# SEMĂNĂTORUL (THE SOWER)

## The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research

---

### Volume 4, Number 1

---

This present publication comprises the first part of Volume 4 of Semănătorul (The Sower): The Emanuel Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research. The Sower Journal presents submissions by the Faculty of Theology of Emanuel University, Oradea, plus contributions from International scholars. The articles are not only published here but have been shared on line with Faculty members and are available on the Emanuel website.

The publication of the Journal has been made possible through the commitment of members of the Emanuel Faculty, the collaboration with Emanuel University Press, the Emanuel "Ethics and Society" Research Centre, and the contribution of distinguished colleagues from The Irish Baptist College, Moira, Northern Ireland and Spurgeon's College, London.

The Journal provides an opportunity for the Faculty members in Emanuel to present a range of articles on various aspects broadly related to challenges in communicating Christian truth in a modern culture. Along with their International colleagues, papers are presented which address important biblical issues, provide opportunity for research, and in addition, often cover practical pastoral themes. Since articles come from different communities across the world there are occasional differences in matters of style etc. But it has been deemed that these are not such as to detract from the profit to be derived from reading them.

Co-editor,
Dr. Hamilton Moore

# CONTENTS

# CREATING AN ORGANISATION ETHIC FROM THE GROUND UP

## PHILIP MCCORMACK[1]

*Spurgeon's College*

ABSTRACT: When an organization produces and issues its code of ethics, often specific to the needs of that particular organization or institution, it frequently contains a brief introduction from the Chief Executive, Chairman or within the military, a Service Chief. This is a top-down exercise. Very good reasons why this should be so can be easily imagined. In some instances, the "brand" of the organization will be inextricably linked with the professional behavior of its people. In others, the conduct of its personnel outside of the workplace might affect public perception of the "brand." It is difficult to see how it could be possible to produce an organization ethic without the explicit endorsement by the senior management of any organization or institution. This article will maintain that there may, however, be a serious problem with a "top-down" approach in the 21st century. Frequently, there are two implied assumptions in these policies: firstly, that personnel within an organization/ institution will understand the ethical language used; secondly, that the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood are known, recognized and accepted. This article challenges the validity of these assumptions. It contends that ethical language has become fragmented, and that an organizational ethic must begin from the ground up by beginning with first principles. The genesis of creating an organizational ethic from the ground up comes from the work the author did as the British Army's lead on ethics.

KEY WORDS: postmodern, individual, ethics, organization, rights

---

1  Rev Prof.  PHILIP McCORMACK, MBE BD (QUB) MTh (Car) PhD (QUB) PhD (Cran) PFHEA FCMI; Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Spurgeon's College; Visiting Professor of Ethics at the University of Worcester.

## 1. Stating the Problem

In 1981 the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre published his well-known work *After Virtue*.[2] Although it has gone through several editions, apart from his response to criticism, he stated in the 2007 edition that "I have found no reason for abandoning the major contentions of *After Virtue*."[3] It is his claim in relation to ethical language that I specifically want to focus on. The "Disquieting Suggestion" of chapter 1 is based upon an imaginary world that he constructs in which a:

Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated to the other bits and pieces or theory.[4]

In this imagined world the language of natural science although used, "is in a grave state of disorder."[5] MacIntyre uses his allegory to explain the impact of Enlightenment philosophy, from his perspective, upon moral theory, maintaining that it was doomed from the start precisely because it used ethical language that had been detached from its source, namely Aristotelianism with its teleological idea about human life. He states that "the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed."[6]

Macintyre's argument is a carefully constructed critique of moral discourse emerging from Enlightenment philosophy, which from his per-

---

2    A MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 2007).

3    MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* vii.

4    MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1.

5    MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2.

6    MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 5.

PHILIP MCCORMACK

spective was a failure. The point he makes is that Enlightenment philosophers were the inheritors of both a moral language and the substance that gave that language meaning and shape. The rejection of Aristotelian virtue ethics with its teleology, led to the fragmentation of moral language and the substance from which it is derived being ignored and then destroyed. A significant contributory reason the project was doomed to failure was, for MacIntyre, the invention and role of the individual in moral discourse. He contended that the individual moral agent "conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in moral philosophy."[7] This inevitably led, he argued, to moral emotivism.

This is not the occasion to engage fully with Macintyre's overall argument. One of the greatest achievements in human history, at least to this author, is the developmental process that resulted in the individual as imagined in Western thought. A key point to highlight, and note, is Macintyre's idea that moral language has become fragmented. I would like to contend that not only has the process of fragmentation continued, even the ethical frameworks created by the Enlightenment philosophers and their successors are now largely unknown. What little knowledge of them that remains, among the general public, is disjointed at best. Abundant evidence may be discerned through watching a debate on TV that purports to examine an ethical subject.

The first part of the problem I want to identify lies in the assumption that organisations / institutions make when they issue their organisational ethic: that their personnel will understand the ethical language used and the implied authority that underpins it. I agree with Macintyre's idea that moral language today has become fragmented and detached from the substance that gives it meaning. The implied assumption that people will understand the language used in ethical codes and understand it in the manner the organisation expects, is questionable. The problem is deepened further by the second aspect to the problem I want to articulate.

---

7    MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 62.

The second aspect to the problem, I want to contend, lies in the assumption that the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood are known, recognised and accepted by the personnel working for that organisation or institution. I want to go much further than MacIntyre and suggest that not only is moral / ethical language fragmented and detached from the substance that gives it meaning, but that the shared societal frameworks within which ethical concepts must be understood are unknown, forgotten by many or have been transformed without much social awareness that this has taken place.

My thinking in this area has been shaped by my interaction with Charles Taylor's philosophical observations concerning modern social imaginaries.[8] According to Taylor, "the social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society;"[9] it is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations."[10] His focus is primarily Western history and the social imaginary that underpinned the rise of Western modernity.[11]

Taylor contends that although our modern social imaginary has been shaped by influential theories, particularly those of John Locke and Hugo Grotius[12] in combination with Reformed Theology,[13] it is not identical

---

8    C Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

9    Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 2.

10   Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 23.

11   Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.

12   Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 10.

13   Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 150. Taylor does not specifically use the phrase Reformed Theology. Rather he refers throughout this book to Protestant theology. However, his references to Protestant can be described as Reformed because of the theology involved and the church groups identified, i.e., Baptist and Presbyterian.

with them. The revolutionary nature of the consequences contained within the theory associated with Grotius and Locke, Taylor observes, would not have been obvious to those who initially embraced them, though they seem obvious to us today.[14] Indeed, "modern modes of individualism seemed a luxury, a dangerous indulgence."[15] However, contained within the logic of the Grotian-Lockean theory of the individual were intellectual drivers that would set in motion changes in the way people imagined their relationship to each other within a community.[16] Instead of a social imaginary based upon some form of Divine order or Platonic-Aristotelian concept of Form, which resulted in a hierarchical sense of society from "time out of mind,"[17] the social imaginary began to be infiltrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by ideas based around the needs of each member of society as an individual capable of establishing a mutual basis of exchange.[18]

One of the characteristics of a social imaginary, according to Taylor, is that it "can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention,"[19] and "seems the only one that makes sense."[20] Social imaginaries can change over time. How "people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met" has evolved in the past. My point is not that social imaginaries change but that the societal frameworks from which our ethical frameworks emerged is unknown to many, perhaps even the majority, and that a process of transformation has occurred without much social awareness that this has taken place. The "taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious

---

14  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 16.

15  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 17.

16  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 12.

17  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 9.

18  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 12-13.

19  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29.

20  Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 17.

to mention" has been forgotten or has become unknown, precisely because it had the characteristic of being "too obvious to mention."

## 2. Explain the Problem

This section makes no claims to providing an exhaustive explanation of the problem. Its main purpose is a brief sketch of elements that have contributed to the problem. Secondly, before we begin with a broad-brush approach, it is not my contention that society is somehow broken. I am hoping to illustrate important changes that have taken place that when viewed together may offer some explanation for the problem outlined in part 1.

2a. *Concepts like language are fluid.* The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman introduced the idea of *Liquid Modernity.*[21] Mark David comments that "Bauman has employed the metaphor of "liquidity" in order to capture the dramatic social changes taking place in our everyday lives. In this way, he seeks to convey the increasing absence of "solid" structures that once provided the foundations for human societies."[22] Bauman argued that Modernity melted those foundational "solids" that gave pre-modern social structure its essential character in-order-to reshape and mould them to fit its needs. In this late-modern period, as a consequence of the interaction between globalisation and individuality, Bauman maintains that "the solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions - the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivises on the other."[23] In other

---

21  Z Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

22  Mark Davis, "Liquid Sociology – What For?" in *Liquid Sociology: Metaphor in Zugmunt Bauman's Analysis of Modernity*, ed., Mark Davis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013) 1.

23  Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 6.

words, the same process that overtook pre-modern life has been increasingly active in the second half of the twentieth century. This time rather than new "solids" taking the place of that which had been melted and reshaped, concepts like love, fear, social structure resemble the characteristic of a liquid in that they do not stand still for long and keep its shape for long.[24]

In the twentieth century, language became a specific area of interest for those whom we might describe as postmodern thinkers. Nash observes that postmodernism has at its heart an "eminent 'lack of trust' in language as a medium for the representation of truth, its unsleeping attention to the fine print of what is said, its rigorous aim to search out inconstancy, inconsistency and contradiction, and its express intent on the dismemberment of foundational authority."[25] Postmodern ideas were grounded in a linguistic indeterminacy,[26] which was driven by a "discourse of suspicion."[27] Language, it was maintained, is a social construct and that all human discourse is conditioned by the socio-political nature of reality.[28] Language therefore, is a cultural creation expressing the socio-political nature of a particular community.

One of the most significant cultural expressions that has become ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, is text-speak. Is text-speak an evolution in language[29] and illustration of the liquidity of language; or is it just intellectual laziness? The answer is not simple or straightforward. The study

---

24   Davis, "Liquid Sociology" 2.

25   C. Nash, *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, 77.

26   Nash, *Postmodern Mind*, 97.

27   Nash, *Postmodern Mind*, 77.

28   S Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* (London, SPCK, 1997) 34.

29   See A Merritt, "Text-speak: language evolution or just laziness?" in The Daily Telegraph (3 Apr 13)   http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/9966117/Text-speak-language-evolution-or-just-laziness.html (accessed 25 Oct 23).

conducted by Drouin and Davis indicated that "the use of text speak is not related to low literacy performance. Nonetheless, more than half of the college students in this sample, texters and nontexters alike, indicated that they thought text speak was hindering their ability to remember standard English."[30] Like any dynamic language, English has needed and will need to evolve to survive. As it has evolved since the end of the Second World War, one may perhaps discern a connection between the idea of linguistic indeterminacy, associated with thinkers like Derrida, and Bauman's more recent concept of liquidity.

Not only has ethical language itself become fragmented and dislocated from the substance that gave it meaning, but language is also increasingly fluid-like and demonstrates evidence of being progressively indeterminate.

2b. *Forgotten, Unknown and Transformed.* How have the foundational concepts that underpin Western democratic society, the "taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," become unknown to many, forgotten by many? Please note the comments at the beginning of this section, that this is only a brief sketch of some elements that have contributed to the situation.

One might turn to the striking idea of the eminent sociologist Ulrick Beck and what he refers to as "zombie categories" in twenty-first century life, for the first clue.[31] Beck explained his idea of "zombie categories" in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford in London on the 3rd of February 1999. Beck used what he described as "individualization" to explain what he referred to as "disembedding of the ways of life of industrial society,"

---

30  M Drouin & C David, "R u texting? Is the Use of Text Speak Hurting Your Literacy?" in the Journal of Literacy Research (2009) Vol 41, 46.

31  U Beck & E Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage, 2001), chapter 14 "Zombie categories: Interview with Ulrick Beck" 202-213. See also Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies," in *Theory, Culture & Society* (2012) Vol 19 (1-2), 17-44.

for example class, family, gender and nation. Individualization does not, he maintains, mean individualism.[32]

Individualization liberates people from traditional roles and constraints in a number of ways. First, individuals are removed from status-based classes. Social classes have been detraditionalized. We can see this in the changes in family structures, housing conditions, leisure activities, geographical distribution of populations, trade union and club membership, voting patterns etc. Secondly, women are cut loose from their "status fate" of compulsory housework and support by a husband. Industrial society has been dependent upon the unequal positions of men and women, but modernity does not hesitate at the front door of family life. The entire structure of family ties has come under pressure from individualization and a new negotiated provisional family composed of multiple relationships — a "post-family" — is emerging.[33]

"The liberated individual becomes dependent upon the labour market and because of that," he argues, "is dependent on, for example, education, consumption, welfare state regulations and support… Dependency upon the market extends into every area of life."[34] It is because of individualization we are living with a lot of zombie categories which are dead and still alive.[35] When asked for illustrations of "zombie categories" Beck cited family, class and neighbourhood as examples. It is striking to think that one of the most distinguished sociologists of our age, described institutions, traditionally understood as being critical to modern life, as husks whose life has been hollowed out: transformed into the living dead.

Another example of transformation that may inform our understanding of the problem is the idea of the state and its impact upon our understanding of the citizen. Philip Bobbitt maintains that there have been various manifestations of the "state." His analysis begins in 1494 when

---

32  Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 202.

33  Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

34  Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

35  Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

Charles VIII invades Italy and continues up to the present day.[36] Bobbitt's argument is essentially that the concept and nature of the state evolved over time adapting to meet the challenges and demands it encountered. He defines the various stages of the state as:

- The Princely State
- The Kingly State
- The Territorial State
- The State Nation
- The Nation State
- The Market State

With the Princely State, the state confers legitimacy on the dynasty; with the Kingly state, the dynasty confers legitimacy on the state; with the Territorial State, the state will manage the country efficiently; with the State Nation, the state will forge the identity of the nation; with the nation state, the state will better the welfare of the nation; and with the Market State, the state will maximize the opportunity for its citizens.[37] Royal Dutch Shell Scenarios sought to illustrate the transformation as follows:

[T]he gradual transition from the Nation State to a Market State model implies a redefinition of the states' fundamental promises, towards maximisation of opportunities for companies, investors, civil society and citizens rather than of the Nation's welfare.[38]

It is not difficult to see how Bauman's concept of liquidity and Beck's individualization fit remarkably well within this notion that a key priority of the Market State is opportunities, or choice, available for individuals, civil society, companies and investors.

We may detect indications of the evolution of the state in the last one hundred years in a transformation in the concept of an individual as citi-

---

36  P Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent* (London: Penguin, 2008) 190-191.

37  Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent*.

38  *Shell Global Scenarios to 2015: The Future Business Environment Trends, Trade-Offs, and Choices* (London: Shell International Limited, 2005), 18.

zen to that where the emphasis is upon the individual as citizen-consumer. The notion of citizen, at least in some significant senses, contains ideas such as civic responsibilities, obligations and duties, whereas, the emergence of the citizen-consumer has led some to talk about *The Authority of the Consumer*.[39] The relationship between the state and the citizen as described by the Scottish Enlightenment Philosopher Adam Ferguson is not one that would sit easily with the majority in the twenty-first century.[40] In his work *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ferguson essentially considers why nations cease to be eminent.[41] He traces the rise and fall of great civilisations like Sparta, Carthage and Rome and examines the relationship that virtue played both in their success and subsequently its lack in their demise, "when" Ferguson laments "men ceased to be citizens."[42] His point, of course, was to encourage the role of the virtuous citizen. Nations consist of men, according to Ferguson, men prepared to fight for their nation.[43] The West has changed dramatically since Ferguson wrote his critique. It is, however, worth noting that even in the age of the citizen-consumer many within the United Kingdom will remember on the 11th of November the sacrifice of millions who would have recognised the responsibilities of the citizen as described by Ferguson.

2c. *A transformation of what it means to be human?* The history of humanity is intertwined with the historical development of technology. The argument that to be human is to have some form of relationship with technology, regardless of whether that is a flint knife, bladed farming tool,

---

39   *The Authority of the Consumer*, ed., R Keat, N Whiteley and N Abercrombie (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). See also M Schudson, "The Troubling Equivalence of Citizen and Consumer," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2006) Vol 608, 193-204.

40   A Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed., F Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

41   Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 200.

42   Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 207

43   Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. 214.

sword or clock is difficult to resist.[44] Andy Clarke in his book *Natural Born Cyborgs* argues forcefully that humans are natural-born cyborgs.[45] "When our technologies actively, automatically, and continually tailor themselves to us and we to them – then the line between tool and user becomes flimsy indeed."[46] His illustration of the humble wristwatch as an example of the transparent symbiotic relationship we already have with technology is compelling.[47] Approaching the relationship between man and technology from an evolutionary scientific perspective, Timothy Taylor contends that it is not possible to understand man's evolution apart from his development and use of technology.[48] It was our use of technology, he maintains, that altered our physical and mental evolution.[49] Christopher Coker notes that the blurring of man and the machine "is in essence the post-human condition."[50] That humanity can have a positive relationship with technology is not, however, the main area of concern. It is whether the speed of technological development is producing changes whose consequences are as yet unknown.

Peter Singer's observation that "a knight of the Middle Ages could go their entire life with maybe one new technology changing the way they lived" offers a reference point from which to glimpse the rapid pace

---

44   T Taylor's, *The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution* (London: Palgrave, 2010), 77.

45   A Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 3. In this book he seeks to establish one of his main points in the first few pages. "The human mind" he states, "if it is to be the physical organ of human reason, simply cannot be seen as bound and restricted by the biological skinbag." 4.

46   Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs,* 7.

47   Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 39.

48   Taylor, *The Artificial Ape.*

49   Taylor, *The Artificial Ape.* 33.

50   C Coker, *Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology in Changing the Way We Fight and Think About War* (London: Hurst, 2013), 24.

PHILIP MCCORMACK

at which technology has been increasing.[51] The rapid development of technology raises questions regarding humanity's ability to cope with, let alone master, these changes. Is it possible that humanity will simply continue to be passively changed by them as we are cognitively manipulated to adapt to the changing technological reality? Scholars continue to raise substantial concerns over the metaphysical impact of technology and life in the virtual world of the internet. For example, Coker maintains that "we know that technology is changing our habits and lifestyles and sometimes even our identity; what we do not know is whether the virtual world in which we now live at least part of our lives is changing us culturally."[52] If we take a military example, one of the consistent features of many of the robotic weapon platforms being developed by Western militaries, is that they have been designed to be used by a youth generation who have spent a significant part of their lives in a virtual computer world. Computers, comments Coker, "are now re-wiring our minds in subtle but important ways."[53]

The work of Baroness Susan Greenfield in this field is particularly relevant.[54] In the past, previous generations had the options of being *Someone* or *Anyone*.[55] However, in the twenty-first century there is now a third option: being "*Nobody*."[56] "The *Nobody* world," according to Greenfield, "is the province of cyber space."[57] She notes that in a recent survey "a child in the UK spends, between their tenth and eleventh birthdays, on aver-

---

51  P W Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (London: Penguin, 2009) 101.

52  Coker, *Warrior Geeks*, 124.

53  Coker, *Warrior Geeks*, 131.

54  Baroness Greenfield has been Professor of Synaptic Pharmacology since 1996 at Oxford. Her book, *You and Me: The Neuroscience of Identity* (London: Notting Hill, 2011) has not only influenced scholars like C Coker cited earlier, but represents the latest findings in neuroscience.

55  Greenfield, *You and Me,* 114.

56  Greenfield, *You and Me,* 115.

57  Greenfield, *You and Me,*

age 900 hours in class, 1,277 hours with their family, and 1,934 hours in front of a screen – be it television or computer."[58] "The screen based lifestyle" she contends "is an unprecedented and pervasive phenomenon… prolonged and frequent video-gaming, surfing and social networking cannot fail to have an unprecedented and transformation effect on the mental state of a species whose most basic and valuable talent is a highly sensitive adaptability to whatever environment in which it is placed."[59]

Potentially, one of the most significant aspects of this is in regard to our capacity to be empathetic. Greenfield cites a report based on a study of 1,400 college students in the USA, where the participants "showed a decline in empathy over the last thirty years, with a particularly sharp drop in the last decade."[60] While she accepts that a declining ability to be empathetic and the popularity of the internet does not prove a causal link, she does however, suggest that it is a starting point for further investigation[61]. An internet addiction, Greenfield speculates, may lead to "an absence of an internally generated past or planned future, in favour instead of just the atomised present. Could one stark and extreme possibility be that, in the end, such people may have simply *no* identity?"[62] (emphasis original). Taken together, the picture offered by Greenfield is quite terrifying: a "*Nobody*" people, living in an atomised cyber-world of a perpetual now, potentially deficient in their capacity to empathise with others and devoid of personal identity. If, however, we are as Clark and Taylor argue, a species who has evolved in partnership with technology, the picture may in fact be much brighter.

This has been only the briefest of sketches designed to offer a partial explanation of the problem I have sought to identify in a top-down approach to creating an organisational / institutional ethic. The implicit

---

58  Greenfield, *You and Me.* She states that "the two types of devices are converging," 115.

59  Greenfield, *You and Me.*

60  Greenfield, *You and Me,* 118.

61  Greenfield, *You and Me.*

62  Greenfield, *You and* Me 127.

assumption that personnel in an organisation or institution will both understand the ethical language used and the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood is unsound. The fragmented nature of ethical language, separated from the substance that gives it meaning and the transformation that has occurred within and to the historic and shared societal frameworks, within which that language has been traditionally understood, in conjunction with the impact of rapid technological change, along with potential implications upon humanity, requires a different approach to the creation of an organisational ethic.

## 3. Practical Solution to the Problem

To create an organisational ethic, one must begin with first principles, ensuring that any expression of values must be grounded upon an ethical foundation that is clearly articulated and the underlying source of any code of behaviour. Now I realise, that the sceptic might accuse me of doing little more than stating the obvious. My experience, however, of giving presentations in the UK and abroad is that what is assumed to be "the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," is no longer obvious to the majority. But neither is it altogether foreign. It is also important to note that many of those I have given presentations to are graduates, many with post-graduate degrees. What has been hugely positive is the response to the ethical foundation that I was charged with socialising within the Army. My experience was that about 80% "get it" immediately and respond with statements like "I have never really thought about it in the way you presented it but you have articulated what I have always believed." I recognise the liquidity of many aspects of modern life and intuitively warm to the notion of "zombie categories," what I want to maintain is the notion that the underlying foundation underpinning the UK, and the West in general, is an excellent place from which to construct any organisational ethic because it is still inviolable.

Mary Midgley refers to social-contract theory as a myth that still shapes our moral and intellectual thinking.[63] For Midgely "myths are not

---

63   M Midgley, *The Myths We Live By* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011) 10-12.

lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning."[64] While she regards the social-contract myth as a typical piece of Enlightenment simplification it was nevertheless an important answer to the divine right of kings.[65] I would want to be more specific than Midgely. Social-contract theory has the ability to shape our moral and intellectual thinking but like our shared societal social frameworks, it is or has become unknown. My own view is that social-contract theory and our shared societal social frameworks exist in symbiotic relationship. The health of one is reflected in the health of the other. Social-contact theory matters because it is inextricably linked with the concept of "the state-of-nature." The primary reason why this notion is important is that it encompasses a description of the human individual. It is our understanding of the individual in the state of nature that shapes fundamental moral ideas about the status of that individual. Robert Nozick is correct in his contention that if the state-of-nature theory did not exist it would be necessary to invent it.[66]

From Hugo Grotius' 1625[67] great work *On Law of War and Peace*, through political philosophers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson to French political document of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in 1793 the idea of the inalienable natural rights of man was buried so deeply that it has formed the basis for Western governmental, legal and societal practices. What natural rights would a person possess in a state of nature? Well for Locke, Rousseau and Jefferson (British, French and American thinkers) the answer would be Life and Liberty and the pursuit of property (Locke) which Jefferson changed to the pursuit of happiness.

---

64  Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, 1.

65  Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, 12.

66  R Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974), 3.

67  H Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace,* "Prolegomena" (XI) (1625) translated from the original Latin *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, ed. AC Campbell.

PHILIP MCCORMACK

Individual life and personal existence are existentially basic. When faced with an existential threat, life will invariably struggle to survive. For cognitively aware species, this struggle is more than mere animal instinct; invariably it will involve the conscious awareness of the consequences of any impending threat to life. Death is not an emotion, it is fact. Life is not an emotion, it is fact, even though it may evoke a bewildering array of emotions in its journey. Life from this perspective is the basic good; without life nothing is possible for any individual.

The concept of liberty has been and continues to be the basis upon which our form of government, approach to law and the type of social construct we accept is founded. For Locke, "In political society, liberty consists of being under no other lawmaking power except that established by consent in the commonwealth."[68] John Stuart Mill, in his great work *On Liberty* recognised that liberty was not only the freedom to act but also the absence of coercion. We can detect both ideas in our democracy. In national elections, the major political parties, especially in the UK, present to the voters of the nation what they would do if elected. In essence, when combined with their manifestos, the electorate were asked to choose freely what laws would be enacted in the new Parliament, who should govern and the nature of the society that would be shaped by both the executive and the laws they would pass. This basic but profound idea of the free sovereign will of the people stems from the political philosophy of thinkers like Grotius, Locke, Rousseau and Jefferson.

How does this shape an organisational ethic? *The Police Service of Northern Ireland Code of Ethics 2008* is an interesting example. In the introductory preamble it makes explicit reference to "respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals as enshrined in the *European Convention on Human Rights.*" The *European Convention on Human Rights*, written in 1950 and enacted in 1953 makes reference in its introductory preamble to "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on

---

68   J Locke, *Two Treaties of Government*, chapter IV "Of Slavery" 114. See http://www. earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf

10th December 1948." Readers of this article will have noticed how each ethic makes reference to a preceding code. In other words, an assumption is made that the reader of a particular code will be aware of the content of the underlying document. In contrast the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) begins with the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Article 1 states "that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" and article 3 that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." Natural rights are not the same as human rights; although it is not difficult to see where some of the language and ideas came from. Natural right is a much older concept and is the intellectual source of the foundational articles in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Creating an organisation ethic must begin with a foundational statement, rather than a reference to some other document, however, excellent that document might be. On the basis of the foundational statement, it is then possible to say something about the ethical principles of the organisation.

At this point I want to briefly outline three ethical principles the British Army considered when refreshing its *Values and Standards* document.[69] If the starting proposition is that everyone has fundamental and inalienable natural rights, this is a first order statement from which second order principles may be deduced. The possession of identical natural rights introduces the idea of intrinsic individual moral equality. Moral equality in Western democratic societies is expressed in a number of ways: for example, equality before the law. Many statues of Lady Justice depict her blindfold. There is equality of voting, although this took too many years to realise in many societies. And of course, many countries now have statutory equality laws. Expressing moral equality in an organisational

---

69 *Values and Standards* https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_ final.pdf (accessed 25 Oct 23)

PHILIP MCCORMACK

ethic on the foundation under consideration generates the expectation of equal treatment within that organisation, in terms of opportunities and responsibilities.

The second moral principle is that of intrinsic individual moral dignity. The sociologist Peter Berger describes how the older concept of honour was gradually replaced by what he describes as "a historically unprecedented concern for the dignity and rights of the individual."[70] It is one of the key distinguishing marks of the transformation from an aristocratic, historical ordering of society to one marked by reciprocity, in which the role of the individual became a matter of personal choice and not that dictated within a predetermined social order. Honour ascribed status on the basis of what someone did, whereas dignity, according to Berger, "always relates to the intrinsic humanity devised of all socially imposed roles and norms."[71] "Both honor and dignity are concepts that bridge self and society;"[72] honour to a social construct of imposed roles and norms established by a higher order of society that defined everyone's place in the hierarchy and dignity to a social construct that was based upon human equality. It is this concept of dignity that forms the basis for the idea of individuals being worthy of respect.

The third principle is that of intrinsic individual moral worth. As a noun the word "worth" means "the level at which someone or something deserves to be valued or rated." In the Christian theology, human value is linked to the belief that man was created in the image of God. The concept of equal moral worth also lies at the heart of classical liberalism.[73] For Loren Lomasky it is our capacity to forge personal identities and individuate ourselves by committing ourselves to certain ends and

---

70  P Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed., S Hauerwas and A MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 173.

71  Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor," 176.

72  Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor."

73  NK Badhwar, "Moral Worth and the Worth of Rights" in *Liberty and Democracy*, ed., TR Machan (Stanford: Hoover, 2002) 89.

then shaping our lives in relation to those ends[74]. Developing this idea of ends Neera Badhwar proposes that individual moral worth resides in "*the equal worth of a shared capacity*, a capacity for appreciating and creating value" [emphasis original].[75] The premise that we should see other human beings as "ends" in themselves, as possessing inherent worth, and not as a "means" to some goal is of course Kantian. Human beings have value by virtue of their capacity, or potential, to appreciate and create value. Individual moral worth resides in our potentiality. Organisations that run training courses to develop individual potential, whether they or their personnel appreciate this or not, are reinforcing the idea of individual moral worth. The British Royal Navy recruitment video "Born in Carlisle, made in the Royal Navy" was designed by clever advertisers who understand how powerful the idea of becoming is to human beings.

## Conclusions

I have sought to challenge the validity of what I have described as a "top down" approach to the creation of ethical codes. The fragmentation of ethical language and the liquidity of language in the twenty-first century mean that institutions must construct their ethic with this key concept firmly in mind. For example, the word loyalty can have a very fluid meaning. Organisations that wish to use this value in their codes need to carefully articulate exactly what they mean when using it.

My experience of giving presentations both here in the UK and abroad is that what we have assumed to be "the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," in relation to shared societal frameworks, is no longer obvious to the majority. But although it has become unknown and has been transformed, it is not altogether foreign. What has been hugely positive is the response to the ethical foundation that I was charged with socialising within the British Army. About 80% "get it" immediately and respond with statements like "I have never really thought about it in

---

74   L Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 31-34.

75   Badhwar, "Moral Worth" 102.

the way you presented it but you have articulated what I have always believed." The moral foundation that underpins the UK is an excellent place from which to begin the creation of an ethical code.

The approach to creating an organisation ethic needs to change and begin from the ground up. It must begin with a statement of first principles from which everything else then flows. It must begin with the individual and an explicit explanation of how the organisation views and understands every member of its personnel, indeed, humanity in general. Far too often, senior managers or executives make assumptions, that what is self-evidently obvious to them, is also obvious to their subordinates. In the last 18 months talking with groups (civilian and military) and giving lectures and running training days for units and formations I discovered that while most will understand that human beings have worth, few can articulate why people have worth. It is not enough to simply state that people deserve respect. Organisations must explain the moral basis that affords the status of individual respect. How can an organisation expect its personnel to show respect to others, if they have not begun by explaining to their own people the basis of on which they are respected within the organisation?

## Bibliography

Badhwar, N.K., "Moral Worth and the Worth of Rights" in *Liberty and Democracy*, ed., TR Machan (Stanford: Hoover, 2002).

Bauman, Z., *Liquid Modernity* Cambridge: Polity, 2006.

Beck U., & E Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* London: Sage, 2001, chapter 14 "Zombie categories: Interview with Ulrick Beck" 202-213.

Beck, U., "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies," in *Theory, Culture & Society* (2012) Vol 19 (1-2), 17-44.

Berger, P., "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed., S Hauerwas and A MacIntyre Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983.

Bobbitt, P., *Terror and Consent* London: Penguin, 2008.

Clark, A., *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Coker, C., *Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology in Changing the Way We Fight and Think About War* London: Hurst, 2013.

Davis, Mark, "Liquid Sociology – What For?" in *Liquid Sociology: Metaphor in Zugmunt Bauman's Analysis of Modernity*, ed., Mark Davis Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013.

Drouin M., & C David, "R u texting? Is the Use of Text Speak Hurting Your Literacy?" in the *Journal of Literacy Research* (2009) Vol 41.

Ferguson, A., *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed., F Oz-Salzberger Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Greenfield, S., *You and Me: The Neuroscience of Identity* London: Notting Hill, 2011.Keat, R., N Whiteley and N Abercrombie, eds., *The Authority of the Consumer*, London & New York: Routledge, 1994.

Grotius, H., *On the Law of War and Peace,* "Prolegomena" (XI) (1625) translated from the original Latin *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, ed. AC Campbell.

Locke, J., *Two Treaties of Government*, chapter IV "Of Slavery." See http://www.earlymoderntexts. com/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf.

Lomasky, L., *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* London: Duckworth, 2007.

Merritt, A., "Text-speak: language evolution or just laziness?" in *The Daily Telegraph* (3 Apr 13) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/9966117/Text-speak-language-evolution-or-just-laziness.html (accessed 22 Oct 15).

Midgley, M., *The Myths We Live By* London & New York: Routledge, 2011.

Nash, C., *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.

Nozick, R., *Anarchy, State and Utopia* New York: Basic, 1974.

PHILIP MCCORMACK

Pattison, S., *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* London: SPCK, 1997.

Schudson, M., "The Troubling Equivalence of Citizen and Consumer," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2006) Vol 608, 193-204.

*Shell Global Scenarios to 2015: The Future Business Environment Trends, Trade-Offs, and Choices* (London: Shell International Limited, 2005).

Singer, P.W., *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* London: Penguin, 2009.

Taylor, C., *Modern Social Imaginaries* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

Taylor, T., *The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution* London: Palgrave, 2010.

*Values and Standards* https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_final.pdf (accessed 25 Oct 23)

# THE CENTRIFUGAL AND CENTRIPETAL FORCE OF MISSION: EXEGETICAL INSIGHTS ON THE GOSPELS

## OVIDIU HANC[1]

*Emanuel University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT: The role of the Holy Spirit in Mission is twofold: *centripetal* and *centrifugal*. The centripetal role reflects the attractive force that the Holy Spirit performs by bringing people into the Kingdom, while the centrifugal force reflects the outward move in which the Holy Spirit empowers the believers to expand the Kingdom of God by taking the Gospel to all men. The Great Commission is simultaneously a call to mission in the sense of fulfilling the centrifugal mandate of bringing Christ to non-believers, and a centripetal mandate of drawing non-believers to Christ. This paper exegetes some key passages in order to highlight this twofold theological and missional aspect.

KEY WORDS: The Great Commission, Kingdom of God, Centripetal and Centrifugal, *missio Dei.*

## Introduction

In a study on mission in the New Testament, Bengt Sundkler used for the first time the terms "centrifugal" and "centripetal" to describe this dual perspective in mission.[2] He considers that the Old Testament has a centripetal approach in which the nations are drawn toward Israel, while the

---

1    Ovidiu Hanc BA (Emanuel) MTh PhD (QUB, Belfast) Lector univ. dr. email ovidiu.hanc @gmail. com.

2    Bengt Sundkler, "Jésus et Les Païens," ed. Bengt Sundkler and A. Fridrichsen, *Contributions À L'étude de La Pensée Missionaire Dans Le Nouveau Testament*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 6; Uppsala: Neutestamentliches Seminar zu Uppsala, 1937, 1–38.

New Testament has a centrifugal approach in which the Church reaches out to the nations. Later he wrote about the *centrifugal* and *centripetal* aspect in mission as:

> Centripetal [universality] is actualized by a messenger who crosses frontiers and passes on his news to those who are afar off; centripetal [as if drawn] by a magnetic force, drawing distant people into the place of the person who stands at the center.[3]

Johannes Blauw, a Dutch scholar, also used in 1962 this terminology in order to describe an apparent contrast between the Old and New Testament and to highlight the missional mandate of the Church.[4] Blauw mentions that these terms are not exclusively related to the Old and New Testament since he admits that there are aspects of centrifugal force of mission in various passages in the Old Testament (e.g. The Servant Song of Isaiah; the book of Jonah), although these passages are rare.

Christopher Wright acknowledges that although there is an obvious level of truth in highlighting the major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament in terms of centripetal, respectively centrifugal, this broad assertion is not entirely adequate.[5] The reason for this argument is that there are centrifugal aspects in the history of Israel[6] and also in the New Testament the aspect of drawing the nations into God's Kingdom as the final purpose of the outward mission is prevalent.

---

3   Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission* (Lutterworth Press, 1966), 14–45.

4   Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (London: Lutterworth Press, 2003), 44–80.

5   Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 523.

6   Wright lists the following aspects: the law goes forth to the islands that wait for it; the Servant will bring justice to the nations; God's salvation reaches to the end of the earth; God sends emissaries to the nations to proclaim God's glory. Wright, 523.

Wright correctly noted that the centrifugal mission of the New Testament church has a centripetal theology.[7]

The purpose of this paper is to highlight various exegetical insights on these twofold centripetal and centrifugal missional aspects as seen in the Gospel writings. The centripetal role reflects God's attractive force of bringing people into the Kingdom, while the centrifugal force reflects the outward movement in which the Holy Spirit empowers the believers to expand the Kingdom of God by proclaiming the Gospel. The Great Commission is simultaneously a call to mission in the sense of fulfilling the centrifugal mandate of bringing Christ to non-believers, and a centripetal mandate of drawing non-believers to Christ. This paper exegetes some key passages in order to highlight this twofold theological and missional aspect.

**The Centripetal Aspect of Mission**

The general tendency in theology was to argue that the Old Testament has a centripetal view on mission, with the emphasis on the nations coming toward Israel. Apparently, with the exception of the book of Jonah, in the Old Testament there is no explicit and missiological mandate of Israel, but only an inward focus in which God draws nations to him. Isaiah emphasized in his writing the centrality of the mountain of the Lord as the driving force that determined the people to approach God by moving from foreign countries to Zion (Is. 2.3; 19.23; 25.6-8; 56.7; 66.18-20; see also Ps. 22.27; 47.9; 72.9-11; Jer. 3.17; Ez. 38.12; Mic. 4.2, etc.).[8]

Following Schultz and Sundkler, Schnabel admits that the process which leads to the integration of foreigners into the people of God is centripetal, both in terms of initiative and in terms of geographical movement.[9] He noted that "[t]he drive to Zion is initiated by the nations,

---

7    Wright, 524.

8    See also J. Kevin Livingston, *A Missiology of the Road: Early Perspectives in David Bosch's Theology of Mission and Evangelism* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 175.

9    Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, The People Of God, And The Nations," *Journal of*

caused by the epiphany of YHWH and the activity of the Servant."[10] On the other side, Schnabel downplays the "centrifugal" movement from Israel to the nations in Isaiah, noting that there are only two statements in Israel's prophetic tradition about such a move (*i.e.* the Servant of the Lord is a 'light of the nations' 42.1, 6–7; 49.6; 51.4–5; and the 'survivors' of God's judgement are sent to be priests among the nations 66.18-21). Although Schnabel notes that Israel's relationship with the nations can be divided into five categories, he fails to argue that this relationship has a centrifugal nuance imbedded into the Abrahamic Covenant (*e.g.* Gen. 12.3). He considers that Gen. 12.3 does not imply a 'missionary out-reach' while the admission of non-Israelites was possible but regulated by the ritual. Schnabel argument is unconvincing, since the admission of non-Israelites is inherently an outward-driven enterprise before it has an inward-driven finality (e.g. Rahab, Josh. 2 and the inhabitants of Gibeon, Josh. 9). A centripetal force of mission that acts magnetically, does not ex-clude a centrifugal force that demonstrates the outreach of God's salvific plan (*e.g.* Jonah). Trying to create a dichotomy between the 'outreach of the grace of God' and the 'outreach of the people of God' is to ignore the importance of the human factor in the economy of God's plan of blessing all the families on the earth by using Israel as an agent of blessing.

## The Centrifugal Aspect of Mission
The etymology of this term goes back to the Latin term *centrifugus*, which implies an outward-movement from a center. Walter Kaiser ad-mits that almost all modern scholars emphasize the strong missiologi-cal nuance in the New Testament, especially in the Great Commission, but few will grant the idea that the Old Testament has such an empha-sis. However he suggests:

> A case for mission forming a central role in the plan of God in the Old Testament
> can indeed be successfully argued, for an international invitation of the gospel

---

*the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 1 (2002): 41.

10   Schnabel, 41.

to all nations is explicitly set forth in the Old Testament, and it forms one of the great unifying threads of meaning in the purpose-plan of God.[11]

In his study of mission in the Old Testament, he argues that Israel's role is not only centripetal and passive in witnessing and spreading the Good News, but also centrifugal, namely an active outward moving in sharing the faith.[12] He emphasizes that Paul's quote of Isaiah 49.6 in an attempt to convince the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia that it is in line with God's sovereign plan of extending the blessing of redemption to the Gentiles.[13] This plan is seen mentioned in various places in the Old Testament not only by God's use of Israel to reach Gentiles,[14] but also by God's use of individuals to reach Gentiles.[15] Because of all these examples, Kaiser correctly argues that an exclusivist emphasis of the centripetal feature of Israel denies the missionary purpose and theology of the Old Testament in which Israel was called to be a light to the nations.

Wright also noted that the centrifugal dynamic of mission is seen in the dominant association of the word *missionary* with the activity of sending and with cross-cultural communication of the gospel. Because of this he prefers not to connect this term with the Old Testament since "Israel was not mandated by God to send missionaries to the nations."[16] Wright admits that his view is not agreed by all. He mentions that al-

11  Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 183.

12  Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 2 edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 9.

13  See also Rom. 1.1-5; 11.25; Gal. 1.15-16 as a parallel to Is. 49.1; Jer. 1.5. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament,* 9–10. David Bosch also considers that the metaphor of light in Is. 42.6 and 49.6 express both a centripetal and a centrifugal movement. David J. Bosch, *Witness To The World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 76.

14  E.g. Gen. 12.1-3; Ex. 7.5, 17; 8.22; 14:4,18; 19.4-6; 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 2; 9.1-12; 33; 57.9; 66; 67; 96; 100; 117; 119.46; 126.2-3; 145.11-12, 21; et. al.

15  E.g. Melchisedek, Jethro, Balaam son of Beor, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman.

16  Wright, *The Mission of God*, 24.

OVIDIU HANC

though he reads the Old Testament missiologically he does not refer to the missionary message of the Old Testament as H. H. Rowley does.[17]

Wright's contribution to our understanding of mission is that he attempts to broaden the sense of the theme *missionary* since there are indeed many passages that are enriching our understanding of mission is a sense that is not restricted to the concept of "sending missionaries". Because of this he welcomes the use of the adjective *missional* instead of *missionary*, since the former terminology has a broader spectrum by describing that which is related to or characterized by mission. "Israel had a missional reason for existence, without implying that they had had a *missionary* mandate to go to the nations (whereas we could certainly speak of the missionary role of the church among the nations)."[18]

Walter Kaiser, mentioned above, argued convincingly about a missionary purpose of God's call to Israel to be a light to the nations.[19] Schnabel disagrees with Kaiser considering that even though it might be theologically appropriate to emphasize the outreach of the grace of God, there is no exegetical evidence that allows us to speak of examples of an outreach of the people of God.[20]

In the New Testament there is an explicit missiological mandate to proclaim the Messianic era to all the nations. Matthew 28.19-20 and Acts 1.8 are the *locus classicus* of the divine commission. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that as the Old Testament is not exclusively centripetal in its missiological focus so the New Testament is not exclusively centrifugal in its missiological mandate.

The focus of this paper is not to have an exhaustive analysis of a certain missiological paradigm but to underline some exegetical insights from the Gospel that attest the fact that similarly to the Old Testament,

---

17  See Harold Henry Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Press, 1945).

18  Wright, *The Mission of God*, 25.

19  Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament*.

20  Schnabel, "Israel, The People of God, And The Nations," 39.

the Gospels follows the same dual paradigm of mission that is at the same time centrifugal and centripetal in approach.

## Matthew: the circular composition of the Gospel

It is generally accepted that the Gospel according to Matthew was addressed to a Jewish audience. However, the composition of the Gospel is strikingly surprising for a writing that has a well-defined audience. The Gospel has a circular composition that begins and ends with a focus on gentiles.

After the introductory genealogy of Jesus, the moment of His birth is marked by the visit of the Magi. This visit is emphatic since this group of gentiles seem to be more open and willing to accept the Messiah, than those living in Jerusalem.

The circular composition is seen in the fact that the Gospel begins by drawing Gentiles to Christ and ends with a missiological mandate of bringing Christ to Gentiles. This circular composition is seen not only at the thematic level, but also at the compositional level. The birth of the Messiah is presented in chapter 1 in connection to the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the birth of a son that will be called Emmanuel – God with us (1.23 *cf.* Isaiah 7.14). The point of this prophecy must be understood not as a reference to the actual name, but to the presence of God among the people. This presence is reiterated at the end of the letter through Jesus' promise to His followers to be with them even to the end of the age (28.20).

The Great Commission is simultaneously a call to mission in the sense of fulfilling the centrifugal mandate of bringing Christ to non-believers, and a centripetal mandate of drawing non-believers to Christ. This mandate is corroborated with the exhortation of Jesus to the disciples to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Mt. 9.37-38). The contrast in Matthew 9 between the crowds coming to Jesus and the need for sending out labourers into the harvest is emphatic. It seems that the main problem of Jesus' ministry was not to draw unbelievers to God, but to send believers to unbelievers.

OVIDIU HANC

The circular composition of the gospel of Matthew attests that a classification of the New Testament as centrifugal, in opposition to the Old Testament that is centripetal, is inappropriate since such a dichotomy is not supported by either of the Testaments.

David Bosch correctly argued that the dominant characteristic of mission in the Old Testament is not that it is centripetal, rather the centripetal category is employed to give expression to the idea that God, not Israel, is the author of mission.[21] Similarly he considers that the New Testament has also a centripetal missionary dimension. The arrival of the astrologers from the East to Jerusalem (Matt. 2), the coming of the Roman army officer (Matt. 8.5), but also references to Simeon's prophetic words (Luke 2.31-32), Jesus' references to the temple as a house of prayer for all the nations (Mk. 11.17) and to the Greeks traveling to Jerusalem (Jn. 12.20) attest the fact that salvation is to be found in Israel. The problem with Bosch's interpretation of the concept that salvation comes from the Jews (Jn. 4.22) in light of all these references to the centripetal missionary dimension is his conclusion, namely that "[t]he world's salvation can be consummated at one place only – in Jerusalem." However, it can be suggested that all these examples attest the fact that the world's salvation is *inaugurated* at one place only, rather than *consummated* in one place only.

**Mark: a house of prayer for all the nations (Mark. 11.17)**
Mark's Gospel presents a peculiar aspect of the inauguration of Jesus' ministry regarding the calling of the twelve. In Mark 3.14 the explicit twofold purpose in the act of appointing the apostles was that they might be with Jesus and that he might send them out to preach. Thus, Mark presents in a unique way the centrifugal and centripetal force of mission as the working paradigm in Jesus' relation to the apostles. This aspect is reiterated in the second sending of the twelve in Mark 6.7 where the verb προσκαλέω is accompanied by the verb ἀποστέλλω highlighting a dialectical tension.

---

21  Bosch, *Witness To The World*, 77.

Towards the end of Jesus' ministry, the evangelist presents another aspect that highlights the centrifugal force of the messianic ministry that was inaugurated in Jesus. The event of the cleansing of the Temple is marked by a peculiar aspect that is presented only in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 11.17, Jesus' words "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*" (emphasis added) represent a quote from Isaiah 56.7 where the prophet predicts the messianic age in which the foreigners will join themselves to the Lord to minister to Him, and because of that they will be brought to God's holy mountain and His house of prayer that will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. This aspect of prayer places the fundamental aspect of sacrifice that was taking place at the Temple at a secondary level. Mark emphasized a peculiar aspect of Jesus' words that focused not only on the importance of prayer but also on the importance of a global aspect in which all the nations converge in the Temple with a prayerful attitude.

At the time of Jesus, it is important to view Isaiah's quote in practical terms regarding the Temple. The Second Temple was characterized by manifold physical barriers that made the presence of the Gentiles in the Temple worship virtually impossible.

The delimitation of the inner sanctuary between the Holy of Holies and the Holy through the veil was clearly required by the Mosaic Law. The access to the Holy of Holies was reserved only to the High Priests once a year, while the main sanctuary was the place where the priests performed their priestly ministry on a daily basis. Regarding the Temple precincts it is important to note that the court was divided into four courts: the court of the priests, the court of Israel, the court of the Women and finally the court of the Gentiles. The Gentile worshipers were only permitted in the outer courts called the Courts of the Gentiles. The two Temple inscription that were discovered in 1871 (*C.I.J.* 2.1400) and 1935 (*OGIS* II.598)[22] were most likely placed in

---

22  (OGIS 598). Josephus, *Ant.* 15.417; *B.J.* 5.5.2; 6.2.4. Philo, *Ad Gaium*, 31.212. Elias J. Bickerman, "The Warning Inscriptions of Herod's Temple," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 37, no. 4 (1947): 387–405; Jean Baptiste Frey,

OVIDIU HANC

the Temple at the end of the Court of Gentiles and the entrance to the inner courts and mentioned that "No outsider is to enter the protective enclosure around the temple; whoever does will have only himself to blame for the death that follows."[23]

The one in charge for the affairs that took place at the Temple, including social order and everyday activities was one of the high priest's representatives described by Josephus as *stratēgos* (*B.J.* 2.409). The Levites were responsible for such aspects according to the Law of Moses and Davidic worship regulations (Num. 18.2-7; 1 Ch. 23.4-5). Any trespass of a foreigner, including a Roman citizen, into the Temple was subject to capital punishment (*e.g.* Acts 21.26-28).

The event of cleansing the Temple took place in the courts of the Gentiles where the transactions that sustained the whole apparatus of daily sacrifice were performed. While such an administrative act can be seen as necessary, the implication was that the worship of the Gentiles was practically impossible within the tumult of this religious marketplace.

While the Mosaic Law stipulated only the delimitation between God and man that was to be mediated by the Priests and Levites, in time, new restrictions were imposed as the new courts were being created. While the women were not excluded or restricted from worship according to the Law, the development of the synagogue tradition meant that the partition between men and women became the norm (*e.g.* mechitzah). Gradually the initial delimitation between God and man in worship was redefined in new categories as men vs. women, Jews vs. non-Jews. However, this demarcation was not intended in God's universal plan of salvation.

*Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions: Jewish Inscriptions From the Third Century B.C. to the Seventh Century A.D.* (New York: Ktav Pub House, 1975), 329; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

23  K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 131.

Mark records Jesus' quote from Isaiah 56.7 emphasizing the universal and inclusive aspect of God's house of prayer in an unique way that highlights the tension between the centripetal aspect of worship that gravitates around the Temple and the centrifugal force of the messianic ministry that the worship of the Temple should be opened for all the nations.

## Luke: two sets of prophetic figures
The Gospel of Luke presents the birth of Jesus as a pivotal missiological moment in which the promised salvation has arrived for both Jews and Gentiles (Lk. 2.27-32). Luke presents four prophetic figures in 4.25-27 and 11.30-32 in a striking centrifugal-centripetal balance.

### Luke 4.25-27: Elijah and Elisha
At the inauguration of Jesus' mission in his own village, in the Gospel of Luke one can see a twofold missiological aspect in His ministry. In the text of Isaiah that Jesus edits and reads there is a delicate balance between "go out" and "attract in." The anointed one is "sent to proclaim to the captives freedom." This is illustrated by Elijah, who leaves Israel and goes to the woman of Zarephath in Sidon. On the other hand, the Messiah also attracts people in, as Elisha attracted Naaman to Israel. These two forces can be called the centrifugal and centripetal forces of mission. For Bailey,[24] loyalty to this text requires commitment to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. The messenger goes out with the message (to the woman), and Naaman is attracted into the community of faith and its prophet.[25]

It is important to note that both persons Elijah and Elisha interact with were non-Jews: the woman from Sidon and Naaman from Syria. In Luke's Gospel, there is no dichotomy between these two aspects

---

24 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 166.

25 Bailey, 169; Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 105.

of mission. On the contrary, the twofold nature of mission is being presented together in an intentional tension: the mission of Elijah has a centrifugal emphasis as he goes to the woman in Sidon, while the mission of Elisha has a centripetal feature as he ministers to Naaman that is drawn from Syria to Israel.

*Luke 11.30-32: Jonah and Solomon*
This missiological dualism is presented in the Gospel again in chapter 11 where another two prophetic figures are grouped. In addition to the comparison of the greatness of Jesus in contrast to Jonah and Solomon, there is a subtle contrast in these two examples in the fact that Jonah had to *go* (centrifugal mandate), while the Queen of the South had to *come* (centripetal magnetism). Also, Jonah had to perform a north-ward journey, while the Queen had to perform a journey from the ends of the earth. This hyperbolic idiom ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς is an indicator of the great distance that can be contrasted with Jonah's long escapade until he finally reached Niniveh.

Regarding prophetic figures ministering to Gentiles (e.g Jonah, Solomon, Elijah and Elisha), Bird correctly noted that they provide an illustration of preaching by both centripetal attraction and by active centrifugal seeking.[26] "The centrifugal force may be observed in the case of Jonah whose 'preaching' (κήρυγμα) entails a journey to Nineveh, while Elijah is 'sent' (ἐπέμφθη) not to Israel, but to a widow."[27]

Considering these examples, there are consistent arguments to highlight that Luke incorporates in his Gospel a twofold theology of mission that is simultaneously both centripetal and centrifugal.

---

26  Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, The Library of New Testament Studies 331 (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 70.

27  Bird, 70.

## John: centrifugal/centripetal dynamic narrative

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the concept of mission in the Fourth Gospel has a distinctive approach. From the beginning of the Gospel, the apostle presents the divine Logos having an ontological relation to God and fulfilling a missional plan. The scholars have been using the term *missio Dei* to describe the participation in the mission of the Triune God by sending the Son into the world to save the world. The concept *mission Dei* was described by the theologians in numerous ways in the last century[28] and generally emphasizes the centripetal aspect of mission in sending of the Son by the Father.

The problem with this theological concept resides in the danger of interpreting the centripetal dimension of mission in such a way that the role of man can be almost nullified. In fact, the concept of *Missio Dei* has been regarded by the scholars as a mission that is ascribed entirely to God in such a way that man becomes inactive in this salvific process.

The Apostle John, similar to the Synoptic Gospels, emphasized the twofold centrifugal/centripetal aspect of mission that was present in the teaching of Jesus.

This aspect is clearly seen in the dynamic narrative of chapter 4 where Jesus goes in Samaria not by chance but a necessity (v.4 :Εδει δε. …). The dynamic is seen in the movement of the players: the woman comes to the well for the water (v.7 … ἔρχομαι) while the disciples had gone away (v.8 … ἀπέρχομαι) to the village for food; the disciples come from the village with the food while the woman goes to the village (v.28 … ἀπέρχομαι) after tasting the living water; the disciples come (v.30 ἐξέρχομαι … ἔρχομαι) bringing food to Jesus while the woman invites (v.29 δεῦτε) people to the Messiah; after the event

---

28   For an overview of the use of the concept see Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 286–304.

Jesus departed (v.43 … ἐξέρχομαι…) and went into Galilee (v.43 … ἀπέρχομαι).

This dynamic is later present in John 6.44 where there is a clear word-play in which the verbs *come* (ἔρχομαι), *send* (πέμπω), and *draw* (ἕλκω) are used one after the other. The centrifugal aspect is emphasized in the sending of the Son, while the centripetal dimension is seen in the fact the Jesus will draw all people to himself (Jn. 6.44).

The death and resurrection of Jesus are marked by a special emphasis on the centripetal and the centrifugal aspect. When the Greeks came to Philip in order to see Jesus, the centripetal aspect of mission is clearly stated by the fact that all men are attracted to Jesus (Jn. 12-32-33). On the other side, after the resurrection the Evangelist presents the centrifugal mandate of the disciples that is modeled upon the paradigm of the Father sending the Son into the world (Jn. 20.21).

Conclusion

The role of the Holy Spirit in Mission is twofold: *centripetal* and *centrifugal*. The centripetal role reflects the attractive force that the Holy Spirit performs by bringing people into the Kingdom, while the centrifugal force reflects the outward move in which the Holy Spirit empowers the believers to expand the Kingdom of God by reaching out and proclaiming the Gospel.

David Bosch correctly emphasized that the danger of defining mission in the Old Testament as exclusively 'God's work' and the New Testament as centrifugal mission in which man is ostensibly more actively involved as 'man's work' is that of constructing two entities that tend to mutually exclude one another.[29] Giving more than two dozen examples, he acknowledged a dialectical and creative tension between God's work and man's that is of utmost importance for the biblical foundation of missions.[30]

As it was argued the *centripetal* and *centrifugal* aspects are not restricted to the Old and respectively the New Testament, but there are present

---

29  Bosch, *Witness To The World*, 79.

30  Bosch, 80–81.

in both testaments. In the Old Testament the nations were drawn toward the people of God, but in this process, God's people (as a corporate entity) and heralds (as individual emissaries) were used to proclaim salvation to the ends of the earth. In the New Testament the Church is mandated with a great commission to bring the message of Christ to Gentiles, however the ultimate teleological aspect of mission is centripetal, namely to bring all the nations to Christ.

In the Gospels, the concept of mission has a theological approach in its centrifugal mandate and a teleological approach in its centripetal aspect. These inseparable aspects are *to proclaim God to the people* and *to bring people to God*.

While in the Old Testament this twofold nature of mission had a physical implication (Israel as the physical people of God and the Temple as the physical place of worship), in the New Testament, mission is a spiritual dimension in which the physical aspect becomes secondary. However, it can be stated that there is no missiological dichotomy between Old and New Testament, since both follow the same dual paradigm of mission that is simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal.

This twofold missiological emphasis has a significant implication for the church today. The presence of so many centrifugal and centripetal missiological aspects in the Biblical texts must function as indicators when it comes to the missional strategy of the Church. Often the Church had a single approach on mission ignoring the alternative. The centripetal mission of the Church should not be passive waiting the people to come to salvation, but proactive. Similarly, the centrifugal emphasis on reaching the lost, should not be man-centered, but God-centered. Thus, the Church today must be proactive in attracting the lost to God and strategic in bringing the Gospel to the lost.

**Bibliography**

Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

———. *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Bevans, Stephen B., and Roger P. Schroeder. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004.

Bickerman, Elias J. "The Warning Inscriptions of Herod's Temple." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 37, no. 4 (1947): 387–405.

Bird, Michael F. *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*. The Library of New Testament Studies 331. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006.

Blauw, Johannes. *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission*. London: Lutterworth Press, 2003.

Bosch, David J. *Witness To The World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Frey, Jean Baptiste. *Corpus of Jewish Inscriptions: Jewish Inscriptions From the Third Century B.C. to the Seventh Century A.D.* New York: Ktav Pub House, 1975.

Hanson, K. C., and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Kaiser Jr., Walter C. *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

———. *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Livingston, J. Kevin. *A Missiology of the Road: Early Perspectives in David Bosch's Theology of Mission and Evangelism*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014.

Rowley, Harold Henry. *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*. London: Carey Press, 1945.

Schnabel, Eckhard J. "Israel, The People Of God, And The Nations." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 1 (2002).

Sundkler, Bengt. "Jésus et Les Païens." Edited by Bengt Sundkler and A. Fridrichsen. *Contributions À L'étude de La Pensée Missionaire Dans Le Nouveau Testament*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 6; Uppsala: Neutestamentliches Seminar zu Uppsala, 1937.

———. *The World of Mission*. Lutterworth Press, 1966.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

# THE CONCEPT, BASIS AND CALL TO GODLINESS IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

## HAMILTON MOORE[1]

*Chester University, UK & Emanuel University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT: This article will focus upon the concept of godliness in the Pastoral Epistles. The actual term *eusebeia*, "godliness," is used ten times in the Letters, (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:1) Beyond these Epistles the word occurs only once in Acts 3:12 and four times in 2 Peter 1:3, 6, 7; 3:11. Related words, as the adjective *eusebēs* "devout" or "godly," the adverb *eusebōs* "godly" and the verb *eusebein* "to worship" or "show godliness" are also found. Wherever these words occur there appears to be no significant difference in meaning. This article will seek to explore the concept *eusebeia*, noting how it was used in the Greco-Roman society and the Hellenistic Jewish community. Considering the main texts where the term occurs in the Pastoral Epistles, we will examine how Paul has then adapted this concept to define for Timothy and Titus the Christian's new existence in Christ, based on his mission, an existence reflecting devotion to God and the consequent manner of life which follows, whether one is in leadership or otherwise.

KEY WORDS The Greco-Roman environment, the Christ-event, ungodliness, the scope of the believer's intercession, leadership and witness in Ephesus and Crete.

## Introduction

As early as Genesis 4:26; 5:22-24; 6:9 it is recorded that people began to "call upon the name of the LORD"[2] and there were those as Enoch and Noah who were said to have "walked with God." Testimony to the privilege of fellowship with God enjoyed by many of God's Old Testament

---

1    Dr. Hamilton Moore, BD, MTh, PhD, (QUB), Recognised Teacher Chester University, UK, Adjunct Prof. Emanuel University, Oradea.

2    Quotations in this article are taken from the ESV.

people is recorded in Hebrews 11:1-14 - those "of whom the world was not worthy." One term to describe this relationship with God in the NT, is the term *eusebeia*, "godliness," which will now be the focus of this article.

## The significant use of the concept

The concept actually occurs ten times in the Pastoral Epistles, (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:1).[3] Outside these Epistles the word is found once in Acts 3:12 and four times in 2 Peter 1:3, 6, 7; 3:11. Related words as the adjective *eusebēs* "devout" or "godly" are found three times, (Acts 10:2, 7; 2 Peter 2:9), and the adverb *eusebōs* "godly" twice, (2 Timothy 3:12; Titus 2:12); the verb *eusebein* "to worship" or "show godliness" also occurs twice, (Acts 17:23; 1 Timothy 5:4). In our focus upon godliness, we will consider particularly the references to the word *eusebeia*, in the Pastoral Epistles. The other references do not need separate treatment as their meaning is not really distinct from how *eusebeia* is used.

Towner[4] who focused upon *eusebeia* in the Pastoral Epistles, highlighted the use of this concept in Hellenistic ethical thought, and specifically its use in the cult of Artemis. In Greek culture it expressed an attitude of reverence towards persons or things (ancestors, living relatives, rulers, i.e., respect for the various orders within life), all under the care of the gods. The Roman equivalent to *eusebeia* was *pietas* which referred to the same range of objects commanding respect. While he has pointed out the use of the concept in the Greco-Roman environment and especially the connection with Artemis, for Towner, it is the concern in Hellenistic Judaism with the Diaspora Jewish community to interpret its faith for

---

3    Aspects of the meaning of the word "godliness" were first highlighted in my exposition of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus in my book, H. Moore, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus: Missional Texts from a Great Missionary Statesman*, (Belfast: Nicholson and Bass, 2016).

4    P.H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus, The Goal of our Instruction: the Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 34, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 171-175.

contemporary non-Jewish society which is important. They used this concept as expressing in Greek the interrelationship between the knowledge of the one true God, the fear of the Lord and the resulting conduct which flows from this. For Towner, this is what determined its meaning in the NT. At its basis is the concept of knowing God and the behaviour that ought to follow from this knowledge. This alone, for Towner, is authentic Christianity, in its inward and outward aspects. This godly lifestyle is set over against *asebeia*, (1 Timothy 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:16; Titus 2:12), "ungodliness." He affirms, "What his opponents presented to the churches as "godliness" Paul exposed as being superficial and empty of a genuine knowledge of God, despite their assertions to a better knowledge of the divine."[5] Because of the extensive use of *eusebeia* in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus it becomes clear that Paul is responding to how the word was popularly employed in Greek and Roman ethics and in the cult of Artemis. For him, contemporary culture needed to face the challenge of the Christian gospel that, in fact, this prized cardinal virtue was attainable only through the true knowledge of the only God (1 Timothy 1:17), by faith in Christ, the only mediator, "who gave himself as a ransom," (1 Timothy 2:5-6) and through the power of the Holy Spirit, (2 Timothy 1:7).

Marshall[6] in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles also has a full discussion of the word *eusebeia* in Excursus 1 and arrives at basically the same view. He is attracted to Quinn's[7] conclusion that the occurrence of the *eusebeia* word-group in these Epistles reflects "the attempt of Roman Christians to identify themselves in terms of the society in which they lived, a city that had temples to personified Pietas …The values grounded on *pietas* in pagan Rome offered a point of departure for showing what Christians meant by *eusebeia*." He suggests that the word-group:

---

5    Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 174.

6    I H. Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary, eds. J.A. Emerton, C.E.B. Cranfield, and G.N. Stanton, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999, 135-144.

7    J.D. Quinn, "Paul's Last Captivity," in Livingstone, E. (ed.), *Studia Biblica 3* (JSNT Sup 3, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980), 289.

May have been chosen because it provides a contact point with pagan society (Greek or Roman) … Ironically, it may well have been the currency of the language in Graeco-Roman thought that delayed and then limited its use in the early church's vocabulary.

Note his conviction here that this use in Greek and Roman society may have been the reason why the word *eusebeia* does not occur in Paul's earlier Epistles. He concludes, as Towner, that Paul, now writing to Timothy and Titus, as his apostolic delegates in Ephesus and Crete, employed the term *eusebeia* to express "a strongly Christian concept of the new existence in Christ that combines belief in God and a consequent manner of life." Therefore, here in the Pastoral Epistles Paul can take a word neglected or likely avoided in his earlier Epistles and now affirm for the society and culture in Ephesus and Crete *the true eusebeia*, i.e., what Christianity meant as a response towards God, lived out in a Christian lifestyle based of what God has done in Christ.

In light of the above, what then does Paul have to say about "godliness" as expressed in the Pastoral Epistles? We will discover that the word "godliness" is used by him to describe elements of a lifestyle of devotion that is truly Christian. But first let us consider:

**The true basis of godliness**

True "godliness" has the Christ-event as its basis. 1 Timothy 3:16 states "Great indeed … is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen of angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." The term "mystery" is a common word for something previously hidden but now unveiled. Here what is revealed is the plan of God centered in Jesus Christ, his person and work, all he has accomplished. When the text says "He was manifested in the flesh" this will include the purpose of his incarnation, his saving death as a ransom, which has already been emphasised in 1 Timothy – see 1:15; 2:5. Note how Christ is further revealed; first, "vindicated" in his victorious life and resurrection by the enabling and action of the Spirit, "seen by angels," on many occasions, (Matthew 28:1-7; Luke

2:13, 22:43, 24:4; Mark 1:13; Acts 1:10-11), "proclaimed" in the mission of God, "believed on in the world" through the spread and success of the gospel, and finally, "taken up in glory," likely a description of the status of his glorification "conferred in and through exaltation."[8] All of this has made the "godliness," which Paul will encourage us to form as a Christian lifestyle, possible. Therefore, these events are "great indeed." Does Paul recall the cry of Diana's worshippers who shouted for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," (Acts 19:28, 34) and so, by way of contrast, he affirms "Great … is the mystery of godliness"?

The second text we should note is Titus 2:11. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age …"  It is not that the grace of God came into existence when Christ came – God has always been gracious – but his grace appeared visibly in Jesus Christ. It is seen in Jesus' birth, life, but above all in his atoning death. Take note of how Paul also personifies this grace.  Grace the saviour became also grace the teacher. This revelation of grace finds its "teaching power" as it exhorts us (negatively) to renounce our old life, "ungodliness and worldly passions," and to live (positive-ly) our new life, one of self-control, uprightness and godliness.  Paul is therefore affirming here in the Pastorals that it is the coming and cross of Jesus which truly lie at the foundation of a godly lifestyle. Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous of good works," (Titus 2:14).  Here, Paul is emphasising that Christ came not to save us from hell but from a life of lawlessness or sin! God's design in sending his Son for us was not just to deliver us from condemnation or the wrath of God, but to bring us to faith and then into purity, to be godly in life, always committed or ready to serve others. To emphasise again, the whole basis of this is the coming and particularly the cross of Jesus. Here we have a completely new insight into what is basic when one speaks of *eusebeia.*

---

8    Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 284.

**The sad contrast to godliness**

The "godliness" of which Paul writes is set in contrast to the false teaching, the ungodliness in the present culture and the unworthy motives seen in the lives of the false teachers who were opposed to Paul, (1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-5; 6:3-5). The apostle had been involved in mission as he travelled in the east after he had been released from house arrest in Rome, (Acts 28:30-31). Titus and he had been in Crete, (Titus 1:5) and he had travelled to Ephesus with Timothy where they discover the false teachings which were now in danger of undermining the whole church. Apparently, Paul had excommunicated the two ringleaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander, (1 Timothy 1:19-20), but because he had to press on to Macedonia in his mission ministry, he left Timothy to stop the influence and spread of such teaching, (1 Timothy 1:3). Therefore, Timothy was to stay at Ephesus in order to challenge the false teachers, who were actively teaching (Paul uses the present tense) a "different doctrine." For this different doctrine, Paul uses *heterodidaskaleō*, which is found only here and again in 6:3 in the NT. Paul largely defines the meaning of *heterodidaskaleō* by his comments here in 1:3-7, 4:1-5 and 6:3-5 concerning the false teachers who advocated "a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching that accords with true godliness," (6:3).

In preaching this different doctrine, Paul accuses the false teachers of teaching the law wrongly, focusing upon "myths," *muthos* and "endless genealogies," *aperantos genealogiais*; "endless" in the sense of only producing constant argument, stressing that they are useless and bring no results, (1 Timothy 1:4). Note that "genealogies" identifies the content as being concerned with OT characters and even possibly OT family trees. Paul had also identified them as "teachers of the law" (1:7), a term used elsewhere of regular Jewish teachers (Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34). But what about the use of the term myths? The two descriptions can be combined, "myths and genealogies" and we can find the same problem highlighted in Titus 1:14, where we again find false teachers teaching "Jewish myths." The heresy also appears to have had some influences from early

Gnosticism (see 1 Timothy 6:20, where their teaching is referred to as that which is falsely called "knowledge" *gnōseōs*; also, the fact that they "profess to know God," Titus 1:16).

In this we do not have fully developed Gnosticism which would affect the dating of these Letters,[9] but what seems to have been Jewish in nature, (Titus 1:10 mentions that the deceivers were "of the circumcision party" and Titus 3:9 identifies their disputes as "quarrels about the law"). The teachers were taken up with useless speculation, involving fantastic stories about famous figures and their genealogies i.e., they were wasting their time in all kinds of fanciful tales regarding ancestors from the past.

We learn something further of the content of the false teaching in 1 Timothy 4: 1-5. "In later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." The time frame is referring to the Christian era between 1st and 2nd coming of Christ with the emphasis being that the doctrinal departure that is part of the moral and theological deterioration prophesied for the last days had already be-

---

9    Knight, after a reasonably full discussion remains a little uncertain as to what the terms "myths and genealogies" refer to, but is clear about some things. Genealogies do not refer to the Gnostic systems of aeons as they were never so-called; if this was intended, Paul would have gone more fully into the content, not simply refer to them with a passing allusion. Gnosticism in any clearly developed form (he refers to E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism,* London, 1973), is later than the NT.  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), 73-74. See also B. Witherington, 111, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians,* Vol.1: *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John,* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, and Nottingham, Apollos, 2006), who in "A Closer Look," 341-347, discusses the opponents of Paul. He stresses the importance of not reading later Gnostic ideas into the text as the false teachers appear to be more like those in Colossians 2 than those dealt with by Irenaeus and others in the second century. This of course, will affect our whole interpretation of the Epistles – here we are dealing with first-century documents and not a second-century church situation.

gun.[10] The false teachers were turning people away from "the faith," the term that sums up the Christian way. On the surface here we have human agents – certain teachers, probably elders, who were speaking erroneous things, with some people listening to them. But beneath the surface we have the real source of the false teaching. People were devoting themselves to a heretical message which had its origin with "deceitful spirits," with the content of the false teaching identified by Paul as the "teachings of demons."[11] The false teachers were teaching a false asceticism i.e., they "forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving," (4:3). Note also 2 Timothy 2:17 which refers to the claims of the false teachers, Hymenaeus and Philetus, that "the resurrection has already happened." The suggestion is that they had a low view of the material world and the human body (Gnostic views) and held that there was no need for marriage as in some sense believers were already resurrected and in their "glorified state."

Taking all these references into account, the situation seems to be that Paul's Ephesian opponents were involved in some kind of "spiritual" exegesis of OT stories, and in the case of Genesis, there appears to be a call to a return to pre-fall patterns of living. The ideas of living in the resurrection era, with paradise or Edenic conditions to be restored, would make it clearly possible for the false teachers to influence some to believe that they could, and in fact should, anticipate it already in the here and now. All this would help explain the use of the Genesis account in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 to counteract the false manipulation of Genesis materials, also the reference to "childbearing" in 2:15, the teaching here in chapter 4 and how Paul encourages the younger widows to remarry in 5:14 (see

---

10  Knight points out that Paul writes of a present situation (4:3-5) and urges Timothy to instruct the church members in this matter (4:6), "here and now," Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 189.

11  Stott writes, "The bible portrays the devil not only as the tempter, enticing people into sin, but as the deceiver, seducing people into error." J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 111.

also where an elder or deacon will be "the husband of one wife," 3:2, 12). The message stated in 1 Timothy 4 is to recognise the basic goodness of created things, everything God has created; food, the world of nature, marriage, sexual fulfilment, family. The kind of lifestyle which the false teachers were advocating was very far from the godliness that would be pleasing to God.

Regarding Paul's opponents, their real motive was gain. In 1 Timothy 6:3-5 Paul focuses again upon the false teachers, who were in his mind throughout the whole Epistle. We find his final condemnation of them in this Epistle here.  He exposes the character of the false teachers and of the false doctrine itself. He also links their conduct to a misunderstanding of godliness and shameful financial motives. First Paul claimed that these false teachers have *deviated from the truth.* They were preaching, "a different doctrine" that "does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness," (6:3).   Paul once again calls the false teaching *heterodidaskaleō* (cf. also 1:3) where *heteros* means "other," or "different," because it strays from apostolic instruction. They have not attached themselves to or adhered to the "sound words …" here *hugiainousin,* where Paul uses medical language for the healthiness of the apostolic teaching. This is the first use of the phrase in Timothy – it is found yet again in 2 Timothy 1:13. The combination "sound doctrine" or "sound teaching" is more common, (1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1 and again, Titus 2:8 "sound speech").  The healthy teaching actually consists of "the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ," for Towner[12] he is the origin and also the authority behind the teaching. Therefore, to agree with Paul is to agree with the authoritative words of Jesus. This teaching is also *kata* i.e., it "accords with," meaning either it is teaching which "leads to" or is "in accordance with" godliness, a reference to its content. It is teaching which is designed to promote or produce godliness in those who submit to it. To engage in other teaching and thus disagree with the apostolic teaching is to teach something which is not healthy, since

---

12   Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 394.

it does not produce spiritually healthy or godly living; promoting such doctrine is to be conceited and to understand nothing, (6:4).

The false teachers have also *caused division in the church.* They are divisive. "He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words," (6:4). The false teacher here has an unprofitable or un-wholesome[13] interest in mere speculations or trifles. The word "controversy" suggests that which goes beyond the stage of a useful exchange of ideas[14] leading to word battles. These lead to other sinful activities, in fact Paul lists five moral defects, "envy" (the resentment of another's status and a desire to replace them), "dissention" (the spirit of contention), "slander" of other teachers, "evil suspicions" (the undermining of the possibility of trust on which relationships are based, thinking the worst of each other) and "constant friction" (the disputations that result from the former vices). These are the sins of men "depraved in mind" (the perfect tense of the participle[15] indicates a settled condition of the mind), the organ of rational discernment where the gospel is processed and grasped. Therefore, their rejection of the apostolic doctrine has robbed them of the truth. Their teaching is not an altered gospel; it is a message that is wholly another. In fact, in contrast to apostolic doctrine, they consider that godliness is a means of gain, a matter of the pocket and not a matter of the heart.[16]

So, Paul accuses them of unworthy motives i.e., *They are devoted to money.* Their only interest in their work is if it is financially rewarding. We do know that Ephesus enjoyed great opulence - see the problem with

---

13  The word used by Paul is "sick" *nosōn* – only here in the NT. It usually describes spiritual or mental illness; now he uses it here as a contrast to the "sound" teaching of v3.

14  Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 395.

15  Knight quotes 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving," claiming that the perfect passive here also has the devil in view, Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 252.

16  D. Guthrie *Pastoral Epistles*, (Leicester; Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 124.

the traders in the past when Paul's teaching began to hit their pockets, (Acts 19:23). Paul himself had to make clear that he was not guilty of such a charge, (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Timothy must withdraw himself from them, reject such ungodliness and follow a different path. At this point we need to look more at what is necessary to allow godliness to be present in the Christian community and to grow.

## The prayerful path to godliness

Paul explains that godliness can flourish in the lives of believers when through prayer "for all people" peace ensues. "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people … that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way," (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Paul in 2:1 is emphasising the universal scope of our responsibility as we come to God in prayer.

We should begin by asking the question whether Paul is still saying something about the problem of the "law teachers" at Ephesus? The word "then" would suggest this. These false teachers may have been influenced by an elitism in which the gospel was restricted to a privileged number, or only the initiated. But Paul has stated that Christ came "to save sinners," not just Jewish sinners, (1 Timothy 1:15). Now we find that four times in 2:1-7 Paul stresses this point. Prayers are to be offered for all people. God will have all people to be saved, (2:3-4); Christ gave himself a ransom for all, (2:6); Paul was a teacher of the faith for all the Gentiles, (2:7). We should understand that the above statements simply continue the theme of universality in the passage. It is the gentile mission (v7) which is in mind.  Paul is indicating that the breadth of God's will or his salvific purpose includes the non-Jewish world.

*How We Are to Pray (v1).*
The Church must pray. Paul writes, "first of all," meaning not primacy of time but primacy of importance.[17] The term "supplications" carries the idea of intercession about particular needs, needs that are critical and

---

17  Guthrie *The Pastoral Epistles*, 79.

deeply affect us. Also, the verb from which the noun is derived has the idea of having an audience with the king! While "supplications" may suggest needs that are more urgent or related to specific or difficult situations, "prayers," will be the exhortation which concerns the bringing of those general needs which are always present. We are urged to bring them as petitions into the presence of the Lord. Again, "intercessions" are specific prayers for individuals. We recall Acts 12:5, where the church prayed particularly for Peter. The Holy Spirit does this for us, (Romans 8:27); again, Jesus our High Priest, (Hebrews 7:25), "ever lives to make intercession for us." They must do this for others. Next is the "thanksgivings." Here is thanksgiving or gratitude for what the Lord had done for them already. He owes us nothing. He is saddened by ingratitude, as with the healing of the ten lepers, when only one returned to give him thanks. (Luke 17:17).

*Who We Are to Pray for (v1-2).* "for all people, for kings..."
The reference to praying "for kings" is quite remarkable since at the time there were no identifiable Christian rulers in the known world. We are reminded of Jeremiah's encouragement to the people carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare," (Jeremiah 29:7); also, Ezra 6:10 which makes the appeal, "pray for the life of the king and his sons."

The term "king" was used of the Roman emperor in the Greek speaking world; here it can be just a generalising reference to Roman emperors or Roman client kings. "All who are in high positions" will refer to any kind of lower official, all holding imperial positions throughout the empire. Tertullian stated, "We pray also for the emperors, for their ministers and those in power, that their reign may continue, that the state may be at peace, and that the end of the world may be postponed."[18]

---

18  Tertullian, *Apology,* translated by T.R. Glover, (Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1931), 39.2.

Tertullian's point about bringing peace to the state is exactly what Paul's exhortation has in mind. He is writing that the outcome of this type of praying is, as we noted, so that God's people can live "a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way," (2:2). He is thinking first of freedom from war and civil strife, like the Hellenistic ideal. So, in the gospel or mission context of 1 Timothy 2, seeking God for "all who are in high positions" can lead first to circumstances that make witness possible i.e., peaceful conditions which would facilitate the preaching of the gospel. Prayer to God can affect the situation – see also Jonah 3:5-10; Daniel 2:46-49; 3:28-30; 4:34-37. But secondly, that the result of the effective prayers of believers for civil leaders is not only peace and stability, but so that God's people can live a life "godly and dignified in every way."

What does the text mean to live in *eusebeia* and *semnotēs*, in "godliness" and "reverence" or in a "dignified" way? We noted that for Towner[19] as far as *eusebeia* is concerned, at its basis is the concept of knowing God and the behaviour that ought to follow from this knowledge. Regarding *semnotēs* and its word group, the meaning in secular Greek and among Hellenistic Jewish writers and Judaism is outward dignity, seriousness, respectability, reverence in conduct and speech, behaviour that is deserving of respect. Such a possibility of a society where peace ensues, in which believers can live godly lives, serve and witness can be realised as we cry to God for all people, especially for kings, for those in other positions of authority. What a responsibility and what a possibility! We should now note that Paul also goes on to employ these related words in these Epistles to describe the conduct of leaders in the church, (1 Timothy 3:4, 8, 11) In fact, in the Pastoral Epistles generally Paul calls repeatedly for a godly lifestyle to characterise people of every standing in the Christian church, leaders, old men, young men, women, and Timothy and Titus themselves, as apostolic delegates. This is where everything has been leading up to, namely:

---

19  Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 171-175.

## The vital call to godliness

"Godliness" in the Pastoral Epistles is the lifestyle which the Christian is called to pursue. Thus, they can be a witness in an alien culture.

First, *The Elders.* We should first note that the churches in Ephesus and on Crete are to be led by godly leaders, (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Actually, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 the most important aspect for fitness to be chosen as a leader is spirituality. In 1 Timothy the elder must have a favourable testimony from three groups, church members, the family and outsiders. None should be able to point the finger. He must be "above reproach." Note that the adjective *anepilēmpton* describes a person who not only is "above reproach" but is deservedly considered to be so.[20]

The statement "above reproach" can, as Hendriksen explains,[21] be taken as a type of heading for all the eleven items which follow. The elder is required to be entirely faithful to his wife at all times, an example of strict morality, literally, "one wife's husband," (1 Timothy 3:2). This is an important statement because the false teachers had forbidden marriage, (1 Timothy 4:3) and sexual promiscuity was common, (2 Timothy 3:6). The emphasis is the same for deacons, (1 Timothy 3:12) and in Titus 1:6 this exhortation concerning elders in Crete is placed first there also, suggesting for Mounce[22] that the lack of marital faithfulness was a serious problem in the churches.

Positively, the elder must be clear-headed, demonstrating balanced, sober thinking. He will be self-controlled, a master of himself, in his behaviour, emotions and impulses. "He must not only talk well but walk well."[23] He will be respectable or honourable – that which causes a person to be respected by others, having an outward demeanour stemming from the inward quality of self-mastery – and hospitable (a practice in

---

20  J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles,* HNTC, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 80.

21  W. Hendriksen, *1 & 11 Timothy and Titus,* 119.

22  W.D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* Word Biblical Commentaries, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 170.

23  King, *A Leader Led,* 59.

HAMILTON MOORE

fact, required of all believers, (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9), because of the dangers of travel and economic uncertainty). Then "able to teach," the only ministry gift listed here among aspects of character which involves having the ability to give guidance and instruction to those who require it, (cf. also Titus 1:9f.).

Negatively, the elder is "not a drunkard." The word occurs again in Titus 1:7 of elders. It is usually a reference to excessive drinking, one who lingers beside his wine. The same stipulation is repeated for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8, and of older women in Titus 2:2. That it is stressed on these separate occasions, points to the fact that such drinking was a serious problem for the churches in Ephesus and Crete. Later we learn of Timothy and his total abstinence, (1 Timothy 5:23). Linked to the first prohibition here and in Titus 1:7 is another Greek word *plēktēs*, again found only here in the NT, making clear that such drinking leads to violence. Elders were not to be violent as drunkards can be; not primed for a fight or ready to intimidate people – even verbally. They must not be greedy for financial gain but gentle, not quarrelsome, "making allowances for slowness, awkwardness, even rudeness in others,"[24] prepared to tolerate a lot. They show reasonableness, or forbearance – a Christ-like quality, (2 Corinthians 10:1). An important contrast when it comes to the false teachers is the reference to financial gain, "not a lover of money." This was a common vice in the Greco-Roman culture. All in leadership, (3:8; Titus 1:7) need to be warned. We have seen this vice highlighted in 1 Timothy 6:5f. The opponents were teaching not because of the needs of the people but just in order to get money. This was the real motivation. Here, with faithful leaders, the opposite is clearly implied, i.e., not characterised by greed but rather, prepared for self-sacrifice as far as others were concerned.

Paul now writes of godliness in those who lead, when it comes to family. A man must evidently be able to govern his family/children graciously and command their respect, maintaining his personal dignity in the process, before he takes on the management of the church, the family

---

24  King, *A Leader Led,* 61.

62

THE CONCEPT, BASIS AND CALL TO GODLINESS IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

of God. Hendriksen[25] has noted that the very first and the last of the requirements describe the elder's relationship to his family. It is similar when we come to deacons (3:12). This must have been regarded as of great importance. Such management must be carried out "with all dignity," here, *semnotētos*.

Concerning the family, in these references Paul is referring to "children" who are still in the home i.e., minors. In Titus 1:6 the requirement is that the elder must have *pista tekna*, faithful children, "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." The question is should "*pista*" be understood as "believing" or as "faithful"? It is used in both senses in these Epistles. Here, the context, with the parallel in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, provide some important pointers as to interpretation. The qualifying statement here "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" emphasizes behaviour and seems to explain what it means for *tekna* to be *pista*. Likewise, 1 Timothy 3:4 speaks of the overseer "keeping his children under control with all dignity." Knight[26] makes the point:

In both cases the overseer is evaluated on the basis of his control of his children and their conduct. It is likely "having faithful children" is virtually equivalent to 1Tim.3v4. If that is so then *pista* here means "faithful" in the sense of "submissive" or "obedient," as a servant or steward is regarded as *pistos* when he carries out the requests of his master.

Mounce[27] notes the use of *prostēnai* "manage" in 3:5 which can mean to govern or to lead. The second idea is expressed when it comes to the cognate *prostatēs* which means "protector." Accordingly, here we have the idea of the father's role as not being dictatorial but rather of caring and

---

25  Hendriksen, *1 & 11 Timothy and Titus,* 127.

26  Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 290. We have followed, as elsewhere, the ESV translation, "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination," but must also point out that the translation in spite of this commences with, "his children are believers …" Such a translation has led to many godly men to actually step back from leadership because some family members remain unconverted.

27  Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,*178.

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA     SEMĂNĂTORUL (THE SOWER) 4.1 (2023)

protecting his children. Likewise, in the church he must not be autocratic but be a caring leader who serves. This is clear when Paul links the concept with *epimelēsetai* again in 3:5 "to take care of" God's church.

Regarding godliness, we should note how Paul often emphasises his concern about the opinion outsiders will have for the witness/testimony of the church (1 Timothy 5:14; 6:1; Titus 2:5, 8, 10; 3:2, 8; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12). Such outsiders often know more about the person since he is among them every day living in the local community or work situation. If the leader does not have the respect of outsiders, it will prove a stumbling block for the gospel. This witness was concerned with the effectiveness of the church's mission in the world. To fail in any of the qualities Paul has outlined could result in a loss of credibility.

What does Paul mean by "the snare of the devil"? Is it that the individual may consider that his bad conduct has not hindered him in achieving success so he will attempt to get away with more, falling into the devil's trap and under the devil's power? The elder who guards himself in these matters saves himself and the church from falling into disgrace and a complete loss of credibility. The word *oneidismos* "reproach" carries with it the idea of bringing reproach upon themselves, i.e., extreme disgrace.

Another way[28] of presenting the qualifications Paul is asking Timothy to seek to find in prospective elders are as follows:

- *His marriage* v2 a one-woman man, fidelity.

- *His self-mastery* v2 temperate, self-controlled and respectable/honourable.

- *His openness* v2 hospitable –*philoxenon* literally, "a love of strangers."

- *His gifting* v2 "able to teach." The elder must be a student of the word and competent to teach it to others either from the pulpit or one to one in a counselling situation.

---

28 These summary descriptions were gleaned partly from J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus,* 92 f/n. 3.

- *His temperance* v3 not snared by alcohol.
- *His temperament* v3 not violent or quarrelsome – including verbal abuse - but gentle.
- *His handling of money* v3 See the testimony of Samuel at the close of his life's ministry, (1 Samuel 12:1-5) and Paul's past witness to the Ephesian elders, (Acts 20:33-35).
- *His family life* v4-5 respected and loved at home.
- *His servant heart for God's people* v5 – caring for the church of God.
- *His spiritual maturity* v6 there is need for true humility and experience to serve as an elder.
- *His public testimony* v7 there must be evidence of reality, stability, and a genuine confession before others. If an elder does not display qualifications of a godly testimony to his neighbours how will the church be effective in their mission to reach them?

In Titus 1 we have similar teaching concerning the character and conduct of elders. We can highlight with additional comments a few other descriptions and emphases in the Cretan situation. As in 1 Timothy 3:2 the overall requirement for elders is stated i.e., they must be "blameless" or "above reproach," as failure here will affect the reputation of the church in the local situation and greatly hinder the witness.

Paul again begins at home. An elder must be "the husband of one wife." This should not be understood as ruling out the unmarried or those who have married again, but the unfaithful and even the polygamous. Paul is simply writing of the usual situation in life and that marital and sexual fidelity are required of any leader. Again, any children should manifest evidence of being "faithful" or under their father's authority in an ordered home-life.[29]

---

29  Note the discussion of this in 1 Timothy 3. The suggestion there was made that it should not be read as "believing children."

HAMILTON MOORE

Paul lists five negatives (all using *mē* in the accusative) regarding the character of the overseer.[30] The elder must be master of himself; he must not be self-willed, which would manifest itself in stubbornness or arrogance. At the root is a fundamental selfishness putting others down to promote oneself.

Leadership brings prestige and power; some may be tempted to misuse such, becoming proud of their promotion, hence increasing their own vanity. They are above listening to criticism or advice, will lord it over others and become headstrong, autocratic, or as v7 states, quick-tempered ("peppery") (*orgilos*, only here in the NT, but see Proverbs 21:19; 22:24; 29:22). Self-control rather is important since they may have to minister to difficult and demanding people. It is clear that an "explosive" lack of self-control renders one unfit for leadership in the church.[31]

They must not be "a drunkard," addicted to drink, which, as was mentioned earlier, must have been a real problem in the culture of Ephesus and Crete since it is mentioned in all the lists (1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; also 2:3). Although people in leadership usually have a forceful disposition, they will not be "violent" but gentle and not ride roughshod over people. Again, they must be motivated by service, not "greedy for gain" or seeking to profit, again an emphasis in all three lists of qualifications. The word *aischrokerdēs* "greedy for gain" is sometimes used of those who take from others, even though they already have in abundance what they desire to take.[32]

---

30  Note the switch from "elders" in v5 to "overseer" in v7. This is still the same person – with a similar pattern in Acts 20:17; 20:28 and in 1 Peter 5:1-2. The second use here of "overseer" is about the function of the elders. Mounce points out that the force of *gar* "for" is easily overlooked. It ties the discussion together and argues against the suggestion that the overseers are distinct from the elders, Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* 390. See also Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles,* 149,160.

 Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 688.

31  Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 688

32  Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 291.

Contrasting (*alla* "but") the five negatives, there are six positives, largely self-explanatory, with a seventh outlining a ministry responsibility. As was noted in 1 Timothy 3, the elder must be "hospitable," since in the setting of Crete it would be vital that one's home be open for worship and to receive those involved in the spread of the gospel, what with the dangers of travel and the poor reputation of inns. The elder also must love what is good i.e., his desire for the believers must be that they manifest the good qualities God wants them to have (cf. Philippians 4:8). He must be sensible in judgement, "upright" in his dealings with people, also "holy" toward God and "disciplined" (*enkratēs* has a sexual connotation in 1 Corinthians 7:9). The last few here do not appear in the list in 1 Timothy 3 and may reflect a more immature Christian community still struggling to put behind it depraved patterns of behaviour.[33] Then in the final virtue, a transition is made to ministry.

Paul moves from home and family, character and conduct, to their grasp of the truth. They must clearly be faithful to the true message, "the teaching" of the apostles, the identifiable body of instruction now bequeathed to us in the NT. This teaching must be "held firmly," and requires the unreserved personal adherence of the elder to and acceptance of the word he has heard. The *hina* purpose clause outlines the real outcome of all in which he has been grounded. He is not simply to enjoy a grasp of the truth itself, but he has been equipped to be involved in the work of the kingdom! He is to engage in a two-fold ministry, indicated by the repetition of *kai*, "both ... and," a ministry of instructing and rebuking. The first points to the fact that he is to urge or exhort his hearers to accept the sound doctrine and respond to it – it will produce spiritual healthiness - and the second carries the meaning of not simply just contradicting but actually overthrowing the arguments of those who speak against the truth. It is clear that such a man has been called essentially to a teaching ministry that necessitates a teaching gift. It can be maintained that here the requirement of 1 Timothy 3:2 "able to teach" is being elab-

---

33  Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles,* 165.

orated upon. Mounce[34] makes the point that if elders are not devoted to Scripture, then they are not fit to serve or take this office.

Not only elders were to be godly but also *Deacons.* In 1 Timothy 3 Paul moves on in his instructions to Timothy to deal with this other group i.e., the deacons. The guidance given to Timothy for the appointment of deacons has, as with the elders, mainly to do with character. Deacons must also be "above reproach," (3:10) – the word is *anenklētos*, which, only used by Paul in the NT, is a synonym of *anepilēmptos* in 3:2. An initial positive quality "dignified" *semnous*, is followed by three negatives which together can present someone whose manner of life is irreproachable, which is finally summed up in the term "blameless" (3:10). Further requirements follow in 3:11-13. Mounce[35] helpfully points out that six of the characteristics are directly parallel to that of an elder. Again, most of the requirements stand in opposition to the opponents' behaviour.

Both the office of church leader and the office of church worker require the same type of person: a mature godly Christian whose behaviour is above reproach. Stott[36] again is helpful here in the way he sets out the qualities of those who serve as deacons and to his outline I have added some additional comments.

In 3:8 he writes about *self-mastery.* The four words in this verse form a natural grouping, sincere in their behaviour, truth talkers, in control of themselves as far as wine and money are concerned.

The word *dilogos* is found only here in the NT and literally means "double-tongued." It can be explained as to say one thing while thinking another or saying one thing to one person but another to someone else. Guthrie[37] points out that it also can be translated as "talebearer" suggesting the danger of being a gossip rather than understanding the need for confidentiality. The reference to "addicted to much wine" is in the present tense and suggests a habitual consumption of alcohol.

---

34  Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* 393.

35  Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* 195.

36  Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus,* 100.

37  Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles,* 95.

"Not greedy for dishonest gain" the subject occurring again here in this passage (see 3:3) suggests that Paul is particularly concerned about the new church workers having the right attitude as far as money is concerned, probably because of the past experience with the covetous false teachers who were no longer among them. In any ministry in the church the leaders must not be motivated by financial gain, but rather by a willingness to spend and be spent for others. Here the deacons probably had responsibility for the church's finances and were involved in the day-to-day needs of the poor, (cf. Acts 6:1-3).

Paul explains in 3:9 that they must have *orthodox convictions*. The word "mystery" here will stand for the sum total of the revealed truths of the faith i.e., the mystery, which is the faith. Unlike the false teachers who had rejected the voice of conscience (1:19) and even "cauterized" it (4:2) by continually disregarding it, they must maintain a clear conscience (1:6) holding on to God's revelation with sincere and strong conviction. Paul was insistent that any who were appointed as deacons would hold firmly to the truth or the doctrine which had been delivered to the church. The word *echontas* here means "holding to, possessing," and expresses solid unreserved commitment to the faith; holding it, rather than teaching it, which was the elders' responsibility. They must not make shipwreck of the faith, as others have done, (1 Timothy 1:19).  In summary, with the mention of "conscience" it is clear that deacons are to live according to the ethical principles of the revealed faith. Here is true godliness.

Finally, Stott points out that they must be *tested and approved*. They should have a period of time – note the temporal *prōton*, "first" to prove their worth and for the church to see the emergence of their gifts and the type of service that they can render. We have almost the concept of probationers. Certainly, here we have the parallel of instructions to Timothy in 5:22, 24-25 where the theme is the care necessary to be taken in the appointment of elders. Was this examination for the prospective deacons to show that they were without reproach? It is here that one finds the reference to deacons being "blameless" – a term mentioned above. Regarding

HAMILTON MOORE

*anenklētoi* Towner[38] claims that the word is used with the legal sense of the term still in the background, and so "it means to be free of any charge of civil or domestic impropriety." It is used again of elders in Titus 1:6-7.

Then we have v11. *A Commendable Home Life.* Is Paul now moving to the home life of the deacon in this verse or rather in the next (v12)? Notice how v11 begins, The AV translates it "Even so must their wives be..." Also, NKJV and ESV has "wives." It is strange that the wives of elders are not mentioned, if this is the meaning. AV margin has "Women in like manner must…" Note NIV text = "Deacons' wives;" NIV margin = "deaconesses." The word here is *gunaikai* or the singular *gunē* and can be translated "wife" (3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6) or "woman" (2:9, 10, 11, 12, 14). So, is the reference to deacon's wives or deaconesses?

Knight[39] advocates that here we should see the deacon's wives and supports this view with several arguments. For example, would Paul, who was always wise concerning sexuality (cf. e.g., 2:9; 5:11, 15; perhaps 5:6) suggest women as deacons' assistants, rather than their wives? Again, there is no reference if women were in view for them to be "the wife of one husband," as there is for elders and deacons and in the qualifications for older widows, (v2, 12; 5:9). Also, if wives are in view, one understands the point that the qualifications of a deacon also involve his wife's qualifications i.e., he could be disqualified from service if his wife is not worthy! Finally, he makes the point that it is not said of the women that they be "beyond reproach," "because it is not they, but their husbands, who have been elected to and put into office." These women, be they wives or church workers, are to live so that they are worthy of respect; like the deacons, they are to have control of their tongue and tell the truth, "not slanderers," (the word actually is *diabolos* the same term translated "devil" and suggests the spreading of lies) and be trustworthy in everything, showing complete reliability (v11). But godliness must not just be evident only among the leaders and their wives. Paul calls for it to mark:

---

38 Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 265.

39 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*,171-173.

*The Whole Church*   What was expected of the leaders was expected of all, (Titus 2:2, 7). This is the Christian witness which was needed for the contemporary society. Therefore, as far as the Pastoral Epistles are concerned, "godliness" is crucial to describe the true Christian lifestyle expected from every part of the church, a godliness which is absolutely vital to influence the local community. Again and again, we mentioned earlier how are warned in these Epistles of the damage which can be done by local believers not living as they ought. Whether in leadership or simply local members, both old or young, the message is clear. As we highlighted, in the choice of acceptable elders, they "must be well thought of by outsiders," (1 Timothy 3:7). Again, older widows should have "a reputation for good works" and the younger must "give the adversary no occasion for slander," (1 Timothy 5:9, 14); wives will so live with their husbands "that the word of God may not be reviled," (Titus 2:5). Also, slaves must so respect their masters "that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled," (1 Timothy 6:1). The younger men in Crete by life and lip must so live that "an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us," (Titus 2:6). We noted earlier that in Titus 2:11-12 Paul reminds Titus, "the grace of God appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age," Therefore, for those among whom Titus is ministering, grace exhorts them to (negatively) renounce our old life, "ungodliness and worldly passions," and live (positively) a new one, a self-controlled, upright and godly life, i.e., devoted to and living in touch with God, manifesting godliness. Therefore, they should live as Paul had outlined in the earlier verses of Titus 2. These new believers are reminded by Paul that Christ came not just to deliver them from the things of the old life, but to live a changed life. This was the purpose of his coming! Paul having guided the elders, the deacons and their wives, and the whole church regarding the vital need for godliness, lastly, urges this of his younger colleagues.

*Timothy and Titus* Concerning both, Paul also is expecting them to be godly. In 1 Timothy 4:6-10 in contrast to the false teaching of his oppo-

nents, Paul's theology of creation (*tauta* "these things") must be set before the believers by Timothy. In this way he will be a good minister or servant of Jesus Christ – "good" in the sense of approved by God. Paul also calls upon him "to train yourself for godliness," (v7), true godliness, rather than the asceticism of the false teachers.  In teaching as Paul commands, Timothy will show how he has been trained in the truth of the faith. The verb is *entrephō* "to nourish," a word which has in its background the image of feeding or bringing up children. Regarding Timothy, the present participle suggests a continual process, the hearing/reading and inwardly digesting of the truth, first described as "the words of faith" i.e., the body of doctrine of the Christian faith; also, as "the good doctrine" in contrast to the false teaching. So, the truthfulness of the apostolic gospel is stressed when compared to the "doctrines of demons." Paul makes clear that Timothy in contrast to the "some" of v1 has carefully "followed" the true teaching, the verb *parakoloutheō,* here in the perfect tense, suggests following a path begun in the past and continuing or persevering into the present (see also 2 Timothy3:10).

Having commended Timothy for the path he was following, Paul now using the imperative, calls upon him to "have nothing to do" or "reject" (see also the use of the word in 1 Timothy 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:10) this false teaching described under two terms; first *bebēlos,* meaning "irreverent," "lacking any sacred character'" and *graōdeis muthous* meaning stories characteristic of old women, ESV "silly myths," a sarcastic label which was often used in philosophical polemic.[40] The word "myths" convey the idea of a tale fit only for children but also reminds us of the first use of the word in 1 Timothy 1:4 for the "myths" of the false teachers where the OT was overlaid with absurd legends and bizarre symbolism. So, Paul is also interested in a good spiritual diet, but it involves this rejection of the junk teaching of bad doctrine, partially influenced by early Gnosticism, as we noted, and rather, feeding upon the true doctrine. Its source is the true knowledge of God revealed in the gospel and involves commitment to the truth, the teaching that "accords

---

40   Knight *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 195.

with godliness," (Titus 1:1; 1 Timothy 6:3-6). Paul is making clear that his mission is to bring people throughout the world to the knowledge of the only true Saviour-God and his salvation, (v8-10) which can lead to the godliness he writes of.

In all his service in Ephesus Paul encourages Timothy, "train (yourself) for godliness," (I Timothy 4:7). The pursuit of godliness involves discipline, and in v8 Paul contrasts the value of godliness with that of "bodily training." Physical exercise is valuable for this life, but godliness has value not only in "the present life" but also in "the life to come." This is one of Paul's trustworthy sayings found in the Pastoral Epistles, (1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4;9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8).[41]

How is Timothy to train in godliness? In the context this training would appear to include study of and appreciation of the truth of God in his word and in the gospel. As Stott[42] writes, "we cannot become familiar with this godly book without becoming godly ourselves. Nothing evokes the worship of God like the word of God." This godliness must be continually cultivated in the life of the Christian. Hence, in I Timothy 6:11, Paul charges Timothy to "pursue" godliness. The charge is to "flee" the false doctrine and materialism of the false teachers, and to pursue six qualities – righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness. If ungodliness is paired with sinful living, (I Timothy 1:9), godliness is paired with righteousness (*dikaiosunē*), used here in its ethical sense as the practical result of justification in the life of the believer, (see also 2 Timothy 2:22). Therefore, godliness, among other aspects, is being defined as an attitude of devotion to God, and righteousness is the lifestyle that flows from it. We found the same pairing in Titus 2:12, ("upright and godly lives"), emphasising the internal and external aspects of true Christian experience. Here Paul has described Timothy as an example of

---

41   These should not be taken as early creedal statements, but rather, they are there to call for the confident acceptance of certain theological and ethical affirmations, over against the errors of the false teachers.

42   Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus,* 117.

true godliness. But this was also to be true for Titus as Paul writes to him in Titus 2:6-8.

Earlier Paul has presented Titus as first of all, *His Spiritual Son.*  In Titus 1:4 we learn that Titus was converted through Paul – he calls him "my son," not by any blood relationship or legal adoption, but his son spiritually. As a Gentile he was accepted as part of Paul's missionary team, note without circumcision, Galatians 2:3-5; cf. v10, but through the same means of faith ("common" here means "shared") as Paul a Jew. He had been assigned *An Important Ministry.* (1:5). "I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."  Note the *egō* "I" of apostolic authority, "I direct-ed (commanded) you;" Titus has full apostolic authority to appoint the required elders, who were to silence by their teaching the false teachers, (1:11). So just as Paul placed Timothy in Ephesus to challenge the false teaching there, so Titus is left in Crete.  As Knight explains, there was still "unfinished work."[43]

Now we learn that Titus was to be *A Godly Example.* Note in Titus 2 how Paul focuses upon the young men as he has the other groups in the Cretan fellowships - see "likewise," (2:6). Titus is to urge them - a strong appeal - to develop one quality - self-mastery. This is really the key term of the section, (used of the older men and the women, (2:2, 5), which really can be understood in a comprehensive sense taking in the others that have been stated, especially if we take the "all respects" *peri panta* to refer to the preceding appeal.  As the older women were examples for the younger, so Titus was to be to the young men. They are to be encouraged by the consistent godly example of Titus, as Paul now writes directly to him. We are imitative by nature and need models to give us direction, challenge and inspiration. Titus should influence them first by being "a model of good works." This emphasis on being a model or example is found often in Paul (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Philippians 3:17). Titus also was to be a *tupos,* a mould into which

---

43  Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 287.

others can be impressed,[44] not as the false teachers who were unfit examples (Titus 1:16). The theme of "good works" is important throughout the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, especially in Titus (Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14; 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17), although it is made clear that such works do not save (Titus 3:5; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 2 Timothy1:9).

He is not only to be a godly example in his service but in his teaching which ought to have three qualities. It is to be marked by "purity" or "integrity," taken as a reference to Titus's character, i.e., the pure motives he had. Also "seriousness" is a clear indication of the manner of teaching. He should be serious in preaching, aware that the eternal welfare of his listeners was at stake. Lastly, there is a focus upon the content of his teaching – it was to be in soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. Titus is to preach the truth, the apostolic doctrine, with clear motives and in seriousness, so that the outsiders will have nothing of substance to say against his preaching. It is of course clear that the apostolic doctrine will be condemned by some. The idea here is that no charges can justifiably be brought against the preaching of the word. Towner suggests that the Epistle gives evidence of the fact that the Jewish-Christian teachers were a dominant threat to the Pauline mission and here the singular "one who opposes" is most likely a reference to them or to a ringleader among them.[45] Paul's aim is that "shame" will fall upon these men since Titus's integrity will mean that they will be discredited. Nothing bad can be said about "us" – note Paul uses the plural and thus includes himself, possibly all who preach.

We have seen that in these Epistles to both Timothy and Titus Paul has called for godliness of life to be manifest in elders, deacons and their wives, the believers generally, and finally in his younger colleagues. All must exhibit a godly lifestyle, so that through it the witness of the gospel can be maintained and the kingdom furthered. Now we must ask, where the power comes from to manifest such a lifestyle? We recall another reference to the false teachers.  These false teachers had "an appearance

---

44   Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles,* 413.

45   Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus,* 733-4.

of godliness," but were denying "its power," (2 Timothy 3:15).  In other words, they have an outward appearance of reverence for God, but there is no reality behind it – their hearts are far from devoted to Him! The truth was that their lives lacked any real power. Paul does not openly explain what he means by the "power" of godliness.   Marshall[46] sees an implicit reference here in the word "power" to "the vital power for Christian living, *given by the Holy Spirit to believers*," (italics mine).  The false teachers have no experience of God's grace in the gospel, and therefore have no impetus towards godliness and no empowerment from the Holy Spirit; however, Christians do. Devotion to God in a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, manifesting righteousness and sacrificial service is what God is looking for in us.

## Bibliography

Fee, Gordon D., *I and II Timothy, Titus* New International Biblical Commentary, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

Hendriksen, W., *I & II Timothy and Titus* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972).

Kelly, J.N.D., *A Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles* HNTC, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

King, G H., *A Leader Led: An Expository Study of 1 Timothy* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1976).

Knight, 111, G.W., *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).

Marshall, I.H., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* International Critical Commentary, eds. J.A. Emerton, C.E.B. Cranfield, and G.N. Stanton, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

Moore, H., *The Letters to Timothy and Titus: Missional Texts from a Great Missionary Statesman* (Belfast: Nicholson and Bass, 2016).

Mounce, W.D., *Pastoral Epistles* Word Biblical Commentaries, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000).

---

46    Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles,* 775.

Quinn, J.D., "Paul's Last Captivity," in Livingstone, E. (ed.), *Studia Biblica 3* (JSNT Sup 3, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980).

*The Letter to Titus* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

Stott, J.R.W., *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (Leicester: IVP, 1996).

Tertullian*, Apology,* translated by T.R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1931).

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

*The Goal of our Instruction: the Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 34, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

Wieland, G.W. *The Significance of Salvation: a Study in Salvation Language in the Pastoral Epistles* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

Witherington, 111, B., *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians,* Vol.1: *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, and Nottingham: Apollos, 2006).

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

Guthrie, D., *Pastoral Epistles* (Leicester; Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

# THE ABA' STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ARGUMENTATION IN 1 CORINTHIANS. LOVE AS A UNIFYING THEME

## CORIN MIHĂILĂ[1]

*Emanuel University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT: It is well known that the letter of 1 Corinthians is peculiar in the sense that it deals with several issues in the Corinthian church, apparently unrelated to each other, except that all the problems were found in the same church. While the purpose for which Paul wrote the letter was that of creating unity, the way he seeks to motivate towards unity is by calling for self-sacrifice, restraining one's liberty, giving up one's rights, ultimately by calling the believers to love. This becomes clear by noting the structure of Paul's argument in dealing with each individual issue in the letter. The sandwich (ABA') structure reveals that at the heart of each of Paul's arguments is a call to self-sacrifice. This is strengthened by noting that Paul begins and ends his epistle with the two most significant redemptive events—the cross and the resurrection.

KEY WORDS: Corinthians, sandwich structure, ABA' structure, love, gospel, cross, unity, theme

## Introduction

The first letter to the Corinthians is peculiar in the way it is structured, at least in comparison with Paul's other letters in the New Testament. First Corinthians is certainly an epistle, just like the other New Testament

---

1    Corin Mihăilă is lecturer in New Testament at Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania and adjunct professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, teaching in the Romanian extension. He resides in Brașov, Romania, working also as a pastor at First Baptist Church, Brașov. Email: corin.mihaila@emanuel.ro

epistles, preserving its epistolary introduction and conclusion. However, in distinction from the other epistles, Paul does not respond to one single issue in the church to whom he is addressing the letter, but to several. Moreover, the way he responds to these issues is peculiar.

The purpose of this article is to analyze succinctly each topic that Paul is addressing in his first letter to the Corinthians, and the way he is constructing his argument and defending his perspective on each issue. What will become obvious, we hope, is that each individual topic is discussed following a precise structure, a structure that may be called a "sandwich" structure or ABA' pattern.[2] We will contend that Paul organizes each topic by placing at the beginning and end of each issue details about the particular issue, while in the middle he provides a background against which to view each specific issue. This background provides the solution to that specific problem. It can be maintained that the solution to each problem, though cast in different ways (e.g., theology, personal example, argument from Scripture, tradition of Jesus), is basically the same: a call to love and self-sacrifice as an embodiment of the gospel. The coherence of the letter is given not only by the purpose for which Paul writes—unity, but also by the solution he proposes—love, seen in the arrangement and the argument of each topic.

Such a study is primarily important for aiding the reader and interpreter to better grasp the meaning of Paul's argumentation. It may also help to counter the view of some theologians that postulate the presence of alleged Pauline interpolations in the epistle or digressions from

---

2    This is not to say that 1 Corinthians is unique in this, only that such patterns are followed with consistency in 1 Corinthians and is seen at the thematic level more than just at the sentence/phrase level. This type of chiastic structure of each topic is not a new idea, but what differentiates our proposal from all the other ones that present an ABA' structure is the fact that each topic is structured according to this pattern and that the middle section in each of these structures provides the solution to each issue and to the major issue of factionalism confronted by Paul in the letter overall. For an argument for the chiastic structure of chap. 5-7, 8-10, and 12-14, see R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 14-16.

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

the topic that supposedly bring in irrelevant material.[3] Such a theory is based on the argument that the middle section of the ABA' structure does not really belong there, since there are supposedly obvious lexical and thematic differences between that section and the surrounding context. Indeed, *prima facie,* one may conclude that such a postulation is correct, but upon a closer analysis, we hope to show the coherence of Paul's argumentation, namely that the middle part of each of the topics that Paul tackles in his epistle is strategically and logically placed within the argument, in order to provide the solution to the problem of dissensions characteristic of every issue. Gordon Fee rightly argues that "these theories miss a basic form of argumentation in this letter, the 'A-B-A' pattern."[4] Lastly, this study may provide an alternative to those who see no structure and coherence between the issues treated in the letter. We believe, with others, that the purpose of the letter is to encourage unity and that is seen at the level of argumentation within each topic. But what gives coherence to all individual issues is the solution Paul proposes and is common to all of them: love and self-sacrifice. This emphasis on love will be seen in several aspects of the letter. First, the content of the middle section of each chiastic structure, when stripped of its contextual details, is at its core a message of self-sacrifice. Second, the climax of the letter is a call to love, as seen in chap. 13. Third, at the end of the letter Paul encourages a demonstration of self-sacrifice by participation in the collection for the Jerusalem brethren. Lastly, Paul decides to treat the issues in the church between two major theological poles: the cross (chapter 1) and

---

3   See, e.g., William O. Walker, Jr. "1 Corinthians 2.6-16: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *JSNT* 47 (1992): 75–94. J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 81–94. According to this theory there are either Pauline or non-Pauline interpolations. For the idea of digression see, e.g., Wilhelm Wuellner, "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, eds.; ThH, 53; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 177–88.

4   Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 16.

the resurrection (chapter 15). Thus, in a way, even the macro structure of the epistle seems to suggest that the path to resolution begins with self-sacrifice, the supreme model being Christ.

In order to prove all this, we will proceed in the following way. First, we will present several proposals for the structure of the letter, focusing primarily on those that come close to our own. Second, we will discuss each topic of the letter and show their ABA' structure. Third, we will seek to point to love and self-sacrifice as the common ground between all the solutions advanced by Paul in the middle section of each topic. Lastly, we will show how this solution for unity is embodied in the gospel, demonstrated by Christ, and evidenced in the macro-structure of Paul's epistle that begins with the cross and ends with the resurrection.

## Proposals for the Macro-Structure of 1 Corinthians

There is no consensus on the structure of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. The proposals range from no structure, to a basic structure, and finally, to a more complex and coherent structure.[5]

*No structure*
Jerome Murphy O'Connor speaks for those who see the letter as a composite document. In his view, "[t]he salient feature of 1 Corinthians is the absence of any detectable logic in the arrangement of its contents."[6]

---

5   For a listing of most proposals of structures of 1 Corinthians, but organized differently than how we proceed, see Matthew R. Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.2 (2016): 256-69; Andrew David Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians" *Presbyterion* 44.1 (2018): 98-114. We do not discuss here the argument for the non-integrity of the epistle and the theory of a redactor. For a presentation and refutation of such a view, see, e.g., J.C. Hurd, "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," in L.A. Jervis and P. Richardson (eds.), *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (JSNTSupp 108; Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 38-62.

6   J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

More recently, Andrew David Naselli, after surveying different proposals for the structure of the epistle, concludes that "it is best to string out the issues in one long list" with no thematic grouping.[7]

*A basic structure*

Most students of the epistle, however, will recognize a basic organizational factor of the issues treated by Paul, namely issues of which he has heard and issues of which the Corinthians have inquired in the letter they sent to Paul. Following this division of issues, traditionally, commentators have divided the epistle in two broad parts: chap.1-6 and chap.7-15.[8] In the first six chapters Paul responds to oral reports (most likely from the Chloe's; cf., 1:11). From chapter seven to chapter sixteen, Paul answers questions that the Corinthians had raised by way of a letter that they sent to Paul through some messengers (possibly Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus; cf. 16:17).[9] In this second part of the letter, the treatment of most topics is introduced by the phrase *peri de*—"Now concerning/about."[10] Most commentators, however, will rightly recognize a certain

1996), 253.

7   See, e.g., Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 106. Nevertheless, he qualifies his conclusions by adding that "the order in which Paul addresses the ten issues in 1 Corinthians matters. There is a logic of progression to his order, especially by ending with the resurrection," 107. For a list of authors who argue for no unifying theme and coherence of the epistle, see Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" 257.

8   See Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 29–30; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, viii–xi. See the presentation by Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 102-3.

9   See, *inter alia*, William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *First Corinthians* (AB, 32; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 120–22.

10   Not all topics are introduced in this way and the presence of each phrase does not necessarily introduce a new topic. For instance, Paul's mention of Apollos in 16:11 is introduced by the same phrase, but it is questionable whether this means that the Corinthians requested that Apollos visit them again and thus Paul responds to their question. See David E. Garland, *1*

flexibility and alternation in Paul's responses to oral reports and written letter.[11]

*A Coherent Structure*

Beyond this basic structure of the letter, that includes a discussion of individual and unrelated topics, most commentators will see a certain level of coherence of related themes. What gives coherence to the letter, most argue, are certain themes that group the issues together in accordance with a supposed thesis statement.[12] Matthew Malcolm, in his review of the approaches to the structure of 1 Corinthians, notes three proposed unifying themes: holiness, unity, and the cross.[13]

Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, for instance, argue that Paul is concerned in 1 Corinthians with "purity in general, and two vices in particular" that dominate and give coherence to the letter: sexual immorality (4:18-7:40) and idolatry (8:1-14:40).[14] These issues, they argue, are in

---

*Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 761. See the pertinent study by Margaret Mitchell, 'Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians', *NovT* 31 (1989): 229–56.

11  See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 21.

12  Malcolm "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," 259.

13  Ibidem; he notes that the unifying themes proposed find their support in the thesis statement seen in different verses. He states: "Indeed, these three proposed thesis statements (1.10; 1.18; 1.30) reflect three themes that are often claimed to be central to the letter as a whole: the need for *unity* (e.g. Mitchell); the corrective of the *cross* (e.g. Gorman); and the call to *holiness* (e.g. Ciampa and Rosner)." For a list of proposals of different themes, see Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 104-6, though he rejects the idea of Paul intentionally grouping the issues thematically. He states: "it is not sufficiently evident that Paul intentionally groups the issues in a particular thematic way," 106.

14  Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 24. See also their article, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians: A Biblical/Jewish Approach" *NTS* 52.2 (2006): 205-18, esp. 208-9. For a similar argument, see E.J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des*

accordance with Paul's Jewish ethical concerns that begin from the thesis statement of the letter in 1:30 with its emphasis on holiness.

Margaret Mitchell argues convincingly that Paul's concern is to end factionalism and create unity, as seen in the thesis statement of 1:10, with its emphasis on unity[15] In order to achieve this purpose, she argues, Paul uses deliberative rhetoric.[16]

Lastly, Matthew Malcolm, together with other theologians, argues for Paul's *kerygma* of cross and resurrection being the unifying theme of the letter, especially at its macro-level, and seen in 1:18.[17]

These three proposals of unifying themes have their validity and support in the text of the epistle, but they should not be seen as competing, much less as being exclusive of each other, but rather as complementary, each emphasizing one aspect of the church in Corinth. For instance, holiness defines the church's identity, a peculiar *ekklesia*, an alternative to

---

*Paulus an die Korinther* (HTA; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006), 47.

15  See Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1991).

16  Others follow her in using Greco-Roman rhetorical categories for analyzing the letter. See, e.g., Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). *Contra*, see Roy E. Cimpa and Brian S. Rosner, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians; Matthew R. Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians. The Impact of Paul's Gospel on his Macro-Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 155; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On page 6 he quotes Duane F. Watson in support: "Studies of Romans illustrate that linking a Pauline epistle to a particular rhetorical species [i.e. forensic, deliberative, or epideictic] is unwise and looking toward a Christian rhetoric may [be] a better solution." See D. F. Watson, "The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles," in J. P. Sampley and P. Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 25–47; 47.

17  See his *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*. In his article "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," he also mentions M.J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

the pagan Roman society. The cross is what gives the church her identity and message, and impacts her behavior. Again, unity is an essential characteristic of a cruciform, holy community. These three themes intermix effectively in 1 Corinthians: the individual issues that Paul addresses in his letter were a matter of divisiveness and threatened to destroy the very peculiar identity of the church marked by the cross. Therefore, Paul seeks to bring about unity in the church, by appealing to the church's holiness and her cruciform orientation. Unity is the purpose of the letter, while holiness and *kerygma* are the opposite of factionalism.

What we propose in this article is the different unifying theme of the letter: love. This theme not only gives coherence to the letter, but it is also the solution to factionalism.

## Proposals for the Micro-Structure of 1 Corinthians[18]

Beyond these proposed unifying themes at the macro-level of the letter that give coherence to the issues and have support in the text of the epistle, there is the question of coherence at the micro-level of the treatment of each issue. It is at this level that we think that more work can to be done. Our suggestion is that in addressing each issue, Paul uses the "sandwich structure" of the type ABA'.[19] This type of structure works in

---

18   We are aware that micro-level structure usually refers to components in a single sentence, but we are using the term micro-structure to refer to units of text, those units in 1 Corinthians that address specific issues, as we will show later. For a discussion of chiasm, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992), 181-82; Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline letters* (JSNTSS 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1 for argument in favor of Paul's structuring his argument chiastically, based on first century rhetorical background; N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the NT: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 139-96.

19   This type of structure has different names: concentric patterns, pivot or ring formations, chiasm, inverted parallelism. Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed, 'Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance', *NTS* 44 (1998), 213-31, argue that identification of 'macro-chiasms' as devices of com-

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

1 Corinthians by Paul initially presenting an issue, then moving on to a central or pivot point, and then repeating the issue from a new perspective. In this structure, the middle segment provides a complementary perspective on the issue at hand, functioning as the solution.

Matthew Malcolm argues for such a construction of the argument and in doing so, quotes John Chrysostom: "For this also is customary for him: not only to develop the issue at hand, but also to depart from there to correct whatever seems to him to be related, and then to return to the earlier topic so that he might not seem to have abandoned his theme."[20] John Hurd also speaks of a pattern that we can identify in Paul: "It seems to be characteristic of Paul that he will present an argument, then bring in a new theme, and finally re-argue the original topic in a new way. I call it Paul's 'sonata' form."[21]

Several authors have argued for such a structure at different places

---

position for whole works, such as Philippians, is a modern construct. They do not reject the idea of 'micro-chiasm' limited to several verses, and question the 'intermediate length-chiasm' as argued for by Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, chap.1.

20  Homily 37 on 1 Corinthians; PG 61.318, quoted in *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*, 88.

21  Hurd, "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," 61. He argues that this is a common feature of Paul's argumentation in his letters, especially in 1 Thessalonians.

and levels in the epistle.[22] We will note here several proposals.[23] Kenneth Bailey has the following chiastic outline:[24]

I. The Cross and Christian Unity 1:5–4:16
II.          Men and Women in the Human Family 4:17–7:40
III.          Food Offered to Idols (Christian and pagan)
                   8:1–11:1
IV.          Men and Women in Worship 11:2–14:40
V. The Resurrection 15

From this chiastic structure of the letter, Bailey concludes that there are three ideas that Paul communicates: the cross and the resurrection, men and women in the family and in worship, and Christians living among pagans. Besides this type of ABCB'A' structure of the entire letter, Bailey identifies chiasm at the level of sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. But such a sophisticated composition is bound to be lost to the hearer. However, his observation that "Biblical 'ring composition' usually

---

22  For an introduction and defense of studying 1 Corinthians from this perspective, see Timothy Milinovich, *Beyond What Is Written: The Performative Structure of 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), esp. cap.1. His proposal of ring formations in 1 Corinthians is based on the oral performative function of the letter and it parallels the oral culture of late Western antiquity. For the Hebrew literary background of inverted parallelism used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes. Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011). Many authors recognize this pattern in 1 Corinthians, but only few seek to show unity from such a structure formed around supposed digression in the middle section. See, Collins, *First Corinthians*, 14-25, 306; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 15-16; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 367.

23  Though John Hurd argues for this type of structure in argumentation in 1 Corinthians, he suggests that such a structure is proper for the study of chap. 8-10 and 12-14. He uses this structure in order to disprove any partition theories; "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," 61.

24  Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, 26.

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

places the climax in the center, not at the end" is valuable to our argument.[25]

Matthew Malcolm, who reacts to Bailey's "sophisticated use of ring composition throughout 1 Corinthians"[26] identifies four major issues that Paul addresses in a chiastic pattern:[27]

> 5:1–13: Sexual immorality (the refusal to judge)
> > 6:1–11: Greedy exploitation (an apparent inability to judge)
> 6:12–7:40: Sexual immorality, the body, marriage

> 8:1–13: Meat offered to idols (using rights to endanger weaker brothers and sisters)
> > 9:1–27: Paul's example/mock defence (foregoing rights for others and self)
> 10:1–11:1: Meat offered to idols (foregoing rights for self and others)

> 11:2–16: I praise you for keeping the traditions I passed on (public worship)
> > 11:17–22: I do *not* praise you (in both v17 and v22)
> 11:23–34: I passed on to you what I also received (Lord's Supper)

> 12:1–31: Gifts within the body (mutual interdependence)
> > 12:31–13:13: Love
> 14:1–40: Gifts (for ordered edification of the whole)

A similar presentation of a chiastic structure for each topic may be found in Timothy Milinovich. Though he proposes multi-layered chiasms throughout the letter, he divides the letter only into three main sections/issues:[28]

---

25  Ibid., 51.

26  Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*, 90.

27  Ibid., 88.

28  *Beyond What Is Written*, 5-8. Here we will present a simplified version,

A: 1.1–4.21: internal issues
    α 1.1-17: divisions in the church
        β 1.18–3.3: 'foolishness' and wisdom of the cross
    α′ 3.4–4.21: Paul, Apollos, and temple

B: 5.1–11.1: external issues
    α 5.1–6.20: sexual immorality and justice
        β 7.1-40: marriage and outsiders
    α′ 8.1–11.1: eating disorder

A′: 11.2–16.24: internal issues
    α 11.2–14.40: proper order and unity in worship
        β 15.1-58: resurrection of Christ and elect
    α′ 16.1-24: Paul's return to a unified church

From these three examples, one can see that there is ample justification for seeing the unity and coherence of the first Corinthian letter by invoking an ABA' structure, not only at the macro-level but also at the level of individual units, which address individual issues in the church. Matthew Malcolm, in his review of different proposals, concludes that "there is broad agreement that a notable feature of the arrangement of the epistle (whether through redaction, rhetoric, or ring composition) is the use of simple ABA' patterning for broad units (most notably, 8-10; 12-14)."[29] Therefore, it is our view that such a structure for each individual issue should be pursued in the study of 1 Corinthians in order to show its unity. The disagreement among the proposals of ABA' patterning within the epistle lies at the level of identifying the topics addressed and structured according to this pattern. Thus, in this next section, we will identify

---

following Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," 264, table 8.

29  Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" 267.

the topics and then show their chiastic structure and the role played by the middle part.

## The ABA' Structure of the Argument of Each Topic

The major topics in 1 Corinthians over which there were divisions in the church are as follows:[30]

> 1:12–4:21 Dissensions around leadership
> 5:1–6:20 Sexual Sin
> 7:1–40 Marriage
> 8:1–11:1 Food Sacrificed to Idols
> 11:2–16 Head Covering in Worship
> 11:17–34 Common Meals
> 12:1–14:40 Spiritual Gifts
> 15:1–58 Resurrection

In the following section we will briefly look at the argument for each individual topic in order to note the sandwich structure.

*Dissensions 1:12–4:21*[31]

In verse 10 of chapter 1 Paul launches into discussing the first topic, i.e., dissensions over church leadership. Interestingly, he only introduces the

---

30  For these divisions and issues see Garland, *1 Corinthians, vii-viii.* We have not included here the topic of collection (16:1–4), which is introduced with the phrase *peri de,* like the other issues, since we believe that this may play an important role in Paul's overall argument for unity in the letter, as we shall see later, besides the fact that Paul was trying to bring clarity to the issue of collection that the Corinthians were confused and possibly divisive.

31  For a detailed discussion of this section of the epistle see Corin Mihăilă, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance Toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4* (LNT 402, London and NY: T&T Clark International, 2009), chapter 1; also Corin Mihăilă, "The Number and Nature of Parties in 1 Corinthians 1-4" *Perichoresis* 17:2s (2019): 41-50.

problem, for, beginning with 1:18 through to the end of chapter 2, he mentions nothing about the problem, only to pick it up again at the beginning of chapter 3.

A careful reading of 1:10–17 and 3:5–4:21 will show that the root-cause of the dissensions in the Corinthian church was a distorted view of Christian leadership. The Corinthians tended to set one teacher against another, based on the world's set of values identified as wisdom (cf. 3:1–4, 3:18–23, and 4:1–5). Thus, Paul seeks to correct such a view of teachers (3:5–17), by challenging the Corinthians to change their way of thinking.

It is at this point that Paul's argument in 1:18–2:16 on wisdom fits in. Though apparently a disconnected theme from the problem of dissensions, it actually forms the theological solution. The Corinthians valued worldly wisdom, which in fact was foolishness from God's perspective. Particularly concerning the evaluation of teachers, the Corinthians appreciated *sophia logou* ("wisdom of words"), that is, eloquent speech, or rhetoric.[32] Thus, in 1:18–2:16 Paul sets out to prove the inadequacy of worldly wisdom to attain to salvation (1:18–25) as evidenced in the election of the Corinthians (1:26–31), and therefore to prove the inappropriateness of "wisdom of words" in the proclamation of the good news of salvation (2:1–5). Paul shows that God operates with a different wisdom, a wisdom hidden and unacceptable to the world (2:6–16).

For Paul, then, the solution to the problem of dissensions was an adaptation to the values proclaimed by the cross, which destroys the wisdom of the world esteemed by the Corinthians, and points to the true wisdom, i.e., of God. Thus, rather than being the digression of an absent-minded preacher, the heart of the argument (1:18–2:16) provides the theological

---

32   For the rhetorical background, see, e.g., W. Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2002), the second part; Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS, 79, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); also his *Paul's Theology of Preaching. The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015).

motivation for changing the way one views the Christian teachers. If the Corinthians should learn to evaluate their teachers using the system of values represented by the cross, then the dissensions will disappear, since the worldly criteria of evaluating leadership will disappear. The result will be seeing them as mere servants of God, whose judge is God himself, and not as personalities who can be named as a means of boasting against each other in order to enhance their own status and honor.

### Sexual Sin 5:1–6:20[33]

Another issue that was destroying the church from within was sexual sin. This topic is discussed again in a sandwich structure. In 5:1–13 we are introduced to the specific problem within the church, i.e., incest, a sin that was not tolerated even among the pagans. Here Paul seeks to convince the Corinthian Christians to take action and excommunicate the sinner and cut any relations with him. He returns to the topic of sexual sin, i.e., visiting prostitutes, in 6:12–20, where he offers a biblical theology of the Christian's human body. Here he argues that the human body, bought by Christ through his sacrifice, should serve to glorify God and not the desires of the flesh.

It is interesting to notice that the middle section of the unit (i.e., 6:1–11) says hardly anything about sexual sin. Its main topic is taking a fellow brother to a secular court, more precisely, civil litigations between brothers. In discussing this topic, Paul argues that the alternative to such inappropriate practice is self-sacrifice, or giving up one's rights, or not doing what is normally appropriate to do (according to the cultural values), in cases in which one has been wronged by another brother (6:7).

What is then the connection between these two main topics: sexual sin and civil litigations? We are dealing here again with the sandwich structure in which the middle part is apparently unrelated to the main

---

33  For a detailed discussion of this section see Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1Corinthians 1–6* (AGJU 18, Leiden: Brill, 1993).

topic, when in fact it plays an important part in the argument for taking action against sexual sin.[34]

We believe that the underlying problem that Paul points to is the fact that the Corinthians have made an unacceptable confusion between the things they should tolerate within the church and what they should not, what they should take action against and what they shouldn't. Thus, in 6:1–8 Paul is pointing out to the Corinthians that they have been intolerant concerning an issue in which they should have been tolerant with each other, namely civil rights. Therefore, Paul warns them that such an attitude will not go unpunished by God in the end, together with other sins, including sexual sin (6:9–11). It is against this background, that the Corinthians should see their unacceptably tolerant attitude with the more serious sin of adultery. In this case they should have been judging the sinner and excommunicating him from the assembly. They should have been intolerant and not have let it go unpunished, whereas in the case of a civil wrong done they should have been tolerant and let it go unpunished.

Thus, the Corinthians lacked the ability to judge correctly, because of their distorted view of relationships, influenced by the Roman pagan culture and values. The solution was again the overturning of the worldly system of values, this time in terms of relationships and adopting the values of the kingdom of God. The Corinthians are called to judge things according to God's criteria for judging relationships. It is one thing to tolerate a wrong done against one's own person, but a completely different thing to tolerate a sin committed against one's own body, and against God and his church. The Corinthians should have tolerated the former but not the later, but they have done the opposite.

*Marriage 7:1–40*
In chapter 7 Paul discusses the issue of marital relationships, in a way not unrelated to the previous topic, at least not in the first part of the chap-

---

34   See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 225, who argues for an ABA' chiastic pattern. *Contra* Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 151.

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

ter where Paul commands Christians to fulfill their sexual duties toward their marriage partners (7:1–6). Thus Paul builds on the previous chapter and clarifies that sexual relationships are not only legitimate solely within marriage, but are also a duty within marriage. However, within this chapter, Paul discusses Christians in different marital status and what they should do. In each case Paul gives one advice, but then presents an exception. In the case of two married Christians (7:1–6), Paul commands them to fulfill their marital duties, except when they agree mutually to not be intimate in order to dedicate themselves for a time of fasting and prayer. After a few verses (7:10–11), Paul takes up again the topic of Christian marriage, commanding against divorce and encouraging reconciliation. To singles (7:7–9), whether by choice or as a result of the death of the partner, Paul recommends that they remain single, unless their fleshly passions cannot be kept under control. In the case of a mixed marriage, of a believer with an unbeliever (7:12–16), a mixture most likely resulting from the conversion of one partner to Christianity after marriage, Paul again suggests (though later commands, cf. 7:39) that they remain in the marriage, unless the unbelieving partner wants a divorce, then the believer is not bound. Lastly and somewhat picking up from the earlier verses, concerning virgins (7:25–40), Paul advises that they remain unmarried in order to dedicate themselves fully to the service of the Lord, though they will do no wrong if they desire to marry.

In the middle of discussing different marital status, Paul includes a short discussion of two different topics, i.e., circumcision and slavery, apparently unrelated to the topic of marriage (7:17–24).[35] Anthony Thiselton notes that: "This verse [20] constitutes the pivotal centre of the roughly chiasm structure which begins and ends with remaining in

---

35  For the idea that this chapter has the structure of a "club sandwich" see Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: Knox, 1997), 122. For an excellent summary and explanation of the connection see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 298–301. Here Garland also anticipates the sandwich structure of chapters 12–14. See also Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 271; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 254, 274, 276.

the situation in which one was called to faith (vv. 17 and 24)."[36] What connects together these two particular topics with the central segment is Paul's advice of remaining in the social status in which one was found, when God saved him/her. In both cases Paul commands that Christians remain in their pre-conversion social condition, except if they are given the opportunity to come out of it. The reason Paul gives here is that social condition has no affect on the Christian service. A Christian is not to seek to release himself/herself from a particular condition, thinking that they will be able to serve God better. No, Paul says, the social condition is neutral. What is important is that Christians remain with God in whatever social condition they find themselves.

The connection between this middle section and the surrounding context is more obvious than in the previous two topics. Paul's advice concerning marriage relationships is that they remain in the social marital status in which they are, whether unmarried or married to believers or nonbelievers. This middle section adds one injunction to the believer who maintains his marital status: to remain with God (7:24). In other words, maintaining one's marital status is not a virtue in itself and neither is changing one's marital status. Sacrifice in order to remain single or to remain married even in a mixed marriage, is not a virtue in itself. What counts is that whatever one decides within the boundaries of God's Word concerning marital status, he/she may continue with God.

Thus, without the middle section of chapter 7, the readers may be inclined to think that a certain marital status is better, more desirable, than another, or that the decision to remain or not remain in that condition may be based on the sexual desires of the flesh or lack thereof. Paul in this middle section adds, or at least emphasizes, that the decision ultimately is not an issue of social condition, but a matter of being with God; not remaining or uniting with someone, but remaining with God.

------

36  Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 552.

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

*Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1–11:1)*[37]

The next issue that was causing dissensions in the Corinthian church which Paul now addresses in this letter is the issue of food sacrificed to idols. The question in the church was whether a Christian should eat meat that was used in pagan temples ceremonies. Such meat, or the excess of it, was then sold in the market or served in the restaurants, most of them being adjacent to these temples. The division in the church was on the issue of eating such meat. On the one hand, there were those who correctly argued that idols are nothing and therefore meat sacrificed to idols is just meat. These were the ones who had correct knowledge and used their liberty in Christ. On the other hand, there were those with a weaker conscience, who only recently came out from an environment and lifestyle closely connected with idolatry and pagan temples, for whom any connection of a believer with the previous pagan lifestyle was inconceivable. Thus, in 8:1–13, Paul specifically writes to those with a correct theology and understanding of spiritual realities to consider this truth: love and care for the brother/sister and his/her convictions is more important than personal liberty of conscience. Therefore, for the sake of the weak conscience of a brother, one should be willing to set aside his Christian liberty in Christ. Paul picks up this issue of food sacrificed to idols in 10:14–11:1, where he advances his discussion by adding two further aspects. First, Paul seeks to convince the Corinthians that any association with temple worship, even just as spectators, is actually involvement in idolatry (10:14–22). There is no such thing as mere spectators or neutral participants; association is active participation. Second, Paul discusses another possible situation in which a Christian may find himself/herself: participation at a nonbeliever's table in his home where the believer is made aware that they are being served food sacrificed to idols (10:23–30).

---

37  On the 'A-B-A' form of argumentation especially in chap. 8-10 and 12-14, see J. Collins, "Chiasmus, the 'ABA' Pattern and the Text of Paul," in *Studia Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus* (Rome, 1963) 2:575-84. Cf. also Cordon Fee, *1 Corinthians,* 16. See also Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 191; Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians,* 367; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 244, 378, 385.

In this case, Paul commands the believer not to eat such food for the sake of the nonbeliever's conscience.

If meat sacrificed to idols is the main issue that the Corinthians were divisive about and asked for Paul's clarification, what is the purpose of the middle section, i.e., 9:1–10:13? Here Paul again seems to discuss a topic apparently unrelated to the main issue.[38] In this middle section, Paul talks about his right to be paid as an apostle as well as his decision to forgo such right for the sake of the gospel (9:1–14).[39] He sought to set aside anything that could have been a hindrance to his or anothers' salvation (9:15–23). This leads him to speak about certain limitations that he has willingly set to his own freedom in order to attain final salvation (9:24–27). The lack of discipline, he argues, has proven disastrous for Israel of old (10:1–13). Thus, the main idea of the middle section is self-sacrifice, without which one may not attain final salvation.

We begin, then, to see more clearly the connection between the main issue of meat sacrificed to idols and the issue of remuneration for Christian service that is developed further into the issue of self discipline. The connection has to do with limiting one's Christian freedom and giving up one's rights for the sake of others, whether believers or nonbelievers. Thus, the middle section of the sandwich structure provides the reason why a believer should not eat from meat sacrificed to idols, by presenting the positive example of his own practice related to his right to be paid as an apostle and the negative example of Israel in the wilderness. Thus, Paul ends this section by calling the Corinthians to follow his own example (11:1).

---

38   See Hays, *First Corinthians*, 148.

39   For the reasons of Paul's refusal of financial support in Corinth, in terms of patronage, see P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2; Tubingen: Mohr, 198)7, esp. chs. 1 and 2; John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup, 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), esp. chs 2 and 3; and Ronald F. Hock, "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class," *JBL* 97 (1978): 555–64.

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

*Head Covering 11:2–16*

In the next large section of the letter, Paul discusses issues related to public gatherings of the Christian Corinthians for worship (11:2–14:40). The first issue within this larger paragraph that led to dissensions in the church was the issue of the head covering of women in worship. This issue again is addressed in an ABA' structure. Without going into the details of the text and the meaning of individual terms (e.g., head and covering) or the relevance for today, we notice that Paul commands the Christian woman to cover her head in worship (11:2–7 and 11:13–16). There are several reasons that Paul brings forth in these verses to support his stance, but the prominent argument is that from nature/culture. In a culture that valued honor and avoided shame, Paul seeks to convince the Corinthians to follow the cultural norms of the day, which meant that the woman should cover her head in worship.

The middle section (11:8–12) deals with how God ordained the roles of men and women in creation. The main idea is that it was God's design by creation that women should bring honor to their husbands.[40] Paul Gardner argues that in this section of the letter, "Paul addresses a matter in which 'rights' need to be examined in the light of care, respect, and love for one another…Paul is urging them [women] to curtail what may appear to be a 'freedom' or a 'right' in a similar way to that which he has described in chapter 9…"[41] In other words, the solution to the issue Paul addresses in this section is giving up one's rights, a form of love and self-sacrifice.

The connection with the issue of head covering then becomes obvious: the middle section provides the argument for the practice of head covering. Culturally speaking, a married woman, who did not cover her head in Paul's day, brought shame to her husband, since she was behaving as an adulterous woman would. The middle section picks up on the idea of shame and shows from creation that God had purposed from the

---

40   See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 510, for the chiastic structure of these verses, with the central assertion being 11:10.

41   Paul D. Gardner, *1 Corinthians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 492.

beginning that the woman bring glory and not shame to her husband in all that she does. Giving honor to one's husband is a form of self-sacrifice. Thus, without the middle section, we are left with a cultural practice, which does not have much weight, since we have already seen that the gospel overturns the values of the world. Without a theological support and criteria to evaluate, we are left to ourselves to pick and choose from societal values, with the risk of becoming a divisive church and a worldly church, each believer doing what he/she thinks is best in his/her own mind. A cultural value, however, which finds its support in Scripture (i.e., creation), must be preserved in the Christian church. As to a particular practice, the question remains whether it supports the biblical values.

*Common Meals 11:17–34*[42]
The next practical topic dealing with divisions with the Christian gathering has to do with how the Corinthians were behaving in the context of common meals. It is well known that in the early church, when Christians were coming together for worship, they also had a meal together and, in that context, they also partook of the Lord's Supper. In the Corinthian church, however, things degenerated. From a meal that was supposed to show unity, sharing, and love among believers, their behavior exacerbated the gap between the rich and the poor (11:17–22).[43] Thus, Paul's command is that be considerate toward one another at these meals (11:33–34).

In the middle section of his argument (11:23–26 and 11:27-32),[44] Paul brings in the tradition of Jesus of when he passed on to his disciples the

---

42  See, e.g., *1 Corinthians*, 437, for the ABA' structure of this section.

43  For the conflict between the "have" and the "have-nots" at the Lord's Supper see, *inter alia*, Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity. Essays on Corinth by Gerd Theissen*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 96–151; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1993, 67–68.

44  See Fee, *1 Corinthians* 590, for the chiastic structure ABB'A', with 11:23-26 explaining the problem and 11:27-32 providing the answer.

practice of the Lord's Supper as a command for all future generations of believers to observe. Though Paul mentions the Lord's Supper in the context of the common meals (11:20), the connection between the tradition of Jesus and the Corinthians' common meals is not at once obvious. What does proclamation of Christ's death have to do with the division between the rich and the poor?

We believe that Paul brings into focus the tradition of Jesus, because the Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for our sake. What the rich Corinthians were doing in their neglect of the poor, was a contradiction of the spirit of the Lord's Supper, i.e., thinking of others and putting others' needs above our own. Thus, at their common meals, the Corinthians were acting in accord with the values of the society at large that led them to confusing the body of Christ (11:29, i.e., the church) from secular associations, where social and economic status mattered. The tradition of Jesus, then, has the purpose of bringing to their attention the essential factor of self-sacrifice in their relations with one another, especially as they gathered for worship.

## Spiritual Gifts 12:1–14:40[45]

As it has already been noted, the Corinthian church was a divided church, whether it had to do with rhetorical prowess of teachers, sexual morality, marital status, pagan practices, gender roles, or social/economic status. One other thing divided the church: their view of spiritual gifts and spirituality. It seems that at least some among the Corinthian believers elevated certain gifts above the others and therefore argued for different levels of spirituality, depending on what spiritual gifts one possessed. From the text, it becomes obvious that the gifts that the Corinthians valued were the more "supernatural" or "extraordinary" ones, more specifically that of speaking in tongues. Basically, their argument was that only those who possessed such a gift were truly spiritual, the others were at best inferior Christians. Paul sets out to straighten up such a false understanding in

---

45  Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 392, states about this section of the letter: "chapters 12-14 are clearly arranged in a chiastic pattern;" see also 441-43.

chapters 12 and 14. In 12:1–31 Paul emphasizes that all saved believers are spiritual, in the sense that all who proclaim Jesus as Lord have the Spirit of God in them, that there is a variety of spiritual gifts, all given by the same Spirit of God, and that their purpose is ultimately for the spiritual edification of the church. From this more general dealing with spiritual gifts, in 14:1–40, Paul moves on to the thorny issue of speaking in tongues. Here Paul shows the superiority of prophecy over tongues and then sets some practical rules in the use of tongues in worship.

The middle section of Paul's argument concerning spiritual gifts deals with the topic of love (chap.13).[46] Ciampa and Rosner contend: "Chapter 13, at the heart of the chiastic structure, is also at the heart of Paul's ethical thrust throughout this letter."[47] The connection of this central segment with the two outer ones is obvious: all spiritual gifts must be exercised in love. Love is important because its main characteristic is seeking the best (spiritual) interest of one's fellow believer. Since spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of the edification of others, and not for self-edification, and love seeks the best interest of others, the exercise of spiritual gifts must always be done in love. Thus, Paul cannot conceive addressing the issue of spiritual gifts without emphasizing love. That is the reason why Paul chooses to use this sandwich structure in discussing spiritual things, in order to put them in perspective, the middle section on love being the background against which the Corinthians are to think of spiritual gifts.

---

46  See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 559-60, for the chiastic structure and chap. 13 as the central assertion.

47  Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians,* 561. A similar statement is found in Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 484: "Paul's placing love at the heart of a rhetorical digression within a macro-chiasm that speaks of the life of the church indicates that for him the primary locus of love is the common life of the church. It is love that makes the life of the church possible."

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

*Resurrection 15:1–58*[48]

The last main cause of dissension among the Corinthians was the view of the resurrection of the dead. It seems that some were denying a final bodily resurrection of the believer. In order to demonstrate the truth of bodily resurrection, Paul starts off with a commonly accepted belief, that of the bodily resurrection of Christ. After proving the historical reality of Christ's bodily resurrection (15:1–11), he moves on to its logical necessity (15:12–19), thus showing that there is an undeniable connection between Christ's resurrection and the believer's resurrection; one cannot logically believe one to be true without believing the other as well. He builds on this argument, bringing in the theological/eschatological argument (15:20–28) of the need for God to subject all things under his feet, through Christ, including the last enemy, which is death. He finishes off with the ethical implications of the resurrection, arguing that the resurrection gives meaning to the practice of baptism, suffering, and morality (15:29–34). Thus, in this first section on the resurrection, Paul deals more generally with the need to believe in the final resurrection. Once he establishes that as a necessity, he finally moves on to what may seem to be the Corinthians' bewilderment: the earthly physical body cannot resurrect.

In what follows (15:35–58), Paul seeks to show how the truth of the resurrection is compatible with the truth of bodily resurrection.[49] He proves the possibility of bodily resurrection by providing examples from botany, zoology, and astrology, seeking to show both the continuity and discontinuity between the earthly physical body and the glorious resurrection body. Thus, though at the resurrection a radical transformation occurs, that does not deny bodily existence in glory, that is, some kind of continuity.

48  For a chiastic structure of the first argument of the chapter (15:12-34), see Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 527. For suggestions of other chiastic structures in the chapter, see Fee, *1 Corinthians,* 783; C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28," *NovT* 30 (1988): 301–2.

49  For an argument of the bodily resurrection of the believer, see Corin Mihăilă "The *Bodily* Resurrection of Jesus. An Argument beginning from First Corinthians 15" *Jurnal Teologic* vol.22, nr. 3 (2022): 9-31, esp. 26-30.

From this succinct presentation of the topic of resurrection, it does not seem that Paul organizes his argument in an ABA' structure. It seems rather that Paul builds his argument in a linear, logical fashion, adding one brick upon another. This is obviously true from the way we explained the flow of the argument. Therefore, we should be careful not to impose our desire for a certain pattern of argumentation on Paul's structure of argument. One thing, however, may be observed, that may give justice to seeing a sandwich structure, namely the placing of ethical injunctions in the middle of his theological argument for final resurrection (15:29–34).

Most often, in writing his epistles, Paul deals with ethical misbehavior by first reminding his readers of some theological truths that they all agree upon. Based on these theological convictions, Paul moves on to behavior and ethical injunctions. Here, however, Paul does not wait till the end to do that (though he ends the chapter with one verse of practical advice, cf. 15:58), but draws out the practical implications in the middle of his argument as an argument for belief in the resurrection. Thus, we see somewhat of a reversal of Paul's usual way of argumentation. Normally his argument goes like this: Why should we behave in a certain way? Answer: Because of our beliefs. In other words, we should behave in a certain way because of what we believe. This time, however, he seems to argue in a somewhat reverse way: Why should we believe this? Answer: Because otherwise our behavior is not justified. In other words, we should believe a certain teaching because of the way we behave. This may be represented in the following way:

Usual pattern of argumentation: belief →behavior
Pattern of argumentation in 1 Corinthians 15:
belief (15:1–28) →behavior (15:29–34) →belief (15:35–58)

If our observation is correct, then what we have in this chapter is also a sandwich structure. The middle section has the role of showing that belief in the resurrection is necessary in order to give value to self-sacrifice.

That is why Paul can end his discussion on resurrection with the injunction to work for God till exhaustion, since there is a resurrection.

The ABA' structure at the level of each topic can be represented in the following way:[50]

**Chapters 1–4** -  Dissensions 1:10–17
                            Wisdom 1:18–2:16
                    Dissensions 3:1–4:21

**Chapters 5–6** -  Sexual Immorality 5:1–13
                            Civil Litigations 6:1–11
                    Sexual Immorality 6:12–20

**Chapter 7**-  Marital Status 7:1–16
                        Circumcision and Slavery 7:17–24
                Marital Status 7:25–40

**Chapters 8–10** -  Meat Sacrificed to Idols 8:1–13
                            Paul's and Israel's Examples 9:1–10:13
                    Meat Sacrificed to Idols 10:14–11:1

---

50  After writing this article, we came across Ralph Bruce Terry's dissertation *An Analysis of Certain Features of Discourse in the New Testament Book of 1 Corinthians* (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 1993), later published as *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* (Summer Institute of Linguistics and The University of Texas at Arlington Publications in Linguistics 120; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1995). We did not have access to the printed versions, only to the content posted on his website (https://bterry.com/dissertation/index.htm), accessed 08.12.2023. In chap. 3.2, table 4 (https://bterry.com/dissertation/3_4-theme.htm), he has a similar chiastic structure for chap. 1-4, 5-6, 7, 8-10, 12-14, and 15. See his article "Patterns of Discourse Structure in 1 Corinthians," *JOTT* 7.4 (1996): 1-32, especially 5-7, where you will find Table 1, the same as in his dissertation.

**Chapter 11:2–16** - Head Covering 11:2–7
  Gender Roles by Creation 11:8–12
  Head Covering 11:13–16

**Chapter 11:17–34** - Common Meals 11:17–22
  Jesus Tradition of the Lord's Supper 11:23–32
  Common Meals 11:33–34

**Chapters 12–14** - Spiritual Gifts 12:1–31
  Love 13:1–13
  Spiritual Gifts 14:1–40

**Chapter 15** Resurrection 15:1–28
  Behavior/Suffering/Morality 15:29–34
  Resurrection 15:35–58

After this succinct presentation of issues in the letter, it seems adequate to state that Paul's way of arguing in 1 Corinthians is peculiar, following a certain sandwich pattern (ABA'). This ring structure of argumentation forces us to see Paul's coherence, sense, and logic in his argumentation. Moreover, we are also forced to admit that even in places where the coherence is less obvious and the pairing of two topics seems disjunctive (e.g., divisions with wisdom, sexual immorality with civil litigations), such coherence does exist, and we are not to dismiss it simply by postulating a theory of interpolation or digression. We are thus not dealing with an absent-minded writer, who starts off on a topic, forgets what he is talking about, only to remember the main topic and in the end to return to it, after chasing a rabbit trail. We are dealing with an author who is very precise in his organization of material and presentation of argument. Paul uses this type of structure, in which self-sacrifice is the middle segment, in order to provide the solution to factionalism around all the specific issues he addresses in the letter.

## Further Observations

There are a couple of implications that can be drawn from this analysis. For instance, Paul's similar pattern of discussing each individual topic does not mean that the middle section is always the same, though a similarity seems to emerge. For instance, in arguing against dissensions, Paul basically uses a theological argument, based on the wisdom of the cross. In arguing against meat sacrificed to idols, he uses his personal example of giving up his rights as well as the negative example of Israel's lack of self-discipline. And in arguing against divisions between the rich and the poor at their common meals he appeals to the tradition of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper.

*Love as Solution to Factionalism*

Nevertheless, something seems to be common to all the middle sections: the idea of self-sacrifice, of willingly giving up rights, of seeking the interest of others.

**Chapters 1–4** In discussing the topic of dissensions, Paul ends up giving himself as an example of willingly renouncing rhetorical wisdom in proclamation (2:1–5).

**Chapters 5–6** In discussing the topic of sexual immorality in combination of civil litigations, Paul advises the Corinthians to be willing to forgo their rights to ask for retribution when done wrong (6:7), reminding thus the Corinthian believers that their body belongs to Christ, and thus they do not have unlimited freedom as to what they can do with their bodies.

**Chapter 7** When discussing the issue of marital status, Paul emphasizes the need to remain with God (7:24), which at times may imply giving up the right to change one's marital status, reminding them for instance, of the obligation one has in a marital relationship, limiting thus one's freedom.

**Chapters 8–10** In discussing the issue of meat sacrificed to idols, Paul gives himself as an example of giving up one's liberty in Christ for the sake of others, by reminding them of his renunciation of remuneration for his Christian service (9:12, 15) and his self-discipline.

**Chapter 11:2–16** In discussing the issue of head covering, Paul reminds the Corinthians of God's creation order, in which the woman is to bring honor to her husband, an example of self-sacrifice (11:9).

**Chapter 11:17–34** In discussing the topic of common meals, Paul seeks to correct the Corinthians' misbehavior and division between the rich and the poor by reminding them of Christ putting others before himself, as seen in his self-sacrifice for others (11:24).

**Chapters 12–14** In discussing the issue of spiritual gifts, Paul again gives himself as a hypothetical example of one who has spiritual gifts but lacks love (13:1–3), the context in which spiritual gifts are to be exercised, a context of seeking the benefit of the other at one's own expense.

**Chapter 15** Finally, in discussing the theological issue of the bodily resurrection, Paul again discusses the issue of self-sacrifice and suffering as a reason for the belief in the resurrection (15:30–32).

One thus is led to recognize that what could correct the problems in the Corinthian church and bring unity is the presence of love, which always expresses itself in self-sacrifice and giving up one's rights.[51]

---

51  See e.g., Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 607, who states: "we urge that 11:2–16, 17–34 and chs. 12–14 share with chs. 8–10 an exposition of the themes of love and respect for "the other" in the light of biblical and shared theological traditions." Ralph Bruce Terry in his published dissertation *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* states that the unifying theme of the letter is: "Obey Christ rather than following social customs," chap. 3.4, https://bterry.com/dissertation/3_4-theme.htm. See also „Patterns of Discourse Structure in 1 Corinthians,"10-11. Terry is correct in seeing the root cause behind faction-

CORIN MIHĂILĂ

Knowing that the thanksgiving section of a letter introduces major themes in the letter,[52] J. Murphy-O'Connor may be right in noting that the introductory thanksgiving is "remarkable for what it does not say": it says nothing about love.[53] The Corinthians were blessed with knowledge and speech, but they lacked love. And because they lacked love, they lacked unity in all the issues addressed in the letter. As a result, Paul writes this letter in order to encourage unity by emphasizing love and self-sacrifice.

That love is central in Paul's argumentation can be seen from the fact that Paul sets aside an entire chapter for its exposition (i.e., chap. 13). The centrality of love and its unifying effect on the Corinthian congregation was defended by Rudolf Bultmann. In response to Karl Barth, who argued that the climax of the letter is chap. 15,[54] Bultmann stated: "I said earlier that Barth's interpretation of chs. 12-14 is the climax of the book. That emphasis is no accident, but corresponds to the fact that chs. 12-14 constitute the climax of the letter if the unity of its contents is accepted."[55] Margaret Mitchell, likewise, argues that chap. 13 and its "encomium to love" is the antidote to factionalism, since in ancient literature, both with-

---

alism as worldliness (i.e., following social customs in all the areas addressed in the letter), but the solution to factionalism that we believe Paul suggested was love. This theme of love, as we have seen, is described in different ways through the central segments of each chiastic structure, but, as we shall see, is also seen at the macro-level structure of the letter, the bookends of the letter, which mentions the cross and the resurrection, thus offering Christ as the supreme example of love and self-sacrifice.

52  See, e.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgiving in the Letters of Paul* (SNT 49, Leiden: Brill, 1977), 13–14.

53  J. Murphy-O'Connor's, *Paul the Letter Writer* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995), 62.

54  K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.H. Stenning (New York: Revell, 1933; repr., New York: Arno, 1970). Cf. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 5, n.12.

55  Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, trans. L.P. Smith (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), 79-80.

in the Greco-Roman world and Hellenistic Judaism, love and concord are associated.[56]

This argument about the essential problem in the Corinthian congregation (i.e., factionalism due to lack of love) is strengthened by the way Paul concludes this letter. In 16:14, Paul admonishes the Corinthians: "All you do, may it be done with love."[57] Then he reminds them of their need to love God (16:22) and of Paul's own love for them (16:24). The last issue Paul discusses in his letter is that of the relationship with other believers. First, he reminds them of the collection for the Jerusalem brethren (16:1-4). By participating in this collection, they would show practical love towards others. Then, he reminds them of Timothy's imminent visit and their duty to not despise him (16:10-11). And finally, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their duty to treasure those who minster among them (16:15-18).

*The Cross as the Supreme Example of Self-sacrifice*
That the issue of love expressed in different ways towards others seems to be the solution to all the problems of dissensions among the Corinthians, is also suggested by the macro structure of the letter. Paul discusses the individual topics between the two major redemptive events: the cross (chapter 1) and the resurrection (chapter 15) of Christ (and of the believer).[58] In other words, for Paul, the gospel should be the

---

56  Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 165-71; see also n.624 for references to the Apostolic Fathers who argue for love as the solution to factionalism. She also shows how the list that describes what love is and what is not in chap.13 "bears a one-to-one correspondence with Paul's description of Corinthian factional behavior," 170.

57  Ibid., 178, n.693, mentions Robertson-Plummer, 394, stating: "He is glancing back at the party-divisions, at the selfish disorder at the Lord's Super, and at their jealousy in the possession of special charismata, and is recalling xiii."

58  See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, 278, where he notes that "it is no accident that … these fundamental themes of the gospel story … stand like bookends—or sentinels—at the beginning and end of the body of his letter to the Corinthians. … All our theology and practice must find its place within the

main motivating factor in the cessation of factionalism.[59] If the church should experience unity, then the Corinthians need to follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice.

## Conclusion

We have sought to show that Paul's dealing with various problems in the Corinthian church follows a particular pattern, a sandwich structure (ABA'). Thus, while the letter is composed of answers to individual issues, ultimately, the structure of each argument is similar. The common element between the way Paul addresses each issue is also his consistent call to the Corinthians to give up their rights, to restrict their freedom, to engage in all manifestations of love, a call that is present in the middle section of each individual chiastic structure. This unifying theme is also the climax of the letter and the fundamental characteristic of the gospel, which forms the bookends of the letter.

The solution of love that Paul offers to the problem of factionalism in the Corinthian church continues to be true for the modern church. If the churches are to experience a resolution to tensions within the church and a solution to their intra-church problems, the believers must learn and practice love. It is only through self-sacrifice and by looking after the interests of others that the unity of the church can be maintained, regardless of what the problems are. That is true, because at the root of each intra-church conflict lies self-seeking interests. If we could adopt Christ's path, i.e., death to self, then we will also experience the power of the resurrection. Bultmann was right: "Love is not an ethical ideal but

---

world framed by these truths."

59  See Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians,* 2, who argues that „...the main body of the letter (1:10–15:38) proceeds from *cross* to *resurrection*." Thus, he proposes that "the macro-structure of the letter evidences the innovative compositional impact of Paul's *kerygma,*" 6.

an eschatological event."[60] He adds: "In that community [i.e., Christian community] the indescribable eschatological event becomes real, so far as love is really present in it… it becomes clear that the preaching of 'love' is preaching the resurrection of the dead."[61]

## Bibliography

Bailey, James L. and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.

Bailey, Kenneth E. *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes. Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011.

Barth, Karl. *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.H. Stenning. New York: Revell, 1933; repr., New York: Arno, 1970.

Blomberg, Craig *1 Corinthians*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *Faith and Understanding*. trans. L.P. Smith. New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969.

Chow, John K. *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*. JSNTSup, 75. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.

Ciampa, Roy E. and Brian S. Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Ciampa, Roy E. and Brian S. Rosner. "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians: A Biblical/Jewish Approach" *NTS* 52.2 (2006): 205-18.

Clarke, Andrew D. *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1Corinthians 1–6*. AGJU 18. Leiden: Brill, 1993.

Collins, J. "Chiasmus, the 'ABA' Pattern and the Text of Paul," in *Studia Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus*. Rome, (1963) 2:575-84.

Collins, R.F. *First Corinthians*. Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999.

---

60 Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 78.

61 Ibid., 79.

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. 2nd ed. NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

Gardner, Paul D. *1 Corinthians*. ZECNT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

Gorman, M.J. *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation. Louisville: Knox, 1997.

Hill, C. E. "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28" *NovT* 30 (1988): 297-320.

Hock, Ronald F. "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class" *JBL* 97 (1978): 555-64.

Hurd, J.C. "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," in L.A. Jervis and P. Richardson, eds. *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker*. JSNT Supp 108; Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 38-62.

Litfin, Duane. *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*. SNTSMS, 79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Litfin, Duane. *Paul's Theology of Preaching. The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.

Lund, N. W. *Chiasmus in the NT: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992.

Marshall, Peter, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians*. WUNT 2. Tübingen: Mohr, 1987.

Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians; The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Mitchell, Margaret. "Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians", *NovT* 31 (1989): 229–56.

Mitchell, Margaret. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*. Tubingen: Mohr, 1991.

Malcolm, Matthew R. "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.2 (2016): 256-69.

Malcolm, Matthew R. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians. The Impact of Paul's Gospel on his Macro-Rhetoric.* SNTSMS 155. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Mihăilă, Corin. *Paul and Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance Toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4.* LNT 402. London and NY: T&T Clark International, 2009.

Mihaila, Corin. "The Number and Nature of Parties in 1 Corinthians 1-4" *Perichoresis* 17:2s (2019): 41-50.

Mihăilă, Corin. "The *Bodily* Resurrection of Jesus. An Argument beginning from First Corinthians 15" *Jurnal Teologic* vol.22, nr. 3 (2022): 9-31

Milinovich, Timothy *Beyond What Is Written: The Performative Structure of 1 Corinthians.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Murphy-O'Connor, J. "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians' *CBQ* 48 (1986) 81–94.

Murphy-O'Connor, J. *Paul the Letter Writer* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995

Murphy-O'Connor, J. *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 1996

Naselli, Andrew David "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians" *Presbyterion* 44.1 (2018): 98-114.

O'Brien, Peter T. *Introductory Thanksgiving in the Letters of Paul.* SNT 49. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Orr, William F. and James A. Walther. *First Corinthians.* AB 32. New York: Doubleday, 1976.

Porter, Stanley E. and Jeffrey T. Reed. "Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance" *NTS* 44 (1998), 213-31.

Schnabel, E.J. *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther.* HTA. Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006.

Thomson, Ian H. *Chiasmus in the Pauline letters*. JSNTSS 111. Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1995.

Terry, Ralph Bruce. *An Analysis of Certain Features of Discourse in the New Testament Book of 1 Corinthians.* PhD diss. University of Texas at Arlington, 1993.

Terry, Ralph Bruce. „Patterns of Discourse Structure in 1 Corinthians" *JOTT* 7.4 (1996): 1-32.

Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity. Essays on Corinth by Gerd Theissen*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 96–151.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

Walker, Jr., William O. "1 Corinthians 2.6-16: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *JSNT* 47 (1992): 75–94.

Watson, D. F. "The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles," in J. P. Sampley and P. Lampe, eds. *Paul and Rhetoric.* New York: T&T Clark, 2010, pp. 25–47

Winter, W. Bruce *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Juloi-Claudian Movement,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Witherington III, Ben. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Wuellner, Wilhelm "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation" in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant.* William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, eds. *ThH* 53. Paris: Beauchesne, 1979, 177–88.

# THE DISTINCTIVE SHAPE OF KINGSHIP IN ANCIENT ISRAEL: A CONSIDERATION OF KINGSHIP IN THE PENTATEUCH

## S. D. ELLISON[1]

*Irish Baptist College*

ABSTRACT: This article explores the shape of kingship in ancient Israel with reference to the Pentateuch and particularly Deuteronomy 17:14–20. It demonstrates that Israel's kingship is distinctive from that of the surrounding nations. The distinctive nature is linked, in the first place, to the creation of the nation and, secondly, to the stipulations for kings contained in Deuteronomy 17. It concludes that although there is some similarity between kingship in Israel and the surrounding nations, at root kingship in Israel is fundamentally distinctive. Whereas in the ancient Near East the king was god, in Israel God was king.

KEYWORDS: Kingship; Deuteronomy; Israel; Pentateuch; Ancient Near East.

## Introduction

The presence of Israelite kingship in the Pentateuch is debated. Whybray argues that apart from Deuteronomy 17:14–20, 'It is of interest to note that there is no reference to a king of Israel anywhere else in the Pentateuch.'[2] This, however, is an overstatement. In Exodus YHWH is presented as Israel's king and they the people of his kingdom (Exod. 15:18; 19:6). In Numbers YHWH is again identified as Israel's king (Num. 23:21) and

---

1    S. D. Ellison (BSc, BD, MTh, PhD). Director of Training and lecturer in Biblical Studies at the Irish Baptist College, partner college of the University of Chester and Spurgeon's College, London. davy.ellison@thebaptistcentre.org

2    R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 100–101.

S. D. ELLISON

there is an indication that a future human leader will imbibe royal pre-rogatives (24:17–19; cf. Gen. 49:10). Moreover, Abraham is promised kings among his descendants (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11). YHWH's kingship is also asserted in Deuteronomy 33:5. It is therefore justifiable to resist Whybray's sweeping statement. The Pentateuch is certainly not replete with references to Israelite kingship, but it is certainly present beyond Deuteronomy 17:14–20. Nevertheless, from the above references the pre-dominant shape of kingship in ancient Israel according to the Pentateuch is that YHWH is Israel's king.[3] Brueggeman observes: 'As an alternative to pretentious oppressive political authority, represented early in Israel's imagination by pharaoh, Israel proposes to order its public life under the direct rule of Yahweh, in a sort of theocracy, "the kingdom of Yahweh" (cf. Exod 19:6).'[4] Human kingship is not ruled out, however, it must merely be instituted within the rubric of YHWH's kingship as will be explored further below.[5]

The institution of human kingship alongside divine kingship, main-taining a division between the two kings, is unique in the ancient Near East. This assertion will be defended first by considering briefly kingship in the ancient Near East. The second step will examine Israel's nationhood and proffer the exodus as the time at which Israel inherited nationhood. Israel's formation has an important bearing on the shape of kingship given YHWH's activity. Finally, this article will explore Deuteronomy 17:14–20 as the governing text for the distinctive shape of kingship in ancient Israel.

---

3   Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 238–41; G. V. Smith, 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible', *Trinity Journal* 3, no. 1 (1982): 33.

4   Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 600.

5   Paul D. Hanson, 'The Community of Faith', in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader in Twentieth-Century Old Testament Theology, 1930–1990*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 370; Whybray, *Pentateuch*, 101.

## Kingship in the ancient near east

Kingship in the ancient Near East must be considered briefly. The extensive accumulation of archaeological and textual data across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has provided a more sharply focused picture of the ancient Near East.[6] It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in detail all the data. Instead, noting the fruit of two centuries of scholarship is sufficient. Livingston observes, 'Comparing the material in the OT with the broader cultural scene, one notes that the Hebrew people were much like their neighbours in regard to housing, food, dress, trade, farming, crafts, implements, weapons, language, script, and many other skills.'[7] Israel, however, was not a mere duplication of other ancient Near Eastern cultures and nations, 'Where theology and morals were important, the Hebrews were vastly different from their neighbours.'[8] Israel's distinctiveness is likewise apparent in their ideology surrounding kingship, because 'the king was not to be identified with deity.'[9] As noted above, Israel maintained a human kingship and a divine kingship. The two are undoubtedly intimately connected, but they are not one and the same as was often the case with the surrounding nations.

Lambert warns 'The modern term "king" is itself inadequate and potentially misleading' when discussing kingship in the ancient Near East 'because of the overtones which it brings,' moreover, 'it is the conventional English translation of two ancient words, the Sumerian *lugal* and the Akkadian *šarru*.'[10] The ancient concept of king designates an indi-

---

6    G. Herbert Livingston, 'The Relation of the Old Testament to Ancient Cultures', in *Introductory Articles*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, The Expositor's Bible Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 340.

7    Livingston, 355.

8    Livingston, 355.

9    Livingston, 356.

10   W. G. Lambert, 'Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 55.

vidual leader exercising rule over territories of different sizes, from cities through nations to entire empires. In Egypt the king was considered both a god and the son of god by virtue of the office. In Mesopotamia the king was understood to represent divinity. Across the ancient Near East the king was always considered to be installed to his office by the gods.[11] Royal ideology in the cultures of the ancient Near East has been succinctly summarised by Preuss, who notes that 'there can be no discussion of a homogenous royal tradition in the ancient Near East.'[12] He does, however, observe that deification and the performance of priestly duties are common.[13] Kingship in the ancient Near East is therefore a fluid concept with common features.

The foundational study in this field in the twentieth century was undertaken by Engnell. He meticulously and systematically surveys Israel's neighbours highlighting the features that constitute their royal ideology. In each culture he notes that to some extent the king is always regarded as divine—Egyptian kings considered divine from birth, Akkadian kings likewise, Hittite kings attain divinity at some point during their kingship or after their death, and Ugaritic kings appear to be the fruit of divine procreation but are arguably not divine themselves.[14] Additionally, there are some cultures in which the king also performs sacral duties as a priest. The Akkadian king's 'greatest and most important role in the cult is his own priestly functions therein.'[15] Or, indeed, some cultures in which

---

11   K. Seybold, H. Ringgren, and H-J. Fabry, 'מֶלֶךְ', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Scott, vol. VIII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 349–52.

12   Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 30.

13   Preuss, 2:30.

14   Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 4, 16, 57, 78.

15   Engnell, 30. Here he also notes that the king was the object of the culture by consequence of his divinity. "publisher": "Blackwel," publisher-place": "Oxford," source": "Amazon.com", "title": "Studies in Divine Kingship in the

the king is the object of the cult, such as the Hittite king.[16] One aspect of kingship in the ancient Near East that has been further developed since Engnell's work is that of the king's justice of righteousness on behalf of his subjects. Whitelam identifies this as a key aspect of kingship with Israel's neighbours. The Mesopotamian king 'viewed the monarch as guarantor of justice throughout the realm.'[17] Elsewhere 'the king's judicial functions were regarded as of such prime importance' that failure to perform them 'brought into question [the king's] right to the throne.'[18] Likewise, the Egyptian king was to guarantee justice throughout the realm.[19] Thus, in addition to deification and the exercise of sacral duties, the king of the ancient Near East was expected to uphold justice.[20]

The preceding observations are not wholly alien to Israelite kingship, but nor are they identical. Nel surmises that 'The concept of a *melek*-rulership in Israel has its roots in the political system of the Canaanite cities of the Middle and Late Bronze age. … Egyptian influences are also possible.'[21] The most notable similarity is the formal characteristics of Israel's concept of the just king in comparison to the other cultures of

---

Ancient Near East", "author":[{"family":"Engnell", "given":"Ivan"}],"issued":{"date-parts":[["1967"]]}},"locator":"30", "label":"page", "suffix":". Here he also notes that the king was the object of the culture by consequence of his divinity."}],"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}

16  Engnell, 61.

17  Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 12 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1979), 23.

18  Whitelam, 25.

19  Whitelam, 27.

20  Whitelam, 17, 37.

21  Philip J. Nel, 'מלך', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 958. See Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:31, who writes: 'Israel borrowed and indeed must appropriate elements of royal ideology from its ancient Near Eastern environment.'

the ancient Near East.[22] Significant contrasts exist too, however. Scale is the first contrast. Baines correctly observes that 'ancient Egypt and the world of the Hebrew Bible were far removed in scale and social institutions.'[23] Thus there was a simplicity to the kingship envisaged in Israel, perhaps explaining the scarce attention it receives in the Pentateuch. Second, Preuss's conclusion that 'Sacral kingship may not have existed in Israel'[24] is surely understated. The priesthood is a separate office in Israel, pre-existing kingship. Indeed, Israel's first king Saul is in part rejected by YHWH because of his attempt to exercise sacral duties (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:9–14).[25] Third, in Israel the king is not divine and yet God is king. As Brueggeman highlights, 'Israel's rhetoric is permeated with "Yahweh as king".'[26] This is not only evident in references to YHWH's kingship in Exodus 15:18; 19:6, Numbers 23:21, and Deuteronomy 33:5. It is also apparent in YHWH's role as suzerain in the treaty structure of

---

22 Whitelam, *The Just King*, 36–37.

23 John Baines, 'Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Offical Forms, Rhetoric, Context', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16.

24 Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:31.

25 We must, however, be careful as there is evidence that Davidic kings, at times, functioned as priests. The biblical evidence is inconclusive on two counts. First, it fails to definitively rule out the possibility of a king-priest operating in Israel. Second, it does not sufficiently demonstrate that the king did anything more than perform priestly duties ad hoc. Deborah W. Rooke, 'Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), offers the intriguing suggestion that the king had both the right and the duty to perform priestly duties, yet delegated this to the priest. For a more thorough discussion that is based on Psalm 110:4 see, S. D. Ellison, 'Hope for a Davidic King in the Psalter's Utopian Vision' (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, Belfast, 2021), 163–67.

26 Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 238.

Deuteronomy.[27] Therefore, instead of combining king and deity in divine kingship like her neighbours, Israel partners the divine king and the human king. Thus, even this brief consideration of kingship in the ancient Near East reveals that 'Although Israel's terminology was the same as the terms used in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, the conceptual images which these terms represented were not always identical.'[28] This will be detailed further in the discussion of Deuteronomy 17:14–20 below, but prior to that the formation of Israel as a nation must be considered for this influences the shape of kingship in ancient Israel.

## The formation of Israel as a nation

Any consideration of the formation of Israel as a nation must acknowledge 'A fierce controversy now surrounds the question of Israelite origins.'[29] While the extensive nature of the discussion mitigates against an in-depth exploration of the topic in this article, it is possible to identify the two primary opposing views. The first is a rejection of any historical ancient nation named Israel. Davies argues for this, identifying three 'Israels': one literary, one historical, and one ancient (i.e., a scholarly construction).[30] He contends that the biblical text presents 'an ideal "Israel", namely the entity created in the biblical literature, which, as we have seen, does not correspond to the real historical Israel.'[31] The Israel that biblical scholars refer to is a nation constituted solely by the Hebrew Scriptures according to Davies.[32] The second view claims that there is evident cor-

---

27  Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1994), 47–48.

28  Smith, 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible', 38.

29  Mark G. Brett, 'Israel's Indigenous Origins: Cultural Hybridity and the Formation of Israelite Ethnicity', *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3–4 (2003): 400.

30  Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 148 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 11.

31  Davies, 75.

32  Davies, 161.

respondence between the biblical narrative and archaeological evidence. Repeatedly the biblical narratives accurately reflect the social setting recreated by archaeological discoveries.[33] Indeed, Knauth observes that 'Historically and archaeologically the Israelites were part of a wider phenomenon at the beginning of the Iron Age, namely, the emergence of ethnically based national bodies.'[34] It must also be appreciated that an overreliance on archaeology is problematic. For,

Archaeological remains (when this phrase is taken to exclude written testimony from the past) are of themselves mute. They do not speak for themselves, they have no story to tell and no truth to communicate. It is archaeologists who speak about them, … placing the findings within an interpretive framework that bestows upon them meaning and significance.[35]

It is therefore with an awareness of this debate that we consider the formation of the nation of Israel as presented in the Hebrew Bible.

This article proposes that the formation of the nation of Israel can be narrowed to the time of the exodus. Throughout the Pentateuch בני ישראל is the most frequently employed construction when referring to Israel as a distinct group.[36] In Genesis and Exodus 1:1 the construction clearly refers to the literal sons of Jacob/Israel, but from Exodus 1:9, on the lips of Pharaoh, and 3:10, on the lips of YHWH, it refers to Israel as a distinct people group. There is, however, a developmental aspect

---

33  Brett, 'Israel's Indigenous Origins', 400–401; Robin J. DeWitt Knauth, 'Israelites', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 456–456. So too M. J. Selman, 'Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age', in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A. R Millard and D. J Wiseman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 128.

34  Knauth, 'Israelites', 457.

35  Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 46. Also, Walter C. Kaiser Jr and Paul D. Wegner, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars*, Revised Edition (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 224.

36  Knauth, 'Israelites', 452.

to this designation: the members of the twelve tribes descended from the eponymous Jacob/Israel, the totality of the twelve tribes just prior to the establishment of the monarchy, and a religious designation for worshippers of the Israelite God, YHWH.[37] Thus, Buch correctly states: 'the 12 *sons* of Jacob did not constitute a nation. Jacob and his sons were merely a family or a clan. Only when they evolved into 12 *tribes* was the nation born.'[38] The question of when this evolution took place can now be answered. Among the wide array of suggestions, three plausible proposals are: 1) taking possession of the land;[39] 2) the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai;[40] and 3) the establishing of the monarchy.[41] Each of these suggestions, however, seem to delay the formation of Israel as a nation given its collective activity prior to these events. Rather, given Israel's own thinking as revealed in the Pentateuch, indubitably the exodus is a more plausible point as which to mark the formation of a nation. Indeed, it is the paradigmatic salvific event in the life of YHWH's people. Toombs aptly captures the reasons why the exodus is compelling:

[The exodus] forms the subject matter of the first five books of the Bible, and provides the philosophy of history which underlies all of Israel's historical writing. … In the events of the exodus the political framework of the nation was established, its economic and social ideals settled, and its theology defined.[42]

---

37  Knauth, 452–53.

38  Joshua Buch, 'The Biblical Number 12 and the Formation of the Ancient Nation of Israel', *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1999): 51. Emphasis original.

39  Knauth, 'Israelites', 455, for example.

40  Graeme L. Goldsworthy, 'Kingdom of God', in *New Dictionary in Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 619, for example.

41  Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 122, for example.

42  Lawrence E. Toombs, *Nation Making*, Bible Guides 4 (New York, NY: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 12.

The exodus from Egypt is the moment that Israel's formation as a nation was initiated. Although this formation was not immediate and required ratification through ensuing events—most notably the giving of the Law at Sinai—it is the beginning of the nation.

This conclusion is defensible in several ways. First, within the narratives of the Hebrew Bible it is possible to trace the beginnings of state formation. Wagner-Tsukamoto concludes that it is possible to trace 'the early beginnings of an economic theory of state formation in the Hebrew Bible.'[43] Second, caution must be exercised that the nationhood of ancient Israel is not considered in terms of contemporary models of nationhood.[44] Third, the designation of amphictyony holds the first two points together. Initially Israel was understood as an amphictyony through the work of Noth.[45] While the trend in recent scholarship has been to move away from this understanding,[46] Lemche provided a compelling argument that Noth's initial suggestion warrants further reflection.[47] Undeniably Israel's grouping did not possess the same sophistication as the established Greek amphictyonies, nor operate in the same fashion. Nevertheless, from the time of the exodus, Israel was an organised grouping of tribes that functioned together as a unit. Fourth, this unity is based on YHWH, his relationship with them and their commitment to him, as opposed to any political purpose.[48] In other words, this am-

---

43  Sigmund Wagner-Tsukamoto, 'State Formation in the Hebrew Bible: An Institutional Economic Perspective', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 4 (2013): 421.

44  Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 120.

45  Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965).

46  H-J. Zobel, 'יִשְׂרָאֵל', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, vol. VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 408; Kaiser Jr and Wegner, *History of Israel*, 21–22, 275–78.

47  Neils Peter Lemche, 'The Greek "Amphictyony": Could It Be a Prototype for the Israelite Society in the Period of the Judges?', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 4 (1977): 58–59.

48  Knauth, 'Israelites', 456; Smith, 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the

phictyony functioned because of the events of the exodus. The nation is formed both theologically and historically via the defining salvific event in Israel's history.[49] Consequently, the designation of Israel as a theocracy is accurate.[50] It is not, however, the only way to designate the governance structure of the nation.

As Israel developed from a family of twelve sons to a nation of twelve tribes, shaped and influenced by significant episodes in its history, and the God who orchestrated those episodes, they developed a sophisticated social structure which was ultimately governed by torah. The basis of the social structure was kinship ties, pre-monarchical Israel was primarily tribal—or better an amphictyony, of sorts.[51] Authority within this system was exercised at three different levels, each an escalation on the previous. The first and lowest level of authority was exercised by the male head of family groups over his own family to rule on interfamilial disputes.[52] The second level of authority was that of the tribe, exercised by elders (likely a gathered group of heads of families), often legislating on disputes between family groups.[53] The final authority was the Priests, who exercised authority on matters that could not be resolved by local communities.[54] Despite the differing levels of authority, all took their bearing from torah. This has led to Porter's suggestion that Moses is the proto-typical king as

---

Ancient Near East and the Bible', 36; Zobel, '416 ,'יִשְׂרָאֵל.

49   Toombs, *Nation Making*, 21.

50   Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 600.

51   Knauth, 'Israelites', 456; Victor H. Matthews, 'Israelite Society', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 521, 523; Randall W. Younker, 'Social Structure', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 786.

52   Whitelam, *The Just King*, 39.

53   Whitelam, 43.

54   Whitelam, 46.

the royal lawgiver.[55] While such a proposal possesses some merit, it fails to recognise the divine origin of the law, Moses's role as a mediator, and the reality that all Israelites—Moses and forthcoming kings alike—were subject to torah.[56] As Smith observes, 'The centrality of the covenant relationship to the unique position of Yahweh as king supports the premonarchal belief in the kingship of Yahweh.'[57] Therefore, Israel did indeed operate as a theocracy, but each individual did not relate to YHWH the king on their own basis. A structure existed in which each Israelite lived before the face of God. In this state Israel existed from the exodus. Evidently, however, Sinai can be pinpointed as the moment in which 'the people are welded together and given a sense of national identity and mission in the undisturbed confines of the desert.'[58]

The intricacies of the debate surrounding the origin of Israel are plethora. The above brief consideration proffers the conclusion that the nation of Israel was constituted through the exodus. A nation consisting of a collection of twelve tribes, holding common ground in their relationship to and service of YHWH, operated as an entity. The authority structure which offered governance of the social structure of the nation further underscores YHWH's rule through his torah. On the basis of this exploration of kingship in the ancient near east and the formation of the nation of Israel that Deuteronomy 17:14–20 can now be examined.

## The distinctive shape of kingship in Deuteronomy 17:14–20

Comment on Deuteronomy must first be offered before focusing attention on Deuteronomy 17:14–20 in particular. Alexander notes, 'The book of Deuteronomy brings the Pentateuch to a significant climax.'[59] Both its po-

---

55  J. R. Porter, *Moses and Monarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 15, 22, 23, 27.

56  Hanson, 'Community of Faith', 370.

57  Smith, 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible', 37.

58  Kaiser Jr and Wegner, *History of Israel*, 192.

59  T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 286.

sition in the canon and distinctive theological voice within the Pentateuch underscore the climactic nature of the book.[60] Deuteronomy does not only serve as a fitting conclusion to the Pentateuch but also a foundational introduction to the subsequent narrative in the historical books.[61] Moreover, it casts its shadow throughout the rest of the Old Testament.[62] Indeed, due to its pervasive influence, some claim that Deuteronomy is a late composition that synthesises much of the Hebrew Bible's theology.[63] This can be rejected, however, if we read the book on its own terms. Deuteronomy claims to be the words of Moses (Deut. 1:1) delivered on the plains of Moab (1:5).[64] Given this examination of Deuteronomy 17:14–20 will deal with the text as it stands its claims will be accepted as accurate. Simply because a book remains relevant throughout an extend period of history does not mean it must succeed rather than precede the events with which it is pertinent.[65] Finally, mention must be made of the book's structure. Alter argues that 'Deuteronomy is the most sustained

---

60  David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston, eds., 'Introduction', in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 14; Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*, vol. 1, The Schocken Bible (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995), 841.

61  J. Gordon McConville, 'Book of Deuteronomy', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 182–83.

62  Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Second Edition (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007), 102.

63  See, for example, the discussion in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xix–xxvi.

64  Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 22–23.

65  William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 117–18.

deployment of rhetoric in the Bible.'[66] While this rhetoric is delivered as a series of sermons, it possesses a striking resemblance to ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties.[67] As Alexnader highlights, 'there can be little doubt that an awareness of [Deuteronomy's similarities to vassal treaties] enables us to appreciate better the main characteristics of the covenant in Deuteronomy.'[68] The vassal treaty structure consists of two parties and the contract between them. In this case we have YHWH the great king and initiator of the covenant, Israel the vassal people and covenant partner, and the book of Deuteronomy the covenant treaty which stipulates and delineates the nature of the relationship.[69] It is therefore correct to contend that 'every indication points to the conclusion that Deuteronomy is one of the most significant books in the Old Testament.'[70]

It is within this significant book that we find the only instructions concerning kings in Israel in the Pentateuch, and arguably all of Scripture. The central speech runs from 5:1–26:19, and within this are found instructions concerning leadership (16:18–18:22). At the centre of this section sits the pericope concerned with the king. As will be argued below, these instructions are not what might be expected in the ancient Near East in relation to kingship. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 can be divided into three parts: two positive injunctions (14–15, 18–20) enveloping a series of three negative injunctions (16–17).

*Part One: Chosen by YHWH (17:14–15)*
Two features of kingship in ancient Israel are immediately evident in 17:14–15. First, the Israelite king is not the highest king in the land.

---

66  Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, NY: Norton & Company, 2004), 869.

67  The foundational work on this is Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1963).

68  Alexander, *Paradise to the Promised Land*, 289.

69  Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 27–32, 47–48.

70  LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 127.

Second, Israel do not yet have a king. It is striking, considering 1 Samuel 8–12, that there is no negativity attached to this anticipated petition by Israel for a king. This demonstrates that 'a monarchy as such need not be antithetical to the principle of theocratic government.'[71] Moreover, there is anticipation of kings ruling YHWH's people earlier in the Pentateuch (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10; Num. 24:17).[72] Even so, also noteworthy is that this petition is simply permissible but not demanded.

The Israelites are instructed emphatically to ensure that their king is a brother. Undoubtedly this was to preserve Israel's distinctive religious character as it was central to the nation's unity.[73] It also, however, ensured that the king was not unduly elevated.[74] Christensen further suggests that the prohibition against appointing a foreigner as king may be designed to quash any temptation to look for an individual experienced in kingly rule.[75] These verses may appear to contain a contradiction—do the people set a king over them or does YHWH choose him—but these two aspects are not incompatible. Kline remarks, 'It is noteworthy that in the secular suzerainty treaties a similar oversight of the vassal's choice of

---

71  Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 97.

72  Daniel I. Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 336: 'While the history of the monarchy in Israel would prove disastrous in many respects, no Israelite prophet and no biblical author rejected the monarchy in principle.'

73  Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 255.

74  R. E. Clements, *Deuteronomy*, Reprint, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 59, notes that this removes 'any belief that the king was a semi-divine, or uniquely endowed, being. He is merely human, although his approval by God and his right to the kingship are expressed through the formula of divine selection.'

75  Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, Second Edition, Word Biblical Commentary 6a (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 384. Cf. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

king is exercised.'[76] Therefore, to state the injunction positively, Israel is permitted to appoint a fellow Israelite to the position of king under the guidance of their suzerain king YHWH. The Israelite king is not God but chosen by God.

*Part Two: Trusting in YHWH (17:16–17)*[77]
The three negative injunctions in 17:16–17 circumscribe the activity of the king and call for trust to be placed in YHWH, the great king. Specifically, the king is prohibited from amassing horses, wives, and wealth. In the ancient Near East horses represented military strength, wives entailed political strength, and wealth presupposed dominance over a subservient people.[78] The text does not demand that the king abstains from these things, merely that the king does not exploit his position for personal gain (note the repetition of 'for himself').[79] Moreover, the impetus is not only obedience in these specifics, but a general attitude of trust in YHWH in all aspects of life. Indeed, the accumulation of the things prohibited would almost certainly have necessitated uncomfortable alliances with nations whose god(s) was not YHWH. Thus, these prohibitions further strengthen the perseverance of Israel's distinctive religious character.[80] This is further underscored with the command that the king was not to cause the people to return to Egypt—what would effectively be a 'moral reversal of

---

76  Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 98.

77  On the specificity of these prohibitions suggesting a late date for Deuteronomy's composition (given their similarity to the snares Solomon becomes entrapped in), Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 266, astutely observes that these prohibitions are 'simply a statement of profound insight into the human condition, one that understands the pride and predilections of those who would rule in ignorance or defiance of divine mandate.'

78  Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 384.

79  Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 419.

80  J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5 (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 295.

the exodus.'[81] Tigay suggests that 'it refers to sending Israelites to Egypt as slaves or mercenary troops in order to pay for horses.'[82] If this is so, it would be more than a moral reversal, it would be an actual reversal of the exodus—a dissolution of the nation, an undoing of its formation.[83] 'These prohibitions, therefore, fit perfectly with the picture of a king who is simply a brother Israelite'[84] for their core is trusting in YHWH.[85]

*Part Three: Subject to YHWH (17:18–20)*

The final segment of this passage offers the way in which the preceding injunctions might be kept. Deuteronomy 17:18–20 display the king as a model Israelite, for here the king is instructed to write, keep, read, and observe 'this law' (v. 18). At minimum, this phrase refers to Moses's second address in Deuteronomy (5:1–26:19), but it more likely refers to Deuteronomy in its entirety.[86] Significantly, the law to be written out by the king is the same law that is binding on Israelites—it is not applicable to him alone.[87] In these verses though, it is explicit that the king 'had no authority to teach or interpret the Torah, let alone amend it.'[88] This is an astonishing for a king in the ancient Near East. As opposed to creating the law, 'The king is to be actively engaged in personally producing a text of the teaching.'[89] There are a variety of summaries offered regarding the purpose of this attention devoted to the torah. Kalland helpfully elucidates a three-fold purpose of serving YHWH, carefully attending

---

81  McConville, 294.

82  Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

83  Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 255–56.

84  McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 295.

85  On trusting both YHWH's salvific acts and authoritative word, see S. D. Ellison, 'The One and Only?', *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2022): 111–19.

86  Daniel I. Block, 'The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut 17:14-20)', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 647 (2005): 269.

87  See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

88  Block, 'The Burden of Leadership', 275. Also, Clements, *Deuteronomy*, 31.

89  Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 966.

to the words of torah, and ensuring an equal footing between the king and his brother Israelites.[90] All these purposes, however, are subsumed in the ultimate aim that 'Thus the king becomes the model Israelite.'[91] In short, the king must possess an inner disposition that results in practical application by way of outward actions.[92] The king is subject to YHWH.

Clements asserts this is a 'surprisingly pietistic demand' for a king.[93] While this is true, it does not mean that the injunctions are unattainable. Israel faithfully observed some of these injunctions. There is no evidence, for example, of Israel ever placing a foreigner on their throne. Furthermore, despite the failures which did occur in Israel's history, the moral force of these kingship laws was not invalidated. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 therefore evinces 'the revolutionary nature of Israelite kingship.'[94] Kingship in Israel possessed a distinctive shape.

## Conclusion

After considering kingship in the ancient Near East, the formation of Israel as a nation, and the stipulations that the nation of Israel were given in relation to their kings, we can conclude that 'Deuteronomy's views on kingship, which are unique in the world of antiquity, stand in sharp contrast with those of its neighbours … In ancient Israel, the king was subject to the law along with his subjects.'[95] As noted above, while there

---

90  Earl S. Kalland, *Deuteronomy*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, The Expositor's Bible Commentary 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 117.

91  Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 5 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 220.

92  Jan Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Ed M. van der Maas, The Bible Student's Commentary/Regency Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 201.

93  Clements, *Deuteronomy*, 31.

94  Block, *Deuteronomy*, 421.

95  Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 387. Further, see Block, *Triumph of Grace*, 340–41; Gregory R. Goswell, 'The Shape of Kingship in Deut 17: A Messianic Pentateuch?', *Trinity Journal* 38, no. 2 (2017): 180.

are some similarities between kingship in the ancient Near East more broadly and Israel's version, the differences are significant. Indeed, Israel's view of kingship repudiates the prevailing models of the ancient Near East.[96] The shape of kingship is related directly to Israel's formation as a nation, for it establishes YHWH as the suzerain in the Mosaic covenant.[97] Tigay's suggestion that the king is 'essentially an optional figurehead' is overstating the case, however.[98] It is better to say that a vice-regency operates in which YHWH's kingship is represented through the torah-obeying Israelite king—'the people of YHWH were to be ruled by a viceroy of YHWH.'[99] The distinctive shape of kingship in Israel is that while in neighbouring territories the king was god, in Israel God was king.[100]

## Bibliography

Aalexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, NY: Norton & Company, 2004.

Baines, John. 'Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Offical Forms, Rhetoric, Context'. In *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, edited by John Day. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Block, Daniel I. *Deuteronomy*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

———. 'The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut 17:14-20)'. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 647 (2005): 259–78.

---

96   McConville, 'Book of Deuteronomy', 187.

97   Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 238.

98   Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 166.

99   Block, *Triumph of Grace*, 337.

100      Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, 98.

———. *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017.

Brett, Mark G. 'Israel's Indigenous Origins: Cultural Hybridity and the Formation of Israelite Ethnicity'. *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3–4 (2003): 400–412.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997.

Buch, Joshua. 'The Biblical Number 12 and the Formation of the Ancient Nation of Israel'. *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1999): 49–57.

Christensen, Duane L. *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*. Second Edition. Word Biblical Commentary 6a. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001.

Clements, R. E. *Deuteronomy*. Reprint. Old Testament Guides. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

Craigie, Peter C. *Deuteronomy*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976.

Davies, Philip R. *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 148. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992.

Ellison, S. D. 'Hope for a Davidic King in the Psalter's Utopian Vision'. Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, Belfast, 2021.

———. 'The One and Only?' *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 21, no. 2 (2022): 111–19.

Engnell, Ivan. *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

Firth, David G., and Philip S. Johnston, eds. 'Introduction'. In *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012.

Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*. Vol. 1. The Schocken Bible. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995.

Goldsworthy, Graeme L. 'Kingdom of God'. In *New Dictionary in Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.

Goswell, Gregory R. 'The Shape of Kingship in Deut 17: A Messianic Pentateuch?' *Trinity Journal* 38, no. 2 (2017): 169–81.

Hanson, Paul D. 'The Community of Faith'. In *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader in Twentieth-Century Old Testament Theology, 1930–1990*, edited by Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 1. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Kaiser Jr, Walter C., and Paul D. Wegner. *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars*. Revised Edition. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016.

Kalland, Earl S. *Deuteronomy*. Edited by Frank E. Gæbelein. The Expositor's Bible Commentary 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.

Kline, Meredith G. *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1963.

Knauth, Robin J. DeWitt. 'Israelites'. In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003.

Lambert, W. G. 'Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia'. In *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, edited by John Day. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

LaSor, William S., David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.

Lemche, Neils Peter. 'The Greek "Amphictyony": Could It Be a Prototype for the Israelite Society in the Period of the Judges?' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 4 (1977): 48–59.

Livingston, G. Herbert. 'The Relation of the Old Testament to Ancient Cultures'. In *Introductory Articles*, edited by Frank E. Gæbelein. The

Expositor's Bible Commentary 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979.

Longman III, Tremper, and Raymond B. Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Second Edition. Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2007.

Matthews, Victor H. 'Israelite Society'. In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, edited by Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005.

McConville, J. Gordon. 'Book of Deuteronomy'. In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002.

———. *Deuteronomy*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5. Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002.

Merrill, Eugene H. *Deuteronomy*. New American Commentary 4. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1994.

Nel, Philip J. 'דלמ'. In *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. VanGemeren, Vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.

Noth, Martin. *The History of Israel*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965.

Porter, J. R. *Moses and Monarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1963.

Preuss, Horst Dietrich. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by Leo G. Perdue. Vol. 2. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996.

Provan, Iain, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. *A Biblical History of Israel*. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Ridderbos, Jan. *Deuteronomy*. Translated by Ed M. van der Maas. The Bible Student's Commentary/Regency Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

Rooke, Deborah W. 'Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy'. In *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, edited by John Day. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 270. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Selman, M. J. 'Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age'. In *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, edited by A. R Millard and D. J Wiseman. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980.

Seybold, K., H. Ringgren, and H-J. Fabry. 'חֲלֹם'. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, translated by Douglas W. Scott, Vol. VIII. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997.

Smith, G. V. 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible'. *Trinity Journal* 3, no. 1 (1982): 18–38.

Tigay, Jeffrey H. *Deuteronomy*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

Toombs, Lawrence E. *Nation Making*. Bible Guides 4. New York, NY: Lutterworth Press, 1962.

Wagner-Tsukamoto, Sigmund. 'State Formation in the Hebrew Bible: An Institutional Economic Perspective'. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 4 (2013): 391–422.

Whitelam, Keith W. *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*. London: Routledge, 1996.

———. *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 12. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1979.

Whybray, R. Norman. *Introduction to the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995.

Woods, Edward J. *Deuteronomy*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 5. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011.

Younker, Randall W. 'Social Structure'. In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003.

Zobel, H-J. 'לְאַרְשִׁי'. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by David E. Green, Vol. VI. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990.

# THE RHETORIC OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB; A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JOB ELABORATED IN RELATION TO SOME CLASSICAL AND MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

## CĂLIN-IOAN TALOȘ[1]

*Emanuel University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT: Why do the righteous suffer? The present research aims to examine the answer to this question as it emerges from the spectrum of dialogues in the narrative of the Book of Job. We will examine the dialogues that stand out in its literary perimeter, then, in the end, we will highlight the reason to which Job, the protagonist of the story, gets access to regarding his own suffering. Afterwards, we will probe a number of classical and modern interpretations in order to highlight the fact that the rhetoric of suffering in the Book of Job, like the classical interpretations, points to a high view of God's power and knowledge and a human attitude of resilience and humility in the face of suffering, whereas the modern interpretations examined tend to highlight a low view of God's power and knowledge and a critical and accusing human attitude.

KEY WORDS: suffering, book of Job, interpretation, rhetoric, classical, modern.

## I. Introduction

This article is divided into four parts. The goal of this article is to identify the meaning that suffering has for the author of the book of Job in order to later observe comparatively how this rhetoric of suffering was

---

1    Dr. Călin Ioan Taloş, BA (Bucharest University); PhD (UBB Cluj); PhD (King's College London); PhD (UBB Cluj); Lecturer at Emanuel University of Oradea, pastor of Gilau First Baptist Church. Email: calintalos@emanuel.ro

received by some classical and modern theologians. We will be able to note, therefore, the contribution that theology, in general, has for defining the meaning of suffering in these days when conflicts and victimizations, dramatic sufferings and irremediable tragedies seem to reach worrying heights.

In the preamble we will profile the general meaning given to suffering by contemporary Christianity. After this general sketch of its meaning for us, in the second part of the work, we will comment on the Book of Job, following the rhetoric of suffering as it emerges from the three rounds of dialogue, three rounds between Eliphaz the Temanite and Job, three between Bildad the Shuhite and Job, two between Zophar the Naamathite and Job, an extensive dialogue between Elihu the Buzite and Job, and a decisive round between God and Job. This exegetical approach will be based on *The Jewish Bible, Tanakh, a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Texts* published in 1985. In the third section, we will highlight the way contemporary theology receives the rhetoric of suffering from the book of Job, and finally we will draw the necessary conclusions regarding the book's rhetoric of suffering and its classical and contemporary reception.

*General Christian Perspectives on the Meaning of Suffering*
Paolo de Petris evokes the strident and epochal interrogation, formulated among others by Rabbi Harold Kushner[2] in the following words:

> Every day we see that the innocent suffer and die young, while the wicked live long and prosper. Why does it happen? How can God's Justice be maintained in view of the fact that guiltless people suffer? What is at stake here is not the mere existence of human suffering, but the fact that it hits innocent people.[3]

---

2   Harold S. Kushner, *The Book of Job, When Bad Things Happened to Good Person* (USA: Schocken Books, 2012), Electronic Edition.

3   Paolo de Petris, *Calvin's Theodicy and the Hiddenness of God, Calvin's Sermons of the Book of Job,* (Switzerland, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 16.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

In Christian theodicy, several reasons have been noted why God allows suffering in the lives of his believing people. The first reason concerns the human being in its ontological aspect. Man suffers because, by creation; he has a being that is fundamentally deficient. The shortcomings or minuses of his being, generate errors, and errors, regardless of their nature, physical, mental (miscalculations) or moral errors, all these produce suffering. Newsom states that "Tragic rupture is the figure at the heart of human existence."[4] And this ontology of suffering can only be ameliorated by reconnecting man with God, through Christ, who is, ontologically speaking, plenary in all respects and, consequently, without error. The perfection of Christ complements the imperfection and vices of the human being on the condition that this fragile being is connected by faith to God, who is always willing to grant full forgiveness on the basis of the atonement achieved by Christ on the cross and, consequently, to offer spiritual relief to the suffering man. An analogy would be the relationship between a household or industrial appliance which, if it does not have access under optimal conditions to the energy source for which it was designed, is non-functional, useless and sometimes a burden, whereas if it is connected to an energy source, it becomes functional and useful.

A second rationale invokes pragmatism or the pedagogy of suffering. That is, suffering has the potential to produce maturity and wisdom. The spiritual and moral growth of the sufferer, as a result of the presence of suffering in his life, "seems to echo Irenaeus' perspective who regarded suffering as a necessary prerequisite for spiritual growth and development."[5] H. Kushner evokes both the thesis of Maimonides who considered suffering a necessary means of growth through learning and the accumulation of experience, and that of C. S. Lewis who wrote of "pain as God's chisel to shape and perfect us . . . ."[6] Just as a student who, accepting the many hours of privations and hardships that rigorous study

---

4    Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job, A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 257.

5    De Petris, *Calvin's*, 276.

6    Kushner, *The Book of Job,* 253.

entails, finally becomes the beneficiary of the knowledge useful for the profession that will ensure a decent living and performance, likewise, the man who accepts the experience, traumatic at times, of suffering, will manage to detach himself from the naive perspective on reality, from the childishness that made him uncomfortable, obtaining instead maturity, a non-theoretical understanding of some aspects of life and the ability to empathize with the sufferer whom he had no way to understand outside of a personal and severe experience. Or, in other words, the patient who patiently goes through the emotional and physical trauma of a medical operation is the beneficiary of the joy of healing and the restoration of his well-being, so the Christian who goes through the suffering of life benefits from the joy of success, which he would not have had out of vicissitudes and tragedies.

A third rationale for suffering reveals the idea of reward. The point here is that God allows human suffering in this life because He has planned in advance both its function in the puzzle of human interaction and its recognition and reward in the afterlife. Therefore, those who suffer much or intensely here, will be richly and generously rewarded hereafter. Life is like a stage play in two acts between which the curtain is drawn. What is before the curtain of death is the first act of man's life, and after this there is the second act, when things unfold in close logical connection with those in the previous act. Calvin highlights this in the following words:

> The souls of the saints, therefore, which have escaped the hands of the enemy, are after death in peace. They are amply supplied with all things, for it is said of them, "They shall go from abundance to abundance."[7]

As he who proves his competence at work receives his remuneration at the end of the term of employment, so he who proves his faithfulness in suffering is rewarded at the end of life. If life continues in eternity, then everything that happens here has eternal resonance. The Book of Job, however, does not start from these premises.

---

7    Calvin Apud. De Petris, Calvin's, 67.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

## II. General Commentary on the Book of Job

The book opens with Job's moral profile, his material condition, the composition of his family or household, and hints of his religiosity (1:1-5).

Later the dialogue between God and the Adversary (*Hasatan*) appears.[8] The latter asserts his skepticism vis-à-vis the reason for Job's righteousness by showing that if Job had not been blessed, he would not have kept his righteousness any longer. Job's righteousness is the happy result of the happy circumstances of his life: health, seven boys and three girls, all healthy, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred pairs of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and correspondingly, many servants (1:3).

Trouble appears in Job's life, as his circumstances change radically. Job loses both his wealth, children and health (1:13-22). The whole tragedy unfolds as a result of divine decision. Will Job remain righteous?

Well, an x-ray of the nature of his faith is constituted by the dialogues.

### 1. The dialogue between Eliphaz and Job.

Eliphaz of Teman advances the thesis that only the wicked are punished: "As I have seen, those who plow evil. And sow mischief reap them. They perish by a blast from God, Are gone at the breath of His nostrils."[9] (4:8-9)

Further, Eliphaz brings into the discussion the statement that all beings are sinful, marked by mistakes, from angels to those who live in houses of clay (4:18-19). Therefore, all are crushed like a worm (4:19), and the untimely trouble that came is a rebuke from God (5:17) and only the appeal to God with repentance, animated by hope (5:8,16), can fully restore Job's unhappy state (5:18- 27): "He injures, but He binds up." (5:18) Paolo de

---

8    *The Jewish Bible, Tanakh, a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Texts* (Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 1340. All Bible quotations in this article are excerpted from *The Jewish Bible, Tanakh, a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Texts* (Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

9    *The Jewish Bible*, 1343.

Petris refers to the German theologian D. Sölle, who, like Elifaz, "states that the most relevant reality is that of suffering"[10] arguing in favor of the idea that suffering is a divine punishment inflicted on sinful man.[11]

Job, on the other hand, insists that he is righteous: "I did not suppress my words against the Holy One." (6:10) He appeals to God asking for an end to this unbearable suffering, not in terms of repentance, but in terms of justice, emphasizing the injustice of being treated like a sea dragon (7:12), even though he is only a simple man (7:17). The sufferer claims, however, the forgiveness of sin (7:21) which he considers, however, only an invention of God (9:20; 10:67), a fabrication. Job does not stop to support his innocence, as it also emerges from the dialogue with Bildad (9:21, 10:7).

## 2. *The dialogue between Bildad and Job*

Bildad focuses his speech on the premise that "Surely God does not despise the blameless; He gives no support to evildoers" (8:20). In other words, Bildad promotes the idea that the good do not suffer and the bad inevitably taste bitterness. In this sense, he uses an analogy with the reed. As a reed withers without water, so a man withers without righteousness (8:11-13). Then, in the light of this analogy, Bildad interprets the unfortunate accident of Job's children, emphasizing that it is due exclusively to their iniquity: "If your sons sinned against Him, He dispatched them for their transgression" (8:4). Bildad also has good news for Job: "If you are blameless and upright, He will protect you and grant well-being to your righteous home." (8:6)

Job reiterates his conviction about himself: "I am blameless." (9:21) But he laments of not being able to prove his innocence before God because he has entered into an unequal debate: "How then I can answer Him, Or choose my arguments against Him?" (9:14) And so, Job despises his life (9:21b, 10:1, 18-19).

---

10   De Petris, *Calvin's*, 27.

11   Idem ibidem.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

*3. The dialogue between Zophar and Job*

Zophar from Naamah has no ears for Job's thesis and claims, with celerity, he calls for his repentance: "If there is iniquity with you, remove it, And do not let injustice reside in your tent" (11:14), otherwise there is no hope but death (11:20).

Job, however, interprets the attitude of the three dialogue companions as one of derision: "I have become a laughingstock to my friend" (12:4) and dismantles both Eliphaz's claim that only the wicked are punished, and Bildad's thesis that the wicked do not escape suffering, showing that in reality things are not like that: "Robbers live untroubled in their tents, And those who provoke God are secure" (12:6). Job emphasizes the empirical truth of this observation: "My eye has seen all this; My ear has heard and understood it." (13:1) As a result, their assertions, contradicted by reality, are unforgivable errors: "But you invent lies, all of you are quacks." (13:4) The dialogue ignites, the relationship ignites, there is a danger of no longer understanding and hearing each other!

Job is lucid, a statement unsupported by reality is a blatant falsehood, harshly accused by God as well. So, pay attention: "He will surely reprove you . . . . ." (13:10) Even if an error is made for the noble endeavor of projecting God in a good light, it is still an error, and God, who is just, will not tolerate it. This view is proven to be true in the last part of the Book of Job: "After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am incensed at you and your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did my servant Job'" (42:7)

Job is approaching the end of his discussion with Bildad and, driven by justice, takes *his flesh in his teeth* (13:14), puts *his life in his hands* and prepares himself to judge with God (13:20-14:22). He pleads his innocence while charging that he is being treated unduly because his life is so obviously fragile as "a driven leaf" and as a "dried-up straw." (13:25) Somewhere in between arguments, Job laments that, though innocent, he is still the weak object of constant suffering and trouble: "Why do you hide Your face, and treat me like an enemy? Will you harass a driven leaf, Will You pursue a dreid-up straw, That you decree for me bitter things

and make me answer for the iniquities of my youth, That you put my feet in the stocks . . . ?" (13:24-27) Job vaguely senses an answer he does not fully pencil in, a clarification he does not yet glimpse. The explanation for the existence of suffering in the life of the righteous is transcendent and ineffable.

## 4. The second dialogue with Eliphaz

This time Eliphaz's rhetoric is not centered on the reasons for suffering, but rather on Job's ambition to prove his innocence and the quarrel with the Judge, which the Temanite translates as lack of piety and fear of God (15:4). However, this unacceptable lack is itself a sin: "Your sinfulness dictates your speech" (15:5). Eliphaz reiterates the argument with the stained angelic world (4:18; 15:15) which seems to be treated with indifference by Job. "The heavens are not guiltless in His sight", Job, and you, a vessel of clay, a frivolous and entropic being, as man is, do you continue to uphold your righteousness? (see 15:25-16). And he returns saying that the suffering man "raised his arms against God" (15:25); finding no other explanation.

After all this, Job remains steadfast in the statements made in the ring of arguments: "For no injustice on my part and for the purity of my prayer!" (16:17). Job stops the battle of words and resumes his prayers (17:17:3-16): "Come now, stand surety for me!" (17:3)

## 5. The second dialogue with Bildad

The Shuahite (Bildad from Shuah), hastened to intervene, asks Job to appeal to reason and weigh words. He feels treated with disrespect: "Why are we thought as brutes, regarded by you as stupid?" (18:3) and reiterates the idea that suffering is the implacable destiny of the wicked (18:6-21), and Job, subsequently, he ought not to act without the use of his mind (18:2) and, at the very least, to recognize his fallen moral state.

Instead, Job feels taken from above in God's net, "Though you are overbearing towards me" (19:5) and does not admit the veracity of the speeches of his friends. He notes the ineffectiveness of the relationship

with his friends and expresses his hope for the appearance of a Redeemer: "But I know that my Vindicator lives;" (19:25) and, at the same time, the hope of a post mortem existence and final justification: "This, after my skin will have been peeled off. But I would behold God while still in my flesh, I myself, not another, would behold Him; Would see with my own eyes: My heart pines within me." (19:26-27)

*6. The second dialogue with Zophar*
The Naamathite (Zophar of Naamah) continues with his own theodicy emphasizing the limited joy of the wicked. Zophar's picture of the world and history pivots around the idea that "The joy of the wicked has been brief" (20:5). This is the theological perspective on the history of Zophar. Be it so, that "the lot God has ordained for him" (20:29) be so implacable and universally applied?

Job objects. He again appeals to the facts. Look at the wicked: "Why do the wicked live on, prosper and grow wealthy? Their children are with them always, and they see their children's children. Their homes are secure, without fear; They do not feel the rod of God. . .They let infants run loose like sheep, and their children skip about." (21:7-11) Even though they had expelled God explicitly, "They say to God, 'Leave us alone, We do not want to learn Your ways; . . . What will we gain by praying to Him?'" (21:14,15) Then, Job refers to the collective memory that rhetorically manages the information that: "For the evil man is spared on the day of calamity, On the day when wrath is led forth." (21:30) In other words, the collective mind has preserved the information of sparing the wicked in the day of calamity. It can also be said, therefore, that "The joy of the wicked has been brief, The happiness of the impious, fleeting?" (20:5) Therefore, the Naamithite's argument fails because of the flimsy foundation of his argument.

Job does not credit Zophar's thesis. God causes some to die materially satisfied, "The marrow of his bones is juicy" (21:24), and others to die "embittered." (21:25) What should the rationale behind this eternal

and unaltered divine resolution be? The mystery gets bigger and the pain deeper.

### 7. The third dialogue with Eliphaz

The Tenamite, Eliphaz, brings in his third intervention the heavy arsenal. Labels and high-tonnage accusations are finally being dumped on poor Job. The list of moral errors is long and heavy: malice (22:5), dispossession (22:6), lack of compassion and flagrant negligence (22:7), influence peddling (22:8), cruelty (22:9), heretical theology with incredible deviations regarding the knowledge of God, conceived as being tributary to the limit: "You say, 'What can God know? . . . the clouds screen Him so He cannot see As He moves about the circuit of heaven.'" (22:13-14) All this includes Job in the ranking of those outside the law and moral conventions of his time: "Have you observed the immemorial path that evil men have trodden . . . ?" (22:15)

Does Eliphaz advance hypotheses or does he bring facts to the dialogue classroom? It seems not. It is certain that these stigmas constitute the prerogative of a rhetoric that ends with the call to spiritual conversion: "Be close to Him and wholehearted; good things will come to you thereby" and "If you regard treasure as dirt, Ophir - gold as stones of the wadi and Shaddai be your treasure and precious silver for you. . . ." (22:21, 24-25)

The sobs of the tormented Job are muffled by the acute suffering (23:2). However, and not even now, Job does not give up on the endorsement of his innocence and fiercely seeks to judge himself with God. But where is he? In all cardinal directions, sunrise, sunset, midnight, noon, God is imperceptible and hidden (23:7-8). The empirical discovery of God is an impossible mission. Or, it is so clear, Job does not make friends with God because, simply, he was never a stranger to him: "I have followed in His tracks, Kept His way without swerving, I have not deviated from what His lips commanded; I have treasured His words more than my daily bread." (23:11,12) Instead, the fear of the Lord is the deep vibration of his soul (23:15).

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

Maybe, if God himself did justice every time and on time, things would be better, people would know what to fear about: "Why are times of judgment not reserved by Shaddai?" (24:1) But because the divine sanction does not manifest itself on time, we have people who move borders, thieves, robbers, evil profiteers, ignoble criminals, adulterers and extortionists (24:3-4, 9-23). All these multiply their deeds Job affirms, "Yet God does not regard as a reproach." (24:12) Job is indignant and demands contrary evidence, otherwise his thesis stands: "Surely no one can confute me, Or prove that I am wrong." (24:25) Eliphaz deepens into silence.

*8. The third dialogue with Bildad*
Bildad the Shuahite returns to the blemished character of man starting from the point that even the moon and the stars are not without flaws and shortcomings before the eyes of God, how, therefore, could any man display absolute candor and original innocence (see 25:6)?

Job reacts to Bildad's inconsolable words, accuses them as such, and energetically notes the creature's trembling before the God who makes the impossible possible and the incredible a reality: "He it is who stretched out Zaphon over chaos, who suspended earth over emptiness," (26 :7-8) while retaining its transcendence without negotiation (26:9). The reader can deduce the explanations why the man with such convictions keeps his heart pure and keeps his mind far from evil.

Job is not convinced by the arguments of his companions and continues to affirm his innocence: "I persist in my righteousness and will not yield; I shall be free of reproach as long as I live." (27:6) In these dialogues, so far, Newsom notes, "Job destroys the genteel closure of the wisdom dialogue. Job does indeed pass violence through language and language through violence."[12] As for the divine justice and the condemnation of the wicked, Job is convinced that the man who commits the crime is doomed, only in the end, to destruction: "evil man's portion from God . . . ." (2:13)

---

12  Newsom, *The Book of Job,* 168.

Job asserts God's omniscience and boundless power to ultimately justify that fear induced by divine attributes is the beginning of wisdom, and "Fear of the Lord is wisdom; To shun evil is understanding." (28:28) Thus, knowledge of God is the foundation of morality in Job's thinking.

The three companions no longer continue the discussion in contradiction with Job. It would have been, in the third round, Zophar's turn, but it's too much for him, and he withdraws. Perhaps Job's uncompromising intransigence causes Zophar to give up arguing with his fellow sufferer.

For Job, however, it is not enough even after the nostalgic commemoration of the good times when he lived in the midst of the family, as in the center of public attention, admired by the young and respected by the old (29:2-8), feared by the administrative and political elite in that area, close to the needs of the poor and the orphan (29:9-12), always ready to do justice to the wronged, after noticing his own naive perspective on life (29:18), Job laments the state he has reached (30: 1), morbid and despised by the most repulsive of his fellows (30:1-13), he laments God's decision to bring him to the lowest of conditions,  although his care not to sin was always awake and lively: "I have covenanted with my eyes Not to gaze on a maiden." (31:1)

Why does God allow evil to good people? "Calamity is surely for the iniquitous; Misfortune, for the worker of mischief" (31:3) states rhetorically and ironically, even the man of suffering. Did not God know his ways? (31:4) Job knows his good deeds and claims justice: "may God weigh me . . . ." (31:6-40). The three companions no longer answer him, the round of debate ends with a Job prepared for justice. Respectful to gray-haired people, and attentive, a young man, who had attended the rounds of the debate, intervenes now, bringing with fierceness, but sapience, an unexpectedly penetrating theological light.

### 9. The intervention of Elihu of Buz

He is reacting to Job's fixation on pleading not guilty before God (32:2). Elihu also vehemently objects to Job's companions for the obstinacy with which they condemned him, without bringing sufficiently solid coun-

ter-arguments in response to the justified fixation, to a certain extent, of their friend in the valley of suffering (32:3). The young man had respected the seniority of the three by refraining from intervening until now, but now he considers it the time to express his thoughts (32:4). Elihu showcases that Job's three companions had failed to convince the latter: "I saw that none of you could argue with Job." (32:12). Only after notifying them of their defeat in the debate does Elihu address Job, and he does so without reserve and to the point, not beating about the bush and putting his finger in the wound.

The criticism of the Buzan (Elihu from Buz) targets Job's repetitive plea regarding his guilt (33:9-10) and sanctions his accusation against God whom he believes is committing an injustice: "But He find reason to oppose me, Considers me His enemy." (33:10) Elihu points out that God does not seek reason to hate man, because, here the facts speak, it is known that He does not punish man according to the gravity of his multiple and malignant transgressions, or in proportion to the severity of his wrongdoings. That if he did it, the man would no longer live, and he does not do it because he takes pity on the guilty one. This is how the person in question, honestly and openly, has the opportunity to admit without hiding: "I have sinned . . . But I was not paid back for it." (33:27) If God takes pity on the guilty and does not punish him according to merit, how can Job say that God hates him? There must be another lever in the spring of divine judgment to explain His decision!

Job, for his part, maintains his plea "I am right, God has deprived me of justice." (34:5) Job feels ignored in the midst of the suffering from which he feeds his grudge and his weeping every day (34:7).

Elihu, in response to the implications of Job's arguments, emphasizes with conviction: "For God surely does not act wickedly, Shaddai does not pervert justice." (34:12) Can someone with a limited mind criticize a limitless mind? God is the boundless thought; He is the source of all that exists. If He were to withdraw, all would succumb to nothingness, "All flesh would at once expire, And mankind return to dust" (34:15), He opposes kings and identifies their iniquity (34:18); men are the work of

His hands and He disposes of their lives (34:20). God knows everything without having to make long observations (34:23). He gives peace, and He withdraws from the immanent so that no one can fully know him (34:29). Elihu's plea has the following charge: "Job does not speak with knowledge; His words lack understanding." (34:35)

Elihu's second objection focuses on Job's despair. In this case, his thesis is that innocence, walking in righteousness, is no longer useful today: "What have I gained from not sinning?" (35:3)

Elihu's answer hits the nail on the head, namely that sinful conduct does not embarrass God; it does not change his character, nor does not affect him morally but, instead, it has an effect on his fellow men: "Your wickedness affects men like yourself; Your righteousness, mortals." (35:8) In other words, living in innocence has implicit utility because moral uprightness leads to morality. Well, it's one thing to live in a country with people subject to rules, and it's another to live your life in one without laws and principles. In the former, there is order, in the latter, there is chaos. So, morality has social value, that's why doing good is important, and doing evil is harmful. Elihu enshrines the value of righteousness and underlines the importance of waiting until the end for God's intervention. There is, in Elihu's conception, an optimal calendar, unknown to us, of divine intervention. But the fact that God does not intervene with sanctions does not mean that God does not justly punish lawlessness: "He rescues the lowly from their affliction and opens their understanding through distress." (35:15) The fact that God does not intervene by saving the righteous does not mean that he never will: "He draws you away from the brink of distress To a broad place where there is no constraint; Your table is laid out with rich food." (36:16)

But Elihu's eloquent answer to Job's charge of unrighteousness is in verse 22 and 23. Since "God is great in his power" and incomprehensible in his thought, how can a limited mind judge the innermost reaches of the infinite mind? It's absurd. Only if God were Job's equal could he be judged and charged for the errors of thought peculiar to limited creatures. But that is not the case. God is in another ontological and epistemolog-

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

ical category, man will never be able to understand him, therefore it is a regrettable error to accuse God of something, an unforgivable error: "See, God is beyond reach in His power; Who governs like Him? Who ever reproached Him for His conduct? Who ever said; 'You have done wrong?'" (36:22-23) Now, this very fact, this very error is debunked by Elihu. Job, in asserting that God does not do him justice, and considering that justice is on his side, errs in treating God as a human whose thinking he can scrutinize and whose intellectual faculties he can comprehend, when, in fact, God does not correspond to it. God is part of another epistemological chart and another ontological catalogue. He is immeasurably great: "See, God is greater than we can know." (36:26) God is in the ontological and epistemological position where he knows and can do everything, while man is in the position where he knows only partially. This necessary conclusion does not authorize man to criticize God for allowing suffering! In Elihu's conception, Job mistakes when he pretends to stand in judgment with God and laments the divine decision that turns him into an innocent recipient of tragedy and pain. In the introduction to the book entitled "Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas" Yafee is quoted as emphasizing Maimonides' and Aquinas' different perspective on Job thus: "Maimonides understands the story to be a parable about an imaginary figure who is perfectly blameless, if somewhat unwise. Thomas, on the other hand, understands it to be the description of a historical person who is perfectly wise, if somewhat sinful."[13] Craig Bartholomew finds Job protesting vehemently and incessantly. He refers to Alvin Plantinga for whom Job's problem can be understood as either lamentation for not understanding why God allows suffering in the innocent person's life, or anger that God allows cruel and unrelenting suffering.[14]

---

13  Matthew Levering, Piotr Roszak, Jorgen Vijgen, eds., *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 11, note: 33.

14  Craig Bartholomew, *When You Want to Yell at God: The Book of Job* (WA, Bellingham: Lexham Press, Electronic Edition, 2014), 29-30.

In support of the thesis of God's superiority, Elihu brings to the fore cosmological evidence from the domain of creation. God is the author of some physical processes and phenomena that man has not even managed to copy: the circuit of water in nature (36:27, 37:6), the electromagnetic phenomenon of lightning (36:29), the existence of light (36:30), the temporal sequence of lightning and thunder (37:3,4), the arbitrary function of electrostatically charged clouds (37:13), the suspension of clouds (37:16), atmospheric heating (37:17), the orbital motion of the planets, and the constants of the cosmos (37:18). Therefore, God is not Job's equal.

## 10. Dramatic divine communication

Just as Elihu was speaking to Job about clouds, lightning and thunder, a wild storm arose. And from the middle of the storm God speaks to him. He employs subtle irony and rhetorical questioning (38:3,4). God evokes some of his creative deeds that he brings as evidence at the trial to highlight the fact that he is superior to poor Job and that his thinking transcends his understanding: the creation of the earth and the galaxy (38:4), the setting of the earth on nothing (38:6), the creation of the earth's atmosphere (38:9), the creation of days, the making of light (38:12-14, 18-19), the waters (38:16), entropy and death (38:17), natural phenomena (38:22-30), the formation of constellations (38:31-33), the creation of universal physical laws (38:33), information and energy (38:36-37), the construction of biological organisms with all their psycho-morpho-physiological processes (39:1-30; 40:15-41:34).

## 11. Job's final answer

Elihu's objections and the doubling of them by God's speech in the midst of the storm convinced the mortal Job of his limitations and of the fact that he had erred in not considering that God does not enter into the catalogue of finite beings: "I know that you can do everything, That nothing you propose is impossible for You." (42:2) Job finally admits that God is superior to him in terms of understanding things and that he committed the error of trying to include the non-finite in his finite judgments:

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

"Indeed, I spoke without understanding Of things beyond me, which I did not know." (42:3b) Both the dialogue with Elihu of Buz, and the one with God, led Job to have a high view of God's power and knowledge and, in effect, to adopt the position of resignation and modesty. The thesis of Job's innocence remains unsettled, but the conclusion of God's absolute superiority occupies the central place in the perimeter of the debates of the book of Job. Job is righteous, but suffering may come into his life for reasons that, to the unfathomable and perfect mind of God, are fully justified. The Job at the end of the narrative is a metamorphosed Job.

The reader has the opportunity of a relatively complete picture. He has access from the beginning of the narrative to the idea of God, even though Job, even now, after the completion of the labour of his suffering, does not have the whole picture of the puzzle.

Job finally understands that he analyzed something for which he had no analysis criteria. God cannot be judged for the suffering allowed, because in order to be able to judge him, Job should have been at least his equal, while he admits that he is not: "I spoke without understanding of things beyond me, which I did not know." (42:3b) Now, this is the idea of the theodicy of the book of Job, God is neither unjust nor without knowledge of the cause of suffering; on the contrary, He is both aware of the cause of suffering and good in His decisions and actions. Man cannot judge the resolution of His actions through the lens of his limited faculties of knowledge.

The feeling that Job experiences is that of self-loathing, and, consequently, he concedes to retract what he asserted in his plea and repents: "I recant and relent." (42:6) Job does not receive divine justification for the suffering inflicted. His rationale remains an unknown, but he may instead correctly infer that God, who is perfect in power and knowledge, has both perfect justifications for the suffering administered and beneficial goals or rewards in proportion for the man who faithfully and justly manages his affliction. In essence, there is a great difference between created man and the divine Creator; limited man does not know the reason for suffering, like so many other things, but God knows it fully, as, more-

over, he knows all things fully. However, this very difference imposes on limited man the quality of refraining from the action of criticizing and accusing God for the decisions taken. Even though Job knows neither the justifications nor the ultimate purpose of his suffering or its planned and beneficial results, they exist and he now fully accepts them.

## III. Classical and modern interpretive positions

*1. Hermeneutics of polyphonic horizons of interpretation in A. Newsom, Carl G. Jung and H. Kushner*

In recent years, the Book of Job has been received through the filter of the meaning it has for the reader's generation and socio-cultural and existential context. For example, Carol A. Newsom proposes to approach the Book of Job through a "Bakhtian and polyphonic reading" with the aim of "reading Job as a book of our own age."[15] However, Newsom wants to emphasize that this approach avoids giving the book a single interpretive direction, in the sense that it "does not flow in only one direction, however" and, at the same time, is careful not to allow itself to be captured by a "mere relativism."[16] Instead, this approach follows polyphonic dialogism, in the idea that it proposes a hermeneutic approach according to which:

> one engages in the discipline of seeing how one's position appears from the perspective of another, listening to the objections that one must answer, seeing what one's own position hides from itself, and being open to the possibility of modification in light of dialogical engagement.[17]

Under this aspect, Newsom emphasizes the existence in the dynamics of dialogues of "the variety of forms of moral imagination,"[18] these

15   Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job, A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 261.

16   Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 262.

17   Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 262.

18   Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 262.

constituting "the fundamental aesthetic and cognitive means by which persons and cultures construct meaning, value, and significance."[19] Newsom believes that this writing leaves open the possibility of any moral perspectives and personal goals or doctrinal loyalties in the open dialogue on the problem of the suffering of the unrighteous, for which it advances a significant series of essential questions vis-à-vis the quality of human existence.[20]

Assuming a psycho-analytical hermeneutic horizon, Carl Gustav Jung conceives God as a "divine darkness."[21] God is represented in terms of a psyche that engages the self and the ego in a self-reflexive synergistic coupling,[22] according to which the ego reflects on an "unconscious"[23] self-tributary to limitations and inherent errors. The image of God, in Jung's vision, as it emerges from his commentary on the Book of Job, is that "of a God who knew no moderation in his emotions and suffered precisely from this lack of moderation . . . . Insight existed along with obtuseness, loving-kindness along with cruelty, creative power along with destructiveness."[24] Job, therefore, "clearly sees that God is at odds with himself [. . .] As certain as he is of the evil in Yahweh, he is equally certain of the good."[25] Later, Jung remarks the following: "Yahweh is not split but is an antinomy - a totality of inner opposites - and this is the indispen-

---

19  Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 262.

20  Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 263-264.

21   Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, William McGuire, eds., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volumes 1-9, Translated by Gerhard Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Second Edition (USA: Princeton University Press; England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), Complete Digital Edition, 14254/Vol. 11, [561].

22  Read at al., *The Collected*, 14342/[640].

23  Read at al., *The Collected*, 14368/[659]; see [758].

24  Read et al., *The Collected*, 14253/[560].

25  Read et al., *The Collected*, 14260/[567].

sable condition of his tremendous dynamism, his omniscience and om-
nipotence."[26] From this angle of reading, suffering is a failure of divinity.

To the question "why bad things happen to good people." Harold S.
Kushner believes that Job is the recipient of an "enigmatic answer."[27] He
breaks down the contents of twenty-five chapters of the book into three
statements, among which he notes with dismay a real antagonism: God
is all-powerful, God is completely good, and Evil exists in the life of the
good Job. Therefore, Kushner points out, "Since it is logically impossible
for a completely good God to let an innocent man like Job suffer if He
could prevent it, one of those three statements must be false."[28] Therefore,
Kushner continues, "To be told that he is sinless and is suffering for no
reason would shake his faith in God's rule over the world."[29] Kushner's
hermeneutics betrays a subjective horizon of interpretation, that is, every-
one understands suffering through the prism of the abrasive experiences
of their own lives. This hermeneutic has the following formulation: "God
is like a mirror. The mirror never changes, but everyone who looks at it
sees a different face». Some people read the book of Job and find that it
confirms what they already want to believe [. . . ] In the end, every one
of us reads his own book of Job, colored by our own faith and person-
al history."[30] This is the case of "equivocal preaching" - of Maimonides,
according to which "God is just, but not in the same way that earthly
beings are just"[31]; of Spinoza who did not see in the book of Job a Jewish
perspective of the problem of suffering; of Isaac Luria according to which
"suffering is part of the messiness of an unredeemed world, a world too
fragile to contain God's pure holiness"[32] a world from which God with-

---

26  Read et al., *The Collected*, 14261/[567].

27  Harold S. Kushner, *The Book of Job, When Bad Things Happened to Good
    Person* (USA: Schocken Books, 2012) Electronic Edition, 11.

28  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 76.

29  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 78.

30  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 243-244.

31  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 254.

32  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 263.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

draws to make room for things other than God,[33] things like pain, suffering and the tragic; of Martin Buber, who considered suffering as an effect of God's hiddenness through which human sinfulness is signaled; of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who denies God's absolute omnipotence, but affirms divine mercy and compassion.[34] Kushner rather represents Luria's thesis, in which God's self-absence takes place ("tzimtzum, God's contraction or withdrawal"[35]) of our humanity with all that is most characteristic among them of its suffering and of nature with its fierceness. God is animated by goodness, but nature, blind and insensitive to our feelings, is devoid of morality and good intentions: "God is moral, Nature is not."[36] In other words, because God makes room for nature, with all its limitations, vices, and strengths, within the perimeter of our existence, by narrowing the scope of His own presence and actions, suffering appears in all its ugliness and sometimes indiscretion. In other words, God is not fully sovereign. Not because it is not absolutely sovereign, but because He chooses to be so in order to allow humanity and nature to fully express themselves. The criticism that can be addressed to Kushner is that he promotes a desperate, sometimes dystopian theodicy, an existentialism deprived of hope. Since God is self-limiting and narrowing His room for maneuver in the horizon of human existence and the world, He consequently allows the existence of evil and suffering, to our despair many times. For example, the Sabeans committed crimes because Job did not have the resources to defend himself, in other words Job was left alone in the ring of aggression and trouble. Here, God no longer rules, but adverse circumstances and the human lack of anticipation and response. However, Kushner points out, although God is not in the midst of the suffering that, only by way of consequence, he has generated, God is in the "miracle of human resilience in the face of the world's imperfections,

---

33  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 260.

34  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 274.

35  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 260.

36  Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 294.

even the world's cruelty."[37] God is not absent when He withdraws, leaving the void created by His absence to be occupied by evil and suffering, but is present in the fibers of human resilience through which man manages to cope with both. Kushner repents of the initial culpability of God and recognizes that the strength to endure suffering bore the mark of God. He expresses himself as follows: "I repudiate my past accusations, my doubts, even my anger. I have experienced the reality of God. I know that I am not alone, and, vulnerable mortal that I am, I am comforted."[38]

### The multiple justification of suffering in the theology of J. Calvin

Paolo de Petris invokes Calvin's theological judgement, which highlights the following: "the suffering of innocent people had to do with God's hidden justice . . . ."[39] De Petris continues to remark: "Calvin's Sermons on Job could be understood to have a timeless dimension, and would be "a work for all men in all ages" and that suffering is a condition of human existence.[40] Suffering, in Calvin's vision, as De Petris notes, is man's means of thoughtfully adopting humility before the omniscience of God, to whom he is always an open universe, while for him, God remains a hermetic and inaccessible world:

> Against the humanist's optimistic vision of a human nature, capable of knowing truth and achieving knowledge of God independently of God's revelation, Calvin posed the opposing conception of a humanity contaminated by sin and alienated from God.[41]

From the perspective of De Petris, the hermeneutics of J. Moltmann's theology of the cross, suffering is understood and accepted by the fact

---

37   Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 300.

38   Kushner, *The Book of Job*, 302.

39   Paolo de Petris, *Calvin's Theodicy and the Hiddenness of God, Calvin's Sermons of the Book of Job* (Switzerland, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 2.

40   De Petris, *Calvin's*, 44.

41   De Petris, *Calvin's*, 63.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

that God himself assumes it through the incarnation of the Son and His sacrifice[42]. But this is possible only on the basis of two realities: 1. God is tri-personal, which allows God to be both unlimited and suffering; The Father is unlimited while the Son is subject to specifically human limitations, the sufferings and traumas inherent in it, and 2. There is an impressive soteriological justification for His incarnation and death. Thus, just as the suffering of God has a fundamental justification, so the suffering of the innocent must have one, regardless of the fact that it is still hidden and inaccessible to us. From Calvin's perspective, De Petris continues to notice, the purpose of suffering is multiple: suffering is a "punishment and a sanction"[43], "suffering as correction and admonition,"[44] "suffering as a test"[45] and "suffering as medicine."[46] But, however grievous the evil of suffering may press, God has the power to convert evil into good.[47]

The merit of Calvin's exegesis is to outline high goals and rational justifications for human suffering, and this is all the more valuable today, as we know that the recent secularist horizon of interpretation of suffering deprives man of any meaning. As De Petris states, "Calvin's Theodicy turns out to be of great topicality, since one of the most difficult threats confronting the modern secularized world is not the existence of suffering, but its apparent purposelessness."[48]

Thomas Aquinas also draws on the rhetoric of suffering from the book of Job in his work entitled *The Literal Exposition of Job*. Serge Thomas Bonino[49] indicates that Aquinas "signals the first structural limit that

---

42  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 24.

43  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 248.

44  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 257.

45  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 263.

46  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 265.

47  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 267.

48  De Petris, *Calvin's*, 281.

49  Serge-Thomas Bonino, *The Incomprehensible Wisdom of God in the "Expositio super Job"*, translated by David L. Augustine, in Piotr Roszak, & Vijgen, Jorgen, eds., *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.:

affects our knowledge of God: the imperfection of our knowledge of creatures, which constitutes our point of departure."[50] Aquinas outlines the limits of human knowledge regarding the world of creatures which, based on the contrast between creatures and the Creator, explains the obvious inadequacy of human knowledge to the knowledge of God as follows: "But since the human mind cannot totally and perfectly understand creatures in themselves, much less can it have perfect knowledge about the Creator himself."[51] As Bonino observes, "The structural incomprehensibility of God to the intelligence of spiritual creatures . . . is a matter of an incomprehensibility by way of excess that results from the transcendence of God compared to all of His work."[52] Therefore, God's justice in the context of Job's suffering, although it cannot be grasped by human thought, certainly has an explanatory foundation. The sufferer, therefore, has no reason to consider himself either God's equal or superior to Him, in his attempt to analyze the quality of divine judgment regarding suffering. However, this conclusion is drawn deductively from the premises that invoke God's perfection: "The perfection of his power and the perfection of his wisdom guarantee the perfection of God's justice."[53] Therefore, concludes Bonino, "God's incomprehensibility forbids every presumptuous challenge of the divine government, every perverse desire to place ourselves above God as a judge."[54]

## Conclusion:

*The book of Job shows that the meaning of suffering is reserved for the transcendental. From the first group of dialogues, one can remark that the*

---

The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 106.

50   Bonino, *The Incomprehensible,* 107.

51   Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Job, Latin-English Opera Omnia,* translated by Brian Mullady (Emmaus Academic, 2016), Chapter Eleven, paragraph 5.

52   Bonino, *The Incomprehensible,* 110.

53   Bonino, *The Incomprehensible,* 124.

54   Bonino, *The Incomprehensible,* 124.

CĂLIN-IOAN TALOŞ

*suffering would have hamartiological justifications. Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar invoke sin as the cause of suffering, while Job argues the opposite of this thesis.*

In the book of Job, suffering does not justify blaming God for the tragedy that He allows. Since God cannot be comprehended, He cannot be accused. Another fact emerges from Job's dialogue with Elihu of Buz, that of the transcendent divine mind and thought. According to this fact God's decision transcends the human mind, the divine cannot be encompassed by the human, and therefore God cannot be blamed by man for the suffering he allows in the life of the one without malice. On the other hand, if the righteous man suffers now, it does not mean that God will allow suffering to persist in his life forever. Likewise, if the wicked man has not tasted the bitterness of suffering, it does not mean that he will not be punished for his wrongdoings.

As can be seen from the four rounds of dialogues of the book of Job, the perspective on the meaning of suffering is polyphonic. The three companions agree on the thesis that suffering is inflicted by God on the wicked man, therefore the sufferer has shown ethical and spiritual alienation from God. Elihu of Buz distinguishes himself by arguing in favor of the thesis that God's mind surpasses human thought in all aspects, therefore, mortal man cannot accuse what he cannot understand! Job resorts to this thesis towards the end of the dramatic narrative of the book. Interpretive polyphony in the modern period is equally evident. Newsom advances the thesis of a comparative polyphony of interpretations so that some of them can be corrected through dialogue with others, and he does so without defending the thesis of a single exegetical conclusion. Jung, for his part, conceives the divine mind as a human psyche, which distances him from the thesis of the transcendent thought of God as it was enshrined by Elihu of Buz and, finally, from the words of God that were heard in the storm. Jung's perspective would not logically allow Job's repentance at the end of the dialogue rounds. A man who treats God as a mentally unstable man has no reason to repent. On the other hand, H. Kushner chooses to identify with one of the directions of Jewish in-

162

terpretation according to which suffering is the result of restricting the presence and limiting the power of God from the space of our reality to free nature and man with all their unique and often regrettable particularities. But, according to this view, even if God is neither at the origin of suffering nor in its tragic fire, He is present in the heroic resilience of man that He actualizes.

For the classical commentators on the book of Job, in this case Aquinas and Calvin, suffering has meaning, even if it remains the great unknown in the equation of the life of the sufferer. Suffering inscribes God in a special ontological category. Only He knows the full duration and purpose of suffering. Man, through his lack of intellectual understanding of its particular meaning, always remains inferior to the Creator who created the physical world and its current phenomena. For both classical theologians, suffering creates the circumstance to adopt the attitude of humility before God and resignation before His plans. Lawrence Boadt signals this clearly: "no one relates to God on a basis of justice or equal rights."[55] And John Gray underlines: "Humanity . . . is not the measure of God's universe."[56] Instead, God remains the measure of all things, including the measure and purpose of suffering. He has the prerogative of knowledge and power, and we are left with the privilege of admiration and humility.

The last dialogues of the book, as well as the classical interpretations (Calvin and Aquinas) of the Book of Job, project a high view of God's power and knowledge, while the modern interpretations, a low view of God's power and knowledge, the former invite to belief, resignation and modesty, whereas the latter tend to induce aversion to the divine decision and rebellion against His will.

---

55   Boadt, *The Book of Job*, 15.

56   John Gray, *The Book of Job*, 115.

**Bibliography:**

Aquinas (St.), Thomas. *Commentary on the Book of Job* (Latin-English Opera Omnia). Translated by Brian Mullady. Emmaus Academic, 2016.

Bartholomew, Craig. *When You Want to Yell at God: The Book of Job.* WA. Bellingham: Lexham Press. Electronic Edition, 2014.

Boadt, Lawrence, ed.. *The Book of Job, Why Do the Innocent Suffer?* New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997.

Gray, John. *The Book of Job.* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.

The Jewish Bible, *Tanakh, a New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Texts.* Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985.

Kushner, Harold S. *The Book of Job, When Bad Things Happened to Good Person.* USA, Schocken Books, Electronic Edition, 2012.

Newsom, Carol. A. *The Book of Job, A Contest of Moral Imaginations.* Oxford University Press, 2003.

Levering, Matthew, Piotr Roszak & Jorgen Vijgen, eds.. *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas.* Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020.

Petris, De Paolo. *Calvin's Theodicy and the Hiddenness of God, Calvin's Sermons of the Book of Job.* Switzerland, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.

# THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM.
# A RABBINIC MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION OF THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

## AURELIAN BOTICA[1]

*Emanuel University of Oradea*

ABSTRACT: In the following article we will analyze the episode of the call of Abraham as it was imagined by the authors of the Genesis Rabbah 39. We will deal with the various aspects of literary devices and structure, and then we will look at the theological worldview that emerges out of Genesis Rabbah. The literary genre of Midrashic Literature employs a number of devices which set this type of literature apart from the others. The formula *lech lecha* (go yourself) functions as the key expression in Genesis Rabbah 39. We will also ask questions about the historical and social background that may have influenced the rabbis in their exposition of the life of Abraham. We will notice that the world in which Abraham lived resembled a palace that was set on fire, an allusion to the world that God created and that, apparently, seems at the mercy of wickedness and evil. It was this context in which God called Abraham, a righteous man whom God spoke to, and used more than any other people of his generations.

KEY WORDS: Abraham, Genesis, Midrash, Rabbinic Literature

## Introduction[2]

Midrashic Literature is a genre of biblical interpretation typical to the wider Rabbinic effort to interpret the Scriptures; first in the Second Temple

---

1   Dr. Aurelian Botica, Professor of ancient Hebrew at the Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania. PhD. Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati, Ohio).

2   The following paper is based on the project *Genesis Rabba: chapter 39:1-6*, that fulfilled the requirements for the Midrash I class, Dr. Richard Sarason

Period and after the destruction of the Second Temple. In its noun form, vrdm appears in the Old Testament with the sense of "story" or "writing" ("written in the story of the Book of the Kings", 2 Chr 24:7).[3] The word derives from the verb דָּרַשׁ "to seek" , "to ask" or "to study" the word of the Lord.[4] The best example for the meaning of the word comes from Ezra 7:10, where Ezra "set his heart to study the Law of the Lord." The prophet Isaiah, too, spoke about the imperative of "seeking" (דִּרְשׁוּ) and then "reading" in the Book of the Lord (Isaiah 34:16). In ancient Israel, the act of "seeking" the Lord could also take the form of "inquiring" from a prophet about the will of God in a certain matter. Thus the king Jehoshaphat asked king Ahab if there were any other prophets "whom we may inquire" (נִדְרְשָׁה) on the problem of going or not going to war. The act of "inquiring" or "seeking" an answer meant that the prophet would consult with the Lord and then convey the will of the Lord to the king.[5]

The word מִדְרָשׁ became a consecrated term in later Rabbinic Literature, where it often appeared with the sense of "studying" the Bible, in general, and "interpreting" the meaning of individual passages, in particular.[6] One

(Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1999).

3    Thus the NIV translation reads "annotation," the RSV, "commentary," the ESV and the TNK, "story", and the NAB, "midrash."

4     Hermann L. Strack, Gunther Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 234, and Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, "דָּרַשׁ" *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks 10, 2015).

5     Thus S. Wagner, "דרשׁ," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 3:293-307. Wagner conjectures that the prophet would have used the proper cultic means in order to find out the will of the Lord in that particular matter. Note, however, 2 Chr 25:15, where king Amaziah was chastised by a prophet for "seeking" the gods of the people, not the God of Israel.

6    Myron B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim," *The Literature of the Sages*, Second Part, Safrai, Shmuel ed. (Amsterdam: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006), 110, argues that by "the second century BCE investigation of Scripture had achieved pride of place in at least some of the varieties of Second Temple Judaism."

must not, however, confuse Midrashic exegesis with the verse-by-verse analysis of the text that is typical to modern exegesis. "Midrash is not 'objective' professional exegesis – even if at times it acquires such methods."[7] As Geza Vermes noted, the Rabbis distinguished between "pure exegesis" – an approach that focused on given linguistic problems of the Hebrew text – and "applied exegesis," which was "not primarily concerned with the immediate meaning of the text but with the discovery of principles providing a non-scriptural problem with a scriptural solution."[8]

In the following pages we will analyze Genesis Rabba 39, with an emphasis on paragraphs 1 through 6. We will translate and then analyse the text asking questions regarding the literary structure, etymological analysis, and biblical exegesis of the midrashists. Special emphasis will be given to the theological views of the authors as well. We will also attempt to understand the extent to which the rabbis read their own social and religious experience into the Genesis text. Finally, we will ask whether their theological assumptions can inform or confront our own and why.

## Translation and commentary
*Midrash Rabbah 39:1*
"Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Go yourself from your land,' etc." (Gen.12:1).

> R. Isaac opened [his exposition with]: "Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your people and the house of your father" (Ps.45:11)."
> R. Isaac said: "[An illustration about] a man who was traversing from place to place, when he saw one building burning. He said, 'Am I to believe that this building is without a supervisor?' The owner of the building looked out and said to him, 'I am the owner of the building.' Thus, because Abraham our father was saying, 'Am I to believe that this world is without a supervisor?', the Holy One Blessed be He looked out and said to him, 'I am the owner of the world.' "Then the king shall desire your beauty" (Ps. 45:12), [that is], to make you beautiful in

---

7    Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash,* 237.

8    *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 62.

the world. [Also], "For he is your Lord, so you worship him." [Thus,] "Then the Lord said to Abram," etc.

 Rabbi Isaac "opened" (פתח) the midrash with the quotation of a verse from the Psalms. The opening, or the "petihta", is a literary device by which the commentators interpret the main verse (here, Genesis 12:1) with the help of "a second, remote verse" that shares a phrase with the main verse.[9] To begin with, a "petihta" – or a proem - is a literary device that the rabbis used at the beginning of a larger sermon in order to interpret a verse by "reference to a second remote verse."[10] The term comes from the verb פתח (to open) and the noun פתחא (opening), and is prefacing the "introduction to a lecture."[11] The petihta contains a verse:

> from the Prophets or the Writings, which is usually not obviously related to the subject of the parashah and which stands at the beginning of the petihta. What follows are various interpretations of this distant petihta verse, concluding with some connection made to the parashah verse, cited at the very end. Hermeneutically, the function of the petihta is to make use of the verse from the Prophets or the Writings to shed light on the (usually Torah) parashah verse.[12]

Here the rabbis used Psalm 55:11 in connection with Gen. 12:1 because they both contain an exhortation to leave one's house (בית אביך) and relatives. In Psalm 45, it is a young girl who is exhorted to forget her

---

9    Myron B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim," 117.

10  *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part*, Shmuel Shafrai ed. (Assen, Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006), 2:117, and H.L. Strack, Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minnesota, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 52-53, for *petihah*, which the authors see as "as a complete short sermon itself."

11  Marcus Jastrow, "פֶּתְחָא" *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1991), 1253.

12  Rachel Anisfeld, *Sustain Me With Raisin Cakes.* Pesikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 45-46.

people and her father's house; in Genesis 12:1, it is Abraham. The remaining, unquoted part of Gen. 12:1 shares the phrase "your father's house" with Ps. 45:11. As the girl must leave her people in order to be the king (Ps. 45:12), so does Abraham have to leave his father's house. And as the king of Ps. 45:12 desires the girl's beauty, so does God desire Abraham's devotion in a world that seemed out of control to Abraham.

The image of the building (a castle) that is burning points the reader to the state of Rabbinic Judaism after the Jewish-Roman war of 67-70 AD and the Bar Kochba Revolt of 132-136 AD.[13] The rabbis are trying to make sense of how God calls individuals during a time of spiritual and institutional ruin. What we have here then is the notion of a higher calling. Just as the girl is summoned to pay obeisance to the king, Abraham is called to obey the King of the universe and leave his father's house, even though the world into which one is called resembles a building on fire.[14] The result will be Abraham being made "beautiful" in the world, as he bowed before the King and left his father's house.

*Midrash Rabbah 39:2*

"Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Go...'" etc.

R. Berekiah opened [his exposition with]: "Your oil has a fine fragrance" (Song of Songs 1:3). R. Berkiah said: To what was Abraham compared? To a flask of balsam closely covered with a lid and lying in a corner, so that no fragrance was emanating. As soon as it was moved its fragrance was released. Thus, the Holy One Blessed be He said to Abraham [move yourself from place to place so that your name might be exalted in the world]: "Go yourself" etc.

---

13  For an analysis of the context of Rabbinic Judaism after 135 CE see Aurelian Botica "Pesikta de Rav Kahana and the Concept of the Mourning of God in Rabbinic Literature," in *Semănătorul (The Sower). The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research,* 2.1 (2021): 110-126. We will return to this subject later on in this paper. 126. London: Marston Book Services Limited, Oxfordshire.

14  For the world being destroyed by "the flames of vice and wrongdoing," see *Midrash Rabbah*, H. Freedman, Maurice Simon eds. (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 313.

The second petihta has Rabbi Berekiah compare Abraham to the "beloved" in the Song of Songs 1:3 In particular, Abraham is likened to the perfume kept in bottle, which does not release its fragrance unless the bottle is shaken (טלטל). If Abraham stays with his father's house, his life would be closed with a lid and the "beauty," that is, the fragrance of his witness would not be released into the world. If Abraham obeys God and leaves his father's house, the perfume would be shaken and its fragrance released, that is, his name would be exalted in the world.[15]

*Midrash Rabbah 39:3*

R. Berekiah opened [his exposition with]: "We have a little sister [אחות]" (Song of S. 8:8).

This is Abraham, who united [איחה] the whole world for us. Bar Kapparah [said]: Like one who sews the rent [in the garment]. "Little" - that when he was still young he would heap up commandments and good deeds.

"And she has no breasts" (Ibid.) - that [breasts] did not suckle Abraham; neither in commandments nor in good deeds.

"What shall we do with our sister on the day when one shall speak about her?" (Ibid.) - [that is] the day when Nimrod the wicked ordered to throw him down into the furnace of fire.

"If she be a wall then let us build upon her" (Song 8:9) - that if Abraham puts up words like a wall [against Nimrod], then [God] will build upon him (lit. "her").

"And if she be a door, let us enclose her with boards of cedar" (Ibid.) - that if he is needy in commandments and good deeds.

"let us enclose her with boards of cedar" - and just like this drawing is [made] only for a short time, so I will not preserve him except for a short time. [Abraham] said to him: Master of the Universe "I am a wall" (8:10), putting up words like a wall, "and my breasts are like towers" (Ibid.). My sons are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. "Then I was in his eyes like one who has found peace (Ibid.)" He was brought in [the furnace] in peace and he went out in peace. ["Then the Lord said to Abram: 'go yourself...'"].

---

15  M. Jastrow, "טֶלטֵל" *Dictionary of the Targumim*, 536.

The authors use Song of Songs 8:8-10 in order to build an imaginative narrative where Abraham is again the main character. Rabbi Berechiah derives the verb אחה (to unite) from the noun אחות (sister) in order to make the connection between Abraham and the character from the Song of Songs.[16]

Having established the analogy, the rabbis then shape the narrative around Abraham by using verses 8 through 10 in the Song of Songs. In the worldview of the rabbis Abraham united (איחה) the world for the people because he proclaimed "the unity and oneness" of God.[17] Furthermore, Abraham stored up righteous acts and good deeds as a "little" boy – again, a word-play that the rabbis obtain from the word "little" (Song 8:8). In order to build up the character of Abraham, Rabbi Bar Kappara compares the "little sister" from Song 8:8 ("and she had no breasts"), with Abraham, who had nobody to suckle from in piety or in good deeds, and yet he managed later to unite the world.[18]

Continuing with the verse "what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for" (Song of Songs 8:8), Bar Kappara obtains a word-play from the phrases "in the day...spoken for" (שידבר) and the narrative of king Nimrod ordering Abraham "to be cast" (שנגזר) into the furnace for destroying the idols. The furnace episode was narrated earlier, in *Genesis Rabbah* 38:13, where Terah, Abraham's father, gave Abraham over to the Mesopotamian king Nimrod because Abraham had destroyed Terah's idols.[19] Linking this episode with Song of Songs 8:9 ("if she be a wall" [חומה), the rabbis have Abraham resist Nimrod like a "wall" (חומה) by using his words against Nimrod. Furthermore, they link Song of Song 8:9 ("And if she be a door [דלת] we will enclose her [נצור] with boards of cedar") with Abraham, who, though he may be poor (דל) in "command-

---

16  Jastrow, "אחה," *Dictionary of the Targumim,* 40.

17   *Midrash Rabbah,* 313.

18  Thus *Midrash Rabbah*, 314, in the sense that Abraham had nobody "from whom to draw inspiration," which made his virtuous character even more laudable.

19  *Midrash Rabbah,* 310-311.

ments and good deeds," God will "enclose" him with boards of cedar (ארז לוח) "and protect" him temporarily - like a drawing [צורה] is temporary.[20]

In closing the rabbis appeal to the book of Daniel in order to link the story of the fiery furnace with Abraham's trial at the hands of Nimrod. They also link the Book of Daniel in connection to the text of Song of Songs 8:10; associating the "towers" (מגדלות) – that is, the "breasts of the sister – with Daniel's companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Finally, Abraham enters the furnace in peace ("then I was in his eyes like one who has found peace" - Song 8:10) and comes out in peace.

*Midrash Rabbah 39:4*

> "Wisdom shall empower the wise ten times more than the rulers" (Qohelet 7:19). This is Abraham, [whom wisdom made him stronger] than the ten generations from Noah to Abraham. [God said] "Out of all those I only spoke with you." Thus, "And the Lord spoke to Abram" (Gen. 12:1).

In verse 4 the authors linked Genesis 12 with a different biblical text, namely, Ecclesiastes 7:19 ("wisdom shall empower the wise ten times more than the rulers"). They use the literary device גזרה שוה (identic category) in order to establish the connection between Abraham and the people of the ten generations from Noah until Abraham.[21] The key word that establishes the congruity is the numeral עשׂר (ten) in the phrase "than ten rulers" (מעשׂרה שליטים). Thus, out of all "ten generations from Noah to Abraham," in a certain unique way God spoke only with Abraham. Hence "And the Lord spoke (said) to Abraham" (Gen. 12:1).]

---

20 Thus the word-play between נצור (enclosed) and צור (drawing). See Jastrow, "צור", as "plan, drawing, design," *Dictionary of the Targumim*, 1270, and *Midrash Rabbah,* 314, for the fact that the drawing "is easily rubbed off."

21  Ghezerah Shawah means literally "an identic category" or an "analogy between two laws established on the basis of verbal congruities in the text." Evidently, the rabbinical tradition had to authorize the verbal congruity in order to become accepted. Thus Jastrow, "גְּזֵרה" *Dictionary of Targumim,* Ruth Belof, "Midreshei Halakhah," in *Encyclopedia Judaica,* second edition, Fred Skolnik ed. vol. 14 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 2007),193-204.

*Midrash Rabbah 39:5*

> R. Azariah opened [his exposition with]: "We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed..." (Jer. 51:9).
>
>> "We would have healed Babylon" - in the generation of Enosh.
>>
>> "But she was not healed" - in the generation of the flood.
>>
>> "Forsake her" (Ibid.) - in the generation of the dispersion.
>>
>> "Then let each one go into his and" (Ibid.). [Thus], "Then the Lord said to Abram: 'go yourself...'"

Again, the authors change the petihta and open with a text from Jeremiah 51:9 in order to set up the *Lech Lecha* ("go yourself...", Gen 12: 1) account in a different historical context. The rabbis read large parts of the Genesis narrative into the Jeremiah verse, and vice-versa. In particular, they focus on the phrase ונלך איש לארצו ("and let us go, each man to his land", Jer. 51:9). Since both Jeremiah and Genesis 12 use the verb הלך ("to go"), the rabbis make the connection between Abraham forsaking his land (ארצו) and the generation of the dispersion leaving their land, without the current possibility that the land be healed.

*Genesis Rabbah 39:6*

> Rabbi Azariah opened [his exposition] in the name of R. Aha: "You loved the righteous, but you hated the wicked," etc. (Psalm 45:7).
>
>> [R. Azariah in the name of R. Aha] interpreted the verse [in light of] our father Abraham. [Thus] when our father Abraham stood to seek mercy on behalf of Sodom, what is written there? "Far be it from you to do [such a thing]" (Gen. 18:25). R. Aha said [concerning this]: You have sworn that you will not bring a flood upon the world. Will you really make void your oath? You will not bring a flood of waters, but a flood of fire. If so, then you have not delivered your oath. R. Levi said [concerning this]: "Shall not the One who judges the earth perform justice?" (Ibid.). If you desire the world [as it is] then there is no justice, but if there is justice then the world [may] not remain. But you are holding the cord from both ends, desiring both the world [as it is] and judgment. Thus if you do not release it a little [from its obligations] then the world will not endure.

The Holy One Blessed be He said to Abraham: "You have loved the righteous and hated the wicked. Because of this God, your God, is anointing you with the oil of gladness before your fellows" (Ibid.). From Noah and until yourself there have been ten generations. And out of them all, I only spoke with to you. [Thus]: "And the Lord said to Abram."

The rabbis open verse 6 with a petihta from Psalm 45:7. Although the "you" of Psalm 45 is not readily identified, R. Azariah's appeal to Abraham and the final quotation of the Psalm at the end point toward Abraham. The authors introduce a second verse, this time from Genesis, where Abraham pleads with God not to kill the righteous along with the wicked (Gen. 18:25). Both Ps. 45:7 and Gen. 18:25 contain the words [רשׁ and צדיק (the "evil" and the "righteous"). The connection allows the authors to build up the problem that will need a resolution. The rabbis also allude to the "flood" incident where God vowed not to destroy the world again. In contrast, R. Levi introduces another scriptural position which recalls not the covenant, but God's attribute of justice. All this material lays the background for a possible conflict between God's desire to punish the wicked and his wish to maintain the world as it is (i.e., without punishment). The apparent tension is solved by identifying Abraham with the character of Psalm 55, who is anointed with the oil of gladness *above his fellows*. The rabbis qualify this: out of all the people, God *spoke* only with Abraham. Hence, "...the Lord *said* to Abraham" [italics mine].

### The function of the petihta-verses in paragraphs 1-6

The reader will notice that only the first two paragraphs commence and conclude with the text of Genesis 12:1. The remaining four each introduce different *petihta'ot*, but they all conclude with returning to the *theme* verse, Genesis 12:1. The first paragraph contains an extended *mashal* which is bracketed by Gen. 12:1.[22] Furthermore, the authors use

---

22   The noun משׁל derives from the same Hebrew verbal form, which means "to handle" and in a secondary sense, to "speak metaphorically" or "prophetically." In 1 Kgs 5:12 the noun is translated with "proverb" ("Solomon uttered

Psalm 45:11-12 as the *petihta* to the Genesis verse, and the *inclusio* to the illustration of the *burning building*. This paragraph, then, may be outlined in the following way:

**Gen. 12:1**    (Ps. 45:11    [**MASHAL**:]    Ps. 45:12)    **Gen. 12:1**
THE BURNING BUILDING

The message of the *mashal* is essential to the rabbis' interpretation of Genesis 12:1. The man who travels from place to place cannot ignore the abnormality of this world, here illustrated by a burning building. His consternation over the fact that no one will intervene to put the fire out is transferred by the rabbis to Abraham himself; thus he asks: "Am I to believe that this world is without a supervisor?" The petihta-verse then is used as a textual background to Gen. 12:1. As the rabbis have God acknowledge that he is the Master of this world, they introduce the second part of Psalm 45, namely verse 11. The king, that is God, desires the beauty of the girl (i.e., "to make Abraham beautiful in the world), and because he is king she must worship him. In essence, this means that Abraham must go and leave his father's house.

Both for the original authors and for the readers of this text the answers to the Genesis 12:1 text have come as profound theological statements. We should not, however, proceed to explain these without becoming aware of the sociological and historical forces that influenced the original authors.[23] For example, in the mind of the authors Abraham

---

3000 proverbs), but it can also have the meaning of "prophecy" (it occurs in Numbers 23-24, in the context of Balaam's prophecies). In Rabbinic Literature the meaning of משל is evidenced by including often times an illustration or a story. It may, in this context, take the form of a "fable", "parable" or "allegory." Thus Jastrow, "משל" *Dictionary of the Targumim*, 108; Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash,* 28.

23  This is not to say that every text should be used to reconstruct the socio-cultural history of the authors. The very fact that these texts have undergone editorial processes makes this quest almost unrealizable. But behind the text one can, at times, sense some of the reactions of the rabbis against the circum-

AURELIAN BOTICA

too saw the world as having being abandoned by its Master. This attitude perhaps betrays an ethical reaction on the part of Abraham against evil; most likely, unpunished evil.[24] It is very possible that the same reaction was shared by many of the rabbis of late antiquity?[25]

What is beyond question here is the fact that, in the mind of the rabbis, Abraham displays the inner beauty of the girl who was desired by the king (Psalm 45:11). Abraham, i.e., the *daughter* in Psalm 45:11, is called to "hear, ... and see, and incline" his ear; possibly, in the face of the abnormalities of this world.[26] The rabbis, however, value this text mainly because it contains the phrase "forget ... your father's house." In essence, God calls Abraham to leave his father's house in order to make him "beautiful" before the whole world, the same world that earlier appeared to be abandoned. One possible theological implication might be

stances in which they lived, or against persons or group of persons whom they interacted with.

24  As already noted, "Abraham saw the world being destroyed by the flames of vice and wrong doing." *Midrash Rabbah,* 313.

25  We have already pointed the reader to Aurelian Botica's "Pesikta D'Rav Kahana and the Concept of the Mourning of God in Rabbinic Literature" and to Rachel Anisfeld, *Sustain Me With Raisin-Cakes. Pesikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism*, esp. 147-162, for references to the time of upheaval in the life of Palestinian and diaspora Jews during the early Medieval Period. The rise of Christianity and, later, of Islam, meant that "Jews had a harder time of defending their identity." One may also take into account the major blow that Rabbinic Judaism felt especially after the Revolt of Bar Kochba (132-136 AD).

26  One is fully aware that this is one of several interpretations made possible of the verse above. Although the verbs of *seeing, hearing*, and *inclining his ear* may not directly apply to the man *seeing* the fire, the parallelism is striking, and may be more than accidental. A more pressing question arises when we relate the first part of Ps. 45:11 to Abraham. In what sense is Abraham exhorted to hear, see, and incline his ear? Perhaps Abraham is called to hear the voice of the King who is calling the "girl," and not necessarily to see the world that is burning? Or is it conceivable that God calling Abraham and Abraham being exhorted to see the world burning are not two mutually exclusive realities?

that God desires Abraham ("so shall the king desire your beauty") in order that he may beautify that seemingly disordered world. Secondly, the idea of God making Abraham great in the world may also allude to the promise of a seed and a great nation; both contained in the subsequent verses of Genesis. Finally, for the rabbis God is the king of Psalm 45:11, that is "the Lord" to whom Abraham (i.e., the girl) must "pay obeisance." In other words, Abraham must go: *lech lecha* ("go yourself").

The second paragraph is rather simple. The Genesis verse brackets the short illustration of the perfume bottle. The petihta-verse comes from the Song of Songs 1:3, and again, it is used as a textual background for how the rabbis interpret the command that Abraham must leave. The fine fragrance of the oil (Song 1:3) becomes the balsam flask (R. Berkiah's comparison) which must be agitated in order to emanate its fragrance. Note also the relation between this and the preceding paragraph. Based on Ps. 45:11, Abraham is to be made beautiful (or "great") in the world. Based on Song of Songs 1:3, Abraham must move out into the world in order that his fragrance emanate before others. Thus: *lech lecha* ("go yourself") Paragraph 2, then, recalls the same notion of beautifying or improving the quality of the world, which is introduced in paragraph 1. One corollary of this may be that Abraham's *moral beauty* must be accompanied by *obedience* in order that it may become effective in the world. Finally, in the mind of the authors Abraham's moral qualities are recognized by God himself. The reader, then, should not miss the striking, perhaps impious allusion here to the fact that, in the eyes of the rabbis, *God actually needs Abraham.*[27]

Unlike paragraphs 1 and 2, paragraph 3 begins directly with the petihta-verse. In an outline form we have:

---

27  According to E. Urbach "the righteous, by their deeds, bring blessing and prosperity to the world," and at times, they are called "the foundation of the world." Urbach also cites Rabbinic sources which give the presence of the righteous as one of the reasons why the world still exists. In *The Sages*, trans. by I. Abrahams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1987), 494.

AURELIAN BOTICA

(Song 8:8  Song 8:9  Song 8:10  Allusion to Daniel  Song 8:10)  **Gen 12:1**

Because this paragraph lacks Genesis 12:1 at the beginning, its content and development are dictated by how the rabbis interpret Song of Songs 8:8-10. As such, the petihta-verses serve as textual backgrounds to an imagined narrative which spans different times in the life of Abraham (see the full explanation given in parenthesis after the translation of G.Rabbah 39:3). The authors will use either word-roots or word-analogies (like the words "breasts," "wall," and "peace") in order to connect the petihta-verses with their own narrative about Abraham. In the conclusion the rabbis interpolate the "trial narrative" from the book of Daniel within their own narrative, which already bears the terminology of Genesis and the Song of Songs 8:8-10.[28] Thus, Abraham (Genesis 12:1) enters the furnace (Daniel) in peace (Song 8:10), and he goes out in peace (Song 8:10). However, the fact that the authors cite Genesis 12:1 only at the very end of the paragraph makes it more difficult to understand how the petihta-verses relate to the Gen. 12:1. One possible interpretation may have the Genesis verse as the sequel to the midrashic narrative of Gen. Rabba 39:3. In this sense, God called Abraham only after he came out of the furnace in peace. But what is the image of Abraham that emerges out of this narrative?

The rabbis saw Abraham as the one who united the world for all subsequent generations. One cannot escape the allusion here to monotheism; in particular, to Abraham as one of the first patriarchs who recognized and worshipped the One God.[29] Abraham also distinguished himself even as a youngster when he "heaped up commandments and good deeds." But in spite of all these qualities God allowed that Abraham would suffer at the hands of Nimord. Thus we witness again the theme

28   By "their own narrative" we mean the Rabbinic haggadah according to which king Nimrod attempted to kill Abraham after he left the idolatrous house of his family.

29   For the editors of Midrash Rabba the phrase "who united the world for us" means that Abraham proclaimed "the unity and oneness of God, the corollary of which is the unity and brotherhood of man." Thus *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis,* 313.

of the suffering of the righteous, a story not completely unknown among the rabbis of the Roman Empire. In fact, the authors weaved the story of Daniel - another righteous sufferer - into the recreated narrative of the Song of Songs as the righteous Abraham enters and leaves the furnace in peace. As such, for the rabbis Abraham embodies not only the ideal of righteousness but he also becomes the source of comfort for those who suffer while living a righteous life. In the providence of God suffering prepares the righteous for a more profound destiny: "Then the Lord said to Abraham, 'Go yourself...'"

Paragraph 4 is the shortest here, as it only uses one petihta-verse from Ecclesiastes 7:19. The authors connect the word עשׂר (ten) from Ecclesiastes with their own narrative about Abraham, so that the expression מעשׂר שׁליטים (more than ten rulers) helps to distinguish Abraham as the only man in the last ten generations whom God spoke with. As such, in order to support the idea of God *speaking* only to Abraham, the rabbis conclude this paragraph with the Genesis verse, namely, "Then the Lord *said* to Abraham..."[30] But the real element that distinguished Abraham from the rest in the eyes of God is *wisdom*. Since the authors already depicted Abraham as storing up commandments and good deeds at an early age (paragraph 3), it is conceivable that by having *wisdom* they meant that Abraham possessed and practiced the Torah. Is it possible, then, that for the rabbis Abraham's standing apart from the rest echoes the belief that Israel's acceptance of the Law led to her becoming the special nation of God?[31]

---

30  As with other situations, this analogy is less than perfect. The root used by the rabbis when describing God speaking to Abraham is דבר, while the Genesis employs the root אמר. The point made by the rabbis, however, is rather straightforward: God addressed Abraham in person.

31  This concept has a long and distinguished history in Rabbinic literature. According to *Exodus Rabba*, *Ki Tissa*, XLVII, 3: "If it were not for my Law which you accepted, I should not recognize you, and I should not regard you more than any of the idolatrous nations of the world." Thus C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963), 116.

AURELIAN BOTICA

In paragraph 5 the rabbis divide the petihta-verse from Jeremiah 51:9 in two parts. They use the first part in connection with different periods in the narrative of Genesis: the Enosh generation ("we would have healed..." Jer. 51:9), the Flood generation ("but she was not healed"), and the generation of the dispersion ("forsake her..."). Abraham's call came as the climax to the events narrated here, events which are interpreted through the rabbis' reading of Jeremiah 51:9. The final part of the petihta-verse is significant because it uses the verb הלך, just like Genesis 12:1 does. Thus Jeremiah 51:9 explains, in part, the call of Abraham as a *solution* implemented by God after the events of the flood and of the dispersion.

The last paragraph is also the longest. The petihta-verse comes from Psalm 55:5, but the authors introduce a second verse, from Genesis 18:25, which is relevant to the larger narrative they are trying to form. The structural outline of this paragraph can be drawn in the following way:

(Psalm 55:5a    Genesis 18:25    Psalm 55:5a +b)    **Genesis 12:1**

The authors use the petihta-verse to lay the background for a better understanding of why God addressed Abraham in Gen. 12:1. Thus the Psalm is interconnected with the Midrashic narrative of paragraph 5 in order to portray Abraham as mediator for the righteous people. The Noahic covenant is also recalled as the authors are building a potential conflict within God; that is, the apparent incompatibility between absolute justice and the covenantal obligations of God. The extended petihta-verse is applied in the conclusion as the authors specify that "God is anointing" Abraham "with the oil of gladness before our fellows." The rabbis resort again to the idea that out of all the men of the former generations God chose to speak only with Abraham (see paragraph 4). Unlike the "wisdom" of Ecclesiastes 7:19, in Psalm 45 the character is set apart from his fellows by his love for justice, his hatred of wickedness, and by his anointing. Embodying all these, the Abraham of the midrashic narra-

tive s distinguished from all the people of the ten generations when he is *addressed* by God as well. This is why, then: "The Lord *said* to Abraham..."

Paragraph 6 introduces probably one of the most theologically profound issues encountered in our texts so far, namely, the tension between the *divine will* and the *human intercession* of Abraham. The rabbis portray Abraham as a lover of the righteous and an enemy of the wicked (Ps 45:8). These virtues, which invest Abraham with the moral prerogatives required of a pious intercessor, allow him to debate no other than God. As with the book of Genesis, in the world-view of Genesis Rabbah God is willing to be swayed from his destructive actions by the pleading of a righteous man who goes as far as to remind God that he too is subject to the constraints of common sense (i.e. one cannot "hold the cords by both ends"). In essence, for the rabbis God is not only just, but also merciful and aware of the moral shortcomings of his creation. The rabbis may just tell us that the virtues of justice and love which God admires in Abraham are worth pursuing; they can even save a world from destruction.

## Genesis Rabbah 39: a rabbinical reading of Gen. 12:1-9

Chapter 39 is a complex text. As a rule, the rabbis used the Genesis passage in connection with other scriptural verses, sometimes placing Abraham as far ahead in time as Nehemiah. This inter-textual "universe" allowed them to render Abraham and his God relevant to the issues faced in their own historical, religious, and cultural experience. Secondly, in the rabbinic hermeneutics of Genesis Rabba, the proof is sometimes established by quoting a verse which appears to contradict the theme at hand, and then interpreting that verse in light of other verses which address a similar concern. For example the promise "I will make you a great *nation*" (Gen. 12:2) could be invalidated by the Noahic narrative where God used Noah's family to recreate the nations of the earth. The rabbis quote Deut. 4:7, "For what a great *nation* is there, that has a God so nigh to them," and then qualify the meaning of "great nation" of Genesis 12:2 in light of the "nation" of Deuteronomy 4:7. But what occupies their at-

tention more than anything else is the person of Abraham. Keeping this in mind, the following are some of the ways in which the rabbis read Genesis 12:1-9.

In paragraph 7 the rabbis sensed a potential problem when God commanded Abraham to leave his father's house: "shall I go out and bring dishonor upon the Divine Name, as people will say, 'He left his father in his old age and departed.'" This was a valid concern, since the duty to honor one's parents...was "one of the precepts by the performance of which a man enjoys the fruits in this world and the capital remains for him in the World to come (Peah 1.1)."[32] As a hermeneutical move, the rabbis interpret the preposition "lecha" (lit. "to/of yourself") as "I exempt *you* from the duty of honoring your parents, though I exempt no one else from this duty."

The destiny of Israel rested on Abraham and on the other patriarchs of Genesis. Genesis Rabbah 39 abounds with motives such as this. For example, in Midrash Rabbah 39:10 the midrashists use the *mashal* of the king who lost and found his diadem (מרגלית) in connection with Nehemiah 9:8, "And you *found* his [Abraham's] heart faithful before you," in order to describe the length to which God went to find and bless Abraham. The authors also interpret מרגלית as referring to the "coinage of Abraham" which was current in the world. They define the characteristics of this and other currencies (Joshua, David, etc.) by connecting their narrative with biblical verses like Joshua 6:27, Dt. 33:17, 1Chr.4:4, from which they take elements necessary to form the effigy of the coin (human beings, animals, towers, and the like). The same theme is carried out in 39:11. According to Genesis12:2,

ואעשׂך לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

---

32  Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), 180. See also Kid. 30b, 31 b-32a, Deut. R. Debarim, 1.15, Gen. R., Toledoth, LXIII, 6. Montefiore offers a good collection of materials on the topic of filial piety; see *A Rabbinic Anthology*, 500-506.

In what sense was Abraham to become a blessing? By revocalising the unpointed בְרכה (blessing) the rabbis transform Abraham into a *pool of purification* (berekah) which "purifies the unclean" (i.e., those whom Abraham brought to God from afar). Abraham *as a blessing* also means that he is set "as a blessing in the Eighteen Benedictions" (39:11) or that "rain and dew shall come forth for your sake" (39:12). The blessing can be material (39:12 - the nations of the earth "are wealthier than we") or come in the form of *counsel*. Reading the "blessing" promise made to Abraham in light of their own experience, the rabbis believed they were the medium through which God would bless the nations of the earth. According to Rabbi Nehemiah, "when [the families of the earth] ... get into trouble they ask our advice, and we give it to them."[33]

## Abraham and modernity - bridging the horizons

The element of sacrifice in Abraham's call has been noticed both by ancient and modern interpreters. The expression "lech lecha" occurs twice with respect to Abraham: the first time in Genesis 12:1, and the second time in Genesis 22:2, "at the beginning of the section of the Offering of Isaac."[34] The modern interpreters of Genesis have usually emphasized the historical implications of Abraham's call. Cassuto believes that "in both cases Abram undergoes an ordeal: here he has to leave behind his aged father...and go to a country that is unknown to him; there (Gen. 22:2) ...take leave of his cherished son forever." In other words, "in his first trial he is bidden to forgo his past, in the last one, his future."[35] The call is made difficult to obey because the land is not named. Not only must Abraham

33  For W. Brueggemann blessing "has in purview a large arena of new life that is to be transmitted, via Israel, to the nations....In these traditions of promise, Israel, by its life and its obedience, is entrusted with the well-being of the nations." In *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 168.

34  Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis II*, trans. by I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 310.

35  Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit*, trans. by Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1974), 114.

separate from the societal bonds that essentially meant survival, but he is never told where exactly he is going. According to Gunkel "God lays upon Abraham the most difficult test of faith."[36]

These views, though informed by a different reading of the Genesis text, are not inconsistent with the Rabbinic reading of Genesis. The idea of sacrifice, for example, is highlighted in Genesis Rabbah 39:7 as well. Here Abraham complains that the people will say "he left his father in his old age and departed." Did Genesis 12:1 suggest an abrogation of the command to obey one's parents? Could God contradict himself? The rabbis, then, reinterpret the expression "lecha" as a temporary divine exemption from the duty of filial obedience. Such an exegetical move may seem arbitrary to the modern reader, but one should not forget that the rabbis read Genesis in light of their social and cultural experiences; of which filial piety was an important aspect. The notion of the *call as sacrifice* is also emphasized in Genesis Rabbah 39:9. The rabbis realized the oddity of the command to leave one's roots to go a land "which I will show you." Why, then, "did He not reveal it to him [there and then]?" They answer of Genesis Rabbah is: "In order to make it more beloved in his eyes and to reward him for every step he took."

One could also recall the haggadic tradition which depicts Abraham not only as the victim of Nimrod, but also as the object of the scorn of his own family. The rabbis never tried to minimize the element of suffering involved in the act of obeying God. In spite of all the qualities which made Abraham special in the eyes of God and in the tradition of Israel, the rabbis saw in Abraham the embodiment of their own experiences. That religion should be a private experience which bestows only serenity and happiness on the practitioner, while excluding discipline, suffering

---

36 *Genesis*, trans. by M.E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1997), 163. The terms "your country", "your kindred" and "your father's house" represent the basic forms of social organization in the ancient world. Often times, leaving one's family meant renouncing the claim to land inheritance. In a world in which agriculture was the main source of income (and thus subsistence) to renounce the land took a lot of courage.

or public scorn, is a modern concept which, if practiced, would engender the survival of the faithful more than organized persecution ever did.

The question asked in Genesis Rabba 39:1, that "Am I to believe that this building is without a supervisor?" remains as poignant today as it was for the rabbis of late antiquity. The Temple had been deserted in 70 CE. The Bar Kochba revolt came as a destructive blow to those who still hoped that someday, somehow, the Temple would be rebuilt and God be worshipped again in Jerusalem.  Against this background, the rabbis of Genesis Rabbah imagined The Holy One Blessed Be He looking out and saying: "I am the owner of the world."

But what is even more unusual is the thought that the King desired a mortal's beauty in order that he might beautify the world through him."[37] This thought comes both as a bold proclamation and as an intimate understanding of the divine.  I believe that the rabbis quoted Psalm 45:11 with the assumption that "beauty," i.e., loving God and embodying mercy, justice, and love for others (his divine attributes) is a powerful means of saving a world that appears to be dominated by darkness.[38] But they also cautioned that such beauty will not touch anybody just by itself. The flask, though full of balsam, must be shaken. Abraham must move himself "from place to place so that "his name might be exalted in the world. Finally, the *beauty* of Abraham allowed him to provoke God on the matter of absolute divine justice. "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness" (Ps. 45:8). These qualities of virtue helped Abraham act as a mediator for a less perfect world. According to Genesis Rabbah 33:3 "the prayer of the righteous changes the intention of the Holy One, blessed be He, from the attribute of strict justice to that of compassion."[39] For

---

37  In R. Jose's words, "so long as the righteous are in the world, there is blessing in the world." From Sifre Dt. 98 pg. 76; in Urbach, *The Sages*, 494.

38  According to Nehama Leibowitz "Abraham, as he left for the promised land, was to be considered the only glimmer of light wandering through a world of thick darkness, eventually...illuminating the whole of mankind." In *Studies in Bereshit*, trans. by Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1974), 110.

39  Quoted by E. Urbach in *The Sages*, 907.

the rabbis, then, righteousness is not static, but engaging. What is more striking is the view that God himself becomes sensitive in the face of human compassion. One's sense of righteousness must never isolate him or her from the social problems of this world. Moral "beauty," then, is the "beauty" of compassion for those who have been written out and expect nothing but absolute judgment.

## Bibliography

Anisfeld, R. *Sustain Me With Raisin Cakes. Pesikta deRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism.* Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Belof, R. "Midreshei Halakhah," *Encyclopedia Judaica,* second edition, Fred Skolnik ed. vol. 14. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 2007,193-204.

Botica, A. "Pesikta de Rav Kahana and the Concept of the Mourning of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Semănătorul (The Sower). The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research*, 2.1 (2021): 110-126.

Brueggemann, W. *Theology of the Old Testament.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988.

Cassuto, U. *Commentary on the Book of Genesis II,* trans. by I. Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964.

Cohen, A. *Everyman's Talmud.* New York: Schocken Books, 1949.

Freedman, H., Simon, M. *Midrash Rabbah* Translated into English, 10 vols., eds. London, 1961.

Gunkel, H. *Genesis,* trans. by M.E. Biddle. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1997.

Jastrow, M. "פ ת י ח א," *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature.* New York: Judaica Press, 1991.

Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Norfolk, VA: Bible Works 10, 2015.

Leibowitz, N. *Studies in Bereshit*, trans. by Aryeh Newman. Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1974.

Lerner, M.B. "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim," *The Literature of the Sages*, Second Part, Safrai, Shmuel ed. Amsterdam: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006).

Montefiore, C.G., Loewe, H.  *A Rabbinic Anthology*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1963.

Pinchas, H.P. *Torah Today*. Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1987.

Shafrai, S. *The Literature of the Sages*: *Second Part*, Shmuel Shafrai ed. Assen, Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006.

Strack H. L., Stemberger, G. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.

Theodor, J., Albeck, C. *Midrash Bereshit Rabba***, 3 vols. Jerusalem, 1965.

Urbach, E. *The Sages*, trans. by I. Abrahams. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1987.

Vermes, G. *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 1975.

Von Rad, G. *Genesis*, rev. ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973.

Wagner, S. " שׁ ר ד ." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, 3:293-307.