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Bill T. Arnold

Biblical Perspectives on Torture: War Crimes, the Limits of Retaliation, and the Roman Cross

Our concept of “torture” has a narrow and generally accepted definition as the “infliction of severe bodily pain, as punishment or a means of persuasion.” The Bible has no exact equivalent, and if we limit our discussion to this definition, we might too quickly conclude the Bible has little if anything to say directly about torture. This is so because the Bible’s lexical specifics have broader connotations. Words translated “oppress” or “torment” have semantic domains close to our meaning of “torture,” but not precisely equivalent. Thus the standard Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are more likely to have entries on “crime and punishment” than “torture,” and these have quite different themes to cover. On the other hand, if we define “torture” as the use of excessive physical or mental pain against one’s enemy combatant or against innocent victims of armed conflict—what we might today call “war crimes”—then the Bible has plenty to say about this topic. Although the Old Testament does not contain large numbers of texts for us to consider, it has important passages in Deuteronomy and Amos pertinent to this theme, as well as scattered texts in the legal corpora. The New Testament, of course, presents the most vivid symbol of torture in human history in the form of the Roman cross.

The Old Testament contains passages that reflect the horrors of wartime torture, especially by prohibiting Israel from engaging in such inhumane acts or in condemning such actions in Israel’s neighbors. The most important of these texts comes from the book of Deuteronomy, which establishes (1) rules for conducting the war of conquest, when Israel entered the Promised Land and defeated the seven nations (sometimes six are listed) inhabiting the land (Deut 7:1-26), as well as (2) rules for ordinary warfare conducted after the settlement against enemies outside the Promised Land (Deut 20:1-20; 21:10-14, and cf. also 23:9-14; 24:5). With regard to the war of conquest, the famously difficult concept of “devotion to destruction” (herem) seems impossible to interpret for today’s readers. Such a ban prohibiting personal consumption
or the taking of plunder is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East, but in Israel it applies only to the war of conquest. When the Promised Land becomes Israel’s, its inhabitants are devoted to Yahweh as a sacrifice in order to make the land itself holy and suitable for Yahweh’s presence. We cannot address the admittedly perplexing questions raised by this feature of the Old Testament in this brief paper. It is enough to observe that the command and practice of exercising such a ban of destruction is limited to Israel’s wars of conquest. It is the rules for ordinary warfare that hold promise for insight into our topic, to which we now turn.

The paradigmatic passages prescribing how Israel is to view warfare generally, Deut 20:1-20 and 21:10-14, occur in a series of legal texts (Deut 12-26). Their placement here aligns them with the Sixth Commandment, the prohibition of murder, and thus they generally take up the topic of limitations on the taking of human life and shedding of innocent blood. The debate between pacifism or “non-violence” versus just war or “justifiable warfare” theory is another topic beyond the scope of this paper, so it is enough at this juncture to observe that Deuteronomy makes the assumption that Israel, once settled in the Promised Land, will live in a world in which war against external enemies is inevitable. And so Deut 20:1-20 and 21:10-14 lay down strict guidelines for the conduct of warfare.

Deuteronomy is first aware that wartime becomes an occasion for events or experiences that simply ought not to be so. Terror or panic should not become the prevailing principle for Israeliite warriors, even before a superior military force, because Yahweh himself does battle for them (20:3-4). More specifically, the builder of a new house should not fail to dedicate it himself because he has been killed in battle (20:5), nor should the planter of a vineyard fail to enjoy its fruit because he has become a casualty of war (20:6). Equally tragic is the young man who fails to marry his fiancée because he has fallen in battle (20:7). We see from these guidelines that Israel’s principles for engaging the enemy in warfare are efforts to avoid whatever seems inhumane or unfair, in these cases, for Israeliite warriors. Similarly, the next paragraph lays down rules for besieging cities that are not numbered among the inhabitants of Canaan (20:10-15). While enemy peoples within the boundaries of the Promised Land are to be annihilated during the war of conquest, any city outside the boundaries are to be offered terms of peace prior to the conflict (20:10). If they accept the terms, they are spared although reduced to forced labor. Otherwise, all males are to be exterminated, while the women, children, livestock, and other possessions may be taken as booty. The law thus establishes a means for waging peace instead of war wherever possible, and then restricts the extent to which Israel can plunder its enemies.

The last paragraph of Deuteronomy 20 censures gratuitous destruction of trees, and especially protects the fruit trees of Israel’s enemies (20:19-20).
Fruit trees served a central feature in ancient life-support systems, taking many years to mature and requiring long-term care and cultivation. The rhetorical question – “Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?” – draws focus to the human tragedy when the area’s ecosystem is ruined, and therefore condemns the “scorched-earth policy” so frequent in warfare of all periods. Israel is not permitted to employ a military tactic that leaves behind a ruined ecosystem and deprives future inhabitants of the area of a viable life-support system.

A final concern of Deuteronomy’s laws of warfare is the humane treatment of captives (21:10-14). The passage assumes a scenario in which Yahweh has granted victory to Israel against an outside enemy. If an Israeliite soldier is attracted to a woman captured from the vanquished enemy, he is not only prohibited from raping her, as so often happens in warfare, but he must accord her proper rites of mourning for her losses, provide time for her to become fully integrated into Israeliite society and culture, and make her a full wife, equal in status to any other wives. Furthermore, she will be protected under the same rules of divorce that pertain to Israeliite wives. The central concern here is for the dignity of prisoners of war, and especially captured women.

In sum, the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy do not address criteria for going to war (ius ad bellum) but are exclusively devoted to proper conduct of the war (ius in bello). This does not mean Deuteronomy provides a precise manual of military rules, for we find nothing here of weaponry, field tactics, or overall stratagems. Instead, Deuteronomy’s military laws provide limitations on inhumanity in times of warfare. The book of Deuteronomy urges its readers to find “avenues of compassion, human concern, and care of the natural order in the midst of the death and destruction” endemic to war. As this may relate to the question of torture in our contemporary context, it may be said that Deuteronomy establishes a principle of restraint, including fairness and concern for the well-being of those who must conduct the war, protection of the environment, and civility for noncombatant captives. Taken together these laws “bespoke a humanitarian idealism that sought to hold in check military abandon,” including wanton destructiveness and cruelty.

Beyond the specific laws of war found in Deuteronomy, the Old Testament has other passages here and there that reveal a concern for compassion and humaneness in the conduct of war. Perhaps most striking in this regard is the list of war-crimes detailed in the condemnation of Israel’s neighbors in Amos 1-2. Other prophetic books contain oracles against the nations (cf. Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; and Ezek 25-32), but Amos’s are unique in several ways. Nowhere else does a prophetic book begin with the oracles against the nations, nor organize them around a recurring rhetorical formula so systematically as
Amos, nor use that formula to compare and contrast the sins of Judah and Israel with the other nations. It is doubtful whether these oracles were ever actually intended to be addressed to the nations in view, but instead their sins and punishments are intended to be lessons for the Israelite audience.

The crimes of the nations are war crimes and general atrocities against humanity. There was nothing so elaborate as the Geneva Convention in antiquity, nor even anything like the rules of chivalry of medieval warfare. Yet Amos assumes the right to appeal to principles of conduct that he believes all nations ought to accept. Where they fail to live up to the international common ethos, they become responsible for their own “transgressions” (peša', a particularly strong word for “sins”), we might say based on natural or general revelation. Thus, the Phoenicians, Philistines, Moabites, etc., are responsible for their war crimes, just as Israel and Judah are for their failure to maintain a just society, although the responsibility of other nations is more generally assumed rather than specifically related to the Torah of Yahweh. These crimes against humanity are not mentioned in regard to Judah and Israel, not because they were never guilty of them, but because they were held to a higher standard, a standard of law and revelation. The nations must answer for their sins, but Yahweh uses a different standard than that for Israel and Judah, who are responsible for Torah observance and the social welfare of all in their kingdoms. Thus, Amos 1-2 uses the rhetorical formula to compare and contrast the sins of the nations with those of Judah and Israel.

For our purposes in this brief survey, we limit our discussion to the crimes of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. These are condemned because they are guilty of crimes that may in general be described as unchecked militarism. In the specific crimes of Israel’s and Judah’s neighbors in Amos 1:3 – 2:3, this includes inhuman treatment of captives, exiling defeated populations, cruel treatment of innocent noncombatants, and unrestrained violence against one’s enemies.

1:3, Damascus “threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron”
1:6, Gaza “carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom”
1:9, Tyre “delivered entire communities over to Edom”
1:11, Edom “pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever”
1:13, Ammon “ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to enlarge their territory”
2:1, Moab “burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom”

The precise crime of the Arameans of Damascus against Israel’s holdings in Gilead is not entirely clear. Such sledges may have been low-hanging wagons
with teeth or spikes of flint or iron underneath for dragging across ears of harvested grain on a threshing floor, and some have assumed they were used in antiquity as a torturous method of executing POWs. However, there is no evidence from the ancient Near East of such use and it appears more likely that we have here a “metaphor for the savage conquest of a territory.”

Both Gaza and Tyre were guilty of exiling “entire communities,” most likely denoting the capturing and selling into captivity the populations of conquered towns or villages. Neo-Assyrian rulers, followed to a lesser extent by their Neo-Babylonian successors, routinely used the exile of populations, which were resettled and often pressed into slavery. Edom’s crime was a failure to restrain anger during wartime, yielding instead to wanton and merciless killing. Ammon’s atrocity is perhaps most frightening of all, in an attempt to wipe out the enemy’s future by killing pregnant women. Moab’s crime, that of desecrating a royal tomb, although sounding less severe, is perhaps more telling because it illustrates the point that these are general crimes against humanity, involving common decency that it was assumed all peoples should know. The violation of tombs was a dreaded sacrilege in antiquity, and graves were routinely protected by curses. The act of removing and burning bones would reflect a belief that doing so inflicted more harm on the dead than could be done to the perpetrator by the protective curse. “Such a risky act must have been motivated by intense vindictiveness.”

This table of war crimes reflects what we may assume were widely accepted forms of warfare, which the prophet could assume all would know—a sort of “international customary law” or “common ethos” of agreed upon conventions and accepted norms of conduct.

Beyond these proscriptions against inhumane acts of violence during wartime, Old Testament legal texts famously establish talionic punishments, including “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” and so on, continuing with hand, foot, burn, wound, and stripe (Exod 21:23-25; cf. also Lev 24:19-20, Deut 19:21). The practice was also an innovation in Old Babylonian law of the early second millennium BC, which almost certainly illustrates its origins in early semi-nomadic Amorite practices and suggests an historical link between Babylonian and Israelite law. Although the idea seems barbaric to readers today, the purpose of the lex talionis (“the law of retaliation”) was to establish limitations on vengeance and vindictive punishment. The idea was to match the punishment to the crime precisely, limiting vindictiveness and preventing unjust and cruel punishment. Jesus, of course, acknowledges and transcends the talionic principle in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:38-39; and cf. 7:12 and Luke 6:31) but in general, the Greco-Roman world of the first century was no improvement on it. This leads us to turn briefly to the New Testament for insight on this topic, in which we find few passages specifically devoted to “torture.” Instead we find at its theological core perhaps
the most famous symbol of cruel and tortuous punishment – the Roman cross, which transgresses well beyond the preventive protections of the Old Testament’s *lex talionis*. Death by crucifixion for a Rabbi guilty of teaching submission to the Roman Emperor but accused of insurrection is certainly an example of disproportionate punishment and demonstrates that the Israelite ideal of limited retaliation institutionalized in the talionic principle would have been an improvement over Roman practices.

The Roman cross is itself perhaps the ultimate symbol of the inhumanity of humans or the extent to which one human being can torture and maim another beyond all reasonable limits. We have archaeological evidence for crucifixion in the first century AD, which provides illuminating details of its procedures and excruciating results. We know that the practice has origins in the ancient Near East prior to the Romans, most crediting the Persians with inventing it as a mode of execution. If the Roman practice of cross-beam crucifixion is to be found in Persian execution by impalement, we even have reference to this practice in late biblical times (Ezra 6:11). Simple impalement on stakes was also a favored form of public execution used by the Assyrians, most famously illustrated by the Neo-Assyrian siege of Lachish in 701 BC, for which we have a graphic series of reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib showing POWs impaled on stakes near the city walls to demoralize the conquered foe, while other POWs were stripped and flayed (for the biblical account, see 2 Kgs 18:13-17; 2 Chr 32:9; Jer 34:7). So we conclude that while the practice has its origins in the early first millennium BC, the Roman innovators were dissatisfied with how quickly the victims died and presumably wanted a way to prolong the suffering and the effect of the public spectacle. Thus they devised the now familiar method of affixing the victim on the stake, supported by the cross-beam, and prolonging the agony with as much pain and ignominy as possible, as an example of what happens to those who oppose Roman might. The Roman cross has become the ultimate symbol of the world’s ability to torture, and serves as a reminder of Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman institutional torture. But significantly, the New Testament’s portrait of that same cross has transformed this cruelest form of torture, by the grace of God, into a symbol of love and grace for millions of believers around the globe and through the ages. So we close these brief reflections on torture in the Bible by celebrating a theology that moves from one of the vilest forms of inhumane torture – the Roman cross – to the sublimest of all expressions of forgiveness – the cross of Christ.

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End Notes


2 So, for example, the OT has ‘nh in the Piel, “afflict, oppress, mistreat, hurt,” which in some contexts comes quite close in semantic domain to our “torture” (e.g., Exod 1:11), and lhš, “oppress” and its noun “oppression,” which at times connotes something close to “torture,” as when Yahweh observes how the Egyptians have oppressed Israel (Exod 3:9). Similarly, the NT has hasanîqō, “torture, torment,” and its nouns (hasanîsmos, hasanîstes, and hasanos), which may connote “the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone” (Rev 9:5).


5 For more on herem, see Jackie A. Naude, “herem,” NIDOTTE 2:276.

6 See also Deut 7:1-26; 23:9-14; 24:5. For details, see the standard commentaries, and for helpful discussion of the “theoretical character” of much of Deuteronomy’s laws, noting their lofty idealism and aspirations but limited experiences, see Peter C. Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 56-58.


8 For more on non-violent response versus justifiable warfare, see Bill T. Arnold, 1 and 2 Samuel (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 100-104.

9 The intervening verses (20:16-18) briefly return to the nature of the war of conquest to distinguish it further from the rules for ordinary war being established in the chapter. On the syntactical markers dividing Deut 20 into three units (vv. 1-9, 10-18, and 19-20), see J. G. McConville, Deuteronomy (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5; Leicester, England/Downers Grove, Ill.: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 2002), 317

10 For details, including deliberate orchard destruction as a Neo-Assyrian tactic, see Jacob L. Wright, “Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19-20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft,” JBL 127/3 (2008): 423-58, esp. 434-45. Wright argues that the biblical prohibition in Deut 20:19-20 relates to cutting down fruit trees when a city has refused to capitulate after an extended siege (p. 430).

11 Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Deuteronomy (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 159.


14 We have a reference to David’s especially cruel treatment of Moabite
POWs, in which he appears to have slaughtered two-thirds of them (2 Sam 8:2).


16 For example, the Phoenician king ’Ahirom of Byblos, had his sarcophagus inscribed with the following warning for any future king or governor who dares to desecrate it: “May the scepter of his rule be uprooted, may the throne of his kingship be overturned, and may peace depart from Byblos! And as for him, may his inscription be effaced with the double edge of a chisel”; P. Kyle McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription of ’Ahirom, King of Byblos,” in *Context of Scripture* (eds. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997-2003), 2:181.


18 Barton, *Amos’s Oracles*, 43-45 and 51-61. Thus for Amos, ethics is not simply a matter of theonomy, or narrow obedience, as is often assumed, but also of conformity to human conventions “held to be obvious universally”; Ibid., 2.


21 However, the scattered references in Herodotus and Thucydides, upon which this claim is based, could just as easily refer to simple impalement on a stake rather than cross-beam crucifixion as we think of it in Roman terms; Herodotus, 1.128.2; 3:125.3; 3.132.2; 3.159.1; and Thucydides, 1:110.3.

22 But see the caveats of H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 72 and 83. The book of Daniel speaks of the Babylonian practice of ripping the victim “limb from limb” and turning his house into ruins (Dan 2:5), which may reflect the same custom of tearing out the weight-bearing central beam of one’s house and impaling the owner on it, thus destroying both the house and resident.

MICHAEL PASQUARELLO

Heard Any Good Sermons on Torture Lately?

When I set out to write this essay I thought it might be interesting to survey and compare sermons that have recently been preached on the subject of torture. While some preachers have addressed this moral issue as a matter of serious concern for Christians, I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of pastors in America have chosen to remain silent. Perhaps a more appropriate title for this essay might be, “Why have we not heard any good sermons on torture lately?”

Fleming Rutledge, an evangelical Episcopalian who spends the majority of her time in a ministry of itinerant preaching and evangelism, speaks from the perspective provided by the Gospel in addressing the moral issue of torture.

... it is time to make the transition from American values to the universal Christian gospel. From the standpoint of Christ Jesus, any talk of ‘deserving’ [the grace of God] is treacherous territory. Everybody seems to love the hymn ‘Amazing Grace,’ but not everybody understands what it means ... Amazing grace can be understood fully only from the standpoint of the Christian gospel. The teaching of Jesus about love for enemies makes no sense if it is detached from his death and resurrection. If it were not for Good Friday and Easter, we would be justified in putting his teachings in a nice gilded box that we could bring out for admiration on ceremonial occasions and kept respectfully on a shelf the rest of the time.¹

Rutledge rightly states that, because of the Gospel, we cannot make Jesus into a nice religious teacher, of either conservative or liberal leanings, as many have done in our time. When the cross is detached from his life and ministry we are unable to take his teaching seriously as a way of being and living given form by God. This is because the Christian faith rests on a unique, unrepeatable event that has fundamentally altered the way we understand reality. “The cross shows us that in Christ Jesus we see God exchanging his divine life for the life of his enemies.”²
The questions raised by Rutledge challenge us to begin thinking about torture within the vision of reality given by the Gospel of Jesus Christ who calls, transforms, and empowers us to live truthfully; that is, according to the truth of God made known in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God. Rather than addressing the issue of torture directly, I want to begin with the Gospel, considering how its message might enable us to speak and live more truthfully in light of the message of the cross. In other words, it may be that we will not hear sermons on moral issues such as torture until the church becomes more attentive to the Gospel as mediated by the Apostolic faith through the canonical witness to the person of Jesus Christ who takes visible form in the church.

To demonstrate what this might mean, I will look to the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a leader of the confessing church in Germany from the early 1930’s until execution in 1945. As a theologian turned pastor, Bonhoeffer’s ministry was devoted to calling the church to ground its being and life on God’s Word, centering itself on Jesus Christ in order to stand against the idolatrous claims made by the Third Reich of Adolph Hitler. For Bonhoeffer, a confessing church was very different from what has become popular in America; that which might be described as either an accommodationalist or activist church. An accommodationalist church pursues “relevance” as it’s primary aim, devising strategies for translating Christianity to be more contemporary, or “with the times,” thereby making sense of life by fitting the Gospel into the familiar assumptions, understandings and experiences of “reasonable” people. On the other hand, the activist church aims to show or prove that Christianity can still be made useful to the modern world as a good resource, tool, or program for either personal improvement or social change. Both forms of church are very popular in our time, and may be seen practiced in both evangelical and mainline congregations.

Bonhoeffer and those joined with him in the confessing church began elsewhere. They did not start by focusing on the possible effects or results that are produced by the Gospel according the the terms and values dictated by the world. They began and ended with the source, substance, and goal of the Gospel, Jesus Christ himself, since they were convinced that the church’s political outlook and moral vision ought to be determined by its primary loyalty to Jesus Christ instead of its commitments to the self, nation, or culture. In 1934, Bonhoeffer worked with theologian Karl Barth to draft the Barmen Declaration as an act of Christian confession to this end. It begins with these words,

‘I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me (John 14:6). It continues, “Truly, truly, I say to you, anyone who does not enter the sheep fold by the door but climbs in by another way, that person is a thief and a
robber. I am the door, if anyone enters by me, the will be saved” (John 10:19).

Then follows this confession,

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides the one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation. 4

In stark contrast to much of the preaching and practice of the church in our time, the Barmen Declaration articulates a profoundly nonutilitarian (i.e., scriptural and theological) vision of the Gospel. This difference helps to illumine the theological and moral crisis which prevents us from seeing that addressing a practice such as torture is exceedingly “relevant” for the church’s witness to the Lord who was “crucified under Pontus Pilate, crucified, died, and was buried.” In other words, a confessing church - rather than an accommodationist or activist church - will seek the truth of revelation as an end in itself, rather than as a pragmatic device for accomplishing goals and producing results independently of faith; that is, in a way which departs from Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture. The way of confession will see Christ as an object of love, awe, and obedience - rather than an object of use, control, and manipulation, even if done for the sake of “reaching people” or “changing the world”- as is claimed today.

Bonhoeffer’s life and witness helps us to see that a confessing church will seek faithfulness without equating it with effectiveness. A church which confesses Jesus Christ will no longer see itself - as Christ’s visible body in the world - as instrumental to ends such as a changed society or improved individuals, but will instead see itself as a people whose being and existence is the work of God, those whose faith and mission consist of witnessing to the truth and reality of the Gospel through the grace of the Holy Spirit who judges, forms, and transforms the church into the image of Christ. In other words, preaching which acknowledges that practices such as torture are fundamentally at odds with the reality of Jesus Christ will be grounded in, and expressive of, an ethos formed by fidelity and witness to the reality of the Gospel - rather than those forms of religious speech that, in our time, are described as “effective communication.”

In his incomplete book, Ethics, Bonhoeffer makes clear that it is God who speaks the final or ultimate word on our life, and that those things that are “penultimate” must be seen and measured in light of God’s word of grace. For when God’s final Word is disposed with in favor of the “penultimate” - the things before that which is final - it is reduced to the quality of what is
calculable, as a merchandise, robbed of its divine power and is thereby no longer a gift. Bonhoeffer then describes two false ways of seeing the penultimate and ultimate.  

One way is what he calls “the radical.” This is to see only the ultimate, so that the penultimate, the things of this life and world, are lost to our view. In this way, God’s final word of mercy becomes the “very harshness of the law, so that everything in our human life is sin and denial.” The alternative view is that of compromise in which the ultimate – God’s final word – is separated from the penultimate things of this life. In other words, God’s word of grace simply justifies or underwrites things as they are. By way of contrast, Bonhoeffer points to the Incarnation in which the reality of God and the reality of humanity, the ultimate and penultimate, are reconciled in Jesus Christ.

What is earnest and serious is not some kind of Christianity, but it is Jesus Christ Himself. And in Jesus Christ there is neither radicalism nor compromise, but there is the reality of God and humanity. There is no Christianity in itself, for this would destroy the world; there is no man in himself; for he would exclude God. Both of these are merely ideas; only the God - Man Jesus Christ is real, and only through Him will the world be preserved until it is ripe for its end.

Bonhoeffer insists we must learn by God’s grace to see and speak of the world and our life as human creatures in light of the Incarnation, since we are neither purely spiritual beings nor autonomous human creatures capable of living without God in the world.

Significantly, this must also include our bodily life, which is a gift to us from God and therefore deserves its own preservation. “Since it is God’s will that there should be human life on earth in the form of bodily life, it follows that it is for the sake of the whole man that the body possess the right to be preserved ... The life of the body, like life in general, is both a means to an end and an end in itself.” This is an important point. The body is not only the “penultimate,” something which can be discarded at the time of death, since Christians believe in the resurrection of the body. The body is also an end in itself. And while subordinated to a higher purpose, it is nonetheless true that, “If the body were only a means to an end man would have no right to bodily joys This would have far reaching consequences for the Christian appraised of all the problems that have to do with the life of the body; housing, food, clothing, recreation, play, and sex.”

This leads Bonhoeffer to the freedom of bodily life, “which includes protections against arbitrary infringement of the liberty of the body.” He discusses slavery and rape before taking up torture. His definition is worth quoting in full.

Torture of the body is to be distinguished from that of corporeal chastisement of which the purpose is to educate the
mentally immature to a state of independence. It is also to be distinguished from that of retributive punishment through which one who is guilty of a base crime against the body of another has his dishonor brought home to him by the injury done to his own body. By torture of the body we mean in general the arbitrary and brutal affliction of physical pain while taking advantage of a relative superiority of strength, and in particular the extortion by this means of some desired admission or statement. In such cases, the body is misused, and therefore dishonored, exclusively as a means to the achievement of another man’s purpose, whether it be for the satisfaction of his lust for power or for the sake of acquiring some particular information. Torture is, in any case, generally an ineffectual means of discovering the truth; though, of course, this argument can have force only in cases where it is really the truth that is sought for.8

Bonhoeffer was concerned with the way torture inflicts the most extreme dishonor on a human being and has the effect of creating intense hatred and a desire to restore such wounded honor by the application of bodily force. In other words, bodily dishonor will seek to avenge itself on the body of its tormentor. For this reason, the violation of one’s bodily freedom contributes to the destruction of a creation’s moral foundation and order.

Writing from prison in 1943, Bonhoeffer reflected on the previous ten years of the church’s struggle to render truthful confession and bear faithful witness to the Gospel. He acknowledges that what was missing - from a Christian point of view - was the kind of “large heartedness” displayed by Christ himself. It was Christ who, according to the Scriptures, bore the sufferings of all humanity in his own body as if they were his own, accepting them by his own free will. Bonhoeffer notes that we are not Christ, nor are we called to redeem the world by our own deeds and sufferings, since we are not lords but instruments in the hand of the God of history. And while we are not Christ, we may share in Christ’s large heartedness with both freedom and responsibility, demonstrating a real sympathy which springs from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer since, “Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behavior.” In other words, Christians are called to sympathy, to acts of justice and mercy by the suffering of others for whose sake Christ suffered; the One whose fellowship we share with them.9

Bonhoeffer concludes with a remarkable passage on the “view from below,” asserting that the time has come for learning to see great events from the perspective of “the outcast, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.” For Christian people, this perspective can occur without either bitterness or envy, as a way of seeing with new eyes, “matters great and small, strength and weakness,
sorrow and joy, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice, and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible.”

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer had already described the form of life which characterizes the church as it is shaped by the Word incarnate in Christ through the activity of the Spirit and daily prayer, mediating on the Word, and bodily discipline.

To be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ is not an ideal of realizing some kind of similarity with Christ which we are asked to attain. It is not we who change ourselves into the image of God. Rather, it is the very image of God, the form of Christ, which seeks to take shape within us (Gal. 4:19). It is Christ’s own form which seeks to manifest itself in us. Christ does not cease working in us until he has changed us into Christ’s own image. Our goal is to be shaped into the entire form of the incarnate, the crucified, and the risen one. Christ has taken on human form. He became a human being like us. In his humanity and lowliness we recognize our own form. He became like human beings, so that we would be like him.

Because Christ unites humanity to himself in the life of his Body, it is the Holy Spirit who makes the words of Scripture “relevant” - in relation to the reconciliation of God and the world - through the church’s embodiment of the reality of the incarnate Word in its language and life, “The truthfulness which we owe to God must assume a concrete form in the world. Our speech must be truthful, not in principle but concretely. A truthfulness which is not concrete is not truthful before God.” However, the temptation to abstract language, joined with desire for human autonomy, separates the church’s language from the concrete, visible form of life sustained by Christ’s presence in history, thus creating a form of “Christianity without Christ” which serves only to stimulate more desire for abstract forms of religious “relevance.” Bonhoeffer rightly contends such strategies render words incapable of truthful expression. His description speaks powerfully to our time.

It is a consequence of the wide diffusion of the public word through the newspapers and wireless that the essential character and the limits of various different words are no longer clearly felt and that, for example, the special quality of the personal word is almost entirely destroyed. Genuine words are replaced by idle chatter. Words no longer possess any weight. There is too much talk. And when the limits of the various words are obliterated, when words become rootless and homeless, then the word loses truth, and then indeed there must almost inevitably be lying. When the various orders of life no longer respect one another, words become untrue.

Bonhoeffer perceived that the temptation to make our lies true was prompted by a kind of Christian, ecclesial self-preservation which produces forms of popular “religion” that presumably appeal and correspond to the needs of the individual human psyche. Such “privatized” religion represents
a withdrawal of the church from the concrete, bodily affairs of public life, thereby serving the limited purpose of “making individuals happy in the depths of their being,” but without asking the most decisive theological question of “whether it is true, of whether it is the truth” revealed by God in the person of Christ.

For it could be, of course, that while religion is a beautiful thing, it is not true, that it is all a nice, pious illusion - but still an illusion. But whoever so speaks [making the question of truth secondary] only sees religion from the perspective of human beings and their needs, not from that of God and his claims. Only the one who has staked his or her life on Christ as the truth is in a position to judge whether Christ speaks and is the truth. Truth is recognized only in the course of living it.14

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer again took up the matter of the church’s conformance to the image of Christ - the truthful unity of Christian thought and action - as a requirement for seeing, living, and speaking the truth according to reality, the reconciliation of God and the world revealed in Christ. Such conformance is achieved by neither establishing programs nor applying “Christian principles,” but is only realized in being drawn by divine grace into the form of Jesus Christ through the ministry of Word and sacrament and by prayer and action for justice. His words help us to see that if preachers are to address moral issues such as torture, their vision of God and the world must first be illumined by the reality of crucified truth indwelling the church as that part of humanity in which Christ has taken form in solidarity with the weak, the humiliated, and the enemy to stand against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power.

We are sick and tired of Christian programmes and of the thoughtless superficial slogan of what is called ‘practical’ Christianity as distinct from dogmatic Christianity. The primary concern is not with the forming of a world by plans and programmes. Whenever they speak of forming [the Scriptures] they are concerned only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ. But here again is not a question of applying directly to the world the teaching of Christ or what are referred to as Christian principles, so that the world might be formed in accordance with these. For indeed in it is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a programme, a universally valid proposition or a law, but that God became man. This means that though the form of Christ certainly is and remains one and the same, yet it is willing to take form in the real man, that is to say, in quite different guises. What Christ does is precisely to give effect to reality. He affirms reality. Whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see the world and God in one.15
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End Notes


2 Rutledge, “My Enemy, Myself: A Sermon” 118.


6 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 127

7 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 151-52.

8 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 185.


10 Bonhoeffer, Letters & Papers from Prison, 17


13 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 367


15 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 80-81.
CHRISTOPHER T. BOUNDS

Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans 7:14-25, His Ordo Salutis and His Consistent Belief in a Christian’s Victory over Sin

The Apostle Paul declares in Romans 7:14-15, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do.”

The history and development of Augustine of Hippo’s exegesis of this passage has received significant scholarly attention. In his initial forays into Pauline study in 394/395, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, Augustine interpreted Romans 7:14-25 as a human being “under the law, prior to grace.”

The “I” pictured here is the quintessential unregenerate person, who has knowledge of the law of God, senses true guilt for sinfulness, longs for deliverance, but is without the grace of Christ to overcome sin. In contrast, the Christian “under grace,” infused with the love of God, is victorious over sin and “ceases to sin.” In 396, Augustine reiterates his understanding in Eighty Three Different Questions and in his work of 398, To Simplician on Various Questions.

There is no hint of change in Augustine’s basic interpretive approach to Romans 7 until 411 in his treatise On the Merits and Remission of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants. In his examination of Job’s righteousness, Augustine compares Job to the person in Romans 7:19-24 who “delights in the law of God after the inner man, while he sees another law in his members warring against the law of his mind.” Job is the type of individual who says, “The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.” At this point, there is no inconsistency with Augustine’s earlier teaching. However, later in the treatise he will argue that Christians who live a life of righteousness like Job are worthy of praise, but are not without sin and therefore must pray regularly the Lord’s Prayer “forgive us our trespasses.” Augustine implicitly connects Christians “under grace” with the person of Romans 7.
What is implied in *On the Merits* becomes explicit by 415 in Augustine’s *On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness*, which sets forth the key seminal ideas of his new interpretation of Romans 7. The person described by Paul in this passage is one “under grace.” The “divided self” pictured so poignantly by the Apostle is the Christian believer. Later, in a series of sermons preached in 417, Augustine clarifies that the “I” in this passage is Paul speaking about himself. Paul is testifying to his present Christian experience and providing a description of every Christian life before the resurrection of the body. By 421 in *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* and in *Against Julian* Augustine acknowledges and repudiates completely his earliest interpretations of Romans 7. In 327, three years before his death, Augustine, writing his *Retractions*, renounces again his earliest position on Romans 7 as a description of an unconverted person “under law” and reiterates his belief that this is Paul’s Christian testimony and the experience of every person “under grace.”

Intimately tied to Augustine’s exegesis of Romans 7 is his *ordo salutis* or order of salvation. In his earliest written work on Paul, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*, Augustine uses his comments to articulate a theological understanding of personal salvation in four stages. Indeed, this is the focus of *Propositions*. Interestingly, while Augustine changes his understanding of Romans 7 as he grows older, and for that matter, his reading of Romans 9-11 and the doctrine of election, his *ordo salutis* remains essentially the same throughout his life. He articulates it clearly in his early theological work, uses it as a reference point throughout his ministry as priest and bishop, and gives it significant treatment in his later treatises.

In his *ordo* Augustine consistently maintains that a Christian is empowered to walk in obedience to Christ through the infusion of love by the Holy Spirit. He describes a normative Christian life as one free from outward or willful sin. Even as his interpretation of Romans 7 changes, this basic understanding of a Christian’s life “under grace” does not, although it is nuanced differently in his later thought.

The question arises: how can Augustine do this with his complete reversal on Romans 7? If the Apostle Paul is describing his Christian life, and with him all Christians, in verses 14-25, how can Augustine maintain a theology of salvation in which a Christian is free from willful sin? The purpose of our paper is to answer this question. To do so, we will first summarize Augustine’s *ordo salutis* and highlight some nuances brought to his understanding in later reflection. Next, we will examine how Augustine reconciles his later interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 with his persistent teaching on a Christian’s outward compliance to the law. Then, we will look more specifically at the role of will or consent in the Christian “under grace.” Finally, we will conclude with a few summary remarks.
I. Augustine’s Ordo Salutis

Augustine in 394 identifies four basic stages in a person’s experience of salvation, subsequently carried throughout his ministry as priest and bishop: a life “prior to the law,” “under the law,” “under grace,” and “in peace.”14 However, he acknowledges that some Christians may not pass through all stages, such as the case of infant baptism in which a child moves from a life “prior to the law” to one “in grace,” bypassing the stage “under the law.”15

He also sees his ordo salutis as an outline of the history of the church. First, the church existed “prior to the law,” from the moment of the fall in the Garden to God’s appointment with the nation of Israel on Mt. Sinai. Second, the church lived “under the law” from the revelation of God’s law through Moses to Christ’s coming. Now, the church lives “under grace” through the incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ. However, Augustine maintains that life “under grace” is never absent in history, but is veiled and hidden. Before Christ’s incarnation, Old Testament saints had some knowledge of and saving faith in Christ or they would not have been able to make prophecies about him. Finally, the church will be “in peace” when it enters the resurrected state in the eschatological age to come.16

Specifically, because of original sin, Augustine believes every human being is born into life “prior to the law.” They live in ignorance of sin and follow their carnal desires without the restraint of conscience or established prohibitions.17 He interprets the Apostle Paul’s statement, “And I was alive once without the law,” as indicative of Paul’s early childhood before he could reason, before he reached an age of accountability.18

The second stage is a life “under the law.” Here, through an awakened conscience and the revelation of God’s law, people recognize their sinfulness. Knowledge of the law produces anxiety over their guilt and prepares them for the grace of salvation. They learn how sinful they really are. They are aware of the condemnation of God upon their lives and want to some extent to live in accordance with the law, but are unable to do so. They are slaves to sin and the fear of God.19 They want to change, but the power of carnal desire is too strong and they find greater pleasure in committing sin. Sin deceives them continually “with its false sweetness.”20

Augustine believes a person is defeated at this stage “because he does not yet love righteousness for the sake of God and for the sake of righteousness itself. And so when he sees righteousness on the one hand and temporal comfort on the other, he is drawn to the weight of temporal longing and thus abandons righteousness, which he was trying to hold on to only in order to have the comfort he now sees he will lose if he holds on to righteousness.”21 People “under law” may conform to the law, but only as long as it is beneficial to them. The desires of the flesh may lead to obedience, but only for selfish reasons. When keeping the law is no longer beneficial, a
person discards it.

The only way humanity’s sinful desires can be defeated is through a true love of God and love of the commanded good. In the absence of real love, carnal desire always triumphs. In the third stage of salvation “under grace,” Augustine teaches that God gives the love of God to the human heart through the infusion of the Holy Spirit, empowering the Christian to “delight” in the law of God and walk in accordance to love. While Christians still have desires of the flesh, and the flesh is in conflict with the Spirit, the love of God triumphs over these desires so that believers do not obey them.22

At this point, it may be helpful to catalogue chronologically some of Augustine’s key statements on life “under grace” to demonstrate his consistent belief in a Christian’s victory over willful sin. Augustine in his description of the third stage clearly states in 395, “When this happens, even though certain fleshly desires fight against our spirit while we are in this life, to lead us into sin, nonetheless our spirit resists them because it is fixed in the grace and love of God, and ceases to sin. For we sin not by having this perverse desire but by consenting to it.”23 In 398 in response to questions raised by his friend Simplicius, he answers, “When grace forgives sin and infuses a spirit of charity, righteousness ceases to be hard and becomes even pleasant.”24 Speaking about the perfection of righteousness possible in the present life and experienced “under grace,” he teaches in 415, “But whersoever he suffers not sin to reign in his mortal body to obey it in the lusts thereof, and yields not his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin it does not reign, because its desires are not obeyed.”25 In the heights of the Pelagian debates of 422, Augustine affirms that the Apostles did not consent to the lusts of the flesh and lived “under grace.” He declares, “I do say that although they were free from consent to depraved lusts, they nevertheless groaned concerning the concupiscence of the flesh, which they bridled by restraint with such humility and piety, that they desired rather not to have it than to subdue it.”26 Then, in the most systematic account of his mature theology in 422, The Enchiridion, Augustine describes the Christian in the third stage of salvation: “But if God has regard to him, and inspires him with faith in God’s help, and the Spirit of God begins to work in him, then the mightier power of love strives against the power of the flesh, and although there is still in man’s own nature a power that fights against him (for his disease is not completely cured), yet he lives the life of the just by faith, and lives in righteousness so far as he does not yield to evil lust, but conquers it by the love of holiness.”27

While Augustine remains consistent in his teaching on a Christian “under grace,” as a life empowered to walk in love and not consent to sinful desires, he does nuance some of the finer points of his teaching, particularly his conception of sin and his understanding of the intensity of sinful desires.
First, Augustine develops his definition of sin. In 395 Augustine acknowledges that a Christian still experiences the lusts of the flesh, but does not sin. At this point in his theology, he defines sin as the consent of the will to obey, or to act according to sinful desire. Simply having sinful desires is not personal sin. He states, “For we sin not by having this perverse desire but by consenting to it.” Elsewhere, he writes that God’s condemnation does not rest upon the one, “engaged in battle, but on the one defeated in battle.”

However, by the opening decades of the fifth century, Augustine’s hamartiology expands. He begins to see sinful desire itself as personal sin and in need of the absolution brought about through the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors;” as well as through almsgiving. While he only sees it as venial sin and not mortal, it is still sin that a Christian must bear until the resurrection of the body.

Augustine comes to see sinful desire as sin because it falls short of the perfect love of God and neighbor, which is the ultimate end of the law. A Christian operates out of the love of God; the love of God enables a person’s obedience, but because of the desires of the flesh, love is not perfect. Augustine states, “It is not the mere “doing” of a good thing that is not present to him, but the “perfecting” of it. For in this, that he yields no consent (to the desires of the flesh), he does good; he does good again, in this, that he hates his own lust. But how to perfect the good is not present to him; it will be, however, in that final state, when the concupiscence which dwells in his members shall exist no more.”

Second, Augustine sees more clearly the intensity of sinful desire in Christian life. Early in his theological thought, Augustine recognizes or acknowledges concupiscence in the third stage, but does not give significance to it. However, while writing The Confessions he begins to address the psychological dynamics and intensity of fleshly desires in detail. They command Augustine’s attention in ways not seen in his earlier work. Nevertheless, while Augustine paints concupiscence in the third stage with greater intensity, he persistently maintains a Christian’s victory over it.

In the fourth and final stage of salvation, a life is “in peace.” This will take place when the bodies of Christians are resurrected in the age to come. Then, there will be nothing in humanity that resists the love of God, but every part will work harmoniously together. There will be the perfection of love in which people will love God with all heart, soul, and mind. All human action will embody the perfect love of God and neighbor. Sin and sinful desires will be impossible to humanity, since they will be like God, having true freedom — to do only what is in accordance with love.

II. Augustine’s Later Interpretation of Romans 7:14-25

How does Augustine reconcile his consistent understanding of the
Christian “under grace” with his later exegesis of Romans 7:14-25? As we stated earlier, by 417 Augustine sees Romans 7 as the Apostle Paul’s personal testimony of Christian experience, as well as every individual in the third stage of salvation. To answer this question, we must examine Augustine’s interpretation of this passage. His clearest and most thorough treatments are *Sermons 151-156*, preached in 417 and two treatises written in 422, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* and *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*.35

First, Augustine begins by reviewing Paul’s teaching from Romans 3:20, 3:27, 4:13, 5:20, 6:14, and 7:4, establishing the fact that the law brings knowledge of sin, and incites sin, but does not take it away. Because knowledge of the law makes a person more sinful and is not able to deliver a person from sin, Augustine is careful to defend the goodness of the law. The law drives a person to seek God’s grace. Only divine grace infusing love in the human heart can set an individual free from sin.36

Second, Augustine interprets Romans 7:7-13 as the Apostle’s personal witness about his life “prior to the law” and “under the law.” Paul’s statement, “For I was alive without the law once,” refers to Paul’s early childhood, before his ability to reason, before an age of accountability. “But when the commandments came, sin revived, but I died,” addresses the time in the Apostle’s life when he became aware of the law, but was not able to keep it, thereby becoming a transgressor.37 More specifically, the phrase “sin revived” refers to original sin in the Garden, passed down to all humanity, which remains hidden and undetected, until the human heart recognizes it when it encounters and balks at the law of God. Paul’s statements, “For without law sin is dead,” and “I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust unless the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet,’” conveys the profound disruption knowledge of sin brings to life. Once sin revives, it becomes “excessive” through the angst created in confrontation with the law. Continuing to speak on the command not to covet, Paul testifies, “But the occasion being taken, sin wrought in me by the commandment all manner of lust.”38 Concupiscence becomes stronger in it assertion of independence from the law.

Third, Augustine argues that Romans 7:14-23 is Paul’s present Christian testimony and all Christians “under grace.” Verse 14 states, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold as a slave to sin.” Here, Augustine notes the use of the present tense, “I am,” and not the past, “I was.” Paul is speaking for himself and his Christian experience. More specifically, the declaration “I am carnal” refers to Paul’s physical body, which has not yet experienced the resurrection. It is the same as saying, “I am mortal.” “Sold under sin” further conveys the idea of a physical body not yet redeemed from its corrupted state, a body that creates a “drag” upon the soul. Augustine makes clear though, this is also the description of every Christian. However, with Paul, Christians do not consent or obey the desires arising from the
body's corrupted state.  

Paul writes in verses 15, “For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” Augustine does not understand this statement to involve any external act by the Apostle, rather an internal motion in the heart. In essence, this is Paul’s admission to concupiscence. He covets or has sinful desires arising from his corrupted body. However, he does not consent or obey these desires. These are desires that wage inside of him. He despises them, longs to be free from them, but finds them nevertheless in his life. Augustine elaborates, “We shouldn’t take what he said, ‘It is not what I want to that I do, but what I hate, that is what I do’ as meaning that he wanted to be chaste, and was in fact an adulterer; that he wanted to be kind, and was in fact cruel. That’s not the sense in which we should understand (this passage). . . but in what sense? ‘I want not to covet, and yet I do covet.’”

In verse 16 Paul continues, “If then I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good.” Here, Augustine develops further his previous thought. What does Paul do that he “would not”? He has sinful desires. The Apostle then recognizes that the law wills that there be no coveting, no concupiscence and he agrees with the law. He wants what the law wants. Augustine explains, “And yet what I don’t want (desire, coveting, concupiscence) occurs in me. What the law doesn’t want, I join the law in not wanting; what it doesn’t want, I don’t want either; so I give my consent to the law.”

Because there is concupiscence in his physical body, but Paul does not consent or give into these desires, the Apostle states in verse 17, “Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.” His body suffers from concupiscence, but not his actions. He does not obey his sinful desires. Therefore, he does not covet, but his body does. Augustine states, “For ‘it is not I that do it,’” cannot be better understood than he does not consent to set forth his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. For if he lusts and consents and acts, how can he be said not to do the thing himself?”

For Augustine, verse 18 is the crux to understanding Paul’s testimony. This is the “clear” passage, through which the more difficult passages of this section are to be read. Paul declares in verse 18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perfect that which is good I find not.” Augustine argues that Paul is empowered to do the good. He is able to walk in obedience to God and follow the law of God, but because concupiscence exists in his body, his actions are not perfect. This accounts for the Apostle’s precision in words. Paul does not say “to do good” is beyond his will to do, but “how to perfect it” is in the present life.

For Augustine verse 18 holds up the ideal action as a basis for judgment of any act. The ideal is an action performed in perfect love of God without
any constraints of sinful desire. Augustine states, “for the good is performed imperfectly when one covets, even if consent to the evil of coveting is withheld.” Complete action, “perfect” action is by contrast action uniformly supported by a person’s desire to act in the love of God. Not only does Augustine contend that this is the correct reading of the verse in which the infinitive “to perfect” appears, but he assumes the other ways of expressing action in Romans 7:14-25, carry implicitly the sense of acting in conformity to the ideal. So, for example, when Paul states in 7:15 that he does what he hates, Augustine interprets this to mean that Paul performs what the law demands, but not without the presence of fleshly desire. Sinful desire does not interfere with his actions, but with the purity of his intentions.

Augustine believes Paul’s declaration in verse 18 is amplified in verses 19-21. The Apostle states “For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that which I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then the law, when I would act, to be good to me; for evil is present with me.” Again, Paul finds the law good when he consents to do what the law would have him to do; inasmuch as his consent falls short of its perfect keeping, as a result of concupiscence, evil is present even in his consent.

In the first part of verse 22, Paul testifies, “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” Augustine confesses that this testimony is key to his transition of seeing Romans 7:14-25 as a Christian “under grace.” Only a person “under grace” delights in God’s law. A person “prior to the law” is ignorant of it; a person “under the law” fears the consequences of breaking the law and is in servitude to it. However, the Christian “under grace” delights in it. This delight comes from realizing the end of the law – love, made possible by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit. In it is love that cheers and gratifies the believer.

The second part of verse 22 and verse 23 continues, “but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” Augustine again interprets this other “law” to be concupiscence in his fallen body. “Bringing me into captivity” addresses the flesh, the body that has a “morbid carnal affection.” Augustine states, “In so far then, as there is now this waiting for the redemption of our body, there is also in some degree still existing something in us which is captive to the law of sin.” This captivity is in the flesh and not in the mind, in the emotions, but not in consent.

In verse 24, Paul declares, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Augustine comments, “What are we to understand by such language, but that our body, which is undergoing corruption, weighs heavily on our souls? In the resurrection there will be full liberation.” Although the actual
law of sin partly holds the flesh in captivity, still it does not reign in the Christian life because a Christian does not obey its desires.

Finally, in verse 25, Paul concludes, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Augustine again drives home his point that Paul, and by inference, every Christian, serves the law of God by refusing to obey the law of sin. However, the Apostle serves the law of sin by having the desires of the flesh, from which he is not free entirely, although he does not give in to them. Augustine states, “To wit, with the flesh, the law of sin, by lusting; but with the mind, the law of God, by not consenting to that lust.” Augustine states elsewhere, “Both the law of God in the mind, and the law of sin in the flesh. I both take delight in this one (mind), and at the same time I feel lust there (flesh). But I am not overpowered; it tickles my fancy, it lays siege to me, it hammers at the door, it tries to take me away, but not it does not (overpower).”

III. The Role of Will or Consent in People “Under Grace”

As we have now seen, while Augustine’s exegesis of Romans 7 shifts from a person “under law” who cannot walk in true righteousness to a Christian “under grace” who can walk in obedience to the law, but cannot perfect it, nevertheless, his later interpretation conforms to his basic ordo salutis held throughout his ministry.

Now, the question must be asked: what enables people “under grace” to walk in obedience to God, to serve the law of God in their mind and not consent to the desires of the flesh? Augustine’s answer: the love of God shed abroad in the human heart by the Holy Spirit. The love of God enables obedience, empowering true consent to the law of God.

Augustine identifies three factors in the exercise of human will: suggestion, delight, and consent. First, a suggestion is any idea that comes to a person’s mind through personal reflection, random thinking, or bodily senses. Therefore, when a person is told she needs to go back to school if she wants to work at a particular company, or an individual has a chance idea to start a new business while talking to his wife about a haircut, or a teenager considers eating an ice cream cone after seeing a Baskin-Robbins advertisement, they have experienced suggestion. More specifically, Augustine sees the law of God as suggestion as it comes to human beings in the law given to Adam in the Garden and to Moses on Mt. Sinai, in the law summarized by Jesus Christ, and in the law of reason and conscience.

Next, Augustine teaches that each suggestion encounters internal desires already existing in the human mind. In response to a suggestion presented to the mind, strong feelings of attraction or aversion may arise, motivating a person to move in one direction or another; or it may meet with indifference, creating little inclination to action; or it may encounter conflicting desires,
causing internal division within the mind about what to do.\textsuperscript{57} For example, when a person encounters a suggestion to eat an ice cream cone from a Baskin-Robbins commercial, strong feelings of sensual pleasure may arise, or stimulate a deep fear of gaining weight, or cause internal turmoil if pleasure and fear are both persuasive to the mind.

From whence do these desires come? Augustine identifies two places: love and the force of habit.\textsuperscript{58} First and most basic, Augustine believes human desires have their origin in love – either the love of God or the love of self.\textsuperscript{59} By creating humanity in the divine image, God made people to love God, which then enables them to turn toward their neighbor in self-giving love, and truly love themselves for God’s sake. However, because of original sin, love has been corrupted, becoming self-centered, seeking its private interest above all else. In fallen humanity, desire or delight, are all manifestations of a person’s egoist love. Augustine calls these “desires of the flesh” and “concupiscence.” All human desires or delights have self-love as their basis, rather than the perfect love of God.\textsuperscript{60}

Second, Augustine believes some desires are built and fortified by habit. A habit begins when a suggestion arouses pleasure that leads to consent. Then, the experience of gratification fuels the pleasure desire, so that when the same suggestion comes again, even greater desire arises, leading to action. As a person continues to consent to the pleasure inclination, the pleasure desire increases in strength, forcing other competing desires (fear, caution) to recede to the background, forming a habit almost impossible to break.\textsuperscript{61}

Finally, Augustine believes a suggestion that arouses the strongest delight leads to consent of the will, which results in action. He believes human beings consent to what they ultimately want. Humanity does whatever is their strongest desire. Human consent follows the desire most aroused by a suggestion.\textsuperscript{62} For example, in the suggestion of eating an ice cream cone, Augustine believes a person will consent to whatever the strongest desire is. If the pleasure desire is stronger, she will eat the ice cream; if the fear of gaining weight is stronger, she will abstain; and if both are powerful, she will have some inner turmoil, but will eventually do whatever the strongest desire is.

As such, the key for Augustine in the sequence of suggestion - delight - consent is delight or desire. Accordingly, humanity in the stage “prior to the law” cannot begin to fulfill the law of God. They cannot “delight” in the true love of God and neighbor. Instead, their “delight” is completely self-focused. Because all human desire in this stage is self-focused, defined by “concupiscence,” the act arising from willful consent will always be selfish. As such, they do not keep the law of God.\textsuperscript{63}

In the stage “under the law,” humanity by God’s grace begins to recognize a need to keep the law of God. They see the need to love God and neighbor. They may begin to desire to walk in true love.\textsuperscript{64} As such, a new desire enters
into the mix. However, when the suggestion of God’s law comes by instruction or reason, concupiscence rises to the fore, dominating any desire to walk in divine love, so that they are not able to keep the law. Their consent follows their fleshly desires. Even when they act in outward conformity to the law, concupiscence is at the root. In wanting to avoid punishment, earn praise, or gain some personal reward, they act out of egoist love in the outward performance of the law. Only when a person wants God’s will out of the love of God alone is the law kept. Thus, in The Confessions Augustine testifies of his life before conversion as one “under law” in which he wants to follow God, but is not able to relinquish his fleshly desires that bind him to the world. His fleshly desires are stronger than his desire for God.

In the third stage “under grace,” Augustine teaches that God infuses divine love or “delight for the law” by the Holy Spirit into human life. This comes as a gift of God to a person. Therefore, when the suggestion of the law comes, it encounters the internal desire to love God, which subordinates any other contrary desire or inclination, leading to a person’s consent. God empowers a person with love, so that this delight, this pleasure, this inclination, “draws” or “leads” human consent. Divine love becomes the strongest desire or delight in a Christian and the human will consents to this love. What the law commands, love seeks and obtains by divine grace.

However, as already been intimated, because concupiscence resists love and consent to the good, the good accomplished by consent is marred. It is not perfect love. Nevertheless, the inclinations against which a person “under the law” struggles are now overcome because a higher inclination, love of God, has subordinated them.

More specifically, in Romans 7:14-25 Augustine sees two conflicting delights. The first, which is the consequence of original sin is concupiscence. Human beings find pleasure or delight in the wrong things. This is the law of sin. The second, which is a result of God’s grace infusing the heart with love by the Holy Spirit is delight in the law of God. Augustine makes clear in his interpretation of this passage that a person “under grace” can consent to the good and yet not be free of conflict. Because concupiscence resists love and consent to the good, the good accomplished by consent is marred. It is not perfect love.

Augustine states, “And, without the gift of God—that is, without the Holy Spirit, through whom love is shed abroad in our hearts—the law may bid but it cannot aid. Moreover, it can make of man a transgressor, who cannot then excuse himself by pleading ignorance. For appetite reigns where the love of God does not (but) if a man begins to be led by the Spirit of God, then the mightier power of love struggles against the power of the flesh. And although there is still in man a power that fights against him—his infirmity being not yet fully healed—yet the righteous man lives by faith and
lives righteously in so far as he does not yield to evil desires, conquering them by his love of righteousness.” 69

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, while Augustine’s interpretation of Romans 7:14-25 undergoes revision in his work as priest and bishop, his basic understanding of a person “under law” and Christian “under grace” does not. Augustine consistently maintains that a person “under law” is unable to keep the law, because of “delight” for self-love. The Christian “under grace” is able to consent to the law and be victorious over the desires of the flesh, because of “delight” in God’s love.

Augustine’s teaching stands in a long historical line of witness to the expectation of a Christian’s victory over willful sin and a life defined by the love of God and neighbor. Augustine in his doctrinal treatises believes Christians are able to overcome their sinful desires, because of the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. Because Christians “under grace” have true love, love subdues all other desires, enabling them to walk in love. While it is not perfected love, it nevertheless is love made manifest in heart and life.

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**End Notes**

1 Romans 1:14-15 (New International Version)


3 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, trans. Paula Fredriksen Landes (Society of Biblical Literature, 1982), 44.2.


5 Augustine, Eighty-Three Different Questions, trans. David L. Mosher, The


7 Ibid., II.21.


13 Unfortunately, in many recent treatments of Augustine’s evolving views of Roman 7, his affirmation and expectation of a Christian’s victory over willful sin is ignored or misrepresented. For example, in his chapter, “Interpretations of Paul in the Early Church,” in Reading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification, ed. David E. Aune (Baker Academic, 2006), 146-168, David M. Rylaarsdam ignores this part of Paul’s teaching. Mark Reasoner in Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation (Westminister John Knox Press, 2005), 70-73 clearly misrepresents Augustine’s teaching on sin by failing to make distinctions in sin. Reasoner portrays all sin as the same and fails to incorporate Augustine’s
finely nuanced understandings of sin into his treatment. This obscuration of Augustine’s teaching on a Christian’s victory over sin is greatest in the widely lauded Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (William B. Eerdmans, 1999), in which not one article on “sanctification” or “holiness” in Augustine is included.

14 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18.2-4.
15 Augustine, The Enchiridion, 119.
16 Ibid., 118.
17 Augustine, Propositions for the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18:2-4; The Enchiridion, 118.
18 Augustine, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.14,16.
19 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18.2-4; The Enchiridion, 118; To Simplician on Various Questions, I.2.
20 Augustine, To Simplician on Various Questions, I.5.
21 Augustine, Commentary on Galatians, 46.
22 Augustine, The Enchiridion, 118.
23 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18.7-10.
24 Augustine, To Simplician on Various Questions, I.7
25 Augustine, On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness, XI.28.
26 Augustine, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.24.
27 Augustine, The Enchiridion, 118. In 427, three years before his death, Augustine in The Retractions 89 states about The Enchiridion, “In this, in my opinion, I have adequately covered how God is to be worshipped, a worship, which Divine Scripture defines as man’s true religion.”
28 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18.7-10.
29 Augustine, Commentary on Galatians, 46.
30 See James Wetzel, “Sin,” in Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia, 800-802 for a more extensive discussion on Augustine’s developing view of sin.
31 Augustine, On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness, VIII.19; The Enchiridion, 121.
32 Augustine, On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness, XI.28.
33 Compare Augustine’s treatment of concupiscence or fleshly desires in his earlier theological work in Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18 and Commentary on Galatians, 46 with his mature theological treatments in Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.13-27, and Against Julian, II.2.5, VI.23.70-73. Also see Augustine’s introspective examination of concupiscence in The Confessions.
34 Augustine, Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, 13-18.2-4; Commentary on Galatians, 46; Eighty-Three Different Questions, 66.3; Concerning Man’s Perfection in Righteousness, III.8, VIII.19; Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.24; The Enchiridion, 118.

Augustine, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.13.

Ibid., I.13. Augustine also addresses what might be a problematic statement to his interpretation of Paul as one unable to keep the law. Paul testifies in Philippians 3:6 that as a Pharisee he was blameless in keeping the law. Augustine reconciles his interpretation in Romans 7 with Paul’s statement in Philippians by saying that Paul kept the law with outward conformity, but it was motivated by sinful desire and not love. As such, Paul was a man “under law” as a Pharisee. See Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.15.

Ibid., I.13.

Augustine, Sermon 154, 154.2-3.

Augustine, Sermon 154, 154.10.

Augustine also notes the word “now” as indicative of Romans 7:14-25 being Paul’s present Christian testimony.


Augustine, Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.29.32; Sermon 152, 152.2.


For this analysis of verse 18, I am indebted to James Wetzel, Augustine and the Limits of Virtue (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 165-175.

On Marriage and Concupiscence: I.30.34; In Sermon 155:1 Augustine states, “Now it is no longer I that perform it, but the sin that lives in me;” it was because he wasn’t performing it by consenting with the mind, but by lusting with the flesh. He gives the name of sin, you see, to that from which all sins spring, namely to the lust of the flesh.”

Ibid., I. 30.34-31.35; Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.20; Sermon 151, 151.6.

Ibid., I. 30.34-31.35.

Against Two Letters of the Pelagians: I.20; Sermon 151: 151.6.

On Marriage and Concupiscence, I.31.35.

Ibid., I.31.36

Against Two Letters of the Pelagians, I.21; Sermon 151, 151.8.


56 Ibid., I.12.34-36.
57 Ibid., I.12.34.


59 Augustine, On Free Will, trans. John H. S. Burleigh, The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. VI (The Westminster Press, 1953), I.16. Augustine states here, “We have discovered that there are two kinds of things, eternal and temporal. Two kinds of men, as well, have been clearly and sufficiently distinguished: those who pursue and love eternal things, and those who pursue and love temporal things.”


61 Augustine, The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, I.12.33-34.


64 Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter, XIV, L.VI.

65 Augustine, The Spirit and the Letter, L.VI.

66 Augustine, The Confessions, VII.3.

67 Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter, XVI.

68 Augustine, Sermon 151, 151.6. Speaking of the Apostle Paul, Augustine states, “He was struggling, he was not subdued. But because he did not even want to have this thing to struggle with, that is why he said, “It is not what I want to, that I do.” I don’t want to covet, but yet I do. So I do something I don’t want to; but all the same, I don’t consent to this lust.”

69 Augustine, The Enchiridion, 117-118.
ROBERT H. CUBILLOS

Consolation as Theme in Luther’s Sermons and Correspondence: Insights into his Theological Ethics

I. Introduction

Various themes have been identified as foundational for Luther’s ethical program. Hegel praised Luther asserting that “the essence of the Reformation [is]: Man is in his very nature destined to be free.” He also stressed, “Freedom of the spirit had its beginnings in Luther.” Peering through this set of lenses, freedom is the theme with which Luther leaves behind the late Middle Ages and ushers in the modern era and with it a relentless religious individualism, part of maturing Geist. Harnack had the same idealistic, historicist mindset, seeing in Luther a new “evolution” to disposition ethics. Althaus, along with a host of theologians, has identified the theme of justification as central to Luther’s ethical thought and break with the Medieval Church.

Luther’s ethics is determined in its entirety, in its starting point and in all its main features, by the heart and center of his theology, namely, by the justification of the sinner through the grace that is shown in Jesus Christ and received through faith alone. Justification by faith determines Christian ethics because, for the Christian, justification is both the presupposition and the source of the ethical life.

Antecedent to centering the reformer’s ethics on his doctrine of justification, recent Luther scholarship involves the scrupulous and wide-ranging activity—one beyond the scope of this study—of establishing where the reformer’s theological pedigree begins. The debate of this crucial question will be largely set aside; but suffice here to add that eminent church historian, the late Heiko Oberman, of Tübingen and Arizona State Universities, was an innovative and influential proponent of situating Luther within the context of late medieval Christian theology by attempting to show important lines of continuity between the reformer and his medieval heritage. Dr. Berndt Hamm,
who focuses on the intellectual history of late medieval and Reformation Germany at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, has been another high-profile advocate making an even stronger case for this continuity. In this same vein and after a close study of the theology and rhetorical style of Luther’s letters of consolation, Dr. Ute Mennecke-Haustein at the University of Bonn, concludes in explicit terms:

The consolation needs of the people of this time is almost limitless, it arises out of the situation of the existence of disease and death, economic and social insecurity, the arbitrary mercy of various authorities, and the religious uncertainty concerning the state of grace and one's eternal fate. The late-Medieval Age suffering, Anfechtung, and consolation literature variously consider this. While Luther accepts this theme, and indeed the consolation letters explain the most important task of theology, it is to be seen as an element of “continuity” in the “break” between the late-Middle Age and reformation. The consolation letters of the reformer can be principal witnesses when it comes to accurately describing this.

I will discuss suffering, Anfechtung, and consolation soon enough, but instead of using Luther’s correspondence to track his trajectory between the late medieval church and the Reformation, I instead want to investigate the theme of consolation contained in a broad selection of his sermons and letters from the standpoint of theological ethics. First, I contend that the special, inseparable connection between God’s work of justification and Luther’s treatment of consolation is that God’s love for the hurting soul is operative in both. Second, that while each consoling sermon or compassionate letter is inadequate on its own to serve as a basis for understanding the reformer’s moral framework, we can instead look at a “whole” these pieces may construct. Thus, my focus will be more upon the ethical norms contained in Luther’s consolatory homiletical practice and correspondence, to gain insights into his theological ethics from a correlation of component parts, as it were, than to assess his struggle against the spirit of the late medieval church as he encountered it. The goal of this essay is not to analyze the continuity between the reformer and the late medieval church nor is it to emphasize a revolutionary nature of his ideas and pastoral approach. Instead, it is to indicate how his theme of consolation is a principal witness to his ethical commitment that takes on the appearance of an ethic of responsibility. Some may question if this assessment is possible or they may say this results in imposing a modern category of ethics onto the reformer. After all, he wrote little about such questions as “What is the structure of the responsible self?” or “by what moral calculus shall I determine my personal responsibility in this situation?” His focus was instead on the more practical and theological features of Christ, salvation, sin, and the sacraments. Despite that, in investigating Luther’s
theme of consolation and questioning the presence of an ethic of responsibility one has to reconstruct Luther’s line of thought from scattered writings that do not explicitly deal with issues of responsibility.

The Reformation, as Luther occasionally called it in reference to the entirety of his work, was a reassertion of the Christian estimation of the supreme importance of the individual. In large part it marked a return to the interiority of Christianity and a reassertion of the essentially spiritual character of its point of view, more so than some movements within medieval piety and mysticism were able to achieve and imbue into the masses. The Protestant doctrine of “justification by faith alone” is a theological application of the ethical principle that the moral situation hinges not upon what one does, but upon what one is; upon the attitude of one’s will and the bent of one’s character. It is what one is that needs to be justified by grace through faith. Luther’s continuity with this point of view and his attempts to restore a more consistent spiritual ethos with the New Testament imperative cast him as the theological radical of the sixteenth century. Undergirding the reforming and ministerial activities in which Luther participated were his theological ethics. Before beginning to investigate this, we must first stop to consider the ministerial task he took on that gave expression to his ethics. In order to understand the theme of consolation embedded in Christian ethical texts it is necessary to comprehend the complex religious and cultural circumstances in which they are formed.

II. The Culture of Distress, Death and Care in Sixteenth Century Western Europe

Prior to Sigmund Freud, the study of suffering and death belonged primarily to theology and philosophy. It was not until the nineteenth century that the experience and portrayal of dying and despondence entered into conversation with psychology and the interpretation of theology as anthropology began. In so doing, consolation faced as much modern hostility as religion itself, giving rise to the ideas that “[i]n religion man seeks contentment” and that religion essentially finds its basis in the human need for consolation. What must be remembered with regard to the nineteenth century’s experiential and psychological Zeitgeist and its projection of religion as consolation is that these views were the result of investigations into what the common person understood by religion and his or her very narrow internal expressions of religion. Moreover, this era failed to produce evidence to sustain the claims that God/consolation is a psychological crutch to support people’s inability to cope with life’s disappointments, or that belief in God arises from the common person’s incapacity to understand physical phenomena. It offered no convincing proof to explain how the religious consolation offered at the religious intersection of the individual and pestilence-
ridden society in the early sixteenth century was a contrivance or failed.

Long recognized as one of the watershed in European history, historians blame the cycle of plague epidemics (bubonic, septicaemic, and pneumonic) as the cause of various divergent consequences ranging from despondence and an obsession with the macabre to economic restructuring and the birth of Renaissance humanism. The great social, religious, and personal disruption associated with plagues makes the late Middle Ages population's desire for advance warning about death and the need for consolation very understandable. Nearly a third of Western Europe perished, and many cities experienced a loss of almost half their people. Transfers in choice of burial site, bequests to new religious groups, and questions of how one manages oneself upon diagnosis are dramatic evidences of social and religious changes in this period. In this culture of distress and death, what were the contours of the pre-reformation ministry of care to which Luther responded?

A. Ars moriendi

French medievalist and cultural historian, Philippe Ariès, summarized the sophisticated preparations associated with the *ars moriendi* (the art of dying) literature and iconography that provide unique insights into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries’ experience of death and suffering. Nearly 300 *ars moriendi* manuscripts survive, 20 percent of which are block books that suggest the great consolatory importance of this subgenre of conduct literature in late medieval and early modern thought. The greatest fear of this era was that once the pestilence was contracted, one would die alone and abandoned. Devout folk considered sudden death to be one of many evils from which they should pray for deliverance.

The catechetical questions posed to the dying person and traditional prayers of the Medieval Church acknowledge a link between warning, preparation, and consolation. People wanted to prepare and to have a “good death” (not to be confused with euthanasia). This required very specific preparations. Dying followed prescribed gestures routinized by old customs: one awaited death lying down with various hand postures, sometimes the head oriented to the east (facing Jerusalem), the hands crossed, and the face turned up to heaven. The *ars moriendi* then gave instruction on grieving and reconciling oneself with loved ones, relatives, companions, and helpers. Grief occurred for both sides; those about to be bereaved needed to express their grief over imminent loss, and the dying person needed to mourn his or her loss of the world. A measure of suffering was an acceptable part of human dying, was short-lived, and not to be denied or obscured. But the Black Death, *per se*, was not the primary impetus behind the *ars moriendi*. The exceedingly high mortality rates among the clergy necessitated a more prominent participation of the laity in the preparation for death, that of a friend, and their own. Dying was
a very public preparation and ceremony took place in the bedchamber of the
dying which was entered freely, by relatives, friends, servant, and children. In
essence, the *ars moriendi* facilitated the process for the dying, for the priest and
pastor, and the laity.

Nonetheless, Dr. Carter Lindberg, Professor Emeritus of Church History
at Boston University, avers that the traditional symbols of security for the
people of the late Middle Ages were rocked at their roots. He emphasizes,
“[t]he shortness of life was never far from people’s minds,” which is an echo
of Johan Huizinga, “[N]o other epoch has so much stress as the expiring
Middle Ages on the thought of death.” In effect, to borrow a recent thesis
from Princeton Theological Seminary’s Dr. Scott Hendrix, people in this era
were primed to listen to the “re-Christianizing” message of the Reformation
in a new way. Comparing Luther with other late medieval *ars moriendi*
contributors, Jared Wicks, S. J., concludes that,

Luther did not first discover such interior trials, but he presented
them with more depth and refinement than was the case in
existing pastoral guidance. One’s worthiness and disposition
is a marginal matter, perhaps a snare, for what matters is to
believe true what God declares and shows forth in sign. Will
one trustingly accept God’s veracity and let Him make one safe
from enemy attacks? The malignant images of death, sin,
and hell have just one remedy. They are dissipated by him who
is for us sheer life, grace, and election. The sacraments reveal
and apply, not Jesus’ offering to God, but God’s astounding
gift to individual believers. All in all, in 1519 Luther laid the
basis for renewing the Christian service of the dying. Most
significantly he would ground this ministry in the central saving
work of Jesus Christ and in his sacramental gift, which does
not exclude the company of those whom he has already drawn
into his sphere of life and love.

Arguing more recently, and after an extensive analysis of the *ars moriendi*
and German Reformation authors’ books on dying (*Sterbebuscher*), religious
studies professor Austra Reinis of Missouri State University acknowledged,
“The emphasis on the sacraments, in particular, on theological discussion of
the sacraments in the context of instruction on the art of dying, is Luther’s
most significant departure from the late medieval *ars moriendi.*” It is from
within this framework that the reformer ministered to and encouraged the
dying and despondent to receive the sacraments with joy and confidence,
assuring them of their salvation and that their death, sin and hell are overcome
in Christ’s passion. Dr. Reinis finishes her work stressing that this certainty
of one’s salvation “represents a radical departure from the *ars moriendi*, which
taught that only through proper preparation could one receive the forgiveness
of sins offered in the sacraments.”
B. The Cura Animarum as an Ethic of Care

To say that pastoral care (cura animarum—cure of souls) was essential for Luther is as incisive as saying that mathematics is essential for Cambridge theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking. The reformer’s books and tracts, sermons and commentaries and letters were hammered out on the anvil of pastoral responsibility. While some may presuppose a “pestilence ethic” serving as a moral-action-guide for Luther’s cure of souls, his ministry of consolation extends far beyond situations involving plague and the care of people facing imminent death. His pastoral contact included those caught in the grips of suffering and distress, many of whom felt abandoned to their own weaknesses and the onslaught of desperate feelings of woe, and many who felt the pangs of conscience and questioned the authenticity of their new faith as Protestants. Lutheran theologian Dr. Oswald Bayer’s characterization of Luther’s ethics as an extension of his pastoral care is spot on the mark: “For all the differences in his addresses, forms of address and ways of expression, for all the different themes and issues, one thing remains certain: in everything, including his ethics, Luther was a pastoral counselor.”

The reformer observed individuals who were without any great measure of confidence in the effectiveness of penitential piety and/or in divine aid; penitents were anything but consoled and God seemingly withdrew himself. He held priests responsible for this in The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), “Therefore, as the priests are, so let their ministry and duty be. For a bishop who does not preach the gospel or practice the cure of souls—what is he but an idol in the world [I Cor. 8:4] who has nothing but the name and appearance of a bishop?”

Others, of the most ardent pastoral concern to Luther, were those whose consciences were ravaged by unbelief and absolute dread with regard to their status before God. These lacked an assurance of salvation and thus faced—to borrow from Otto’s classic discussion of numinous (religious) feelings—the “awefulness,” the tremendum [of God], for which ‘Wrath,’ ‘Fire,’ ‘Fury,’ are excellent ideograms.” To describe such a conscience in havoc, Luther employed the term Anfechtung referring to, on the one hand—from the heavenly standpoint—a trial sent by God to test and strengthen the believer’s faith, or an attack by the devil to destroy the believer. On the other hand—from the human standpoint—it is analogous to Kierkegaardian “Angst” but without any specific English equivalent. It is a “feeling response,” whose content is terror and structure is dread toward God. One discerns it as a tormented experience of a guilty conscience. It is all of human doubt, panic, and desperation that drive the soul to believe that one’s guilt is greater than God’s desire to forgive.

This is where Luther demonstrates the cure of souls par excellence. In his estimation, only “the sure and certain Word” of the Gospel was able to save
one from such distress and despair and bring peace. Moreover, the restoration of peace was evidence of God's affirmation of his grace and the effectual power of the means of grace. For the reformer, the care of souls was the shepherding, interpreting, enabling love of God—all in the context of bible-based care—revealed in Jesus Christ, represented pastorally, and lived out in Christian community. Reformation scholar Dr. James Kittelson of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, elevated this as Luther's most important motivation when he said, “above all the care of souls, but not the church as such, was the driving force in Luther's personal development and in his career as friar, professor, theologian, and even reformer.”

In Luther's including the medieval conscience as a central territory of spiritual battle, he targets a new dimension of spiritual care, a new breadth and depth in the cure of souls. Notice how he unpacks Paul's argument in Lectures on Galatians. Here he refers to those who have committed themselves to the cure of souls at the deepest level as “instructors of conscience.” These are primarily preachers and teachers who understand the Law/Gospel dialectic and those among the priesthood of believers who come into contact with human life with the desire to lead the afflicted to the place of healing and full realization of God's grace. Luther's ministry of the cure of souls was a ministry of consolation and encouragement that carried forward his theme of justification by grace.

The reformer also knew that life-and-death situations reveal what people really believe. He equally knew that the Scriptures and orthodox doctrine have the possibility of giving what they describe. The function of consolation is also to give to people what it describes. “In order to comfort timid, dismayed, troubled consciences, [Christ says] 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' Here we are called to come to this consolation, to the gospel.”

To take stock a little, the account I have been developing suggests that the reformer's response to the sixteenth century culture and experience of suffering and death was for the disturbed conscience of the sinner to hear the comforting word of the Gospel. The ancient consolation literature gave comfort with the firm and constant reference to the immortality of the soul and the unvarying reminder that death had no penal character to it. The Greeks drew comfort from the hope of a noble death, Judaism in the nearness of God as expressed by the Psalter. Luther saw that consolation placed the petrified soul on the receiving end of care and hope, he also saw that the doctrine of justification provided the mind with a clear resolution between law and gospel; both served to construct a defense against the perennial spiritual terror of his age. The “re-Christianization” and awareness that Luther helped to bring about—that God's name comforts also had a comparable effect upon the perception of death. Whereas death was once a Stygian foe in the medieval
church, the reformer made it into a friend, or at least something that need not be feared as much.

When plague hit Wittenberg, Elector John urged the professors to leave. Instead of going to Jena, Luther stayed on insisting that, “when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament and in faith overcomes death,” a person “is thus responsible before God for his neighbor’s death.” To be sure, Luther’s stay communicates an indelible message. It expresses in the strongest terms possible that the cure of souls as an ethic of care requires unwavering moral responsibility. Dr. Theo Boer of the Protestant Theological University, The Netherlands, recently put forth, “Through justification by faith alone human beings are freed to become ethical subjects and to bear true moral responsibility.” However, before we can reflect on the relation between Luther’s doctrine of justification and the concept of responsibility, we will be well served to consider his theme of consolation in his sermons and correspondence and to discern how they may elucidate an ethic of responsibility.

III. Luther’s Ministry of Consolation

It need scarcely be said that the theological issue of a spiritually salutary death has always been a central characteristic of pastoral concern. After the end of the Middle Ages, instructions for Christians preparing for death continued to be written either as a subsection of larger theological and pastoral manuals, or, less frequently, as individual treatises. In Luther’s writings, his instruction on consolation primarily appears in various sermons and letters; it is not confined to any one particular section of his collected writings. Here is where he had an impact upon individual Christian inwardness. This is where a spiritual leader strives to form a Christian people; here is where the pastor/theologian influences the moral qualities possessed by a person, a group, or community, where people are directed toward moral excellence and the good. Again, my interest is to investigate the reformer’s theme of consolation as it carries forward his theology of justification and to identify what insights the theme provides into his theological ethics.

A. Sermons

The funeral sermon was a public declaration that the departed had obtained salvation. Lutheran funeral sermons of the sixteenth century intended for both clerical and popular audiences to receive instruction and to console the grieving. “In this way their vivid accounts of sickbed and death continued the tradition of the ars moriendi of the late Middle Ages, which had also stressed the importance of a blessed death.” Unlike the Lutherans, the Reformed rejected most funeral ceremonial, including the preaching of funeral sermons.
“A Sermon On Preparing to Die”\textsuperscript{42} (1519) contains several preparatory stages (twenty points) for death, has a quasi-vigil tone about it, and forms a practical, guided imagery or a final mental construct much like the \textit{ars moriendi} for the soon-to-be-departed. Whether the “closeness of death” refers to the plague and to the fact that people have come to a point of desiring a sudden death which was formerly a source of great fear—or perhaps to an atmosphere of anxiety that surrounds death and the gruesome block renderings depicting death in the \textit{ars moriendi} and architecture that may have taken hold of the culture—is unclear.\textsuperscript{43} What is clear is that Luther wants to make sure that the focal point of death is Christ.

You must look at death while you are alive and see sin in the light of grace and hell in the light of heaven, permitting nothing to divert you from that view. You must not view or ponder death in yourself or in your nature, nor in those who were killed by God’s wrath and were overcome by death. If you do that you will be lost and defeated with them. But you must resolutely turn your gaze, the thoughts of your heart, and all your senses away from this picture and look at death closely and untiringly only as seen in those who died in God’s grace and who have overcome death, particularly in Christ and then also in all his saints. In such pictures death will not appear terrible and gruesome. No, it will seem contemptible and dead, slain and overcome in life. For Christ is nothing other than sheer life, as his saints are likewise. The more profoundly you impress that image upon your heart and gaze upon it, the more the image of death will pale and vanish of itself without struggle or battle. Thus your heart will be at peace and you will be able to die calmly in Christ and with Christ, as we read in Revelation [14:13], “Blessed are they who die in the Lord Christ.”\textsuperscript{44}

Notice Luther’s use of the imperatival \textit{must}. Not only did he want to provide some practical evangelical pastoral assistance at the deathbed, he also wanted to impart a sense of responsibility to maintain one’s gaze upon Christ. This is also accomplished in his first Invocavit sermon, March 9, 1522 (the first of eight exhortations preached at Wittenberg to school his hearers in the understanding of how they are responsible to live now that God had made them Christians); it too places responsibility on the Christian to prepare for death and to focus on Christ. Luther underscores that:

The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his [or her] own battle with death by himself [or herself], alone. We can shout into another’s ears, but everyone must himself [or herself] be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore, everyone must himself [or herself] know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian. And
these are what you, my beloved, have heard from me many

days ago.\textsuperscript{45}

Systematic and ecumenical theologian, Dr. Gerhard Sauter, at the University

of Bonn, also senses the Christian responsibility to console others in his
treatment of the sermon. He paraphrases the reformer’s thrust, “Have you

forgotten your responsibility for your weaker brothers and sisters? We

must prepare others to stand before God and to account authentically

for themselves. This very responsibility before God forbids us from living

in such a way that we withdraw into ourselves, behaving in an isolated, self-

enclosed manner.”\textsuperscript{46} True, Luther is constantly turning people outside of

themselves into the world.

Funeral sermons focus on the resurrection of Christ and its promise to

Christians, who in the sleep of death await the resurrection. Luther preached

funeral sermons for Frederic the Wise in 1525 and his brother, the Elector,

Duke John of Saxony in 1532. The sermons have a self-sustaining, pragmatic

component; one that relies on a future “fact” of the resurrection and which

thereby provides consolation rooted in hope.

Learn to comfort yourselves with these words and instill in

your hearts the fact that it is far more certain that Duke John of

Saxony will come out of the grave and be far more splendid

than the sun now is than that he is lying here before our eyes.

This is not so certain as the fact that he will live again and go

forth with Christ because God cannot lie. But take it to heart!

For he who does not have this comfort can neither comfort

himself nor be happy, but the more the Word escapes him the

more the consolation also escapes him.\textsuperscript{47}

Luther preached that the believer must cling to the Word of God and

Christ since belief was haunted by the possibility of unbelief. In his style and

the style of the faith he represented, he counseled, “If you give yourself to

Scripture, you will feel comfort and all your concerns will be better, which

otherwise you cannot control by any act or means of your own.”\textsuperscript{48} The

assertion of trust in Christ was itself a kind of worship, a litany intended to

comfort. “This then is the true art, that in suffering and cross we should look

to the Word and the comforting assurance, and trust them, even as He said,

‘In me you shall have peace, but in the world, tribulation’ [cf. John 16:33].”\textsuperscript{49}

“To be sure, also the faithful are suffering tribulation, but they are consoled in

it, as we read in Ps. 4:2: ‘Thou hast given me room when I was in distress,’

and in 2 Cor. 1:4: ‘Who comforts us in all our tribulation.’ This comfort hope

and trust in God have given us.”\textsuperscript{50} “Therefore when something terrifies or

harms you it is most comforting that you speak up, confess Christ, and say: $\textit{Omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius},$ all things are under his feet, who can be against

me?”\textsuperscript{51}
Luther’s homiletic foci were no different from other sermon writers in this era: the cure of souls and orthodox teaching was the twofold emphasis. Not only were parishioners repeatedly clued-up to the finer points of doctrinal orthodoxy, but sermons also signified that the maintenance of theological principles never had an intrinsic value. These homiletic samples, and many more could be drawn from, also illustrate Luther’s sense of Christian obligation—responsibility. While the impact of preaching upon individual hearers may appear negligible, sermons, with all their limitations, were the best available device for forging corporate confessional identity, for creating doctrinal uniformity, and building a more responsible character in God’s people. As we can see from this sample of Luther’s sermons, he placed a high value on his audiences’ responsibility for their spiritual interests: The prominent feature on which this selection of sermons focuses—just as in his letters—is Luther’s emphatic establishment of Jesus as the object and basis of all consolation.

Him who comes to Me I shall equip, not only to be refreshed and satisfied and to quench his own thirst but also to become a sturdy, earthen vessel, endowed with the Holy Spirit and with gifts that enable him to give consolation and strength to many other people and to serve them, as he was served by Me. Thus Christ proposes to transform the man who comes to Him into a person different from the one Moses is able to make of him.52

B. Letters and Occasional Writings

Just as in his sermons, Luther’s correspondence provides continuous opportunities to perfect his consolatory exaltation of God in life and death. Luther’s reputation for mordant and forceful language obscures his opposite predilection for tender-hearted words of human sympathy and humor. His letters to and about his children demonstrate this, especially those in reference to the death of his children, where though grief-stricken he still praises God and considers the feelings and concerns of others. On the one hand, because of his own anguish, he is able to write powerful letters of consolation to others. On the other, Dr. Mennecke-Haustein explains that his letters of consolation have their basis in his own comfort and joy, in Luther’s faith-experience that Christ is near to human beings and gives himself to them: “This comforting and joy-inspiring (‘tröstliche und freudigmachende’) experience Luther sought to convey with his language making use of the capacity of language to express emotion.”53

Either way, his pastoral reputation for assisting individuals became so widespread that many wrote him asking him to send them in writing either counsel or consolation if he was unable to come in person.54 His epistolary
practice has a paradoxical feel of an “absent presence” intrinsic to his direct style. For example, with his removal of Friar Michael Dressel, the prior of the Augustinian monastery at Neustadt/Orla who was unable to maintain unity and peace in the cloister, he states, “And being absent, I want this letter to do to you, who are not available to me now, [precisely] what I would have done to you, could I be with you.” He then consoles Dressel with the reminder that leaders cannot be good and pious in and of themselves, they are responsible to be peacemakers.55

Note also the death of Benedict Pauli’s only son. Luther advises mourning but commands Pauli to “leave room for consolation. And this consolation is that the Lord gave you and now has taken away your son. Why do you torment yourself so much about this? God is omnipotent. He who has given you one son can also give you more.” Citing John 14:19, Luther then bumps up against theodicy and attempts to curb any notion that God is the cause of evil, insisting that “Why he permits this or that evil to befall us should not trouble us at all.”56

And upon the death of Catherine Jonas, Luther writes to Justus Jonas—the surviving husband—a note of shared consolation. He mentions that his own daughter (thirteen year old Magalena Luther, who had died just three months earlier) “fell asleep on Jesus’ bosom with so many godly and blessed expressions of faith in him and this is my great and only consolation.”57 Another instance where Luther invokes the loss of his dearest, devoted daughter was in his correspondence to Andrew Osiander who suffered a double measure of grief with the loss of his wife and daughter. But the language appears to shift ever so slightly in the letter to Osiander. I find in it a bit of the language of an ethic of responsibility. The fact that Osiander had “been visited by a cross and indeed a twofold cross” implies a responsibility to bear it. And while God’s evidential love toward Luther was manifest in his dearest daughter, he is responsible to crucify his own corresponding “natural love which asserts itself too powerfully in us” in order that “the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God may be done.”58 Both Luther and Osiander are responsible to offer up their natural emotions as if to replicate the Akedah Yitzhak (Gen. 22:2), “for the Lord this burnt offering is necessary, for us it is a consolation.”59 Thus, if Luther is espousing a nascent ethic of responsibility, and I believe he is, then he is working with the issues of integrating faith and ethics, or responsible living as an outworking of his theology.

Besides the “crises” of death, other crises can strike the believer, be it illness, financial woes, domestic difficulties, etc.; these too can result in a crisis of faith and were not uncommon among Protestants. Salvation and its assurance, peace and joy in one’s life, as well as security in eternity, are issues on which the conscience primarily suffers. These can serve as a sourcing mechanism
for our investigation of the theme of consolation. For Valentine Hausmann and his chronic unbelief, Luther consoles him with the words, “How many there are who have less faith than you have?” Hausemann’s awareness of his condition is an affirmation that God wants to help him. Luther seems to say “hang in there!” “Cling calmly to God, and he will cause everything to turn out well.” Four months later, Luther writes again insisting that Hausmann should not be impatient with regard to achieving the strength of faith he feels he ought: “You should not worry too much about it,” implores the reformer. Furthermore, additional instructions and responsibilities are given to assist in the situation:

You must pray powerfully, cry out against your terror, and repeat the Lord’s Prayer in a loud voice. Above all, you must take to heart that there is no doubt that your terror comes from the devil. God wants you to resist, and it is on this account that he allows this to happen. And you may be sure that he will hear fervent prayers and help. [H]ave something from the Psalms or the New Testament read to you in a clear voice, and listen attentively to the reading.

Examples of “other crises” include Matthias Weller’s and his bouts of melancholy. He was encouraged by Luther to avoid his own thoughts and to listen to what others (presumably Christians) say to him. It is a divine command that they are to comfort one another, and he needs “to learn to believe that God is speaking to you through them.” His brother, Jerome Weller, lived in Luther’s home, tutored the Luther children, and served as amanuensis for much of the table talk. For his depression Luther encouraged him to “rejoice in this temptation of the devil because it is a certain sign that God is propitious and merciful to you.” When the temptation to become depressed appears, Jerome ought not dwell on “those deadly thoughts,” but instead “joke and play games” in order to “drive out [the] diabolical thoughts and take courage.” The stratagem for Weller was “more merriment!” and for Jonas Von Stockhausen, police captain of Nordhausen, the prescription was “sweat it out!” “For the darts of the devil cannot be removed pleasantly and without effort when they are so deeply imbedded in your flesh. They must be torn out by force.” Nonetheless, the foundational similarities between these are Luther’s reminder of Christ’s unpleasant sufferings and believers’ responsibility to bear them like him.

The preceding references can be re-read through the lenses of “personal responsibility” as each case required an action or Luther prescribed a duty. In his “A letter of consolation to the Christians at Halle” (1527) occasioned by the murder of his friend, follower, and young pastor—George Winkler—and written to console his parishioners, the reformer’s primary points include a call for them to pray for their enemies. They are responsible not to retain any
feelings of bitterness or thoughts of revenge, but to pity and pray for his murderers. In the midst of this calling to act responsibly, he bids them to accept suffering as natural and inevitable for Christians.

The final correspondence we will consider concerns George Spalatin who wrote to Luther requesting that he prepare a book or letter of spiritual consolation for Elector Fredrick who was bedridden with a serious illness. Luther refused him, exclaiming to Spalatin—who was also the elector’s chaplain and secretary—that he did not see the necessity of it since he had already written a modest exposition of spiritual comfort entitled *Tessaradecas consolatoria*, “The Fourteen of Consolation.”66 “Even better,” responds Luther, “why don’t you urge him to read the Gospels and the Passion of Christ, for there is no better consolation than that?”67

In sum, Marius relates “[t]here was always in Luther a powerful sense, paradoxically terrifying and comforting at once, of the individual standing alone before God.”68 On the part of Luther’s sermon hearers or recipients of his letters, he consoled them with the good news of justifying grace. Theirs’ was a responsibility to labor hard through the suffering and grief, being responsible before God and relying solely on Him for the results of His plan as they had come clear in the death and resurrection of Christ as well as by the means of grace in their own lives. As Dr. Jane Strohl of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary fittingly contends, “Although he gives his own particular cast to the art of dying, death remains the final test, and one is not wholly secure until it has come and gone and found one steadfast. While proclaiming faith to be a gift, Luther still holds the dying person responsible for remaining constant in the conviction that he is saved by grace alone.”69

These representational selections of the Luther canon reveal his pastoral concern and demonstrate his intentionality of calling people to live and die responsibly in the context of the Word, to rely on the mercy of God and His justifying grace, and to accept salvation and the consolation of God by faith. The exemplarism contained in these sermons and correspondence was directed primarily, although not exclusively, to sustaining a Christian attitude rather than providing concrete examples of the Christian life and its good works. The emphasis is not on an external act which is to be dutifully emulated, but an internal mind-set which is to be evident to others. Specifically, in their responsibility to imitate the paradigmatic pattern of Christ’s life, Christians are to have faith in the midst of bearing the cross and faithfully serving the needs of the neighbor, not as it is displayed in Jesus, but because it is displayed in Jesus. Christians are to be obedient, humble and loving, not as Jesus was—which would present an overwhelming challenge since we live in vastly different cultures and under immeasurably different circumstances—but because he was.
IV. Luther’s Theology of Justification and Theological Ethics

The continuity between Luther and late medieval culture segues into a new quality of the experience of God where God actively assails passive humanity in order to bestow joy and courage to life. “This is the comfort that preserves us. Our hearts are full of joy and courage despite the persecutions and raging of the world. For we have the kind of Lord who does not merely redeem us from sin, God’s wrath, and eternal death, but who also protects and saves us in suffering and persecution so that we do not perish.”70 And where the former response to human suffering, death, and the cure of souls was culturally hidebound, Luther’s response, and the content and shape of his consolation—I am arguing—find its grounding in theological ethics and its source in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Before we investigate this, we are once again in a better position to understand Luther and his theological ethics if we first understand his Sitz im Leben and the contours of the theology and philosophical ethics to which he responds.

A. Justification By Grace Through Faith

In his lectures through the Psalms (1513-15), Romans (1515-16), and Galatians (1519), and in his working out his theology in controversy with Eck and his other detractors, Luther emphatically rejected the medieval notion of progressive justification and its Aristotelian source that “we become just by doing just acts.”71 He came to see that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God (iustitia Dei) and that “by the righteousness of God we must not understand the righteousness by which He is righteous in Himself but the righteousness by which we are made righteous by God. This happens through faith in the Gospel.”72

In his sermon Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519), Luther exclaims that it is this righteousness, an “alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, [which is] instilled [into us] from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith.”73 The justification of sinners is not due to their sanctification, but due to Christ’s fulfillment of all righteousness. His righteousness has been imputed or credited to us.74 Proper righteousness is the outgrowth of Christ’s alien righteousness (justitia Christi aliena). It is proper “not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works.”75 The Reformation, like Paul, articulated the liberation of humanity by faith from the obsession of works. Thus, the correct sequence in Luther’s mind was “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”76 Along this line, Luther insisted that genuine faith does not serve the self, but is active in love toward the neighbor.77

Luther’s juxtaposition of justification and consolation by faith is most evident in his Lectures on Galatians where they appear as a sequential progression
in the life of the believer that begins with justifying grace, gains momentum by faith, and—like the concluding crescendo of a Bach fugue—ends with the victorious climax of consolation. Justification—reception of forgiveness by faith—gladdened and consoled conscience—triumph over troubles, including the ultimate trouble, death. The doctrine of justification, for Luther, brings assured “consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors.” He professed, “Thus when a man is consoled and encouraged by the grace of God—that is, by the forgiveness of sins and the peace of conscience—he can bravely endure and overcome all troubles, including even death itself.” In Luther’s thinking, justification vouchsafes the experience of consolation. Again, the reformer carries forward consolation as a conclusion to justification when he insisted, “If He gave Himself into death for our sins, then undoubtedly He is not a tormentor. He is not One who will cast down the fallen and bring propitiation and consolation to the terrified. Otherwise Paul would be lying when he says ‘who gave Himself for our sins.’” It is in Luther’s theology of justification we see what Christ’s love has done for us, in the theme of consolation we see theological ethics embodying justification, both of which are grounded upon God’s unmerited love for humankind.

B. Theological Ethics and the Ascription of Responsibility

Luther cut his ethical teeth, so to speak, while lecturing several times weekly on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics during his first year at Wittenberg (1508-09). Here he saw firsthand the amalgamation and domination of the Aristotelian system in scholasticism. Aristotle’s seminal doctrine of ἔξις, where humanity’s moral virtue is incrementally realized, perfected, and made permanent (on the order of skill or musical expertise achieved by continual practice or ἑξιμόσχ) was baptized by the scholastics who Christianized the notion as an added sense to human nature, the vehicle by which good works done in imitation of the example of Christ prepare for the reception of grace, righteousness and, inevitably, salvation.

Against this thrust of most scholastic moral theory and anthropology Luther asserted,

[the common saying that human nature in a general and universal way knows and wills the good but errs and does not will it in particular cases would be better stated if we were to say that in particular cases human nature knows and wills what is good but in general neither knows nor wills it. And this is in agreement with Scripture, which describes man as so turned in on himself that he uses not only physical but even spiritual goods for his own purposes and in all things seeks only himself. This curvedness is now natural for us, a natural wickedness...
and a natural sinfulness. Thus man has no help from his natural powers, but he needs the aid of some power outside of himself.\textsuperscript{82}

It was the scholastics and their Aristotelian method of basing “sin and righteousness on works, both their performance or omission,”\textsuperscript{83}—the scope of their actualization on what a person does—that troubled Luther. He thought that this was to place action in ascendancy over being; and to be turned into the self (\textit{incurvatus in se}) instead of being absolutely dependent upon God. Faith is not to look “within,” but “outside of,” to Christ. If we believe that what a person is, is the result of what a person does, then the matter of sin and grace are in point of fact removed from any discussion of human nature; it consigns them solely to the realm of works. This, Luther believed, is the underlying reason why,

[our theologians...]

And this is why Luther reasoned that “[v]irtually the entire \textit{Ethics} of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This in opposition to the scholastics.”\textsuperscript{85}

Luther concluded that the Aristotelian person seeks his/her own good in everything, and therefore human fulfillment comes in self-love. Furthermore, inasmuch as the medieval ethic sought after justification and reduced to a basic mechanistic imitation\textsuperscript{86} of Jesus’ life-style, both of which are primarily ethical concepts, through pious works, the most we can say is that it was this theological ethic which brought about the reformer’s failure as a monk.\textsuperscript{87} The focal point of medieval Christology was the archetypal and paradigmatic nature of the life, work and death of Christ, the \textit{Christus exemplum}.\textsuperscript{88} Luther rejected medieval piety’s placement of the \textit{Christus exemplum} before the \textit{Christus sacramentum}, works before faith, and the \textit{imitatio Christi} before \textit{conformitas Christi}. This is not to say that he rejected good works or the imitation of Christ. In fact, it is faith in Christ’s sacrifice which in turn obliges or “behooves” us to imitate and live according to the example of Christ.\textsuperscript{89} This reversal of the traditional medieval order, rather than the compulsion of an existential choice, is the truly revolutionary aspect of Luther’s Christological and ethical thought. It was the realization that in imitating Christ we cannot hope to become a contributor to the divine activity of assimilating a copy of the \textit{exemplum}. It is the reformer’s theological ethics that make the believer responsible to perform good works and it is her maintaining the imitation
Christ that gives guidance and direction for those works to be performed.

Underlying this seemingly straightforward dichotomy is a profound theological insight. The transformation of humanity is a prerequisite for its reformation. The art of living authentically for God and for others, what we may refer to as *ars vivendi*, is the spontaneous, responsibly responding action of that transformed character participating in acts of beneficence as unto God, not out of obedience to a discipline of law imposed from without. Yet here, in a manner of speaking, is the proverbial rub in the reformer’s theological ethics.

Luther first worked out some of the main contours of his theological ethics in his 1520 tract, “The Freedom of a Christian.” His undertaking was to create a context in which people could become the kind of Christians envisioned in this tract, introducing the seemingly complementary theses that the Christian life was one wherein the Christian is “a perfectly free lord, subject to none” and “a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all.” It makes clear that a believing Christian is free from sin through faith in God, yet bound by love to serve his neighbor, and Luther sees these as correlative truths. Nonetheless, his ethics—based as it is on the law of love—contains his famous ambivalence. On the one hand, it is free from the law; on the other hand, deontologically, it really is God’s command, and the Christian is responsible, even duty-bound to follow it. Is this not in fact a new formulation of law standing in the way of true morality? How does Luther advocate freedom from law and resolve this apparent love legalism?

Systems of ethics are inclined to discuss moral acts in terms of their goal (teleological), duty (deontological), or fittingness (*euthékontik*). A theological ethical system based upon the doctrine of justification by faith tends to discuss moral acts in terms of what they presuppose or are intended to express. From this standpoint, Luther asserted that the Christian is free inasmuch as the Word of God and the forgiveness of sins in Christ liberates her from sin, death, hell, and the devil. Such a liberated Christian does not scorn good deeds but does them willingly. Joined with Christ in justification the Christian lives as Christ in the world, a life of consoling service to others.

As to its outworking, Luther presented his theological ethics in the context of his recommendations for practice. “Why, the whole Scripture is concerned with provoking us to faith; now driving us with commands and threats, now drawing us with promises and consolations. In fact, everything in Scripture is either a command or a promise. The commands humble the proud with their demands, the promises exalt the humble with their forgiveness.” In other words, the task of theological ethics is to present the claims of the Word of God to humanity. Theological ethics must, therefore, remain grounded in the Word of God; otherwise it is untrue to its charge and disintegrates into a theoretical enterprise at best or—at worst—a metastatic escapist *gnosis*. Luther elevated this new ethical context within the theological
confines of his age and lived it out—lived it as a demonstration of consolation and *cura animarum*—reflecting the Gospel working through the Christian individual, penetrating whatever it touches as it serves others.

The fine, theological point of it—a harmonizing of his alleged ambivalence seen through today's theological spectacles and wrapped in the parlance of responsibility—is this: the task set before the Christian is more a responsibility, and less a duty. It is discretionary, filled with problems left to one’s moral sensitivities and decision-making abilities. The norm is not simply a law to be obeyed, but a job as a faithful, responsible steward to be done well (Mt. 25:21). Just as the reformer responded in love to the real world of his experience, the responsible Christian responds to God by responding in love to the exigencies and people found in each situation with which experience is shared.

The authentically Christian ethic for Luther is based on an experience of what God has given and makes possible, not on some absolutized perception of what God demands; it therefore deals more with *deeds* than with specific deeds (the parable of the Good Samaritan is really about being a neighbor, not just loving one’s neighbor). This is an ethics, then, that consists not of Christian actions, but always of “Christian acting,” not in the sense of role-playing, but as a people who have been shaped by God whose Christian responsiveness grows out of the response to God’s love and responds to others.\(^95\) Therefore, in the theological attribution of responsibility, the Christian is made, not held, responsible. Casting this in terms of the reformer’s notion of conscience—the key to his mature theological understanding of the self, and a key insight into his theological ethics—our union with Christ\(^96\) makes us conscious of responsibility, the self as being before God and responsible toward God.

**V. Consolation and the Moral Economy of Christian Responsibility**

In this article I have brought together Martin Luther’s theology of justification with his theology and ministry of consolation, and found them to be compatible, based, as they are, on the love of God as revealed in Christ. I have shown that the theme of consolation, while temporally conditioned, affirmed, and established in the lives of people, is to be seen in the light of Luther’s theology of justification and theological ethics. Consolation was no mere theoretical model; it was effectively used as a spiritual resource in his personal experience.\(^97\) It was also understood to be biblically determined, as Paul announced to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:3-7),

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we
ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.98 Accordingly, consolation begins with transcendence and turns to human responsibility to fortify others, the same as loving one’s neighbor. From its place in the divine economy, consolation is to be injected by the Christian into the lives of people when they need it most as part of the moral economy of Christian responsibility.

We identify Luther as a reformer, yet his pastoral ministry was far more extensive than is generally recognized. He never lost sight of the individual soul, which he cared for and consoled with God’s Word. And perhaps chief among his contributions in the history of Christian thought was the notion that the redeemed/justified do not need to be overwhelmed by sin, distress, and death. Looking at the present-day religious scene, we may conclude that he greatly contributed toward this achievement. Not in the sense that psychotherapeutic religion has prevailed over cultural conceptions of death or in the prolonging of biological survival over any cost in suffering, but in the reformation sense; one that calls us, above all else, to protest our own sin and insouciance toward God, to be open to God’s love in life and death and to be responsible to see the neighbor as Christ sees her, to be—in Luther’s words—“a Christ to the other.”99

Against those who insist that “the stakes of evangelical spiritualism that continue to be raised are at constant risk of having their bluff called,”100 or a Nietzschean narcissistic assertive, “If it was the central purpose [of the Protestant Reformation] to make people—all people—think, feel, and act as Christians, to imbue them with a Christian mind-set, motivational drive, and a way of life, it failed,”101 Luther would hurl his inkpot and offer his Christological wager.

Why are you seeking and looking for other ways? Look to Me, and reject all other thoughts regarding ways to heaven. You must expunge these completely from your heart and think of nothing but these words of Mine: “I am the Way.” See to it that you tread on Me, that is, cling to Me with strong faith and with all confidence of the heart. I will be the Bridge to carry you across. In one moment you will come out of death and the fear of hell into yonder life. For it is I who paved the way and the course. I walked and traversed it Myself, so that I might take you and all My followers across. All that is necessary is that
you unhesitatingly set your foot on Me, wager boldly on Me,
go cheerfully and happily, and die in My name. 102

The imperatival tone in the reformer's wager tells us again that the
reformation ethic of responsibility is a theological ethic—more so, a Christian
ethic—insofar as it confesses Christ to be the participatory center of the
church and her ethics. Thus, it is Christological. In affirming this, we must
step back from our usual grounding of our ethics implicitly or explicitly in
various human experiences with respect to how we define morality. The
appeal to experience alone does not substantiate an ethical position. Nor can
the philosopher and theologian simply identify the state of affairs that must
obtain in human existence (i.e., the need of consolation) for persons to have
such experiences (i.e., being consoled). The ultimate and best evidence for
Christian ethics and justification lies in God's Word in its tripartite sense of
Christ, the gospel he made known, and the Scripture that reliably communicates
this and consolation to us (e.g., “Even though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death,” “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help
in trouble,” “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your word has revived
me,” “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you
rest.”)

I have also demonstrated that a suitable context for consolation is the
moral economy of Christian responsibility. The responsibility to console
emerges from Christ's vicarious sacrifice into a world that is God’s, yet fallen.
It is a mature ethic of care, of respect, and enhancement to the integrity of
life. The theme of consolation in Luther's correspondence and sermons not
only demonstrates but gives us the insight into his theological ethics that
there is a moral economy to Christian responsibility: Christians are to structure
the basic forms of human relationships in which they live in such a way that
God may be glorified and people might receive God's gift of consolation.
For Luther, the characteristic of this Christian life is life lived in response to
redemption. It is decisively rooted in one's responsibility to God for the
actions made in life, in one's faith, hope, and love. In so doing, the anxiety
and ritual of death are replaced by the ethics of life, through Jesus Christ;
through his life, death, resurrection, and reign in power. This was how Luther
reinterpreted his era's interpretations of life and death.

Indeed, the fundamental part of the Christian art of living (ars vivendi) is
the recognition that life takes place in the presence of God, and the challenge
to take responsibility for the whole of our lives, religious and secular, is as
stewards obedient to God. While we cannot simply repeat the reformer's
consolatory insights and inject them into our age, we can ask of what might
this ethics and ministry consist and where does it begin it in light of the
terrors of our day. The starting point of a genuinely Christian ethics in
Luther's system of thought and its relation to the realities of our world today
lies in the recognition that the conversion of the individual leads to a new faith and obedience, a new lifestyle of being bound to the God who commands, and a personal ethic of responsibility to the commands of God. All too often Christianity today avoids responsibility when entering the realm of love, and avoids love when entering the realm of responsibility. To the extent that the people involved in the cure of souls are a Christ rooted people, they must remember that the love and beneficent care offered to others is implicit in their responsibly-responding relationship to God. As such, a ministry of consolation may be the most effective way to promote a renewed sense of Christian responsibility for today, because it emphasizes the inner resources of faith and a redeemed life rather than any external incentives that our world may offer.

What, then, does consolation in the moral economy of Christian responsibility require? It is the responsibility for the Christian to be, on a one-to-one basis, a companion and encourager of him or her who is in distress, in desperate need, or alone, to be spontaneously near him or her and absolutely, genuinely present with someone whom hardship—or whatever nature it may be—has placed in critical need or solitude. It includes loving our neighbors (Rom. 13:8-10), caring for their souls, directing them to God, providing for their needs where we are able, and speaking the consolations of God into their life. "If another can comfort and encourage me by telling me that he stands with me under the same command—and there is no greater comfort or stronger encouragement on earth than awareness of this common bond—nevertheless no other can be responsible for my proper hearing of what is commanded of me."

Thomas à Kempis wrote, "All human comfort is vain and short." Not so with the consolation of God; its forms are many and can always match the suffering. God can deliver us "out of affliction" or encourage us "in affliction" so that it can be endured. Luther would be quick to add that the consolations of God soften, rather than remove affliction. The moral economy of Christian responsibility today, just as in Luther’s day, takes up this ministry of care to temper sorrow, rather than striving to make it disappear, and what is to be expected from its influence is calmness in catastrophe, strength in tribulation, and peace in adversity rather than the sudden and definitive extinction of all suffering. It is a positive ethics of accompaniment, as opposed to living and dying in desolation.

At this point permit me to beg to differ with Pascalian heartfelt intuition and the diminution of consolation, that «Peu de chose nous console, parce que peu de chose nous afflige.» Life—whether during the late Middle Ages, or the Reformation, or today—involves a monumental amount of conflict management, the greatest of which is death. A prevalent Christian theme asserted by the reformer was that in order to achieve consolation in this life,
one must first be responsible to confront and successfully manage the anxieties of the age and the fear of death by responding and responsibly relying on the God who alone redeems from sin, justifies, and gives peace of conscience, comfort, and security. Thus, consolation is not a remedy, it is a result of the remedy; it is found in *ars vivendi* not *ars moriendi*.

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Endnotes


3 *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* (vol. 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957-65), 79.


6 See the collection of translated articles in Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety: Essays by Berndt Hamm* (ed. Robert J. Bast; vol. CX of Studies in the History of Christian Thought; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 177 Hamm refers to the symposium “Die Frühe Reformation als Umbruch” (Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1996) and the question that is constantly discussed as to whether the Reformation should be understood as a radical break from the world of the late Middle Ages or as a process of continuation that the Reformation is both. It is a radical change, in that it rapidly broke from and re-evaluated tradition; it is a continuation in that it took up and developed crucial themes from within that tradition.”


Consolation (Trost in German, consolatio in Latin) involved giving encouragement to someone who was sick, sad, or hopeless and to take heart again. To be consoled was considered a gift from God.


See, for example, LW 3:6 (Commentary on Genesis), "At the beginning of the Reformation (initium Evangelii) He (God) kept me occupied to such an extent with responsibilities, worries, perils, and hardships that all ambition was shut out of my mind."


The need to educate the laity in Christian fundamentals was mandated by the Council of Nantes and the Decretum of Burchard of Worms (d. 1125). Jean Gerson (1363-1429) initiated the literary form in his immensely popular Opus tripartitum that originated out of similar concerns and was the source of much of the ars moriendi. See Jean Gerson, Oeuvres Complètes(with introduction, text, and notes by Mgr. Gloricux; vol. 2; Paris, Desclé, 1960-1973), 316-343.
The intense medieval fear of sudden death is investigated in Edelgard E. DuBruck and Barbara I. Gusick, eds., Death and Dying in the Middle Ages (vol. 45; Studies in the Humanities: Literature—Politics—Society; New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

Attributed originally to Anselm (1033-1109) and commonly titled “Admonition of St. Anselm to Someone Dying and Fearing Excessively for his Sins” can be found in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, ed., Analecta Anselmiana: Untersuchung über Person und Werk Anselmus von Canterbury (vol. 4.1; Frankfurt am Main: Minerva-Verlag, 1969-1975), 169-171, and J. P. Migne, ed., Patrologiae cursus compleus (Series Latina, vol. CLVIII; Paris, 1844ff.), cols. 685ff. The phraseology intended to affirm the morally and doctrinally correct response: Do you believe in the elements of the Christian faith as they have been defined by the Church? Do you rejoice that you die in the Christian faith? Do you recognize that you have seriously offended God? Are you sorry you have offended your Creator? Do you intend to avoid offending God if He should prolong your life? Do you hope and do you believe that you will come to eternal salvation not by your merits but by the merits of Jesus Christ? Then the dying person or condemned person was urged to place all his faith in the death of Christ. The only specifically ecclesiastical part of the occasion was the final prayer of absolution by the priest.


Jared Wicks, “Applied Theology at the Deathbed: Luther and the Late-Medieval Tradition of the Ars moriendi,” Gregorianum 79/2 (1998): 365-67, where the Ars moriendi contributions of Jean Gerson, Thomas Peuntrner, Johann Geiler, and Johannes von Paltz are diligently contrasted with the German text of Luther’s “Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben.”


The historical term for pastoral work has the primary sense of cura or “καρο” with a strong sense of “καρεύω” behind it. The historical centerpiece of this ministerial function was “admonition” (ἵππιον, Acts 20:31) or “correction” (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 2 Th. 3:15) or “instruction through the pastor” (1 Th. 5:12, 14). As well, it is used as the last effort before rejecting a heretic (Tit. 3:10). Its usage was familiar to the apostolic fathers (1 Clem. 7.1; Ignatius Ephesians 3.1; Hermas Visions 2.4.3), and the reference may be applicable to admonitory sermons (2 Clem. 17.3; Justin Apology 67.4).

Cf. Per Anderson, “Reading Luther on Plague in a Technological Age,” Word & World 13/3 (1993): 277-283, who investigates Luther’s essay on “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague” and argues that Luther’s ethic of plague presupposes a life and thought world transformed in a way that seems irreversible.
Parenthetically, Tentler’s reading of the late Middle Ages instructional manuals used to guide the confessional practice of priests led him to argue that “consolation and the cure of anxiety remained as prominent to the penitent as discipline and the creation of guilt” in the sacrament of penance. Yet, one can hardly imagine what consolatory effect was realized during intense penitent interrogation and the glaring lights of priestly scrutiny. On this Ozment states, “Priests and laity were often completely frustrated when they attempted to determine degrees of consent to sin and culpability.” See Thomas N. Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 103, 131, 148, 349, cited in Steven Ozment, The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 218-19.

Recall the Medieval Latin descriptor sinecure (“without cure” [of souls]), typically applied to the sacerdotal types who shirk this responsibility; those who hold an ecclesiastical office that requires little or no work, but nonetheless provides an income to the holder.


A monastic method of bible study—Oratio, meditatio, tentatio (prayer, meditation, Anfectung)—was encouraged (over his own writings!) where praying and meditating on the scriptural text with conscientious diligence was practiced, especially in times of God’s tempting and testing in spiritual matters, e.g., with doubt and despair. See LW 34:283-88.

James M. Kittelson, “Luther and Modern Church History,” in The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 261. The cure of souls as an hermeneutical lens on Luther to fathom his life and work and their applicability church life today is ably drawn out in Kittelson’s chapter.

Therefore I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves by study, by reading, by meditation, and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both your own and others,
consolation, and take them from the Law to grace, from active righteousness to passive righteousness, in short, from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in the conflict of conscience it is the devil’s habit to frighten us with the Law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that thus he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ.”

34 LW 51:129 (Sermon on St. Matthias’ Day, Matt. 11:25-30, 1525).

35 Examples include Plutarch’s letter to his wife, Consolatio ad uxorem, occasioned by the death of their infant daughter Timoxena, and Cicero’s Consolatio, which he wrote to himself after the death of his beloved daughter Tullia to help him overcome his grief.


37 Friedrich Gogarten, Christ the Crisis (trans. R. A. Wilson; London: SCM Press, 1970), 284, citing WA 40 II, 254, held that for Luther, “the full content of the Christian faith as he understands it. ‘Christ attributes all he does and says to the Father, and this makes God’s name no longer terrible to us, but comforting.’”

38 LW 43:121, n. 4 (Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague, 1527).

39 Ibid, 131.


43 Wittenberg suffered under the plague to the degree that the University was temporarily relocated to Jena in 1527, yet Luther stayed “because of the terrible fear among the common people,” some dying in his arms. Note Luther’s letter to George Spalatin, August 19, 1527, WA, Br, IV, 232-233. During the pestilences of 1535 and 1539, even while he was at some of his most trying times as a reformer, he continued to go into the homes of the sick and dying.

44 LW 42:104.

45 WA 10, III, 2-3, LW 51:70.


47 LW 51:240 (Sermon at the Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony, I Thess. 4:13-14, August 18, 1532). But, beyond the practical, this also brings to mind Moltmann’s (re)orientation of theology, his proleptic point of view, and the eschatological ethics of the resurrection, or, what the redeemed world of life is lived like; “‘The future has already begun.’ Jesus’ resurrection already makes possible

48 LW 51:204 (Sermon at Coberg on Cross and Suffering, 1530).

49 Ibid., 205.

50 LW 25:179 (Lectures on Romans, expositing Rom. 15:33)

51 LW 52:278 (The Gospel for the Festival of the Epiphany, Mt. 2:1-12, 1535).

52 LW 23:273 (Sermon on the Gospel of John [7:39], 1530-32)

53 Reinis, Reforming the Art of Dying, 9, citing Mennecke-Haustein, Luthers Trostbriefe, 9.


55 To Michael Dressel, September 25, 1516, WA, Br, I, 57-59.

56 Spoken to Benedict Pauli, June 1533, WA, TR, I, No. 949. Strohl asserts that, “Behind the devil’s machinations Luther glimpses God allowing evil so that God might bring good from it, a good that will often escape the sufferer’s notice until the light of glory replaces the light of grace. The devil is God’s devil. The petitions in the Lord’s Prayer to ‘save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil’ are, after all, directed at staying the very hand of God.” Jane E. Strohl, “Luther’s Eschatology: The Last Times and the Last Things” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1989), 110. The late Richard Marius of Harvard contended that Luther had no “rational or systematic answer” for the problem of evil and that “Satan was finally God’s Satan, doing in a perverse way God’s will.” See Richard Marius, Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 76-79.


58 To Andrew Osiander, June 3, 1545, WA, Br, XI, 113, 114.

59 Ibid.

60 To Valentine Hausmann, February 19, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 267

61 To Valentine Hausmann, June 24, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 322-23.

62 To Matthias Weller, October 7, 1534, WA, Br, VII, 104-06.

64 To Jonas Von Stockhausen, November 27, 1532, WA, Br, VI, 386-88. Note also the letter to Mrs. Jonas Von Stockhausen on the same day (pp. 388-89) wherein Luther mentions that God sends suffering in order that we might conform to him. Note also the encouragement that she not leave her husband alone and that she hide the cutlery, other sharp instruments, and any toxins: “leave nothing about with which he might harm himself. Solitude is poison to him.”

65 A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle Upon the Death of their Pastor, George Winkler, September or November 1527, WA, Br, II, 402-03, LW 43:145-66.


67 To George Spalatin, November 11, 1521, LW 48:325-28.

68 Marius, Luther, 333.

69 Strohl, “Luther’s Eschatology,” 160.


72 LW 25:151 (Lectures on Romans).

73 LW 31:297 (expositing Phil. 2:5-6). This anthropological and soteriological perspective, that the Christian is and lives in another extrinsically, extra se, by an alien righteousness, not from and in herself, is essential for understanding Luther. See Daphne Hampson, Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9-55.

74 The doctrine of justification, considered by Luther and his followers to be the articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae, is enshrined in the Augsburg Confession (1530), a brief statement in Article 4; the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article 1 (1537); Belgic Confession (1561), Articles 22-23; Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Question 60; and Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Chap. II. For a superb examination of the historical development of the doctrine, see Alister E. McGrath, Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, (3rd cd.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

75 LW 31:299 (Two Kinds of Righteousness).


77 Perhaps his most earnest declaration of this belief is in his Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1546), LW 35:370-71.

78 LW 26:133 (expositing Gal. 2:17)

79 LW 26:27 (Lectures on Galatians).

80 LW 26:39 (expositing Gal. 1:5).

81 See Works of Aristotle, vol. 2, and the references to training by accustoming or habituation at 1098b4, 1099b9, 1103a20, b16; 1119a27, 1121a23, 1151a19, 1152a29; 1180a3, 15 until one acquires the right habits (©2'H) referenced at 1095a4, 1103a17, 1148b17, 34; 1154a33, 1179b21, 1180b5, 1181b22.


83 LW 25:261 (Lectures on Romans).

84 Ibid., 263.
85 LW 31:12 (Disputation Against the Scholastics).

86 While I Cor. 11:1, 1 Pet. 2:21, and the writings of Tauler and à Kempis press believers into the medieval rhetorical sense of imitatio, a careful observance of how one responds to the givens in one time and place and going and doing likewise in another time and place, mimicry is not the aim but is often the unmindful result. What is intended is closer to Paul’s depiction of the identifying essence of his life in Phil. 1:21 (“For to me, to live is Christ”). This speaks to a far more meaningful connection than a conformand’s simple impersonation of Jesus, the core sense being nearer to the Johannine μόρφωσις, a participatory religio-moral-action-guide found in the real living experience of rootedness in Christ and the concrete ethic of his example; one of concrete relations—a responsibility before God.


89 LW 27:238, “the suffering of Christ is both a sacrament and an example—a sacrament because it signifies the death of sin in us and grants it to those who believe, an example because it also behooves us to imitate Him in bodily suffering and dying. The sacrament is what is stated in Rom. 4:25: ‘Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.’ The example is what is stated in I Peter 2:21: ‘Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.’”

90 LW 31:333–377

91 From Paul’s dictum, “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all” (I Cor. 9:19, ESV).

92 Richard Niebuhr “solves” this problem in Luther by utilizing Ernst Cassirer’s The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (4 vols.; trans. Ralph Manheim, pref. and intro. Charles W. Hendel; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1996). He relegates the law emphasis to the image of “man the citizen” homo politicus (the obeyer and enactor of laws), which—incidentally—Niebuhr rejects, and incorporates the love emphasis into the image of “man the answerer” homo dialogicus (the fitting responder), the symbol of the responsible person. See H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). Gustafson “solves” it by considering Luther’s ethic a Gesinnungsethik, an ethic of disposition; as it is not a new external law it avoids legalism. The Christian is inwardly disposed to do what the law requires her to do in a different spirit from what was once the case and she acts out her faith toward her neighbor in a spirit and manner that exceeds legal requirements.
See James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). The notion of exceeding legal requirements is reminiscent of two other possible “solutions.” Pascal’s epigram indicated his contention that true morality is found beyond the law, "la vraie morale se moque de la morale" ("true morality laughs at morality"), see Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres Complètes (Texte Établi et Annote par Jacques Chevalier; vol. 34 Bibliothèque de la Pléiade; Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 1094, §24. As well, Halakhic Judaism’s concept of לָפַט מָשָּׁרָה חַרְדָּא (lifnim mishurat ha-din), usually rendered “beyond the line of the law” or “beyond the measure of the law,” understands morality to begin only after the fulfillment of the law. As a supererogatory act, it promotes an end (teleologically) which is morally binding to follow (deontologically), yet in such a manner that it is not deontologically obligatory because it requires so much of the actor. The requirement is to do the right and the good in the eyes of Yahweh (Deut. 6:18) as evolving from the context of one’s acts, and may vary with circumstances and individuals; different from the imposition of a fixed objective legal standard (דינ, din). Along this line, George Lindbeck (“Martin Luther und der rabbinische Geist,” Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 40/1 [1998]: 40-65) finds formal similarities, despite material differences, in his comparison of Luther’s point of view as a pastor and catechist to Max Kadushin’s probing of the Rabbinic mindset in the latter’s The Rabbinic Mind (Classics in Judaic Studies; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952; repr., Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Academic Publishing, 2001).

93 LW 21:103, Luther says, “Here you have a word and a command of God hovering over you, commanding you to love your neighbor, to rebuke the disorderly, and to comfort the sorrowful. Because it is a matter of command, it cannot be wrong” (expositing Mt. 5:33).

94 LW 36:124 (The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520).

95 I am drawing on Niebuhr’s The Responsible Self, 126, and his theological conception of responsibility: “Responsibility affirms: ‘God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.’”

96 A trenchant interpretation of neighbor love as shaped by justification/union with Christ which serves as a model to understand and integrate faith and ethics—following the Finnish school of Luther interpretation—is provided by Michigan State University College of Law Professor, Mark Totten, who also holds a Ph.D. in ethics from the Yale University Department of Religious Studies. See his “Luther on Unio cum Christo,” Journal of Religious Ethics 31/3 (Winter 2003): 443-462.

97 LW 43:200, “I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!” (A Simple Way to Pray, 1535).

Jacques Derrida, _The Gift of Death_ (trans. David Wills; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111 culls this reading from Charles Baudelaire, “The Pagan School,” in Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr., eds and trans., _Baudelaire as Literary Critic_ (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 74-77. Derrida argues that the act of doing good is a gift to someone that usually comes at a great cost to us, the greatest of which would be to die for others. Derrida’s clever yet slight reference to the Christian teaching of God suffering a death to save humanity (p. 40-50) is eclipsed by his discussion of Jan Patočka’s distillation of religion as responsibility and Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals as “the long history of the origin of responsibility (Verantwortlichkeit)” (p. 112). While religion needs to sustain its conversation with its secular critics, and vice versa, identifying the essence of religion to be responsibility results from drawing a sizeable portion of religious dross from their theological predecessors.

Gerald Strauss, _Luther’s House of Learning: Indoctribution of the Young in the German Reformation_ (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 307, in Hendrix, _Recultivating the Vineyard_, 149. This sentiment, particularly indicative of the reductionistic element in Strauss’ work, also reflects a morally solipsistic thought on Christianity in general. It calls to mind Nietzsche’s madman who announces the death of God in _The Gay Science_, no. 125 (1882) and his haunting queries, “Whither is God?” he cried. ‘I shall tell you. We have killed him — and I. All of us are his murderers. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?’” Nietzsche devoted the lingering years of his rational life to the answer that humanity must take the matters of forgiveness and atonement into its own hands. So too with our consolation, at the end of the day it can be found by our own hand, “The thought of suicide is a strong means of comfort: it helps us get through many an evil night.” Friedrich Nietzsche, _Beyond Good and Evil_ (ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann; trans. Judith Norman; Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 70, §157

Mennecke-Hauslein, _Luthers Trostbriefe_, 274, emphasizes this aspect of Luther’s consolatory style, “Vielmehr betont er immer wieder seinen Willen, sich um den Consolandus zu bemühen, sein Bestes zu geben und alle seine Künste sprachlichen Überredens und Überzeugens, des Aufmunterns und Erheiterns, kurz, seine rhetorica consolatrix einzusetzen” (“Rather he stresses repeatedly that it is his will to exert himself for the one being consoled, to give his best and to use all his speaking skills in persuading and consoling, in encouraging and cheering up, in short, his rhetoric of consolation”).


Pascal, _Oeuvres Complètes_, 1132, §175, “little things console us, because little things afflict us.”
The meaning and pointing of לְשׁוֹן רֵעִים (לְשׁוֹן רֵעִים) in Isa 53:9 (usually rendered “rich”) remain controversial subjects and need resolution because of the importance of this verse and chapter in the history of Old Testament (OT) messianic interpretation. One approach has been to emend it to “evil-doers” (הַשְֹאָל). Others leave the text as it stands in the MT, believing the text anticipates or predicts the burial of Jesus in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea. The fact that “rich” is a tri-consonantal reversal of its parallel term “wicked” הָרָעְל (הָרָעְל) has been noticed by a few commentators. But since “rich” is not a normal parallel for “wicked,” they conclude emendation is the best solution. Most, however, do not mention this literary feature or see it as exegetically significant.

This article will argue that emendation is not required because “rich” can provide a proper synonymous and semantic parallel to “wicked” in this text and within its OT context. These “rich” are the “wicked rich.” While rejecting the MT reading as the Hebrew word for “rich,” some in principle have agreed by proposing a sense like “rabble” based on an Arabic cognate. What follows will establish that Isa 53:9 is not a prophecy applicable to the wealthy Joseph in whose tomb Jesus was buried. A contribution to scholarly debate on this matter is made, not by discovery of the interplay of common letters for “wicked” and “rich,” but by demonstrating that this play on words is an intentional use of the word “rich” because it offers this pun and provides a suitable synonymous parallel to the “wicked ones” of the preceding poetic line. These “rich ones” in the OT cultural climate also would have been considered disreputable people. This study hopes to answer the challenge posed by Watts in his commentary on Isaiah: “With a rich one remains unexplained. The phrase has been applied to Jesus but it is difficult to find the meaning in its original setting.” Further it will challenge the answer given by Young’s commentary: “There is no need to assume that לְשׁוֹן רֵעִים necessarily connotes rich men who are evil.” Isaiah 53:9a (the first of two bi-cola in v. 9) will be shown to be a synonymous and symmetric parallelism: a-b-c // [a’]-b’-c’ with a 3:2 word-count meter. The translation of this text that will be defended is:
Survey of Modern Interpretations/Translations of Isaiah 53:9a

The issues that divide interpreters and translators of Isaiah 53:9a are evident when versions and commentaries are compared. Many leave interpretation open to the reader while others are minimally or highly interpretive, but rarely is rendered other than “rich.” Others also have accepted that “[the] rich [ones]” is a repetition of “[the] wicked ones” in Isa 53:9a. While concluding that “rich” is not a natural [parallel] to “wicked,” North makes reference to Nyberg’s work in 1942 which insists that these terms are synonymous and uses the OT prophets’ denunciations of the rich as proof.8 What follows will pick up where Nyberg left off and provide similar and additional, yet hopefully more convincing, support for the synonymous parallel of “rich” and “wicked” in Isa 53:9a. What is new is the conviction that the author purposefully employed to symbolize the “wicked” (משל), using this reversal of letters as a literary device to enable his readers to make the interchangeable connection between the wicked and the “wicked wealthy.” Childs rejects this approach by saying that a link between the burial of the rich and wicked “hardly offers a natural parallel within Israel.”9 This is true in terms of the burial customs for each class of citizens, but the concern of the text of Isaiah 53:9 is with the fact that the Servant undeservedly was treated like a criminal (which concept is identified as those who are “wicked” // “rich”). Even Childs helps on this point by noting that this juxtaposition (wicked // rich) continues the typology of the Servant as the righteous and innocent sufferer of the Psalter.10 Others, in line with Nyberg, as Childs points out, allow for “rich” to have, within its semantic range, the sense “rich through extortion.”11

Exegesis of “Rich” in Isaiah 53:9a

The main controversy that surrounds Isa 53:9a (ojis דוד) is the meaning of the opening verb based on the root יד (“give”; “place”). Regardless of how this is resolved, it has little or no bearing on whether in 9aii means “a rich one” or “the rich ([oppressive] ones).”12

The phrase (53:9aaii) is the great challenge for the exegete of this verse. Who is this rich one or rich ones? Why the plural expression “in his deaths”? Is the initial waw antithetical? Since the verse begins with a wayyiqtol (preterite, past-tense) verb, and not a n’qatal (so-called prophetic perfect), why do some say this text prophesies the death and/or burial of this servant with a rich man?13 Is he Israel or an individual? Was he associated in death with the wealthy and wicked (synthetic parallel) or just the wicked (synonymous parallel) or, contrary to expectation, with the rich (antithetic parallelism)? Our concern is with the meaning of this clause in its
immediate literary, linguistic, and living contexts. Notably the NT does not use this text (Isa 53:9a) as one fulfilled by Jesus.\textsuperscript{14} The term לִֽבְּלֹ ("rich") is singular; but is it a collective (plural) or numerical (singular) single form in function?\textsuperscript{15} The LXX uses plural forms for both "wicked" and "wealthy."

The poetics of Isaiah 53:9a are arguably those of a synonymous parallelism. The verb of 53:9ai must be supplied for 53:9aii and the final terms mirror each other ("his grave" and "in his deaths," which latter is often emended to "in his tomb"). All this warrants that the remaining and medial terms (adjectives) of 53:9ai and aii be viewed as mirror images.\textsuperscript{16} Since [the] wicked [ones] is plural "rich" can be interpreted as a collective singular, i.e. [the] rich [ones]." Further, since the context is about the intentional and/or actual mistreatment of a righteous one as if unrighteous, the mention of the "shearers" in 53:7 shows that the author is focused on the oppressors (cf. vv. 7a and 8a) of this "lamb" (cf. vv. 6-7). Such undeserved association with evil oppressors is the concern of Isaiah 53:9. As a result the initial waw of 53:9aii may be taken as pleonastic (stylistic and un-translated) or explicative ("even") rather than adversative ("but"; e.g., NASB uses "yet").

The Poetry and Poetics of Isaiah 53:9a

The Hebrew consonantal text of Isaiah 53:9a may be schematized as follows (cf. the MT major disjunctive accents):

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{c'} & \text{b'} & \text{[a]} \\
\text{בֶּן אָדָם} & \text{כַּבֵּר} & \text{כַּבֵּר}
\end{array}
\]

It forms one line of a synonymous, incomplete bi-colon with a 3:2 word-stress meter.\textsuperscript{17} As the mechanical layout of 53:9a above shows, 9aii is a mirror image of 9ai. Most telling is the fact that the words for "wicked" and "rich" share the same basic consonants but in reverse order, producing a kind of alliteration and assonance: +יכ" /// כַּבֵּר כַּבֵּר \( rēšā'īm l'āšēr \). This has been recognized previously by scholars.\textsuperscript{18} But the main contention here is that this phonetic and morphological similarity was a pun intended to clarify that these "rich ones" are related to the "wicked ones." These are the wicked rich or wealthy oppressors. For those who interpret this oppressed servant messianically and individually, he would be treated like a criminal in his death and burial. He would be "assigned" to evil design a place with the dregs of society although he did not deserve it. This was the intention of the oppressors, regardless of what kind of tomb he actually received. For those who interpret this suffering servant as Israel (typologically messianic to some), the nation was unjustly treated as one deserving a dishonorable death or burial. This suffering servant, though not guilty of violence or verbal abuse (v. 9b, or if synonymous, only verbal violence), has a criminal's tribute and tomb planned for him. This proposed synonymy of "wicked" and "wealthy oppressors" is further strengthened by the fact that other approaches to explain contextually this term (לִֽבְּלֹשׁ) are: (1) to emend to לִֽבְּלֹ חָסִי "doers of evil"; or (2) to defer to an Arabic cognate
(thus Hebrew homograph) meaning “refuse [noun]” or “rabble”; or (3) to emend to “demons” (דרון גויים). It should be noted that no textual data exist to support these or any other proposed emendations. We are left, therefore, to do the best we can exegetically with the text as it stands.

A major exegetical issue for many commentators is the plural form of the final term of 9aii “in his deaths” (in הרמות). The point of the various proposals is that this may have referred to a burial place or tomb built at a religious site. An argument that tries to support the plural MT form “deaths” as original says that it refers to the nation of Israel rather than an individual, or it is a plural collective to parallel the singular collective in the synonymous colon. “Tomb” is a more exact parallel with “grave” but “death” does not remove the synonymous nature of these two cola in Isaiah 53:9a. Whatever the conclusion (“death” or “tomb”), the evidence for the meaning of “rich” (עלים) presented so far is not affected one way or the other.

Some suggest that the interpretation of the preposition (לע, lεv) that begins the bi-colon immediately following (Isa 53:9b) does tip the scales one way or the other as regards the subject of Isaiah 53:9a. Oswalt, for example, notes that antithetical parallelism (thus adversative waw) for Isa 53:9a could be supported by a causal use of לע in 53:9b; that is, that the original plans were thwarted due to the servant’s righteousness. But since synonymous parallelism is so likely in 53:9a, the preposition beginning the bi-colon of 53:9b must be taken as concessive “although,” which is a rare but possible use of לע. However, regardless of whether one says “because he did no violence” or “although he did no violence,” the arguments for the synonymous nature of Isaiah 53:9a stand.

The Wicked and Wealthy in the OT

The author of Isaiah 53 could expect his audience to relate to his parallel of “rich” and “wicked” and play on the shared root consonants because in their world of religious thought the “rich” were often considered disreputable. A number of OT passages support this, as well as the collective use of singulars like “rich.” In the Book of Isaiah נָרַשֶּׁל is a hapax legomenon. It is found twenty-two other times in the OT. Little is said of riches in Isaiah, when other words rendered “rich” are investigated. Mainly, riches are the spoils of the nations and salvation that God’s people will receive eschatologically (Isa 25:6; 30:23; 33:6; 45:3; 60:5, 11; 61:6; 66:12). In Isa 10:3 wealth is left behind when disaster strikes. North notes that Nyberg insists the words “rich” and “wicked” in Isa 53:9a are synonymous and quotes the prophets’ denunciations of the wealthy. In addition he quotes a Targum as identifying these “rich” as “rich in possessions they have obtained by violence.” The translation “a rich man” is viewed as pedantic since the singular Hebrew form (עלים) is a collective (plural) in function.

Synonymous Parallelism of Isaiah 53:9b

The bi-colon in 53:9b does not have to be synonymous in order for the
one in 53:9a to be synonymous, but then the likelihood that 53:9a is synonymous is strengthened. Most have taken 53:9b as synthetic but an argument can and will be made that it is synonymous. The following will show that this second bi-colon of 53:9 is synonymous: he did no violence [with his mouth] // that is, no deceit [was] in his speech.
The structure and poetry of this verse is suggestive of its synonymy:

```
[D]  C  B  A
[with his mouth]  he-did  no-wrong  Although
[עשתה]  לֹא רֹמאֶס

D  [C]  B'1  [A]
with-his-mouth  [he-did]  and-no deceit  [Although]
[בפירי]  לֹא מִרְמאֶס
```

This results in a line of synonymous bi-colon, with the pattern a-b-c-[d] // [a]-b'1-b'2- [c]-d, and a 3:3 word-stress meter. The נָאָה beginning the second half of this parallelism is to be understood not as co-ordinative (“also”) but as pleonastic (stylistic) or explicative (“even”) or emphatic (“especially”).

Reverse parallelism is perhaps less rare than often imagined. The second member of the parallelism may contribute to the first, whereas most often it happens the other way around. Not only poetically is synonymy supported but also lexically and contextually. The word often rendered “violence” (רֹמאֶס) can just mean “wrong [especially ‘as a false witness’].” In context 53:9b is a flashback to v. 7, where the servant’s mouth is first mentioned for its virtue: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (NRSV). The emphasis in context is on the lack of speech-related sins. He refused to be abusively defensive or to lash out verbally in revenge or anger at those who abused him. Isaiah 53:9b, then, may be read not as the servant’s avoidance of physical and verbal retaliation but as only the latter, restated as reverse parallelism. The “violence” of Isa 53:9bi is the verbal violence of a false or hostile witness.

A key OT theme is the importance of knowing how and when to speak. OT wisdom literature abounds in advice about speaking seldom, sensibly, and sanely. The Apostle Peter (1 Pet 2:21-24) may have reflected upon this OT spirituality in the light of Jesus’ teachings, when he recalled the words of Isa 53:9b to illustrate the sinless life of Christ, who stood silent before his accusers and went willingly and quietly to his undeserved crucifixion.

**New Testament Use of Isaiah 53:9b**

The NT does make messianic use of Isa 53:9b (1 Pet 2:22) while it nowhere employs 53:9a. Such an argument from silence does not prove the interpretation of “rich” as “[wicked] rich” as opposed to “rich [man],” but why the Apostles would have by-passed such a precise proof-text if they saw
a parallel between it and the rich Joseph of Arimathea is very curious. Peter, apparently, was more impressed with the typology of the parallel between the Isa 53 servant’s silence than his burial, for whatever reasons. The interpretation being proposed merely clarifies that 53:9aii is a restatement of what is said about him in 53:ai (that he was treated like a criminal at the time of his death). Isaiah 53:9b adds that he was not deserving of such abuse; although (or “because”) he had committed no violence or spoken deceitfully (as most versions have it). But as shown above this second bi-colon of 53:9 is likely synonymous, as is the previous one.

Immediately before Peter cites Isa 53:9b, he says that the way Jesus suffered is an example to believers (2:21), and immediately following he explains how this example is primarily in how he managed his mouth (2:23). Part of Matthew’s account of Jesus’ trial explains that he gave no answer to his accusers and refused to reply to a single charge from Pilate, to his amazement (Matt 27:12-14). Peter does not introduce this quotation with a formula of fulfillment or of it being a pronouncement of Scripture, and makes no reference to the OT author or book. He does employ it contextually, however, in a manner that indicates he understood Isa 53:9b (and presumably 9a et al.) as suitable for application to Jesus. But Peter’s version of Isa 53:9b is more reflective of the Greek than Hebrew OT. Instead of “he did no violence [or ‘devised no scheme’] “ of the MT, 1 Peter 2:22 has “who committed no sin” (cf. LXX “because he practiced no lawlessness”). Apparently Peter wanted to emphasize that the Messiah (Jesus) was sinless not just innocent of particular types of wrongdoing or harm (physical or verbal). While the LXX uses “because,” Peter chooses to focus on this sinless character, and is not concerned with the connection to 53:9a.

Conclusion

Challenging the consensus of opinion that “rich” (מלך) in Isa 53:9aii is either synthetically or antithetically related to “wicked ones” (לאו אדונים) in 53:9ai, this examination of Isa 53:9 has determined that the relationship is most likely synonymous, and that the best translation of לאו אדונים is as a collective singular adjective functioning as a plural indirect object (the same as “wicked ones” in the previous colon): “rich ones.” Further the common association of wealth and wickedness in the OT world suggests that within this synonymous parallelism, the full sense is “[the] wealthy [wicked].” The author’s intention in v. 9 was to tell about the servant’s undeserved suffering (v. 9b), wherein he was portrayed and processed as a criminal in his death and burial by his persecutors and prosecutors (v. 9a). The plan of these evil people (rich and reprobate) was to place him among the refuse of mankind (v. 9a), even though he had committed no violent and verbal crimes (v. 9b). The synonymy of “wicked” and “wealthy” is strengthened by the fact that these two Hebrew words share the same basic consonants, but in reverse order. The author intended his readers to take this as a sign that “wicked” of the preceding parallel line is intertwined with the “wealthy” of v. 9aii. Therefore
emendation of יִשְׂרֵאל (יִשְׂרֵאֶל) to “doers of evil” (יִשְׂרְאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל) as often resorted to, in spite of no textual evidence, is unnecessary. The content, construction, and context of Isa 53:9 argue for a synonymous parallelism not only in v. 9a but also in 9b. This depends on accepting the presence of reverse parallelism in both cases in addition to observing how other structures and statements in the immediate and more distant contexts support the synonymous nature of these two bi-cola. Consequently the proposal being made is that “violent” of v. 9bi be understood as a counterpart to “no deceit was in his mouth” of v. 9bii. The synonymy of Isa 53:9a is not dependent on this but is strengthened by it. It was demonstrated that OT thought is replete with concepts about the frequent wickedness that comes from wealthy and powerful people, the servant’s (or for some the Messiah’s) verbal virtue, and the righteousness of speaking the right words at the right time. Silence or economy of words is highly praised. The S/servant especially is praised for being quiet before his enemies and not sinning verbally. A case has been made for the understanding of Isaiah 53:9 as a text that reveals that (1) the suffering servant would be handled by his opponents as a criminal in regard to his death and burial (53:9a); and (2) this treatment would be unfair and unjust because this servant had never sinned verbally or had never acted violently or retaliated verbally (53:9b).

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Bibliography: For Further Reading on Parallelism and Hebrew Poetry


End Notes

1 TDOT recognizes this verse as “the most disputed text” (as regards this term in the OT) which many and especially older scholars consider corrupt. G. Johannes Botterweck , Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament [TDOT], vol. XI: 419 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), s.v. חַיְבְלָה by Szabo.


3 Cf., as representative of much Evangelical popular scholarship, the *Moody Monthly* article by Allan A. Macrae, which argues that the *waw* connecting each parallel line must be adversative ("but") and that the singular "rich" must mean "a rich man." See Allan A. Macrae, "With the Rich in His Death," *Moody Monthly* (September 1976): 70. For a defence of the messianic prophecy position cf. E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3: chapters XL-LXVI, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 353, n. 34.

4 In this article parallelism of the verses concerned will be described in traditional terms as synonymous, synthetic, or antithetic for convenience sake. While the author is very aware of the modern trends and theories regarding the nature of parallelism, these do not prove that the categories of synonymy or antithesis are not valid in many cases. "Synthetic" masks the great variety and complexity and mystery of bi-cola that are not strictly synonymous or antithetical, but time and space do not allow me to discuss these matters here. Suffice it to say that the following essay is an argument for the recognition of synonymy in these verses, regardless of the fact that many OT poetic passages or verses are monocola, tricola, or simple statements of "A, also B." It is well recognized that the OT poets could work apart from parallelism when desired or required; and that debate continues over the precise nature of meter and parallel thought, as well as the concept and character of Hebrew poetry. See e.g. publications by (see Selected Bibliography) A. Berlin, James Kugel, R. Alter, J. P. Fokkelman, A. Schökel, A. Cooper, M. O’Connor, F. Landy, W. Watson, and D. Clines, *inter alia.*


6 Young, 353, n. 34.

7 Among more recent and popular English versions, the NIV has "He was assigned a grave with the wicked [plural], and with the rich [singular] in his death" while NRSV has "tomb" instead of "death." If this is a synonymous bi-colon then the singular "rich" would have to be taken as a collective singular (singular in form but plural in function). NASB interprets the text as an intentional messianic prediction: "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death." But Blenkinsopp translates: "His grave was located with the wicked, his sepulcher with reprobates." Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 40-55, 345. Along similar lines North offered: "And they gave him burial among felons, And with the dregs of men when he died." North, *The Second Isaiah*, 65. To move away from just English texts, and more traditional by contrast, Baltzer has "Und Er gab ihm bei Verbrechern sein Grab und bei einem Reichen seine Stätte." Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Jesaja* (Göttersloh, GR: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 494. Luther’s text reads: "Und man gab ihm sein Grab bei Gottlosen und bei Übeltätern, als er gestorben war." *Die Heilige Schrift* (Philadelphia: The National Bible Press, 1967), 669.


10 Ibid.
Ibid. But no footnote is offered to tell who these are.

KJV has the strange but literal “he made his grave,” which represents the kind of translation that lead to the desire for emendation. Cf. Baltzer, Der Prophet Jesaja, 494. Childs, Isaiah, 408; C. C. Torrey, The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 253; North, The Second Isaiah, 65; Christopher R. North, The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, 2nd ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1956), 122; Claus Westermann, Das Buch Jesaja 40-66 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 205; Schooos, Jesaja II, 326; Koehler and Baumgartner, eds., Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, s.v. מָכַר. The verb as it stands has an indefinite subject, which apparently led Torrey to translate it “appoint.” See Torrey, 253, 420. Exegetes face the urge to re-point the verb as passive (“he/it was assigned”) or use a third plural subject (“they appointed”). Change מָכַר máyyIt1cn either to מָכַר muyyittn or מָכַר uyIttnh. This latter option follows IQIsa מָכַר. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, The Anchor Bible, vol. 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 348. Blenkinsopp renders it “located.” Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 345. The LXX, interestingly, has the equivalent word but uses a future tense and 1st-person pronoun (“and I will give”), whereas the MT is unmistakably past tense and 3rd-person. Similarly the Vulgate employs the future tense but stays with the 3rd-person subject (“and he shall give”). Sapp has suggested that the consonantal text of MT or Qumran represents a present tense imperfect מָכַר “he/it give” or מָכַר wytn “they give”). Sapp takes the Qumran text as a corrective on the MT. David A. Sapp, “The LXX, IQIsa, and MT Versions of Isaiah 53,” in Jesus and the Suffering Servant, ed. William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 190. With simple מָכַר these could be interpreted, alternatively, as future tense, since the morphology would be the same—context making the difference. Some argue for an active form with passive function. E.g. Macrae alludes to examples in Gen 11:9; 48:1; Am 6:12; and Mic 2:4. See Macrae, “With the Rich in His Death,” 70. But none of these examples uses מָכַר.

Of interest is the fact that only Matthew finds it necessary to speak of Joseph’s wealth (cf. Matt 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; and John 19:38-42).

However, Peter does utilize Isaiah 53:9b (the second of the two bi-cola in v. 9; cf. 1 Pet 2:22), which suggests a mindset among the Apostles that the entire verse and perhaps chapter are Christological, at least by application. Peter calls Christian slaves to follow Christ’s example of not retaliating against those who mistreat them but rather fully trust in God (cf. 1 Pet 2:18-24). Isaiah 53:9b is quoted as a proof-text that Christ did not retaliate verbally when insulted on the Cross, what Peter calls “the tree” (1 Pet 2:21-24). The text, if messianic, only foreshadows or foretells that the S/ servant will be treated in purpose, if not in practice, as a criminal when dead and buried, although he committed no crime.

This is handled in one of two ways by the versions. NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, and JB (to name a few) all read “with the rich”; while the ASV and NASB, for example, have “with a rich man.” The former versions take this word as a collective singular while the latter ones as a numerical singular. LXX and Vulgate have “and the rich” (respectively, καὶ τοὺς πλούσιους and et divitem) as well as Syriac (.sŷr) and Targum (דְּרוֹמֶה ‘attire). Macrae’s argument (“With the Rich in His Death,” 70-71) that something must be added after “rich” is insightful, but this does not mean that “man” must be added. It is just as reasonable to add “ones.” His point that languages like German and Hebrew often use a singular adjective like...
rich to mean "rich man" applies equally to "rich men." The definite use of anarthrous nouns in Greek or Hebrew is well documented. In OT poetry many nouns are definite without the definite article prefixed. Nothing in the Hebrew language indicates clearly that an anarthrous noun (as "wicked ones" in Isa 53:9ai) applies to a small number of people while if definite it would mean "a large group." The surrounding context defines this wicked group as more than a few.

16 Cf. John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66, NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison and R. L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 397 Oswalt urges that the text must not be made to say more than it does by forcing an antithetical parallelism onto a text that structurally is clearly synonymous. Delitzsch (Isaiah, II: 326-29) argues in much linguistic detail for the traditional "rich," also compelled by the presupposition of Jesus' fulfillment of the verse. Disagreement with Delitzsch is not on a linguistic and lexical basis but a poetical and hermeneutical one. He is bothered by Luther's marginal gloss "a rich man who sets all his heart upon riches, i.e. a wicked man" (p. 327), the very view this article supports. Delitzsch wrote when conservative scholars had fewer hermeneutical options than today, especially with our expanded understanding of how the NT uses the OT in light of first-century Jewish exegesis. But as will be shown, the understanding of "rich" as synonymous with "wicked" does not remove a valid messianic application to Jesus, it just restricts the fulfillment to his being treated like a criminal rather than that plus being buried in a rich man's tomb. The translation of בְּנֵי חֶסֶד in Isa 53:9aii is properly "rich" as Delitzsch and others demonstrate. Its interpretation or application in the context of Isa 53, the poetry of v. 9, and biblical prophecy is that of "[the wicked] wealthy." "Rich" here parallels "wicked ones" so is a figurative way to restate the latter (which is the first group named in Isa 53:9ai, followed by its counterpart "rich [ones]" in 53:9aii). Word meanings (usages) are principally governed by context and in poetry to parallelism. Authors are not restricted to common lexical options especially when writing poetically.


18 See, e.g., North, The Second Isaiah, 231, who notes the alliteration; Baltzer, Deutero-Isaia, 527, who points out the reversal of the consonants וְזִאָד and לְשׁוֹן ְזִיָּר was previously observed by Gesenius. North makes no more out of this than to defer to an emendation to מְדִים, "those doing evil." Baltzer only
comments on this word-play in passing and agrees that the “rich” is somehow related to an “evil doer” (“Frevler”); then moves on to what he considers the most pressing exegetical matter for this verse, the plurality of “death” in 9aii.

19 The Arabic cognate ‘ṣr (“wicked”) could suggest a Hebrew consonantal homograph (רָעָע) that is used just this one time in the OT literary corpus. In transmission it could have been corrupted to רָעָע (and this form is a hapax in Isaiah). Of course this is highly conjectural. Cf. J. A. Alexander, The Prophecies of Isaiah, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976 rpt. of 1953 ed.), II: 301-302; and Delitzsch, Isaiah, II: 327 North (The Second Isaiah, 231) cites A. Guillaume’s reference to Arabic: IsOwa “rabble” or “refuse of mankind.” Cf. A. Guillaume, “A Contribution to Hebrew Lexicography,” in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies XVI/1 (1954): 10. For the “demons” hypothesis see D. W. Thomas, “A Consideration of Is 53 in the Light of Recent Textual and Philological Study,” Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 44 (1968), 79-86.

20 The entire phrase “and with a wealthy one [or ‘the wealthy’] in his deaths” is usually deemed unintelligible, so re-punctuation is resorted to automatically (רָעָע bāmāţō instead of רָעָע bēmōţūw), since the change affects only the removal of one letter, the yod from the MT. This changes the meaning to “his burial mound” or “his sepulcher” (following Albright’s proposal). Cf. Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 348 and R. N. Whybray, Isaiah 40-66, The New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1975), 178, both who cite W. F. Albright’s 1957 essay in The High Place in Ancient Palestine, Volume du Congrès: Strasbourg, VTSup 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1957),242-58, and noting that this option may also be supported by 1QIsa. Since this approach preserves the consonantal text, with the minor exception of the removal of a vowel letter which may have been inserted later by the Naqdanim, it is arguable and plausible that here we are dealing with a lexical rather than transcriptional error (although accepting that the vowel points were applied to the wrong word, the authoritative consonantal text remains unchanged). Rather than reading preposition ב + “death/s“וַיהָ (possessive pronominal suffix 3ms (waw), the root is רָעָע “back, hill, ridge, high place” רָעָע “high place(s)” or “great high place(s).” The suffix may be interpreted otherwise as feminine or abstract (Ugaritic cognate is bmt, “back”). One wonders why not just suggest רָעָע “in his death” as better alternative, since “[the] rich [one]” is singular morphologically if not functionally.

The point of 53:9, for Oswalt, is to highlight the final irony of this Servant's life. He was not buried with the poor, who had been his faithful companions in life but was surrounded in death (not burial) with those who oppressed him and whose sins he carried (Ibid., p. 398). In this way Oswalt tries to makes sense out of the use of “grave” in 53:9ai and “death” in 53:9aii.

25 Gesenius speaks of both “good” and “bad” wealth as options of meanings for יָבִיב. The latter is the sense of “haughty” or “impious” given that riches are a source of pride and pride in the OT is impiety. In relation to Isa 53:9 he cites Job 27:19, “They go to bed with wealth, but will do so no more; they open their eyes, and it is gone” (NRSV). Cf. Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, transl. Samuel P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), s.v. יָבִיב. DCH still lacks the volume containing this Hebrew term (cf. David J. A. Clines, gen. ed., The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, 5 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1993-2001), hereafter DCH. Vol. 6 is forthcoming (November 2007).


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28 Exod 30:15 (where the arthrous and collective singular form appears for “rich” and “poor”); 2 Sam 12:1-2, 4; Jer 9:23 (22 MT); Mic 6:12; Psa 45:12 (13 MT); 49:3; Job 27:19; Prov 10:15; 14:20; 18:11, 23; 22:2, 7, 16; 28:6, 11; Ruth 3:10; Ecc 5:11; 10:6, 20.

30 Ibid.

31 NRSV, JB, and NEB have “and”; ASV, NASB, KJV, NKJV, NIV, NAB, Vulgate, and LXX have “nor” or “neither.”


33 Cf. Gen 16:5 where NIV has “wrong” (also Job 19:7; 21:27; Prov 8:36). In several passages this term is used in a context of false speech (e.g. Exod 23:1; Deut 19:16; Jer 51:16; Mic 6:12; Psa 27:12; 35:11). See Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, s.v. יָנָה, where the following verses are given for this term meaning a witness who does wrong or false witness: Exod 23:1; Deut 19:16; Psa 35:11. There is a homograph (II יָנָה) that means “devise,” and this fits the context better, although this is speculative and not firmly fixed in Hebrew lexicography. It can be considered, however, as a possible solution. Cf. Koehler and Baumgartner, s.v. יָנָה II, which compares Syriac ḫmas “to devise”; and Arabic hamasa “to murble”; cf. Job 21:27, “the schemes by which you would wrong [יָנָה]me.” Cf. VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. II יָנָה, by John E. Hartley, which word is said to mean “think, invent” (cf. Syriac “meditate, muse, study”); the verb in Job 21:27 is said to be related to this Syriac cognate. DCH mentions this verse and others in Job in relation to יָנָה, but in line with its lexical philosophy gives no etymological data.

34 For 53:9bii NAB has “spoken any falsehood”; NEB “spoken no word of treachery”; JB “no perjury in his mouth.”


37 ὃς ἀμαρτάων οὐκ ἐποίησεν cf. ὃς ἀμαρτάων οὐκ ἐποίησεν. This influenced the Vulgate, “he had done no iniquity” (imquitatem non fecerit).
A Review Essay: The Church and Postmodern Culture Series

Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church
James K.A. Smith
*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*
2006, 156 pp. softcover, $17.99

What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church
John D. Caputo
*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*

GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn
Carl Raschke
*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic*
2008, 175 pp. softcover, $17.99

Baker Academic, under the direction of James K.A. Smith, is partway through publishing *The Church and Postmodern Culture* series. The series, with three of an anticipated seven books published, aims to capitalize on the opportunity that postmodernity (the cultural phenomenon) provides to rethink church comprehensively utilizing postmodernism (the philosophical movement). Pastors, specialists, lay members are all welcome to read and explore where continental philosophy meets the church. The books are offered, Smith says, “as French lessons for the church.” This review essay examines the first three books of the series, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, and *GloboChrist*, offering overall thematic strengths and weaknesses of the series.

*Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*

James Smith’s *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* kicks the series off by considering postmodernism’s most recognized mottos: “There is nothing outside the text;” “Postmodernism is incredulity toward metanarratives;” and “Power is knowledge.” Smith begins with Derrida’s claim that “there is
nothing outside the text," which he reads as saying there is nothing that is not interpreted via language (39). A consequent practice of deconstruction, then, allows the church to break up the world as it is interpreted by contemporary culture (57-58). Smith sees in modernity a danger for lone-ranger Christianity, and Derrida’s belief that all interpretation is community governed is a welcome practice for the church as she seeks the guidance of the Spirit (58).

Next Smith urges his readers to see Lyotard’s claim that postmodernism is incredulity toward metanarratives as a deep skepticism, not toward the scope of stories, but toward the legitimation of stories by appeal to universal reason available to any smart and virtuous individual (67-68). Postmodernism’s belief that all narratives are culturally and temporally conditioned does not negate whether or not something is true, only the certainty with which it is known. If all knowledge is narratively based, then Christianity can boldly proclaim its cultural, temporal, and universal story without appealing to something beyond it (70-71). Not only can the church preach in humility and confidence, but the church must do so.

Third, Smith defends Foucault’s claim that “power is knowledge” as the belief that communities form truth claims based on the structures already found therein. Knowledge is never neutral. Now, one can read Foucault as a Nietzschean—power is neither good nor bad—describing power’s role in culture, or as an Enlightenment liberal—power is bad and please take your hands of my individual autonomy—prescribing roadmaps for a better society (96-97). Smith reads Foucault as the latter, but defends power, and the role it plays in formation by institutions. Smith’s critique of one flavor of the emerging church—denominations shouldn’t tell us how to run our churches and churches shouldn’t tell people how to run their lives!—results in a defense of formation through discipline. If Foucault is right, Smith says that it’s not a matter of whether or not there will be power, discipline, and formation, but who will do it and what direction it will go. The answer to a culture forming sexualized, publicized, and electronically networked people is not no formation, but formation with the proper telos in focus—Jesus (106-7).

All of this gathers the role of the church as a confessional community, relying not on universal reason, but revelation; preaching Christ rather than demonstrating the faith’s correlation to absolute truth. Smith is more concerned that the church put forth something worth adjudicating than who gets to adjudicate. “We confess knowledge without certainty and truth without objectivity” (121). Though postmodernity has not completely supplanted modernity, it haunts it. We like penicillin and anesthesia but we are keenly aware that, as Stanley Hauerwas has said, we won’t make it out of life alive. Faced with a postmodern culture preoccupied with death, individualism, and skepticism, Smith says we preach, practice, and perform the story of Jesus.
**What Would Jesus Deconstruct?**

Next, John Caputo seeks to show how deconstruction can help save the church as an institution by reflecting on the four words of the book's title, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* Caputo argues that the "bite" of the *would* must be felt by those who first ask the question (24). What *would* Jesus do? Certainly not capitalize on the profitability of such a slogan! Caputo urges that we keep this question open refusing to give quick answers because while deconstruction does not deny that there is a path, or way, to God, it does believe that the path is covered by many footprints (38). This is the "plain sense of the plurality of things" (41). Caputo illustrates this with the French word *pas,* which can mean either 'step' or 'not.' Deconstruction answers the question "What is the beyond?" with "*Pas.*" But does this mean a step or nothing? Precisely: the "step/not beyond" (42-46). This is the path walked by deconstruction.

Caputo clarifies this step/not by distinguishing between events and names. Events have happened and are still happening. They are vocative—but though they call to us and we call to them, they are beyond our reach. Names, on the other hand, are existential. They are the natural order of real things (58-59). [This is not a defense of realism. Caputo affirms with Derrida that what is beyond, the step/not, is beyond real; it is "hyper-real" (39).] Names must always be deconstructed in order to hear and continue striving for the event. For example, what passes under the name democracy must always be deconstructed so that the event of democracy is always pursued (61). True democracy, along with gifts, hospitality, justice, forgiveness, and love, is impossible. Our names for these events are never the events themselves and must always be deconstructed and in this deconstruction we see their impossibility and thereby practice them as expressions, but only expressions, of the impossible. Relentlessly pursuing these impossibilities is a type of "madness" for the Kingdom that is the uniqueness of Jesus (86-87). He pursues these things and his Kingdom is just such an impossibility.

So, *what* would Jesus deconstruct? Caputo highlights Christianity's (mainly in the form of the Religious Right's) approach to war, abortion, and homosexuality. What is good is impossible because, for example, justice calls to us and our name for justice is simply a lesser evil. One might need to resort to war at times, but while it is justified, it is never just (101). Likewise, while Caputo is against abortion, he admits that it might be the lesser evil (115). Caputo seems less complicated regarding homosexuality, however. Quite simply, the Greeks were right and the Christian/Jewish tradition was wrong (109). While we have no reason to think Jesus would have taught differently from Judaism (108), his gospel of love would today find love in homosexual relationships (109).

Caputo finishes by examining two churches in light of his apology for a deconstruction of Christianity. These churches struggle to live out the
Kingdom of God in their contexts while it is impossible. The good news is that by deconstructing Christianity the church can continue living into the impossibility of the Kingdom of God (137-38). With this summary in place, let's turn to a critique.

Caputo's ability to communicate complex subjects with humor is undeniable. He is a gifted philosopher. However, several problems are equally evident. First, Caputo urges that the impossibility of knowing the path to God makes one's tentative steps possible as steps of faith. While some worry that this path leads nowhere, Caputo is quite right to say that deconstruction does not lead to nihilism. Even though one never knows where it will lead, it will lead somewhere. Now, this may be an appropriate approach for one exploring the Christian faith or Islam or Judaism, but it is not appropriate for one determined to follow the way of Jesus. When Jesus announces that he is the way, he is the deconstructor of all paths but his alone. While deconstruction can still apply to all attempts to follow this Jesus, the resurrected Jesus is not tentative in where he is leading. He is leading to the Father. He calls people to repent and follow. The One whom Jesus reveals is one with Jesus. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. The step/not beyond has taken flesh in Jesus.

Second, Caputo falls into the Enlightenment camp through his defense of homosexuality and his critique of Scripture. Caputo grounds his defense of homosexuality by "invoking the spirit of a certain Jesus" and "the basis of critical reasoning" (109). But whose critical reasoning? And which Jesus? Certainly not the historical Jewish Messiah nor the critical reasoning of the majority of Christians. Because Caputo is not making an appeal from the Christian tradition, but an appeal to common sense (available to all?), he is continuing the Enlightenment project. We should all agree on homosexuality once we've reasoned well enough, right? From here, Caputo rightly assumes that people will wonder exactly what status he believes of Scripture when he believes homosexual love should be accepted by Christians, even though Scripture teaches against it. He answers by saying that he is not an "idolater" (110). Whatever status one affords Scripture, one cannot put a book before God who is wholly other. But if Caputo rejects aspects of the Bible and the broad tradition of followers of the God whom he claims to worship, can Caputo be worshipping this same God? And if he rejects aspects of the biblical teaching, then from where does Caputo's understanding of God come? This seems a Christian religion without the bounds of Scripture and within the bounds of Caputo's reason.

Perhaps if Derrida could say that he rightly passed for an atheist, then one can read Caputo and say he rightly passes for a Christian. Caputo is devoted to the church and follows (his interpretation of) the way of Jesus. But one still wonders: Who does Caputo believe Jesus to be? Could this Jesus, right
now, deconstruct Christianity personally or would it simply be the memory of Jesus that deconstructs Christianity? Caputo wants to live out the teaching of Jesus with habits that Jesus would recognize today (112), but why doesn’t Caputo think that this is exactly what the Religious Right, Caputo’s favorite target, is doing?

**GloboChrist**

Carl Raschke’s *GloboChrist* is a most appropriate third installment of the series. Raschke’s call for radical Christians to take their love to the world nicely follows Smith’s desire for a confessional witness of the Christian faith. This love must be as radical as the devotion of radical Muslims and reflect the radical difference between these religions. As Raschke says, the “differences make the difference” (115). Raschke’s work is also a strong counterpoint to Caputo’s work because Raschke is devoted to Jesus of Nazareth crucified, resurrected, and, most importantly, coming again.

Christ Jesus is becoming the GloboChrist. Contrary to the religious critics of the death of God movement, secularism has not moved the world over. Rather, religion is making a comeback. Controversially, Raschke believes that mass communication, globalization, religious and political upheaval is not something Christ is working against, but a way he is showing his relational power. “Christ is showing his power not just among the nations but also for the nations” (19). Yet religion has not taken this ally in its propagation neutrally. While it utilizes globalization, religion also battles against globalization because of its secular flavor. As a result, the clash of civilizations is not between religions, as Samuel Huntington believed, but between the religious and the secular. With the upsurge of Christianity and Islamism, religion is winning (32). That said, the clash will inevitably come between these distinct religions and their radically different eschatologies (139). *GloboChrist* is Raschke’s critique of the West’s anemic versions of Christian faith and his brave challenge that Christians become radical, relational, revelatory, and rhizomic in order to fight Islam as we watch and wait for the Kingdom of God in the return of Jesus. This is the Globopomo moment.

Let’s focus on Raschke’s two most important contributions. First, Raschke moves beyond deconstruction to the semiotic project of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze uses the notion of the rhizome to illustrate the relation between ideas. A rhizome is a subterraneous root structure that grows horizontally that sends up shoots periodically. In applying this to Christianity, Raschke says that globopomo mission must recognize that there is no pure gospel, but only one that is contextualized. Similarity between expressions of the faith, then, is not found in their being logically self-similar but in their having “rhizomic” relations (40). They are related as family trees reveal relations over generations: something unites them, but it is often difficult to see what (41).
Raschke defends this notion as a necessary outflow of Incarnation by saying that the real is always relational. Christian missionaries—and yes, they are desperately needed—must utilize indigenous religious expressions in order to spread the gospel, not only for theological reasons, but because this is how Christianity spread so quickly in the first three centuries.

Second, Raschke takes the Emerging Church movement head on, challenging those who may be tempted to think that the “new kind of Christian is simply an easier-to-get-along-with Christian” (160). Raschke writes, “Open-mindedness, nonjudgmentalism, and radical inclusivity, are no less idolatrous” than “narrow-mindedness, legalism, [and] exclusivity” (159). Raschke’s relationality is always radical. Radical relationality recognizes and believes religious differences, while believing one to be right and the other wrong, but all with a radical devotion to love the other. This is not Gianni Vattimo’s “weak Christianity.” It is the postmodern application of mission by a product of the Magisterial Reformation. One almost expects Raschke to yell, “To arms!”, but instead Raschke queries, not disapprovingly, with the words of the controversial Mark Driscoll: “[I]s the ‘emerging’ future of the new evangelical Christianity in the hands of a generation of ‘whiny idealists getting together in small groups to complain about megachurches and the religious right rather than doing something’ that will hasten the eschaton itself?” (150). One wonders how Caputo might respond!

**Reflection and Critique**

The brunt of critique in this review has fallen, perhaps unfairly, on John Caputo for two reasons. First, because his work supersedes the boundaries of what is normally associated with Baker Academic projects. Second, because Caputo has most thoroughly practiced one of the most important emerging themes of this project: Preaching. Smith urges that we communicate with confessional language and Raschke says that Christians must be about “preaching the joyful inevitability of the coming GloboChrist, the GloboChrist who turns back the sword of Islam.” (150). Caputo does not simply talk about preaching; he preaches! Thus my critique attempts to capture the true strength of the series: *It has something to say and it demands response*. It preaches and it stirs me to preach, but not in the way of modernity, which, I believe Peter Leithart has said, “thunders from the pulpit.” This is Incarnational, relational, active preaching. It is full bodied preaching. I hope the *Church and Postmodern Culture* series continues in this regard.

On the other hand, the series is not readily accessible for as wide an audience as they hope. For those with eyes to read, however, it is this challenge that both draws Christians into the postmodern conversation and provides space for readers to think about their own vocations. While each book reviewed here finishes with sections that focus on local churches with Smith’s
enthusiasm for radical orthodoxy, Caputo’s praise for St Malachy’s and the “Ikon” assembly in Belfast, and Raschke’s critique of emergent Christianity, the series still struggles to draw the academy and the church closer together. However, this shortcoming allows for reflective and effective practitioners to find their place as practical theologians. I do not know how Smith and Raschke would fare as preachers or how Caputo would fare as pastor, but their work can make embolden preachers in their proclamation and encourage pastors in their discipleship, thereby facilitating the call of more preachers, pastors, and professional thinkers. The series deconstructs itself by always calling for more participants.

A second critique is that the three contributors so far are all men working in a North American context. Would it not be better to have alternative voices and geographical contexts? Perhaps not. First, while these are all North American men, they do not always agree. Caputo roves outside the Christian tradition while Smith emphasizes a confessional witness. Caputo relies heavily on Jacques Derrida while Raschke opts for Gilles Deleuze. Second, these men are working in the context for which they are writing. Perhaps the people who need to read this series are best served listening to others in their context who ably provide resources to begin critiquing that this is (and is expected to be for future contributions) a “guys only” group. Perhaps we could see that the current (and expected) contributors aim to deconstruct the series itself by making it clear that more needs to be written and read and practiced. This is not meant to be seen as a final word because we haven’t yet heard from another gender or the rest of the world! The series deconstructs itself by offering a certain uniformity of voices.

Conclusion

Toward the end of the series preface, Smith asks, “What does Paris have to do with Jerusalem?” The challenge I faced as I paced myself through some of the tough reading was “What does Paris have to do with Johnson City, New York?” I thought of people in my church who would hear my sermons, sit in our small groups, and raise money for their teens. The challenge (and it is a challenge) of every reader of the Church and Postmodern Culture series is to ask this same question in the hope that God’s Spirit makes the connection clear and shapes our worship and witness of the resurrected Jesus—even through our institutions.

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WEBSTER C. MUCK

A Review Essay: The Life of Christ

For 75 years, from the time I took New Testament Survey at Wheaton College under Edith Torrey in the mid-30s, until I retired from teaching in the early 70s, no year passed without my reading a half-dozen books on the Life of Christ. As a matter of fact, my retirement didn't change that. A couple of months ago, I finished reading Walter Wangerin's *The Book of God*, which is a novel covering the entire Bible, and which devotes the last 200 pages to the New Testament. And I'm now waiting for Anne Rice to finish her three-volume set on *Christ the Lord*. I've read the first two volumes and will read the third when it comes off the press.

Long ago, I started classifying the lives of Christ I read. There were lives of Christ that were mere lists of dates and events. These lacked personality. There were, at the other end of the spectrum, those that were written solely to express disdain: I rejected these as demonstrations of spiteful malice. Frederick Nietzsche fell into this category. His idealizing of the Superman was a worship of power; Jesus dared to describe himself as 'meek and lowly of heart,' and Nietzsche flew into a cold rage at such a display.

Closely associated with this type of presentation is that of Sigmund Freud, who wrote in his *Future of an Illusion* that any type of religion was infantile and unworthy. Freud's analysis renders any kind of human life abnormal. For example, if you are characteristically late to everything, you are dilatory; if you are ten minutes early for all events, you are an eager beaver; if you are always on time, you are compulsive. You can't win through to normalcy because there is no such a thing! Perhaps that was because Freud's data base was his own patients, of whom he used a dozen or so to set up his theories.

The latest release of books from the Crossings book club has two rehearsals of the Life of Christ. One is a sorting of the gospel data into chronological order; the other is a coffee table book that adds art to history from the American Bible Society. The first, by Ed Stewart, compiler, and titled *Jesus 365: Experiencing the Four Gospels as One Single Story* is not the way
the church down through the ages has read the story of Christ’s life. Stewart homogenizes the data; the people of God have savored the differences.

Garry Wills has taken a different path than Steward, a path more in line with the history of the church’s interpretations. In his life of Christ (What the Gospels Meant) he quotes Raymond E. Brown’s rendition of the passion of Christ (A Crucified Christ in Holy Week) where Brown deals with the demand that all the strands of the Gospels be woven together: “When these different Passion narratives are read side by side, one should not be upset by the contrast or ask which view of Jesus is more correct: the Marcan Jesus, who plumbs the depth of abandonment only to be vindicated; the Lucan Jesus, who worries about others and gently dispenses forgiveness; or the Johannine Jesus, who reigns victoriously from the cross in control of all that happens. All three are given to us by the inspiring Spirit, and no one of them exhausts the meaning of Jesus. A true picture of the whole emerges only because the views of it are different. To choose one portrait of the crucified Jesus, in a manner that would exclude the other portrayals, or to harmonize all the Gospel portrayals into one, would deprive the cross of much of its meaning. It is important that some be able to see the head bowed in dejection, while others observe the arms outstretched in forgiveness, and still others perceive in the title on the cross the proclamation of a reigning King.” And Wills eloquently ends his book by answering his own question: “How to read the Gospels? As a whole, with the reverence they derive from and address, yet with the intelligence God gave us to help us find him.”

I cannot read a Life of Christ rapidly. Usually, I read a book in tempo with its type: I skim a book until it has proved that it deserves the respect of careful reading. Some chapters can be exhausted by reading the first and the last paragraphs. With some books I read no more than the publisher’s blurb, the introduction, and the preface; then I know it has no interest for me and I return it to the shelf whence I took it. But the majority of the Lives of Christ, even those written by authors who despised the Nazarene, I read slowly. I know of no other class of literature I approach in this fashion, and I have never bothered to ask why.

I read each volume of the Life of Christ with a sense of the author’s presence. That varies: I approach G.K.Chesterton’s The Everlasting Man with a different mind-set than I bring to Sholem Asch’s The Nazarene. To neither one am I rejecting: I simply itemize what I think they will bring to the subject-matter and then verify my expectation. In a sense, I do that with all books, but I do it more intentionally with these books than with any other genre.

One fact on which all the lives of Christ agree is that Jesus was born and lived in poverty. Anne Rice at the close of her first volume on the life of Christ (Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt) imagines Mary speaking to Jesus after his visit to the Temple when he was 12: “And now you come home with us
to Nazareth. Not back to the Temple. Oh, I know how much you want to stay at the Temple. I know. But no. The Lord in Heaven did not send you to the house of a teacher in the Temple or a priest in the Temple or a scribe or a rich Pharisee. He sent you to Joseph bar Jacob, the carpenter, and his betrothed, Mary of the Tribe of David in Nazareth. And you come home to Nazareth with us.”

I have never lived in poverty, so I do not know from experience what it is to be poor or what it is not to know when I’m going to get my next meal. I have read much about such things. For example, Rudyard Kipling, in his book on the half-Irish, half-Indian Kim, relates that Kim always wanted to be with his impoverished friends rather than his high-placed English acquaintances during the vacations. For Kim, the fellowship of the poor was vastly superior to life among middle-class British.

Which brings me to the question, What do I do with these Lives of Christ? They say to me:

Love as Jesus loved;
Intend with the mind-set Jesus used;
Respond to others as Jesus responded.

For a while, some suggested that we use the question, What would Jesus do? as a clearinghouse for our behavior. But Jesus lived 2000 years ago. His ideas of hygiene do not accord with ours. His cultural patterns clash with those of the 20th century. His dress would set him apart from those who wear jeans and T-shirts. His sandals would be ill-suited to Minnesota snow.

Jesus himself left us in no doubt, Love. “A new command I give you,” he said [John 15.12]. It is the urgency and the emphasis that are new, for the form of the command goes back to the law of Moses; indeed it goes back to the nature of God.

Paul called it “a far better way.” His description of the way of love is sublime: [1 Cor 13.1-13]

“If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love, I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.
“If I speak God’s word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain ‘Jump,’ and it jumps, but I don’t love I’m nothing.
“If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don’t love, I’ve gotten nowhere.
“So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.
“Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self.
“Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t strut.
“Love doesn’t have a swelled head, doesn’t force itself on
others, isn't always ‘me first,’ doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score of the sins of others, doesn’t revel when others grovel.

“Loves takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end.

“Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

“When I was an infant at my mother’s breast, I gurgled and cooed like an infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

“We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won’t be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright. We’ll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

“But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us to that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.” (Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase)

As to the intentions Jesus brought to his life, they, too, come clear in the majority of those who write his life. Echoing Isaiah, and rebuking the imperialist aims of his disciples, Jesus told them: [Matt 25.24-28]

“You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held in hostage.”

Jesus was under no illusions. He came to earth to die. In perhaps the greatest drama of all time—maybe of all eternity—he employed death to defeat Death. The road he took to the Cross was the road of servitude. His choice was deliberate; he knew what he was doing. I wonder: when did it come clear to him? Anne Rice thinks it was on his way home from the episode at the Temple when he was 12. Wangerin suggests that it was during the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. I think it was when he “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” That’s the King James; The Message renders it, “When it came close to the time for his Ascension, he gathered up his courage and steeled himself for the journey to Jerusalem.”

I like the way Anne Rice sets the contrast: “In sum, the whole case for the
non-divine Jesus who stumbled into Jerusalem and somehow got crucified by nobody and had nothing to do with the founding of Christianity and would be horrified by it if he knew about it that whole picture which had floated in the liberal circles I frequented as an atheist for 30 years that case was not made.”

And why was it not made? “He set his face to go to Jerusalem.” I have a great deal of sympathy with Thomas who reacted to this stubbornness with unbelieving loyalty: [John 11.16] “Come along. We might as well die with him.” Jesus’ recognition that he must die, and his determination to do so as Jewish scripture predicted form a watershed for those who write the story of his life.

I first moved out of this unbelieving loyalty to an understanding that Christ went to the Cross with deliberation when I was in college. I was reading G. Campbell Morgan’s *The Crises of the Christ.* When it came to the story of the Transfiguration, [Luke 9.28-36] the topic of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah was “the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” That’s the King James Version. None of the modern versions captures the force of King James, which emphasizes the awkwardness of a man’s accomplishing his death. I was so struck by this that, later, I preached on it. My congregation was not enthralled by my sermon: several thought I should stick to topics that were less strange.

At 93 years of age I view my death as imminent, but I do not consider it an accomplishment. It will be a nuisance, but I do not seek either to hasten it or delay it. Since I don’t have a vote in the matter, I don’t waste energy contemplating it. But Christ had a different intention about his death. In the passage about the good shepherd, [John 10.1-21] he says:

“I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them too. They’ll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one shepherd. That is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down: I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father”

I sympathize with Jesus’ disciples’ confusion at such words. Nor has the confusion lessened a great deal over the years. For example, who are the “other sheep” our Lord is referring to? Are they the Muslims? Are they those who, not having heard, have yet believed?
But consider, not what he is not saying, but what he is saying: he is asserting his ownership: “My own sheep.” I am comforted by Jesus’ insistence that he knows his sheep and calls them by name. I do not plumb the depths of such knowledge. I understand why my farmer uncles and aunts forbade their children to name any of the animals that were destined to end up on the dining room table. “I couldn’t eat a bite that noon,” one of my cousins told me. “I had named that hen and she came when I called her. I cried when she was killed.”

Cosmically, I do not know how literally I may take the Psalmist when he sings praise to the Lord who “Counts the stars and assigns each a name.” But Jesus knows my name, and yours, and promises to care for us.

When Jesus says that he has the right to lay down his life as well as to take it up again, he parts company with us. We do not have such control. Nor do I want it. Jesus had to choose between what he wanted and what was the will of his Father. It was not an easy choice, and the conclusion was never foregone. We should never read a life of Christ and confuse the possession of “all power” with “being carried to the sky on flow’ry beds of ease!”

We come to the third use of the Life of Christ genre of literature. It is to respond to others as Jesus responded. This includes both loving and intending. It excludes, as we have seen, the accidents of how he dressed and conducted his manner of life.

The essence of the Godhead is love, as John the apostle said [I John 4.17-18]

“God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.”

When one’s view of God does not put love first, that misconception leads to such events as the Inquisition, the Holocaust, and American slavery, or, indeed, any kind of slavery. The Inquisition was performed by organized Christianity that thought that righteousness could be achieved by punishment. That was the same mind-set that prompted George Bush to bomb Iraq. The Holocaust was Hitler’s idea of ridding society of the Jews; his public relations justification was that he was doing Germany a favor. And the American South considered that an enslaved Negro was God’s notion of a proper society.

Jesus said, of those who crucified him, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” I think his prayer overrode that of those who crucified him, who said, “His death be on us and on our children.” Jesus
promised the repentant thief, “You will be with me in Paradise.” He acted with total disregard to the ritual laws that would make him unclean by touching bleeding women, lepers, and dead bodies.

We adopt Jesus’ perspective in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that the sight of bleeding, damaged victims stirs compassion. Therefore we will join in the singing of that new song that the Apostle John foresaw in his vision of our final society: [Rev 5.9-10]

“You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men and women for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

He’s talking about us.

Webster C. Muck is professor of psychology emeritus at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota.
Book Notes

Matt Tomlinson
In God’s Image: The Metaculture of Fijian Christianity
Reviewed by Michael A. Rynkiewich

Tomlinson’s narrative is called ethnography in Anthropology; the description of the culture of a single society, with a focus dictated, in part, by the interests of the people being described. Fiji, as a nation, has a problem. The British colonizers permitted the Fijians to own their own land, but because of that, the Fijians saw no need to work as slaves for the British. The British then brought in Indians from elsewhere in the Empire to work as servants and labourers. Now, fifty some years after independence, the population is about 50 percent Fijian and 50 percent Indian, or Indo-Fijian. Business belongs to the Indians, and the land belongs to the Fijians. The political debate has been punctuated by three violent coups, events unique in the Pacific Islands.

Fiji, in a sea of islands, is intimately linked to Tonga and Samoa, a triangle in which Polynesian culture developed and from which it spread thousands of years ago. All three are predominately Christian, specifically Wesleyan/Methodist, although in recent years the Mormon Church has grown with speed. In local, that is, district and village, settings, there is also a sense of leqa (pronounced leng-ga) or ‘trouble’ The trouble is “social disunity, which leads to the loss of power” (5). The conceptual structure of this trouble reveals itself in the analysis of discourse: past/present, lotu/vanua, capitalism/communalism, democracy/chieftaincy, Fijian/Indo-Fijian. The theme Tomlinson develops in the book is this: “The metacultural distinction between the lotu (Christianity) and the vanua (a complex domain encompassing chiefs, their people, land, and tradition) is a profoundly consequential one in Fiji” (6).

Fijians consider the people of the past to have been, at once, pagans and powerful. That makes their spirits still dangerous, and yet their time looms larger than life with a unity that, regrettably, has now been lost. Christianity is perceived to be responsible for this loss of unity, but also to hold the possibility of reconstituting community. Sometimes this hope takes ethnic form: “to be Fijian, the claim goes, one must be indigenous and Christian” (7). So, a culture (linguistic domains and discourse that shapes perceptions and behavior) about culture (interpretations of the past and the present) has developed that wrestles with these dichotomies.
Tomlinson’s concluding third section of the book deals with ways that the church has been involved in metacultural debates. “My goal is to understand the context in which riotous and destructive acts can seem to many local observers to be the positive acts of moral Christians” (27). Many in the church are exploring new ways to understand Fijian society and the place of the past, the Indo-Fijians, the processes of modernization, and the enduring chiefs in a new configuration that does not lead to the violence of the coups. Tomlinson tells the extended narrative of a catechist who had a dramatic conversion demonstrating God’s power in and over the events shaping his life, and in particular reshaping some of the dichotomies that characterize Fijian metaculture. If the church caused a loss of power in the past, it may be the church that reconnects Fijians with power in the future. However, in an otherwise fine ethnography, Tomlinson fails to help the reader see how a personal conversion and coming into power will affect the larger narrative of how society should operate. A failure shared too often by the church in other eras in other lands.

In the past, doing anthropological fieldwork placed researchers in emerging Christian societies populated with missionaries and indigenous pastors. But, the anthropologist, bent on discovering what this culture was like before the arrival of the missionary, the administrator and the trader, saw the missionary as in intruder seeking to change the culture she wanted to recover. Christianity was in the way of solid anthropological research and that put anthropologists at odds with the missionary enterprise. The result was ethnographies in which missionaries were not even present or ethnographies in which missionaries were the bad guys.

There is now a new movement, beginning around 1990, called The Anthropology of Christianity. The movement reflects the postmodern turn, in which everyone is deconstructed (in this case, the anthropological enterprise) and everyone has a voice (even if Christianity no longer has a privileged voice). Joel Robbins, who worked in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, has fostered the movement with his Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society leading a wave of young ethnographers who treat “local Christianities” as a given fact and, with a more neutral pose than their predecessors, proceed to describe the culture and society that exists in the present. Tomlinson’s book is one of many in the series Robbins edits with the University of California Press: Webb Keane, Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter; Matthew Engelke, A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church; David Smilde, Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism; Francio Guadeloupe, Chanting Down the New Jerusalem: Calypso, Christianity, and Capitalism in the Caribbean; William F. Hanks, Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross; and Frederick Klaits, Death in a Church of Life: Moral Passion during Botswana’s Time of AIDS.
These ethnographies, and others outside the series, including two readers,\(^1\) provide a new resource for missiology, and, at the same time, provide a challenge for doctoral programs in Missiology and/or Intercultural Studies to do this level of research and writing.

Michael A. Rynkiewich is professor of anthropology at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

**End Notes**


John R. Tyson
Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley
Reviewed by Kenneth J. Collins

Even though it is now more than two hundred years since the birth of Charles Wesley, research into his life and thought yet remains at a rudimentary stage. Two works that are addressing this issue, each in its own way, are *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley* and a new biography, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. Although the first work is a fine addition to the primary sources, it is not actually an autobiography of Charles since it does not include the entirety of his life but ends abruptly in 1756. The material that makes up this manuscript was found, oddly enough, “among some loose straw on the floor of a public warehouse in London.” The manuscript was later purchased, along with some other materials, by Thomas Jackson in 1831. However, neither Jackson’s edition of the Journal nor the subsequent attempt by Telford was complete and accurate since neither was able to handle properly the shorthand material that was a part of the original composition. Beyond this, Jackson took greater editorial liberties with the text than were warranted with the result that a complete and accurate edition of Charles Wesley’s journal would have to await this twenty-first century effort.
The second work, *Assist Me to Proclaim*, is indeed a birth-to-death biography and it is interlaced with an able discussion of Charles Wesley’s poetic genius as expressed in his numerous hymns. For those readers who are unfamiliar with “the younger brother of Methodism,” the life and thought of Charles offers a number of contrasts to his older brother, John. To illustrate, Charles, as Tyson aptly points out, was a turbulent personality often moved by passions that John hardly or rarely felt. With his head and heart often out of sync, Charles at times burst onto the scene (the Grace Murray fiasco, for instance) and took bold and irremediable action that his hesitating brother could only regret. Moreover, these differing personalities clashed theologically in terms of the doctrine of Christian perfection, especially as to the manner of its actualization. And Charles, for his part, never shared John’s antipathy for the rich but was far more gregarious. Indeed, John Gambold described Charles Wesley as a ‘man made for friendship.”

As important as these differences are, the reader of Tyson’s narrative is nevertheless struck with the numerous similarities between these brothers who were two of the principal leaders of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. Both, for example, sought early on to be sanctified before they were justified; that is, they hoped to be saved by “my best endeavours to serve God.” Both doubted at one point whether they had ever been a Christian demonstrating how important the Pietist notion of “real Christianity” (as opposed to nominal Christianity) was to them. Both viewed the willingness to die as an key indicator of saving faith. Both had important and memorable evangelical conversions to the proper Christian faith which issued in freedom from the guilt and power of sin. Both engaged in field preaching and confronted the mobs in gracious serenity. Both informed their wives that they would not preach one sermon less or travel one mile less in a married state than in a single one. And both insulted the venerable at Oxford in prophetic sermons that made them the pariahs of the University. To be sure, these similarities are not only numerous but they are also stunning. That is, Charles and John Wesley were not only brothers by birth they were also, in a real sense, brothers in the gospel.

After his marriage to Sarah Gwynne in 1749, Charles Wesley effectively settled down and travelled much less. He was therefore, as Tyson puts it, “less amenable to his older brother’s requests and demands for evangelistic assistance.” But the key tension that emerged between the brothers as their careers progressed had to do with the issue of ecclesiology in general (would Methodism remain within the Church of England?) and with lay preachers in particular (Charles would fire the lay preachers almost as fast as John would hire them). Tyson offers a helpful and extensive discussion of this issue and thereby reveals the theological trajectory of Charles that was distinctively his own. Overall, then, Tyson’s work is a faithful guide to a complex and
sophisticated figure, one who deserves significant treatment in his own right out from under the shadow of his far more famous brother.

Kenneth J. Collins is professor of historical theology and Wesley studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

Brian Stanley
The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910
Studies in the History of Christian Missions
2009. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
Reviewed by Marcella Hoesl

In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910 this excellent book by the Director of the Center for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, is most welcome. Using mainly primary sources the author presents a fine panorama of people and events of the lively processes that took place in the eight commissions that made this Conference so important in church history. The book notes that the modern ecumenical movement began with Edinburgh 1910, even though the word “ecumenical” was abandoned due to differences in how “ecumenical” was understood. In that context, an enlightening detail is the mention of the Roman Catholic Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona who sent a letter of greeting to the Conference (Roman Catholics were not represented). The Bishop was a friend of Angelo Roncalli, who was to become John XXIII, the architect of the Second Vatican Council.

Chapter V ‘Give Us Friends!’ words taken from the address by V.S. Azariah (1874-1945), an Anglican clergyman from southern India, gives much food for thought of the major issues facing churches today, such as race, imperialism, inculturation, dependence on foreign aid, spirituality. (Roland Allen’s classic, Missionary Methods, Ours or St. Paul’s? (1912) readily comes to mind.)

Chapter 10, Missionary Co-operation, gives an excellent distillation of the proceedings of Commission VIII, ‘Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity,’ so vital as we await Edinburgh 2010. As the author notes: “The promotion of unity between Christians was a means to the end of co-operation in mission, rather than the other way around” (279). Briefly referred to (317f) the Department of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England was a remarkable cooperative endeavor of the six major British Missionary Societies in Britain for many decades, and also for a number of European societies including several from the United States—an ecumenical story yet to be written.
Photos, footnotes at the bottom of each page, a full bibliography add to the readability of this book. It will serve well as a learning and teaching tool for church historians, missiologists, ecumenists, all persons who wish to understand the movement of the churches to this day, what we can learn from probing the past, and with hope for the future of the ecumenical movement.

Marcella Hoesl is a Maryknoll Sister and the former academic dean and professor of systematic theology at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas.

Reviewed by Howard A. Snyder

This attractive peer-reviewed journal is the fruit of the new Manchester Wesley Research Centre, created in 2003 at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, in collaboration with several other Wesleyan-oriented institutions. Cliff College in England and Asbury Theological Seminary are among the collaborating institutions. The journal is linked as well with The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University. The coeditors are both associated with Nazarene Theological College.

The Manchester Wesley Research Centre was created “to support research in the life and work of John and Charles Wesley, their contemporaries in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, their historical and theological antecedents, their successors in the Wesleyan tradition, and contemporary scholarship in the Wesleyan and Evangelical tradition.” The journal’s press release makes the point that examining Wesleys’ contemporaries means “proponents or opponents.”

Four of the five essays in this first annual issue are by research students at Nazarene Theological College or the University of Manchester. Their topics hint at the range of current Wesley research. John Cunningham writes on “Pneumatology Through Correspondence: The Letters of John Wesley and ‘John Smith’ (1745-1748).” J. Russell Frazier’s essay considers “John Wesley’s Covenantal and Dispensational View of Salvation History”—apparently part of his larger research on John Fletcher’s doctrine of dispensations. Randall McElwain writes on “Biblical Language in the Hymns of Charles Wesley,” and D. R. Wilson on “Thou shalt[he] walk with me in white: Afterlife and Vocation in the Ministry of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.”
The lead article by Henry D. Rack, emeritus senior lecturer at Manchester and author of *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, is titled “A Man of Reason and Religion? John Wesley and the Enlightenment.” Rack notes recent reassessments of the Enlightenment, then revisits the question of John Wesley’s reasonableness or credulity. “Wesley was nearer than has often been allowed to the centre of a spectrum stretching from deists and sceptics at one end to claimants to divine inspiration at the other,” Rack concludes, seconding David Hempton’s assessment that Wesley embodied “creative tension between enlightenment and enthusiasm.” However Rack notes Alexander Knox’s caveat that Wesley “was prone to find supernatural explanations where natural ones were more plausible.”

Rack summarizes Wesley’s views on toleration, education, politics, social reform, and church order. Commenting on Wesley’s ecclesiology, Rack points out the paradox that in forming a voluntary society (largely) within the Church of England, Wesley “was unwittingly organizing a religious body on ecclesiastical principles quite different from those of most existing English churches” and those he himself formally espoused.

Cunningham’s essay concludes that “perceptible inspiration was the essence of John Wesley’s economic pneumatology.” For “since inspiration is perceptible, the nature of the Holy Spirit is self-revelatory. God seeks self-disclosure.” Cunningham sees a practical implication: “In order to be faithful to its namesake, Wesley studies (especially those in theology) must always be framed by his commitment to the relational nature of God’s Holy Spirit.”

J. Russell Frazier examines John Wesley’s understanding of history, particularly his use of the themes of providence, covenant, and dispensation. Wesley’s emphasis on history was part of his case against predestination, providing a “cogent view of history against the Calvinist doctrine of decrees.” Calvinism “seemed to bypass the significance of personal histories of conversions due to its emphasis on divine fiat,” whereas “Wesley’s theology authenticated salvation experiences” embedded in real history. “Wesley developed a theology of history which gave meaning to personal histories as well as the history of salvation within the world.”

In his essay McElwain says the biblical language in Charles Wesley’s hymns was “both the natural outflow of a lifetime of biblical study and a deliberate effort to ‘preach’” through hymnody. The article is part of a larger project examining Charles Wesley’s biblical interpretation.

D. R. Wilson explores Mary Bosanquet Fletcher’s fifty-year ministry in terms of both her spiritual journey—particularly her “belief in the afterlife and concern for the unconverted”—and the complex of liberties and restrictions facing Methodist women. Mary Fletcher’s ministry included “establishing a religious community of women” (on Pietist precedents), “founding an orphanage, becoming one of the first female Methodist
preachers, and playing a central role in the ministry of a local Anglican parish.” Wilson notes correctly that “Neither the Established Church nor Methodism as a movement with the Church, offered the opportunity for women to [fully] pursue a call to either lay or ordained preaching.” In Methodism, restrictions actually increased over time (a familiar pattern in new movements). The essay adds to the growing body of research on Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and other early Methodist women preachers.

The welcome appearance of *Wesley & Methodist Studies* is another sign of the international flowering of Wesley studies today. Where I teach in Toronto half a dozen of competent younger Canadian scholars are pursuing doctoral work in Wesley studies, and similar things are happening elsewhere. Growing international collaboration as represented by this journal speaks well for the future of Wesley studies in the new century.

*Wesley & Methodist Studies* is now accepting submissions for future publication. Information is available at www.mwrc.ac.uk/wesley-and-methodist-studies/

**Howard A. Snyder** is professor of Wesley studies at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario.
Can you define cosmoanthropecclesiology?

a. It’s what happens when you sneeze.
b. It’s the type of knot church members will use to hog-tie you for using the word “science” in a sermon.
c. It’s Christian confusion about how cosmology, anthropology and ecclesiology intersect.

ANSWER: c.

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