolmaster. Dutch education in Ceylon 1690-1795 (Dissertatie Utrecht, 1978; Groningen: Wolters Noordhoff, 1978), passim.

³⁸ Ibid., 91.

Training

For a number of years Jacome Gonsalves was the religious superior of the Oratorians in Sri Lanka. He also served as vicar-general under the Bishop of Cochin. In the absence of priests after the departure of the Portuguese missionaries, much of the day-to-day running of local congregations had been left to lay leaders who were known as *mooppus* and *annavis*. Their understanding of Catholic teachings was certainly limited and often heterodox. During his pastoral tours Gonsalves instructed *annavis* and *mooppus* on the basic practices of Christian faith. *Annavis* were expected to lead the people assembled for prayer in the local churches. The people of the village selected leaders from their own caste. Gonsalves created local confraternities which were pious associations of church members.³⁹ These groups conducted some works of charity. Gonsalves drew rules of conduct for them so that the work could be done in peace and amity. They were created in keeping the distinction of caste. They had their own chapel with their own lay leaders.⁴⁰ These leaders were men of the place. Therefore, no caste distinction was noted with regard to holding these offices within villages. However, one has to remember that although in this period there was no racial distinction between Sinhala and Tamil, there was discrimination by caste.

Publications

The publication of books was used for religious ends by missionaries. Gonsalves produced forty two written works, in addition to booklets prepared for churches in four languages,⁴¹ because he realized that the literary efforts were the best ways for equipping the church under Dutch siege. Among the compositions, hagiography, poems, and devotional and

³⁹ A confraternity is a voluntary Christian association of lay people. It was created by the church hierarchy to promote special works of Christian charity and piety.

⁴⁰ VP-D II, 174.

⁴¹ They are Sinhala, Tamil, Portuguese and Dutch.

controversial writings were undertaken to provoke the reader to interest in the Catholic faith. Gonsalves was a scholar and missionary. He used both prose and verse to convey his message. His ability to use several languages made it possible for him to coin suitable new words to convey Catholic teachings.

The publication of books by Gonsalves began long before the Dutch missionaries started such activities. The Dutch missionaries used their printing press (established in 1737) mainly to issue translations of the Bible, catechisms, and prayer books, for use in their schools and churches. The quality of their publications was poor as their works were mainly translations into colloquial language. Those publications were often unintelligible because of the syntax errors and the inferiority of translation. By contrast, the writings of Gonsalves were of high quality in language and the style of writing.

He wrote many of his works at Bolavatta, near Negombo, and in the city of Kandy. Since there was no printing press, his writings had to be hand-copied by scribes. It is reported that there were twelve copyists employed for the purpose at Bolavatta.⁴² Therefore one may find several scribal errors in the copies. Although the editor should personally check the reliability of the copy, Gonsalves had hardly any time for this. The western tradition of meticulously checking the manuscript before going to circulation seems to have been absent. Gonsalves made as many copies as possible for distribution among the indigenous Catholic leaders in addition to the few missionaries scattered in all parts of the country. It is reported that around 1730, two thousand volumes were sent, mainly to the mission in Jaffna.⁴³ These books

⁴² S. G. Perera, *Life of Father Jacome Goncalvez* (Ottawa: Humanics Universal Inc. 2006), 21.

⁴³ VP-D II, 237.

became a great inspiration to Oratorian missionaries and a great influence on the people.⁴⁴

Jacome Gonsalves has been called “the most successful missionary that Sri Lanka ever had. He was the creator of Catholic literature in Sri Lanka whose name is still held in benediction and whose literary works in Sinhalese and Tamil are still in daily use in the church of this island”.⁴⁵

It is probable that Velivita Saranankara thera (1698-1778) who contributed to the revival of Buddhism and Sinhala literature after a lapse of more than two centuries received inspiration from this foreigner who produced a large number of literary works of high quality. It was a period where quality Sinhala writings were lacking. Saranankara was able to revive the art of narrative prose which was the main literary style of Gonsalves. His *Sarartha Sangrahaya* giving the stories of the Buddha (1718) was written after the *Devaveda Puranaya* (1712)⁴⁶ of Gonsalves which give the story of Christianity. It is very likely that Saranankara who was the junior contemporary was inspired by the writings of Gonsalves.

Visiting

The intermediary and social functions of the Catholic priesthood were a significant factor in the popularity of the Catholic faith in the island. Gonsalves visited Catholic communities in all parts of the country. The period of stay in one place was inadequate for him to get to know the people. During his stay the people sought his counsel and prayers.

When a priest arrived in a village, Catholics of the village received him ceremoniously. He was brought to the place arranged for

⁴⁴ Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon*, 183.

⁴⁵ Perera, *Life of Jacome Goncalvez*, 178.

⁴⁶ *Deva Veda Puranaya*. [Tamil: *Deva Arulveda Puranam*.]

Compendium of the Bible in 2 parts. 400 printed pages.

meeting in a procession with music. This was undertaken in villages where Dutch presence was minimal. The non-Catholic neighbours who heard the priest address the Catholic crowd were encouraged to speak to the priest and discuss religious matters.⁴⁷ This was an opportunity to reach those who did not belong to the Catholic faith.

The Oratorians adopted some customs similar to Buddhist priests. In their personal life they conformed to the Sri Lankan ideals of asceticism. They adopted the local dignified speech. They had to lodge and eat in the houses of Catholics of numerous castes, disregarding caste distinctions.⁴⁸ Like contemporary Buddhist monks, Jacome Gonsalves never went on his visits except accompanied by a lay helper. He adhered to the instruction of Joseph Vaz to abstain from receiving money and other voluntary contributions from the people. The contributions of the faithful were collected by a lay official and used for the expenses with regard to the activities of the mission.

Churches

According to Robert Knox (1641-1720), an English prisoner in Kandy from 1661 to 1680, there were no Catholic priests in the kingdom in his period. He states:

“How they maintain Christianity among them. If any enquire into the Religious exercise and Worship practised among the Christians here, I am sorry I must say it, I can give but a slender account. For they have no Churches nor no Priests, and so no meetings together on the Lord’s Dayes (sic) for Divine Worship, but each one Reads or Prays at his own House as he is disposed. They Sanctifie (sic.) the Day chiefly by refraining work, and meeting together at Drinking-houses. They continue the practice of Baptism; and there being no Priests, they Baptize their Children themselves

⁴⁷ Perera, *Historical Sketches*, 105.

⁴⁸ Aquinas 1985,164

with Water, and use the words, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and give them Christian Names. They have their Friends about them at such a time, and make a small Feast according to their Ability: and some teach their Children to say their Prayers, and to Read, and some do not."⁴⁹

The task before the Oratorians was therefore formidable. They had to give basic training in Christian living to these people as well as instruction to those who would seek baptism to join the Christian community. They had to build churches wherever possible to gather the Christians into one place for weekly worship and instruction. The churches in Sri Lanka built by the Goan Oratorian missionaries mostly followed the Indo-Portuguese architectural ideas. The main centre of the Oratorians till 1742 was the church at Bogambara which had been permitted by Vimaladharmasuriya II.⁵⁰ There were several churches which are believed to have been built by Gonsalves in all parts of the country.⁵¹ The fact that he had to build new churches would indicate that the Catholic community in Sri Lanka was growing. The style and the size of the Church depended on the political situation and the economic capabilities of the Christians of Sri Lanka. Certain aspects of the local climate and culture also were considered. Most material support came from the faithful for these building projects. The churches built in the Kandyan territory were made of wattle and daub. The roof had straw or cadjan.

⁴⁹ Knox, *An Historical Relation*, 397. After his escape from the Kingdom of Kandy Knox wrote the manuscript of *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon*, which was published in 1681. It is an account of his experiences in the kingdom of Kandy. The book contains engravings showing some inhabitants, their customs and agricultural techniques.

⁵⁰ A. H. Mirando, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Colombo: Lake House, 1985), 54.

⁵¹ VP-D II, 329, 468.

It is reported that on one occasion Gonsalves baptized 600 adults in Colombo during one visit in 1710.⁵² The numbers indicated adult persons who came from Buddhist and Hindu backgrounds. In 1711 he had baptized an entire Sinhala village in addition to baptism in other places.⁵³ There were 20 confraternities in and around the city of Colombo.⁵⁴ These conversions had been mass movements, as entire villages came to receive baptism. In the 36 years of his stay in Sri Lanka he had baptised many people of different ethnicities and religions. His letter to the Oratory of Goa in 1709 states: "Among them there were many teachers of *Chingala* schools⁵⁵; similarly there were some *Bracmanes* and pagan priests, some Moors and other respectable persons."⁵⁶

Propaganda

Among the propaganda activities of Gonsalves, wayside dramas and pandals (*torana*) provided entertainment to the people in a period when such activities were rare. In these pandals the stories of Christ, Mary and the saints were displayed. They were used as teaching as well as evangelistic tools.⁵⁷ Gonsalves' poetic compositions were used in these public performances.

In agreement with the prevailing cultural practices of the country he organized processions with dancing, music, and singing. These religious processions had an evangelistic purpose as well. They were full of events of enjoyment for onlookers. Festivals involving processions were accompanied by hymns and prayers. A procession, in Christianity, is an organized body of people

⁵² Oratorian Mission Report, hereafter OMR, 1957, 110.

⁵³ VP-D, II, 26

⁵⁴ OMR 1957: 107

⁵⁵ The schools in this period were run by the Dutch Reformed Church. The schoolmasters theoretically served as local ministers. But many of them were Christians of Reformed faith for legal purposes only.

⁵⁶ VP-D II, 327.

⁵⁷ Oswald Gomis, *Some Christian Contributions in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Archbishop of Colombo, 2009), 49-50.

advancing in formal or ceremonial manner as an element of Christian ritual. It is an expression of popular piety. There is evidence that during the time of Gonsalves, displays like stilt walking, stick dance (Portuguese *pauliteiros*, Sinhala *lee-keli*), men with oversized head masks (*olu bakku*), and other sport displays were added to the Catholic processions in Bolavatta and other places where there was a robust Catholic community. The Oratorians seem to have adopted local customs regarding processions where they used tom-toms, *hevisi* (drumming) and *pavada* (floor spread). In this manner the Oratorians amalgamated practices of Goan processions with local Kandyan customs successfully.

Miracles

It is said that the healthy church is founded on three basic principles. They are the word, works, and wonders. All three of these can be found in the ministry of Gonsalves. Wonders or miracles were the most often attested motivations for conversions of non-Christians in the period of the growth of the Church. Miracles are by definition something extraordinary, events not scientifically explicable by natural laws. They played a part in powerful propaganda and persuasion. The gospels record exorcisms, cures, and nature wonders as three kinds of miracles performed by Jesus. During the early period of the Oratorian mission the occurrence of miracles inspired many people to faith.

Gonsalves used many methods to make the Catholic faith attractive. The fact that miraculous cures are reported⁵⁸ indicates one reason for his success in reviving the Catholic community and preventing them from falling into other religions. The information regarding his works indicates that there were several miraculous events associated with the ministry of Gonsalves. Like many other Oratorians, his preaching of the Gospel in this period was accompanied by unusual events. Among such unusual events were sudden bodily cures, exorcism of demon-possessed

⁵⁸ Perera, *Life of Fr. Jacome Goncalvez*, 93

people,⁵⁹ elimination of pests from the fields, cure of snake bites, safety from the attack of wild beasts, and also punishment of people for their evil actions.⁶⁰ The stories of these events led many to accept the Catholic faith. Those people who accepted the Gospel on account of extraordinary events had to be nurtured by teaching on their inner validity and the authority of the Gospel. There were people who were attracted to the faith on account of material signs. There was a tendency for some such people to recourse to Buddhism and popular religious practices unless they were grounded in the Word and Christian fellowship. Gonsalves struggled hard to teach these new believers the main essence of the faith.

Many rational and scientific thinkers have dismissed miracles as physically impossible, as they are violations of established laws of physics within their domain of validity. However, as Perniola states, “if we discard all that is somewhat miraculous, we will find it difficult to explain fully the success of the missionary work of the Oratorians in Ceylon”.⁶¹

Political

A relative of the king of the Nayakkar clan⁶² tried to persuade the king to seek the British for aid to get rid of the Dutch. There were others who recommended him to get help from the French,

⁵⁹ VP-D II, 73-74, 121-122; Paulusz, *An Historical Relation*, 231.

⁶⁰ VP-D II, 120, 147-148, 330, 332-335.

⁶¹ VP-D I, xxvii.

⁶² The Nayakkar Dynasty ruled the Kingdom of Kandy from 1739 to 1815. They were the last royal dynasty to rule the Sinhalese kingdom. It is believed that they were related to the Madurai Nayaks and Tanjore Nayaks. There were four kings of this lineage. They were (Sri Vijaya Rajasinha, 1739–1747), Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747–1782), Sri Rajadhi Raja Singha (1782–1798), and Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798–1815). They were originally Hindus and converted to Buddhism to occupy the throne and took the responsibility for protection of Buddhism in the island. Relations between the Kandyan aristocracy and the Nayakkars remained fraught throughout the period of their rule in Kandy.

Danes, or even the Portuguese. When King Narendrasinha sought advice concerning the support of foreign powers, Gonsalves is reported to have discouraged the king from seeking the help of the Portuguese.⁶³ The king was pleased with the advice of this Catholic priest against the use of a Catholic nation. He seems to have stated to the king: "Sire, you did not ask me what was good for the missionaries, but what was best for your majesty and your country!"⁶⁴

The Dutch governor van Imhoff (1736-1739) got to know that Gonsalves' advice to the king prevented any Portuguese involvement in the country. In 1737 he requested an interview in Colombo with Gonsalves. The governor gave letters granting him safe conduct. Gonsalves accepted the request believing that it would be beneficial to the Catholics in Colombo. Therefore he went to Colombo to have an interview with the governor for several days. The result of this meeting was peace and tranquillity for the Catholics in the Dutch territory for a short period. Thereafter the missionaries were able to visit the faithful in Colombo and other Dutch-held lands.⁶⁵

Combating the reformed protests

The missionary work of the Oratorians was often hindered mostly by the Dutch *predikants*. The Oratorians had to combat the challenge of Reformed Christianity on two fronts. The *predikants* of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Dutch territory took every action to discredit the Catholic teaching, in addition to the penal laws enacted by the VOC. The Dutch *predikants* as well as the catechists and schoolmasters of the Dutch establishment were on the lookout for Oratorian missionaries to hand them over to justice.⁶⁶ Usually Catholics did their best to maintain secrecy

⁶³ VP-D. II,302-303; 110. S.G. Perera, Goncalvez, 86.

⁶⁴ S. G. Perera, *Life of Father Jacome Goncalvez* (Ontario: Humanics Univesal Inc. 1942), 80.

⁶⁵ VP-D II, 302-303.

⁶⁶ VP-D II, 343.

about the presence of the missionaries since they would suffer with him for giving missionaries hospitality. Sometimes when Gonsalves was passing the sentries at night, the soldiers seized his box containing the items used for Mass.⁶⁷ On one occasion when he was ministering to the Catholics in Kalutara a catechist of the DRC reported him to the local Dutch authorities. Therefore the Catholics stopped dealings with their priests for fear of possible punishment for sheltering a Catholic priest. Some even did not open their doors to him or give him a guide to lead him to a secure place.⁶⁸

In the tradition of education in Goa, where Gonsalves had his formation, disputations offered a formalized method of debate designed to uncover and establish truths in Christianity. Gonsalves made use of this training in his ministry in Sri Lanka. He took part in public debates with well-prepared arguments. Some of these debates were arranged by the King of Kandy in keeping with the tradition of traditional Sinhalese religious tolerance.

The debate between Nanclars de la Nerolle, a French Huguenot, and Gonsalves before King Narendrasinha (1707-39) was significant. The Calvinist attacked the use of images in Catholic worship, which the priest defended with reference to the Scriptures. Evidently, the king and the Buddhist bystanders were highly impressed by the defence of image worship put up by Gonsalves.⁶⁹ Statues, icons, paintings of Buddha and other sacred personages played an important part in the Buddhism of this era.

⁶⁷ VP-D II, 343.

⁶⁸ VP-D II, 345.

⁶⁹ De la Nerolle was a person of French extraction. He served the King of Kandy as gentleman-in-waiting (*appuhami*). (Dewaraja, *Kandyan Kingdom*, 120). According to the information given by Valentyn he was a bitter opponent of Catholic priests [Francois Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indie* (Amsterdam: 1724), 202]. He was among the Huguenots that had fled France by the early 18th century.

Charity

Oratorians often set aside a sum of money in order to redeem Catholic slaves.⁷⁰ Most of them had become slaves because they had sold themselves into slavery when they were unable to pay their debts. The Oratorians also continued to nurse the sick and dying due to pestilences prevalent in this era. Smallpox appeared sporadically. On such occasions the people had the habit of fleeing from those afflicted with it. They even abandoned in the woods the sick ones who were alive.⁷¹

A report on the lifestyle of Joseph Vaz around 1710 states:

“Whenever Father Joseph Vaz was at the church of Candia, it was his usual custom soon after Mass to distribute to the poor rice enough for a meal. On Sundays and feast days the amount he gave was more generous. Every year he had four public meals at which he invited all the poor of the city and of the surrounding districts.”⁷²

Gonsalves continued this tradition of helping others. A. H. Mirando in his *Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th Centuries* states: “These missionaries, however, began by unscrupulous means such as pecuniary incentives to wean away certain Buddhists from their faith. In this manner they procured many converts among the poorer people undermining the Buddhist religion.”⁷³ He has not supported the statement with original

⁷⁰ VP-D I, 75-76. Slavery was very common in this period in the Kingdom of Kandy. It was an ancient institution in society. The slaves in this period were those who sold themselves when they got into debt or found it difficult to support their families. Some were punished by law to slavery. Some prisoners of war also were treated as slaves. The whole family became slaves as a result. They remained in slavery until they could redeem themselves or by the involvement of others. [Ralph Pieris, *Sinhala Samaja Sanvidhanaya* (Colombo: Saman Press, 1964), 196-203].

⁷¹ VP-D II, 146-147.

⁷² VP-D I, 499.

⁷³ A. H. Mirando, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Dehiwela: Tisara, 1985), 54.

source material. However, it must be stated that it is hard for a Buddhist who believes in karma to understand the principles of Christian charity.

Books

Jacome Gonsalves mentions that when he arrived in the island, “literature in Sinhala for Catholics was not available, except the sign of the cross, litany and the Lord’s Prayer”.⁷⁴ He is credited with 22 books in Sinhala, 15 in Tamil, four in Portuguese and one in Dutch.⁷⁵ Although he was a foreigner, rather than translating or imitating Christian works of the West, he presented original works to suit the cultural traits of the country. His writings were not translations, but creative writings in the local languages. He had to find appropriate correct words to express Christian ideas in Sinhala. Edmund Peiris states that “if the excellence of a literature is judged by its quality of endurance, then Fr. Gonsalves’ literary works must rank high indeed”.⁷⁶

Gonsalves’ audience was not limited to the reading public. His writings were among the most powerful devices. Sinhala Buddhist vocabulary could not be expected to express clearly the Christian God or the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He set the style for Christian writers who followed him. Godakumbura states that “his importance lies in the fact that he used the vehicle of Sinhalese language to convey ideas which were foreign to Sinhalese classics”.⁷⁷ His dramas, composition of songs, hymns, and carols, helped to attract the non-Christian as well as

⁷⁴ VP-D II, 342-356; S. G. Perera, *Life of Fr. Jacome Goncalvez*, 94-114; W. L. A. Don Peter, *Gonsalves Pathavali* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1950).

⁷⁵ Perera, *The Oratorian Mission in Ceylon*, 250.

⁷⁶ Peiris, Edmund, *Studies; Historical & Cultural* (Colombo: Catholic Press), 70.

⁷⁷ C. E. Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature* (Colombo: Apothecaries, 1955), 346.

Christians. The *Dukprapti Prasangaya* attracts large crowds even today.

Sinhala

The most admired Sinhala prose work of Jacome Gonsalves is *Deva Veda Puranaya*. It is a compendium of sacred history with stories from the Bible. His masterpiece in poetry is *Veda-kavya*, which is a splendid attempt at a synthesis between Christian themes and Sinhala poetic diction. It is a poetic work of 528 verses. In it he has acknowledged the influence of Sinhala books such as the *Prakumbasirita*, the *Guttilla Kavya*, the *Kusa Jataka*, and the *Saelalihini Sandesaya*. In this poem he follows the pattern found in the *Budugunalankaraya* where King Bimbisara invites the Buddha to the city of Visala where the roads were very well adorned.⁷⁸ Gonsalves has used a similar description of presenting Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem.⁷⁹ There are many verses of the *Budugunalankaraya* used by Gonsalves at times substituting the 'Budun' with 'Jesu'. In this poem he uses the metre, tune, and the arrangement of words of the *Budugunalankaraya*.⁸⁰ The Archangel Gabriel's presence before God is explained in the manner similar to that of a person taking his position before the King of Kandy.⁸¹ Gonsalves tries to present the characters described in the biblical account in a familiar pattern found in Sri Lanka⁸². In the *Pasan-pota* of Gonsalves the mournful emotions of Mary evoke compassion for a grieving mother in Sri Lanka.

Similarly he uses stories and characters of Hindu and Buddhist mythology to give a familiar indigenous expression to Christian stories. He uses them to create an inspirational Christian imagery for the Sinhala reader. In one place he describes Jesus, the Son of

⁷⁸ *Budubana Pratiyaaksaya* 1932, 31.

⁷⁹ Mat. 21:2-9; *Budugunalanakara*, v. 480.

⁸⁰ Fernandopulle, op. cit.,81

⁸¹ *Veda-kavyaed. By Sunil Ariyaratne* (Colombo: Govt. Press, 1993), 209.

⁸² *Ibid.* 388

God, seated enthroned in Heaven like the god Sakra sitting in his palace in Tautisa heaven. The concluding hymns were composed in the *Jayamangala-gatha* metre.⁸³ In his *Agnana-ausadaya* he refers to many Hindu mythological references to gods. He also uses the Hindu cosmological views to elucidate his views of Christianity.⁸⁴ He mentions many beliefs such as the 'hundred and thirty six hells' to evoke fear of unbelief. He used Buddhist and Hindu mythological allusions which were familiar to the people of Sri Lanka. Gonsalves used the local Sri Lankan literary and poetic heritage in a creative manner to present the Christian faith to the local people. Even in the arrangement of words he has been successful in communicating the Gospel effectively to his readers.⁸⁵

Tamil Writings

Gonsalves produced a large volume of Tamil Christian literature as well. Many of the themes were also covered under his writings in Sinhala. As a single author he is regarded as the scholar who produced the largest number of Tamil Christian writings in this period.⁸⁶ His *Kristiyani Alayam* is supposed to be the oldest Tamil prayer book in Sri Lanka. The most popular Tamil work of Jacome Gonsalves is *Viyakula Pirasangam* which contains soul-stirring sermons on the Passion of Christ. He also produced some polemical works such as *Nava Tarkam* (1732) and *Nalu Vedam*, refuting the teachings of non-Catholic religions.⁸⁷ *Viyakula*

⁸³ *Jayamangala-gatha* comprises 8 stanzas. The Buddha is mentioned 8 times in these stanzas of blessing. It is not a part of the Buddhist canonical writings.

⁸⁴ *Agnana-ausadaya* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1961) 11.

⁸⁵ Fernandopulle, op. cit. 105; I. S. Weerakkody, *A Study of the Traditional Lenten Pasan Singing*, paper presented at the International Research Conference on Christian Studies, 4-5 July 2015, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya.

⁸⁶ UPHSL, 1995:481.

⁸⁷ Edmund Pieris. "Tamil Catholic Literature in Ceylon." *Tamil Culture*, 2:237ff; W. L. A. Don Peter, *Star in the East* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1995).

Pirasangam (1730) is on the sermons of Christ. His *Devavedapurnam* (1725) was a publication containing a collection of information about the history of Christianity, doctrines of the Church of Rome, and repudiation of heretical beliefs. *Suvisesha-
viritturai* (1728) is an exposition of the gospels.

He uses Tamil words to add rhyme in his poetic writings. In the *Veda-kavya* he uses Tamil words without any modification. There are many Tamil loan words in his Sinhala writings. This way he has enriched the Sinhala Christian language and these words have become naturalized Sinhala words. He served in bilingual communities in the coastal towns in Sri Lanka; therefore these words were easily understood by the people.

Evaluation of his literature

Sinhala and Tamil Catholics in Sri Lanka owe a good part of their Christian vocabulary to Jacome Gonsalves. He evolved a language and style to express Christian ideas and ideals to suit both the learned and the commoner. It was Jacome Gonsalves who wrote popular prayers like The Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary in Sinhala and Tamil. These are still in use in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. It was Jacome Gonsalves who introduced *pasan*, a form of plaintive chants still sung during the season of Lent. He embodied them in a book called *Pasan-pota* or the Book of Dirges.⁸⁸ The Tamil counterpart of *pasan* known as *oppari* was also composed by Jacome Gonsalves. They contain pathos said to be seldom found in prose or verse in any language.

Music

Gonsalves was not only the originator of indigenous Catholic literature but also church music. He is regarded as the father of Sinhala Catholic music.⁸⁹ It is reported that Gonsalves had learnt

⁸⁸ *Pasan Pota*, ed. By Sunil Ariyarante (Colombo: Govt. Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ Oswald Gomis, 'Indigenizing the Church in Sri Lanka', *Tribute: Missionary Sons of the Soil* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1990), 27.

to play the violin, organ, and some Indian musical instruments.⁹⁰ He was familiar with Western music. His writings show that he was able to appreciate and enjoy the local music and the folklore of Sri Lanka. On the advice of Vaz he adopted traditional local music and methods of singing for Christian worship. This was attractive to the Buddhist population as Buddhism did not have a tradition of religious music. Singing by a choir was unknown.

His *Veda-kavya*, *Mangala-gitaya*, *Yagna-bhakti-abhyasaya*, *Vandana-karmasthanaya*, *Atama-raksanaya*, and *Pasan-pora* are his compilations in verse. It is said that he used to select a cluster of Christian houses and sing hymns seated under the shade of a tree while playing a *rabana*.⁹¹ The Buddhists had chanting of *pirit* and *gatha*. It was found to be useful to convey Catholic religion to the Sinhalese who were used to it in their Buddhist worship. Chanting was suitable in a period where there were no books. Chants could be memorized. Some of his books were meant to be chanted. In fact *Suvisesa Visarjanaya*, which contains the gospels for Sundays and feast days, was chanted by an *annavi* during Mass in the absence of the priest.⁹²

Sinhala and Tamil hymns composed by him were set to Carnatic ragas, Kandyen *vannam*⁹³ and folk music. His work *Mangala geetaya* was akin to a 'Canticle for Festivals'. It contained hymns set to folk music found in *seth kavi*, *pael kavi* and *goyam kavi* of the local setting. There were also hymns composed in the *Jayamangala* metre. These hymns were sung on feast days in

⁹⁰ S. Sudarshie, *Sinhala Grantadarsahaya* (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1931), 136.

⁹¹ *Rabana* is a one-sided drum. It is played with the hands. The bodies of these drums are made by carving the trunk of a tree. The skin usually used is that of a goat.

⁹² Don Peter, *Studies in Ceylon Church History*, 55.

⁹³ *Vannam* are songs in the Kandyen period which accompany dances. The word *vannam* is derived from the Sinhala word *varnana* meaning praise.

churches to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. His *Ananda kallippuwa* was a poem sung in *vannam* style.

It was Jacome Gonsalves who evolved a chanting style for Catholic prayers. Even today his prayers like *Kayaduskara-prarthanava* are chanted, and move the faithful to the depths of their soul with devotion. Gonsalves also wrote a series of sermons similar to the Buddhist *Pin Anumodanava* (transfer of merit) which Catholics could chant at funerals to communicate merit to the dead. The compositions of Passion chants have been in use in the Catholic Church ever since. He amalgamated the Buddhist chant style with chants he had learned in Goa to suit the local situation.⁹⁴ The *Dukprapti Prasangaya* contains nine sermons and chants presented as dramatic scenes composed for chanting to a mournful tune. According to Fernandopulle it is a composition taken from the paschal event narrated in the four gospels. At the end of each performance the main teachings of the particular sermon are given in summary in the form of a prayer. The intention was to move the heart of the spectators.⁹⁵

The chanting of mournful songs of *pasan* became a traditional practice at funerals during the time of Gonsalves. Thereafter it became a common practice not only among Catholics but also among Buddhists who used the *Vessantara-jataka* for the same purpose in Catholic areas of the country.⁹⁶ Even his *Deva Niti Visarjanaya* is intended to be chanted rather than read to be appreciated. It is usually chanted in homes for about a week after bereavement.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Candappa, *Don Peter Felicitation Volume* (Colombo: Lanka Printing Co. 1983) 91.

⁹⁵ Fernandopulle *Study of the Sinhala Works*. Passim.

⁹⁶ D. E. Hettiaratchi (ed.), *Vesaturuda Sanne* (Colombo: Lakehouse, 1950), 25.

⁹⁷ Fernandopulle, *Study of the Sinhala Works*, 244.

Gonsalves has also used the literature and music used in the devil-dancing ceremonies in his chanting accompanied by a variety of musical instruments. His *Ananda-kalippuwa*, used by teachers of traditional folkdance, has borrowed many expressions and styles of singing from the *Kohomba Kankariya* of the local people.⁹⁸ One can notice close similarities in words and rhymes in these two works.

He also composed a number of prayers and litanies to be chanted in worship. They were composed to be chanted according to the local melodies. This helped the Christian church to merge with local customs and be less alien.

In his musical compositions one can notice his competency in many languages. While using the classical and colloquial Sinhala words he adds Sanskrit words to create respect and engender appropriate delivery. Repetition of words creates a rhythm appropriate for dancing.

In his poetical and musical works, the influence of Goan Catholic music, South India Carnatic music, and local *vannam* and other folk music have been incorporated in an appropriate manner. The Tamil *oppari* (lamentations sung by women at funeral homes) have been specially influenced by the lamentations sung on Good Friday.⁹⁹

Carols

While *pasan*-singing is mostly for sorrowful periods such as Good Friday, the Catholics in Sri Lanka today follow the *pasan* tradition established by Jacome Gonsalves, transmitted from one generation to another orally over three centuries. Carol singing is for a different purpose. A carol is a festive song, generally

⁹⁸ Fernandopulle, *Study of the Sinhala Works*, 327.

⁹⁹ K. Sivathamby, *Ellathil Tamil Elakkiam* (Madras: New Central Book House, 1987), 174; Fernandopulle *Study of the Sinhala Works*, 179.

religious. It was not essentially connected with church worship. Carol singing could accompany a dance or popular singing. The *Mangala-gitaya* composed in 1730 by Gonsalves can be regarded as the first Sinhala carol. Its tune displays local characteristics.¹⁰⁰ He employed local folk music prevalent among the fishing community in Sri Lanka together with Carnatic melodies in his carol songs.¹⁰¹ Following the tradition of *vannam* singing Gonsalves' carols have been sung accompanied by drums and local musical instruments. The last verses of the *Mangala-gitaya* are in the *jayamangala* metre.¹⁰² It was a popular method for the solicitation of blessings.

*Cantaru*¹⁰³ songs are a type of Sinhala Christian hymn which is used in churches for religious worship. The popularity of Gonsalves' music is the reason for E. R. Sarachchandra using the tunes and at times the words of *Mangala-gitaya* in his *Manamé* drama. Similarly there are other writers who have adopted the terminology and tunes from Gonsalves for their writings.

Drama

Drama has been a valuable tool which has been used throughout church history to tell the Christian message of salvation. A non-Christian would be much more willing to view a dramatic presentation than simply to hear a sermon. This has been one of the most fruitful forms of evangelism of Roman Catholics of this period. In addition, drama provided an opportunity for laity to become involved in the activities of the church closely.

Sinhala culture did not encourage literary drama because such activities are prohibited in the eight precepts observed by Buddhist monks as well as those who take special religious vows for a short period. Sinhala culture regarded drama as morally

¹⁰⁰ Fernandopulle, *Study of the Sinhala Works*, 188.

¹⁰¹ Peiris, *Sinhalese Christian Literature*, 26.

¹⁰² Stanzas of Victory and Blessing

¹⁰³ Sinhala word derived from the Portuguese.

unacceptable.¹⁰⁴ The seventh precept says: “I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics.” Since the precept is to give up singing and dancing, the playing of musical instruments and the watching of entertainments, there was no room for the sanction of Buddhist society for ‘entertainments’, as they were regarded as stumbling-blocks to that which is wholesome. There was an encouragement to dancing and song in the royal court since the advent of the Nayakkar dynasty in the eighteenth century. It was however limited to the upper echelons of society. Even in the case of dancing practised for exorcism ceremonies, the skill was confined to the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. Therefore in the Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms, the nobility and the clergy that produced art in other cultures did not usually get involved in dancing, music, and other entertainments.

In this atmosphere, the music, dance, and other entertainment forms introduced by Gonsalves and other Oratorians received popular attention. Hence it became a valuable evangelistic tool. There is no indication of any drama acted in the royal courts or in circles of educated laity.¹⁰⁵ Therefore Gonsalves’ contribution in this respect can be regarded as an important development in Sinhala drama.

Dramatic performance of episodes from the Bible and the characters of saints have contributed to the entertainment and education of the common man about the virtues of Christianity and the mystery of salvation since the Middle Ages in Europe. They are compositions in poetry or prose acted upon a stage. Passion plays provide viewers with a popular interpretation of biblical events. They represent the course of salvation history

¹⁰⁴ Fernandopulle, *Study of the Sinhala Works*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ E. R. Sarachchandra, *The Sinhalese Folk Play and the Modern Stage* (Colombo: Lakehouse, 1953), 16; Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature* (Colombo: Lakehouse, 1955), 303.

from the Fall to the Last Judgment. Since the early sixteenth century religious drama was used as a medium of catechetical instruction in Goa. This was very useful to impart the knowledge of Bible stories to adults who were illiterate. During the Portuguese period there is evidence of theatrical activity in Sri Lanka in Tamil and Sinhala.¹⁰⁶ The Passion plays of Gonsalves renewed the dramatic tradition introduced to Sri Lanka in the Portuguese period.¹⁰⁷ His drama was influenced by biblical and hagiographical plays whose primary function was the depiction of Christian salvation. Soteriological and Christological allegories used by Gonsalves were influenced by the 'sacred theatre' of the era.

The influence of Jacome Gonsalves is seen in the public performance of *nadagam*, the earliest form of recognised drama in Sri Lanka. Some of the themes for Catholic *nadagams* were drawn from the works of Jacome Gonsalves. His compositions are also found in lyrics and songs of *nadagam*. His *Dukprapti Prasangaya*, *Pasanpota*, and *Mangala Gitaya* were important in dramatic presentations. These plays were often performed as street drama. Although street dramas remained religious they were not liturgical. All dramas staged by Gonsalves were performed in public. The language used was rich with local idiom while it incorporated music, dance. The characters also had distinct costumes. His dramatic performances contributed to the development of Sinhala theatre in the next two centuries.

Puppet shows

Using puppetry in teaching has been one of the most enjoyable forms of learning for people of all ages. Gonsalves was familiar

¹⁰⁶ M. H. Gunatilaka, "Christian Contribution to Early Sinhala Theatre," in *Don Peter Felicitation Volume*, ed., E. C. T. Candappa and M. S. S. Fernandopulle (Colombo: Don Peter Felicitation Committee, 1984), 32.

¹⁰⁷ Peiris, Edmond. *Sinhalese Christian Literature of the XVII and XVIII centuries*. (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1943).

with the use of dramatic use of puppetry by the Jesuits in Goa. Puppet shows were significant in the two main Christian festivals: Christmas and Easter. At Christmas, presentations the crib played an important part. Puppet figures were used to show the arrival of the shepherds and the kings to pay their homage to the infant Jesus.¹⁰⁸ There are reports of the Oratorians using images and puppets of biblical personages for the passion plays in Kandy and Vanny during Lent of 1706.¹⁰⁹ The practice continued till the end of the eighteenth century. Puppets became popular for entertaining children and adults alike.

In the Sinhala Buddhist tradition, human actors were not willing to play the part of a sacred personage such as Buddha or Christ. Honouring this custom, they used images and puppets to represent the characters. They allowed spectators to escape into an imaginary world.

Gonsalves made other visual representations for the Passion during Holy Week. In Holy Week he used pictorial dramatizations of the passion of Jesus. During the Lent period there was one dramatic performance each week. Lent culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday and the resurrection on Easter Day.¹¹⁰ Puppeteers also performed versions of popular stage plays, stories of saints and biblical events and figures. Puppetry was one of the most inexpensive aids of evangelism used by Gonsalves.

Local context

During this period, while teaching and preaching all over the country, he also set about a synthesis between Christian ideas and ideals and indigenous cultural patterns. In his *Devaveda-Puranya* Gonsalves presents the Garden of Eden where there is sandalwood, other kinds of local fragrant trees, mango, jak, and

¹⁰⁸ Fernandopulle, *Study of Sinhala Works*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Perera, *Gonçalvez*, 57 and 185.

¹¹⁰ Fernandopulle, *Study of Sinhala Works*, 129.

banana trees. Birds, fruits, and flowers are also local. He also uses phrases and words from local fairy-tales and folk tales about gods.

His language proficiency gave him ample opportunities to meet people of various social classes and races in the island. He became familiar with the folklore of the country. One may even notice words which were confined to rural villagers. Repetition of words found in the local usage has been used by an effective technique to commit Catholic teachings to memory. His *Dukprapti Prasangaya* uses this with great finesse.

The spirit of Sinhalese literary activity had declined after the end of the Kotte era. Due to the belligerent activity in the country after the arrival of the Portuguese, very little literary activity was seen in the early years of the Kandyan kingdom. The influence of the Tamil and Portuguese languages is seen in the Sinhala writings of Gonsalves. However, his literary works created a new trend because his writings were not inspired by Buddhism. On the other hand, the literary trend created by him eventually led to the revival of Sinhala literature in Kandy during the period of the last Nayakkar kings and in the Matara era of Sinhala literature in the low country.

The literature produced by him is unique to the Sinhala language. It is stated that nothing has been composed in Sinhala which has equal knowledge of and feeling for Christianity.¹¹¹ His ministrations to the Catholics in many parts of Sri Lanka made him familiar with the unique features of the language used by them. He created works of high-quality Christian literature responding to the need of the era. He shaped a Sinhala language suitable to express Catholicism in Sinhala. He added new words to express

¹¹¹ Fernandopulle, *Study of Sinhala Works*, 232; M. H. Gunathilake, කිතුනු ජනවත්තනා නාටියේ පුර්වගීඨි ආභාසය හා ගරු ජාකුමේ ගෞරවයෙන් පියතුමා සතු වූ හෙළ උරුමය (Colombo: Godage, 2014).

Catholic concepts clearly and correctly. There has not since been any writer in Sinhala who composed such a variety of literary works dealing with numerous themes.

Polemical works

During most of his period of stay in Kandy Gonsalves' relationship with Buddhists in the city was cordial. He learnt the Sinhala language from Buddhist monks. King Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687-1707) and Narendrasinha (1707-1739) allowed Catholics to construct a church in Bogambara, conduct religious worship services, and hold processions in the kingdom. These kings protected the Catholic priests from the Dutch persecution. Narendrasinha provided candles for the church services in Kandy. He ordered his courtiers and subjects to address the priests as *unnanse* – a title of honour given to the nobility of the kingdom.¹¹² The first Kandyan king of the Nayakkar dynasty, Vijaya Rajasingha (1739-1747), donated an ivory statue of the Virgin to Bolavatta Church. There were rumours in the city of Kandy that the Nayakkars were currying favour with Roman Catholic priests. This association between two foreign groups, the Nayakkars and the Catholic priests, provoked suspicion among nobles and the Sangha, causing King Vijaya Rajasingha to delink his connections with the Oratorians. Gonsalves' polemical writings aggravated already soured ill-feeling among his opponents.¹¹³

Gonsalves had a good knowledge of other religions. His knowledge of Buddhism was excellent because of his usage of Sinhala writings and the close association with Buddhist monks. Among his Sinhala polemical writings are *Bhedakarayange Tarkaya*, *Matara Pratyaksaya*, *Budu-mula*, *Buddha-bana-pratyaksaya* and *Agnana-ausadaya* (1740). Among his Tamil writings *Nava Tarkam* contrasts Catholicism with Calvinism. *Kadvul Nirnayam* was critical of Hinduism. *Muslaman Vedam*

¹¹² VP-D II, 471; VP-D III, 1985:24.

¹¹³ UPHSL 1995:208.

discusses Islam with a refutation of its errors. *Nalu Vedam* discussed the non-Roman Catholic faiths in Sri Lanka: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Calvinism.

Hostility

Gonsalves had not been diplomatic in the articulation of arguments regarding other faiths, especially regarding Buddhism, in his polemical writings. Some of his writings caused problems to him and his Oratorian colleagues in the kingdom of Kandy. His *Matara Pratyaksaya* was critical of Buddhist teachings. *Agnana-usadaya* discussed various issues of different faiths and contradicted them in the conclusions. The *Budu-mula* and *Matara Pratyaksaya* are also polemical writing against Buddhism. In the *Budu-mula* he was critical of popular Buddhist practices such as *deva* worship. The appearance of these books caused considerable damage to the personal credibility of Gonsalves among the Buddhist nobility in Kandy and eventually that of the king. Some modern editors of these writing have been embarrassed by them; therefore they have omitted some parts of these controversial books.¹¹⁴

The kings of Kandy were in principle tolerant of the Catholic missionaries. In 1739 the last king of the Sinhala dynasty died. The next king was a Nayakkar from South India.¹¹⁵ In due course the attitude of the Kandyan court towards the Catholics became unfriendly. From the very beginning there was a substantial faction who had viewed with disfavour their kings' generosity of spirit towards the Catholic priests. The revival of Buddhism in Kandy in this period offered popularity to this group. Fire was

¹¹⁴ Don Peter, *Studies in Ceylon Church History*, 17.

¹¹⁵ The practice of marrying princesses from the royal house of Madurai took place as the Kandyan kings insisted on spouses from the Ksatriya extraction to grace their coronation as well as to produce successors acceptable to the subjects (K. I. Koppedrayar, *Contacts Between Cultures: South Asia*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Pr., 1993), 376.

added to their ill feelings by the anti-Buddhist polemical works circulated in Kandy and written by Gonsalves. The new king, Sri Vijaya Rajasingha (1739-47), was from a South Indian Nayakkar family. Therefore he was in a somewhat insecure position on account of his alien origin. At the beginning he was not comfortable on the throne as there was a group of courtiers who looked upon the new dynasty with disfavour.

In the meantime the Dutch authorities also infused fear in Kandy about the bona fides of the Catholic priests. In 1729 the Dutch Governor revived anti-Catholic activities in the Dutch territory and tried to implement penal laws against the Catholics. In the course of this persecution he sent an envoy to the King of Kandy to persuade him to expel the Catholic priests in the kingdom. The governor's letter indicated that a powerful Portuguese fleet was being prepared to re-conquer the country.¹¹⁶ In fact the king gave orders to arrest the missionaries, but on the plea of Gonsalves the order was repealed.

However, within a short time the deliberations against Gonsalves regarding the anti-Buddhist publications began. Gonsalves was arrested at his church at Bolavatta on the orders of the king and brought before the royal tribunal as a criminal. Gonsalves' polemical works affected his relationships with the people of other faiths in the country. K. M. de Silva, condemning Gonsalves, states: "His anti-Buddhist polemics was a curious way, this, of repaying the hospitality and tolerance of the Kandyans."¹¹⁷ Gonsalves was falsely accused of hiding the treasure of Pedro de Gaskon, whom the king had executed. The king ordered his ministers to interrogate Gonsalves. He was respectful and gentle throughout the interrogations. Although the evidence was found to be false, the king ordered him to be tortured and beheaded.

¹¹⁶ VP-D II, 1983:344.

¹¹⁷ K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 198.

The best witness in a hostile situation like this is good behaviour and thoughtful words. He wanted to win the people, not the argument. Therefore when Gonsalves welcomed with joy the opportunity for martyrdom, the king was moved and ordered his release. According to Buddhist sources the king ordered the expulsion of the Catholic priests from his kingdom and the demolition of Catholic places of worship.¹¹⁸ Those orders were not rigidly carried out and Catholic priests could remain in the Kandyan Kingdom for a few more years. Because of their opposition the Catholics were compelled to change the site of their headquarters from Kandy to Bolavatta.¹¹⁹ Five years after the death of Gonsalves the Oratorian priests were expelled from the Kingdom of Kandy.

Evaluation

No priest in Sri Lanka has played such a singularly significant role in the history of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. His wisdom in administration, his intense labours, the benefits resulting to the church from his initial reputation in the court of Kandy, his great humility and saintliness, were remarkable. It is only after his contribution to the Sinhala Catholic literature that scholars paid attention to the Catholic contribution to the enrichment of Sinhala literature. W. L. A. Don Peter calls him the 'Buddhaghosa of Lanka's Catholic Church' as "something similar to Buddhaghosa's outstanding literary contribution to Buddhism was done for Catholicism in Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century" by Gonsalves.¹²⁰ At the same time, his contribution to Tamil Catholic literature is equally important. A large number of converts have been made through his writing. Even the books

¹¹⁸ Mirando 1985:54.

¹¹⁹ Robrecht Boudens, *The Catholic Church in Ceylon Under Dutch Rule* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1957), 99-100.

¹²⁰ W. L. A. Don Peter, *Historical Gleanings* (Colombo: Arnold International Printing House, 1992), 95-101. J. Clement Vaz, *Profiles of Eminent Goans, Past and Present* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1997), 113-116.

that caused him great pain and harm such as *Agnana-ausadaya*, *Matara Pratyaksaya*, and *Budu-mula*, have been the reason for the conversion of over thousands. The numbers who were attracted to the faith through his books in his lifetime and after cannot be correctly ascertained. In 1740 the Dutch Governor van Imhoff in his report to his successor states that “Catholic numbers are multiplied under persecution”. Tennent has noted that they had a church in every district from Jaffna to Colombo and in 1734 they extended their operations even to the southern province.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

According to S. G. Perera: “Father Vaz planted and Father Gonsalves watered the vineyard of Ceylon and God gave it increase. It is these two priests more than to any other before or since, that the modern church in Ceylon owes its existence, its numbers, its traditions and its literature.”¹²² He enriched the Sinhala language to present scriptural and liturgical language and to enable it to express specific doctrines and moral codes as well as peculiar cultural practices of Catholicism.¹²³ He has made the Catholic expression relevant to Sri Lanka by adaptation and indigenization of its teachings. In this way he contributed to the enhancement of the Sinhala language. The fact that Gonsalves was proficient in the many Western and Eastern languages enabled him to use words and expressions from different languages. This intermixture of various linguistic traditions incorporated into Gonsalves’ writings has enriched the Sinhala language. Up to this time the traditional languages which augmented the Sinhala language were Pali, Sanskrit and Tamil. Gonsalves enlarged the Sinhala vocabulary by deriving influence from these languages he knew.

¹²¹ J. Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998), 58.

¹²² S. G. Perera, *Historical Sketches* (Colombo: Catholic Book Depot), 110.

¹²³ Fernandopulle, 1999:248.

Gonsalves' contribution to the Sinhala language can be regarded as an important factor in the process of indigenization of Christianity in Sri Lanka. His incorporation of the spoken language of the period was a great help to the later missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, who embarked on Christian ministry in Sri Lanka. His use of Buddhist terminology to explain Christian concepts is remarkable as it was the best way to speak to the ordinary man of a new religious faith.¹²⁴ As Fernandopulle indicates: "The literary style or polemical works may not devalue the works of Gonsalves; rather they reflect a positive and remarkable contribution of the author to the Sinhala literature, language, culture and especially towards the indigenization of Christianity in Sri Lanka."¹²⁵ He presented Catholic rituals and practices in terms of indigenous thought. He made an attempt to bring about a synthesis between Christian concepts and indigenous culture within the bounds permitted by Catholic doctrine. He made Catholic religious thought and practice intermingle with the native culture in Sri Lanka to give the Church in Sri Lanka a distinct but indigenous character.

His Main Writings

Books in Sinhala

The names of these books may differ in different sources because of the scribal errors in the process of copying.

1. *Kristiyani Palliya* (Christian Church) 1715
2. *Deva Veda Puranaya* (Sacred History) – two volumes – 1725
3. *Satya Updesa* (True counsel – Summary of Sacred History) n. d.
4. *Dukprapti Prasangaya* (Passion of Christ)
5. *Suvisesha Visanduma* (Gospel Solution) (Exposition of gospels for Sundays and Feast days) 1730
6. *Dhammaudyanyaya* (Garden of Virtues) 1736

¹²⁴ Don Peter 1963:7; *Star in the East* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1995).

¹²⁵ Fernandopulle, 1999:300.

7. *Deda Pratiharaya* (Itinerary of Miracles)
8. *Sucruta Darpanaya* (Mirror of Virtues) n. d.
9. *Deva Niti Visarjanaya* (Judgement of God) 1720
10. *Agnana Ausadaya* (Blindness of Pagans) 1715
11. *Matara Pratyaksaya* (Enlightenment of the Kingdom of Matara) 1733
12. *Budumula* (Refutation of the Doctrine of Buddha) 1737
13. *Budakaranage Tarkaya* (Gag for the Mouth of Heretics) 1720
14. *Pratiharyavaliya* (Itinerary of Miracles)
15. *Veda Kavya* (Poetical Work from the Creation of the World to the Resurrection of Christ) 1725
16. *Mangala Gitaya* (Various Hymns for all the Feasts of Christ, Our Lady, the Apostle) 1730
17. *Dictionary of Sinhala–Portuguese* 1730
18. *Dictionary of Portuguese–Sinhala* 1720
19. *Dictionary of Portuguese, Tamil, and Sinhala* 1735
20. *Gnanagnaya* (Medicine for Wisdom) 1738

Books in Tamil

1. *Kristiyana Alayam* (Christian School) 1715?
2. *Deva Arul Veda Purana* (Sacred History) 1725
3. Summary of *Deva Arul Veda Purana* 1736
4. *Suvisesa Viritturai* (Exposition of gospels for Sundays and Feast Days) 1728
5. *Viyakula Pirasangam* (Sermon of the Passion of Christ) 1730
6. *Tarama Uttiyanam* (Lives of Saints) 1736
7. *Aputa Varalaru* (Itinerary of Miracles) 1734
8. *Gaga Unarcci* (Christian Awakener) 1734
9. *Sukirta Tarpanam* (Mirror of Virtues) 1736
10. *Vattiyarum Kadiyanavamum Tarkkam* (Controversy against the Reformer in Dialogue) 1736
11. *Nava Tarkam* (New Arguments) 1732
12. *Musalman Vedam* (The Origin and Refutation of the Nefarious Mahometan Religion) 1734
13. *Kadavul Nirnayam* (Refutation against Paganism) 1738
14. *Nalu Vedam* (Detailed Refutation of Four Religions: Paganism, Buddhism, Islam, and Calvinism) 1738

15. Dictionary of Selected Words 1731

Books in Portuguese

1. *Mencitculo dos Evangelhos* (Commentary on the Gospels) 1734
2. *Aliviaxo da Conscienceia na Missao* (Comfort of Conscience in the Mission) 1734
3. *Demonstracao da Igreja Catholic por Sete Notas* (Proof of the Catholic Church by Means of Seven Notes) 1720
4. *Igreja Catholica e Reformada* (The Catholic Church and the Reformed) 1730
5. *Chronica Sagrada* (Sacred History) ~ not complete
6. *Espelho de Virtudes* (Mirror of Virtues)

Books in Dutch

1. *Rooms-katholieke Kerk en Hervormde* (The Catholic Church and the Reformed) n. d.

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