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This present publication comprises the second part of Volume 2 of Semănătorul (The Sower): The Emanuel Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research. In spite of the continued pandemic in Romania, with all the subsequent challenges caused, the Journal has continued to present submissions by the Faculty of Theology of Emanuel University, Oradea, plus contributions from International scholars. They are not only published here but have been shared on line with Faculty members and are available on the Emanuel website.

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The journal includes a range of articles on various aspects broadly related to challenges in communicating Christian truth in a modern culture. It presents papers which address important biblical issues and practical pastoral themes.

Editor,
Dr. Hamilton Moore

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The book of Exodus and New Testament Soteriology

T. Desmond Alexander¹

ABSTRACT

The Exodus account of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt describes the greatest salvific event found in the Old Testament. As a story that concludes with Yahweh dwelling among the Israelites, it highlights how people may come into a more intimate relationship with God. In this light of this, it is noteworthy that New Testament writers draw heavily on the book of Exodus to explain the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. This article surveys the process of salvation that is described in the book of Exodus, focusing especially on Passover and the covenant ratified at Mount Sinai. This provides a foundation for exploring some of the ways in which New Testament writers address soteriological concepts that are centred on Jesus Christ.

KEY WORDS: Exodus, Passover, Covenant, Sanctification, Soteriology

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to explore how a holistic reading of the book of Exodus might inform our understanding of New Testament soteriology. It is the author's conviction that the book of Exodus provides a paradigm of divine salvation that shapes how New Testament writers explain the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ. This article does not pretend to offer a fully comprehensive outworking of its central thesis. Rather it indicates with broad brushstrokes the basis for believing that a strong link exists between the book of Exodus and New Testament soteriology.

The book of Exodus narrates a remarkable story of divine activity that centres on the liberation of Israelite slaves from Egypt. This is then followed by their transformation into a nation that has the privilege of living in the presence of the God of all creation. With good reason, God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is viewed as 'the foundational salvific event of the Old

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Testament.² No other period in Old Testament history compares in significance with the exodus from Egypt and the subsequent events at Mount Sinai. It is the premise of this essay that, from a biblical theology perspective, the book of Exodus models the process by which alienated humans are reconciled to God and, importantly, this model informs the New Testament understanding of how salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

In its present literary context, Exodus is penned as a sequel to Genesis. Set against the background of humanity being alienated from God, Exodus draws on promises of hope that recurs throughout Genesis. Exodus needs to be read within this larger context.

At its most basic, the Exodus narrative recounts how the Israelites come into a personal relationship with God. At the outset of the Exodus narrative, they are far from God, under the control of an anti-god figure. In the opening chapters of Exodus, the Israelites are forced to serve successive Egyptian pharaohs, who are presented as opposing Yahweh. By the end of the book, the Israelites have entered voluntarily into a unique covenant relationship with Yahweh, which results in God living in their midst. Salvation is understood in terms of how people who initially are at a distance from God come to be in his presence. Exodus describes how a particular group of people establish a close relationship with God. As we shall see, this involves, among other things, the consecration of people to a holy status.

The theme of knowing God permeates the entire Exodus narrative in multiple ways. It is highlighted in Pharaoh's response to Moses and Aaron: 'Who is Yahweh that I should heed him by releasing Israel? I do not know Yahweh and moreover I will not release Israel' (Exod. 5:2; author's translation). Responding to Pharaoh's ignorance of Yahweh, the signs and wonders episodes abound in statements about making God known to both Israelites and Egyptians (Exod. 6:3-7; 7:5, 17; 8:10[6], 22[18]; 9:14, 16, 29; 10:1-2; 11:7; cf. 14:4; 18). The theme of knowing God underlies the covenant or friendship treaty ratified at Mount Sinai. Emphasising the relational nature of knowing God, the Sinai covenant prepares the way for God to reside among the Israelites. Ultimately, knowing God does not merely involve acquiring information about him. Rather,

² B. D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018), 184. C. J. H. Wright, "Reading the Old Testament Missionally," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. M. W. Goheen, (The Gospel and Our Culture; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 116, describes the exodus as the 'primary model of redemption in the Old Testament (primary both chronologically and theologically).'

it is about having a relationship with him. For the Israelites, Yahweh moves from being a remote deity to being a God who lives among them, sharing their nomadic existence as they journey to the promised land.

Exodus describes how God makes himself known through both actions and words. From beginning to end Yahweh takes the initiative so that the Israelites and others may know him. From appearing to Moses as a flame of fire (Exod. 3:2) to descending as a pillar of fire-and-cloud on the newly erected tent-sanctuary (Exod. 40:34–38), the Exodus narrative recounts how God reveals himself. Like a multifaceted diamond, the Exodus story ‘witnesses to God’s compassion, faithfulness, glory, holiness, justice, majesty, mercy and power.’³

Working with the premise that Exodus presents us with a paradigm of divine salvation, how should we determine the shape of the paradigm? What features are most significant?

To begin, it should be emphasised that we can only comprehend accurately the nature of salvation by reading Exodus as a whole. Salvation in Exodus is a process with various components. What may only be seen partially in one passage is often supplemented by what is said elsewhere. Our reading of Exodus must take into consideration the subtle allusions and parallels that are created by the author of the book. By way of illustration, it is important to recognise that in Exodus the tabernacle is portrayed as a model of Mount Sinai. This creates a series of connections that are based on the concept of graded holiness.⁴ Recalling an observation of Nachmanides, Jacob Milgrom writes:

Mount Sinai is the archetype of the Tabernacle, and is similarly divided into three gradations of holiness. Its summit is the Holy of Holies; God’s voice issues forth from there (Exod. 19:20) as from the inner shrine (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89); the mountaintop is off limits to priest and layman alike (Exod. 19:24*b*) and its very sight is punishable by death (Exod. 19:21*b*), and so with its Tabernacle counterpart (cf. Lev. 16:2 and Num. 4:20); finally, Moses alone is privileged to ascend to the top (Exod. 19:20*b*; see 34:2*b*) just as later, the high priest is permitted entry to the inner shrine under special safeguards (Lev. 16:2*ff.*).

The second division of Sinai is the equivalent of the outer shrine, marked off from the rest of the mountain by being enveloped in a cloud (Exod. 20:21;

³ T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, (Apollos OT Commentary 2; London: Apollos, 2017), 2.

⁴ Cf. P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

24:15ff. [P]; see 19:9, 16) just as the cloud overspreads the entirety of the Tabernacle (Num. 9:15ff.) Below the cloud is the third division Here is where the altar and stelae are erected (24:4). It is equivalent to the courtyard, the sacred enclosure of the Tabernacle.⁵

When Mount Sinai is viewed as the ‘archetype’ of the tabernacle,⁶ the process by which the Israelites become holy to ascend the mountain in Exodus 24 may be helpfully compared with the ritual described in Exodus 29 for the consecration of the priests for service within the ‘tent of meeting.’⁷ The instructions for the consecration of the high priest in Exodus 29 parallel, but in greater detail and with more intensity, the description of the consecration of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 24.⁸ Both accounts describe how

⁵ J. Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term ‘Aboda*, (University of California Publications Near Eastern Studies 14; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 44-45; cf. M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 190; A. M. Rodriguez, ‘Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus,’ *AUSS*, 24 (1986) 131-137; N. M. Sarna, *Exodus*, (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 105; N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*, (New York: Schocken, 1996), 203; M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, (Oxford/New York: OUP, 1999), 59-64; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 105; Alexander, *Exodus*, 563-565.

⁶ Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term ‘Aboda*, 46, fn. 173.

⁷ Whereas the tent is designated a *miškān* ‘dwelling place’ 19 times in 25:1-27:19, it is called an *‘ohel mō‘ēd* ‘tent of meeting’ 15 times in 27:20-30:38. The exclusive use of *‘ohel mō‘ēd* in 27:20-30:38 is linked to the consecration of the high priest, underlining the nature of his special role as mediator between God and the Israelites. See R. E. Hendrix, ‘The Use of *miškān* and *‘ohel-mō‘ēd* in Exodus 25-40,’ *AUSS*, 30 (1992) 6-13; cf. R. E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker, (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 2003), 809–810.

⁸ The more detailed instructions for the consecration of the high priest reflect the high priest’s need to be holier than other priests. As the one who meets daily with Yahweh, the process by which the high priest is made holy models best what is necessary to facilitate human interaction with God. Yet, even the Aaronic high priest is not permitted to come into God’s presence but must remain behind the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. Aaron’s role as high priest resembles that of Moses ascending and descending the Mount Sinai. The more detailed instructions in ch. 29 also involve the purification of the bronze altar through the offering of a ‘purification/sin offering’ (Exod. 29:10-14). The altar mentioned in ch. 24 does not require to be purified because it is made of natural stones (cf. Exod. 20:25). For a fuller discussion of the altar instructions in Exodus 20, see B. Foreman, ‘Sacrifice and Centralisation in the Pentateuch: is Exodus 20:24-26 Really at Odds with Deuteronomy?’, *TynBul*, 70 (2019) 12-16.

people acquire a holy status and move towards God through rituals that involve whole-burnt/ascension and peace/fellowship offerings. Although the accounts in chs. 24 and 29 are quite different in terms of content, there are clear points of similarity. Both chapters share common features associated with the concept of consecration.

Importantly, the two consecration rituals in chs. 24 and 29 have elements in common with the Passover ritual recorded in Exodus 12.⁹ In this regard, it is worth observing what is said in Exodus 13:2. Yahweh says to Moses, 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal' (NIV). This theme of consecration is later picked up in Numbers 3:11-13 when the Levites become substitutes for the firstborn males.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD." (Num. 3:11-13 ESV)

This reference to the consecration of the firstborn at Passover is echoed later in Numbers 8:

For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel. (Num. 8:16-18 ESV)

As we shall see shortly, acquiring a holy status is an important element in the process of salvation; only those who are holy may come safely into God's presence.

There are, however, other aspects to the process by which the Israelites come to know God personally. As a model of divine salvation, the Exodus story describes how God delivers the Israelites from oppression under the king of Egypt. The story, however, is not merely recorded to narrate the deliverance of the people, remarkable as this is. This liberation has a significant theological

⁹ These will be considered in more detail below.

component. This is intimated at the start of Exodus when Pharaoh is portrayed as resisting God's plan for humanity. Pharaoh's exploitation of the Israelites is set against the background of the people being fruitful, multiplying and filling the land (Exod. 1:7). The vocabulary used in Exodus 1:7 recalls clearly Genesis 1:28. The wording of 1:7 underlines that the Israelites are fulfilling God's creation mandate. However, Pharaoh does all in his power to oppose this. The Egyptian king, who is viewed as a deity by his own people, is subtly portrayed as opposing God's purposes. From the outset Exodus portrays Pharaoh as Yahweh's archenemy, with the king's malevolent actions underlining his evil nature.

In spite of the intransigence of successive Egyptian kings, God reassures Moses that he will free the Israelites from the yoke of Egyptian oppression, redeeming the people 'with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment' (Exod. 6:6; NIV). Later, after the decimation of Pharaoh's chariot force at the Lake of Reeds, the Israelites celebrate their divine redemption, echoing God's earlier promise: 'You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode' (Exod. 15:13 ESV). In both Exodus 6:6 and 15:13 the Hebrew verb *ga'al* is used to denote redemption.

The concept of divine redemption from evil powers is an important component in the Exodus story, but this of itself is insufficient to restore a harmonious relationship between God and the Israelites. To achieve this outcome, the Exodus story underscores through various episodes that before the Israelites may come into God's presence they need to be ransomed from death, purified from sin's defilement and endowed with a holy status. All of these elements are essential if people are to be restored to the special status that Adam and Eve had before God expelled them from the Garden of Eden.

PASSOVER AND CONSECRATION

Although it is rarely appreciated, the account of the Passover in Exodus 12 is theologically significant as regards understanding the paradigm of salvation that is developed in the book of Exodus. As the climax to the signs and wonders that Yahweh performs in Egypt, the Passover is central to God's redemption of the Israelites from Pharaoh's control. At the heart of Passover is the consecration of the firstborn. In the light of this, it is noteworthy that the account of Passover contains elements that are associated elsewhere in Exodus with the consecration of people. Striking parallels exist between the Passover ritual, the ratification of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 24:1-11) and the process by which the Aaronic priest

are sanctified (Exod. 29:1-37; Lev. 8:1-36).¹⁰ In all three cases, animal sacrifices are offered, blood is sprinkled and a meal is eaten, involving sacrificial meat. While the circumstances differ, in each context a process occurs by which people are consecrated to a holier status.¹¹

One unexpected feature of the Passover account in Exodus 12 is the need for the firstborn Israelite males to be delivered from death. This necessity is especially noteworthy, for on all previous occasions when God struck Egypt, he carefully distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, ensuring that no hardship comes on the Israelites. The death threat concerning the firstborn Israelite males introduces a new dimension into the story. It reveals that deliverance from death is a necessary component in the process of consecration. Before people can be restored to a fully harmonious relationship with God, death must be overcome, reversing the punishment that came on humanity when Adam and Eve betrayed God in the Garden of Eden. To this end, the Exodus story introduces the concept of a sacrificial ransom that delivers the firstborn males from death. The animals that are sacrificed die in the place of the firstborn males.

While the concept of ransom is not mentioned specifically in Exodus 12, it comes in Exodus 13:13-15, which records directions for remembering the Passover in the future. Firstborn male donkeys are to be ransomed from death through the offering of a suitable substitute. Something similar appears to be intended for firstborn male Israelites. These instructions involve the concept of 'ransom', using the verb *pādāh* (cf. Exod. 34:20). The specific mention in Exodus 13 of a substitute being offered to save a life strongly suggests that a similar principle is at work when the Passover sacrifices are made. The animals die as substitutes for the Israelite firstborn males.

In a further development at a later stage, God instructs that male Levites should become substitutes for all firstborn Israelite males (Num. 3:41-51). This process also involves the payment of a ransom. Designated by God as substitutes, the Levites replace all the firstborn males who have been consecrated to Yahweh through the Passover (compare Exod. 13:2 and Num. 3:45). When the Levites replace the firstborn males, the holy status of the latter is transferred to the

¹⁰ Cf. J. A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, (JSOTSup 395; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 119-124.

¹¹ While Exodus 12 is the first episode of significance that focuses on the motif of consecration, the actions of Zipporah in rescuing Moses from death may prefigure this (cf. 4:24-26). See Alexander, *Exodus*, 106-107.

former. For this reason, the Levites, and they alone, are authorised to serve at the tabernacle/temple.

Apart from ransoming the firstborn Israelite males from death, the sacrificial animals contribute other elements to the Passover ritual. Special instructions are given that involve the sprinkling of blood on the door frames of the Israelite houses (Exod. 12:7, 22). This action is probably viewed by the ancient Israelites as ritually cleansing all those who entered through the doors.¹² The mention of hyssop¹³ points in the direction of purification.

Finally, very precise directions are given concerning the cooking of the sacrificial meat and its consumption by the people. The nature of these instructions implies that the Passover meal differs from other meals. The combination of sacrificial meat and unleavened bread reappears in the instructions for the consecration of the Aaronic priests in Exodus 29. Although the narrative in Exodus 12 does not mention the concept of consecration, Exodus 13:2 refers specifically to the firstborn males being consecrated and belonging to God.

Strong links exist between Passover and the consecration of the high priest in Exodus 29, although the instructions for the latter are much more detailed, as befits his holier status. Nevertheless, the same pattern is evident. When the relationship between the rituals in chs. 12, 24 and 29 is appreciated fully, the Exodus story reveals a process of salvation that focuses on ransom from the domain of death, purification from the uncleanness of defilement from sin, and consecration from common to holy status. Bringing the fuller Exodus narrative into view, we can include, as we have already noted, redemption from the powers of evil. To this we may add another component: the making of a friendship treaty/covenant that binds those redeemed by God into an exclusive relationship with him. This underlines the relational dimension of knowing God.

¹² Before the Israelites can become God's people they need to be ransomed from the domain of death and purified from the defilement of sin. Both of these elements are essential to the process of atonement (J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, (Hebrew Bible Monographs 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 44-79) and both are found at the heart of the Passover ritual. The use of blood for cleansing is described more fully in Exodus 29.

¹³ Although the Hebrew term *'ēzōb* is frequently translated 'hyssop,' a more accurate translation would be 'marjoram' (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: The Pentateuch (Exodus-Leviticus)*, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864), 22; C. Houtman, *Exodus. Vol. 1, Chapters 1:1-7:13*, (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1993), 164; W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible 2A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 407).

ESTABLISHING A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

According to Exodus 15:17, God's purpose in rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is that they should dwell with him on his holy mountain. With this aim in view, God brings the Israelites to another mountain, Mount Sinai, where he establishes a special covenant relationship with them. The events at Mount Sinai anticipate and prepare for the Israelites living with God on his holy mountain.

At Mount Sinai God invites the Israelites to enter a covenant relationship with him. If they are prepared to obey him and keep his covenant, they will become 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:6 ESV). God grants the Israelites the privilege of potentially becoming a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6),¹⁴ who will fulfil God's original commission to humanity at creation. The Hebrew expression *mamleket kōhānīm* is best understood as denoting 'a body of priests ruling as kings,' a reading that is reflected in the earliest translations into Greek and Aramaic.

Once the covenant relationship is established, God gives instructions for the construction of a portable sanctuary, where he will dwell among the Israelites. This underlines that the people have come to know God relationally.

The transformation of the Israelites into a holy nation rests on the grace of God. By God's initiative and power, they are brought to Mount Sinai, carried on eagles' wings (Exod. 19:4). Yet Exodus reveals that this is not cheap grace. If the Israelites are to have a covenant relationship with God, they must obey God

¹⁴ See R. B. Y. Scott, 'A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus xix 6),' *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, 8 (1950) 213-219. As Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: The Pentateuch (Exodus-Leviticus)*, 97, remark, 'Israel was to be a regal body of priests to Jehovah, and not merely a nation of priests governed by Jehovah' (Keil and Delitzsch 1864a: 97). Supporting this interpretation of *mamleket kōhānīm*, W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible 2B; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 158, draws attention to other elements within the narrative that point in a similar direction: in 19:10-15 all of the Israelites are to consecrate themselves by way of preparing to ascend Mount Sinai into God's presence; 22:31[30] requires all Israelites to be holy; those who offer sacrifices in 24:5 are designated 'young men' and are not 'hereditary clergy.' See also W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 80-105; J. L. Ska, "Exode 19,3b-6 et l'identité de l'Israël postexilique," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction - Reception - Interpretation*, ed. M. Vervenne, (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1996), 298-299; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, 63-100.

and keep his covenant (Exod. 19:5). Yahweh demands of the Israelites exclusive and total obedience if they are to become priestly monarchs and live as a holy nation in God's presence. The obligations of the covenant are designed to order and shape the Israelite community so that the people's behaviour resembles that of Yahweh. Compassion and integrity are to be prominent characteristics of God's holy people.

The covenant or friendship treaty established at Mount Sinai brings the Israelites into a unique relationship with God. This is necessary if they are to dwell with God on his holy mountain in the land of Canaan. Strikingly, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion are linked by the portable sanctuary, which Yahweh instructs the Israelites to build. Symbolically, the Israelites take Mount Sinai with them on their onward journey to the promised land. This underlines that the events in the Exodus story lay the foundation for Israel's future relationship with Yahweh.

GOD AS SAVIOUR AND SOVEREIGN

Viewed as a whole, the Exodus story emphasizes Yahweh's role as both saviour and sovereign. While the first half of Exodus gives prominence to God's saving the Israelites from slavery, his majestic power is demonstrated through the signs and wonders that lead eventually to the destruction of Pharaoh's chariot force. In celebration of their dramatic deliverance at the Lake of Reeds the Israelites extol God's majesty (Exod. 15:6, 11). Although the second half of Exodus stresses the lordship and majesty of Yahweh through a covenant that demands exclusive allegiance and a portable sanctuary constructed for a royal inhabitant, his compassion and mercy are highlighted by his willingness to forgive the rebellious Israelites and renew the covenant relationship that is endangered by the golden calf/bull incident (Exod. 32:1-34:33).

Exodus highlights how Yahweh comes as saviour and sovereign to bring the Israelites into a special relationship with himself. The sequence of events described in Exodus provides a distinctive paradigm for understanding the process by which alienated humans are brought closer to God. In this respect Exodus is unique in the Old Testament.

The Exodus account of the process by which the Israelites become God's holy people is followed in the book of Leviticus by descriptions of rituals that are designed to maintain the holy status of the nation, removing any defilement that threatens the God's presence in their midst. These rituals have much in common with the process of salvation that is set out in the book of Exodus, but a

distinction should be carefully drawn between rituals that inaugurate the covenant relationship and those that maintain it.

EXODUS FORESHADOWS A GREATER SALVATION

The events recorded in Exodus are presented as describing the process by which the Israelites experience divine salvation, but these events merely foreshadow a greater salvation that is yet to come. The salvation paradigm revealed in Exodus becomes the basis for Old Testament expectations regarding a future, greater exodus. Several features point toward this.

Firstly, although the Israelites have the privilege of knowing God more closely, they do not enjoy unhindered access into God's presence. Even Moses is not permitted to see Yahweh's face. In Exodus Moses' relationship with God becomes more intimate - from hiding his face in fear before Yahweh in Exodus 3:6 to asking to see God's glory in Exodus 33:18 - but at most he is permitted to see only God's back (Exod. 33:23). The limitation placed on Moses reflects the limitation of the covenant established at Mount Sinai. The remarkable events at Mount Sinai involve a partial restoration of humanity's broken relationship with God, but this falls short of being a complete restoration. The Israelites are brought closer to God, but they still cannot come into his immediate presence.

Secondly, the Exodus story reveals that the Israelites are prone to disobey Yahweh. Their wayward actions are a constant barrier to them becoming fully the holy nation that God desires. As God's initial proposal in Exodus 19:6-7 highlights, the Israelites special status is conditional on their faithful and exclusive obedience to him, a point underlined by the three-fold mention of the Israelites affirming their willingness to obey God (Exod. 19:8; 24:4,7). Unfortunately, even before they depart from Mount Sinai their proneness to disobey is illustrated by their making a golden idol (Exod. 32:1-6).

Thirdly, the tabernacle is but a model of the heavenly sanctuary (Exod. 25:9). There is an expectation of something more permanent to come. In addition, the regulations associated with the Sinai covenant presuppose a world in which uncleanness remains a dynamic force, having the power to disrupt the holy status of the Israelites. Viewed as a microcosm, the tabernacle illustrates the idea that one day God's glory will fill the whole earth.¹⁵ At this stage God's holy presence is restricted to the Holy of Holies.

¹⁵ See T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 31-42.

Our analysis of Exodus reveals that the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt provides a paradigm of salvation involving redemption, ransom, cleansing, consecration and a covenant relationship. How is this paradigm reflected in the New Testament?

THE INFLUENCE OF EXODUS ON NEW TESTAMENT SOTERIOLOGY

In the light of Old Testament prophetic expectations of a greater exodus, New Testament writers adopt the Exodus paradigm of salvation to interpret the significance of Jesus Christ, especially his death at Passover. The apostle Paul captures in a sentence this connection when he writes: 'For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed' (1 Cor. 5:7; ESV). In a similar fashion, the apostle Peter speaks of Jesus Christ as 'a lamb without blemish or defect' (1 Pet. 1:19 NIV). The context suggests that Peter has Passover in mind. He subsequently remarks that those ransomed by Christ's blood (1 Pet. 1:18) become 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession' (1 Pet. 2:9 NIV), an obvious allusion to the Exodus story (Exod. 19:6). The concept of ransom is associated with Jesus Christ frequently throughout the New Testament (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 1:68; 2:38; 21:28; 24:18; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:6, 14; Heb. 9:12, 15). Unfortunately, because many of these references are brief, we cannot always be certain that they allude to Passover, although this possibility is not ruled out.

In describing Jesus Christ as the source of eternal life, John's Gospel presents Jesus Christ as a Passover sacrifice, a link confirmed by John's remark that Jesus' bones were not broken, like those of the Passover sacrifice (John 19:31–37; cf. Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). In the light of Jesus' death, it seems likely that the author of John's Gospel interprets John the Baptist's remarks about Jesus being the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29; cf. 1:36) as denoting the Passover lamb. While some New Testament scholars claim that Passover has no soteriological significance, this reflects a failure on their part to appreciate the true nature of Passover as a consecration ritual. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus' statements about eating his flesh and drinking his blood (John 6:53–58) and about being freed from slavery to sin (John 8:34–36) make best sense when viewed in the light of Passover.¹⁶ This special interest in Passover is reflected in the fact that compared to the Synoptic Gospels, John's

¹⁶ See P. M. Hoskins, 'Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John,' *JETS*, 52 (2009) 285-299; P. M. Hoskins, 'Freedom from Slavery to Sin and the Devil: John 8:31-47 and the Passover Theme of the Gospel of John,' *Trinity Journal*, 31 (2010) 47-63.

Gospel mentions three annual celebrations (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Passover is important in John's Gospel.

As a consecration ritual, Passover highlights the importance of people being made holy so that they may come close to God. Possibly drawing on Passover, the author of Hebrews states that Jesus Christ is 'the one who makes people holy' (Heb. 2:11 NIV). Later, he repeats this claim on two occasions. He writes, 'We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb. 10:10 NIV); 'And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood' (Heb. 13:12 NIV). Acknowledging the importance of sanctification, the apostle Paul regularly speaks of the followers of Jesus Christ being 'holy ones' or 'saints' (e.g. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).¹⁷

A NEW COVENANT

The Exodus story records how the Israelites enter a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Through this friendship treaty, they agree to serve him faithfully and exclusively. However, subsequent events reveal that due to their persistent disobedience their unique relationship with God is constantly under threat. Eventually, the prophet Jeremiah announces, in line with other prophets, that God will establish a new covenant with his people (Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Isa. 54:10; 55:3; 61:8; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26–27; Jer. 32:40). This new covenant is later mediated through Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6), with the author of Hebrews extolling its many advantages over the covenant made at Mount Sinai (Heb. 8:8; 9:15; 12:24).

While God comes to dwell *among* his people at Mount Sinai, through the new covenant God comes through the Holy Spirit to dwell *within* his people.¹⁸ Consequently, the Aaronic high priesthood and cultic activities associated with the old covenant become redundant (cf. Heb. 7:12). With his ascension, Jesus Christ becomes high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Whereas under the old covenant the Holy Spirit equipped individuals to manufacture the tabernacle, under the new covenant the Holy Spirit bestows grace-gifts for the building of an organic temple. Illustrating this correspondence, the apostle Paul describes

¹⁷ See the fuller discussion in D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1995).

¹⁸ See J. M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology; Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006).

himself as a master builder, who, like Bezalel with the tabernacle, lays a foundation on which others can build (1 Cor. 3:10; cf. Exod. 31:2-5; 35:30-35).

CONCLUSION

Without exhausting every detail, a strong case can be made for claiming that the book of Exodus provides a model that exemplifies the process necessary for repairing the broken relationship that exists between a holy God and aberrant humanity. The means by which the Israelites come to experience God's presence in their midst includes the following: redemption from the powers of evil; ransom from the domain of death; purification from defilement; consecration or sanctification to be holy; the establishment of a covenant relationship. This list is not exhaustive, but it emphasizes the importance of understanding biblical soteriology in a way that embraces a variety of important, complementary elements.¹⁹

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Deborah and Barak: An example of complementarian leadership?

Paul R. Williamson¹

ABSTRACT

This article examines the respective roles of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 and 5. Traditionally Deborah has been counted as one of Israel's 'judges' (i.e., divinely-appointed leaders who emancipated Israel from foreign oppression). Following Block, this discussion argues that a close reading of Judges suggests otherwise. Comparison between Deborah and other judges in the book demonstrates that Deborah's role in the book of Judges was quite distinct; Deborah had a prophetic role as the person through whom God's remedy to the current crisis was revealed. Barak functioned in the typical role of judge (military deliverer), but together he and Deborah provide an early biblical example of complementary leadership.

KEY WORDS: Deborah; Barak; Judge(s); Prophet(ess); Leadership

Leadership is Male. David Pawson's controversial title is certainly provocative,² if not a little overstated in relation to the OT at least. It's quite true, of course, that when we think of leadership in the Old Testament, we generally think of males. Israel's priesthood was exclusively a male office. So too was Israel's monarchy — with the sole exception of Jezebel's murderous daughter, Athaliah (2 Kgs 11). Prophecy, likewise, was a male-dominated office. However, this was a role in which females could legitimately function. And it is a notable example of such that we are focusing on in this article, as we consider the respective roles of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 and 5.

As we do so, we should also consider the possible ramifications this may have for leadership among God's people today. It's surely fitting that we do so. After all, this is one of the few examples where a male and a female exercise some form of joint leadership in Israelite society. Some time back a friend suggested that Ahab and Jezebel might be another example of such complementarian leadership, but I suspect that that was more along the lines of an egalitarian

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² David Pawson, *Leadership is Male: What does the Bible Say?* (Anchor Recordings, 2014; first published by Highland, 1988).

model. In any case, I doubt if any would want to hold up Jezebel as a biblical role model or precedent that we should follow. As most will be aware, a complementarian view of leadership holds that while males and females are equal in status, there are significant differences between the roles they should exercise in the home and in the church. Egalitarians, on the other hand, argue not only for equality in status, but also equal opportunity insofar as life and ministry are concerned. Putting it simply, anything a male can do, a woman can and indeed should be allowed to do: no role or position should be fenced off as gender-specific or gender exclusive. Now that may be a gross oversimplification, but hopefully it's not inaccurate or misleading. So, on this vexed question of male and female leadership roles, how might the account of Deborah and Barak help us out? Presumably it has something to contribute to biblical-theological reflection on the respective roles of men and women among the people of God. So let's begin by having a look at the relevant biblical text.

Judges 4–5 bring before us Deborah and Barak. Deborah is traditionally understood as the only female judge we meet in this recurring cycle of apostasy, repentance and salvation. To cite Arthur Cundall, “At this point we are introduced to Deborah, the savior of her people and the only woman in the distinguished company of the judges.”³ The “judges” (שֹׁפְטִים/*šōp̄tîm*) described in this book are not, of course, judicial officials in the modern sense; rather, they were charismatic leaders; leaders through whom God delivered Israel from a series of spiritual and political crises. God raised up and equipped these “judges” or “deliverers” to emancipate the Israelites from foreign oppression, and to secure an extended period of peace during their leadership. The latter, in some cases at least, was apparently tribal or local, rather than ethnic and national. But however extensive their leadership, during it the Israelites enjoyed a measure of peace and stability, rather than hostility and chaos.

Altogether there are twelve such leaders mentioned in the book.⁴ These leaders are often sub-divided into major and minor judges on the basis of how much (or how little) we're told about them. Of the so-called minor judges, we know almost nothing — usually just a verse or two is allocated to each, typically

³ Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth*, TOTC (Leicester: IVP, 1968), 82. While a more nuanced understanding of Deborah's leadership is reflected in more recent commentaries, Cundall is by no means alone in thinking of Deborah as a judge in the customary sense of this book.

⁴ I.e., Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson. Deborah's role is the subject of this paper. Abimelech is not actually a “judge” at all — indeed, he is more an “antijudge,” an addendum to the Gideon cycle.

telling us who they were and (in most cases) how long they exercised leadership and where they were buried. We're informed that Shamgar used an ox goad to strike down six hundred Philistines (3:31). But no further information is supplied, other than the fact that he "delivered/saved" (Hiphil **ישע**) Israel.⁵ We know that Tola "led/judged" (**שפט**/*šp̄t*) Israel for twenty-three years, but we hear nothing of how he went about "saving" (**הושיע**) Israel (10:1–2). Slightly more information is supplied concerning his successor: Jair led for twenty-two years, controlling thirty towns in Gilead by means of his thirty donkey-riding sons (10:3–5). Ibzan led seven years, and apparently the most significant thing about him was that he married off his thirty sons and thirty daughters outside his clan (12:8–10). Elon led for ten years, but that's about all we're told about his exploits (12:11–12). Abdon led eight years, but again, other than his forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys, we know precious little about him (12:13–15). It's not altogether clear what we're meant to infer from all this donkey-riding: does it symbolize a time of peace and stability; or does it reflect aspirations to kingship and royal status? In any case, insufficient information is given about any of these minor judges to help us determine the roles occupied by Deborah and Barak. For this, we must consider those whose exploits are described in a bit more detail.

The first of these characters is Othniel, who emancipated the Israelites from the evil hands of Cushan-Rishathaim (i.e., Cushan the doubly wicked).⁶ Israel had been subject to this king for eight years (3:7–11). We're not told how Othniel set about his work, but what we are told is quite significant: in response to Israel's penitent cry for help, God raised up for them this savior/deliverer (**מושיע**); and having been divinely equipped for the task by God's Spirit coming on him, Othniel went to war and overwhelmed Cushan-Rishathaim; thus peace was secured until Othniel's death, some forty years later. In many respects Othniel, the first of Israel's judges, was the role-model; the paradigm against which the others can be measured. Certainly, unlike most of those mentioned subsequently, no undesirable character traits or spiritual flaws are drawn to the readers' attention. We'll return to this a little later.

The next deliverer, Ehud, is something of an enigma for any who would wish to take a moralistic approach to the OT. This ancient 'double-O-seven' initiates Israel's deliverance by strapping on a concealed weapon, deceptively gaining a

⁵ Hiphil **ישע** ("to save").

⁶ "Rishathaim" literally means "doubly wicked," probably a pejorative corruption of this tyrant's true name.

private audience with the Moabite king, and then using the element of surprise to sink his sword deep into Eglon's enormously fat waistline. But however suspect his morality, this left-handed assassin was God's answer to Israel's penitent cry for help; and with God's help, he secured peace in the land for eighty years (3:12–30).

After the Deborah/Barak cycle — which we'll skip over for the present — we encounter Gideon, who somewhat reluctantly facilitates Israel's liberation from the ravaging Midianites. Once persuaded to lead this campaign, however, Gideon's faith is put to the test by some radical troop reductions. But eventually the victory is secured through a clever ploy, ably assisted by divinely-induced panic within the Midianite camp. The story, however, does not have a happy ending. Despite his own refusal to embrace kingship, Gideon names the son of his Shechemite mistress *Abimelech* (i.e., “my father is king”), and this renegade son and his Shechemite pals soon become a major threat to the very peace and security that Gideon had won.

The next major judge we meet is Jephthah, who delivers the Israelites from yet another foreign threat — this time it's the Ammonites who are the chief antagonists. Jephthah's parentage — being the son of a prostitute — had previously made him a *persona non grata* among his Gileadite clan. However, his reputation as a seasoned warrior led them to appoint him as their leader, now that they were in a bit of a pickle. And so in William Wallace fashion,⁷ Jephthah picked a fight with the Ammonites, but made a somewhat rash vow to God in the process — one that would lead to tragedy and regret. Nevertheless, with God's help Jephthah was successful, so much so that he later had to face the tall poppy syndrome,⁸ which he promptly cut off in the bud.

The last of the major judges in the book is of course Samson, arguably the most tragic figure of them all. Despite a promising start and initial successes, Samson's personal and spiritual shortcomings increasingly become a threat to both himself and his people. For all the various attempts to rescue the Israelites from their Philistine overlords, emancipation is never fully achieved. Finally the secret of his supernatural strength is disclosed, Samson is subdued, and his life ends in one final act of vengeance.

⁷ Sir William Wallace is the Scottish warrior played by Mel Gibson in the Hollywood epic, *Braveheart*.

⁸ I.e., the criticism or disparagement of successful people.

At least three things stand out about these major judges: (i) Yahweh is usually said to raise them up as saviours for Israel; (3:9, 15; 6:14; 10:14–15; 13:5; cf. 2:16–19); (ii) the key to their success is Yahweh’s action and/or the endowment of Yahweh’s spirit (3:10, 28; 6:16, 34; [cf. 7:2, 7]; 7:22; 8:3; 11:29, 32; 13:25; 14:19; 15:14; 16:20); (iii) almost all of them have some kind of flaw that makes them less than the ideal saviour or deliverer.

So then, how do the exploits of Deborah and Barak fit in with all this? Let’s look at our text in a little more detail — Judges 4 in particular. After the brief mention of Ehud and his demise,⁹ we’re told that “again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (4:1 NIV 2011). Consequently, the Lord sold them into the hands of yet another foreign oppressor — this is a constant refrain in the book and it is obviously one of the main lessons the author intends his readers to learn. Apostasy from the Lord leads to punishment instead of blessing. On this occasion the Israelites found themselves in the hands of Jabin and Sisera his army commander — possibly constituting the greatest threat to the nation so far.¹⁰ But once again, the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help, and in response, God raised up a judge or deliverer. But who is this deliverer? Is it Deborah, as traditionally understood? Or is it Barak who, as we’ll see, can legitimately claim the role of judge on this particular occasion?

As Block observes,¹¹ the following arguments may be used to support the traditional understanding of Deborah as Israel’s judge or deliverer: (i) Deborah is introduced at the stereotypical point where we expect to be introduced to the next judge; (ii) Deborah is actively involved in the ensuing deliverance (indeed, there are several parallels with Ehud); (iii) Deborah is given priority (always named first alongside Barak) and is explicitly linked in ch. 5 with the restoration of peace and security (5:6–8); (iv) Deborah’s “sitting” (4:5) matches Sisera (4:2) to some degree, so one might reasonably infer that they are counterparts; (v) Deborah is explicitly described as *judging* Israel (4:4), the same lexeme (שפט) that is used to describe the successive *judges* in this book.

⁹ For a concise summary of suggested explanations for the reintroduction of Ehud after the passing mention of Shamgar, see Trent Butler, *Judges*, WBC (Texas: Nelson, 1999), 87.

¹⁰ Six Israelite tribes are involved in the battle. Five other tribes are mentioned as not participating. Only Judah is not mentioned. The Canaanite coalition with Jabin at its head seems to have been quite extensive, hence the scale of this particular threat for Israel.

¹¹ Daniel I. Block, “Deborah among the Judges; The Perspective of the Hebrew Historian,” in *Faith, Tradition and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. Alan R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier and David W. Baker (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 232–34.

However, as Block goes on to point out,¹² the traditional interpretation also raises numerous questions, most of which will be considered in the following discussion.

Of course, if Deborah were solely involved in this military affair, her role as deliverer would not be questioned — however odd or anomalous it may be. But she is not the only such figure in this episode — and that fact certainly raises at least some reasonable doubt over the traditional interpretation, and prompts us to consider carefully the precise nature of her role in this narrative.

The author begins the deliverance account by introducing Deborah, ostensibly the only female ‘judge’ in the book. Given the patriarchal setting, this is most unusual in itself. In a patriarchal society such as ancient Israel women normally took a back seat or subordinate position, with leadership roles generally being confined to males. However, as already acknowledged, there are some notable exceptions to this, such as Miriam (Exod 15:2), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14),¹³ and obviously Deborah herself is a case in point. This being so, we must take care not to exclude Deborah from office simply on account of her gender. Some years ago an Irish acquaintance of mine took umbrage because that’s what he thought I was doing; his wife was a senior minister in a local church, so that probably didn’t help. But while Deborah’s gender is certainly a factor in my argument, I hope to show you that it’s not simply a matter of gender. That alone would arguably be insufficient grounds for challenging the traditional interpretation.

Moreover, it’s quite clear that Deborah did exercise some kind of leadership role within her community. Not only is she described as a prophetess, but she is also expressly said to have been “*judging* Israel at that time” (4:4, my tr.).¹⁴ The question is, in what capacity was she doing so? Are we meant to infer from this that Deborah was already established as one of Israel’s judges in the usual sense (i.e., a charismatic deliverer through whom Yahweh emancipated Israel from

¹² “Deborah among the Judges,” 235; see also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 193–94.

¹³ Female prophets were arguably more commonplace in the ancient Near East and in Israelite society than the few OT references to such (cf. also Noadiah [Neh 6:14], the “prophetess” in Isa 8:3, and the more general references in Ezek 13:17 and Joel 2:28 [MT 3:1]) might suggest; cf. J. Stökl, “Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East,” and H. G. M. Williamson, “Prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day (New York/London: T & T Clark 2010), 47–61, 65–80.

¹⁴ The same verbal root is used to describe the leadership exercised by several of those depicted in the book (cf. Judg 3:10; 10:2, 3; 12:7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14; 15:20; 16:31; cf. Ruth 1:1).

oppression)? Or is Deborah operating as a judge in some other capacity? And if so, in what kind of judging was she engaged?

Well, it's immediately apparent that, whatever her precise role, the judging in which Deborah was engaged was quite different from that alluded to elsewhere in the book. According to Judges 4:5, Deborah "sat" or "held court" (NIV) in some kind of official capacity "under the Palm tree of Deborah."¹⁵ Here the Israelites came to Deborah for judgment/*mišpāt* ("to have their disputes decided", according to the NIV). So at least two things stand out about this judging role of Deborah: (a) she was already exercising this role previously, prior to any *military* action; (b) it involved offering some kind of "judgment" for those who sought her out. Both these features seem to mark out Deborah's activity as quite distinct from the other judges in this book. We will return to this matter in a moment. For now, the important thing to note is the fact that Deborah does not appear to be judging Israel in the normal or typical sense reflected elsewhere in this book. Deborah is apparently not a judge in the usual sense of military or political leader — certainly not initially, at the very least.

This might well explain the fact that it is only here, in the case of Deborah, that judging is in any way defined in the book. That is to say, because Deborah is an exception to the norm, her "judging" activity warranted some sort of explanation. The leadership she exercised, however extraordinary,¹⁶ was not quite the same as that of the others mentioned in this book.

There is, of course, another key feature that distinguishes Deborah from the rest of the Israelite judges: she is explicitly introduced to us as a "prophetess" (4:4). Indeed, Deborah's initial description is identical to that of a similar figure who will be introduced in chapter 6. There, in response to Israel's cry for help because of Midian, the first thing Yahweh did was to send them a prophet prior to the introduction of the judge. In chapter 6 this person, who immediately precedes God's calling of Gideon, is literally described as: "a man, a prophet"

¹⁵ All agree that Deborah's "sitting" alludes to some kind of official function/status.

¹⁶ While female prophets are unusual in the OT (e.g., Exod 15:20; 2 Kgs 22:14–20//2 Chr 34:22–28; Isa 7:3; 8:3, 16–18; Neh 6:14), the kind of authority that Deborah seems to have been exercising is even more so — perhaps "an indication of how irregular things became in the judges' period" (Barry G. Webb, *Judges*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 189; similarly, Butler, *Judges*, 93). However, unlike later examples in Israel's history (cf. 1 Kgs 21; 2 Kgs 11), Deborah's leadership is not criticized by the narrator. Butler, however, contends that while Deborah herself is not criticized, "the text implicitly criticizes the nation of Israel for having to rely on women to deliver them from danger and to fulfill the major roles in their society" (Butler, *Judges*, 93). This is evidently so in the case of Jael, but is much less obvious in the case of Deborah.

— the male equivalent to Deborah’s description here in chapter 4 as “a woman, a prophetess.” We’ll return to the possible significance of this parallel or analogous description presently. For now, all I want us to observe is that Deborah is actually introduced to us not as a judge, but as a prophetess.

It is arguably in Deborah’s capacity as a prophetess (i.e., as a divine spokesperson; cf. Exod 4:15–16; 7:1–2) that the Israelites “went up to her for judgment” (4:5 my tr.).¹⁷ Given this possibility, some English translations (e.g., NIV; NET) may be quite misleading when they suggest that Deborah was operating in a forensic capacity. The idea that Deborah “held court” and that the Israelites came to her in order to settle their “disputes” may be reading too much into two Hebrew words,¹⁸ we’re simply told that she “sat” (in some official capacity) and that they came to her “for judgment.”¹⁹ What the latter entailed is not spelt out — or is it? Following Ackerman,²⁰ Block concludes that Israel’s *crying out* (v.3) and a royal or divine pronouncement (Hebrew: מִשְׁפָּט/mišpāt) are conceptually related: “When subjects appealed (šā‘aq) to a king for help in a matter, his pronouncement in response was designated his *mišpāt*.”²¹ Thus

¹⁷ It is unclear whether the verb (עלה) is used here in its normal (i.e., topographical) sense (cf. Judg 1:1), or has a more technical sense of “going up to inquire of God” (cf. Judg 20:18, 23). While Block (“Deborah among the Judges,” 241) is inclined toward the latter, the fact that Deborah is explicitly located in the hill country cannot be ignored. Block’s conjecture (“Deborah among the Judges,” 241) that Deborah set herself up as an alternative to the official channel of divine communication nearby (i.e., the priests at Bethel) is somewhat speculative.

¹⁸ Cf. Stek, for whom the narrator presents Deborah as “the source of justice where the wronged in Israel can secure redress and the oppressed relief” (John H. Stek, “The Bee and the Mountain Goat: A Literary Reading of Judges 4,” in W.C. Kaiser and R.F. Youngblood [eds], *A Tribute to Gleason Archer* [Chicago: Moody, 1986], 62). However, while such judicial “sitting” is clearly evident elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Exod 18:13–16; cf. 1 Sam 7:15–17), no judicial rulings are explicitly mentioned here in Judges 4 (or in 1 Sam 7 either). Moreover, as Block (“Deborah among the Judges,” 237, 239) observes, “in the present context it is difficult to see a connection between such a judicial function and her role in the rest of the narrative.... One wonders why the narrator would have made this passing reference to the settlement of relatively petty civil disputes when the issue in the chapter is a national crisis.” Even so, this has not prevented recent commentators from continuing to adopt the traditional understanding of Deborah’s judging in a forensic sense (e.g., Butler *Judges*, 983–984; Webb, *Judges*, 188–89).

¹⁹ Lit. “For *the* judgment,” although the articular form may not necessarily indicate a particular judgment (*pace* Block, “Deborah among the Judges,” 239).

²⁰ James S. Ackerman, “Prophecy and Warfare in Early Israel: A Study of the Deborah-Barak Story,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 5–13 (11).

²¹ “Deborah among the Judges,” 239. In particular, see 1 Kgs 20:39–40; 2 Kgs 6:26; Job 19:7; cf. 2 Sam 15:1–6; 1 Kgs 3:16–28. Block further notes that such “cries” in Judges were always directed to Yahweh, as is illustrated in Yahweh’s sarcastic retort of Judg 10:14. Thus understood, Deborah is presented here as Yahweh’s representative, to whom the Israelites come for Yahweh’s answer (or *mišpāt*) to their cries.

understood, the Israelites simply sought Deborah out to hear what God had to say; that is, to receive a divine oracle of some kind (i.e., a word/directive from the Lord).²² That *mišpāṭ* can denote such is clear from Exodus 28:30, where the pouch containing the Urim and Thummim is described as “the pouch [יִשְׁפָּט/ḥōšēn] of judgment [*mišpāṭ*].” These stones were the only legitimate means of divination in ancient Israel (cf. Num 27:21). And such is precisely what these Israelites got from the mouth of Deborah: “Her commissioning of Barak represented the divine *mišpāṭ*” (cf. 4:6–7).²³ Accordingly, it is doubtful that we are to understand Deborah as a *judge* either in the usual sense, or even in a forensic sense. Rather, Deborah was a prophetess, through whom Yahweh’s response to the current crisis was made known.

This would also help explain the need for Barak and the role he was to play in the ensuing events. If Deborah were in fact a judge in the typical sense, Barak would surely be redundant and something of an enigma. Why involve Barak at all, if Deborah was indeed the charismatic military leader that Yahweh had raised up? Surely “Captain Courageous” could have been ignored, and with God’s help, Deborah could have ably carried out this task without him? Why include Barak, if Deborah was the judge? Now one could argue that Deborah needed a man to lead the Israelites in battle; however, this seems to undermine the premise — the suggestion that she was the judge (i.e., the military deliverer) on this occasion. As will be suggested below, it seems more reasonable to infer from this and the ensuing narrative that the typical role of judge was actually undertaken in this episode by Barak.

Moreover, Barak’s reluctance to go to battle unaccompanied by Deborah seems to reflect the kind of character flaw that marks every major judge in the book after Othniel.²⁴ We have already noted Ehud’s somewhat questionable morality.

²² For Block (“Deborah among the Judges,” 239), it is significant that it was “the sons of Israel” who came to her; this expression is used everywhere else in the book as a collective, suggesting a representative body coming with national concerns as opposed to isolated individuals coming with their personal disputes.

²³ “Deborah among the Judges,” 252.

²⁴ Barak’s insistence on Deborah’s accompaniment and her verbal response can be given two strikingly different interpretations. For the vast majority of translations and commentators, Barak’s demurring is interpreted negatively, as an indication of cowardly reluctance on his part. Consequently, Deborah’s prediction concerning the outcome of the battle is seen as implicit rebuke: Due to his less than enthusiastic response, he is to play the secondary part to the woman in this incident. Therefore, some degree of censure is intended in vv.8–9. Others have cast Barak’s request and Deborah’s reply in a more favourable light: Rather than betraying any cowardice on his part, Barak’s request is seen as giving expression to genuine faith and dependence upon Yahweh. Conscious of human inadequacy in the context of “holy war,” Barak

Gideon's need for double reassurance betrays some measure of unbelief, and the consequences of having a Shechemite concubine are even more telling.²⁵ Jephthah's rash vow and Samson's immorality likewise betray the serious shortcomings that seem to typify almost all of Israel's judges. Thus understood, Barak stands out as a typical Israelite judge (i.e., a *flawed* human leader), whereas Deborah's untarnished character would certainly make her atypical.²⁶

It is also worth noting that the dialogue between Deborah and Barak seems to suggest that, initially at least, Deborah had no intention of accompanying Barak to the battlefield; she seems to imply that the honour would have gone entirely to Barak had he not equivocated (cf. 4:7, where she speaks of Yahweh giving Sisera into "your hands" rather than "my/our hands"; i.e., the honour was not something Barak would have had to share with Deborah).²⁷ Again, it is difficult to square this with Deborah's alleged role as judge; she apparently does not see herself as one of the combatants, and certainly not the commander-in-chief of the assembled army.

Furthermore, Deborah's role at the battlefield seems to be much more in line with her responsibility as a prophetess, announcing the Lord's directive to Barak

is wisely requesting Deborah's presence in order to know when to make his move. As a recognized channel of divine communication (prophetess), Deborah's function would be similar to the later use of the Urim and Thummim — a means of knowing precisely when to raise the war cry and engage the enemy. It is observed that there is no explicit criticism of Barak's request in Deborah's response, and it is possible that this "oracle," rather than being an implicit rebuke, served to reassure Barak of total victory. Thus, for some Barak expresses genuine faith, whereas for others he betrays faithless cowardice. The words which would settle the matter are unfortunately ambiguous: v. 9b may be interpreted either negatively, "Because of the way you are going about this" (NIV 1984 cf. KJV; JB; GNB), or more neutrally (and literally), "the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for ..." (so ESV; cf. NRSV; RSV; NEB; NASB; REB).

²⁵ Abimelech seems to be a self-imposed leader, whose deeds (along with those of his Shechemite collaborators) are eventually avenged by God. Abimelech is nowhere said to judge Israel (9:22 uses a different verb [שָׁרַר], meaning "to rule"), and this episode seems to be an expanded comment on 8:35 and the disintegration into chaos that followed Gideon's lifetime.

²⁶ For Block, unlike the antiheroes in the rest of the book, "Deborah was different. She was the only one the narrator cast in an unequivocally positive light ... She stands out as a lonely figure indeed" ("Deborah among the Judges," 236). While this may be overstating things slightly (cf. Othniel), Deborah's flawless character is immediately striking in this downward spiral of apostasy that is reflected in the life of the nation and its leaders. Moreover, rather than betraying immodesty or personal boasting, Deborah's declaration in 5:7 may simply reflect exhilaration and amazement (so Webb, *Judges*, 209).

²⁷ While one would immediately have thought of Deborah when she predicted the honour going to a woman (4:9), it is reasonable to infer from the lack of specification in Deborah's description (not "to me" but "to a woman") that Deborah had discounted herself as a possible candidate; rather, she is alluding here to the as yet unknown Jael (4:17–22).

at the appropriate moment (Judg 4:14). Her complete absence from the description of the actual fighting (cf. Judg 4:15–17) is something of an anomaly if she was in fact a typical judge in Judges. The battle scene clearly depicts Barak in the role normally associated with the judges described elsewhere in this book. Deborah does not appear to carry out a combative role in the battle itself.²⁸ Her function seems to have been simply to reveal Yahweh’s battle-plan in advance, announce the appropriate moment to engage the enemy,²⁹ and — in typical prophetic fashion (cf. Exod 15), play a leading role in the post-victory celebrations (Judg 5:1).

Doubt over Deborah’s role as judge is further fueled by the fact that typical language describing other judges in the book is nowhere applied to her. Neither the noun “saviour” (Heb. מוֹשִׁיעַ) nor the related Hiphil verb “to save” (Heb. הוֹשִׁיעַ) is used anywhere of Deborah (cf. Judg 2:16; 3:9, 15, 31; 6:14, 15; 8:22; 10:1; 13:5). Admittedly, it is not used of Barak either; however, its absence is much more explicable in his case; after all, the text explicitly tells us that this honour would go to “a woman” (4:9). Initially we might assume that Deborah is here alluding to herself, but it’s clear from what follows that this is not the case.

But it’s not just a matter of typical language being omitted in relation to Deborah. The use of an unexpected form of the qatal verb in association with Deborah’s “rise” in Judges 5:7 (i.e., שִׁקְמָתִי/šaqqamtî, rather than simply יִקְמָתִי/qāmtî) may be a further indication that the omission of terminology used of other judges (i.e., “the Lord raised up ...”) is quite deliberate.³⁰ More

²⁸ On the basis of Judges 5 (vv.7, 12), Susan Ackerman (*Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 38–44) concludes that Deborah was originally portrayed as military leader, but that this has been deliberately downplayed in the chronologically later chapter 4. However, this is conjectural and neither of these verses demands greater involvement in the battle than that suggested by chapter 4, where Deborah and Barak’s roles are clearly demarcated.

²⁹ From 5:4 we learn that a thunderstorm came. The fact that Sisera deployed his full chariot force suggests that it was in the middle of the dry season, when rain was totally unexpected. Thus the Lord intervened by means of a thunderstorm to give the advantage to the Israelites. It is probable that Deborah anticipated the storm’s approach and gave the order to attack. The storm turned the advantage in favour of the Israelites. Sisera’s iron chariots got bogged down and quickly became a liability rather than an advantage.

³⁰ So Block, who tentatively takes this as a Piel dialectical variant of שָׁכַח “to rise early” (*Judges, Ruth*, 226). However, as he acknowledges, most take the additional element (שׁ + *daghes forte*) simply as the relative pronoun (cf. Judg 6:17; 7:12; 8:26), here attached to the normal qatal verb form (for similar usage with other qatal verbs, cf. Ezra 8:20; Ecc 5:15; Lam 2:16). Such usage of the relative pronoun immediately after ׀ to give the sense, “until X ...,” is not uncommon

significant, however, may be the fact that there is no reference to Deborah's empowerment by Yahweh's Spirit (cf. Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:19; 15:14). While again this is not peculiar to Deborah, it may be a further indication that she is not being portrayed as the judge figure in this account. Indeed, as Block contends (1994: 249), the presence and declaration of Yahweh's prophetic messenger (Deborah) may also help explain the non-mention of the Spirit's empowerment in the case of Barak.

Further evidence casting doubt on Deborah's "judgeship" is the terminology which the narrator does specifically apply to her; i.e., a "prophetess" (lit. "a woman, a prophetess," Judg 4:4; cf. "a man, a prophet," Judg 6:8) and a "mother of Israel" (Judg 5:7). In particular, the description of Deborah as a prophetess — and its striking similarity with the later description of a male prophet at the start of the Gideon account, may suggest that each exercised a similar role: in other words, one can infer from the analogy between these two passages that Deborah's role was analogous to the anonymous male prophet of Judges 6:7 (i.e., Yahweh's spokesperson), whereas Barak's role was analogous to the role played by Gideon (i.e., judge-deliverer).

Assuming this to be so, Block contends that "Deborah's prophetic status and not her judicial office led the 'sons of Israel' to come to her at the palm between Ramah and Bethel."³¹ Thus for Block, Deborah is not a judge either in the charismatic-deliverer sense or in the forensic-judicial sense. Rather, the judgment (*mišpāt*) for which the Israelites consulted her was the oracular sense of determining Yahweh's will concerning military action, a "prophetic" role also attested elsewhere in this corpus (cf. Judg 1:1–2; 20:18, 23, 27–28; 1 Sam 14:36–42; 23:1–6; 28:6).³² Moreover, the role Deborah plays here in Judges is further attested in extrabiblical material.³³ Interpreted in this light, "The call of Barak was Yahweh's answer to the crisis."³⁴ He, and not Deborah, was Yahweh's appointed deliverer for this particular situation. Deborah's commissioning of Barak represented the divine *mišpāt* in the present circumstances. This would also explain Barak's insistence that Deborah

(see Ps 123:2; Song 2:7, 17; 3:5; 4:6; 8:4; see also texts that use such a construction with a qatal verb: Exod 32:20; Deut 2:14; Josh 8:26; Judg 4:24; 1 Kgs 10:7; 2 Kgs 17:23; Ezek 34:21).

³¹ "Deborah among the Judges," 240.

³² While most of these instances presumably involved priests (using the Urim and the Thummim), it is clear from 1 Sam 28:6 that prophets were another such source of such divine revelation.

³³ For examples, see Block, "Deborah among the Judges," 244–46.

³⁴ Block, "Deborah among the Judges," 247.

accompany him to the battle-field; viz. so that he could get further divine directives as to how and when to engage the enemy.

There is one further and noteworthy piece of evidence which should probably also be considered: in the two biblical lists of Israel's judges, Barak's name is included whereas Deborah's is not, cf. 1 Sam 12:9–11 LXX;³⁵ Heb 11:32. The omission of Deborah in these lists might not be deemed odd or significant given that neither list is comprehensive. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Barak makes the absence of Deborah appear all-the-more significant. One could reasonably infer from this that Deborah was not considered one of the judges in biblical antiquity.³⁶

Therefore, though traditionally Deborah has been recognized as exercising a dual role of judge and prophetess, there is good reason to conclude that Deborah was solely the latter; a prophetess who issued Yahweh's call to Barak and passed on Yahweh's directions for the strategy he was to employ against the Canaanite war machine. Thus understood, this constitutes an OT example of what might well be described as complementarian leadership.

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³⁵ The Masoretic Text has the otherwise unknown *Bedan* (בדן), whereas Syriac includes both Deborah and Barak. While not dissimilar from Barak (ברק), and possibly even a phonetic variant (so David T. Tsumura *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 323), many see Bedan as a corruption of 'Abdon' (12:13-15) or 'ben Dan' (an allusion to Samson) rather than ברק.

³⁶ Admittedly, while Josephus (*Antiquities*) initially assumes distinctive prophetic and military roles for Deborah and Barak respectively, he subsequently portrays Deborah as assuming Barak's rank as commander-in-chief in the battle with Sisera.

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Delighting in God's Word: Drawn from Thomas Watson's *The Christian on the Mount*¹

Dr Jim Davison²

ABSTRACT

The work chosen for this article is Thomas Watson's, *The Christian on the Mount*, for it encourages all believers to explore the neglected art and discipline of meditation on the Scriptures. From a focus upon delighting upon God's word, Watson suggests that the believer's affections will be drawn not only to embrace that word but a desire will be created in the heart to meditate upon it day and night; just as the psalmist did in Psalm 1. He explains that meditation goes beyond simply study of the Word, which brings understanding. Meditation is presented as a duty which should not be slighted. It should be deliberate, morning and evening and at the same time impromptu. The benefits and usefulness of meditation are explained and the necessity of meditation cannot be downplayed.

KEY WORDS: Transforming grace, the Word of God, study, the art of meditation, royal edit.

Psalm 1 has been described as “the Psalm of Psalms.” This is a fair comment as it has within it the very essence of Christianity. It may also be described as ‘A Travel Guide’ that requires close attention as it maps out the road of “quicksand where the wicked sink down into perdition” and the firm road on which “the saints tread to glory.” In his Sunday evening reflection on Psalm 1 (22/03/20) Steve Auld (Pastor, Great Victoria Street Baptist Church, Belfast) reminded us of this and on Wednesday evening (1/4/20) he drew our attention to the need to take care, to keep a watchfulness over our souls. As a help to taking care he painted a picture of life as a garden and emphasised the need to pay great attention to the garden to ensure it is not overtaken by weeds or other hindrances

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Christian on the Mount*, p.1 (Orlando, Florida: The Northampton Press, 2009).

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to its beauty and usefulness and so be destroyed. The same applies to the Christian life; such attention is needed that will enable the Believer to grow and flourish in the service of God.³

The same point regarding watchfulness is made by Thomas Watson when he says, “Watch over your hearts every day; lock up your hearts every morning and give Him the key.”⁴ He quotes Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153) who would often say, “Lord, there is nothing more flitting than my heart. Keep watch and ward there.”⁵ Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686) was, and still is, a highly acclaimed Puritan minister. He earned an M.A. from Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He served as pastor of St. Stephen’s Walbrook, London for about ten years until he was ejected at a result of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. But Watson continued to preach in private homes and other places, until the Declaration of Indulgence came into force in 1672. From this date Watson obtained a license to preach and this he did at Crosby Hall, Bishopsgate. When Watson stepped down from his charge at Crosby Hall, he retired to Barnston in Essex, where he died suddenly while praying. Watson’s works, which are still very much in demand today, express a depth of doctrinal teaching in a very concise heart-warming and heart-searching way. There is also much practical wisdom demonstrated in the application and this many times by way of illustration. In this chosen work, *The Christian on the Mount*, Watson invites all believers to explore the much passed-over and neglected hidden gem and discipline of meditation on the Scriptures. The comments above are but echoes of God’s Word: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). Knowing that the springs of life can become polluted (Prov. 21:2; Matt. 15: 28-29) it is important to take this advice seriously.

Following some exegetical comments on Psalm 1 Watson turns to the subject of delighting in God’s Word. He first makes the point that God has equipped mankind with the capacity to delight: “The great God has grafted the affection of delight into every creature; it has by the instinct of nature something to delight itself in.” But it is important to note that while this is true, the Christian does not make God’s Word his delight by perception or feeling; it is by God Himself

³ *The Christian on the Mount*, p.1

⁴ *Ibid*, p.119

⁵ Cited in Watson, p.118

enlightening the soul. It is “not by intuition but by divine inspiration.”⁶ This God does when He infuses transforming grace into the soul.

Watson makes this clear when he says that “the saint’s delight in the law of God proceeds...from soundness of judgement.” And with this soundness of judgement, wrought by the Spirit of God in the inner man “the mind apprehends a beauty in God’s law and then the judgement draws the affections...after it.” Delight also shines forth when there is in the soul, “a predominance of grace,” for it gives a new emphasis to the will, which is evidenced by a “spontaneity and cheerfulness in God’s service.”⁷

However, while it is acknowledged that all have the capacity to express delight, it is also true that, by nature, none have the desire to delight in or serve God. In Job 21: 14-15 we read that the wicked say to God, “Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways” and “What is the Almighty that we should serve him?” And the psalmist says, “The fool says in his heart ‘there is no God’” (Psalm 14:1; see Rom. 3:10-18).

But by the working of grace in the heart, as noted above, a new emphasis is placed in the will. For Paul this is nothing less than becoming “a new creation” in Christ (2 Cor.5:17). The effect of this work of grace in the heart, “files off the rebellion of the will...it changes the lion-like fierceness into a dove-like sweetness; it changes hatred into delight.” Indeed, we can go further and say that “a gracious heart loves everything that has the stamp of God upon it.”⁸

Now if a heart that has the stamp of God’s approval upon it loves everything that has the stamp of God upon it, surely there must be delight in God’s revelation of Himself. In other words, would not God’s revelation of Himself in His Word be a most engaging subject to give attention to by a gracious soul? And in doing so would not the thoughts and actions, of a gracious soul, be constantly entwined with it? Surely the answer to these questions is an emphatic yes! the mind will be “wholly busied about it.” Furthermore, the delight that would flow from this activity will result in the child of God giving God “the

⁶ Watson, *The Christian on the Mount*, pp.4, 5

⁷ *Ibid*, pp.5, 6

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.6, 7

strength of his affections, the cream of his duties; if he has anything better than another, God shall have it.”⁹

Watson also describes the Word of God as a “divine treasury to enrich us;” to enrich us in the knowledge of the truth pertaining to assurance and the mystery of God (Col.2:2); and as a “strong cordial” that will give “strong consolations” that can “sweeten afflictions.” But for these truths to be of any benefit, the cordial must be taken, and the treasury opened for knowledge and truth to be received. Understanding these truths and applying them will surely bring comfort, and O how we need such assurance and comfort at this present time (Ps. 119:50; 1 Cor. 15:55)!¹⁰

The psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). This is a lovely clear description of God’s Word and its purpose, but if we do not look to where the light or lamp is shining, how can we know where we are going? Likewise, when the Word is described by Peter as “a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:20). The darkness speaks of a heart without Christ, a failure to take heed to the prophetic word, while the morning star is none other than Christ in the heart, the one of whom the prophets spoke.

Many other reasons could be given why we should delight in God’s Word but the all-encompassing one is because it reveals the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “The law of God” says Watson, “is a letter sent from heaven, indicted by the Holy Ghost and sealed with the blood of Christ.” What an amazing description of God’s Word! In support of his argument Watson quotes Isaiah 62:5 and Hosea 2:19 and asks the question, “Is it not delightful reading over this love letter?” The response, surely, is Yes! Exercising our minds and hearts with such an all-encompassing description of God’s Word would give satisfaction and delight to any soul!¹¹

Another help to attaining this delight in God’s Word is to have a “spiritual heart;” one that is not earthly minded, for “an earthly heart will not delight in

⁹ Ibid, pp.11, 12

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.16, 17

¹¹ Ibid, p.15

spiritual mysteries.” Pray, therefore, for a spiritual heart; one that will thirst after the living God.¹²

All this evidence, for Watson, indicates that to engage the mind in God’s Word brings delight, and “he who delights in God does not complain that he has too much of God, but rather too little.” Now to attain this delight, we must hold God’s Word in high esteem; prize it so highly that it is “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold” (Ps. 19:10). But the casual reading of God’s Word will not achieve this desire. It will only be accomplished by setting such a high valuation on God’s Word that the affections will be drawn to embrace it and a desire arise in the heart to meditate upon it day and night; just as the psalmist did.¹³

As the psalmist expressed it: “As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2a). This was no quiet longing after some water, but the audible panting produced by the intense desire and overwhelming sense of want. The implication we can draw from this agonising desire after God, by the psalmist, is that he believes it is God alone who can satisfy the thirsting soul (see also Ps. 36:8-9; Ps. 63:1; Isa. 12:2-3; John 6:69).

However, as intimated above, to experience these realities requires an intimacy with God’s Word and the best way to have this intimacy is not just to read God’s Word, not just to study God’s Word to gain knowledge, but to mediate upon it so as to put its precepts into practice.

It is interesting to note Watson’s reasons why he sees the study of God’s Word as different from meditating on it and why he urges meditation. His explanation is insightful: “They differ in their nature...they differ in their design...and they differ in the outcome and result.” In their nature because “Study is the work of the brain, meditation of the heart; study sets the mind to work; meditation sets the heart to work.” In their design because “the design of study is notion; the design of meditation is piety. The design of study is finding out a truth; the design of meditation is the spiritual improvement of a truth. The one searches

¹² Ibid, p.21

¹³ Ibid, p.20

for the vein of gold, the other digs out the gold.” In regard to outcome and result, “Study leaves a man never the whit the better; it is like the winter sun that has no warmth or influence. Meditation leaves one in a holy frame; it meets the heart when frozen and makes it drop into tears of love.”¹⁴

In the Psalms we find the same sentiments being expressed by the psalmists regarding the blessings and delight that flows from meditating on God’s Word: “Blessed is the man who[se]...delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2); “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” (Psalm 119:15-16); “Your servant will meditate on your statutes. Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counsellors” (Psalm 119:23b-24); “O how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day...it is ever with me” (Psalm 119:97-98b).

While these testimonies regarding meditation are true, and a great encouragement to all God’s people to be often occupied in the art of meditation, the all-important reason for doing so is because God commands it. In Joshua 1:1-9 we read how Joshua was charged by God, to lead the Israelites into the promised land. But within this charge we find the injunction to mediate on God’s Word: “The LORD said to Joshua....This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written therein” (vv.1, 8).

Now although the charge is specifically given to Joshua it places each child of God under the same authority and security. In Deut. 32:46 we read “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law.” And in 1 Kings we read, “Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes and his commandments...as it is written in the Law of Moses” (1 Kings 2:1-4). We read in the New Testament that the mother of Jesus “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Finally, on the road to Emmaus the hearts of the two companions were on fire as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them (Luke 24:32). And this before He was revealed to them!

¹⁴ Ibid, p.31

The Joshua periscope, quoted above, is fundamental in God's revelation of Himself, for up to this time instructions regarding obeying God were given by direct verbal communication (Genesis 2:16; 26:5; Exodus 3:10). But here we read of the "Book of the Law", which was written by Moses at the command of God (Exodus 17:14). We take the "Book of the Law," up to this point, to be the first five books of Holy Scripture (the Pentateuch), to which was added the Book of Joshua (Joshua 24:26) and the following books of the Old and New Testament ("Holy Scripture") in later generations until it was closed by the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos.

Having shown the delight to be had from God's Word and the duty imposed upon all Believers to meditate on it, we turn, briefly, to enquire into the nature of meditation. Watson's definition of meditation is helpful in our quest to determine its nature: He writes: "[It is] the soul's retiring of itself so that, by a serious and solemn thinking upon God, the heart may be raised up to heavenly affections." This description reveals three things about the nature of meditation: 1) "the soul's retiring of itself" indicates the need to "get out of the crowd of worldly business...take heed the world does not follow you...Lock and bolt the door against the world;" 2) "a serious and solemn thinking upon God" indicates "it is not a cursory work," it has an "intensity to recollect and gather together the thoughts" and "a staying of the thoughts on the object;" and 3) "there is the raising of the heart to holy affections," which is nothing less than to "heal the soul of its deadness."¹⁵

What we have considered so far has enabled us to recognise that meditation on God's Word is a most essential tool in developing a life of godliness; a life in all its aspects that will honour and praise God. God has given us His Word that we might understand His "wisdom in writing, and His love in sending it to us." But to emphasise it once more, "we must not run over it in haste," for if we do "the truths of God will not stay with us." The reason for this is because "The heart is hard and the memory slippery." So hard and slippery that reading God's Word without meditation would be like "writing in the sand or like pouring water into a sieve."¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, pp.25, 26, 27

¹⁶ Ibid, pp.65, 66

Watson, in seeking to drive home the necessity of meditation, quotes Deut. 6:6 “These words which I command you this day shall be in your heart” and insists that “without meditation the truths that we know will never affect our hearts.” Two illustrations are given to help our understanding of the point being made: 1) “As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart”; and 2) as eating requires the stomach to digest the food for it to be of value, “Just so it is not the taking in a truth at the ear, but the meditating on it, that is the digestion of it in the mind that makes it nourishment.”¹⁷

A final reason in support of Watson’s argument is that “without meditation we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and His Word.” This is a most serious charge, but if we accept, as we must surely do, that the purpose of God in giving us His Word was that we should “meditate on it day and night so to that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it” (Joshua 1:8) it is a just charge. The words of God to Joshua are nothing less than a “royal edit” as they come from the King of kings and Lord of lords. Failure to meditate on God’s Word, is not only to “undervalue it”, it is truly a “slighting [of God’s] authority, and contempt done to the divine majesty.”¹⁸

Following his reasons for meditation two negative points are considered by Watson to show “why there are so few godly Christians”. The negative points are: 1) “People are so much in the shop that they are seldom on the mount with God.” In other words, Christians are more busied about worldly business than about soul business, so much so that meditation “is grown almost out of fashion.” Indeed, says Watson, “It is to be wailed in our times that so many who go under the name of professing believers have banished godly discourse from their tables and meditation from their closets”; and 2) “The devil is an enemy of meditation”, he is opposed to it because it is “a means to compose the heart and bring it into a gracious frame.” For the devil hearing God’s Word preached is one thing, but meditation is quite another: “He can stand your small shot, provided you do not put in this bullet [of meditation].”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid, p.66

¹⁸ Ibid, pp.66, 67

¹⁹ Ibid, p.68

Turning to the reproofs, illustrated by general examples, it is to be noted that they cover the world of farming, medicine, the legal profession, and general traders. Surely only as examples! In each category there are those who meditate but they “turn all their meditations the wrong way,” they “let out their meditations upon other fruitless things.” Things that have no benefit to their souls. Like the farmer who “meditates on his acres of land [and] not upon his soul” or who will “not let his ground lie fallow, but he lets his heart lie fallow.” Likewise, the physician “who meditates on his remedies, but seldom on those remedies that the gospel prescribes for salvation: faith and repentance.” Or the lawyer who focuses on the laws pertaining to his profession (the common law) to such an extent that on “God’s law he seldom meditates in it either day or night.”²⁰

So also, the tradesman, who is “encumbered about with many things” that are lawful, but he does so to the extent that he meditates on his “account book day and night.” He does not meditate “on God’s book” and this, for Watson, can only be “fruitless meditation” with the result that you have “gotten but a fool’s purchase when you die (Luke 12:20).”²¹

Having reproved those who neglect the duty of meditation Watson, eager to impress upon his readers, once again, the necessity of meditation, writes, “If ever there were a duty, I would press upon you with more earnestness and zeal it would be this, because so much vital parts and spirit of religion lie in it.” Such is his desire to extol meditation as an aid to a closer communion with God he gives this very apt illustration: “Food may as well nourish without digesting, as we can fructify in holiness without meditation.” Watson goes on to liken meditation to a hill, which “when you have gotten to the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect: Christ and heaven before you.”²²

Watson now turns to consider two objections to meditation: 1) “So much business in the world...leaves no time for meditation”; and 2) “Getting the heart into a meditating frame is very difficult.” To the first of these objections Watson notes that “the world indeed is an enemy to meditation...and in a crowd of

²⁰ Ibid, p.69

²¹ Ibid, pp.69, 70

²² Ibid, p.71

worldly employments, it is easy to lose all thoughts of God.” But to ensure this does not happen we are advised not to treat piety as a “minor matter, a thing fit only for idle hours.” Now all this is not to decry the legitimacy of worldly business, rather, it is to highlight a legitimate concern that people who raise such objections, down-play “the great business of piety.” It was never God’s intention that the affairs of the world or “a particular vocation should jostle out the general duty to holiness.”²³

The second objection considered by Watson, namely, “Getting the heart into a meditating frame is very difficult.” In this objection it can be seen that “the flesh cries out for ease. . . . It is reluctant to pray, to repent; it is reluctant to put its neck under Christ’s yoke.” But as is noted in Matthew 11:12, which Watson refers to, there is a holy violence to be exercised in our relation to the kingdom of heaven. In other words, “as our salvation cost Christ His blood; it may well cost us sweat.” It is also pointed out by Watson that “riches are hard to come by” but this does not deter men from venturing for such riches. They do not conclude that because it is a difficult task they will “sit still and be without them.” “Men venture for gold” but there is a reluctance for many Believers “to spend and be spent for that which is more precious than the gold of Ophir.”²⁴

Watson accepts that on “first entering upon meditation, it may seem hard, yet once we are entered it is sweet and pleasant.” So sweet and pleasant that “we shall sometimes think ourselves even in heaven” and declare with Peter, “Lord, it is good that we are here” (Matt. 17:4). Such an experience can have only one outcome, the “Christian who meets with God in the mount would not exchange his hours of meditation for the most orient pearls or sparkling beauties that the world can afford.”²⁵

Having removed the two objections Watson goes on, helpfully, to explain the difference between “occasional meditation” and “deliberate meditation”. Of the first he says, “[they] are such as are taken up on any sudden occasion.” In seeking to illustrate what he means Watson suggests that when we “look up to the heavens and see them richly embroidered with light” we could meditate on

²³ Ibid, pp.73, 74

²⁴ Ibid. pp.74, 75

²⁵ Ibid, p.

this: “If the footstool is so glorious, what is the throne where God sits!” Likewise, when we see “the skies bespangled with stars,” it would be an occasion to think, “What is Christ, the Bright Morning Star!” Meditating on such subjects would surely warm our hearts; they would be like “music that delights the senses” and acts as a “good conscience.” Watson’s description of a good conscience is lovely: “[it is] the bird of paradise within, whose chirping melody enchants and ravishes the soul with joy.”²⁶

Everyday things like, when dressing in the morning or retiring at night or having a meal or walking in the garden are some of the things Watson suggests could lead to impromptu meditations. For example, “when dressing yourselves in the morning” pose this question to yourself: “I have put on my clothes, but have I put on Christ?” And as for mealtimes, use them to consider “How blessed are those who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Oh, what “a royal feast that will be”; even “a love feast.” With these suggestions and others like them it is easy to understand the benefit Watson aims at by having “heavenly meditations from earthly occurrences.” Indeed, says Watson, “it argues a spiritual heart can turn everything to a spiritual use.” And in doing so the blessing of God would surely be upon such meditation.²⁷

In regard to deliberate meditation Watson makes only one point, but in making it he is very clear and precise: “set some time apart every day so that you may in a serious and solemn manner converse with God in the mount.” Following on from this Watson considers the most suitable time and duration for such meditation. As for a suitable time Watson accepts that “it is rather hard to prescribe because of men’s various calling and employments.” However, he indicates his preference for the morning in saying “the morning is the most fitting time.” Watson’s first reason for his preference, is on the premise that the first fruits are to be offered to God (Exodus 23:19) and this means that “God [should] have the first fruits of the day; the first of our thoughts must be reserved for heaven.”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, p.77.

²⁷ Ibid, pp.78, 79

²⁸ Ibid, pp.79, 80

Expanding on his argument Watson gives five additional reasons why the morning; “the golden hour” and “the queen of the day”, as he calls it, is best. Because: 1) the “mind is most fit for holy duties”; 2) “morning thoughts stay longest with us the whole day afterwards”; 3) “Perfume your mind with heavenly thoughts in the morning and it will not lose its spiritual fragrance”; 4) “Wind up your hearts towards heaven in the beginning of the day and it will go better all the day afterwards”; and 5) “He who loses his heart in the morning in the world will hardly find it again all the day after.”²⁹

There is no denying that the reasons proffered by Watson give wise council, but we must also note that he does not rule out performing this duty in the evening. He accepts that “God had His evening sacrifice as well as His morning one,” but it clear, to Watson, that evening meditation should only apply when “the urgency of business [allows] time only for reading and prayer in the morning.” On these occasions it will be good to “recompense the lack of morning meditation with evening meditation.” It is also true that “you [may] find yourself more inclined to good thoughts in the evening.” This being so we “dare not neglect meditation at such a time.” Indeed, to do so “may be a quenching of the Spirit” and you must never “drive this blessed dove from the ark of your soul.”³⁰

Before leaving the topic of deliberate meditation Watson highlights, again, his preference for this duty to be exercised in the morning by another lovely illustration: “as the flower of the sun opens in the morning to take in the sweet beams of the sun; so open your soul in the morning to take in the sweet thoughts of God.”³¹ But whether morning or evening one thing is fundamental to Watson and that is the necessary duty of daily deliberate meditation.

Turning to the question of how long such meditation should last Watson suggests “one half-hour every day.” However, it would appear that there is a flexibility in his suggestion with this comment: “Meditate so long until you find your heart grow warm in this duty.” To explain what he means Watson gives us another very apt illustration: “If, when a man is cold, you ask how long he should stand by the fire. Surely, until he is thoroughly warm and made fit for

²⁹ Ibid, pp.80, 81

³⁰ Ibid, p.83

³¹ Ibid, p.83

his work.” It may be argued that the pace and total change in modern life compared to when Watson lived may impact the time spent on meditation, but whatever the circumstances it is the Christian’s duty to give God that which is urged upon us by Watson when he says, “Let this be the Christian’s resolution, not to leave off his meditations of God until he finds something of God in Him.” Or, as we read in Song of Solomon 5:4 and 8:6, when he sees some “moving of affections after God” “some flaming of love”.³²

The “benefit and usefulness of meditation” is set out under several particulars, which emphasise that meditation “is an excellent means to profit from the Word;” “makes the heart serious;” “is the bellows of affections;” “fits a man for holy duties;” “is a strong antidote against sin;” and “a cure for covetousness.” In opening the first of these particulars: “meditation is an excellent means to profit by the Word,” Watson reminds us that the hearing or reading of God’s word will bring “a truth into the head, but meditation brings it into the heart.” In a further reference to hearing the Word preached Watson informs us that “Many complain that they do not profit from sermons.” This is a sad comment, but for Watson the “chief reason” why they do not gain any profit from sermons is because “they do not chew the cud; they do not meditate on what they have heard.”³³

Sermons may bring us some knowledge of God’s Word, but we need to progress beyond knowledge itself. And this is where meditating on the sermon comes into play, for it will make the heart serious in the things of God. “Bible knowledge without meditation,” says Watson, “makes us no better than devils! Satan is an angel of light, yet he is black enough.” If we want to have a heart that is serious in the things of God, we need it to be like a well ballasted ship, which “is not so soon overturned by the wind.” Such a heart “is not so soon overturned by vanity.” Neither is it blown into any opinion or vice.” Indeed “the more serious the heart grows, the more spiritual; and the more spiritual, the more it resembles the Father of spirits.” Truly it is “meditation that brings the heart into this blessed frame. Meditation is the bellows of the affections.”³⁴

³² Ibid, p.84

³³ Ibid, pp.85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 85

³⁴ Ibid, p.86

Failure to “warm ourselves more at the fire of meditation” results in “our affections [being] so chill and cold in spiritual things.” So chill and cold that the soul is not fit for holy duties. It is like the hard ground that first needs to be broken up before the seed can be sown, and this meditation does; it softens the heart so the seed of the Word can be sown in the heart. In this way, Watson argues, we become fit for holy duties, such as prayer, which is “the spiritual pulse of the soul by which it beats strongly after God.” Taking the example of Christ Watson says, “When Christ was upon the mount, then he prayed. Just so, when the soul is upon the mount of meditation, now it is in tune for prayer.”³⁵

Before closing this section on the usefulness of meditation Watson shows that meditation is not only “a strong antidote against sin,” it is also a good means to banish vain and sinful thoughts.” On the first point Watson sets forth his evidence by way of a question; “Would [men] be so brutishly sensual as they are if they seriously meditated on what sin is?” He then describes what sin is by another question; “Would they take this viper in their hands if they did but consider its sting?” and this makes his point very well.³⁶

The second point: “vain and sinful thoughts” leads Watson to remark that “the thoughts are the first plotters and contrivers of evil.” Indeed, “The mind and imagination are the stage where sin is first acted.” What Watson is saying here is that in regard to sin our thoughts are no different to our actions; to think evil is to commit evil. This is made clear when he says, “The impure person acts over immorality in his thoughts; he contemplates wickedness.” This is but to echo the Words of Christ in Matthew 5. The solution, for Watson, is to meditate on God’s Word, for “the Word of God is pure (Psalm 119:140)—not only subjectively, but objectively. It makes them pure who meditate on it.”³⁷

This is a great truth, and it shows there is an excellency in meditating on God’s Word. Such excellency that it acts as a “golden ladder by which the [saints] ascend to paradise” and in so doing “[it] brings God and the soul together.” These truths also enable the Christian to take “a measure of his heart, whether it be good or bad” for as the writer of Proverbs says, “as he thinks in his heart,

³⁵ Ibid, pp.87, 88

³⁶ Ibid, pp.88, 90, 89

³⁷ Ibid, p.90

so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Oh, Christian, taking this text to heart we can say with Watson, “As thoughts of God bring delight with them, so they leave peace behind them.” Furthermore, meditation acts as a husbandman in the garden of the heart as “it plucks up the weeds of sin...prunes the wasteful branches...waters the flowers of grace and sweeps all the walks in the heart so that Christ may walk there with delight.”³⁸

Summarizing Watson, we can say that the nature of meditation is to bring us into a mindfulness of the things pertaining to God’s revelation of Himself. The mindfulness of the matter suggests a retention of the subject meditated on, in order to benefit from it. If this is true, as I believe it is, then the necessity of meditation cannot be downplayed. Indeed, by not meditating on God’s Word, “we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and His Word” for it comes to us “as a royal edit.”³⁹

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³⁸ Ibid, pp.92, 93, 94

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Is there a Key to Pauline Theology?

Hamilton Moore¹

ABSTRACT

Pauline theology is to be found in the beliefs and doctrines expressed in the New Testament writings of Paul, the former Jewish Pharisee and later Christian apostle. This article will attempt to assess the influences upon Paul or from where we can trace the roots of his theological thinking. Paul's past and present links with his Graeco-Roman environment, and his Jewish heritage are first discussed. But it is suggested that the real key to his theology is his experience in meeting the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. Paul theology is rooted in a sudden conversion experience. Two passages of Scripture, Galatians 1v10-24 and 1 Timothy 1v 12-17 are expounded to reveal Paul's radical new personal understanding and world view. Added to these influences was finally the rich heritage upon which he drew as he became part of the Christian community. He takes over this teaching on Christ's person and saving work even though he supplemented it. We will suggest that Paul is more an interpreter of Christ in his theology, influenced by what he has found in Church tradition, but adding to it that extra dimension which came uniquely from his conversion and calling as an apostle.

KEY WORDS: Theology, Hellenistic environment, Jewish heritage, conversion, Christian tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Pauline theology or Paulism is the theology and form of Christianity which developed from the beliefs and doctrines espoused by the former Jewish Pharisee and Christian apostle. This theology is expressed by Paul in the New Testament writings traditionally attributed to him. In our attempt to assess this theology we must ask about the influences upon Paul or where can we trace the roots of his theological thinking?

(1) THE NATURE OF OUR SOURCES

There are certain difficulties when one begins to speak in terms of "Pauline Theology." This is due to the nature of our sources. First, Paul's epistles are not theological treatises but living, personal correspondence written to churches

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with particular problems and needs. He has not left us therefore with a systematic theology. Again, we do not have Paul's complete thought. He discusses subjects only because a particular problem in a church required his instructions (e.g., the Lord's Supper at Corinth). What understanding we have of Paul's thought we owe to what scholars have called "the accidents of history" which drew a response from him in dealing with various doctrinal and practical problems. Because certain questions were never raised, they were never discussed. There is the loss of the historical setting or situation for some of his teaching which may have given us more understanding. Also, we must be careful therefore in assuming that because a matter was not taken up, it had no place in his thought. Providentially, we have of course in Paul's writings all that the church needed.

(2) PAUL'S SENSE OF AUTHORITY

Paul wrote with a great sense of authority. This authority was based on his sense of divine vocation and appointment as an apostle. One important aspect of Paul's apostleship was his consciousness of being a medium of revelation (Rom.16v25-26; Eph.3v5). He has the conviction that he writes the commands of God (2 Thess.3v6,14; 1 Cor.14v37). His letters are to be read publicly and heeded (Col.4v16-17; 2 Cor.2v9). He claims to have the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.7v40) and the mind of Christ (1 Cor.2v16). He emphasises his divine call and authority to build up Christ's church (2 Cor.13v10; Gal.1v6f.). Paul's immediate successors recognised that authority (2 Pet.3v15).

(3) INFLUENCES ON HIS THEOLOGY

Paul was a Jew who became a Christian and lived most of his life in a Greek environment. Influences are therefore threefold i.e., Jewish, Greek and Christian.

(a) *Paul's Graeco-Roman Environment.*

Paul was from Tarsus (Acts 21v39), a typically Greek city, highly civilised and a sophisticated centre of Greek learning. Some suggest as W. C. van Unnik,² that he came to Jerusalem as a small boy, which, in their opinion would have protected him. For van Unnik, the only text which gives definite information about Paul's early youth (Acts 22v3) mentions Tarsus but points us in an altogether different direction, namely, to Jerusalem. He claimed that if Paul spent his early years in the holy city of Judaism, he would have found himself

² W. C. Van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: City of Paul's Youth*, (London, 1962).

in an atmosphere completely different from that of paganism, dominated by the Law and the Temple. This therefore would have far-reaching consequences for his theology. But simply being in Jerusalem would not of course shelter him. After four centuries of Hellenistic influence in Palestine even Jerusalem was no protective cocoon. Martin Hengel's³ work *Judaism and Hellenism* clearly established the fact that Hellenistic influences were, and had been for centuries, penetrating Judaism even in Jerusalem. Paul also spent most of his life as a Christian in lands where Greek culture and civilisation met him at every turn.

Paul uses examples of the Greek Games (I Cor.9v24; Phil.3v14; I Cor.15v32; 2 Tim.4v7) and employs common adoptive procedures and contemporary practices for the release of slaves (e.g.. Gal.4v1-7) to illustrate spiritual truth.

Stoicism was popular in Paul's day. The stoics preached about moral reformation, "spiritual" conversion, victory over life and death, humanitarianism. These would rub off on Paul in a superficial way. Stoics used the rhetorical question (Rom.6v1), short disconnected sentences, the use of the imaginary objector (I Cor.15v35), down to earth illustrations and contrasts (Rom.8v38-39). The word conscience (*suneidēsis*) is thought to be stoic in origin. See also Rom.2v14 - Stoics spoke of living according to nature (a law indwelling every man); Col.1v17 all things hold together (*sunestēken*); Phil.4v13 being content, self-controlled, self-sufficient (*autarkēs*) is also a stoic concept - here for Paul sufficiency is through Christ. Paul therefore adapted himself to the hearing of the ordinary people and used the style, forms of speech and concepts familiar to his readers.

But Paul did not depend on the Stoics for his message and much of his theology is in stark contrast to the views of the Stoics. For example, Paul taught a personal God revealed in Christ, while the Stoics thought of God as world soul, vague and dim, highly pantheistic and often equated with fate. Their view of sin was very different. For the Stoics one could control sin by one's own efforts. Also, the Stoics despised the body, whereas in Paul the body has been redeemed, and will share in the resurrection, (Rom.8v23; 1 Cor.15v35-54).

The Mystery Religions were everywhere in the first century. Two well-known examples are Mithraism (of Persian origin and popular among Roman soldiers) and the Isis mysteries of Egypt. They had some very crude ideas. There were different means of initiation by which one is said to come more and more into

³ M. Hengel *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2nd edition tr. John Bowden, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

contact with the deity and escape fate and share immortality with the one worshipped e.g., eating bull's flesh, being immersed or sprinkled in water or blood. Some have suggested a relationship between these "sacramental" acts and communion and Christian baptism, which are of course connected by Paul with Christ's death and resurrection. Ridderbos⁴ suggests that beyond the general fact of a sacred eating and drinking most scholars see no real connection. He also maintains that nowhere in the Mystery Religions is the symbolism of death present in the baptismal ritual. One term Paul shared with the Mystery Religions is the word mystery itself (*mustērion*). They used it of a sacred rite for the privileged few, but Paul used it of a hidden counsel of God now revealed.

Paul really owed nothing to the Mystery Religions. For Paul one knows God, through Christ, by faith. Salvation for Paul is salvation from sin, not from fate or ignorance. In the Mystery Religions God was never thought of as dying in history but rather in nature, vegetation or the natural process. The Mystery Religions were a cult for the privileged few but the Gospel was for everyone.

What of Gnosticism? In the past certain scholars (e.g. Bultmann⁵) claimed that Gnostic themes like the Heavenly Redeemer, flesh and spirit, formed the background for Paul's Christology and anthropology. In fact, a whole series of ideas, the doctrine of the fall of the creation (Rom.8v19f.) and of Adam (Rom.4v12-17), the contrast of the natural and the spiritual (I Cor.2v14ff; 15v21,44-49) of light and darkness and demonic rulers of the aeon (I Cor.2v6-8; 2 Cor.4v4) were said to be related to Gnosticism. The false doctrines with which Paul had to contend with at Corinth and Colossae were said to have been of a Gnostic character and gave Paul occasion to employ Gnostic schema in a Christian re-interpretation.

Partly because of new discoveries at Qumran and Nag Hammadi (1946, Upper Egypt Coptic Gnostic Writings), Ridderbos⁶ has explained that unrestrained talk about Gnosticism as a system of thought already fully developed or worked out in Paul's day had long since passed its high-water mark. Rather than being fully developed before Christianity it was taking shape simultaneously and the Christian elements were yet to be added. Therefore, Paul's theology does not represent a form of Christianised gnosis. In addition, as Ridderbos⁷ maintains,

⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 24f.

⁵ R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity: In Its Contemporary Setting*, Trans. R. H. Fuller, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956).

⁶ Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*, 34.

⁷ Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*, 35.

it appears to be firmly established that the Redeemer myth is not antecedent to Christianity but is borrowed from it. Yamauchi⁸ has shown that Gnosticism in any clearly developed form is later than the NT.

(b) Paul's Jewish Heritage.

Paul's Jewish background and upbringing left a deep mark on his life. He had everything as far as a Jew was concerned (Phil.3v5-6). He was more zealous than many others in his day (Gal.1v14). Did he come to Jerusalem as a small boy, Acts 22v3?

Paul was an uncompromising monotheist (Gal.3v20, Rom.3v30, I Cor.8v5-6) and never relaxed his belief in the One God although he came to see that God was revealed in Christ. His mind was saturated by the Old Testament and he believed it to be holy scripture, a real revelation of God, (Rom.1v2, 4v3; 2 Tim.3v16). He came to see that one needed the light of Christ to illuminate it. Like the Rabbis he would often quote without reference to the immediate context (Rom.9v24/Hos.2v3). Again, like the Rabbis he argued *a fortiori* i.e., if this is true then... See Paul's "much mores" (Rom.8v32, 5v8). Rabbis used to take arguments from the law/prophets/writings and build up a case - see Rom.10v19-20, 3v10-20. Paul used the rabbinical practice of allegory (Sarah and Hagar) in Gal.4v21f, but sparingly, and only in matters of secondary importance. It has been argued that an allegory can be used as an illustration, (Gal.4v21). Like the Rabbis, he spoke of the Old Testament in personal terms (Rom.11v2, Gal.3v8).

As a Pharisee he shared the belief in the importance of the Law. The law to a Pharisee meant both the written law of Moses and the oral traditions of the fathers (Gal.1v14). Being zealous for the law, Paul was intent on rooting out members of the new religious movement whom he understood to be challenging it. His persecuting zeal should be seen in this light. As Hunter⁹ had established, "Though the surface of Paul's thought may owe much to Hellenism, its sub-soil remained Jewish," He would come to see that the law was fulfilled in Christ (Rom.10v4) and in his community, living in the power of the Spirit of Gpd, (Rom.8v4).

(c) Damascus.

⁸ E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1973).

⁹ A.M. Hunter *The Gospel According to Paul*, (London: SCM Press, 2012), 11.

While, as we have discussed, Paul's Hellenistic background and Jewish heritage no doubt influenced his theology, they may not provide the real key to its uniqueness. Jeremias¹⁰ has maintained in his significant article, "There is only one key to Pauline Theology. It is called Damascus," Jeremias understood Paul as one of those men who have experienced a sharp break with their past. Paul's theology is a theology rooted in a sudden conversion. He explained the great influence that this dramatic event had on Paul's whole thinking and theology.

Shortly we will comment directly on the main points which Jeremias highlighted. But first it will be helpful to note how Paul himself viewed his conversion experience on the way to Damascus, as he sets it out in two of his Epistles, Gal.1v10-24 and 1 Tim.1v12-17. In both of these passages Paul gives thanks to God for his own purpose in grace, how he worked in his life and had mercy upon him. He sets out the record of the man he was; the man God made him by grace to become and God had also transformed his whole understanding and world-view.

Gal. 1v10-24.

Paul has written to his Galatian converts because he had heard of the arrival of visiting preachers, Jews, who while professing to be Christians, had not been fully delivered from Jewish legalism. They were misleading his Galatian converts. No doubt they had a real desire to live a holy life and were open to be taught how this was possible. In order to really advance in the faith, they were listening to those who told them that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (Gal. 4v10, 11; 5v2, 3). In reality, they were being led back to the law and its prescribed celebrations to trust in their own works to continue to be accepted by God. F. F. Bruce¹¹ makes clear the reality of the situation. This "full" gospel of the Judiazers (adding circumcision with the commitment to law-keeping) for Paul was no gospel at all. The apostle knew that it really denied the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and the grace of God. A commitment to keep the law, which in reality they could not do, was a return to legal bondage, and a denial of the message of justification by grace through faith. Rather than the true gospel it was a perversion (1v7) and did not come from God (5v8). Paul insists that there is only one true gospel; it was the gospel which was revealed to him by God and that gospel he had been called to preach.

¹⁰ J. Jeremias, "The Key to Pauline Theology", Exp. T. (Oct. 1964), 27-30.

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982), 79.

THE GOSPEL WAS BROUGHT BY HIM.

In 1v10-11 Paul explains how he had proclaimed the gospel message to the Galatians when he first came to them. His whole emphasis is to make clear that his Gospel came from God, not from men, cf. 1v11 where he insists that it “is not man’s gospel ... I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

He still refers to the Galatians as *adelphoi* “brothers,” expressing his loving concern for them even although they may have been moving away from him theologically. Literally, he says, “I make known to you” and the direct object is the gospel. This message is of course centred upon the cross, as 3v1 tells us, with its focus on “Christ crucified,” emphasising the need to “boast” in the cross, (6v14). This is a message completely distinct from that of the Judaizers i.e., it is the work of Christ which paid the price for sin (1v4) needed nothing added to it, whereas, as we noted, they insisted that it be supplemented with special days and circumcision.

In this gospel he was not just telling the people what they wanted to hear. He was not just seeking to “please man” so that they would look after him well, as often travelling preachers would expect. In his preaching he had to be Christ’s servant; he had to be bringing the true message to please God and he insists that he was. In v10 *peithō* means “persuade” men, but not “conciliate,” which would imply relaxing the relationship with those who insisted upon the circumcision requirement. This would be a denial of the true gospel. All this had been made clear to him through his encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus Road.

THE GOSPEL WAS REVEALED TO HIM.

Longenecker, Silva¹² and other scholars actually take verse 11-12 as setting forth the thesis of the letter in formal and solemn terms i.e., it is about the true gospel. Note how at this point Paul uses the first person singular “I.” Witherington¹³ makes two points here. This is “a personal letter from Paul alone, not a joint communication.” Again, in calling his readers “brothers,” “The family language which he uses is not just conciliatory but it makes clear a fundamental conviction of Paul’s...that the family of God is composed on the

¹² R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 20-21; M. Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 153.

¹³ B. Witherington, 111, *Grace in Galatia: a Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 91. He mentions Jesus’ own teaching about the family of God, Mk. 3v31-35 par. Matt. 23v8.

basis of faith, not heredity or other factors.” This is Paul’s new conviction through his encounter on the Damascus Road.

Paul affirms that the message was not his gospel, nor did he get it from any man or human source who taught it to him – it came by direct revelation. Paul has already stressed this in v1, with both verses focusing upon source and denying that his message originated in mere human ideas or any human tradition. Paul did not invent it nor was he taught it but God revealed it.

Silva,¹⁴ after a careful discussion of the options, suggests that the phrase “the revelation of Jesus Christ” should be interpreted as an objective genitive. Elsewhere Paul views God as the source of revelation, when he expresses the subject of *apokaluptō* it is always God (1 Cor. 2v10; Gal. 1v16; Phil. 3v15). So also many modern commentators,¹⁵ follow Silva’s objective sense. Longenecker,¹⁶ differs from others in that he sees this statement of the revelation as setting out the *means* rather than the *content* i.e., Jesus Christ is the agent and God the Father is the source. But the main point here is the source of the revelation – it has a divine origin.

THE GOSPEL WAS EXPERIENCED BY HIM

In v13-24 Paul writes, ‘You have heard...’ (v13) which makes clear that others (the Judaizers) will have given the Galatians information about him. He of course wishes to outline the crucial events in his life to make sure that they know the real facts especially as they relate to his affirmation in v11-12 concerning the revelation he received from God and not from any human agency. Witherington¹⁷ makes the important point that “...Paul is not writing an autobiography here; he is arguing a particular case and trying to persuade his audience to adhere to the one true gospel of grace, adhering to his own personal example.” There are then three chapters in his life here – although the narration of Paul’s “story” continues into 2v1-21.

(a) *In the Jewish Religion.*

In v13 and 14 Paul uses the word “Judaism” which is found only here in the NT. We note that it is used in the Jewish literature of the times (cf. 2 Macc. 2.21;

¹⁴ Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case*, 64-68.

¹⁵ E.g., R. Y. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, (Michigan, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 54.

¹⁶ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 24.

¹⁷ Witherington 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 96.

8.1; 14.38; 4 Macc. 4.26), as Witherington¹⁸ points out. He sees the word as describing “a Torah-true Jewish lifestyle and belief system as contrasted to Seleucid Hellenism.” This was where Paul once was, but he had now through his Damascus Road encounter come to see that birth as a Jew, Torah observance or living under the Mosaic law was not what fitted him to be a member of the people of God. As he will affirm in the Galatian Epistle the true “Israel of God” (6v16) is composed of those who have been delivered from the condemnation of the law by the cross, share Abraham’s faith and live a Spirit enabled lifestyle.

The term used to describe his former “manner of life” is *anastrophēn* which, while it will be grounded in certain belief systems, emphasises more praxis. For a Jew, it was essential to walk in God’s statutes, keeping all God’s commandments, (1 Kings 6v12). The problem is that our fallenness means we have no power to do this (Rom. 8v3). But now in this Epistle Paul will reveal that the true children of faith have the enabling Holy Spirit (Gal. 5v16-26).

Paul writes about the dark history of his former life before he met the Lord. The memory of it must have grieved and humbled him many times. He was a fanatic in persecuting. Note that *ediōkon* and *eporthoun* are both imperfects, “persecuting” and “seeking to destroy,” suggesting a period of persistent persecution and the phrase *kath’huperbolēn* which is only in Paul in the NT (Rom. 7v13; 1 Cor. 12v31; 2 Cor. 1v8, 4v17) signals an “intensity” in persecution which was undiminished. Witherington¹⁹ explains that the above adverbial phrase, “indicates the level to which the persecution reached. Paul went to extremes, the persecutions being not merely extensive (in and beyond Jerusalem) but also intensive.” We also know that when he had ravaged Jerusalem, he set out for Damascus (Acts 9v1-2). So, he “tried to destroy” ESV, but did not succeed²⁰ the church he now knew to be “the church of God” (Acts 8v1-3; 9v1, 13; 22v4).²¹ Through his Damascus Road experience he now realised that the Christian community was God’s church and he had come to see that he had dared to set himself against God!

Paul also informs us that he was extremely zealous – a “zealot,” not for political ends but for the traditions of his fathers, advancing in Judaism, outstripping his

¹⁸ Witherington 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 98.

¹⁹ Witherington 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 100.

²⁰ See also Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case*, 71.

²¹ Note Paul’s use of the phrase “the church of God” of a number of local communities which help to make it up. After Damascus he is beginning to think more “universally” of a single entity existing over against Judaism – the church of God.

young friends as he progressed as a Pharisee in the “strictest party” of the Jewish religion. Fung makes the point that to a Jew, a crucified Messiah was in itself a decisive refutation of any claim to messiahship – as in effect, Paul himself points out in 1 Cor. 1v17-24. A crucified Christ was an insult to every Jew and “impelled him (Paul) to give himself wholeheartedly to what he considered the unmistakable duty and sacred duty of uprooting the pernicious sect of Jesus’ followers.”²²

The verb *prokoptō* in its imperfect form (*proekopton*) will express the continuing religious and moral progress or “advance” of Paul’s development in Judaism which was unparalleled among his contemporaries. The same word is used of Jesus’ advancement as he grew “in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,” (Lk. 2v52). Regarding the reference to the “traditions of my fathers” Longenecker²³ suggests that Paul will be referring to (1) the teachings and practices developed in the Pharisaic schools of Second Temple Judaism, later codified in the Mishnah, Palestinian and Babylonian Gemaras, Midrashim, and various individual halakic and haggadic collections of rabbinic lore, plus (2) the more popular interpretations in the synagogues of the time, represented in the extant Targumim. Stott²⁴ affirms, “No conditioned reflex or other psychological device could convert a man in that state. Only God could reach him – and God did!” One should also note that if Paul the Jew had made as we shall see such a radical break with Judaism then the Galatians, as McDonald²⁵ points out, “should realise that to allow themselves to be induced into supposing that the gospel needed any Judaistic additions was sheer folly.” The Galatian Epistle with its content demonstrates that Paul had moved in exactly the opposite direction from them in his conversion from Judaism to Christ. Damascus moved Paul to insights that led him to warn the Galatians how they must not turn back from their Christian freedom to the slavery of the law (2v4; 4v9, 22-31; 5v1, 13).

(b) *On the Damascus Road.*

²² Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 59.

²³ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 30. Fung sees the “tradition of the fathers” as “Pharisaic traditions and more particularly those enshrined in the oral law transmitted and expounded in Pharisaic schools, which comprised the 613 prescriptions (248 positive commands and 365 prohibitions) of rabbinic exegesis,” *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 57.

²⁴ J.R.W. Stott, *The One Way: The Message of Galatians* BST (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 32.

²⁵ H. D. McDonald, *Freedom in Faith: A Commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1973), 29.

Before this it was “I,” “I” (v13-14). Now the subject of the two participles is no doubt “God” (v15-16) – recognised by this addition in a A, D and *et al.* In every stage of Paul’s experience God’s initiative and grace are mentioned.

In v15 he testifies that he was the object of God’s special electing purpose. He was once a Pharisee, a separatist, now he discovers that he himself was destined, “separated” before he was born, to be like both Jeremiah (Jer. 1v4f.), the prophet to the nations, and the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 49v1-6) to be God’s chosen instrument as a light to the Gentiles.²⁶ Here on the Damascus Road we have a calling by grace to preach the gospel of grace.

Paul explains in v16 that there was a revelation made *en emoi* literally, “in me.” We do know that there was a great revelation made *to him* on the Damascus Road – he saw the risen Christ (Acts 9v5, 27; 1 Cor. 9v1; 15v8). But this moment also involved inner illumination – something like 2 Cor. 4v6, or the removal of the veil from his heart, 2 Cor. 3v14. Paul also on the way to Damascus received a new understanding of Jesus Christ, his person, also the reason for his death and of course his gracious calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles. For Bruce,²⁷ Jesus Christ is revealed, but the gospel and Jesus Christ are inseparable. The ESV uses the simple dative in the text i.e., “to me,” but “in me” as the footnote. Are there not two aspects to the one revelation? Fung²⁸ also insists that:

...the phrase should not however, be taken to suggest a merely inward revelation without a corresponding external object, for there is little doubt that the preceding phrase (“to reveal his Son”) refers to Paul’s vision of the risen Christ (also attested in 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8) on the road to Damascus...the inward illumination and the physical vision were alike part of God’s revelation to him.

The statement is that the revelation by God was of “his Son.” Note in Galatians the other references to Jesus as “Son of God,” 2v20; 4v4, 6. This should not be understood as merely a reference to the incarnation for it is used in a resurrection context – here, following the encounter on the Damascus Road (Acts 9v20) and in Galatians 4, where God sends “the Spirit of his Son” into their hearts – a sending subsequent to the redemption of v4. It is Sonship in the ontological sense (see also Rom. 1v3f; 1 Cor.1v9; 15v20-28; 1 Thess. 1v10). “Paul is

²⁶ Witherington, 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 105; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 64, points to other similar references, cf. Rom. 15v21 with Isa. 52v15; Acts 13v47 with Isa. 49v6; Acts 18v9f. with Isa. 43v5.

²⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 89.

²⁸ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 64.

claiming that he received insight into the unique nature of Jesus' sonship."²⁹ If Paul had met Jesus of Nazareth risen on the Damascus Road, how would you not come to this understanding?

Stendhal³⁰ is an example of scholars who consider that what happened on the Damascus was only a call, like other prophetic calls in the OT (e.g., Jer. 1v5-6; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1). It is true that the experience involved a call, but it was much more: first of all, it was primarily a conversion. O'Brien³¹ can affirm:

To describe the Damascus Road experience as *simply* Paul's "call" to the Gentiles does not account for the revelation of Christ and his gospel in which there was a radical change in Paul's thinking about Jesus as the Messiah and the Son, about the Torah, the messianic salvation, and not least Israel's and the Gentiles' place within the divine plan. In the Damascus encounter Paul underwent a significant "paradigm shift" in his life and thought; his own self-consciousness was that of having undergone a conversion.

So also with Witherington³² we can say that:

Paul's Gospel of grace is bound up with Paul's experience of grace and is grounded in the content of God's revelation of his son in Paul, which Paul then worked out the implications of for his beliefs about God, messiah, law, salvation, who God's people are and a host of other subjects.

We can see in reading Galatians that many of these were actually worked out in this Epistle. Paul's symbolic universe was radically affected, we could say "turned upside down."³³ So his conversion and call coincided in time, and the sightless days at Damascus gave him opportunity to reflect on his experience and confirmed to him all that Jeremias will now explain to us. In fact, Luke records, "...For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And *immediately* he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9v19b-20).

The purpose of his call was "to preach him among the Gentiles." Note the present tense (compared to the aorists, "set apart" and "called") affirms Paul's

²⁹ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 65.

³⁰ K. Stendal, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 7-23.

³¹ T. O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?" in D. A. Carson, T O'Brien, and M. A. Seifrid, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, Vol. 2 (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 390. See also 1v6 where Paul describes the "conversion" of the Gentiles as their "calling" by God.

³² Witherington, 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 115.

³³ Witherington, 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 115.

continual preaching of Christ – or more precisely “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1v23; 2v2; Gal. 3v1). The area of his ministry is identified as a Gentile area (2v2, 8). Here he is claiming that his conversion and calling has been all of God. But what about after it? Was not that from man? Again, Paul denies it.

(c) *On the Missionary Trail.*

Paul reveals in v17-24 that first there were some things he did NOT do. Since his conversion he had remained independent of all human authority. What he did not do was to confer with flesh and blood. Nor did he go up to Jerusalem. The mention of apostles “before me” implies that he is also as much an apostle as they are (the words *pro emou* are temporal – time – not status). But then there were things which he did do. Instead of “going up,” he “goes away.” He went to Arabia – see Acts 9v19, 23, and note the “some days” he was with the disciples in Damascus, followed by the “many days,” implying a leaving from and a returning again to Damascus after his time away from the city.³⁴

Arabia is generally understood as the Nabataean kingdom east of the Jordan valley established in the 2nd century BC. Bruce³⁵ points out that there were many Gentiles there, settled and Bedouin and no doubt Paul preached to them. But Arabia should also be understood for Paul as a contemplative retreat – considering and reflecting on all that had happened to him on the way to Damascus, all that the risen Lord said to him and revealed to him through Ananias (Acts 9v10-19).³⁶ So he returned from Arabia with his commission and message confirmed to the very city he had formally set out for intent upon the destruction of the church.

Paul certainly in Galatians testified to what the grace and purpose of God had done in his life – and clearly revealed in his warnings and theological teaching something of his new world-view and insights concerning salvation and the gospel he had come to firmly hold. However, we can also add what Paul in writing to Timothy expressed of the mercy of God he had received. Jeremias’

³⁴ Witherington, 111, *Grace in Galatia*, 116 suggests that the word “immediately” v16 has an emphatic position and seems to go with what follows it. “Paul is denying any immediate consulting with humans including any immediate going up to Jerusalem. And by contrast an immediate departure to Arabia.”

³⁵ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 96. See also Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 69.

³⁶ That Paul’s presence in Arabia was more than a time for contemplation is revealed by the reference in 2 Cor. 11v32 which showed that he had attracted the hostile attention of the governor. There was a time around 37CE when Caligula was emperor that Aretas was in control of the city of Damascus and because of Paul’s preaching in Arabia the Aretas’ Ethnarch went after Paul so he had to escape in a basket.

article which we will yet consider will resonate with these two passages helping us appreciate more fully the significance of what Damascus meant for Paul.

1 Timothy 1v12-17

Paul's own conversion shows how one can be guilty or condemned as a sinner by the law as he set out in 1v8-11 and yet be saved by God's mercy and grace. He actually presents himself as "a paradigm of the saved sinner"³⁷. Paul focuses on his personal experience of God's mercy – in fact, mercy to the greatest of sinners - emphasising that this same mercy can be experienced by "all who believe," (v16).

Paul reminds Timothy of what the Lord has done for him "appointing" him to be his servant. He is filled with wonder and gratitude for his salvation and at the fact that Christ should have considered him at all. He testifies to:

What he had received.

First, he writes of God, "who has given me strength ... appointing me to his service." He refers to the inner strength the Lord had given him. Timothy is learning that if God gives him a work to do for him, he will give him the strength. Paul writes, "he judged me faithful." It was faithful commitment to God's word and his commandments that was the reason why God took him up and used him.

Where he had been with God.

Where did he previously stand with God? "Formally" *to proteron*, he had spoken evil of Jesus Christ and his messianic claims – thus he was "a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent." The last word is *hybristēs*, violent, seething in anger, vicious, finding satisfaction in insulting and humiliating other people. In Rom. 1v30 it is a sin characteristic of the pagan world.

How he was saved.

He knew God's "mercy" and then "the grace of the Lord overflowed" to him – Paul is using language which suggests an abundance, *huperepleonasen* - the compound verb means to abound "above its usual measure" in an attempt to express the superabundance of God's grace to him (1v14). He was saved

³⁷ P.H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 105.

through faith which led him on to a heart filled with love for the Lord. Or alternatively as Knight³⁸ proposes, Paul's experience of Christ brought him from unbelief and hatred of God's people into the realm of faith, not just the initial act but the sphere of faith, in an ongoing relationship with Christ, plus love for the Christian community (1 Cor. 13v13; Eph. 1v15; 1 Thess. 1v3, 3v6; 2 Thess. 1v3).

Towner³⁹ comments upon the new manner of existence for Paul, "in Christ Jesus." Surprisingly for some the phrase is nine times in the letters to Timothy. "Despite less diversity of application...there is little to suggest that these letters to Timothy reflect a non-Pauline use of the phrase." Twice we have the sphere of life or faith "in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. 1v9; 3v12; the rest express certain qualities basic to Christian existence, "faith and love," 1Tim.1v14; 2 Tim. 1v13; "faith," 1 Tim. 3v13; 2 Tim. 3v15; "life," 2 Tim. 1v1; "grace," 2 Tim. 2v1; "salvation," 2 Tim. 2v10. The phrase sets out Paul's understanding after Damascus of the mystery of our union with Christ and the sense of our new and renewed status, "expressing a dynamic existence that is eschatological, relational and existential."

Paul can now affirm that this salvation from God came through Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Damascus Road. He makes this clear in a "trustworthy" saying – with four more in the Pastorals (1 Tim. 3v1; 4v9; 2 Tim. 2v11; Tit. 3v8). Why the use of this affirmation in these Epistles? Paul's gospel or his teaching had experienced many attacks in the past. The "trustworthy saying" formula is a way whereby he can add affirmation to its apostolic authority, and by using this formula for the various aspects of his teaching reject the heretical alternative of the false teachers as that which does not belong to this category. We can note that "When Paul states that the *logos* is *pistos* he is saying that it is a faithful presentation of God's message (cf. 2 Tim. 2v2)."⁴⁰ Only his gospel is "deserving of full acceptance" with *pas*, literally, "all" meaning wholehearted appropriation and application to yourself.

Paul has since Damascus come to clearly understand that the law brings condemnation, but the good news/gospel announces salvation. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Paul has created a new saying which really

³⁸ G.W. Knight, 111, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1992), 98.

³⁹ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 142.

⁴⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 99.

reflects the existing tradition with regard to the coming of Christ, see Mark 2v17, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”; Luke 19v10 “for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”; and John 18v37 “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth.” The mission of God in Christ concerned his “coming into the world,” which for Hendriksen⁴¹, includes incarnation, suffering, death. The “world” is an important emphasis in light of what appears to be the exclusivist and elitist nature of the heresy in the Pastoral Epistles. “The juxtaposition of *world* and *sinners* shows that *world* is an *ethical* concept. The reason for his entrance into this realm of sin is given in the words ‘sinners to save’...the paradoxical *coming* was, after all, fully justified and gloriously motivated.”⁴²

In a remarkable admission, concerning “sinners,” Paul claims that he was the worst - here the word is *protos*, meaning not first in this context, but foremost or chief. Remember his admission in Acts 22v4 to the Jerusalem mob, “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.” See also 1 Cor. 15v9-10 where Paul insists that he was “the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

Why he obtained mercy.

Paul gratefully announces in 1v16, “But I received mercy.” To what purpose? Paul continues, “For this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.” His conversion was an example of what God – here it is Jesus Christ - could do. He demonstrated his unlimited patience, the full extent of his forbearance. He did this *prōtos* “first” in Paul for others to see, those who would also believe| *ep’ autō* “in him” lit. “on him,” depicting saving faith in Christ, using the prepositional phrase “to repose one’s trust upon.” From Damascus, this was therefore Paul’s glorious mission message. The whole passage, showing Paul’s sin and Christ’s saving work, which in believing results in everlasting life, is meant to be seen to discredit the law teachers. They have no

⁴¹ W. Hendriksen *1 & 11 Timothy and Titus*, (London, Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 78.

⁴² Hendriksen, *1 & 11 Timothy and Titus*, 78-79. Note how he continues, “It was *to save* sinners that Christ Jesus came into the world. He did not come to help them save themselves, nor to induce them to save themselves, nor even to enable them to save themselves. He came *to save* them!” This was his understanding since Damascus.

such clear message of good news. How Paul's encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road has radically changed his understanding and his message!

What was the result?

In 1v17 Paul breaks out into a spontaneous doxology. Here God is affirmed as "King," (see Ps. 10v16; 74v12; Jer. 10v10) but in distinction from all earthly rulers, even the emperor, he is "the King of the ages." Also, he is the "immortal" God, a quality proper to God alone and "invisible" in contradistinction from the materialistic views of gods in pagan idolatry. Finally, Paul affirms that he is "the only God," highlighting his supremacy.⁴³ To such a one must be ascribed all "honor and glory," an esteem for which he is alone worthy. It is clear from the various references in his Epistles that Paul never forgot what the Lord had done for him at Damascus. That such a great God could send his own Son, demonstrate in him mercy and impart to him eternal life demands the response of the highest praise. The Greek says "to the ages of the ages" ESV "forever and ever" – praise beyond time and on into eternity. The final *amēn* means that Paul is looking for a response from Timothy and the hearers of the letter as well.

The all-importance of Damascus for Paul's life and theology.

As we noted earlier, it was Jeremias⁴⁴ who pointed us to Damascus as the real key to the transformation in the life of Saul the persecutor to Paul the preacher of the gospel. His world-view and theological understanding were radically changed through this encounter with the risen Christ. As Gal. 6v23 states, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

As we stated earlier, Jeremias understands Paul as one of those men who have experienced a sharp break with their past. It can be maintained that as far as Pauline theology is concerned Damascus is the key. Jeremias' main insights are here highlighted – with my additional comments occasionally added.

(a) His fellowship with Christ had its roots in the Damascus experience. From the time he saw Jesus in his glory, the exalted Lord becomes the great reality of his life. The centre of Pauline theology is to be found in Paul's thought regarding Jesus Christ, and is expressed in the apostle's frequently repeated phrase "in Christ" with a number noted in the Pastoral Epistles. So, it can be affirmed that Paul's theology is Christocentric. His was a life lived in communion with and

⁴³ Knight makes the point that adding *sophos* "wise" probably reflects the influence of Rom. 16v27, Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 105.

⁴⁴ Jeremias, "The Key to Pauline Theology," *Ex T. Oct.* 1964, 27-30.

response to his risen, exalted Lord. Evangelical scholars have affirmed this understanding of Paul in opposition to contemporary religious existentialism which seeks to explain Paul's theology along the lines of anthropology. It can be maintained that Paul's doctrine of man is only a part of his total thought, as are other proposals regarding the centre of Paul's theology. Everything is subservient to and should be understood in relation to Paul's conception of Jesus Christ.

(b) His understanding of the cross and its saving power is anchored in the Damascus experience. He was convinced that the Christians were adherents of a false Messiah. He understood that God has cursed Jesus by death on a cross. But now he saw Jesus as the risen Christ exalted by God. At that moment it became clear to Paul that the persecuted Christians were right in claiming that Jesus as the Servant of God, died on the cross as a substitute for the sins of many. Paul knew the truth of Gal.2v20 – Jesus was the Son of God who “loved me and gave himself for me” and 3v13 ‘Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, *by becoming a curse for us.*’

(c) His knowledge of the omnipotence of grace or the greatness of God's mercy and God's gracious selection and predestination was born on the Damascus Road. These are all themes highlighted in the passages we have considered from Galatians and 1 Timothy.

(d) His understanding of the fearfulness of sin stems from Damascus. He had believed he was blameless by the law's standards. Now suddenly he sees he has blasphemed the Messiah and endeavoured to wipe out his community.

(e) From Damascus we understand his radical opposition to legalism. We can comment that there are two aspects to Paul's convictions. A negative aspect - it was not through his law-keeping he found acceptance. Compared to his contemporaries he had reached the highest achievement, but in seeking to “establish” his own righteousness he had missed “God's righteousness” (Rom. 10v3); a positive aspect - he came to realise that he was actually justified by faith, on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for him (see e.g., Galatians 2v16).

(f) His future hope was rooted here. He had met the risen Lord as the firstfruits of them that sleep. He had seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (1 Cor.15v20, 2 Cor.4v6).

(g) His sense of missionary obligation and his role as an apostle stem from Damascus. He was converted on the road to Damascus but also called by God

to be the apostle to the Gentiles as the Lord had revealed to him from the very beginning, (Acts 9v15-16; 26v17-18).

(h) His doctrine of the church has at least one root here (Acts 9v4; 22v7; 26v14). The Lord identifies himself with his church, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?”

Another work centered on the influence of the Damascus event on Paul’s life is that of Longenecker’s, *The Road from Damascus*. In this book there are 11 contributors who examined the nature of Paul’s Damascus Road experience and the impact of that experience on his thought and ministry as revealed in his Epistles and transformed worldview. The contents are set out as follows:

- Interpreting Paul’s conversion: then and now / Bruce Corley
- A realized hope, a new commitment, and a developed proclamation: Paul and Jesus / Richard N. Longenecker
- A new understanding of the present and the future: Paul and eschatology / I. Howard Marshall
- Israelite, convert, apostle to the Gentiles: the origin of Paul’s Gentile mission / Terence L. Donaldson
- Paul and justification by faith / James D. G. Dunn
- God reconciled his enemy to himself: the origin of Paul’s concept of reconciliation / Seyoon Kim
- Contours of covenant theology in the post-conversion Paul / Bruce W. Longenecker
- Sinai as viewed from Damascus: Paul’s re-evaluation of the Mosaic law / Stephen Westerholm
- Paul’s conversion as key to his understanding of the Spirit / Gordon D. Fee
- Paul on women and gender: a comparison with early Jewish views / Judith M. Gundry-Volf
- Paul’s conversion and his ethic of freedom in Galatians / G. Walter Hansen.

But there is more to Pauline theology than the evidence of Hellenistic influence, Paul's Jewishness and Damascus. There were Paul's contacts with the Christian community which welcomed him.

(4) Paul's use of Christian Traditions.

Paul at his conversion entered an already existing Christian community. He warmly pays tribute to the existence of this fellowship in Romans 16. Of Andronicus and Junia he writes "they were in Christ before me," (16v7). Paul's debt to his predecessors in the early Christian communities is one of the firmest conclusions established in recent study.

We must not think of him as a sort of spiritual Columbus. He was not in splendid isolation when converted. There was a church at Damascus and Jerusalem ready to receive him, if cautiously at the beginning. He had contacts with the churches in Jerusalem and Judaea (Acts 9v26-28; Gal.1v18-24) and greetings sent to the recipients of Romans 16 represent a great host of men and women already Christian before he came on the scene. From all these sources he "received" much of the apostolic teaching he was content to acknowledge as common property and a shared possession (I Cor.15v11) and then to "hand on" this teaching to his converts (I Cor.15v1ff.; I Thess.2v13, 4v1; 2 Thess.3v6; Col.2v6).

Therefore we must recognise that there was a rich heritage already there for Paul (Rom.1v3; I Cor.11v23ff.; 15v3ff). He gratefully took over the teaching on Christ's person and saving work even though he supplemented it. He must be seen as no innovator or arch-corrupter of the gospel. Paul is more an interpreter of Christ on the basis of Church tradition than an innovator, though we need always to keep in view the extra dimension of his theology which came uniquely from his conversion on the Damascus Road and his calling as an apostle.

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The Baptist Movement in Romania in its Historical and Religious Context

Dinu Moga¹

ABSTRACT

Protestantism influenced Eastern Europe through the Radical Reformation, through German Pietism and especially through a number of Neo-Protestant movements which taught the necessity of personal saving faith and stressed the importance of a holy and disciplined life. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Christian groups emerged in Romania. Among these were the Baptists, whose life and ministry was not easy in its history.

The fall of communism in 1989 gave a sudden freedom to all the evangelical churches which began to experience a revived activity. A new era for the rebirth and development of the Baptist faith and its Christian education began in Romania. This essay is aiming to explain how it all began and developed in an environment which was hostile in most of the situations.

KEY WORDS: Protestantism, Byzantine orthodoxy, Catholicism, Radical Reformation, conversion, Dacia, Latin, Slavs, Hungarians, Anabaptists, animism, fetishism, naturism, Communism, persecution, saving faith.

THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF ROMANIA FROM THE BEGINNING TO 1856

Evangelical Christianity in Romania² developed over a period of a century and a half and in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy which molded the whole life and

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² According to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (RNIS) the population of Romania in 2014 was 19.5 million of which 90% are Romanians. The remaining 10% are ethnic minorities, including Hungarians and Gypsies. The dominant religion is Orthodoxy, 85.9% of the population adhering to it, and the second largest is Protestantism with 6.2% followers. The Roman-Catholics represent 4.6%, the Greek-Catholics, 0.8% and the Seventh Day Adventists 0.5%. The Reformed Church has 3.2% followers, mainly among the Hungarian and Germanic population of Romania. The Pentecostals represent 1.9% and the Baptists 0.6% of the total population. Data is taken from the official site of the RNIS at <http://www.insse.ro>. See also http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Comunicat-presa_Rezultate-

belief of the nation. Although most scholars would say that Eastern Europe, with its form of Eastern Orthodoxy, never experienced a Protestant Reformation, it is argued by non-Orthodox historians that beginning in the sixteenth century the movement initiated by Luther, Calvin and the rest of the Reformers had a limited, but important, impact on the people of Romania. This impact was most importantly felt through the transmission of the Scriptures in the Romanian language. Over this period various non-Orthodox Christian groups spread and developed in many Eastern European countries. Among these countries Romania also experienced a sequence of events which facilitated the emergence of new religious movements within its territories.

Protestantism influenced Eastern Europe through the Radical Reformation, through German Pietism and especially through a number of Neo-Protestant movements which taught the necessity of personal saving faith and stressed the importance of a holy and disciplined life. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Christian groups emerged in Romania. These are the five main evangelical movements in Romania today: the Baptists, the Plymouth Brethren, the Pentecostals, the *Tudorist* Movement and the Evangelical wing of the Orthodox Church, also called the Lord's Army (*Oastea Domnului*)³. The *Tudorist* movement and the *Oastea Domnului* sprang up as independent renewal movements within the Romanian Orthodox Church and through their doctrinal emphasis they belong to the Evangelical tradition.⁴ The members of these two movements are all Bible-believing Christians who claim to have had a personal conversion experience and presently nurture a sincere desire to proclaim the biblical message of salvation through faith alone.

Before the Baptist movement emerged in Romania in 1856⁵ the country was known as the heir of the Christianity of the ancient Roman province of Dacia.

preliminare.pdf. One must not forget that the Romanian Baptists were persecuted by the Communist regime prior to 1989. It is only since the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century that Baptists have experienced unprecedented freedom. According to recent estimates the Evangelical believers in Romania would make of 5 % of the population. Some ethnic groups, like the Gypsies and the Turks, are just beginning to be reached with the Gospel.

³ Among the leaders of these movements, Dumitru Cornilescu produced the most loved translation of the Bible in modern Romanian. This Bible is largely used today in all the evangelical churches in Romania.

⁴ A detailed account about these two movements within the Orthodox Church of Romania is given in a master thesis by Adrian Stănculescu, *Romanian Evangelical Christianity: Historical Origins and Development Prior to the Communist Period* submitted to Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, May, 2002, pp. 304-361.

⁵ This is the year when a good number of German craftsmen arrived in Bucharest in order to settled down and find new jobs opportunities. Among these Germans a man called Karl Johann

Dacia was an imperial province established in the second century by the Emperor Trajan for his veterans. Under the influence of the Romans, the people of Dacia adopted the Latin language and the Christian faith. It has been proved that the initial stage of Christianity in Romania had a Latin form and that until today the primary religious words in the Romanian Church are of Latin origin. Church tradition looks to the planting of the Gospel in Romania by the missionary efforts of the apostle Andrew around the Black Sea shores.

It has to be said that the Christianization of the Romanians took place in a period when adopting the Christian religion did not mean a radical break from the beliefs and the practices of the past, but only an exchange of the names of the pagan deities for the names of “saints”. Keeping the old pagan beliefs and practices, even though not formally accepted by the hierarchy of the church, could be overlooked, and it was indeed overlooked with great ease. The result of this compromise is well described today by a secular Romanian historian. He proves that syncretism between Christian faith and pagan popular religion characterizes the Orthodox religion of the Romanian people today. Here is what he says:

Our history did not experience a dramatic uprooting of the old deities, but a retaining of the popular paganism, with some adjustments to Christianity... For instance, burying the clay doll, *caloianul*, the veneration of the prehistoric idols of clay. Even today we have the sacrifices of the white roosters which are given to the priests at burial ceremonies, symbolizing sacrifices on the altars of different gods. The celebration of nature when children dress in green leaves, like in pantheist religions, the ritual dance around the fire, are traces of this pagan popular cult ... There were no demolished temples, nor broken idols, there was no conflict here, not even in people’s conscience, as the inhabitant of the villages, keeping his old traditions, did not see any contradiction between the old and the new faith. He bowed down before the new herald that was ushered in, and entered the church bringing his prehistoric rituals before the altar.⁶

Scharschmidt and his wife arrived in Budapest on 30th of April 1856 in an oxen pulled cart. Through this Baptist couple the pure teaching of the New Testament also arrived in Romania. See Alexa Popovici, *Istoria Bapțiștilor din România 1856-1989* [The History of the Baptists in Romania 1856-1989] revised edition (Oradea: Făclia & Universitatea Emanuel, 2007), p.17. See also Ian M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009), pp. 137-158.

⁶ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Introducere la Istoria Culturii Românești* [An Introduction to the History of Romanian Culture] (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1969), pp. 102-103. The

By the third century Christians were so strong in Dacia that they attracted the attention of the Emperor Diocletian, and many became victims of the Great Persecution initiated by him at the dawn of the fourth century. After the division of the empire in 395 A.D. and the separation of the two major spheres of medieval Christianity led by Rome and Constantinople, the Romanian lands became a border between Eastern and Western Churches, and a disputed area between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. One of the great patristic theologians of the Romanian Orthodox Church of these times was John Cassian. He became a foundational figure in ascetical theology and marked in equal measure the Eastern and Western monastic culture.⁷

The Latin basis of the Romanian Church continued to remain part of the special character of Romanian Orthodoxy, whose geographical position continues to be a bridge between Latin and Greek ecclesiastical worlds. While the Romanians pride themselves on being the only Latin nation which embraced the Orthodox faith, contrasted with Poland which is the only Slavic nation which embraced the Roman Church, they look back and count the cost of what it meant to be a Latin nation surrounded by the Slavs and Hungarians.

Beginning with the fifth century, the territory of the former Dacia became part of the Byzantine administration. In 602 the Slavs descended from north of the Black Sea and occupied much of the Balkan Peninsula. Despite their undeveloped civilization, by the eighth century they achieved political and social domination in Dacia. We know that when Dacia was drawn under the authority of the Bulgarian Empire, in the year 860 A.D., the population of Dacia was forced to exchange Roman-Catholicism for Byzantine orthodoxy. In the same year, Cyril and his brother Methodius worked as missionaries among the Slavs and established the Slavonic language in their liturgy. Against the opposition of the Roman-Catholic Church these two brothers translated the Bible into the language which was later known as the Old Slavonic and invented a Slavic alphabet based on Greek characters. This is how the liturgical and literary language of the Balkans was established. From then onwards the Romanians adopted Slavonic liturgy and Bulgarian ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In their homes they spoke a Latin language, but in their churches they worshipped in a Slavonic language which was imposed upon them under the

translation is taken from Stănculescu, *Romanian Evangelical Christianity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23. Similar comments on this aspect are made by Iosif Țon in his book *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] (Oradea: Cartea Creștină, 2009), p. 189.

⁷ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church – An Introduction to its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2008), p. 66ff.

threat of being otherwise anathematized and which the priests themselves could barely read.

Joseph Ton explains what it meant for the Romanians to come under the influence of Byzantium and the Slavonic language.⁸ It produced at least two important effects. First, Romania cut itself off from contact with Western Europe with all the benefits it would have gained from that relationship. Secondly, Byzantine Orthodoxy never placed any importance on having a theologically educated clergy. The role of the orthodox priest was to perform rituals, and the measure of his theological training was limited to what he needed to know in order to baptize, celebrate liturgies, hold confessions, anoint, officiate at marriages, burials, services for dead people, sanctify waters and other things, read from the books to “bind” or “loose” on earth, services for rain and fertility, etc. When for about one thousand years you had church services conducted compulsorily in a language which the priest could not read and the people could not understand, the inevitable result was a Romanian “Christian” religion reduced to the mere carrying out of rituals. The priest was unable to teach anything else except the necessity of fulfilling these rituals. The final result of this process was to keep the Romanian people captive for centuries in great spiritual darkness.

Over the years the fact that the orthodox religion of the Romanian people is so far removed from the teaching of the Bible has raised sharp criticism from scholars. Some of these were nominally orthodox: others were actually students of orthodox theology.⁹ In the second half of the nineteenth century these people began to produce valuable research into the popular beliefs of the Romanians. The twentieth century followed up with other studies, but these were sweetened by the authors’ nationalist-orthodox thinking: an approach that continued in other similar studies produced under the communist regime. After 1989, when the communist regime collapsed in Romania, much more objective studies began to be published.

⁸ Ton, *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.

⁹ The first two studies were commenced in 1884 and 1893 by two Romanian scholars named B. P. Hașdeu and N. Densușianu. Gheorghe F. Ciușanu studied theology in 1908 in Râmnicu Vâlcea, became an orthodox priest and a lecturer in Romania. The Romanian Academy announced a prize of 5,000 Lei to be offered for the best study on “The superstitions of the Romanian people compared with those of other nations”. He started to research and after six years produced one of the best studies about the superstitions of the Romanians. He wrote the book and received the prize in 1913, but after 1944 his book was forbidden by the communist authorities for the years to come and it was only republished after 1990. Detailed account is provided in Ton, *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 190-221.

These scholars were specialists in their own fields. Visiting people where they lived, they produced research which contained a collection and systematization of the beliefs, customs and religious practices of those Orthodox Romanians. Their conclusions about the religion of the people are worrying. The thing which struck them most was the pagan character of the life and thinking of the people they interviewed (manifested through customs and practices celebrated at different events in their lives). Ciușanu concluded in his study: “Alongside the official religion lives [in Romania] – maybe with much more vitality – the superstition. It constitutes a true religion of the many and finds itself in great strength, because it is the oldest form of religion: a mixture of fragments of animism, fetishism and naturism... The nation never understood her superior beliefs in their true spirit. She only retained, in fact, her primitive beliefs, superstitious, adopting only formally and superficially the new concepts of religion, which were much higher than her level of intellect”. He continues: “Christianity, when it was seeking to root itself within the nations – among which the Romanian nation is also a part – found here a paganism that has existed for hundreds of years, allied with fragments of animism, fetishism and naturism. A fight has then started among the old and banded together religions and the new, lonely and helpless, religion of Christianity. But neither one side, nor the other capitulated. Eventually they struck a bargain and made peace: each one giving in a bit to the other. And out of this peace was born a mixed religion which we can see still today in the life of the Romanian people”.¹⁰ These researchers continue to speak about the presence among those who called themselves orthodox believers of a Romanian Pantheon, magic, witchcraft, incantation, fights against the evil one, and the involvement of the Orthodox priests in magic, poltergeist practices and exorcism.

Apart from these observations it needs to be said that there were numbers of believers in the Orthodox Church of Romania who suffered under the communist regime. The state secret police, the Securitate, was especially brutal in communist Romania, and there were many examples of the suppression of individual dissidents, monks and priests, amounting to many victims in the course of the last two generations. Under the 1959 sustained communist crackdown against the Orthodox Church, five hundred priests and leading monks were arrested and subjected to the infamous communist show-trial. Two mass trials were held, inflicting sentences of between eight and twenty-five

¹⁰ Quoted by Ton in *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual] *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

years in prisons and forced-labour camps.¹¹ But professor Boia of the University of Bucharest makes an important remark when he says that „the acts of resistance were individual ones, of certain clergy, but never of the Orthodox Church, as an institution (capable, in the 80’s, of accepting without murmuring even the demolition of many of their churches). The difference is great”, he continues to say, “compared to the predominant Catholic countries from Central Europe, where the Church has assumed a “worldly” mission, the one of preserving the civic and political values despised by communism (the exemplar case of Poland)”.¹²

What can we say about the state of Orthodoxy in Romania today? Looking at the way the majority of so called orthodox believers live their orthodox faith, Ton concludes in his book that the orthodoxy of many in Romania “has fallen from Christianity into paganism”.¹³ Harsh words to say about a tradition which “generally regarded the church world-wide up to the Middle Ages as «their church »”¹⁴, but this cannot be denied for it is very visible and it is documented by the television media almost every week. The sorceresses around Bucharest not only prosper, raising their palaces and self-proclaiming themselves with the deplorable title of “the queens of white magic”, but also receive visits from high level personalities: politicians, sports celebrities and great business people, all belonging and confessing to be “faithful orthodox”.

Many orthodox people today would say that this is the result of a millennium of darkness maintained intentionally by the Orthodox hierarchy through the use of the Slavonic language in church worship. This has been adopted as a strategy to fortify the Orthodox Church against the incursion of the West. This “strategy” not only kept the Romanians in spiritual ignorance and in the practice of mere rituals, but it also hindered the development of the national language and writing until the first half of the sixteenth century. This is a subject which has received

¹¹ Cf. McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.* p. 68. For individual cases of persecution of various orthodox priests, monks, monasteries and information about those who informed the Securitate about them see the well documented material by Carmen Chivu-Duță, *Culte din România între prigonire și colaborare* [The cults of Romania between persecution and collaboration] (Iași: Polirom, 2007), pp.29-77.

¹² Lucian Boia, *Suveranii României. Moharhia, o soluție?* [The sovereigns of Romania. The monarchy, a solution?] (București: Humanitas, 2014), p. 14.

¹³ Ton *Căderea în Ritual* [The Decline into Ritual], *op. cit.* p. 222.

¹⁴ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, *op. cit.* p. 5.

much attention from scholars and one to which we shall direct our attention in what follows. (It is the time of deacon Coresi.)¹⁵

The first half of the sixteenth century brought major changes to the European religious scene. Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in Geneva and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, called for a return to apostolic, New Testament Christianity. Reformation thought was also brought to Moldavia and Transylvania, two of the provinces of what would become Romania later on, largely by German settlers who emigrated eastward due to Catholic persecution. Most of the Germanic population of Transylvania were Lutherans. A large part of the Székely population (The Turkish population assimilated by Hungarian tribes) became Calvinists, while many of the rich Hungarian people remained Catholics. The Romanian population was largely orthodox. But the orthodox Romanians during this time were tacitly tolerated until later in 1780s when the Hapsburgs realized that they could use them as allies against the Protestants.¹⁶ These four religious denominations were present at this time in Transylvania and they were called *receptae* (*religions officially recognized and protected*). So, in the sixteenth century Transylvania became a land of religious toleration and liberty.

Against this background one important effect of the Reformation in the Romanian territories was the arrival of the first writings in the language of the people. At the initiative of the Reformed leaders of Transylvania, deacon Coresi became the first publisher of religious works in the Romanian language. As a result Coresi represents the first attempt to break down the orthodox blockade against the use of the Romanian language in their liturgical services. It is interesting to follow the events leading to Coresi's editorial, writing and translation work.

¹⁵ Ana Dumitran, "Reforma și Românii din Transilvania în Secolele XVI-XVII" [The Reformation and the Romanians of Transylvania in the 16th and 17th Centuries]. Ph. D. diss., Cluj-Napoca, 1993, pp. 47-60. It seems that Coresi had his origin in a numerous Greek family named Coressios. There are many hypotheses regarding the origin of Coresi, but the most favoured by Romanian scholars such as B. P. Hașdeu, Ar. Densușianu, A.D. Xenopol is that he descended from a Greek family from the island of Chios. After settling in Țările Române (Walachia), this Greek family took up the name Coresi without adding any other forename, as was the custom in the 15th and 16th century. Other explanations are provided by Predescu who favours the idea that the first Coressios became established in our country at the end of 15th century, around 1490. See Lucian Predescu, *Diaconul Coresi* [Deacon Coresi] (București: Bucovina, 1933), pp. 7, 10.

¹⁶ Neagu Djuvara, *O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri* [A short history of the Romanians narrated for young people] (București: Humanitas, 2007), pp. 119-120.

Beginning in 1520 German merchants returning from the markets of Liepzig brought Luther's books with them to Sibiu. The effect of this book trafficking was the transformation, by 1529, of the town of Sibiu into an entirely Lutheran settlement. By 1535 all the Germanic population of Transylvania became Lutherans.¹⁷ In 1544 the Germans in Transylvania adopted the Augsburg Confession of Faith and the Hungarians followed shortly after. In 1544 the leaders of Sibiu hired a man called Filip Moldoveanu to translate the Lutheran catechism into the Romanian language. It is not known exactly if the translation was made from German or from Hungarian, but we know that this is the first theological book printed in the Romanian language.¹⁸ The first translation of the four gospels into Romanian was printed in Sibiu in 1552.¹⁹ Calvinism began to be spread in the Hungarian communities as well. The town of Debrecen in Hungary, also called "Little Geneva", became the center of Calvinism in Eastern Europe. The second centre of Calvinism was in Romania in the town of Cluj-Napoca, although it was soon to be moved to Braşov, the town where Coresi started his printing ministry.

The indisputable value of Coresi was not that he was or he wasn't of Romanian origin, but that he felt he was a Romanian and he contributed immensely to the development of printing and of the literary Romanian language. He printed religious books at the order of town mayors, rulers and metropolitans, nobles and bishops in Transylvania. His publications, in great part produced at Braşov between 1556 and 1583, are true monuments of the old Romanian language.²⁰ In the introductions and prefaces that Coresi wrote, he brought into discussion for the first time the introduction of Romanian into religious worship. The

¹⁷ In Romania there are about 250 citadels and fortified churches built by the Germans in Transylvania beginning with 14th century and continuing until the 18th century. They are living testimony for the life and organizing structure of the Germanic society of these times. The Germans came to Transylvania from the Western side of the Rhine and began to populate Transylvania between 12th and 14th century. Most of them were peasants and practiced crafts such as stone cutting, clay pottery, carpentry, land cultivation and animal raising. They were renowned for their excellent organization, discipline and diligence.

¹⁸ Iosif Ţon mentions this in "Întroducerea la ediția în limba română" [Introduction to the Romanian edition] of the translation in the Romanian language of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Cf Jean Calvin, *Învățătura Religiei Creștine* Vol. 1, trad. Daniel Tomuleț, Elena Jorj (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creștină, 2003), p. 39.

¹⁹ Between 1551 and 1553 the work entitled *Tetraevanghelul slavo-român* was published at Sibiu. See Ion Gheție, Alexandru Mareş, *Diaconul Coresi și izbânda scrisului în limba română*, [Deacon Coresi and the success of writing in the Romanian language] (București, Editua Minerva, 1994), p. 76.

²⁰ The list of Coresi's works is found in D. R. Mazilu, *Diaconul Coresi* [Deacon Coresi] (Ploiești: Cartea Românească, 1933), p. 8ff.

language used in his works was the one spoken in Țara Românească (or Walachia), in the south-east part of Transylvania, and formed the basis for the formation of the literary Romanian language. He sensed that the Romanians felt the need for a literary Romanian language which could help them understand and plumb the depths of their faith.

The earliest efforts of publishing the Bible in Romanian occurred in 1582 with the printing in the small town of Orăștie of the so-called *Palia de la Orăștie*. This document was printed by Șerban Coresi (the son of Deacon Coresi <http://www.answers.com/topic/coresi>) and Marian Diacul and was the first partial translation of the Old Testament in the Romanian language. This translation was a direct result of the Protestant Reformation and it was supported financially by a few reformed nobles, Romanian as well as Hungarians. The entire Bible was not published in Romanian until the end of the 17th century, when monks at the monastery of Snagov, near Bucharest, translated and printed *Biblia de la București* (The Bucharest Bible) in 1688. But *Palia* remains the most important Bible translation, because it made a break with the church language and ritual of the Romanians, replacing the Slavonic tradition with the Latin one. Under the influence of the Protestant Reformation the Romanian church switched from the use of Byzantine worship in the Slavonic language to a liturgy performed in the Romanian language. The actual transition, however, from the Chirilic letters to Latin letters happened much later in 1863.²¹ Before that time we wrote like the Bulgarians, Serbians or the Russians which gave the west the impression that we were a nation from another family than the neolatin one.

As Romanians, however, we embraced the Reformation which was spreading through the whole of Europe. Calvinism had a great influence on Coresi and on the Romanians located in Transylvania and the most important contribution of Coresi's printing and editorial ministry was the introduction of the liturgy in the Romanian language not only in the reformed churches, but also in the orthodox ones.

Romanian communities of Calvinist faith continued to exist in Transylvania, but they began to be opposed by both the Orthodox and Catholics. After the settlement in Transylvania of the Habsburg regime (1699-1918), the Romanian Protestant communities disappeared, gradually joining the Greek-Catholic or the Hungarian Reformed communities. It was a regime gradually imposed in

²¹ Djuvara, *op. cit.* p. 199.

Transylvania by the Austrian Empire. The arrival of the Austrians in Transylvania took place in the context of their offensive against the Ottoman Empire, especially following the Ottoman's failure to occupy Vienna in 1683. The Ottoman army was backed up by the rulers of Walachia and Moldova, Serban Cantacuzino and Gheorghe Duca. In 1699 after sixteen years of Austrian offensive against the Turks, to whom the Polish and Venetian armies, and later the Russians, allied themselves, the peace of Karlowitz brought dire consequences for the Turks. Besides all the territories retained by Poland, Venice and Russia, the Austrians kept for themselves the whole of Hungary, Slovenia, a part of Croatia and Serbia and the whole of Transylvania. After 1690 the "master" of Transylvania began to rule from Vienna. King Leopold, who was a hardcore Catholic militant, thought that the best thing for Transylvania - where the majority were Protestants grouped under three denominations: Calvinists, Lutherans and Unitarians - was to bring the Romanian Orthodox believers in Transylvania under the rule of the pope. It all happened after three years of hard negotiation with the metropolitan Atanasie who, in 1701, accepted the points of the 1439 Union of Florence on condition that the orthodox clergy would receive the same privileges as those of the catholic clergy. The Jesuits played an important role in the negotiations. At the beginning the whole Orthodox Church in Transylvania adhered to the *uniates* (Greek-Catholics). As the years passed it became obvious that the Habsburgs were not keeping their promises. A few years later, in 1711, under the insistence of their orthodox brothers in Moldova and Țara Românească, and the mission of the Russian church, more than half the Orthodox Church in Transylvania returned to Orthodoxy. To stop this return the authorities responded with unbelievable brutality.²²

This union between the Orthodox Church and Rome had its own benefits despite the fearful pressures encountered in the process. The church was allowed to send young men to Rome and Vienna to be trained for the priesthood. In the first half of the 18th century they returned to Romania and brought with them the first cultural elements which would westernize the Romanian principalities. The first scholarly Romanians who would write history and produce grammar, literature and studies about the Romanian language were former Romanian Greek-Orthodox students who had studied in Rome and in other western centres of study.

²² Djuvara, *op. cit.* pp.136-137.

Life for the peasant population, whether under the Orthodox Church or under the Greek-Catholic church, was extremely difficult. By the end of the eighteenth century there was an intellectual class in both churches, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic that sent petitions to Vienna demanding greater liberties and equalities for the Romanians in Transylvania. Possibly influenced by the French Revolution a renowned petition known as *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* was sent to Vienna in 1791 on behalf of the Romanians in Ardeal (Transylvania) in clearly expressed and well-argued claims. The result was minimal: something changed but not much. Gradually the Greek-Catholic priests received equal rights with the Protestants and Catholics. More and more schools were opened, and more and more young people went to study in the west.

In the meantime, due to the fierce persecution of the Anabaptists in Western Europe during the sixteenth century, groups of these believers spread towards Central and Eastern Europe, reaching the two provinces of Romania: Transylvania and Walachia. But additional intense persecution from the Habsburgs and the opposition of the Jesuits meant that, after 1767, the Anabaptists were no longer to be found in Transylvania. About the same time, two of the Principalities of Romania (Moldova and Walachia) entered the so-called “Phanariot era” (1711-1821). This was the time when the Ottoman Porte began to nominate Greek princes from Phanar, a district of Constantinople, outside the walls of the town, to rule the two principalities of Romania. The administration, the church and the culture were controlled in these two principalities by Greek nobles from Constantinople who ruled from Bucharest and Iasi. The Greek influence had a negative effect on the Romanian people. Under their leadership they intended to establish a Greek Christian kingdom in all the orthodox nations around them. Being fiercely proud of their Byzantine past they had a superiority complex towards all the neighboring nations, including the Romanians, and had no regard for the local interests, thinking that they alone were called to rule all the orthodox nations. Just like the Slavonic language, the Greek language and their religious culture had a darkening effect upon the people of Romania.

When the Phanariot era ended in 1821, Romania went through a series of events starting with the revolution of 1848, then the union of the first two Principalities of Moldova and Țara Românească in 1859, and eventually the independence from foreign domination in 1877-1878, followed, in 1918, by the Great Union of all three Principalities of Moldova, Țara Românească and Transylvania into one single nation state.

The decade when Romania achieved independence began with the overthrow of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1866 and the installation of Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen as the new prince and later King Charles I (1866-1914). Most of the political class of the time believed that, having had so many military conflicts in the past, Romania would not be able to achieve the status of a truly free and independent country, truly western in its orientation, unless it had a foreign ruler. On the 10th of May 1866 Charles, a foreign sovereign - distant relative of the King of Prussia and closer relative of the King of France, Napoleon III - was brought to the country in secrecy for fear of the Austrians. From then onwards the development of Romania was to be based, in large part, on Western models.²³

Once independence was achieved, the Romanian Orthodox Church began to experience a time of profound transformation. The State began to dominate the Church, offering it new conditions for the development of its theological training and state salaries for its priesthood. These benefits led to a docile subservience of the Church to the State and its political interests. In a short time, the Orthodox Church became a national institution with a powerful influence over the masses, particularly in the countryside, where development in all aspects of life was very slow. Nevertheless, the failure of the church to maintain high moral standards among the people and the increased decadence which became visible in the leadership of the Orthodox Church precipitated unprecedented revival movements within Romanian Orthodoxy known as the Tudorist movement in Țara Românească (today known as the Brethren Church) and the Lord's Army in Transylvania. In addition, the increased influence from Western Europe in the last part of the 19th century brought about the formation of other religious evangelical movements in Romania. Among these movements the Baptists were about to become the most energetic in their endeavour to spread their Christian faith.

THE BAPTIST MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA

Baptist beginnings in Romania are indisputably associated with the early German Baptists. The Baptist movement sprang from three main regions of the country: south, south-east and the western part. In April 1856 a man called Karl Johann Scharschmidt, with his wife Augusta, came to Bucharest, in Țara Românească (Wallachia), and found work there among his countrymen from Germany. This southern region of the country went through a period of

²³ Djuvara, *op. cit.* p. 204.

agricultural and industrial development. Thousands of mills, factories and workshops were established everywhere, creating economic opportunities which attracted many workers and craftsmen of German origin. Johann Scharschmidt was one of the carpenters baptized in Hamburg by Oncken in 1845. He moved from Hamburg to Hungary, where he was deeply involved in Baptist witness, and from Hungary Johann and his wife came to Bucharest becoming the first Baptists to settle in the capital city of Romania. He and his wife, they seem to have had no children, lived in Bucharest for 10 years and then moved in 1866 to Iasi, a town in the north east part of Romania. His nomadic spirit was used by God, says the Romanian historian Popovici, to bring the Baptist faith to our country. The couple was friendly and communicative, full of love for those around them, extremely interested to see others coming to faith and enthusiastic to preach the good news of the Gospel. From Oncken and Lehmann they had taken the well-known motto “every Baptist a missionary” and constantly put that into practice in their lives. Three years after they moved to Bucharest Johann and Augusta were printing and distributing thousands of leaflets and tracts. Although Johann did not consider himself a preacher, the Romanian Baptist Church remembers him as an efficient literature distributor and a very gifted person-to-person evangelist. When the work of the church in Bucharest grew Johann sent word to the church in Hamburg asking Oncken for help and in 1863 Oncken sent August Liebig to take over the pastoral ministry of the church.

Baptist witness spread from Bucharest among the Germans in Cataloi, a small village in the north of Tulcea, in the larger region of Dobrogea, the south-east part of Romania. Once again Oncken stepped in to organize the ministry in that area and asked Liebig to move from Bucharest to Cataloi. The Bucharest church decided against Oncken’s instruction and for a year Liebig was unable to move from Bucharest. Eventually, in 1867, after much talk the insistence of the brothers in Cataloi prevailed and Liebig was allowed to go there on condition that he would continue to help resolve pastoral issues in Bucharest.

The church decided that in the absence of Liebig’s preaching they would read one of Spurgeon’s printed sermons every Sunday morning during worship.²⁴ At the same time a Bible depot was opened in Bucharest by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) and its strategic ministry being overseen in Vienna where the British-born Edward Millard was acting as BFBS’s representative. From the

²⁴ Details in Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 17-28. Cf. Randall, *Communities of Conviction*, pp. 147-158.

very beginning missionary work, personal evangelism and the distribution of Bibles and tracts became the emblem of the Baptists in Romania.

In the absence of a pastor the church in Bucharest asked Millard in Vienna for help and in 1878 Millard sent Daniel Schwegler to take up the pastoral ministry of the Bucharest church which had about sixty members at the time. Besides his pastoral work in the Bucharest church, which lasted until 1886, Schwegler also managed the Bible depot. During his ministry a young man named Johann Hammerschmidt from Hagenbeck, near Hamburg, arrived in Bucharest with a cargo of animals and reptiles dispatched for the government minister Câmpeanu and stayed there to care for these animals. He was converted and was baptized in 1883.

In 1891, because no one else was there to do it, Hammerschmidt stepped up into the pulpit and preached to the church. From that moment he fulfilled a preaching ministry whenever it was needed. In 1903 he was called to pastor the church and he continued to do so until 1910 when he took up the pastoral work of the church in Posen.

It was during his ministry that the first ethnic Romanians were baptized in the Bucharest church. The first Romanians to be received as members in the German Bucharest church in 1896 were Ștefan Pîrvu and Nicolae Manole. During Hammerschmidt's pastoral ministry a third young Romanian, a pharmacist, was baptized in Bucharest in 1902. His name was Constantin Adorian. Because of his excellent knowledge of the German language he was able to study theology in the Hamburg Baptist seminary and soon became a vital instrument in the hands of the German church in Bucharest to spread the Baptist witness among the Romanian population.

The influence of the German ministers on the Romanian nominally orthodox population was soon noticed by the city authorities in Bucharest. They began to show concern and to treat this as a challenge to the position of the Romanian Orthodox Church. In 1900 the city authorities told the leaders of the German church in Bucharest to focus their ministry only upon the Germans, and threatened to punish their pastor and the members of the church if they did not comply. Such a threat could only speed up the events which led in 1912 to the ordination of Adorian as pastor of the growing Romanian-speaking Baptist church in Bucharest. When Transylvania became part of the Romanian Kingdom in 1919, there were about 21,000 Baptist believers in Romania. By then the Germans were but a small proportion of the total Baptist community.

A Romanian Baptist Union was formed, which was and is one of the largest Unions in Europe.

But the most powerful witness of Baptist faith was about to be experienced in the third region of the country, the north-west part of Romania. One of the richest parts of Transylvania was the region called Crişana and within this region the Bihor County played a significant role in the development of Baptist faith in Transylvania. Hungarian and German Baptist evangelists formed Baptist groups in the Cluj and Bihor counties, initially among their own nationalities. In 1848 the Hungarians proclaimed the union of Transylvania with Hungary. The Romanians could not accept this and allied with the central government in Vienna against the Hungarian revolutionaries. Twenty years later, in 1867, the Austro-Hungarian dualism was created and Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, received authority over Transylvania. This state of affairs lasted until 1919 when the Treaty of Trianon was signed and Transylvania returned to be part of the Romanian Kingdom.

The beginnings of the Baptist movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be traced to two independent groups: a group of Austrian and Hungarian carpenters who were converted in Hamburg in the 1840s and British itinerant booksellers who came to Hungary and Transylvania in the 1870s. The Baptist faith arrived in Bihor County in 1871, brought by a Bible distributor named Anton Novak, a German from Vienna who was employed by the BFBS to distribute Bibles in Hungary and Transylvania.²⁵ Novak arrived in the small town of Salonta Mare where he found a group of Bible loving people who belonged to the Hungarian Reformed Church but were dissatisfied with the spiritual state of their church. Novak's ministry focused on the study and interpretation of the Bible. This led to the formation of the first Baptist church in Salonta Mare which became instrumental in the spread of the Baptist faith in the whole of Transylvania. Other groups of Baptists were formed in Arad, Cluj and Braşov. A dominant figure in the development of the Baptist faith in this area was Henrich Meyer, another German sent by Oncken to ministry in Austro-Hungary and Transylvania. In 1875 Mayer baptized important key figures in the life of the church in Salonta, one of them being a man called Mihaly Kornya. A new religious movement started from the ground, through the simple desire to live out faithfully the Word of the Bible in their lives. The church in Salonta

²⁵ Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 29-30.

displayed great missionary zeal, great dedication and was led by a spirit of sacrifice.

Due to their religious background, most of those Hungarian Baptists were of Calvinist convictions. They constantly stressed divine election, predestination and the need for firm church discipline. Mihaly Kornya became the greatest Reformed Baptist evangelist of Transylvania. In his sermons Kornya often used the expression “those elected by the Lord” and when he discussed with his friends about the salvation of others he used to say: “if they are elected by the Lord, they will repent”.²⁶ Due to his Calvinist convictions Kornya was extremely strict in his church discipline, knowing that those who are saved, even if sternly treated for their backsliding, will not lose their salvation. He died in 1917 and it is recorded that he baptized over eight thousand converts in Transylvania, both Hungarians and a great number of Romanians. As an evangelist and church planter Kornya seems to be unequalled by any other in the history of evangelical life in Romania.²⁷

During the First World War the Hungarian and German Baptists continued to influence the Romanian-speaking Baptist churches. The early Baptist communities among the Romanians were like a family gathering, in which the participants would read the Bible, pray and sing Christian hymns. For more than a century and a half this continued to be the strategy throughout Romania for planting new Baptist churches. By 1920 a core of young Romanian Baptists were pioneering the Baptist Church throughout the whole country of Romania.

Those dedicated to spread the teaching of the Bible were pouring down the richness of their soul through their preaching. They were courageous missionaries and knew how to seize every opportunity to sow the teaching of the Bible in the hearts of those who were opened to receive it. Most of those preachers were simple people with little education.

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE AMONG THE BAPTISTS IN ROMANIA

But the thing which defined the Baptists in Romania most clearly right from the beginning was their zeal to see the Bible distributed in great numbers. Often the pioneers of the Baptist faith in the villages and towns were Bible distributors. Putting the Bible in people’s hands arose from the conviction that faith must be founded on and nourished by the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New

²⁶ Popovici, *op. cit.* p. 33.

²⁷ Kornya’s ministry is described with interesting details by Randall, *Communities of Conviction*, pp. 137-146 and Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 33-36.

Testament. In their view every Baptist believer needed to read and to know well the Old and New Testament.

Whenever the Baptists went, they encouraged people to get involved in programs of Bible reading. To most of the people the Bible came with a message unknown to them before and reading the Bible led to the conversion of many people. They compared the Christian life they had with the Christian life described in the New Testament and realized that they did not have that life. This is the testimony of the Romanian Bible translator Cornilescu, who, in order to see this *new life* coming in the midst of his people, decided in the 1920's to start producing a new version of the Bible in Romanian.²⁸

Although most Romanian Baptist pastors had not had intense theological training, there were some among them with a strong desire for the publication of Christian magazines containing devotional articles, Christian news, studies and commentaries. The first Baptist magazine was entitled *Adevărul* (The Truth) issued for the first time on 1st January 1900. The magazine was published monthly through the publishing house of the Baptist Association in Curtici and was edited by Gheorghe Şimonca, a law student, assisted by another believer named Gheorghe Crişan.²⁹ This magazine was followed by various other Christian magazines, edited and published in different towns in the western part of Romania.

Another magazine is worth mentioning. *Lumina Lumii* (The Light of the World) was first published in 1904 in Arad under the editorial care of Gheorghe Slăv, a skillful writer with great zeal and an excellent knowledge of the Bible. For each issue Slăv chose to translate one of Spurgeon's sermons from German or Hungarian which took about eight pages of the magazine. Another eight pages were given to short articles, news and topics related to faith. Through the publication of Spurgeon's sermons this magazine contributed to the development of the preaching skills of the pastors. As they read them each month and saw how Spurgeon made the transition from the Bible text to his sermon, how he organized his arguments, used his illustrations and applied the teachings of the Bible to every day Christian life, the pastors learned much about the technique of sermon preparation. These published sermons also gave them

²⁸ Dumitru Cornilescu, *Cum m-am întors la Dumnezeu* [How did I return to God], Bucureşti, Biserica Evanghelică Română, p. 6. See also *Cornilescu: din culisele publicării celei mai citite traduceri a Sfintei Scripturi* [Cornilescu: the background to the publication of one of the most read translations of the Holy Scripture], ed. Emanuel Conţac, (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint and Logos, 2014).

²⁹ Popovici, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

a rich source of knowledge and stimulated their zeal by unfolding to them the richness of the doctrines of grace. This magazine was like heavenly manna for the newly founded churches. As in Bucharest so in other smaller churches where they did not have a pastor: the reading of Spurgeon's published sermons from the pulpit was feeding a church that hungered for the truth.³⁰

Even before the First World War, due to the rapid growth and progress of their work, the Baptist churches were always in need of Bibles and hymn books. This need for Bibles and hymn books never diminished. During the war no hymn books were printed. After the war the need became even greater. Other Christian literature was seriously scarce before the war and after the war this became almost nonexistent. Pastors were overstretched with their pastoral duties and the preaching of the Word and were overwhelmed by the great number of churches they had to care for. Also, very few of them were sufficiently trained theologically and linguistically to attempt writing books.

When translation of other foreign theological works came up for discussion, the churches had to face the reality that they were too poor to raise funds for the translation and publication of these books. At the first Baptist Congress, held in 1920, Pastor Mihai Vicaș spoke about the acute need of churches for literature and translated works. The minutes of the Congress show that the appeal of this pastor caused the leaders present to determine to set up a fund for Christian literature.³¹ But from then on all the good intentions to stimulate creative activity and enrich our heritage of Christian literature have been up against difficult times, hindrances and persecutions, and a continuous discouragement of all those who might have given themselves to writing and translation. For decades to come the Baptists in Romania would suffer a serious lack of Christian literature.

For much of the second half of the 20th century Romania was part of the Soviet sphere of influence. Due to a climate of permanent harassment and continuous crushing of creative forces, there was hardly any development of Christian education³² and literature in Romania. Because all the energies of those capable

³⁰ For other works published by Slāv see Popovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-212.

³¹ For a detailed list of all the books, magazines and translation works published in Romania between 1920 and 1941 see Popovici, *op. cit.* pp. 319-321.

³² After 1920 the Southern Baptist Convention, USA, agreed to provide funds for the development of a theological seminary in Bucharest, and in 1923 a large seminary building was erected consisting of a number of classrooms, a dormitory and several apartments. Few other Bible courses were organized for lay preachers in Bucharest or in other Baptist centres in the western part of the country.

to write and translate were focused on the fight for religious freedom, from then on we have a very poor inventory of Christian literature and education in Romania. We can only speculate how the work of the Gospel might have progressed in a context of religious freedom. It may be that if there had been ample development of Christian education and literature, accompanied by catechizing, educating the members of the churches and arming them with powerful doctrinal knowledge, the country would have had well-equipped churches with well-trained leaders and ministries. Instead, the dark times which engulfed Romania and the evangelical churches led to the virtual disappearance of any attempt to promote these vital ministries. True Christian education survived in Bucharest, though it gave the churches a reduced number of pastors every four years. Personal witnesses, person-to-person evangelism and the missionary endeavors were the only ministries which could not be taken from the churches.

From the moment that the communist power legitimized itself in Romania in 1946, the Baptists and the other Evangelical movements in Romania had to live their faith under constant pressures. The Orthodox Church was always pushing for great opposition against them, and the communist power was always pressing down upon them to make them comply and compromise. In the official bureaucracy of the communist party after the Second World War, the specific terminology used to describe these evangelical movements, or religious minorities as they were often called, was “cults”, “sects” or “anarchical groups”. The communist regime acted violently against them, arresting many leaders and imposing many administrative punishments.

Even though it is now over thirty years since communism collapsed in 1989, the Orthodox Church in general refuses a constructive dialogue with, or official recognition of, the evangelical movements, while it itself has to deal with its own recent past with thousands of shameful compromises, even corruption, preferring to find refuge in an infantile arrogance grafted into a totally non-Christian nationalism.

The Roman-Catholics in Romania accept the position of “a second rank” in the Romanian religious hierarchy. Though they were considered a tolerated religion their intellectual elite was all but destroyed. Many clergy, hierarchs and monks were involved in the process which indicted them for high treason and espionage, and the pronounced punishments meant many years of detention.

After half a century under great pressure, the Greek-Catholics of Romania, known as The Romanian Uniate Church, continued to be ignored, sometimes

even disdained, by the Romanian authorities. This is the Church which was legally suppressed by the communist regime through the Decree no. 358 of 1st December 1948, whose ecclesiastical elite (bishops, priests, teachers, and archbishops) were almost all thrown into the communist prisons. Following the Soviet model in Ukraine two years before, from September – October 1948, the priests were put under incredible pressure, physically and morally, to cross over to orthodoxy. A significant number joined the Orthodox Church, but many remained within the “resistance” and a good number of those who joined later retracted.³³ There is a strong feeling today that when the phase of direct “legal” martyrdom ended in December 1989, the Romanian State and the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) seem to have agreed to continue their common front against the Greek-Catholic Church, continuing with a phase of psychological martyrdom.³⁴

There is still tremendous pressure to be affiliated with the Orthodox Church: from family and friends, from tradition, and from politics. Culturally, one needs to be Orthodox to be considered a good Romanian. The Orthodox Church is campaigning continuously to be the official national church. Thus, those who have been in the Orthodox tradition tend to remain Orthodox. The Orthodox Church is generally opposed to the evangelical efforts to share the gospel in Romania. Orthodox priests are particularly engaged in leading the opposition and at times this comes to physical conflict. Orthodox publications and preaching are against the “proselytizers,” who are accused of “stealing the sheep” out of the true fold.

Despite all the above difficulties, the fall of communism in 1989 gave a sudden freedom to all the evangelical churches which began to experience a revived activity. A new era for the rebirth and development of the Baptist faith and its Christian education began in Romania. Some results included a marked increase in publications and the advent of private schools. In 1990, Emanuel Baptist Church in Oradea, one of the largest Baptist Churches in Europe, established its own Baptist Theological education. It developed its own nursery school and all the grades leading up to a well appreciated Baptist High school. The

³³ Cf. Raportul Tismăneanu [Tismăneanu Report], [http : //www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CADR.pdf](http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CADR.pdf), pp. 70-71 quoted by Carmen Chivu-Duță, *Culte din România între prigonire și colaborare* [The cults from Romania between persecution and collaboration] *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

³⁴ Cristian Bădiliță and Otniel Vereș, *Biserici, Secte, Erezii: Dialoguri fără prejudecăți despre marile tradiții creștine* [Churches, Sects, Heresies: Dialogues without prejudices about the great Christian traditions], (București: Vremea, 2011), pp. 5-6.

underground theological school, known as “The School of the Prophets”, was reorganized as an accredited theological Baptist Institute. Emanuel Church extended its vision and moved towards developing this Institute into a Baptist University. Since its foundation Emanuel University functions under the authority of Emmanuel Baptist Church and offers academic programs in theology, languages, music and management.

Soon after Emanuel University was established, “The School of the Prophets” recommenced. The history of this school goes back to 1985 when Slavic Gospel Association, UK, responded to the call of Emanuel church to help train people for the ministry. Before the fall of communism the school was held in secret, often in the woods and mountains, for fear of detection by the authorities. When freedom came it could be openly promoted as part of the church’s ministry. It continued to be a training ground for leaders and workers in Romanian churches, most of these situated in rural places. Their two-year evening course aims at equipping laymen for the ministry.

After 1989 the importance of Christian literature resurfaced with great urgency in Romania. Făclia Publishing House³⁵, located in the town of Oradea, in the Bihor County, is probably the only Reformed Baptist publishing house in Romania whose aim is to continue and develop the reformed beginnings of men like Kornya and Toth, whose ministry was exercised only 30 km away from where it is located.

After almost thirty years of publishing Reformed books in Romania, Faclia Publishing House has translated and published more than 300 titles. These books are used today by the pastors of the evangelical churches in Romania and the students of all the evangelical schools in the country. Faclia Publishing House continues to be committed to see that the great vacuum of academic theological books, written by committed conservative evangelical scholars, is filled.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Baptist Church from Romania enjoys great freedom today, but it also faces many challenges which demand a new generation of godly and well qualified servants, with a profound knowledge of the Bible and a comprehensive understand of present times. The society is devastated by

³⁵See the website www.faclia.ro. A short history of Faclia Publishing House is presented in John Birnie, *Great Oaks from Little Acorn: The Origins and Development of SGA (UK)* (Eastbourne: Slavic Gospel Association, 2010), pp. 139-147.

problems such as high divorce and abortion rates, poverty, alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, homelessness, and orphans. The freedom gained by the people in December 1989 brought with it uncertainty of what the future might bring. Unemployment continues to be high and opportunities for economic growth difficult to seize. Many Romanians, among them many evangelical believers, have immigrated to different parts of the world in search of better jobs, leaving behind them the old people in their family and churches. For the churches the unstable economy means that little money is available for funding projects to counteract these problems.

Biblical doctrine is undermined by unbiblical traditions and legalism. The churches need to find ways to better assist the new follower of Christ in facing the challenges of his or her new faith. New believers need encouragement and equipping with solid and sound biblical teaching in order to enable them to resist the temptations found in modern society.

One feature of the Baptists in Romania even today is their commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture which they treat as the basis of Christian life and devotion. The belief that each individual has a need for personal conversion through spiritual rebirth and commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is powerfully pushed forward in sermons and bible studies. One central characteristic of the Baptists in Romania is the strong awareness of the importance of spreading the good news of salvation and teaching and making disciples. Sharing the good news arises from their joy in knowing Christ and His transforming power, and from their concern to remain faithful to the command to proclaim Christ's Gospel to the whole world. Preaching has long been recognized as a key moment in Baptist worship.

But all these are under constant attack from those ready to conform the church to a more modern pattern of worship. Our churches need to deepen the knowledge of what it means to have worship that is truly God-centered. They need to learn to engage with Scripture every day and to affirm with great clarity the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

The Baptists in Romania have now the opportunity to go into every corner of the world proclaiming the message of Christ to people of every race, nation, and language group. I am persuaded that the Romanian Baptist Church both in Romania and in the Western Romanian Diaspora is being given an opportunity unique in its history to learn to use all the means by which it can proclaim the clear and pure message of the Bible. We have the opportunity today to strengthen the Baptist witness which started in 1856 as never before.

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Augustine on Nature and Sin

Corin Mihăilă ¹

ABSTRACT

The question of the nature of man was of great interest to Augustine, given the philosophical and religious milieu in which he lived. His focused was on the concepts of free will and of the grace of God, and how the fall, salvation, and glorification impacted man's capacity to choose freely and remain good. From his writings, especially in his controversy with Pelagius, we can understand that human nature must be understood along the four stages in redemptive history: creation, fall, salvation, and glorification. In his pre-fall state, man was able to choose either to sin or not to sin. In this state, the grace of God assisted man in establishing him on a good course, had he chosen to obey. In choosing evil, in the fall, man lost the ability to choose not to sin. The only way he is able to do good is if God intervened with his grace in salvation. Once man is saved by grace, man's will is again freed to do what is good, God's grace acting not only in freeing the will, but also causing the will to desire good. The state of the saved person, however, anticipates the glorified state in which man will not be able to sin any longer and thus unable to desert the good.

KEYWORDS: Augustine, nature, sin, gnostic, ascetic, Platonism, Pelagius, free will, free choice, grace.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches that man was created in the image and likeness of God. This characteristic, quality, or capacity is constitutive of his nature and it has often been identified with man's capacity of reason. This, in turn, speaks of his ability to freely and equally choose between good and evil. Thus, when God created the first man, he created him responsible for his choices; he had a free will and thus could have chosen to live without sin or to go against God's command and therefore sin. In choosing to disobey God, he *fell short of the glory of God*. The question resulting from such a tragedy and that has come up every so often as a debate throughout the Church history, even from its beginnings, is how the fall has affected human nature, especially his capacity of free choice or free will.

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The answer to this question, that has to do more with the doctrine of Creation and Anthropology, effects the way we interpret man's responsibility for his moral behavior after the fall. Thus, the way we view the doctrine of the fall and of the nature of man shapes the way we view the doctrine of salvation.²

The first theologian to put in a systematic form the doctrine of human nature in relation to the fall of man and his redemption is Augustine, bishop of Hippo, whose thinking has influenced and shaped the formulation of orthodox theology for the centuries to follow. Thus, it is not in the least surprising that an examination of Augustine's theories of the will, freedom, and grace is still of great contemporary interest.

No one questions that Augustine held that every man is responsible, but judgements diverge radically on the implications to be drawn from this responsibility. Hence, Augustine can be shown to hold that the will is free but the question is in what sense is it free in relation to the four stages in the history of salvation: creation, fall, redemption and glorification? In this article, we will try to analyze and summarize Augustine's Anthropology, specifically man's capacity to choose, or the freedom of the will, in relation to these four stages in redemptive history. By this, we will try to explain the initial state and vocation of humanity, to estimate the damage done in the Fall and, as a conclusion, to point to the resources for recovery provided in Christ. All this we will do taking into consideration the future eschatological state of man in relation to free will and sin.

Before we engage in this study we need to note and emphasize three important things about Augustine's thinking which stand as a foundation to his view of human nature. Firstly, his theology was very much influenced by the religious and philosophical trends of his day, influences that we will discuss shortly. Secondly, most of Augustine's philosophical theories of man (i.e., freedom of the will) depend on his psychological insights, in particular into his own behavior, and the accuracy and therefore the wide applicability of these insights and observations have made his *Confessions* of universal interest. Thus, in his theology there is a relationship between theory and practice; he is realistic in his affirmations. Lastly, and probably the most important, it must be emphasized that for Augustine it is impossible to demarcate the boundary between

²For more details, which we cannot include here because of space and of the limitation of the subject treated here, on the importance of Anthropology in relation to other doctrines see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996, pp.455-462. Also see him on the different interpretations of the image of God in man, pp.495-517.

philosophy and theology. Hence it becomes impossible to discuss ‘philosophical’ questions, like that of the freedom of the will, without recourse to theological problems like the operations of grace. Taking these three things into consideration in our discussion of Augustine and his opinion on the human nature in relation to the fall, we will begin by pointing to the religious and philosophical presuppositions that had influenced his thinking and how his theology constituted a turning point in thinking of the human nature.

MAJOR THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES ON AUGUSTINE³

The Gnostic Movement

The basic idea of Gnostic anthropology was that “the material condition of humanity is a tragic accident for which human beings do not bear primary responsibility.”⁴ The Gnostics emphasized the inevitability of sin; everything happens by necessity, even God himself. They subjected God and man to the slavery of an all-powerful fate. The various schools of Gnosticism depicted man as the victim and slave of forces over which he had no control, and, therefore, they diagnosed sin as inevitable and man as lacking responsibility. The fall did not produce a major change in man since he was a slave to sin before and after. In their view, then, salvation means the salvation of the spirit from the prison of the flesh, aided by Christ, who is offered as a model of such liberation. This salvation is entirely eschatological, since only then will the spirit be freed from matter.

Irenaeus was the first one to make responsibility and freedom of choice, rather than fatalism, determinism and inevitability, the burden of his message, writing against the Gnostics. Thus, the switch was made from the pessimistic view of the state of man to a more optimistic one, but without a big influence of the fall upon his free will. Salvation, in Irenaeus view, will be completed in eschaton, when the bodily condition of man, in which he was created, will finally be perfected.⁵

³For a detailed treatment of these influences see for example, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: Harper & Row, 1978, p.344-361, who presents the theological thought in the East and West before Augustine. Also, see Jeroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (vol.1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp.278-292. Most of the information that follows in this section is indebted to Patout J. Burns, *Theological Anthropology* (Sources of Early Christian Thought; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp.1-22.

⁴Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 3.

⁵Ibid., 4.

Augustine, on the other hand drew a pessimistic picture of man but not as the Gnostics did (also Manicheism) who saw matter as evil but from the point of the fallen nature of man. Thus, the fall did effect the free will of man. This pessimistic view of the fallen man, as we will see, constituted the starting point of his Anthropology.

The Ascetic Movement

Burn states that “the differences between the condition of Adam and that of his offspring are, in ascetic theory, largely environmental.”⁶ The surroundings before the fall made Adam's obedience to the command of God without difficulty. He had the freedom of choice and according to the choice he would be punished or rewarded. According to the ascetic movement, every man is born with the same capacity. The only difference is that we have to struggle to serve God in a hostile environment and with every sin, our capacity to choose good becomes “increasingly difficult and improbable.”⁷ Thus, we can say that:

the freedom of self-determination to good or evil, which is the inalienable divine image implanted in humanity at its creation, stands as the foundation of this anthropology. The exercise of this autonomy for good may be enhanced or encumbered by environmental factors whose actual influence, however, depends upon the individual's own prior consent. Through repeated choices a person will orient himself to either good or evil.⁸

Though Augustine retained some features of this anthropology, he disagreed with the fact that man possessed the capacity to desire and choose the good as God required as the inalienable property of nature without the possibility of losing it. Augustine believed in a radical change that the fall brought in the nature of man regarding his capacity to choose freely to do good. Thus, though he believed in the notion of reward, he explained that it was grace that made it possible while the ascetics believed in the assistance of grace only after man chooses the good.

Christian Platonism

Christian Platonism “identifies the divine image in humanity not as the autonomy of self-determination (as in the ascetic movement) but as rationality, the human capacity for knowledge of God.”⁹ This capacity is relegated to the

⁶Ibid., 4.

⁷Idem.

⁸Ibid., 6.

⁹Ibid., 7.

spirit, through which man can attain salvation. Matter, in turn, is considered evil, because of the passions, which for Augustine are named *concupiscence* (i.e., sexual desires, inclination). Prior to the fall, the human spirit was able to subject the desires of the flesh, but, with the fall, “the human spirit lost its dominion over the desires of the flesh and fell under the spell of sensual satisfactions...the dynamism of the spirit became the passion which serves bodily appetites.”¹⁰ According to Christian Platonism, salvation, then, is liberation from passions by the ascetic behaviour born of free will. Augustine rejected the fact that the effort, the desire or love for good and ultimately for God (*charity*) is inherent in man's nature. He believed that both the conversion and the perseverance (the beginning, the increase, and the fulfilment of charity) are gifts of God's own love. No wonder he was called “the doctor of grace.”¹¹

Augustine retained some of the features of these three religious-philosophical trends as we will see next, but rejected most of them because of his view of the nature of man, the impact of the fall, and the nature of salvation. All of them considered human nature inherently good, even after the fall, and thus having the capacity to choose to do good; the fall did not effect the freedom of the will. The only change is that the circumstances are hostile to him after the fall and the desires of the flesh (*cupiditas*) overwhelm the spirit. In this case, salvation is nothing but a cooperation between God and man¹² and Christ is an example to be followed. Of course, the objection brought to all this by Augustine is that it renders grace in vain. In response, Augustine emphasizes the pessimistic state of man that needs the help of God in every step of the way.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., 8. For a deeper study of the influence of Platonism on Augustine see John Burnaby, *Amor Dei* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947). He does a great study on the concept of love (*amore*) in Augustine. *Amore* is a neutral word and it characterized the initial state. At the fall *amore* became *cupiditas* and at conversion it became *charitas*, but *cupiditas* is still existent and a possibility. “*Amore* is *charitas* when it is the love of God” (*Amore Dei*, the greatest of loves, actually the true love), p.142.

¹¹Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, p.294; he quotes here, Albert C. Outler who said: “the central theme in all Augustine's writings is the sovereign God of grace and the sovereign grace of God.”

¹²Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.352.

¹³This emphasis on grace can be seen especially in his book *On The Grace of Christ*. It is to be noted that this view was cultivated during the Pelagian controversy and thus what follows will be discussed in this context. Pelagius is the one who retained most of the features of these theological-philosophical trends, because he emphasized an optimistic view concerning the capacity of the human nature.

THE HUMAN NATURE AND ITS RELATIONS TO SIN

Having looked at the theological and philosophical contexts in which Augustine formed his view of the human nature and capacity to choose good, their influence upon his own reflections on these matters, and his rejection of the major features of these trends, we will turn now to examining in a systematic way his own views.

For any study of Anthropology, including that of Augustine, we believe that the most useful approach would be that of trying to understand the condition of man before and after salvation. This would be important for the way we understand and minister to the unbelievers and, on the other hand, it will provide us with an understanding of how we need to live as redeemed and what to rely on as the basis for our hope of glorification. But in a study of biblical Anthropology, we need to realize that a proper understanding of man's condition is reached only by a proper understanding of the human nature before the fall and in the light of the eschatological hope. Therefore, we will consider the human nature in all four stages of the redemptive history as perceived by Augustine. The basis of Augustine's classification of the four ages can be understood as the relationship between law and sin, free choice and divine influence or free will and sin: *ante legem*- when men were ignorant of their sin (*posse non peccare*), *sub lege*- when they were aware of it but unable to conquer it (*non posse non peccare*), *sub gratia*- when they believe in the Redeemer and struggle against sin with divine aid, and *in pace*- when for the first time the body will be brought fully into subjection to the spirit (*non posse peccare*).¹⁴

Posse Non Peccare (it is possible not to sin)

The nature of Adam before the fall is the nature of spiritual beings (including Satan) before they were affected by sin. According to Augustine, Adam was endowed with every possibility to do good and with the Spirit's gift of charity. By God's grace, man was given the freedom to choose between good and evil. His spirit and body worked together in perfect harmony. *Cupiditas* was not yet powerful in his body because he had not yet sinned to cultivate the custom of sinning, though he had the freedom to sin. In their pre-fall state, Adam and Eve had no obstacles between them and their love for God and their obedience to God's command; neither the environment nor the desires of the flesh placed any such obstacles. Though the soul was not yet all that it could have become had Adam not sinned, the first couple was governed by the merit-reward economy

¹⁴see E. TeSeile, *Augustine the Theologian* (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), p.160.

described by the ascetic anthropology and could easily have earned eternal life by ending up with the capacity of no longer being able to fall.¹⁵ Thus, Adam and Eve had the possibility and freedom not to sin and could have remained without sin had they only persevered in the good.

It is to be noticed here that Augustine makes a distinction between being without fault and remaining in that goodness which is without fault.¹⁶ Being without fault was a gift of God while remaining without fault was of the first man. He received the ability to persevere in good, but perseverance was up to him.¹⁷ This does not mean that he had no assistance from God; he had the help of God but in a different way than the saved and glorified people have it. God gave Adam the possibility to persevere only if he so willed it.¹⁸ Thus, Adam was not left alone in his choices, but he was helped by God once he chose good. The emphasis is on the capacity of the free will to choose to persevere, on the grace of God that can be seen in the capacity of not sinning and the reward for not choosing to sin, and his responsibility if he chose to sin. In this respect, Adam was the recipient of three valuable opportunities: “he was able not to sin, not to die, not to desert the good.”¹⁹ Hence when Adam sinned, he sinned with full knowledge.

Augustine’s emphasis on the free will of the pre-fall Adam must not be confused with Pelagius’ view. The major difference between their views of the freedom of the will is in regard to the locus of the ability not to sin. Pelagius distinguishes three elements which are involved in fulfilling divine commands: capacity, will, and action. “By his capacity, a persons can be just, by his will he decides to be just and by his action he is just.”²⁰ Thus, according to Pelagius, it is in our own power to avoid sin, and the ability not to sin is of nature. And because not to sin is ours, we are able to sin and to avoid sin at the same time.²¹ For Augustine, on the contrary, the capacity of not sinning is of God; it is a gift. Augustine transfers Pelagius’ thinking and makes it an analogy for God, in order to prove the nonsense of this reasoning: “inasmuch as, in an infinitely greater degree, it is

¹⁵Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, X.27.

¹⁶Ibid., X.28.

¹⁷Ibid., XI.32.

¹⁸Ibid., We will note later the difference between this gift of perseverance and the one given to the saved and the glorified.

¹⁹Ibid., XII.33.

²⁰Ibid, III.4.

²¹Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 56.XLVIII, 57.XLIX; notice that for Pelagius, the fall did not change anything in the nature of man (probably the greatest fault in his thinking) thus we can compare this view with Augustine’s view of the unfallen nature.

God's not to sin, shall we therefore venture to say that He is able both to sin and to avoid sin?"²² By this analogy, Augustine seeks to show that the first man received the capacity to be good (actually was made good) and thus could have remained good, but choosing sin was of his own doing.²³

This moves us to the question of the origin of sin; if God created man as good, where is the idea of choosing bad from, i.e., what is the cause of the evil will? In the words of Augustine, "If the first man was created wise, why was he misled? And if he was created foolish, how can God not be the cause of vice, since folly is the greatest of the vices?"²⁴ The most satisfactory analysis of this doctrine in Augustine is done, in our opinion, by T.D.J. Chappell.²⁵ He argues: "In this case there is no cause which is efficient- only a cause which is deficient; for the Fall is not an effect, but a defect."²⁶ He continues:

An action can be explained only by reference to some supposed good at which it is said to aim. It follows that an action which cannot be seen as aiming at any supposed good whatever *cannot be explained*. But, plausibly, the first wrong action was just such an action. Therefore, the first wrong action is necessarily inexplicable; it can have no explanation of the only kind which is appropriate to the explanation of actions. To look for its motivation will be wholly vain; it can only be sin as a bare, unmotivated, inexplicable, irrational assertion of the will's freedom to choose. Thus the fall cannot be explained.²⁷

With this explanation of Augustine's theory, we can see how the first man was assisted by God's grace (making him good, giving him the possibility to remain good, and rewarding him for choosing good) and was also responsible for every action. Thus, in this first stage, man had the freedom not to sin and assisted by God when choosing good. The question that must be answered next is what

²²Ibid.

²³Augustine was trying to show that there is not really any difference between capacity and will. According to him, the will (*voluptas*) is not a part of the human *psyche*, rather it is the human *psyche* in its role as moral agent. "*Voluptas* is not a decision-making faculty of the individual, as subsequent philosophy might lead us to suppose, but the individual himself." As a result, a man wills what is good because he is good and he wills what is bad because he is bad. See Rist, "Augustine on free will and predestination," *Journal of Theological Studies* (vol.XX, Oct.1969), p.421-423.

²⁴Augustine, *On the Free Will*, III.71.

²⁵Chappell, "Explaining the Inexplicable Augustine on the Fall," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LXII/3, pp.869-883; he calls this theory the "no-explanation account" (NEA).

²⁶Ibid., 869.

²⁷Ibid., 871.

happened at the fall and what consequences it had upon the nature of man, namely his free will in relation to sin.

Non posse non peccare (it is impossible not to sin)

In the fallen condition, asserted Augustine, the human person lacks the resources to love and to choose good. Man is not free not to sin or to sin any longer, the only freedom he has being the freedom to sin. Augustine does not deny man's free will, only the idea of autonomous beings, that is, man's ability to weigh up good and evil and decide upon the one or the other. Unless we are helped by God's grace, fallen man's freedom of choice is only the freedom to sin.²⁸ Augustine justifies this by saying that:

For this is the most just penalty of sin, that a man should lose what he has been unwilling to make good use of, when he might with ease have done so if he would: which, however, amounts to this, that the man who knowingly does not do what is right loses the ability to do it when he wishes. For, in truth, to every soul that sins there occur these two penal consequences- ignorance and difficulty.²⁹

Thus, according to Augustine, we are free and able to do evil of our own accord, but we are unable to choose the good freely. We are devoid of *caritas* but the servant of its opposite, namely *cupiditas*. Our only freedom is to choose among evils.³⁰ Of course, this concept is drawn from the fact that once man started to sin, he continues to do it unless God intervenes. That is, the choice to sin set man on a course of sin, sin becoming a custom and a habit that is cultivated in man.³¹

²⁸It is here where Pelagius disagrees with Augustine; he sees grace located in freedom of choice and in the law and teaching (for this see his writing, *Letter to Demetrios*), Christ being just an example to be followed and imitated. Of course, the criticism brought by Augustine is that this thinking makes Christ's sacrifice in vain (this can be read for instance in his writing *On Nature and Grace*).

²⁹Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, 81.10.

³⁰By this he does not mean that the fallen man is incapable of some good. But all good done by fallen man is with God's help, though this help is not necessarily sufficient to salvation. The good man is capable of doing even after the fall may be included in what is called common grace.

³¹It is to be noted that even Pelagius believed in this power of habit, but he believed this to explain the tragic situation of man apart from the original sin. He says: "Doing good has become difficult for us only because of the long custom of sinning, which begins to infect us even in our childhood. Over the years it gradually corrupts us, building an addiction and then holding us bound... What you establish in the beginning will last, and the rest of your life will follow the pattern you set at the start... Its power (custom) is greatest when it develops in people from their

Augustine's understanding of the consequences of the fall upon human nature and the freedom of the will can be explained as the loss of the two functions of grace that were effective in the primitive condition: 'operating' or 'prevenient' grace, on the one hand, and 'cooperating' or 'subsequent' grace, on the other hand. The first assures man of his ability to use his free will in a good way and the power to subjugate all other desires, while the second assists man after he chooses good and rewards him for his choice of good. Once the fall occurred, man lost these two functions of grace, free will remaining, but not in the real sense. TeSelle explains: "Willing, wherever it is found, is freedom within a certain horizon of necessity; and the difference between true freedom and bondage is not that between arbitrariness and constraint, but that between responsiveness to authentic value and self-will."³² Although our wills and choices are free, we still need freeing from sin. Although we are *liberi*, we are not *liberati*.³³ Therefore, although we are 'free' agents in the sense that we are responsible for our acts, we are unfree, until God intervenes, in that we are in bondage of sin.³⁴

Thus, according to Augustine, men do not begin *tabula rasa*, coming into being in a state of neutrality, somewhere between good and evil, able to equally choose good or evil. Instead, all men and women start with a handicap. This doctrine is fundamental to Augustine, for it is the basis for his scepticism about the intellectual powers of mankind and hence to his reliance on divine revelation. At the same time, his view of the consequences of the fall upon human freedom of choice, leads him to a weak view of the transmission of original sin. O'Donnell argues that "the weakest link in Augustine's theology of sin is his view on the transmission of original sin."³⁵ Augustine inclined to a theory of physical propagation, according to which the disorder of the sexual appetites was not only the sign of sin but the instrument of its transmission.³⁶

early years." (*Letter to Demetrias*, 12, 13). From this we can see that he believed in the necessity of grace but in a different way from what Augustine understood it, as we shall see later.

³²TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p.292.

³³It is to be noted that in this context, Augustine uses this term 'free' in the sense of 'responsible'.

³⁴For a more detailed analysis of the concept of 'free will' in Augustine, see Rist, "Augustine on free will and predestination," pp. 420-425.

³⁵James O'Donnell, *Christ and the Soul*, p.2; for the influences of the earlier fathers upon Augustine concerning this doctrine see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp.344-366; Kelly notices that even Augustine was divided in mind between the traducianist and various forms of the creationist theory of the soul's origin.

³⁶Because of the belief in the transmission of the original sin, Augustine believed also in the baptism of the infants which is not enough for receiving the blessedness of heaven but the avoiding of damnation. Thus, though the eternal consequences of original sin are removed by

Thus, the most obvious symptom of the corruption produced by the fall is his enslavement to ignorance, *concupiscence*, and death. *Concupiscence* stands, in a general way, for every inclination that makes man turn from God to find satisfaction in material things, which are intrinsically bad. By far, the most violent, persistent, and widespread of these is, in his opinion, sexual desire, and for practical purposes he identifies *concupiscence* with it.

Thus, as a conclusion to this part, we can say that, according to Augustine, the debility of sinful man is a problem within the will, arising from the power of custom and affection in the case of personal sin, and from the temptations of *concupiscence* in the case of original sin. Man is free in the fallen condition, but free only to sin unless the grace of God changes the situation.

Posse peccare (it is possible to sin)

This pessimistic view of man's fallen state, as enslavement to sin and damnation, requires a radical intervention of God's grace to save man, according to Augustine. God's saving grace establishes man in a state of a new freedom, a freedom different from the freedom Adam had before the fall. The difference between the pre-fall freedom and post-salvation freedom is explained by Augustine by pointing to the different way grace works in these two conditions:

A stronger grace is in the Second Adam. By the first grace, a person has justice if he wills it. The second grace can do more; it moves a person to will, indeed, to will so strongly and love so ardently that by the opposing will of the spirit he conquers the lusty will of the flesh. The first grace, which showed the power of free choice, was not insignificant; without this assistance a person could not persevere in good, although he could abandon the help if he so chose. The second grace is greater because a grace which restores a person's lost liberty

baptism what was left untouched by baptism was *concupiscence*, the inclination toward sin and, as a result, every human being eventually succumbing to sin. To this, Pelagius answered by saying that sin is transmitted from Adam not by propagation but by imitation. By stating this, Pelagius claims the possibility of living without sin and claims that there were people in the Old Testament who lived sinless lives. In response, Augustine stated the fact that, even if there were sinless people, they were so not because of free choice but because of the assistance of God's grace (see, *Man's Perfection in Righteousness*). But if there were people who lived without sin, Augustine emphasizes over and over, then they could not have prayed the Lord's prayer where it says *Deliver us from evil*.

and enables him to attain and remain in good if he so wills does not do enough unless it also causes him to will it.³⁷

By this, Augustine states the perseverance of the saint who, by free will (freed by God's grace), chooses the good only because God so arranges the circumstances that he will choose freely whatever God wants.³⁸ We need to notice here that for Augustine, the state of the saved man is not the same as the unfallen Adam; one reason is because if he was restored to the same state, any sin which he committed would be a sin laden with the consequences of Adam's original sin. So, when the saved man sins, he sins because the grace of God is not assisting him, God does not provide the circumstances to influence his will to choose the good, and therefore he sins out of his free will. But in general, the saved person is the slave of *caritas* and thus he chooses good naturally and freely because God wants so: "Their wills are so inflamed by the Holy Spirit that they are able because they so will and they so will because God causes them to will."³⁹

Thus, according to Augustine, there is a paradox here: moral responsibility for rejecting God remains, while the moral merit for accepting God is abolished by grace.⁴⁰ Man does wrong of himself but does right only because God does it in him.

We can see in all this how Augustine tried to preserve the free will of man and at the same time to emphasize the effective work of the grace of God. All choices of will and all acts are acts of desire, hence acts of love, either the

³⁷Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XI.31.

³⁸By this Augustine claims the fact that when God decides to offer us salvation, he doesn't just present to us this possibility of getting saved and then allows us to choose but, besides the fact that he gives us the capacity to choose He also prepares our will in such a way that we will choose. Thus, he believes in predestination only because he believes in the sovereign nature of the grace that cannot be overcome. Predestination is defined as God's foreknowledge of his own actions and his preparation of the means by which those whom he does liberate are liberated unfailingly. So, we are talking about not only the possibility but the actuality of perseverance. The fact that salvation is a work of God is seen, argues Augustine, in the baptism of the infants: they are capable of neither assent nor refusal, it's all the work of the grace of God. He says concerning the fact that God gives both the ability and the will to believe: "Then is the will of use when we have ability; just as ability is also then of use when we have the will. For what does it profit us if we will what we are unable to do, or else do not will what we are able to do?" (*On Grace and Free Will*, 31.XV). For more information on the subject of salvation see also TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, pp.319-338.

³⁹Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XII.38.

⁴⁰For a more detailed study of these paradoxes in Augustine see, James O'Donnell, "Augustine: Christ and the Soul," <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/twayne/aug4.html>, accessed 04.03.2022.

divinely inspired love called *caritas*, or the sinful selfish love called *cupiditas*. God's grace works effectively in changing the circumstances that create *caritas* and eventually changes the will.⁴¹ The faithful Christian, therefore, is one who believes utterly in God but who responds to the exigencies of daily life by living as though everything, salvation included, depends on his own actions. Therefore, it is still possible to sin as a saved person, and sin we will, but it will not be a habit, because we have the grace of perseverance.

Non posse peccare (it is impossible to sin)

Once man is saved, he continues to struggle with sin, but, assisted by God, he is able to maintain a life of obedience. This state, however, is not the final one; the final one awaits the time when man will not be able to sin. This glorified state of the nature is best understood in comparison to the initial state of man:

The original freedom of will was to be able not to sin; the final freedom will be much greater—not to be able to sin. The original immortality was to be able not to die; the final will be greater—not to be able to die. The original power of perseverance was to be able not to abandon the good; the final will be the blessedness of perseverance itself—not to be able to desert the good.⁴²

This statement is a comprehensive and a sufficiently clear one and therefore does not need any further explanation. What is obvious in Augustine's statement and must be emphasized is that the final state of man should not be confused with the initial state of man. By comparing these two states, Augustine reaches the conclusion that "freedom will be greater once free choice is unable to serve sin."⁴³ Freedom, in its highest degree, is the possibility to choose only good, because freedom is defined in relation to the good purpose it can serve. The more you choose good the more freedom you have. Being slaves of God is the greatest freedom we can have: *You will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

CONCLUSION

We have seen in this article the state of human nature, its capacity, will, and action, in the four stages of the history of salvation, as viewed by Augustine. In

⁴¹This of course contradicts what Pelagius believed and that is that man has not lost the capacity to choose, it is inherent in our nature, but that he became slave of sin through custom and all that God does is to present him the way of salvation and man can choose it or reject it. Augustine, on the contrary, believed that man's nature had been damaged, corrupted but it was still existent.

⁴²Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, XII.33.

⁴³*Ibid.*, XI.32.

all these four stages, Augustine sought to preserve the free will of man under any circumstances. The way he did it was by rejecting the idea of fatalism in Gnosticism and by using some of the features of the existent religious and philosophical ideas, especially that of the Ascetic movement, namely the principle which emphasized the power of custom. Needless to say, his doctrine on human nature was developed during the Pelagian controversy. Thus, though he believed in the free will of man, he did not do so at the expense of the grace of God, which he saw as effective from the point of the preparation of the will for salvation all the way to glorification, in every step of the way. In trying to keep the balance between these two, the free will and the grace of God, he himself recognized that he did not know why people do not choose to avoid sin if the possibility is guaranteed to them. The only thing that he was able to say concerning this is that "God will certainly recompense both evil for evil, because he is just; and good for evil, because he is good; and good for good, because he is good and just; only, evil for good he will never recompense, because he is not unjust."⁴⁴ Thus, the emphasis throughout all his writings is on the sovereign grace of God that is the only means of redemption and glorification of the fallen man: *What hast thou that thou didst not receive it? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

Do we have free will as fallen men? Yes. Can we choose God? No. It is God who chooses us: *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how*

unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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Christian notions of love and theology in the context of the dialectics between individualism and collectivism

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the current dialectics between collectivism and individualism, more precisely, of the tension between, on the one hand, the claim of the preeminence of theology, in exchange for sacrificing individual freedoms, as in the case of collectivism, and on the other hand, the claim of prevalence individual liberties, at the cost of “elasticizing” theology and implicitly relaxing the ecclesial unity, as in the case of individualism, there is a critical perspective that theology would hinder individual freedom by positioning itself as a Berlin Wall between individuals that it insensibly separates them from each other. Against this dialectical background, love is valued at the expense of theology. The reason is that the former unites individuals, connecting them to each other, while theologies irrevocably separate them and restrict their freedom of thought while also endangering their personal well-being. In this article we aim to argue that love in general is inalienable from rationality and discernment, skills that are specifically theological, and Christian theology is inseparable from love, which is its original source and inspiration. Therefore, the adoption of love presupposes the adoption of discernment, and the acceptance of Christian theology implies, at the same time, the acceptance of love that animates theology.

KEYWORDS: love, individualism, collectivism, enemy, theology.

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Robert N. Bellah, in the religious section of the book *Habits of the Heart*, brings to the fore, along with other congregations of an American city, the Christian community pastored by Larry Backett. This congregation, according to the author of the book, is characterized by a family spirit, it is united around a normative set of theological theses such as the divinity of Christ, His exemplary morality, the immutability of God, the intrinsic value of the human being, the love of neighbor, etc. All those who are part of this community find themselves under the theological umbrella of dogmas, but those who do not agree with the

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entire dogmatic content are outside the umbrella and constitute the “wider society”.² This is a religious collectivistic decoupage of the American society at the end of the twentieth century. A closed cultural reminiscence like an island surrounded by water. Collectivism, says Harry Triniadis, “may be initially defined as a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives.”³

However, since the seventeenth century, in Massachusetts, USA, there has been an individualistic trend. And this is because the individual's religious experience is a precondition for his acceptance into the community.⁴ In other words, authentic religiosity is notified through individual experience. This exposes the germs of a subversive but effective religious individualism, for which, later in the eighteenth century, people like Anne Hutchinson, come to outline their dogmatic quintessence in terms of their own religious experience, different from the canonical institutional doctrinal system.⁵ The culture of freedom and individualism has been relentlessly invoked by Central American personalities such as Thomas Jefferson, who has briefly said, “I am a sect myself,” and Thomas Paine, who has claimed that “my mind is my church.”⁶

Faith, once privatized and profiled according to one's own sensibilities, has also become the criterion for choosing the church to which the individual should belong. Thus, “it was possible for individuals to find the form of religion that best suited their inclinations.”⁷ Individuals are no longer required to follow the strict and unchanging rules of the united church. Instead, they are in a position to choose the church they want from the generous palette of the nearby religious “market.” Churches thus end up by relentlessly entering the bitter competition

² Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Updated Edition, California, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, 230-231.

³ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*, New York, London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018, 2.

⁴ See Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Heart*, 233.

⁵ See Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Heart*, 233.

⁶ Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Heart*, 233.

⁷ Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Heart*, 233.

for membership: “religious bodies had to compete in a consumers’ market and grew or declined in terms of changing patterns of individual religious taste.”⁸

The autonomous individual, free from normative constraints and independent of theological loyalties, becomes the center around which the church pivots and pulses. In these terms, the cultural individualism is established that Triandis defines as: a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and dis-advantages to associating with others.”⁹

In the 21st century, the religious individual is confiscated by the tension between individualism and collectivism, between moral principles that transcend its individuality and immediate personal desires, dependent on his own life circumstances, between community goals and personal goals. If the congregation is to win souls, in the ideological rhythm of individualism, under the auspices of the Great Commandment, it will be obliged, for the sake of including as many as possible under the theological umbrella of its community, to “elasticize” its theology by spreading it so as to cover as many of them as possible, but will pay the price for the theological “thinning” of its beliefs, becoming more and more lax about theological principles and moral beliefs, and more prone to revisiting and amending its beliefs according to its sensibilities, increasingly diverse of the individuals it targets. If, however, the religious community prioritizes its doctrinal and congregational unity over the appetites of individuals, increasingly different from each other, retaining their collectivist aplomb, then it will succeed in preserving its dogmatic content and internal communion, but it will sacrifice the desire for numerical growth, because individuals differing dogmatically from its confession of faith and being perplexed by its doctrinal intransigence, will react by withdrawal and indignation.

The tension between individualism and collectivism is transferred to the mental level in deep dilemmas and painful dissonances. If personal goals will contrast with the theological view of the congregation, as if a young person has a choice between theology that forbids marriage and the lover of his heart that does not share his faith, and the person will be nurtured by the culture of incorrigible

⁸ Bellah, et. al, *Habits of the Hart*, 233.

⁹ Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*, 2.

individualism, then he will be able to accuse theology of empathic emptiness and will be able to categorize it as a fence or a wall that stands between them. In this respect, theology becomes undesirable and in its place is erected a pedestal for love, simply for the merit of being constituted anywhere and anytime in a bridge between people's hearts. Therefore, love, not theology, is what one is looking for. This perspective expresses an antagonistic polarization between theology and love, a modernist dualism with nihilistic critical reflections, specific to M. Foucault, F. Nietzsche or J. Derrida. The hope of thinning out the doctrine, according to the individualistic paradigm, consists in the possibility of creating a theology in which everyone can find themselves. But is this possible? Stephen Prothero, in his work entitled "God is not One" concludes with conviction and precision that "One of the most common misconceptions about the world's religions is that they plumb the same depths, ask the same questions. They do not."¹⁰ Therefore, this hope has no practical and social basis.

Stanley Hauerwas, in his article, "Love's Not All You Need" rejects the antagonism between theology and love, pointing out that since moral values are based on theological statements, then ethical behavior, in this case love manifested concretely to one another, does not appear out of the blue, but it is due to the theological beliefs that inspire such a conduct. Here are his words: "There can be no ultimate separation between our theological convictions and our ethical behaviour, because our moral values are not ultimately separable from our religious affirmations."¹¹ Theology, according to the American theologian, precedes love, and there can be no love without theology, "God does not exist to make love real, but love is real because God exists. God can come to us in love, only because He comes to us as God, the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of our existence."¹² On the other hand, according to Hauerwas, Christ put on the garments of truth and love, which do not point to the reality of love, but to the person of Christ, so "If we are to be true to the Gospels it seems clear if we are to learn to love, we must first learn to follow Him."¹³

The American theologian suspects that the reason why it is preferred to promote love as the main message of Jesus Christ is the one fueled by the idea that love,

¹⁰ Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One, The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World – and Why Their Differences Matter*, New York: Harper One, 2010, 24.

¹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, "Love's not all you need," *Cross Currents* 22, no. 3 (1972): 225–37, 227. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24457602>.

¹² Hauerwas, "Love's not all you need," 227.

¹³ Hauerwas, "Love's not all you need," 229.

in general moral behavior and the habit of doing good, is “an easy thing that requires no discipline or training.”¹⁴ And the direct consequence of adopting the aforementioned antagonism and prioritizing the exposure of love over theology is that of projecting upon Christ an image of a fabricated and superficial love, “a love that does not require the following of him to be morally good. But as we cheapen the Gospel to fit our own illusion about love we also cheapen the richness of our moral lives.”¹⁵ The theologian exemplifies the cheapening of moral behavior by evoking an episode from Robert Anderson’s “Tea and Sympathy,” in which the wife of a headmaster of a prep school has an intimate relationship with “a young man in order to provide him with the manly confidence necessary for him to make a success out of his life.”¹⁶ Although the woman’s gesture is intended to be well oriented, its significance will have other values if it is viewed from the perspective of her husband who gives maximum value to marital fidelity. By this example, the American theologian points out that Christians should “resist the temptation to reduce the Gospel to a single formula or summary image for the living moral.”¹⁷

Love cannot be defined in terms of situational individualism which invokes as a criterion of a moral life the individual needs and particular situations of life, but on the contrary “to love one as to be loved means we must refuse to meet the needs of some.”¹⁸ Therefore, the ethics fueled by individualism will make the biblical foundation from which it derives superfluous. What is implicit in Hauerwas’s writing is that he belongs to the collectivistic camp.

This is evident from Dorothy Sayers’ short story “Gaudy Night,” in which we are told that a student, disappointed to the point of despair that he had failed an exam, due to a work evaluated by one of the dons at Oxford as non-scholarly, took his own life. As a result, his widow, full of anger, blames the teacher incessantly, invoking the boundless suffering that was caused by the teacher. The answer comes from a culture of the community: “We must be willing, if we are to live morally in this life, to let others suffer for our principles.”¹⁹ That is, according to collectivism, people who do not fit into the normative perimeter of the community, regardless of whether it is university or ecclesiastical, will have

¹⁴ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 229.

¹⁵ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 229.

¹⁶ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 231.

¹⁷ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 231-232.

¹⁸ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 231.

¹⁹ Hauerwas, “Love’s not all you need,” 232.

to bear the consequences of not being included. According to this paradigm, the principle is more important than the person. At least, as is the case described above, the person will sometimes have to bear the consequences of not falling within the principal, moral or doctrinal perimeter. If the wishes of the individual are taken into account, then the doctrine should be “elasticized”, but if the unifying value of the doctrine is taken into account, then the individual should be excluded, and exclusivism will be labeled as action without empathy, the doctrine will be disavowed, and union will be claimed under the auspices of love, not theology.

But the question we intend to answer is: does love place itself on the opposite side of theology, should we prefer love over theology because the latter has disappointed us, has created confessional walls, and kept us at a distance from each other?

In the pages below we aim to demonstrate on biblical and theological grounds that, on the one hand, love has theological functions, that when we actually love, we think and discern, and on the other hand theology is an expression of love, that when we follow the Christian theological approach we express love, and not any kind of love, but its highest form, the love that does good to an enemy. So, we cannot say that we must limit ourselves to love because it has nothing to do with theology, it does not divide, it does not exclude and it does not hurt. It is true that love does not hurt, but neither does Christian theology, based correctly on what is most essential to it, because it is animated by love that does good to one’s hostile fellow man. Through love, collectivistic practices are driven by care for the one who cannot fit into the dogmatic perimeter, and also through love, individualistic reflexes are tempered by the concern not to produce tensions and imbalances within the community.

LOVE AS THEOLOGY

The thesis of this section is that love is fundamentally characterized by discernment, a specific faculty of theology. The whole argument has the following construction: Since rational discernment is a function of theology, and discernment, as such, is also a fundamental function of love, then love fundamentally has theological functions.

Discernment is a function of theology. Vincent Pelletier, referring to the writings of St. Ignatius in which types of discernment are highlighted, defines theological discernment as “accurate insight that with wisdom and grace allows one to see the truth of things as God sees them. [...] Discernment is to see into

the heart of things.”²⁰ Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman consider that “Discernment is the art of perceiving differences. It is also implicitly more, for perceiving differences is but the first step in a process of inquiry that ultimately leads to judgments of truth, of value, and of action. Is this idea true or false? Is this action right or wrong? Does this idea or action make me a good or moral or a bad and immoral person?”²¹

Whether we approach the notion from a metaphysical point of view, like Pelletier, or from a more epistemological and conventional point of view, as in the case of Lawler and Salzman, theological discernment is the competence to distinguish truth from error, good from evil, good consequences from the evil ones, by relating to God's perspective of seeing things as revealed in the canonical writings.

Love as a human feeling was analyzed from a social perspective by Pitirim A. Sorokin, a Russian who became professor at Harvard. He defines love in the following terms: “*love is the experience that annuls our individual loneliness; fills the emptiness of our isolation with the richest value; breaks and transcends the narrow walls of our little egos; makes us coparticipants in the highest life of humanity and in the whole cosmos; expands our true individuality to the immeasurable boundaries of the universe [...] love beautifies our life [...] love is goodness itself; therefore it makes our life noble and good [...] love experience means freedom at its loftiest.*”²²

He noted the existence of seven aspects of love, seven points of view from which love can be analyzed: religious, ethical, ontological, physical, biological, psychological, and social.²³

From a psychological point of view, love has, in Sorokin's analysis, five dimensions: intensity, extensity, duration, purity, and adequacy.²⁴ *The intensity of love* is, for example, “when the same person gives to others at one time 2 per cent of his wealth and at another 90 per cent of it, his second love action will be

²⁰ Vincent Pelletier, “Discernment,” *The Furrow* 58, no. 1 (2007): 35–42, 40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27665469>.

²¹ Michael G. Lawler, and Todd A. Salzman. “Moral Theology and the Will of God — Critical Discernment.” *The Furrow* 63, no. 10 (2012): 484–90, 484. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41709060>.

²² Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love, Types, Factors and Techniques of Moral Transformation*, Radnor, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002, 11.

²³ See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 3.

²⁴ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 15.

many times more intense than the first.”²⁵ *Extensivity of love* is distinguished by the scale or perimeter of the loved ones, which starts from self-love, which has a value of 0, to the love of loved ones, fellows, acquaintances and the whole world or universe.²⁶ This dimension fits well with the following distinction made by Anders Nygren: “In Judaism love is exclusive and particularistic: it is directed to one’s ‘neighbour’ in the original and more restricted sense of the word, and it is directed to ‘neighbours only’ ... Christian love, on the other hand, overleaps all such limits; it is universal and all-embracing.”²⁷ “*The duration of love, may range from the shortest possible moment to years or throughout the whole life of an individual or of a group.*”²⁸ This temporal dimension of love is found in the love of the mother who takes care of her sick child throughout the illness or in that of the person who financially supports his fellow man for many years, etc.²⁹ *The purity of love*, “*ranges from the love motivated by love alone - without the taint of a ‘soiling motive’ of utility, pleasure, advantage, or profit, down to the “soiled love” where love is but a means to a utili-tarian or hedonistic or other end, where love is only the thinnest trickle in a muddy current of selfish aspirations and purposes.*”³⁰ *The adequacy of love* consists in the identity between the subjective purpose of love and the objective consequences of its action.³¹ When love does not express this identity, two forms of inappropriate inadequacy appear: a) when the objective consequences of the action of love are different, to the point of opposition, from the purpose of love, as for example in the case of a mother who loves her child and wants to bring him up sociable and respectful, but the actions of her love pampered him instead, making him capricious, unpleasant, irresponsible, lazy and dishonest.³² b) when the actions of a person, which although not animated by love, prove to be a real advantage for one or more people.³³ In the catalogue of the first inadequacy may be included Werner G. Jeanrond’s text: “Love has been invoked in order to punish children, to persecute non-believers, heretics, and

²⁵ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16.

²⁶ See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16.

²⁷ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982 (1930–6), p. 63.

²⁸ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16.

²⁹ See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16-17.

³⁰ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 17.

³¹ Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 17.

³² See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 17.

³³ See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 17.

revolutionaries, to exclude and even burn women who dared to challenge the patriarchal order in church and society.”³⁴

Love, under this last aspect, highlighted by Sorokin, is characterized by the discernment to choose between the options of her actions in terms of probable consequences. So, from this point of view, we are talking about a pragmatic discernment of love. But love distinguishes not only among the actions best suited to its purpose, as Sorokin remarks, but also among a wide range of purposes, regarding the loved one from the point of view of his being and the circumstances in which he finds himself.

Therefore, love shows a pragmatic discernment, to which Sorokin expressly refers, but, let us admit, also a discernment that chooses among a considerable diversity of purposes that the person expresses or not, giving way to the actions that serve the better to the noblest and most beneficial of them. Given that Sorokin was limited to the first kind of discernment, we will highlight the latter as well, thus speaking of a teleological discernment, a discernment of significance. According to the latter, love discerns and organizes axiologically, both the purposes that the loved one feels, more or less, and those related to life circumstances. For example, a loving mother leans over her whimpering baby, trying to distinguish among his main needs and trying to meet them on time.

In the following lines we will refer to love in terms of its capacity to discern as evidenced by some New Testament texts, and we will refer in particular to the Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the Johannine Epistles.

The Gospels

In the Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew, there is invoked a love distinct from the love of the publican, from a love that shows benevolence and candor only to those who have previously had similar manifestations. The evangelist distinguishes the love that responds symmetrically, with benevolence to benevolence, from asymmetrical love, a love that responds to malicious attitudes expressed through curses, hatred, oppression, and persecution (Matthew 5:44)³⁵, with attitudes and actions opposed to hatred, with blessings, good deeds, and prayers to God for the well-being of the hostile. This love is not only characterized by a pragmatic and teleological discernment, but especially by a self-referential extensional discernment (we owe this taxonomy to Sorokin who wrote about the “extensity of love” noting the possibility of

³⁴ Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, London: T & T Clark International, 2010, 26.

³⁵ All the quotations from the Bible in this paper are taken from English Standard Version.

combining different dimensions of love into one act.³⁶), a love interested in the manifestation of divine love, which presents itself differently from that of the publicans, but which is specifically a love of the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:45). A love that widens its borders, encompassing even its enemies inside. The invocation of this love is the core of the theological reform of Jesus Christ and the hallmark of his messianic program. (The same extensive discernment of love is set forth by Luke in chapter 6: 26-36). The evangelist distinguishes especially in verses 33-36 between “the love of sinners” and the love of “sons of the Most High.”

Another exposition of the quality of love to discern is that of the text in Matthew 7: 9-10. These verses present, by means of a rhetorical question, the paternal love that denotes a pragmatic discernment: “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?” The love of the father knows how to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. The loving father will not give his son a snake if he asks for a fish, and he will not give him a stone if he asks for a loaf of bread, as he understands the fish and bread are necessary to feed his child.

In the same Sermon on the Mount, the evangelist Matthew emphasizes love in terms of its competence to discern between the objects of love. One is true and the other one is false. Here the extension of love is limited to God, and it does so by precise calculation and correct evaluation, in a word of discernment. God is not the same as Money, and the claims of one are different from the implications of the other, so “for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24).

In the Gospel of Mark, the dialogue between Jesus Christ and the rich young man is evoked. Out of love (Mark 10:21), Jesus of Nazareth correctly distinguished the young man's intimate need, namely, detachment from goods and attachment to God. And in chapter 12 of the same Gospel, cognitive love is invoked, which also implies discernment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30). The same cognitive love is expressed in Matthew 22:37 and Luke 10:27.

In Luke's Gospel, the love expressed by deeds towards one's neighbor is noted in the Samaritan's narrative. The Samaritan, by the gesture of his love, denotes

³⁶ See Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 20.

teleological discernment. He notices the need of the physically abused and finds the right means for his care and healing: “He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.” (Luke 10:34). The Samaritan discerns between stranger and neighbor, and he does so out of positive feelings, like that of pity. The Samaritan exemplifies the commandment of love in Leviticus 19:18.

In the Gospel of John, the discernment of love is especially noteworthy in chapter 3:16 where the sending of the Son for the redemption of those who believe in Him is highlighted. This teleological discernment is characterized by the remark of the deepest need that people have, the need for a Savior.

Thus, discernment as a dimension of love is found as self-referential extensional discernment expressly in the case of self-evaluating love pursuing the love of enemies (Matthew 5:44), a pragmatic discernment in the case of paternal love (Matthew 7: 9-10). The merciful Samaritan (Luke 10:34) and God Himself who sends His Son to fulfill the need for human salvation (John 3:16), an extension of critical discernment (Matthew 6:24) in the case of love that extends to God, but that does not include money in the perimeter of its extension.

Love in the Pauline Epistles

“It was Paul above all who established the terminology of love, especially of the noun *agape*, which he uses most frequently, and which becomes virtually a technical term for love in this sense.”³⁷ says James Brennan. From the point of view of the discernment of this feeling, one can notice the adequacy of the consequences of the action of love for its purpose in the following cases: the death of Christ as a divine action with eternal consequences for the benefit of men (Romans 5:8), the love of apostles which distinguishes among the actions most appropriate to the purpose of their love even disposing them for the supreme sacrifice (1 Thess. 2: 8), the love that discerns falsehood and chooses good over evil (Romans 12: 9), the love that distinguishes between doing evil and doing good and chooses the latter (Romans 13:10), love that builds up (1 Cor. 8:1), love that grows in knowledge (Philippians 1:9), love that distinguishes envy, distinguishes praise and pride, and chooses not to act out of envy, self-praise, pride, or hypocrisy (1 Cor. 13: 4, 2 Cor. 6: 6). There is also the aspect of love characterized by extensional discernment in the following

³⁷ James Brennan, “Charity in the New Testament,” *The Furrow* 20, no. 3 (1969): 1–7, 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27660071>.

situations: love that makes a positive discrimination against the disciplined person of the church (2 Cor. 2: 8), love that distinguishes the model of love in the person of Christ and that acts by virtue of it for the benefit of the Christian community (Eph. 5: 2).

Love in the Johannine epistles

In addition to the apostle Peter, who implicitly presents the cognitive side of love through the act of covering sins (1 Peter 4: 8) or that of avoiding duplication, the apostle John dedicates his writings to *agape* love, love which, as Brennan points out, is the affective cause of the incarnation and redemption: “Even more clearly than St. Paul John points to love as the motive of the incarnation and redemption (‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son’ (John 3:16)).”³⁸

And in the Apostle John we have the pragmatic discernment of love, highlighted by the fact that God’s actions are adequate to the achievement of the purpose of His love for man. This category includes the act of adoption (1 John 3: 1), the act of giving the life of Christ to sinful people (1 John 3:16), the act of sending His only begotten Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice (1 John 4:9, 4:10). All these actions of love show discernment, foresight, a divine plan carefully crafted so that the consequences of divine action are appropriate to the purpose of his love for man. Other Johannine texts that indicate discernment and calculation are distinguished by the following ideas: love discerns fear and seeks to drive it away (1 John 4:18), love that distinguishes between kinds of moral conduct, commandments, and non-conformity (2 John 1:6).

In concluding this section we can emphasize that there are thirty-three texts in the New Testament that highlight either the pragmatic discernment of love, an adequacy of the consequences of the action of love to its purpose, or a self-referential teleological or extension discernment. This fact confirms that love is not a feeling opposite to rationality, but on the contrary, it is a feeling intimately and inextricably correlated with human or divine thinking, calculation and judgment.

THEOLOGY AS LOVE

In this section we aim to show that Christian theology is fundamentally an act of love, so that we cannot dissociate theological activity from the love that has generated and continues to animate it. The whole argument has the following

³⁸ Brennan, “Charity in the New Testament,” 6.

construction: theology is the propositional and actual expression of a conception of God, God, in the Christian paradigm, is in essence divine love and He manifests this love, therefore Christian theology is the propositional and current expression of love and its manifestation.

Religion, considers H. D. Lewis, “must somehow supply itself with more information about God than that he exists. It claims in fact to know a great deal about him;”³⁹ And David K. Clark, referring to Christian theology, believes that this “seeks to articulate the *content* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the *context* of a particular culture.”⁴⁰ The fact that theology is actually an act of love we will see towards the end of this section. Looking at theology from a historical perspective, as Clark evokes it, we can see that in the patristic period theology simply meant “the doctrine of God.”⁴¹ Justin Martyr believed that God was manifested in the New Testament, and that “the NT does in fact fulfill the OT.”⁴² Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen leaned on the supreme value of knowing God through the Bible, which they viewed as superior, but subsequent to that which comes from philosophy.⁴³ Tertullian is the first to distinguish between the Christian content and the pagan content of knowledge.⁴⁴ Irenaeus lays the groundwork for both “the true apostolic tradition” and the Scriptures.⁴⁵ Although Irenaeus confronted the pagan thinking of the Gnostics, “he did not repudiate all pagan language or concepts. Rather, he expressed Christian truth and argument by adapting certain pagan categories to Christian use.”⁴⁶ Augustine gives faith the first place in the process of knowing God by reserving a secondary role to reason by preserving it by virtue of the tools it possesses, namely, those of knowledge of languages, dialectics, eloquence, the science of numbers, history, and laws.⁴⁷ Therefore, the theologian, “after initially accepting basic Christian truth, the Christian theologian moves forward, using

³⁹ H. D. Lewis, “What Is Theology?”, *Philosophy* 27, no. 103 (1952): 345–58, 354. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3747902>.

⁴⁰ David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, Method for Theology, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003, 56-57.

⁴¹ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 57.

⁴² Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 58.

⁴³ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 59.

⁴⁴ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 59-60.

⁴⁵ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 60.

⁴⁶ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 61.

⁴⁷ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 62.

reason to acquire richer understanding. In this dialectics, faith and reason reinforce each other.”⁴⁸

In the Middle Ages, John of Damascus, who lived in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, organized the theological approach in “prolegomena, theology, anthropology and soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology”⁴⁹, and Peter Abelard, who lived in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, presupposed a harmonization of patristic theological discourses.⁵⁰ For the first time Theology was first considered a science by Alain of Lille in the late 12th century.⁵¹ And Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, gave the highest medieval expression to theology. He emphasized that reason and faith are independent ways of knowing God, although only the latter can guide the human soul to the understanding of deep truths about God such as the Trinity and incarnation.⁵² Although theology uses philosophy to demonstrate its fundamental truths, “Christians must not allow philosophy to dominate theology. Theology goes beyond the bounds of philosophy.”⁵³

Then, also in the 13th century, St. Bonaventure pointed out that “theology requires, not merely intellect, but a living and personal faith that includes appropriate character traits and attitudes. Like science, knowledge of God is a gift of God.”⁵⁴ William of Ockham, a theologian of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, says Clark, prepared the ground for the appearance of the Protestant Reformation. He believed that “theology should address the spiritual needs of Christians. Ockham doubted the possibility of proving God philosophically. [...] he stressed in his theology the absolute power and freedom of God and in his spirituality a simple faith and a dependence on the Scriptures.”⁵⁵

In the theology of the Reformation, we have the case of M. Luther, who considers, Clark points out, that “Theology is about the gospel: God’s call to sinners to experience forgiveness by grace through faith. Salvation is God’s work entirely.”⁵⁶ The same soteriological perspective upon theology is found

⁴⁸ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 62.

⁴⁹ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 64.

⁵⁰ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 65.

⁵¹ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 65.

⁵² See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 66.

⁵³ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 67.

⁵⁴ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 68.

⁵⁵ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 69.

⁵⁶ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 70.

with Calvin too. For him, knowledge of God is naturally implanted by God “in the minds of all persons.”⁵⁷

Unlike the Reformers, Clark observes that Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of nineteenth-century liberal theology, “theology’s function is to analyze religious experience.”⁵⁸ Therefore, the perimeter of divine revelation extends from that of letter to that of experience.

In the twentieth century, Karl Barth refused to conceive that theology is based on any philosophical or scientific presupposition. He also rejected the idea of a systematic theology, and reconnected theology with Scripture, considered to be the Word of God, freeing it from the tribute paid to religious experience.⁵⁹ Since Christian truth is not revealed outside the specific circumstances of human life, this led Fr. Tillich to defend the thesis that theology cannot support the separation between revelation and human situation.⁶⁰ Tillich tried, Clark points out, a synthesis “between revelation as God’s work and theology as a human activity.”⁶¹ Theology must include both the knowledge of God and the human experience that derives from it. In other words, theology expresses the knowledge of God by becoming the very medium through which the message is actualized. The very transposition of theology into writing must be derived from an unwavering motivation for the manifestation of the person and character of God. As Lewis, points out the theologian, “above all he has himself to live a profoundly religious life.”⁶² Therefore, theology is not only a written transposition of God's character, but also an exposition by the very theological approach of what is most essential to the divine being. As we will see below, this is love.

The synthesis of knowledge and experience remained a concern and a challenge at the same time for all contemporary theologies, from the liberal and narrative to the evangelical ones. However, which will prevail, revelation or human experience? The tension from the competition between the two made theology suffer from cultural pressure, because, as Clark pointed out, “culture shapes theology.”⁶³ And this is especially true of individualistic thinking in which the community tends to “elasticize” theology so as not to upset anyone. This is also

⁵⁷ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 72.

⁵⁸ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 77.

⁵⁹ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 77-78.

⁶⁰ See Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 79.

⁶¹ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 80.

⁶² Lewis, “What is Theology?” 358.

⁶³ Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 80.

evident in evangelical theology: “From an evangelical perspective, the risk is that culture will take the dominant position over Scripture.”⁶⁴

What follows from the above brief description are the following two things: 1. Theology is both a propositional transposition about God and His work of human salvation, as well as an exposition of the character of the divine being, and 2. Theology, under the influence of culture, can undergo changes in accent or subtleties. In this section we aim to note the emphasis on love that theology seems to have lost, an emphasis that needs to be fully recovered.

According to the Christian narrative, God is, in His essence, love: “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4: 8, ESV). In other words, the entire Old Testament scripture is reduced to two commands: 1. To love God and 2. To love your fellow man (Matthew 22:37, 22:39, Mark 12: 30,31; Luke 10:27). These demands are echoed in two Old Testament texts: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

Jesus Christ expresses the most radical form of love by extending the perimeter of love so that it encompasses even enemies. In the well-known Sermon on the Mount, Christ addresses the new *Agape* command, saying, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” In this paragraph, Jesus Christ formulates a kind of love that transcends the love of the Gentiles, that is, love characterized by symmetrical love, love that responds evenly, that offers love to the love that it receives. Jesus requires that man give way to divine love, namely asymmetrical and super-generous love, the love that seeks to do good to the one who does harm to him, the love of which man is not capable unless he is animated by Christ’s divine spirit.

This new love evoked by Christ, which is the essence of His teaching, was received as such by the Apostle Paul. On the basis of this love he builds an ethic in accordance with which he claims to the church in Rome the following:

⁶⁴ Clark, *The Know and Love God*, 80.

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all [...] To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:17, 20-21). Unlike the Christian ethics, taken over and promoted by the apostles, the Jewish ethic was and is different.

The Jewish theologian Meir I. Soloveichick, in his article, issued in February 2003, “The Virtue of Hate”, contrasts Jewish ethics — which he unequivocally defends — with Christian ethics saying that for the Jews “hate can be virtuous when one is dealing with the frightfully wicked. Rather than forgive, we can wish ill; rather than hope for repentance, we can instead hope that our enemies experience the wrath of God.”⁶⁵ And this justification of hatred of the enemy is based, says the Jewish theologian, on the fact that God Himself shows a deep contempt for this category of people: “Jews hate the wicked because they believe that God despises the wicked as well.”⁶⁶ Of course, this ethical perspective differs from that expressed in the words of Christ when he was on the cross. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). It is not the same thing that occurs at Yom Kippur, when toward the end of the holiday, Jewish worshippers turn to God, referring to those they have deliberately wronged, saying, “Father, do not forgive them, for they know well what they do.”⁶⁷

Through the command of love that does good to the enemy, Jesus Christ revolutionized humanity by elevating it above gregarious behavior driven by the reflection of mutual and symmetrical love that, as easy as it is, is incapable of surmounting conflict. And conflicts are not few regardless of the community space or the historical circumstances. Or the very emphasis on what is more essential to Christianity, that is, on love that does good to the enemy, has been lost in the great religious events from the First Church Council to the Protestant Reformation and postmodern Christian missionary movements. What would the Protestant Reformation have looked like if the slogan ‘Sola Charitas’ had been added to the other slogans?

Therefore, if theology is the propositional and updated expression of God, and since God is the promoter of divine, elevated love, of that love which does good

⁶⁵ Meir I. Soloveichick, “The Virtue of Hate,” *First Things*, 2003, accessed: 02.25.2022, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/02/the-virtue-of-hate>.

⁶⁶ Soloveichick, “The Virtue of Hate.”

⁶⁷ Soloveichick, “The Virtue of Hate.”

to the hostile, then theology is the propositional and current expression of this love. This thesis is defended by the theologians of the first centuries.

The early theology of the church preserved the emphasis on love, which also includes enemies. The counsel of Christians by Ignatius is included in this catalogue. Here are his words: “Where they are in error, be steadfast in the faith; in face of their fury, be gentle. Be not eager to retaliate upon them. Let pure forbearance prove us their brethren. Let us endeavour to be imitators of Lord, striving who can suffer the greater wrong, who can be defrauded, who be set at naught, that not weed of the Devil be found in you.”⁶⁸ Clement of Rome has the same admonitions that he addresses, presenting the reason why the practice of love and kindness is fully justified: “But let us be kind to one another. According to the compassion and sweetness of him that made us. For it is written: «the merciful shall inherit the earth, and they that are without evil shall be left upon it; but the transgressors shall perish from off the face of it.”⁶⁹ Athenagoras notes the love of Christians, who, though uneducated, most of them differ in their ethical conduct from those who are educated but untrained in the principle of the love of Christ: “[...] For who of those that reduce syllogisms, and clear up ambiguities, and explain etymologies, [...] who of them have so purged their souls as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and, instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them (to abstain from which is of itself an evidence of no mean forbearance), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives? [...] But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth: they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law, they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbors as themselves.”⁷⁰ Tertullian points out that “it is not permitted to do evil even when it is deserved.”⁷¹ And Augustine brings to the fore the source of the enemy’s love by invoking faith and prayer: “I know, I have known by experience, that

⁶⁸ J. H. Srawley, ed., “The Epistle of St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch”, vol. I., Second Edition Revised (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910), 50.

⁶⁹ William, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, trans. and ed., “The Genuine Epistles of the Apostolical Fathers, St. Barnabas, St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, The Shepherd of Hermes and the Martyrdoms of St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, Written by Those Who Were Present at Their Sufferings” (New York: 1810), 154.

⁷⁰ Marcus Dods, George Reith and B.P. Pratten, trans., “The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras” vol. II., (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 387.

⁷¹ C. Dodgson, trans., “A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Anterior to the Division of the East and West, Tertullian” vol I, Apologetic and Practical Treatises, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842), 335.

there are Christian men who do love their enemies. If it seems to you impossible, ye will not do it. Believe then first that it can be done, and pray that the will of God may be done in you.”⁷²

Finally, we would like to point out that theology, through its pedagogical act, speaks of love, and that Christian theology, at its very dawn, was elaborated and written out of love for the church. Theology is animated by the very essence of God’s character, of love. The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Colossians, mentions his sufferings that accompany his endeavor to complete the revelation of God’s salvation: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, to make the word of God fully known [...] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:24, 25, 29). It follows from this text that the effort of the Apostle Paul to make available to the church the Revelation of Salvation, the fundamental theology, was made for the sake of the Christian community. The theological approach, therefore, is animated by love. In addition to the Epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle wrote other theological writings from prison. These are Ephesians (Ephesians 3:1), Philippians (Phil. 1:12-14) and Philemon (1:9). They are the living testimony that theology is a result of love, not just an expression of it. And the theological approach as an expression of love is shaped by the theology of the incarnation compressed by the Evangelist John in the text that evokes the fact that out of love the Word (the only Son of God, see John 3:16) was given through the incarnation and lived among men proving grace. and enunciating the truth about God: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).

CONCLUSION

From the introductory section on defining the problem, we noticed that against the background of the dialectics between collectivism and individualism, the exclusive appeal to love can be claimed, on the grounds that it is simply not dogmatic. The resort of the call to love derives from the dilemma that the dialectics mentioned highlight. Namely, if priority is given to the individual, then the community must extend its doctrine so that it covers the full range of ideas expressed by the individuals concerned. Or if priority is given to the community and the doctrine that makes possible its internal unity, then individuals who do not fully and loyally conform to its specific values must be

⁷² ***, Sermons on Selected Lessons of The New Testament by S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Vol. I, S. Matthew, S. Mark, s. Luke (Oxford: John Henry Parker, MDCCCXLIV/1844), 77, See also p. 80.

left out of its dogmatic and social perimeter. Therefore, what is more desirable, the valorization of the individual by sacrificing the unity of the collective or the valorization of the community and the doctrine that strengthens it by sacrificing the individual together with his specific idiosyncrasies? Or should this dilemma be viewed from a different perspective? Contemporary religious expressive individualism, as we have seen, denounces the aggressive rigidity of religious collectivism by accusing the theological centrality of collectivist circles of insensitivity, exclusivism, and lack of elementary humanity. The perspective pursued in this article is that divine love and Christian theology are intrinsically connected.

The thesis here is that love and theology are in a synergistic relationship. We cannot speak of love without speaking of its theological discernment, and we cannot embrace theology without embracing the love that animates theology and formulates its approach. When we love, in fact, we theologize, and when it does theology, we let ourselves, willingly or unwillingly, be animated by the love that inspires Christian theology. Therefore, in the two sections of this article, we have tried to show that the perception of love as separate from theology is unfounded for two reasons. First of all, love, as presented in the New Testament, is not a feeling devoid of cognitive functions and value judgments; on the contrary, it is capable of discernment and rationality. Therefore, the claim of founding society or religious assembly on love as pure feeling is not justified, because there is no genuine love without discernment and judgment. The moment a person is animated by genuine love, that person is immediately consumed by the desire to fulfill the highest good for the loved one to the detriment of a lower or mediocre good. So, the one who loves, discerns and selects.

Secondly, Christian theology is not the cause of the separation among people, of the creation of “Berlin walls” between fellow human beings, since, on the one hand, it is entirely animated by the divine love it expresses, propositionally and open, a love that made possible the encounter between man and God and the unity between man and his fellow man, even if man is sometimes willing to wear the unnatural armor of hostility, enmity, and aggression. Christian theology is the carrier of love that does good to one’s fellow man, finding for its endeavor unlimited resources and sufficient real motivations in God who took flesh.

Where there is divine love, there is also theology, and when Christian theology is expressed, then love is manifested expressively. The degree of

problematization of the dialectics between collectivism and individualism is profoundly alleviated by the fact that both actors involved in this dialectic, the individual and the community, are both direct providers of love, where it exists, of course, and its immediate beneficiaries. Collectivist practices will be carried out in such a way as to ensure that individuals who cannot fit into the dogmatic perimeter of the community and its conservationist decisions, will benefit from sincere care, true empathy, real sensitivity to their position and needs, both by adapting the discourse, the clear expression of the objective pursued as well as, above all, the availability of dialogue and the search for consensus on practical and human issues. Subsequently, collectivism will have the quality of offering love. But it can also be its beneficiary, if the exponents of individualism are animated by divine love. Because in relation to the community driven by collectivism, the individual will temper their actions if they prove to be generators of internal tensions and convulsions. Representatives of individualism, being aware of both its social value and the cognitive and axiological nature of love, will avoid genuine love, creating subversive and unconstructive actions. Instead, they will pursue their participation in dialogue, and at the same time the adaptation of their discourse, envisaging its correct reception and respect for the values managed and expressed by the collectivist community. Love, therefore, will help people to live together. In other words, the actions of the actors of the two social paradigms are closely guided by the principle of the adequacy of love, since divine love is theological, and Christian theology is inevitably animated by love.

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The human sinful nature: a mental by-product or a metaphysical anthropological dimension?

Ovidiu Hanc¹

ABSTRACT

The human sinful nature is utterly denied by our secular research because this anthropological dimension can be defined only in a theistic, moral framework. Because of this, any scientific and philosophical approach to the study of human nature is unsatisfactory without the vital contribution of Theology. Biblical anthropology is a *sine qua non* study field that will eventually elucidate the puzzle of man's soul. The human sinful nature is not only a mental by-product at the end of a long naturalistic sequence of events. It is rather an undeniable feature of the human soul that cannot be explained out by psychologists or neuroscientists. The human soul, and human conscience are reflections of a metaphysical anthropological dimension in which morality exists and sin is more than a dysfunction or a disorder of the brain. Theology enlightens our understanding of human nature, mind, and existence. Sin is a spiritual reality that cannot be neglected because it is a psychosomatic dimension that affects both soul and body. An endeavour to justify a purely scientific materialistic anthropological system negated of a spiritual dimension is to ignore the essence of human nature created in the image of God.

KEY WORDS: human sinful nature, essence of sin, conscience, anthropology, hamartiology, morality.

INTRODUCTION

According to the naturalistic paradigm that is so prevalent in scientific communities, human beings are a product of a long process of evolution in our universe. However, if we take biblical religious claims into consideration, we discover another reality in which human beings are products of an act of creation not evolution. This act of creation was followed by an act of rebellion of man toward God, an act that marked the fall in sin. This fall into sin marks an anthropological shift in which the 'sinful nature' of human beings governs the entire human existence.

Because of these two divergent models any study of the human nature will face these two antithetical paradigms: the naturalistic approach in which man is a

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product of a long process of evolution and the theological approach in which man is created by God.

Theology was traditionally considered as the queen of the science, however, with the rise of modern scepticism, the existence of God has shifted from a prerequisite of human existence to the fact that it has become not only a hypothesis but moreover, an unnecessarily hypothesis. The study on human nature has often fallen into a naturalistic paradigm in which theology as a science was demoted from any epistemological claims. Nevertheless, the use of theology and philosophy in an anthropological endeavour is essential for a holistic approach in which supernaturalism can not only inform our natural research but also elucidate it.

This study tries to advocate several aspects. First, it argues that an attempt to demote theology as a biased and unscientific field of science, is simultaneously unacademic and unscientific. Such an approach is methodologically flawed since it confuses epistemology with subjectivity. It is like an attempt to discard any historical record of a specific nation written by that nation on the grounds of subjectivity. In the end, who else is more authorized to write a history of a specific country if not the historians of that country. Such an historical record can be subjective and unhistorical, but it should not be demoted as unreliable on the sheer fact that it is subjective, hence unhistorical. The use of theological studies to advocate theological dogmas seems a circular argument, nevertheless, not only in humanistic studies but also in scientific field we use scientific methods to demonstrate scientific theories.

Second, any epistemological endeavour that seeks to divorce a dialogue between science and theology will end up creating a naturalistic anthropology that cannot function without a moral dimension. Any use of an exclusive scientific critical approach to define humanity is like trying to define beauty by using physical measuring tools. Because of this, the use of theology alongside any scientific science is not only necessary but also compulsory. An attempt to create an anthropological system void of a spiritual dimension is to ignore the very root of the nature of man created in the image of God. This pivotal theological concept is definitory for all its subsequent derivations like anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and doxology.

Third, the use of fundamental concepts as mind, soul, consciousness, and sin must be scrutinized not only by philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and doctors, but also by theologians.

HUMAN BEINGS: A BIOLOGICAL, A DUALISTIC OR A UNIFIED BEING?

The Naturalistic/Biological paradigm

The naturalistic view is that in which the existence of man is a product of a complex process of evolution. The concept of a 'sinful nature' in human beings is not something that the biological paradigm takes into consideration. The concept of the 'sinful nature' requires a moral framework, otherwise it is futile to try to assess human behaviour in a moral vacuum. In a biological paradigm the history of the Holocaust is not morally repulsive and produces no more indignation as hunting an antelope by a lion in the Savannah. Because of the lack of a moral framework, the study of human nature in a pure naturalistic or materialistic setting is inadequate.

Natural science can only try to answer the question of how we appeared on this universe; however, these answers are not beyond dispute. Although it claims to be a scientific theory, when it comes to objective analysis the theory is lacunar and unsatisfactory. For example, the naturalistic paradigm cannot account for the complexity of human beings nor for the number of human beings on earth. Regarding the complexity of human beings, the complexity of human body does not account for an accidental appearance of a living cell from a primordial soup that evolved into complex organisms. The appearance of new genetic information is unanswered since the natural phenomenon that can generate genetic information is not known. Similarly, the naturalistic paradigm is deficient in explaining the origin of human life that is generally presented in terms of evolution in hundreds of thousands of years. A simple conservative growing rate cannot account even for a time span of 50,000 years that would make the world's population a staggering figure.² The sheer number of people today is out of sync with the evolution theory.

William Lane Craig argued that in our post-Christian culture, reason and religion are at odds. In this context only the physical sciences are taken as authoritative, and "the picture of the world which emerges from the genuine sciences is a thoroughly naturalistic picture."³

Nevertheless, even though scientific naturalism shapes indeed our secular cosmological framework, the origin of human beings is still debated today and requires a broader framework that goes beyond scientifically observed natural

² White Monty, 'Billions of People in Thousands of Years?', Answers in Genesis, accessed 12 March 2022, <https://answersingenesis.org/evidence-against-evolution/billions-of-people-in-thousands-of-years/>.

³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 16.

laws. The naturalistic paradigm has failed to give a convincing explanation on the origin of human beings, but it also failed to give a plausible clarification on the existence of the human conscience. Because of this lacunar paradigm, the use of philosophy and theology is needed to contribute to the study of human nature.

The Dualistic paradigm

This paradigm is a philosophical paradigm that takes into account the existence of a meta-physical dimension of body and soul. Starting from antiquity, philosophers considered that human beings exist in two dimensions: a physical part (*i.e.* body) and an immaterial part (*i.e.* soul). At first it was believed that sin is a matter of the body. In ancient philosophy, the soul was considered good, but it was trapped in the prison of the body. Since the body was regarded as bad, it functioned as a reality that obstructs of the manifestation of the divine nature. This concept is the basis of the teaching of purification, teaching which aims to overcome the pleasures of the body.

Schleiermacher, who was influenced by Plato's philosophy defined sin as the fight between body and soul. In this theory sin is due to body pleasures and instincts. Based on the Greek idealism that supports the superiority of the mind to the body and on the biblical texts in which Paul speaks of the flesh (σάρξ *sarx*) and its impact on the believer's life, sin is defined in this conception as the tendency of the lower or physical nature to dominate and control the higher or spiritual nature.⁴ Theologians still debate the extend in which this concept is present in the theology of the New Testament, as Gnosticism was prevalent in the thinking milieu of the first century.

The Biblical paradigm

The Bible presents the history of the creation, the fall, and the redemption of man. With the fall of man, sin has led to the corruption of man's nature and separation from God. From the moment of the fall, the whole human existence was rooted in sin. All evil deeds done by man are ultimately external manifestations of the sin that resided within. Sin has altered the image of God in man, and led to the corruption of the human soul.

Outside the spiritual realm it is futile to tackle the concept of sin. Sin is a concept that can be used only in a religious sense. An attempt to define sin outside the theological context will lead to failure. Sin is a separation and an alienation from God and a reality that is intrinsically anti-God. A broader analysis of hamartiology in line with the doctrine of God is necessary. Sin should first be

⁴ For a more broad analysis of the doctrine of sin and its nature see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 529.

defined in line with the doctrine of God and then applied to the doctrine of man. Ridderbos noted that both the essence of sin and true manhood, finds its explanation in the fundamental fact that man was created by God.⁵

In opposition to the dualistic paradigm, the biblical paradigm advocates that the root of sin is not in the flesh but in the soul. The body is regarded as good (2 Cor. 6:19-20), while sin is produced in the soul. Ultimately sin includes the whole being, including the body; however the essence of sin is found in the soul. Sin is an intrinsic spiritual reality, not a physical reality.

Sinful human nature: soul or sickness?

The soul represents the sum of our human reality, existence, and personhood (mind, emotions, and will). Our conscience is the inward metaphysical capacity that attests our spiritual dimension and witness about a reality that transcends the physical one. Our consciousness attests that our existence is more than what we see, feel, and think and bears witness to our need for God and the reality of our sinful nature.

The concept of morality and consciousness

The philosophical debate on morality goes back to Plato's moral theory and rationality. For him it is rational to be moral. Humans have goodness insofar as they stand in some relation to the Good, which subsists in itself.⁶ Philosophers debated extensively on the nature of morality and consciousness.⁷ For Immanuel Kant, conscience represents a special kind of moral judgement. His conclusion in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is as follows: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."⁸ Kant's reflection on human conscience is used by C. S. Lewis to develop his argument for God grounded not only in the general revelation but especially in the moral law.⁹

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis argued that the problem of all human neurotic manifestation is not *sin*, but the childhood experiences of every individual, experiences that carry a significant emotional substance. This view

⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 104.

⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 104.

⁷ For a succinct analysis of the moral argument see Craig, 104, 172–83.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 351. For a thorough analysis of Kant's view of conscience see Umut Eldem, 'Kant's Conception of Conscience', *Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 11 (2020): 110.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 145–68.

was seen as a ‘revolutionary methodology’, therefore, many psychologists attempted to solve matters of the human soul through therapeutic psychiatric practices. In this approach, the solution to the human dysfunctionalities is not religion but psychoanalysis.

Although Freud influenced in a significant way the psychiatric approach of the 20th century, the results were not so promising. Orval Hobart Mowrer, one of the most prominent psychologists of the 20th century, is known for his research on behaviour therapy but also for his stand against the tendency to shift from the concept of “sin” to “sickness”. Mowrer admits that while the psychologists heralded the epoch-making acclaimed liberation from sin as a great incubus to have the excuse of being sick rather than sinful, they have cut the very roots of our being by becoming amoral, ethically neutral, and free.¹⁰

The impulse towards a reality that is beyond our naturalistic world cannot be explained in a satisfactory manner by psychological theories or by psychiatric treatment.¹¹ According to Freud, our search for *God/a god* is best explained by our childish behaviour. We need a father and because of this we *invent* God, as a fatherly figure that will eventually fulfil our intrinsic need. Nevertheless, the Scriptures offer a radically shifted paradigm in which God is in his pursuit of the man that He had created. The man has alienated from God and hence all his existence is unfulfilled apart from this divine relationship.

From the scientific point of view, the study of consciousness is a huge area of study, and it is far from finding a consensus among psychologists, psychiatrists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, and/or theologians. The classical approach to the concept of mind was coined by René Descartes in his Cartesian Dualism. According to his philosophy of the mind, which is a mind-body dualism, the mental phenomena represent a reality that is meta-physical, since the mind exists independently of the human brain. This approach was challenged by Gilbert Ryle, who postulated in his critique that our mind is just a ghost in the

¹⁰ O Hobart Mowrer, “‘Sin’: The Lesser of Two Evils’, *American Psychologist* 15 (1960): 301–4. For a response to Mowrer’s view see Edward Pohlman, ‘Psychologists Take Another Look at Sin’, *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 15, no. 3 (1961): 144–52; Russell J. Becker, ‘Sin, Illness and Guilt’, *The Christian Century* 83, no. 33 (1966): 1007–9.

¹¹ Joubert Callie argued in an objective manner that as psychiatry took biblical concepts and secularized them, the psychiatrists faced several fundamental challenges, not being able to escape their crisis. Callie Joubert, ‘A Christian Response to the Crisis in Psychiatry’, *Answers Research Journal*, no. 7 (2014): 173–87. Although concepts like sin were seen as restrictive to research, scientists use theological and moral concepts such as sin, conscience, forgiveness, etc. not as secularized concepts but as vital instruments in the psychiatric field. Sara E. Lewis and Rob Whitley, ‘A Critical Examination of “Morality” in an Age of Evidence-Based Psychiatry’, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 36, no. 4 (2012): 735–43.

machine. Recent neuroscientists and psychologists continue to propose different or divergent views on consciousness.

In his study on conscience and the personal and social effects of the suppression of it, Budziszewski admitted that the natural law is unconsciously presupposed -- even when consciously denied -- by modern secular thinkers, too. He noted that “[e]verything in conscience can be weakened by neglect and erased by culture.”¹² Budziszewski correctly argues that although conscience works in everyone, it does not restrain everyone. Conscience is a universal reality of human nature that can be considered or ignored.

From a theological and biblical perspective, the consciousness is not a mere cognitive feature of our brain, nor a product or a by-product of our complex mind engine. Our conscience reflects the existence of our soul that is created by God. We are psychosomatic entities that function in a close relation between mind and body. However, the biblical theology of our mind is integrated in the whole concept of soul and conscience. As spiritual beings, humans do not have a soul. They are a soul that has a body. Although the biblical theology of the value of our bodies is important and our existence is contingent to our soul-body reality, our physical bodies are of secondary importance in relation to our souls.

In his study of neuroethics, Ben Mijuskovic admits that Christian theologians and ethicists will think differently from their secular colleagues about the conceptual and practical questions raised by disorders of consciousness. He correctly admits that “[i]f we ask what it means to be a conscious self, Christian theology is likely to raise the question of the soul.”¹³

From a biblical point of view conscience is part of the human soul (ψυχή *psuchē*) and represents the inner work of the divine law that is bearing witness of the moral reality, functioning as an inner judge of self-condemnation or self-approval (Rom. 2.14-15). The term for conscience is συνείδησις (*suneidēsis*), is found 30 times in the New Testament and represents the moral awareness as a divine given ability to perform introspection and self-evaluation.

Sin: guilt or sickness?

Karl Menninger, a renowned psychiatrist of the 20th century performed extensive research on the human condition. His book “Whatever Became of Sin?” highlighted the tendency of our society to reject and dismiss the idea of human sin, and to replace this concept with medical or psychological ones like illness,

¹² J. Budziszewski, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 25.

¹³ Ben Mijuskovic, *Consciousness and Loneliness: Theoria and Praxis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 106.

dysfunction, syndrome, disorder, and so on. The outcome of this tendency is that humans are no longer held responsible for their action. Human actions and interaction can thus fall only under the diagnosis of medical or psychiatric investigation. Menninger notes that today there is no more mentioning of the notion of sin, although this used to be a fundamental concept used by the prophets. “It was a word once in everyone’s mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles—sin with an “I” in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything?”¹⁴

The result of such an approach is that man becomes exempt from any kind of moral responsibility for his actions. Such an exclusion would amount to an amnesty for any reprehensible act, and the concept of moral or social justice would simply be nullified. If man is no longer guilty but only sick, then guilt is no longer an inherent reality characteristic of man but an abstract external reality.

Any analysis of human being and behaviour outside an absolute moral framework will end up in a humanism in which relativity will cancel out any concept of individual responsibility. In the humanist paradigm man is good, and social values are contextual conventions that have no absolute moral dimension. Man thus becomes God. In such a theological system, we will not find the notion of sin, because sin would be an attack on the basic values of humanism. Sin from within is replaced by a disease from without, and if this “disease” cannot be diagnosed or treated, the guilt does not belong to the patient but to the limitations of medical or psychological treatment.

Sin: an error in the evolutionary process or an error in the creationist act?

The simple fact of addressing the concept of sin in relation to human beings is very challenging for the naturalistic paradigm. If sin, as a moral reality, does not exist, why do we find this concept in any given social and religious culture? If a concept does not exist, the need for a non-existing concept should not exist as well. Because of this we should analyse whether the (hypothetic) existence of a non-existing concept is not an error in the naturalistic evolutive framework. Why and how has this error appeared?

Regarding the religious paradigm, the existence of a human sinful nature is something that appeared as an error in the creation history. However, we should also ask ourselves whether the human sinful nature is a testable hypothesis.

There are other attempts to define sin through metaphysical or anthropological dualism. In metaphysical dualism, the distinction between the spiritual and the physical world is distinguished, the sin being the consequence of belonging to

¹⁴ Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1974), 13.

the physical world. In the anthropological dualism the distinction is made between the outward and the inward man. The outward man is considered inferior and sensual, while the inner man is regarded as being in connection with God. When scholars try to explain the notion of sin, however, without a theological framework, this endeavour is futile.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SIN

From a Biblical point of view, sin represents any form of conscious or involuntary disobedience that man has in relation to God or his divine Law. Sin entered the world when man was deceived by Satan and sinned choosing to disobey God's command. The devil is described by John as the one who sins from the beginning (1 Jn. 3:8). The devil tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God, thus they became sinners. The sinful nature is a universal reality for human beings. By falling into sin man has turned away from God. This alienation is multifaceted and is manifested in spiritual death, hostility, and rebellion towards God, and because of this the entire existence and the human personality (intellect, will, and feelings) was affected by sin.

Terminology of the Old Testament

There are quite a few words in the Old Testament Hebrew that describe the notion of sin. The verb חָטָא (*cha.ta*) 'to sin' / חֵט (*chet*) 'sin' is the most frequent, together with its derivatives.¹⁵ The term is found more than five hundred times and encapsulates the idea of missing the target, making an error, or deviating from the proposed target. The principle behind the term is that of falling short of a certain standard or norm. This word is most often used in the context of deviations from moral or religious standards or in a ceremonial context connected with the sacrifices for sins (Lev. 4:1-35). Technically it can have an amoral sense referring to a slinger missing a physical target (Jud. 20.16), but the most common feature has a moral dimension in relation to God's standards. The term can often describe the formal aspect of violating God's law without describing the inner motivation for sin, but the main feature of the term is that of deliberate sin.

The term רָע (*ra.a*) 'be evil' / רָע (*ra*) 'bad' represents a bad reality, a malignant or an evil one. The term פָּשַׁע (*pa.sha*) to transgress, to rebel / פְּשָׁע (*pe.sha*) transgression, rebellion refers to the action by which an agreement or a relationship between two parties or persons is broken (Ex. 22.9; 1 Kings 12.19; 2 Kings 1.1). In a ceremonial or religious context, this term alludes to a man's rebellion against God's sovereignty and holiness (Ex. 23.21; 1 Kings 12:19).

¹⁵ to sin (*cha.ta* - חָטָא); sin (*chet* - חֵט); sinner (*chat.ta* - חָטָא); sin (*cha.ta.ah* - חָטָא); sin (*chat.ta.ah* - חָטָא).

The term אָוֹן (a.von) ‘iniquity’/ הַחַטָּא (a.vah) ‘to pervert’ describes the aspect of depravity, perversity, or guilt, but also describes the consequence or punishment for iniquity. It occurs for the first time referring to Cain as a reference to his punishment (Gen. 4.13). Thus, the term refers to both the deed and/or consequence of a deliberately committed evil (e.g. Lev. 5.1, 17; 7.18; Job 7.21; 10.6; Dan. 9.5, etc.).

The term שָׁגָה (sha.gah) ‘to wander’/ שְׂגִיָּא (she.gi.ah) ‘error’ denotes the concept of departing from a good path. Often this term is used in cases of sins committed out of ignorance, while in Lev. 4.13 and Num. 15.22 is especially referring to unintentional sin committed without a deliberate and wilful decision.

There are many other related words that encapsulate the idea of rebellion, moral failure, stubbornness, treachery, etc.

Terminology of the New Testament

In the New Testament we have several variations of words and derivatives that outline the idea of sin. The most common word is ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) and describes the spiritual state of mankind and an offense or wrongdoing against God (Rom. 3:23). The term implies a wilful and culpable attitude, not to be confused with unintentional wrongdoing. Another term used is ἀδικία (*adikia*), which reflects an injustice or dishonesty and is often used in the legal field (Lk. 16:8-9). This term contrasts the idea of righteousness and justice (Acts 1:18; 8.23; Rom. 1:18; 3:5; 6:13; 1 John 1:9; 5:17).

We also find a suite of other words and derivatives that outline the broader concept of sin either as an offense against a legal system or moral code, or as an injustice committed against humans or divinity. Such examples are ἀνομία (*anomia*) as lawlessness (Matt. 7:23; Rom. 4:7; Heb. 10:17; 1 Jn 3:4); ἀσέβεια (*asebeia*) as a godless state; παράπτωμα (*paraptōma*) as a trespass; παράβασις (*parabasis*) referring to a violation of a law (Rom. 4:15; 1 Tim. 2:14); and many other terms reflecting stumbling, guilt, deviation, disobedience, etc.

The essence of sin

Any study of the essence of sin requires a terminological clarification, because there is a difference between the essence of sin and the manifestation of the state of sin. The essence of sin is an *a priori* reality or primary cause that determines any other subsequent form of sin. It is the difference between a virus or an infection and a disease. There are many proposals when it comes to the essence of sin; however it is important to note that various theological terminologies that were employed, at times, vary more in terminology than in description.

Disobedience

The most common biblical terms about sin in both the Old Testament and the New Testament have the meaning of missing the target or deviating from God's absolute and objective standard. In this sense, the essence of sin can be understood as man's disobedience to God. The history of biblical characters gives us examples in this regard of disobedience to God's commandments and ordinances. Disobedience can therefore be the cause of every sin or sinful attitude of man.

Man acts freely, wilfully against the will of God. Man's actions are essentially a declaration of autonomy from the divine standard, and the violation of this standard can be perceived as the root of all sins. But the question we can ask ourselves is whether disobedience is a form of manifestation of sin and not its essence, because disobedience may have a reason behind it to produce disobedience. Disobedience is not a reality that appears *ex abrupto* without a motivation for this state.

Rebellion

For some, the essence of sin is rebellion against the absolute sovereignty of God. It is difficult to differentiate between disobedience and rebellion, as they represent similar states in many aspects that interconnect and interrelate. Sin is not just an act of disobedience but a much deeper rebellion. Man's rebellion is the total and universal rejection of God's will and sovereignty.

However, the phenomenon of rebellion cannot be justified as an intrinsic reality. The manifestation of this phenomenon is most likely caused by another primary reality. Rebellion materializes in common sins, but it is a cause in itself. Rebellion is the manifestation of a state of sin, not its essence.

Sensuality

Schleiermacher defined sin as the struggle between body and soul.¹⁶ In this theory sin is due to bodily pleasures and instincts. Based on Greek idealism that upholds the superiority of the mind over the body and the biblical texts in which Paul speaks of nature and its impact on the believer's life, sin is defined in this conception as "the tendency of the lower or physical nature to dominate and control the higher or spiritual nature."¹⁷

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III.3 The Doctrine of Creation (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 35.

¹⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 529.

There are other proposals to define the essence of sin through a metaphysical or anthropological dualism to explain Pauline anthropology.¹⁸ In metaphysical dualism the distinction is made between the spiritual and the physical world: the man on the outside is considered inferior and sensual, while the man on the inside should seek to be in touch with God.

However, for Paul, the flesh is a sin-producing power not because it is sin *per se*, but because sin uses the flesh as an instrument. It is true that Paul speaks of the flesh as something that leads to sin (Rom 7:5, 8, 18, 23, 25, 8:5), but the concept of σάρξ (*sarx*) must be seen in the context of Pauline theology as a whole. The *flesh* in Paul's theology is not only the sphere of the sensual or bodily reality¹⁹ but also the spiritual sphere (Gal. 5:19-21). Paul emphasizes in his theology the importance of the body (Rom. 12:1, 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 2 Cor. 7:1) and does not classify human flesh as the source of sin.

The nature and essence of sin is not in the body since sin is spiritual in nature. Calvin stated that it is pointless and foolish to restrict the corruption only to what are called the impulses of the senses, or sensuality.²⁰ The Bible's teaching on the body does not render the idea that it is the source or the essence of sin.

Privatio

Bavinck advocated the term *privatio* to explain the essence of sin.²¹ Sin has many facets. By *privatio* sin is nothing positive, but only a deprivation of good things (obedience-disobedience, faith-unbelief, righteousness-unrighteousness).²² However, deprivation of all that is good is rather the effect of sin, not its essence. Leibnitz noted an aspect of the *privatio* theory that sin is seen as the result of man's finitude and weakness.²³ The central idea of this position is that people sin because they were created inferior. In this theory sin is seen as inevitable. Leibnitz held the theory that the existence of sin is consistent with the divine perfections. Sin is inevitable because it arises from the necessary limitations of the creature.²⁴ Because man is limited in his powers, Leibnitz asserts, he is prone to sin.

¹⁸ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 100.

¹⁹ Ridderbos, 101.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. II, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 252.

²¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 137–51.

²² G. C. Berkower, *Studies in Dogmatics: Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 255.

²³ R. C. Sleight, 'Leibniz's First Theodicy', *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 481–99; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013), 134.

²⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:135.

Such a theory, however, leads to the conclusion that God, is the creator of an imperfect man who had no chance of not sinning. Sin in this equation is a necessary evil.

However, sin was man's choice not his destiny. The biblical teaching concerning the creation of man is that he is made in the image of God with free will. If God had not created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or forbidden man to eat from it, then even if man was finite, he would not have the ability to sin. So, sin is about choice, not about the deprivations imposed on man. Man has sinned precisely because, in the freedom God has given him, he has abused it. The freedom man enjoys, however, is the *framework* for the occurrence of sin, not its *cause*. It is not the abuse of freedom alone that leads to sin. There are sins produced not only by committing them, thus making an abuse, but also by omission. Thus, simple disobedience to God in doing something is a sin committed not through abuse of freedom.

Egocentrism

Sin, having self-centeredness at its core, brings about a shift from the state in which God is the centre of man's life to the state in which man becomes the centre of his world. Sin is done against God, therefore, egocentrism is the turning away from God. Augustine stated that "pride is the beginning of sin."²⁵ Calvin also states that Augustine was not far off when he asserted that pride is the beginning of sin and identifies infidelity as what was the root of rebellion,²⁶ and in this infidelity is found pride.

In its essence, sin is rebellion against God. In daily life almost all of man's actions are directed towards himself. This can also be very clearly seen in the fact that the first commandment in the law is that of having no other gods than God. Since each commandment forbids one sin, the most important commandment (the first in the Law) is meant to forbid the most "important" sin. As Jesus said, the whole Law is summed up in this first commandment (Matthew 22:36-38). Man's sin is that he seeks to make himself God.

Moreover, sin appeared in the universe when Satan sinned, and this occurred because of a self-centred attitude. Sin is a reality that is not necessarily anthropological. Sin exists independently of man, so hamartiology has anthropological effects but is not limited to the field of anthropology. The difficulty in defining sin is that it is analysed strictly in an anthropological context and the different aspects of sin manifested by man make it difficult to

²⁵ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 505.

²⁶ Calvin, *Calvin*, II:143.

answer. There are texts in the Bible that speak of angels and the devil sinning (2 Peter 2:4; 1 John 3:8).

The essence of sin can be most clearly deduced from the study of the first sin that was committed in the universe. The appearance of sin in the universe was caused by Satan. In Is. 14:12-15 and 2 Thess. 2:4 we see Satan's actions being directed against God. His desire has been and always will be to be God or above God. Self-centeredness underlies his actions.

Barth supported the idea that sin is based on pride. His Christological model reveals that sin is pride, in contrast to the humility of the Son of God.²⁷ God is already humble even though man continues to be proud. Brunner asserted that man has his origin in God, but sin is the reversal of this.²⁸ In this context, he defines sin as defiance, arrogance, desire to be equal with God, emancipation, deliberate separation from the hand of God.

In his study of the nature and origin of sin, Robert Culver stated that Satan's basic motive was pride. It may also be called selfishness."²⁹ Starting our analysis of sin exactly where it first appeared, we conclude that self-centeredness is the essence of sin. "Sin in its essence is the act of preferring self or another being over God. It is the placing of man's ego before love and worship of the Creator."³⁰

Karl Menninger has a broader use of terms to identify the Great Sin. He notes that *acedia* is the heart of all sin, but this sin is also called selfishness, or alienation, or schizophrenia, or egocentricity, or separation.³¹ Although the terminology differs from scholar to scholar, the idea of man's egocentricity or self-centeredness is prevalent.

Arguments against this position are based on those situations where sins do not have a self-centred cause (loving a person more than God, devotion to a cause that is against God). Charles Hodge combats the idea that selfishness is the essence of sin because, in this case, happiness is the ultimate goal.³² This theory, he argues, destroys the idea of the moral good and confuses what is right with what is expedient. Yet egocentrism does not destroy the idea of the moral good because there is no exclusion of the positive side in this equation. Not every

²⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.1 The Doctrine of Reconciliation (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 358–513.

²⁸ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 129.

²⁹ Robert Culver, 'The Nature and Origin of Evil', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129, no. 514 (1972): 114. Culver, 114.

³¹ Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* 189.

³² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:145.

self-centred action that aims at happiness is sin. Almost all human actions, however, have as their goal their own person.

But a distinction must be made between the *essence* of sin and the *effect* of sin. Once sin has penetrated the human being it has led to a distortion on all levels, including the rational. Idolatry, for example, does not necessarily have an egocentric cause, although to a certain extent it should not be ruled out, but it occurs against a background of sin-distorted thinking (the existence of other deities). Idolatry is not caused by self-centeredness, but it is the effect produced by sin, which was produced by self-centredness. The primary essence of sin is self-centeredness, and it was produced when Satan wanted to be God.

CONCLUSION

Malcolm Muggeridge is credited the saying: “The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact.” Human depravity is indeed a verifiable characteristic of humanity; however, this depravity can be defined only in a theistic, moral framework. Humans like to think that they are good and moral, but man’s inclination is inherently towards evil, violence, wars, and hatred. Within a secular framework, the concept of sin, depravity and human responsibility become futile. At the intersection of Philosophy, Science and Theology we can objectively admit that without an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of human nature, any scientific and philosophical approach is unsatisfactory without the vital contribution of Theology. This inter-disciplinary dialogue is possible only if our definition of reality is not *a priori* naturalistic.

Scientists offer various solutions to the problem of sin. This problem is approached from both atheistic/secular and theistic perspectives. Secular psychologists propose the concept of illness as an answer to the dilemma of sin and human conscience. Secular neuroscientists deal with the problem strictly medically since the reality of sin is not a premise of modern secular medicine. Secular philosophers move beyond psychoanalysis to the mental phenomenon as a cognitive by-product.

On the other hand, psychology, medicine, philosophy, and theistic theology start with a holistic approach to the human being in which soul and consciousness are integral realities of human existence. Sin is a spiritual reality that cannot be neglected, a psychosomatic dimension that affects both soul and body. The sinful nature of man is indeed one of the most empiric testable hypotheses. The rebuttal of the human moral dimension is ultimately rooted in man’s desire for autocracy. The existence of a human sinful nature implies the existence of a moral dimension that makes man morally responsible before God. The natural

paradigm cannot give an answer to the realities related to human nature yet is by far the best justification for an autocratic existence.

The foundation of sin consists in man's desire to be equal with God. The essence of original sin is man's apostasy and his deep tendency to be self-absorbed. The solution to the sinful self-centred nature is the redemption through Christ. The sacrifice on Calvary is explained in the context of human self-centeredness - God gave everything for man so that man would come out of the self-centeredness created by sin (and its consequences) and give everything to God. God stripped Himself so that man would give up himself. Sin in its essence is the act of preference to self or another being before God. It is placing the ego of man in the face of the love and worship of the Creator.

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