A CRY INSTEAD OF JUSTICE

THE BIBLE AND CULTURES OF VIOLENCE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY
DERECK DASCHKE &
ANDREW KILLE

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The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective

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Dereck Daschke
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Andrew Kille

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Foreword

The essays that make up this volume were originally developed for the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section of the Society for Biblical Literature, of which both Dereck and Andrew have been chairpersons. We are grateful to the participants of the sessions, who have continued to challenge us and stimulate new ways of seeing how the Bible and the human psyche have shaped one another. We are especially thankful for the vision, leadership, and encouragement of two of those colleagues—Wayne G. Rollins and J. Harold Ellens. Their efforts to bring about a revival of psychological biblical criticism and their contributions to the group and to the literature are immeasurable.

Our appreciation also goes to the people at T&T Clark International, who helped us frame the book, made suggestions for its development, and showed enduring patience when the project was held up for over a year while Andrew recovered from a severe injury. Thanks are due to Claudia Camp, Burke Gerstenschlager, and Katie Gallof.

And we offer our grateful thanks to those who put up with us, inspired us, and sustained us every day as we wrestled this book into being: my wife Pamela and son Russell, without whom I could not have managed this past year and a half (Andrew), and my wife Jen and our ever-interesting three boys, Sam, Christian, and Tommy, who remind me always of what's good in the world, especially when I spend so much time thinking about what's not (Dereck).

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Contributors

Benjamin J. Abelow (M.D., Yale Medical School; B.A., History, University of Pennsylvania) studies religion and Bible from an interdisciplinary perspective. He writes and presents at academic conferences in the U.S. and Europe.

Matthias Beier, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling and Director of the Psychotherapy and Faith Program at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana. The author of two books, *A Violent God-Image* (Continuum, 2004), and *Gott ohne Angst* (Patmos, 2009), Beier is a nationally certified psychoanalyst in private practice and a fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. Inspired much by the well-known German theologian, psychoanalyst and social critic Eugen Drewermann, and by liberation theologies of all stripes, his work focuses on the deconstruction of violent images of God and the recovery of the therapeutic dimension of religion for humanity.

Ronald R. Clark, Jr., obtained his Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School in Memphis, Tennessee. He is a member of local domestic violence councils and the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force. He leads the clergy training for Community Against Domestic Violence, and is also an adjunct instructor at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. He is the author of *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology for Domestic Abuse*, *Emerging Elders* (Cascade Books, 2005), and numerous articles on abuse, theology, and Hebrew/Greek studies. He also co-leads a committee on abuse and the Church for the Association of Marriage and Family Ministries. Ron was the preaching minister for the Metro Church of Christ in Gresham for eight years. During Easter 2007 he led a new church plant in downtown Portland, the Agape Church of Christ, committed to addressing social justice and empowering the oppressed. Ron and Lori Clark have been married since 1987. They have three sons, Nathan, Hunter, and Caleb.

Darcie Davis-Gage is an Assistant Professor of Counseling at the University of Northern Iowa. She received both her Master's and Specialist in Counseling from Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kansas, and obtained her Doctorate in Counselor Education from the University of Iowa. After graduating, she accepted a counseling position at the Lafayette House, a women's mental health agency providing services to families affected by substance abuse, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. While working at the center, she offered individual, group and family counseling to many women and children. She also facilitated group treatment for men who were charged with domestic assault. Her current research agenda includes examining site supervisor's style of supervision and emphasis in supervision. She also has research interests in groups, multicultural education, and women's issues.

Dereck Daschke received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is the Chair of the Department of Philosophy & Religion at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, where he has taught since 2000. He served as the Chair of the Psychology and Biblical Studies section of the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting from 2005 to 2007. His research and publications have mainly focused on the intersection of psychology and apocalypticism or millennialism. He is the co-editor with W. Michael Ashcraft of *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader* (New York University Press, 2005).

D. Andrew Kille is editor of *The Bible Workbench* (http://www.bibleworkbench.org) and director of Interfaith Space in San Jose, California. He holds an M.Div. from the American Baptist Seminary of the West, and a Ph.D. in psychological biblical criticism from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and is currently Chair of the Psychology and Biblical Studies section of the Society of Biblical Literature (http://www.psybibs.org). He is author of *Psychological Biblical Criticism* (Fortress, 2001) and co-editor, with Wayne G. Rollins, of *Psychological Insight into the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2007).

Dan Merkur is currently a psychoanalyst in private practice in Toronto, Canada, and a visiting scholar at the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. He has a doctorate in the history of religions, has taught at five universities in Canada and the United States, and has to date published twelve books and many articles.

Michael Willett Newheart is Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Howard University School of Divinity, where he has served since 1991. His books include *"My Name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Liturgical Press, 2004), *Word and Soul: A Psychological, Literary, and Cultural Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Liturgical Press, 2001), and *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (Mellen Research University Press, 1992). Prior to taking his position at Howard, he taught at a college and four seminaries in Kansas City, and he served as a missionary in Costa Rica. Michael's Ph.D. is from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is an ordained Baptist minister and a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Carol Klose Smith is currently a clinical assistant professor at the University of Iowa. She has over 15 years of counseling experience working in various settings, including counseling at an undergraduate university, a medical school, and a domestic violence shelter. She earned her doctorate at the University of Iowa in 2007. Her research interests include school counseling issues in rural areas, career counseling for the gifted and talented, domestic violence and spirituality. She enjoys running, playing viola, and having coffee with friends.

Daniel J. Terry has degrees from Baylor University, Truett Theological Seminary, and Wake Forest University. He is currently completing his doctorate in education at Texas Christian University, where his focus is on curriculum theory, cognition studies, and science of mind. An educator who has worked in religious communities, higher education, and as a psychotherapist, Daniel is currently employed at Texas Christian University, and lives in Fort Worth with his wife and two daughters.

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Introduction: The Bible and the Psychology of Violence

D. Andrew Kille

> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
> is the house of Israel,
> and the people of Judah
> are his pleasant planting;
> he expected justice,
> but saw bloodshed;
> righteousness,
> but heard a cry! (Isa 5:7)

Some time ago, I was invited to appear on *Spirit Talk with Jean*, a local cable access program devoted to dialogue and building understanding between differing religious groups in our local community. Though I was there in my capacity as an interfaith organizer and consultant, the host had noticed one particular entry in the *C.V.* I had sent her, and was led to ask me this question: "You wrote an essay on the *Destructive Power of Religion*. Have you had any second thoughts since then?" It was clear that this question sprang out of the host's firm conviction that religion was a creative and healing force in the world, and to write on such a thing as the destructive power of religion must have been due to a momentary lapse of sanity or perspective.

At the time I offered some bland comment on how it was important for us to acknowledge the darker side of religious history and experience. But the question has stuck with me, given that, as often as not, I find myself joining in dialogue and peacemaking work while carrying a book with a title like *Terror in the Mind of God*, *Is Religion Killing Us?* or *The Destructive Power of Religion*.[1]

1. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Quran* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003); J. Harold Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger-Greenwood, 2004).

The volume before you, *A Cry Instead of Justice*, inspired by Isaiah 5:7, is the result not only of my own second (and third, and fourth) thoughts about the complex issue of religion and violence, but it also brings together a number of perspectives from scholars who have reflected on the interrelation of the Bible and cultures of violence. Many of these essays were originally presented before the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section of the Society for Biblical Literature, of which my co-editor Dereck Daschke and I have both been Chairperson.

Studies of violence and religion have become a growth industry since the events of September 11, 2001. With the collapse of the Twin Towers, what had previously been a concern of a few became front page news, and there is no lack of pundits with answers to the question "How could this happen?" The question that underlies this collection is focused more specifically: What is the relationship between the Bible and violence? Is the trouble, as Simon John De Vries declares, "not with the Bible, but with the misuse of the Bible by Fundamentalists and other exploitative ideologists"?[2] Is the problem with the Bible only that people do not really know how to read it correctly? Or is there something inherent in the text that allows or even encourages violence?

How might we understand this relationship and, more importantly, what can we do about it? What can we discover when we look carefully at the intersections of religion, violence, psychology, and *scripture*?

Scripture and Violence

Although there have been many books written about the relationship of religion and violence, for the most part they have addressed only tangentially the role that scripture plays. Two books in particular, *Is Religion Killing Us?* by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer and *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* by Hector Avalos, have taken a more direct look at the role that sacred texts play in justifying or even creating violence.[3]

Is Religion Killing Us?

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer argues that the fault is, indeed, in the texts and not simply in the interpreters. He states:

2. Simon John De Vries, "Scenes of Sex and Violence in the Old Testament," in Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion*, 75–98 (75).

3. Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?*; Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2005).

> [*R*]*eligiously justified violence is first and foremost a problem of "sacred" texts and not a problem of misinterpretation* of the texts. The problem, in other words, is not primarily that people take passages out of context and twist them in order to justify violence. The problem is actual violence at the heart of these texts that can be reasonably cited by people to justify their own recourse to violence.[4]

So serious is Nelson-Pallmeyer about this that whenever the word "sacred" is used in relation to a text, he places it in quotation marks. He explains that when a text is called "sacred," it tends to place the text above criticism; violent elements are either legitimated, or, at best, not examined too closely.

He identifies two significant strains of violence in the Bible and Qur'an. The first is what he calls the "Violence-of-God" traditions, the second consists of violent story lines, found primarily in the Hebrew Bible. The backdrop for the emergence of monotheism from earlier polytheism is the understanding that the one God is more powerful than all the other Gods. And how is this power proved? Through demonstrations of superior violence that inspire belief:

> Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
> Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
> awesome in splendor, doing wonders?
> You stretched out your right hand,
> the earth swallowed them. (Exod 15:11–12 NRSV)

The Lord is a "jealous" God, one who clearly takes sides in human affairs and punishes those who presume to depart from the path of the "chosen." When Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson asserted that the 9/11 attack took place because God had withdrawn protection from the nation, they did not need to strain to find biblical passages that clearly supported that view.[5]

The violent storylines that Nelson-Pallmeyer identifies include narratives that are central to many people's understanding of biblical teaching: Exodus, Exile and Apocalyptic. Though the Exodus is often viewed as an act of liberation, there is no denying that it is liberation that comes through what must be described as superior violence. It is punctuated by God's killing of the children of the Egyptians, the destruction of the Egyptian chariots at the Red Sea, and the violent takeover of the Land of Canaan.

4. Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?*, xv (italics original).

5. Falwell later apologized for his remarks on Robertson's 700 Club broadcast. See "Falwell Apologizes to Gays, Feminists, Lesbians," CNN, n.p. (accessed May 29, 2009). Online http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/14/Falwell.apology.

Similar themes of the Violence-of-God are to be found in both the New Testament and the Qur'an. The New Testament reflects assumptions about God's liberating, punishing, and apocalyptic violence, and many passages in the Qur'an describe the punishments of hell and the destruction that is coming for the unbeliever. While recognizing that extremist interpretations of the Qur'an are no more mainstream than Falwell's interpretation of the Bible, Nelson-Pallmeyer argues strongly that passages in the Qur'an "could *reasonably be interpreted* to justify or even require violence, terrorism, and war against enemies in service to Allah or in pursuit of 'Islamic justice'."[6]

How shall we deal with these traditions? Nelson-Pallmeyer insists that it is necessary to hold a certain doubt about the assertions of sacred texts. This flies in the face of the certainty that seems to be integral to the truth claims of these texts, but the alternative seems only to justify and establish violent ways of thinking and living:

> Attributing every word of the Quran directly to Allah or claiming God or the Holy Spirit as the author of biblical texts leaves little latitude for scriptural challenges, new revelations, and new interpretations that are desperately needed if the world is to pull back from the deadly precipice of violent destruction rooted in our distorted images of a violent God. The writers of the Bible and Quran are often treated as if they absorbed God's Image, God's Self, and God's Essence with the efficiency of sponges absorbing water. It would be more accurate to say that if God's revelation is like water that God hopes will be absorbed into the life of the world, then these writers receive this water more like asphalt than sponges.[7]

Confronting the violence in scripture might mean discarding or invalidating certain texts and ideas. Certainly, putting aside certain texts with their Violence-of-God images and stories would call for a different kind of religious faith. It would find a different underpinning for ethical action than systems of reward and punishment. Many people have explored alternate ways to read and understand the texts, bringing the tools of scholarship and critical analysis to the task.

Fighting Words

Nelson-Pallmeyer's contention that interpreters of the Bible and Qur'an are refusing to acknowledge how their texts may be causing violence and destruction seems mild compared to the scathing critique leveled by Hector Avalos in *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*.

6. Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?*, 91 (italics original).
7. Ibid., 97–98.

"Reappropriation," which he defines as any idea "that it is legitimate to deviate from the 'original meaning' of a text in order to apply it to another cultural or temporal context," is "a morally sordid game," and "a morally reprehensible charade that should end."[8] He suggests that there is no objectively verifiable standard that would validate one interpretation above another, and that one could just as well reinterpret Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in ways that would justify it in today's world by suggesting that it's reference to "Jews" is merely metaphorical, and that "*das Volk*" really is an inclusive term.

We do not have room here to challenge what is clearly a throwback to a crude concept of "original intention" as determinant in the meaning of a text, but it is worthwhile to hear Avalos's challenge to religious hermeneutics. The problem, Avalos argues forcefully, is not whether religious texts are being interpreted correctly, however that may be understood. The roots of violence lie in the mere fact that there are religious texts *at all*.

Violence, in Avalos's view, is attributable to human competition for scarce resources. When I lack some necessity of life—food, land, water, or power—and I see that you have it, I will try to take it from you, and you will try to defend it. Many scarcities are visible, measurable, and verifiable. Religion, however, creates a scarcity of a different kind, a scarcity which is neither visible, measurable, or verifiable—a scarcity of access to the supernatural, the sacred, the divine.[9] Avalos suggests that religious traditions create a false sense of scarcity by controlling four areas: access to divine communication; sacred space; a privileged community; and salvation.

We will consider here only the first: access to divine communications. Avalos uses the term "inscripturation" to refer to the "creation of a written account of what is believed to be authoritative information about or from supernatural forces and/or beings."[10] While the process shares some of the qualities of the movement from orality to written texts, it represents a particular kind of transition. A written text can become

8. Avalos, *Fighting Words*, 362.

9. A similar argument is made by Regina Schwartz, who takes issue with John Collins's reduction of her argument in *The Curse of Cain* to a simple correlation of monotheism and violence. She describes, rather, a range of monotheistic interpretations, ranging from a narrowly defined, insider vs. outsider mentality to an expansive increase of grace and bounty, into which the whole world eventually is welcomed. The former view, which is comparable to Avalos's "scarcity," does, in Schwartz's view, contribute to violence. See Regina M. Schwartz, "Holy Terror," *SBL Forum* n.p. (accessed May 29, 2009). Online http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=161.

10. Avalos, *Fighting Words*, 104.

scripture long after it was originally written down, or a text that was once considered scripture can over time cease to be inscripturated.

How does scripture become a scarce commodity? In the ancient world, the ability to read and write was itself a scarce ability. Writing was perceived to have magical qualities, and more often than not, those who were literate were members of the priestly class. When a particular text or texts is deemed to be the communication from God, there is not only conflict with those outside the textual tradition, but there remains within the community the question as to how those texts are to be interpreted correctly. The Hebrew Bible gives evidence of conflicts of interpretation within the community and critiques of religious traditions considered by some to be absolute.[11] The emergence of Christianity and its reinterpretation of the Hebrew tradition occasion another kind of conflict, one that breaks out again and again into violent confrontation between Christians and Jews.[12]

In Islam, the Qur'an is understood to be the direct and clear revelation of God's (Allah's) instruction and intention. Yet here, too, there is tension between the fixity of the Arabic text and the necessity for interpretation into specific times and places. Muslims assert that the Qur'an is unchanging, but that it must continually be applied to changing contexts.

In all these cases, Avalos proclaims, all interpretations are alike in that no one interpretation can lay claim to being any more verifiable than another. Violent and peaceful readings alike amount to not much more than subjective value judgments which say nothing about the "essence" or "true meaning" of a religious tradition.

Avalos advocates "zero-tolerance" for religious violence based on scripture. Based on his view that religious scriptures by their very nature create false scarcities and thus are a source of conflicts, often violent conflict, not only with other traditions but within the tradition itself, he declares plainly, "*it is always immoral to commit any act of violence for religious reasons*."[13] He proposes two possible solutions to religious violence—retain religion, but in a modified form, so that (unverifiable) scarcities are not created, or eliminate religion entirely from human life.

11. See, for example, Amos 5:21–22; Jer 7:4; Mic 6:6–8.

12. This conflict is neatly summed up in Matthew's phrasing in the Sermon on the Mount, "you have heard it said…but I say to you…" (Matt 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). It is further illustrated in the Synoptic Gospel reports of conflict with the Pharisees and scribes (see, e.g., Mark 2:16–17, 23–28; 7:1–16 and parallels). For a fuller exploration of the conflicts between Christians and Jews, see D. Andrew Kille, "Unconsciously Poisoning Our Roots: Psychological Dynamics of the Bible in Jewish/Christian Conflict," *Pastoral Psychology* 53 (2005): 291–301.

13. Avalos, *Fighting Words*, 354 (italics original).

Avalos is particularly scathing in his disdain for academics who try to sustain the sacredness of texts by marshaling arguments that privilege one interpretation over another. In Avalos's view,

> Since religious violence is caused mainly by competition for resources, then part of the solution must involve making religious believers aware of how they have created scarce resources. Nonbelievers must challenge believers to explain why they believe in such resources in the first place… Of course, it is naive to expect that believers will automatically examine their beliefs and abandon them. However, making believers aware of how religion can create scarce resources must be a starting point if there is a solution at all.[14]

Academics have a responsibility, in his view, not to perpetuate the scarcity that underlies religious violence by justifying, recontextualizing, or defending scriptural violence. Even those who seek to enable communities to read their sacred texts in a more benign or inclusive way are fundamentally legitimating the very dynamic that creates violence in the first place.

I think Avalos is naive, both theologically and psychologically, but his harsh criticism of the way academics deal with the Bible perhaps serves to highlight some serious issues that confront us. But as I read both Avalos and Nelson-Pallmeyer, I kept hearing a nagging voice in the back of my mind that kept asking "but will it *preach*?" For all that I might agree with points that either author might make, I could not imagine anyone in a religious community steeped in scripture giving them much credibility. What creative relationship does the academy have with the person in the pew?

The Meaning of Scripture

The more I read about the relationship of scripture and violence, the more I am reminded of a pointed comment made by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, himself a scholar of Islam, some twenty-five years ago: "[W]e scholars do not in fact understand what scripture is. We do not know how to treat a text as scripture."[15] Smith proposed that biblical scholarship, then still much under the *aegis* of historical criticism, involved the study of the *pre-scriptural* phase of the Bible. Newer forms of criticism, especially the literary criticism that was emerging at the time he was

14. Ibid., 359.

15. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World," in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (ed. M. Levering; New York: SUNY, 1989), 29–57.

writing, were focused on the Bible in its *post-scriptural* phase. While the former studied the Bible as if it were *any* historical artifact, the latter approached the texts as if they were *any* literary text.

Confronted with the many and varied sacred texts of the world's peoples, Smith ponders whether there may be "some common human propensity to scripturalize," and calls for deeper investigation into the historical, sociological, and psychological dynamics of dealing with a text *as sacred scripture*.[16]

Smith's "scripturalization" hints at a deeper reality than Avalos's "inscripturation." Avalos imagines that someone or some group wakes up one morning and decides to create a sacred text in order to control the sacred and have a corner on divine revelation. Avalos's idea that conflict arises from scarcity has some legitimacy. But if, as he asserts, the scarcity created by sacred texts, places, and people are unverifiable and ultimately illusory, why should anyone care? Scarcity alone is not sufficient to create conflict; there must be a *desire* for what is scarce. Scripturalization is one of the mechanisms by which this profound desire is expressed, invoked, and nurtured, and it is the power of this desire which does not easily allow us to put quotations around the word *sacred* in dealing with sacred texts.

I do not propose to venture a comprehensive answer to the question of what this desire may be or how it functions, but I do want to suggest we need more serious investigation into several psychological and psychosocial mechanisms that come into play when we deal with scripture. I want to highlight here two specific dimensions of this interaction. The first concerns the psychodynamics of identity formation and preservation within the group. The second involves the psychological process of idealization and splitting which, I believe, is a key to understanding scripturally based religious violence. Again, to draw the issues in bold relief, I want to refer to two specific forms of religious violence—the grim history of anti-Semitism in Christianity, and the psychology of religious terrorism.

The Psychology of Anti-Semitism

I have written elsewhere about the development of anti-Semitism from its roots in the New Testament texts.[17] Simply stated, anti-Semitism has its origin in the psychodynamics of group identity formation, what

16. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible," in *Rethinking Scripture*, 18–28.

17. Kille, "Unconsciously Poisoning Our Roots."

W. W. Meissner calls the "cultic process."[18] This process involves conscious and unconscious strategies aimed at distinguishing an individual or group from other individuals and groups. A sense of connectedness with "us," strengthened by emphasis on our differences with "them," helps a group, especially a newly emerging group, to develop cohesion and stability.[19] It is precisely this dynamic that lies in the world behind the text of the New Testament. A new community, the "Jesus Jews," begins to diverge from their original group, sparking first disagreement and then open conflict and disassociation. Written expressions of that struggle for identity, not yet considered scripture, serve to clarify and define the boundaries of the community. Within the world of the text, we find the conflict expressed in three modes: Christological argumentation, supersessionist attitudes, and, finally, defamatory polemic.[20]

So far, so good. When we as scholars try to address the issue of anti-Semitism, our frequent strategy is to remind people of the nature of the first-century setting and the historical context of those texts. We hope by this process to defuse potential prejudice and violence and to convince people that Jewish–Christian conflict is ancient history. That is the tack taken by many essays on scripture and violence—*text* is constrained by *context*.

Yet, while the roots of anti-Semitism may lie in the ancient conflict and the struggle for identity, something significant happens when this text becomes *scripture*. Suddenly, it is not merely a historical document of old rivalries—it is now a sacred and reliable record. The text now *speaks*, and it speaks *with authority*. The most significant developments in anti-Semitism did not take place in the ancient world; they took shape in the interpretive space in front of the text, as "the Jews" became less specific in time and space and became more cosmic. When "the Jews" become detached from actual experience, they become a screen, as it

18. W. W. Meissner, *The Cultic Origins of Christianity: The Dynamics of Religious Development* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000).

19. James Wellman and Kyoko Tokuno argue that this dynamic of developing individual and group identity over against others means that conflict is inherent to religion. Further, because conflict is socially functional for religious identity, and because the source of the identity is unverifiable, religiously based motivations are particularly intractable to outside influences. James K. Wellman Jr. and Kyoko Tokuno, "Is Religious Violence Inevitable?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (2004): 291–96.

20. Norman A. Beck, "The New Testament and the Teaching of Contempt: Reconsiderations," in *Jewish–Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue* (ed. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 83–99.

were, onto which all the unconscious, shadow dimensions of the Christian community could be projected.

According to Mortimer Ostow, a psychoanalyst who undertook a nine-year study of the psychology of anti-Semitism, there are four interrelated factors that work together in creating and sustaining anti-Semitism. First, there are innate psychodynamics that make use of discrimination and categorization. This "friend or foe" dynamic has an important survival function. Secondly, there are those group dynamics that build on those tendencies to confirm and exploit certain forms of discrimination and prejudice for the sake of group identity and cohesion. This is the "cultic process" identified by Meissner. Thirdly, there are mechanisms—psychological, social, and cultural—for transmitting and preserving those prejudices. Finally, there are individual personality factors that make individuals more or less susceptible to the prejudices of the group.[21]

Where does *scripture* appear in this system? I would suggest that it plays a role in both the second and third components. In relation to group dynamics, scripture may indeed reflect attitudes and prejudices that are part of the group's identity formation, but an even more significant factor is how the group interprets and uses its scriptures within its current situation. The group may exploit and emphasize conflict or find interpretive strategies to diffuse or control aggression.

These intensifying or mitigating strategies are part of Ostow's third component—they are structures that serve to transmit and preserve prejudice or to limit and mitigate hostility and conflict. The essays in the present volume fall within this category as well; the writers contributing to the present volume seek to guide the understanding of sacred texts in a direction that will not support or engender violence. Yet we must ever recognize that there are far more powerful dynamics at work than academic argumentation.

I believe Ostow's fourth component—individual personality factors—holds a significant key to the overall question of the relationship of scripture and violence. For all that we can talk about the historical context and development of a sacred text or tradition in its pre-scriptural phase, or about its literary, symbolic, ideological, or even psychological significance in a post-scriptural way, ultimately the destructive power of scripture is unfolded in the individual—in relationships with the text, the community, and one's self. Is there something we can point to in the individual psyche which might help us to understand how scripture

21. Mortimer Ostow, *Myth and Madness: The Psychodynamics of Antisemitism* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996).

functions, why human beings seem to have a need to scripturalize, and why the same scriptures are read to justify or to subvert violence?

The Psychodynamics of Religious Violence

In his book *Terror and Transformation*, an exploration of the ambiguity of religion, James W. Jones reminds us:

> Any and all experience, from which any and all claims to knowledge derive, inevitably has a mediated, psychological dimension. The experience is shaped by the cognitive structures we bring to it and our personal, psychological history has inclined us to be attracted by some elements of our experience and to repress others.[22]

Jones identifies a dynamic that lies at the root of religious experience: the psychological processes of idealization, splitting, and projection, as described by Kohut, Fairbairn, and Winnicott and their followers. These processes may prove creative or destructive. Briefly put, in the early stages of development, an infant does not have the perspective, experience, or personality strength to deal with the unpredictability inherent in human beings. In order to preserve a sense of narcissistic control, the child forms idealized perceptions of itself and the mother (self-objects). The child engages in a process of splitting "good" aspects from "bad" ones, adding the "good" to the idealized parent image and projecting the "bad" elsewhere—notably on him- or herself. In this way, an internal, psychological dynamic of the perfect other and the bad self is created and reinforced.

These processes of idealization, splitting, and projection remain a part of us throughout our lives. For an infant, this mechanism is necessary for survival and is a normal part of personality formation. Over time, however, the messiness of lived reality rises up to challenge our "pure" idealizations, and individuals are pushed to develop the capacity to deal with ambiguity, imperfection, and "shades of grey."

For many people this process of development is interrupted for one reason or another, and they fail to develop a capacity for dealing with ambiguity. Immature in their dealing with the world, they continue to rely on splitting and over-idealization for survival. Many such people, Jones suggests, are drawn toward more authoritarian and rigid religious groups that sustain and perpetuate these strategies.

Jones develops these points in more detail in *Blood that Cries Out from the Earth*, and explicitly names scripture as one potential object of

22. James W. Jones, *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002).

this destructive idealization. "In the case of religiously motivated terrorism," he writes, "that idealized object can be a divine being, *a sacred text* or set of beliefs, a holy institution, or a revered teacher or leader."[23]

Studies of religious violence have suggested several common aspects that Jones believes stand out for clinical psychology: shame and humiliation, apocalyptic division of good and evil, judgmental God-images, a drive for purification, and authoritarian submission and isolation from outsiders. Refining his estimation of the relationship of idealization to religious violence, he suggests that idealization in itself is not the issue. Rather, it is an idealization that carries with it shame and humiliation. An angry and judgmental God or a reading of a sacred text that emphasizes condemnation and shame can fan the flames of religious violence. Jones explains:

> By demanding submission to a deity, text, institution, group, or teacher that is experienced as wrathful, punitive, or rejecting, religions inevitably evoke or increase feelings of shame and humiliation that are major psychological causes of violent actions. By continually holding before the devotee an overly idealized institution, book, or leader, religions set up the psychodynamic basis for splitting and bifurcating experience. By teaching devotees that some groups are inferior, evil, satanic, or condemned by God, religions encourage the demonizing of others and their social death, making their slaughter seem inconsequential, justified, or even required. For these reasons any turn to violence is not accidental but is rather close to the heart of much of the religious life.[24]

Jones is not, with Avalos, ready to declare that religion is inherently or necessarily violent. He acknowledges that "religion is not only about the search for meaning and value, but that religion is also a container for aggression, self-hatred, sacrifice, and various anxieties,"[25] but the latter fact does not automatically trump the former. Research does not uncover any inherent correlations between religion and authoritarianism. As Juergensmeyer remarks,

> [R]eligion is not innocent. But it does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances—political, social, and ideological—when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change.[26]

23. James W. Jones, *Blood that Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11 (emphasis added).
24. Ibid., 157.
25. Ibid., 142.
26. Juergensmeyer, *Terror*, 10. Sharon Erikson Nepstad notes ("Religion, Violence, and Peacemaking," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 [2004]:

Idealization, Splitting, Projection, and Scripture

I believe it is fair to say that idealization plays a significant role in the psychology of scripturalization and the phenomenon of scripture. Why is this text different from all other texts? Because somehow it has connected to my deepest sense of the numinous Other, because I have a sense of connection through this text with something that is transcendent and bigger than myself. If I accord it authority, if I listen when it speaks to me (or when I hear the transcendent speaking to me through it), then it is *scripture.*

Does that then mean that scripture is by definition perfect, unchallengeable, authoritarian? Are we compelled to agree with Avalos's assertion that scripture by its very nature creates conflict by claiming a monopoly on truth? Or must we join Nelson-Pallmeyer in insisting on scare quotes around the word "sacred" when we speak of "sacred texts"? Or is there a way that we can genuinely engage the texts which involves both our critical capacities and our sense of conversing with the sacred and numinous?[27]

What are we to do in response to the destructive power of religion? It is not enough simply to acknowledge and describe the many violent ways of reading and interpreting sacred texts that foment the destructive power of religion. It is striking to me that so many writers offer suggestions that address precisely the need to live in a world of ambiguity and uncertainty. Nelson-Pallmeyer calls for a willingness to doubt assertions by or about sacred texts and an acceptance that often our enemies have something very important to teach us.

John Collins writes, "Perhaps the most constructive thing a biblical critic can do toward lessening the contribution of the Bible to violence in the world, is to show that that certitude is an illusion."[28] We must "break

297–301) that the social dynamics that characterize religious violence are also true of those who oppose religious violence. The difference between them is precisely the difference between a stance based in absolutist separation of good and evil and a stance that recognizes the ambiguity and incompleteness of life: "[R]eligion is not inherently dogmatic, rigid, socially intolerant, and exclusive…when religious teachers and practicioners [*sic*] reject simplistic moral dualism and define themselves as truthseekers rather than truth protectors, then religion can undercut the polarizing dynamics of conflict" (p. 301).

27. I believe this is precisely the kind of engagement that Walter Wink has advocated, an engagement that involves moving from original fusion with the sacred text to a critical distancing and then to a re-engagement at a deeper level. See Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

28. John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence" in Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion*, 11–30 (26).

this tendency to idealize by viewing Paul and his antagonists in a more balanced manner," advises Charles Davis.[29] Mark Adam Elliott argues that we need to "allow for the development or relativization of revelation… The ambiguous form and temporary nature of revelation are often taken quite seriously by groups otherwise strongly committed to biblical revelation."[30]

Recognizing the dynamics of idealization, splitting, and projection at the heart of potentially destructive approaches to religion and to scripture helps us to understand not only that such approaches exist, but something about why they are attractive, why people are drawn to them, why they continue to have power. It also may help us to understand how rational and academic treatments of the destructive power of religion may have little impact.

Cognitive Linguist George Lakoff suggests that one of the myths that hampers politically liberal movements is the belief that if you give people the facts, they will themselves reason to the correct conclusions. While our academic credentials may incline many of us to believe that assertion, our psychological insights would surely remind us that people are moved equally, or even more, by unconscious dynamics—archetypal symbols, personality types, cognitive frameworks, and defense mechanisms. As Lakoff warns, "People do not necessarily vote in their self-interest. They vote their identity. They vote their values. They vote for who they identify with."[31]

Cultures of Violence

Religion and violence have a complicated relationship, and no single perspective can do justice to the multiple factors that contribute to it. It simply is not possible to sustain the argument that "the Bible made me do it." As I have written elsewhere, "It is only in the dynamic encounter between the text and a specific reader, in a specific community, in a particular historical and cultural context that individuals engage, interpret, internalize, and ultimately act on those texts."[32] The Bible originated in

29. Charles T. Davis III, "The Evolution of a Pauline Toxic Text," in Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion*, 191–206 (205).

30. Mark Adam Elliott, "Retribution and Agency in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Teaching of Jesus," in Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion*, 207–31 (228–29).

31. George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2004), 19.

32. D. Andrew Kille, "'The Bible Made Me Do It': Text, Interpretation and Violence," in Ellens, ed., *The Destructive Power of Religion*, 8–24 (56).

human cultures in which violence was a reality, and the need to express, channel, and control violence within the culture has left its marks on the text, as Nelson-Pallmeyer so vividly argues. Further, as the Bible became sacred text, became *scripture*, it functioned (and continues to function) as a culturally accepted and authoritatively interpreted guide for shaping attitudes and legitimizing or marginalizing behaviors that can be aggressive or pacific, divisive or unifying. How we interpret the text will emerge not only from the words on the page, but from the interaction of our own need for identity and belonging, the traditions, attitudes, and behavioral standards and expectations of our social group, and our own personalities.

The Bible is deeply connected to cultures of violence; hence the subtitle of the current collection, *The Bible and Cultures of Violence in Psychological Perspective*. The book is divided into two parts: in the first, "Cultures of Violence in the Bible," the authors explore how violence may have shaped the biblical text, how it is expressed within the text, and what we are to make of violence as interpreters of the text. In "Childhood and the Myth of Adam's Fall," Benjamin Abelow suggests that the story of Adam and Eve in Gen 3 may have emerged out of the childhood experience of physical punishment for wrongdoing. Daniel Terry's "With the Jawbone of a Donkey" examines the connection between shame and violence with reference to the story of Samson in the book of Judges. Dan Merkur also picks up on the Samson narrative, along with tales of the "sons of the prophets," Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Samuel, and others, to describe a particular psychological state he names "Biblical Terrorism." Finally, Michael Willett Newheart explores "The Transgression of Aggression"—how the aggression of an interpreter might be evoked by the aggression implicit in the Gospel of John, and what to do about it.

Part II, "The Bible Within Cultures of Violence," leads us to consider how the Bible is used in violent settings to justify and sanction violent acts. Ronald Clark's "Submit or Else!" turns to the issue of partner abuse, and how biblical admonitions against divorce and in favor of spousal submission are used to defend violent behavior. Carol Klose Smith and Darcie Davis-Gage extend the focus to violence against women generally, bringing a feminist perspective to bear in "The Quiet Storm."

What happens when people in the Bible kill, often invoking the name of God? Matthias Beier investigates that question in light of the work of Eugen Drewermann, the German theologian and psychologist, in his essay "The Deadly Search for God." Dereck Daschke suggests in "A Destroyer Will Come Against Babylon" that former president George W. Bush's intermingling of politics, religion, and warfare following

September 11, 2001 mirrors the "oracles against the nations" of the Hebrew prophets. And, turning our attention to the imagination of the apocalyptic future, Ron Clark examines the role of psychological transference in the popular Left Behind series in his essay "Sent Ahead or Left Behind?"

More Questions than Answers

How does scripture, taken as scripture, actually work on individuals and communities? What connection is there, if there is a connection, between the text and behavior? Is it a matter of archetypal symbols that stir up unconscious depths and invite the next step on the journey of individuation? Is it a set of rules for behavior that offer rewards for desired behavior and negative reinforcement for wrongdoing? Does it provide cognitive models after which I may pattern my life? How does my own personality serve to filter, bend, or distort my reading of the text?

The questions raised about the relationship of the Bible to cultures of violence cannot be easily answered, nor will any single answer suffice to address them. Still, it is important to make the attempt, and perhaps even more important in today's world where religious conflict seems inevitable and the potential for violence, even extreme violence, so threatening. While I disagree greatly with Avalos's assertion that scripture by its very nature creates conflict, I think we need to take seriously his critique that our academic, ecclesiastical, and liturgical avoidance, re-contextualizing, and re-interpretation may simply reinforce some of the very dynamics that engender and sustain religious violence. It pushes us to acknowledge to what extent we are simply asserting a counter-fundamentalism, an equally unsustainable disdain for "fundamentalists" and others who would dare to read scripture without reference to our sacred categories of history, context, transmission, and tradition.

James Jones observes that "the war on terror is a war of ideas."[33] Although terrorism is an extreme example of the culture of violence, less global but nonetheless destructive manifestations of violence and hostility require our careful consideration. By offering other interpretations, by sustaining societal structures and personal perspectives that honor ambiguity, by challenging authoritarianism and absolutism, we hope to create strong and viable alternatives to cultures of violence.

33. Jones, *Blood*, 158.

Part I

Cultures of Violence in the Bible

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Paradise Lost: Childhood Punishment and the Myth of Adam's Sin*

Benjamin J. Abelow

In reading the Hebrew Scripture's account of Adam and Eve's primordial sin and punishment in the third chapter of Genesis (Gen 3), one is left with the distinct impression that Adam and Eve, who in a sense are the first children of God, provide a mythic portrayal of childhood disobedience and its consequences. In fact, various commentators, formal and informal, have seen in the Genesis account the situation of ordinary children.

For example, Hermann Gunkel, in his classic commentary on Genesis, repeatedly points to images of childhood in Gen 2 and 3: "The first sin was only a child's sin"; "The model [for the biblical portrayal of Adam and Eve]…is clearly the state of children who are not yet ashamed"; "Just as the child who has transgressed its father's commandment flees his look, so the man did not dare appear in God's sight"; "The man is portrayed as an erring child, not as a hardened sinner"; "The sin the man committed is indeed portrayed…as a child's sin."[1] In a similar vein, E. A. Speiser, in his Anchor Bible commentary on Genesis, writes:

> When Adam has been caught in his transparent attempt at evasion, Yahweh speaks to him as a father would to his child: "Where are you?" In this context, it is the same thing as, "And what have you been up to just now?" This simple phrase—a single word in the [Hebrew] original—does the work of volumes. For what [the biblical author]…has thus evoked is the childhood of mankind itself.[2]

* I thank David Brodsky for sharing his expertise on the Pentateuchal laws on children and their Rabbinic interpretation. I thank Phoebe Abelow and Meryl Randman for suggestions that markedly improved the overall quality of the presentation.

1. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997 [originally published in 1901]). Quotes found respectively on pp. 1, 14, 19, 19, 32.

2. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Anchor Bible 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 25.

Other writers have focused more directly on something Gunkel and Speiser leave unstated: the theme of corporal punishment. In the seventeenth century, Samuel Sewall, a colonial magistrate in Massachusetts, described how he beat his four-year-old son for misbehavior. Moments before the beating, Sewall writes, his son "sought to shadow and hide himself from me behind the head of the cradle, which gave me the sorrowful remembrance of Adam's carriage."[3] In the late twentieth century, the German writer Christoph Meckel linked Gen 3 to his own painful childhood:

> For ten days, an unconscionable length of time, my father blessed the palms of his children's outstretched, four-year-old hands with a sharp switch. Seven strokes a day on each hand: that makes one hundred forty strokes and then some. This put an end to the child's innocence. Whatever it was that happened in Paradise involving Adam, Eve, Lilith, the serpent, and the apple…—I know nothing about all that. It was my father who drove me out of Paradise.[4]

These and other writers take for granted the existence of strong thematic parallels between the story of Adam and Eve's sin and the experiences of ordinary children.[5] We ourselves likely do the same. Yet it is precisely because the parallels seem so natural, even obvious, that we must stand in wonder, pondering questions such as these: How did reflections of childhood disobedience and punishment enter into the Genesis account and, through it, emerge as a cornerstone of Judaism and Christianity? Once embedded in the biblical account, why did this particular story provide such a powerful focus and source of resonance for subsequent generations of believers? Why, in this otherwise transparent portrayal of childhood, is the archetypal act of filial disobedience represented as something we do not readily recognize in the situation of children—that is, eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

Such questions form the central focus of this essay. But to address these questions in a meaningful way, we must begin by stepping back from the Gen 3 text and entering into the world of human childhood. For if it is childhood that is portrayed in the text, we must understand, in

3. Linda Pollack, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (London: Fourth Estate, 1987), 183.

4. Quoted in Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990), 3.

5. As another example, Jon D. Levenson ("Genesis," in *The Jewish Study Bible* [ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; New York: Jewish Publication Society/Oxford University Press, 2004], 8–101 [17]) comments: "The primal couple have left the magical garden of their childhood and their innocence…"

some detail, what it is that children have experienced. Only then will we be positioned to grasp fully what the text is saying, and what it might teach us.

This essay has three parts. Part 1 describes the physical punishment of children in ancient Israel and the New Testament world, settings from which emerged crucial traditions pertaining to Adam's sin. Part 2 shifts attention from the external to the internal, focusing on the child's inner, psychological responses to punishment. Part 3 builds on the first two parts to elucidate Gen 3, showing that widespread patterns of childhood physical punishment are reflected in specific and unexpected ways in the Judeo-Christian myth of primal disobedience.

Part 1: Corporal Punishment of Children in the Pentateuch and Beyond

Since time immemorial, parents, and especially fathers, have inculcated obedience in children through corporal punishment. The book of Proverbs, of course, prescribes the rod as part of normal childrearing—for example, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."[6] But the Pentateuch is especially harsh. In the book of Deuteronomy, a male child who is persistently disobedient is subject to death:

> If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, that will not hearken to the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and though they punish him, will not hearken unto them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him and bring him out unto the elders of the city…and all the men of the city shall stone him with stones, that he die… (21:18–21)

According to both Exodus (21:17) and Leviticus (20:9), a person who insults his parents is subject to death. Striking a parent, not surprisingly, also is punishable by death (Exod 21:15).[7] Though by the Rabbinic period these laws were, essentially, rejected through reinterpretation, there is no evidence that the biblical authors themselves intended the

6. Prov 13:24; see also 23:13 and 22:15

7. On the translation of "insults" (which can also be rendered as "curses" or "treats disrespectfully"), see Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 128, comment at 19:14. Deuteronomy specifies a male child (*ben*). Leviticus specifies a man (*ish*)—that is, an adult child. Exodus does not indicate the child's age; the text gives no explicit subject to the verbs "insults" and "hits," but simply gives the male singular form of the verbs; hence the verses are usually translated "He who insults…" and "He who hits…"

laws to be interpreted more loosely than others in the Pentateuch.[8] Thus, modern scholars have often presumed enforcement of these laws in ancient Israel. For example, Carol Meyers writes:

> The extreme penalties attached to legal strictures that aimed at ensuring parental authority…are most likely a function of the critical importance of establishing the household authority of mother and father, especially over adult children. When subsistence resources are scarce, as in early Israel, the exercise of parental authority is even more marked."[9]

In a similar vein, Leo G. Perdue suggests that paternal power in ancient Israel was nearly absolute:

> The primary designation of the household, *bet ʾab*, translates literally as "house of the father," indicating that much of the authority within the extended family was vested in the "father," or head, of the household (*ʾab*), who usually was the grandfather or father… In the household, the authority of the senior male in all areas of family life was considerable… [and included] handling the sale of children when the household was not economically viable, and having, at least for a time, the power of life and death over children and other household members judged in violation of certain laws… Married sons and their families remained under the authority of the head of the household until he died or became incapacitated.[10]

In these biblical injunctions and scholarly comments we find an extremely rigorous child-rearing culture, one that may well have included, in actual practice, capital punishment for offenses such as persistent disobedience. This is the child-rearing culture from which the story of Adam's sin emerged; this is the culture we must consult when examining thematic parallels between childhood and the Gen 3 narrative.[11]

8. The Rabbinic period spanned roughly from the first through sixth centuries C.E. The Mishna, which was edited in the early third century C.E., interpretively limits Deut 21:18–21 practically out of existence, and does much the same for the other cited passages from the Pentateuch.

9. Carol Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel* (ed. Leo G. Perdue et al.; Louisville. Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1–47 (31).

10. Leo G. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions," in Perdue et al., eds., *Families in Ancient Israel*, 163–222 (180).

11. Most scholars would date the Exodus injunctions as closest chronologically to Gen 3, with the Deuteronomic and Levitical injunctions coming somewhat later. In the context of the documentary hypothesis, Gen 3 and the Exodus injunctions are said to come from the two earliest sources, J and E, respectively. Though none of the injunctions may fully overlap in provenance with Gen 3, the injunctions as a group provide strong evidence of an enduring culture of rigorous childhood discipline in ancient Israel—one that can reasonably be extrapolated to the Gen 3 compositional context. In fact, there is soft evidence that childrearing norms associated with Gen 3 may have been even harsher than that expressed in the Deuteronomic injunction,

But we cannot stop there, for the myth of Adam's sin, while playing a significant role in later Judaism, became even more central to Christianity. Whereas in Judaism Adam's sin has served as a prototype and paradigm for human sin, in Christianity it became seen, much more explicitly, as the actual *source* of human sin.[12] For example, in his Letter to the Romans, often considered the most important theological tract in the New Testament, Paul writes:

> Then as one man's [Adam's] trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's [Jesus'] act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:18–19)

Here, Paul asserts that Adam's sin is the root source of human corruption, which, theologically speaking, makes salvation—and, by implication, the entire structure of Christianity—necessary. Thus, if we wish to understand the cultural setting from which Judeo-Christian ideas about Adam's sin arose and developed, we must examine not only ancient Israel but Paul's world, that is, the cultures of Imperial Rome and Hellenistic Judaism.

Let us first consider the pagan Imperial context, with examples arranged chronologically from the century before to the century after the emergence of Christianity. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.17.25; first century B.C.E.) advocates that parents and teachers "chastise the young with special severity" to shape them for a virtuous life. According to Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), boys could be beaten by fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and teachers. The poet Ovid (43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.) addresses the dawn-goddess Aurora, saying, "You defraud boys of their sleep and hand them over to their teachers, so that their tender hands should suffer savage blows" (*Amores* 1.13.17–18); of course, it was parents, not Aurora, who actually handed over the children. The philosopher and Imperial advisor Seneca (3 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) explained that children are beaten for the same reason that animals are, "so that the pain overcomes their obstinacy" (*De Constantia Sapientis* 12.3). The poet Martial (40–103 C.E.)

which at least did not authorize the father unilaterally to execute the child; see the discussion of Gen 38:24 (also said to be J source) in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 196. For a table of putative documentary sources for the complete Pentateuch, see the appendix in Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit, 1987), 246–60.

12. This Christian understanding may have been built on earlier Jewish texts whose interpretation did not become highly influential in Judaism, especially 2 Esd 7:48: "Adam, what have you done! For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are descendants." See W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary: Genesis* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 34.

complained for comic effect that his sleep was being interrupted by schoolhouse beatings "as loud as that of bronze being beaten on an anvil." The medical authority Galen (130–200 C.E.) states that once children are about one year old they "can be made to obey by the use of blows, threats, reprimands, and admonishments." Quintilian (first century C.E.) provides insight into the terror experienced by these Imperial children, hinting that they frequently lost bowel or bladder control during punishment: "when children are beaten, the pain and fear often have results which it is not pleasant to speak of and which will later be a source of embarrassment" (*Institutio Oratoria* 1.3.16).[13]

Clearly, the physical punishment of children was common in the cultural setting where Christianity developed as a distinct religion, and in which the texts of the New Testament were composed. In fact, the ubiquity of punishment in the Imperial context is indicated in the New Testament itself. The book of Hebrews, probably composed around 65 C.E., asserts that *all* legitimate sons are beaten (12:8). Paul himself speaks to the overall situation of children as follows: even the "heir to an estate," when still a child, "is no better than a slave" (Gal 4:1)—a comment that, given the routine physical punishment of slaves, may itself have had corporal overtones. Jewish sources from the period, both in Palestine and the Diaspora, also make clear that corporal punishment, especially by fathers, was widespread.[14] Much the same can be said of Christian sources from the first four centuries of the Common Era.[15]

13. For *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, see Emiel Eyben, "Fathers and Sons," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (ed. Beryl Rawson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 113–43 (126). For Cicero, see Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147. For Ovid and Seneca, see Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1989), 27–29. For Martial, see Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedemann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1991), 112. For Galen, see Aline Rouselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996 [first English translation, 1988]), 54.

14. See, e.g., Philo (*Special Laws* 2.232, 248) and Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.28). Earlier, Sirach (second century B.C.E.) is especially blunt: "Beat his sides while he is an infant, lest he be hardened and disobey you" (30:12). For a discussion of corporal punishment during the Rabbinic period, see John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1996), 91–93.

15. For a discussion of childhood corporal punishment as prescribed in early Christian writings including Ephesians, Didache, Barnabas, Didascalia, Apostolic Constitutions, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, see O. M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 152–222.

The punishment of children in a patriarchal context has characterized not only ancient Israel, Greco-Roman culture, the Jewish-Hellenistic world, and the early Christian environment—but the West in general (and many other cultures as well). Though a recitation of evidence is beyond the scope of this essay, the basic pattern of patriarchal punishment in the West is well documented from classical Greek times to the modern period.

Part 2: The Inner Realities of Childhood

So far, we have spoken of the *external* realities of childhood—of what has been done *to* children. We turn now to the internal realities of childhood, to the inner, psychological responses of children to physical punishment and threat.

Let us start by considering the obvious fact that when children wish to do something, to follow their own wills, they naturally view the situation from their own perspective. They see their own gratification as vitally important, their own desires as valid, their own actions as a valuable and necessary means to achieve their aims. But the corporal training process impresses on children a new perspective. Children quickly learn that to focus on their own desires and objectives—to the extent that these conflict with the aims of the parents—is a punishable act. As a result, to reduce the frequency of punishment, children begin to internalize the lessons that are being pressed upon them. They come to see their natural desires as culpably willful, their actions as disobedient, their own gratification as being at most of secondary importance, acceptable only when it comports with the parents' objectives.

One way to describe this change is to say that children abandon their own perspective and adopt the perspective of the parents, moving from identification with their own will to identification with the will of the parent. But how does this complex change in perspective and identification occur? To answer this question, it is useful to conceptualize the child's mental operation as involving five related but distinct processes, which we consider in turn:

Disengagement
Adoption
Repudiation
Idealization
Self-Incrimination

Disengagement. By "disengagement" I mean the process by which the child disconnects from or suppresses his or her natural desires and goals. Depending on the rigor and thoroughness of the training regimen, disengagement may be partial or total, but it must occur. If the child does not disengage, he or she will ultimately be holding warring perspectives, the child's own and the parents'. To give a spatial analogy, disengagement creates the necessary space in the child's mind to accommodate the desires and goals of the parents.

Adoption. By "adoption" I mean the process by which the child accepts the parents' desires and goals as his or her own. During this process, the parents' desires and goals (to continue the spatial analogy) enter into the psychic space that was emptied when the child disengaged from his or her natural desires and goals.

It is important to recognize that when children learn discipline, morality, values, ideas, or modes of behavior through the threat of punishment, it is not learning in the usual sense. In fact, it is not "learning" at all, but coercive inculcation—a word that derives from the Latin *calx*, "heel," and whose etymological meaning is to "stamp in" or impress with the heel: to "teach" with the foot, through the use of force. The distinction between learning and coercive inculcation explains why terms such as "disengagement" and "adoption" must be used to describe the child's mental operations. In true learning, the child undergoes a natural, internally driven change of mind. Often, rational argument and empirical evidence play an important role in this process, convincing the child of the inherent falsity of his or her previous position and opening the child's mind to new ways of seeing things. In contrast, during coercive inculcation, the child's previous assumptions, ideas, and values do not change or evolve in response to an inner grasp of their falsity. They are, instead, abandoned out of fear of punishment or loss of love.

To clarify this point, consider the following quotation from the Englishman Joseph Strutt (1765–1844), who describes how he responded to his six-year-old daughter when she misbehaved:

> I took her by the hand into a tent pitched by the side of the house and there I reasoned, and inflicted with my open hand, alternately, till I observed [that] her mind received the warm, kind, pathetic, parental observations I addressed to her.[16]

16. Linda Pollack, *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 164.

Although Strutt believed he was teaching his daughter proper behavior, it is clear that what really occurred was the coercive inculcation of obedience, a crude form of brainwashing. The contradictions inherent in this educational method are particularly apparent in Strutt's description because of the stark juxtaposition of "reason" and "open hand," and the explicit statement that something "warm, kind, [and] pathetic" can be communicated with blows. Yet the same contradictions can be discerned in all cases where the threat of physical force is used to affect a child's outlook and behavior.

Repudiation. In this stage, having now adopted the parents' perspective, children look back, so to speak, on their own disengaged desires and goals and judge them critically. Repudiation is a pejorative process. The previously held desires, goals, actions, and attitudes—all of which had been accepted without thought or question—are now seen by the child as willful, self-centered, disobedient, and prideful. In fact, these judgments are the same ones held by the parent and, in this sense, repudiation is an aspect of the process of adoption. Eventually, the child, grown into an adult, may direct these same critical judgments against the natural perspectives of his or her *own* children. The simple fact that parents throughout history have, generation after generation in an unbroken chain, used physical punishment to inculcate their children with obedience testifies to the durability of the repudiation process.

Idealization. Young children often idealize their parents—seeing them as exceptionally smart, strong, good, and the like. This tendency to idealize provides a number of specific benefits for the child. Among these, idealization motivates the child to interact with the parent in ways that can improve the child's treatment by the parent. This point requires some explanation.

The love that children have for their parents, and the love and affection that parents bestow on their children, are often viewed as wholly natural, automatic, and unconditional. But the reality is more complex. Because children require nurture to survive, and this nurture is not always readily available, evolution and psychology have equipped children with emotional and behavioral strategies to help ensure adequate parental affection and attention. Jennifer Freyd, Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon and an expert in childhood memory, development, and trauma, describes the situation this way:

> Because attachment is of overwhelming significance [to the child], a complex system of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components is operative during the child's development. The system ensures attachment: children love their caregivers, and that love motivates the children to display affection towards their caregivers, which in turn elicits love, nurturing, and protection from the caregivers.[17]

When children idealize their parents, they see them as especially worthy of love, affection, and respect. The children are therefore naturally motivated to act and communicate in ways that increase the likelihood of a benevolent and nurturing parental response. The importance of this process for the child's well-being, even survival, is especially great in situations where the child is subject to parental threat, neglect, or betrayal. Such children, though in desperate need of a strategy to improve their situation, are unable to exert a direct, beneficial influence on parental behavior. For example, they cannot impel their parents through entreaty or coercion to reduce the threat of punishment or neglect. However, these children can *indirectly* improve their situation by adopting a benevolent psychological posture of love and adulation toward the parent, which is likely to be reciprocated to a greater or lesser degree. The benefit that children can obtain through this process can be schematized simply: idealization of the parent → improved attachment between the parent and child → better nurture and protection by the parent.

In contrast, if a parent is hostile or inattentive and the child does *not* idealize the parent, the child may be persistently angry, mistrustful, critical, or resentful. The child might even be strongly inclined to seek retribution against the parent. In all these situations, the child will tend to act and communicate, verbally and non-verbally, in ways that alienate the parent, attenuate the parent–child bond, and heighten conflict with the parent. The risk of corporal punishment and of emotional or physical rejection by the parent is increased. This situation also can be schematized simply: child is persistently angry, critical, or resentful toward the parent → parent responds with defensive or retributive hostility → child receives less nurture and more corporal punishment.

It is important to recognize that, while in *principle*, the child can think and feel one way about the parent yet act another, the practical reality is otherwise. Children, especially young children, lack the sophistication and social skills to persuasively dissimulate their true feelings—which can inadvertently be revealed through subtle shifts in vocal tone, facial expression, and bodily attitude, to say nothing of more overt verbal or

17. Jennifer J. Freyd, *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 71.

physical expressions of hostility. Even adults find it hard to dissimulate deeply felt inner states; young children can find it impossible. As Jennifer Freyd notes, "a young child is ill equipped to manage such a façade."[18] Thus, in situations of potential conflict, to avoid punishment and increase nurture, young children are practically forced to change their *inner perceptions* about the propriety of parental actions. As a practical matter, young children *must* see their parents and their parents' behavior as good and appropriate.

Bessel A. van der Kolk, Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University and an expert on trauma, discusses this same issue from a different perspective:

> People in general, and children in particular, seek increased attachment in the face of external danger. Pain, fear, fatigue, and loss of loved ones and protectors all evoke efforts to attract increased care… When there is no access to ordinary sources of comfort, people may turn to their tormentors. Adults as well as children may develop strong emotional ties with people who intermittently harass, beat, and threaten them. Hostages have put up bail for their captors, expressed a wish to marry them, or had sexual relations with them; abused children often cling to their parents and resist being removed from home; inmates of Nazi prison camps sometimes imitated their captors by sewing together clothing to copy SS uniforms.[19]

The common link among these varied situations is the vulnerability and dependence of the individuals, and the resultant danger of fully experiencing, on a conscious level, internal responses against their tormentors that otherwise would arise spontaneously.

In the early twentieth century, the iconoclast psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi attempted to parse the moment-by-moment experience of children who are physically overwhelmed by adults:

> It is difficult to fathom the behavior and the feelings of children following such acts of violence. Their first impulse would be: rejection, hatred, disgust, forceful resistance. This or something like it would be the immediate reaction, were it [i.e., the child] not paralyzed by tremendous fear. The children feel physically and morally helpless, their personality is still too insufficiently consolidated for them to be able to protest even if only in thought. The overwhelming power and authority of the adults renders them silent; often they are deprived of their senses. Yet that very fear, when it reaches its zenith, forces them automatically to surrender to the will of the aggressor, to anticipate each of his wishes and to submit to them….[20]

18. Ibid., 65.

19. Bassel A. van der Kolk, "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma," *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 12, no. 2 (June 1989): 389–411

20. Sandor Ferenczi (trans. J. M. Mason and M. Loring), "Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child," (originally published in 1932) in Jeffrey Mousaiff

The writings of Freyd, van der Kolk, and Ferenczi help clarify different aspects of the same childhood situation. The picture that emerges has profound implications for the child's developing moral sense, that is, for his or her evolving capacity to judge right and wrong. Consider a child who is physically punished for disobedience. At the start of punishment, the child may believe that the parent is acting unjustly. In fact—to the extent that the child does not initially believe his or her own behavior is improper—this perception of injustice follows almost automatically. Perhaps the child believes that the parents, in giving priority to their own wishes, are acting arbitrarily. Or perhaps the child thinks it wrong for the parent to compel compliance through force. Certainly, most adults would think it wrong for someone to initiate force against *them*. In fact, many would see the initiation of force as the defining feature of immoral and illegal behavior. (In writing here of justice, arbitrariness, and the initiation of force, I do not suggest that children can themselves articulate these concepts with precision. However, I do believe—and anyone who has observed children knows—that even small children have intense and deeply felt, if inchoate, perceptions about the justice and propriety of parental actions.)

And yet, for the child to maintain these morally critical perspectives on the parent—to see the parent as wrong or bad—is unsustainable. If the goal of punishment is to induce submission, the child's refusal to relinquish this moral perspective and submit requires that the parent up the ante, with threats of increasingly intense or sustained violence. This is the meaning of "a battle of wills," and it is a battle that the culture has long taught parents they must not lose. The terse recommendation of the Italian Renaissance writer Giovanni Dominici—"Double the punishment if they deny or excuse their fault or if they do not submit to punishment"[21]—is just one of many comparable examples from the historical literature. Similar advice can be found today in pro-punishment child-rearing books and websites. The passage from Deuteronomy quoted earlier (21:18–21) is merely an extreme version of the same dictum.

Mason, *Assault on the Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Collins, 1984), Appendix C, 283–95 (289). Both Freyd and Ferenczi, in the quoted passages, are referring to childhood sexual abuse. However, their concepts apply well also to the situation of children who experience non-sexual physical assault by parents, because the underlying power-dynamics of violence and vulnerability are similar.

21. Quoted in J. B. Ross, "The Middle-Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century," in *The History of Childhood: The Untold Story of Child Abuse* (ed. Lloyd DeMause; New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 183–228 (214).

According to that passage, a son who refuses to obey should first be punished and then, if he still refuses to submit, should suffer the ultimate escalation of threat—death. The general point is this: the parental threat of physical punishment, and the credible threat of its escalation, by its very nature forces children to obey blindly, and this entails a suppression of their own moral judgments. For children implicitly understand (or learn quickly) that to maintain principled moral judgments can readily lead to resistance, insubordination, punishment, tremendous pain, and a rapid deterioration of their physical safety—even, potentially, to the point of death.

To conclude this discussion of idealization—which has now become, in part, a discussion about the coercive suppression of moral judgment in children—consider this quotation by the psychiatrist Leonard Schengold:

> If the child must turn to the very parent who inflicts abuse and who is felt as bad for relief of the distress that the parent has caused, then the child must break with what has been experienced and out of a desperate need for rescue, must register the parent, *delusionally*, as good… So the bad has to be registered as good. This is a mind-splitting or mind-fragmenting operation.[22]

Here, Schengold suggests that the threat of physical harm by parents can induce a kind of moral insanity in children, literally driving them out of the moral dimension of their minds. This understanding of physical threat and its psycho-moral consequences stands in diametrical opposition to the traditional view of corporal punishment, which for virtually all of history has been thought necessary for fostering and promoting the child's moral sense.

Self-Incrimination. When a child is physically punished, he or she has two options: to see the beating as justified or as unjustified. If the child views the beating as justified, he or she will necessarily see the self as guilty and the parent as innocent. If the child views the beating as unjustified, he or she will necessarily see the self as innocent and the parent as guilty. The former perspective, while humiliating, is relatively safe and free of risk. In contrast, as we have seen, the latter perspective is dangerous, and there are tremendous pressures operating against it. From the child's perspective, blaming the self, while not a desirable option, is the only action that is compatible with a state of dependence and vulnerability. The child *cannot* blame the parent so the child *must* blame the self. As a result, almost automatically, whenever a child is corporally

22. Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (New York: Ballantine, 1991), 26 (italics in original).

punished by the parent, the child comes to see the self as bad and guilty. As Bessel van der Kolk explains,

> When the persons who are supposed to be the sources of safety and nurturance become simultaneously the sources of danger against which protection is needed, children maneuver to re-establish some sense of safety. Instead of turning on their caregivers and thereby losing hope for protection, they blame themselves. They become fearfully and hungrily attached and anxiously obedient.[23]

Notice here that the child's sense of guilt does not arise because the child believes he or she has acted wrongly. The guilt arises for purely psychological reasons having to do only with the child's state of dependence and vulnerability, and the child's resulting inability to oppose the parent. Notice, too, that the guilt arises irrespective of whether there is a legitimate reason for feeling guilty. Finally, notice that the intensity of the child's guilt does not depend primarily on the nature of the infraction. Instead, the intensity depends on the severity of the punishment itself. This is the case because, the harsher the punishment, the more guilt the child must accept on the self if the parent is to remain blameless.

Van der Kolk is not alone in noting links between coercion, obedience, and guilt. The psychologist Alice Miller writes that the physically punished child, "would like to shout out its anger, give voice to its feeling of outrage… But that is exactly what it may not do… [T]he healthy impulse to protest against inhumanity has to be suppressed… What remains is a feeling of its own guilt, rather than outrage."[24] The Harvard psychiatrist and trauma expert Judith Herman has expressed a somewhat similar perspective:

> Self-blame is congruent with the normal forms of thought of early childhood, in which the self is taken as the reference point for all events. It is congruent with the thought process of traumatized people of all ages, who search for faults in their own behavior in an effort to make sense out of what has happened to them. In the environment of chronic abuse, however, neither time nor experience provide any corrective for this tendency toward self-blame; rather, it is continually reinforced.[25]

23. Van der Kolk, "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma," 392.

24. Alice Miller, *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 129–30. Elsewhere Miller makes a similar point: "children tend to blame themselves for their parents' cruelty and to absolve the parents, whom they invariably love, of all responsibility"; see Alice Miller, *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 169.

25. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 103.

Let me end this part of the presentation with a clarification. Some of the above-quoted passages use the term "abuse." In citing these passages, I do not mean to suggest that one must apply this emotionally laden and arguably culture-bound formulation to historical situations of physical punishment. Neither must one accept the view that physical punishment is, by its very nature, a form of "abuse"—a term that commonly bears some connotation of malicious ill-intent by the person carrying out the action. Clearly, such ill-intent has by no means always been present in situations of corporal punishment. In fact, there is ample evidence that in many circumstances parents have punished children in the belief that doing so was beneficial or even necessary for the child's well-being. Thus, I do not mean to equate corporal punishment with "abuse." However, I *do* mean to suggest that, whether it occurs in the context of parental ill-intent or good-intent, physical punishment has fundamentally similar effects on the child. Almost inevitably, physical punishment produces in the child specific and destructive psychological pressures, motivations, and consequences. The above-quoted passages provide penetrating insight into these harmful effects.

Part 3: Adam's Sin in the Context of Childhood

If children come to believe, through the mind-twisting process of self-incrimination just described, that they are guilty, what is the nature or quality of the guilt they experience? A great diversity of "offenses" may lead to punishment, but there is a single, unifying feature that defines an action as punishable: it willfully contravenes the parents' wishes or stated rules. That is, *disobedience*, and especially willful disobedience, is what leads to punishment. As a result, when children, in response to physical punishment, come to see themselves as guilty, they experience the guilt as arising from *a tendency towards willful disobedience*.

This fact points to a remarkable set of overlaps or parallels between the psychological experiences of the child and those of the religious believer—for the Judeo-Christian concept of sin, like the quintessential "sin" of childhood, is centered on disobedience. Observe that in both Judaism and Christianity, as in childhood, disobedience leads to punishment and obedience obviates punishment.[26] These thematic parallels or

26. Though the punishment is understood somewhat differently in Judaism and Christianity. In Judaism, the punishment is primarily collective and this-worldly, especially the destruction and expulsion of the people Israel. In contrast, in Christianity the punishment is primarily individual and other-worldly, especially punishment in hell.

overlaps with childhood help explain why the concept of sin has been so believable, so resonant. Sin portrays, in mythic form, the time-immemorial punitive experiences of children, and it epitomizes the sense of guilt, which is rooted in an awareness of one's willfulness, that emerges from these experiences. Because corporal punishment has been the cultural norm, the biblical conception of sin has tended to "make sense" subliminally and thus to engage powerful childhood emotions.

These considerations may be particularly relevant to Christianity. Observe that for most of Western history, by both tradition and law, the father has been the ultimate authority and punisher within the family. Thus, one would expect that punishment-induced guilt from childhood would be experienced primarily with respect to the father. It is therefore striking that the Christian concept of sin (especially as taught by Paul) is specifically one of willful disobedience to a divine Father. The precision of this parallel with the realities of childhood suggests that Christianity would engender particularly strong childhood resonances. To frame the point in psychoanalytic terms, the Christian concept of sin appears to be an especially well-suited vehicle for experiencing emotional transferences arising from childhood punishment. Further, the precision of this parallel raises the distinct possibility that Christian teachings about sin were deeply shaped by, or even arose in response to, cultural patterns of paternal coercion and violence.[27] Given the exceptionally explicit patriarchy of the early Roman Empire—which provided the most immediate formative environment for the writings of the New Testament—it seems reasonable to suggest that Christian concepts of sin and punishment arose as an evolutionary refinement of the somewhat more generic portrayals of sin within Judaism. In fact, I would suggest that the Jewish concept of sin-as-disobedience was itself deeply shaped by patterns of punishment in the ancient Jewish world.

These ideas are relevant to Gen 3, which on the level of narrative myth embeds overt thematic parallels with childhood. To summarize some of these parallels: Adam and Eve are child-like, exemplified by their innocence, nakedness, and lack of shame; they disobey a father-like God;

27. For additional arguments relevant to this point, see Benjamin J. Abelow, "Religious Behavior as a Reflection of Childhood Corporal Punishment," in *The Biology of Religious Behavior: The Evolutionary Origins of Faith and Religion* (ed. Jay R. Feierman; New York: Praeger, 2009), 89–105, and "What the History of Childhood Reveals About New Testament Origins and the Psychology of Christian Belief," *CSER Review* 2 (2007): 11–16. For a different formulation of fundamentally similar concepts, see Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 50–56.

their manner of disobedience is naïve and child-like; Adam responds to God's call as children might, by hiding; Adam and Eve are punished for their disobedience, as are children. When believers who were reared with traditional modes of discipline encounter teachings about Adam's sin, they experience powerful resonances. When these believers learn that, according to Christian teaching, humans are tainted with the Sin of Adam—the primal Sin of disobedience to the Father—they sense subliminally, from their own childhood experiences and emotions, that the teaching portrays reality. For these reasons, I suggest, the Gen 3 narrative has tended to be affecting and believable.

As with the concept of sin itself, these narrative parallels with childhood likely help explain not only the cultural resonance of the Gen 3 story, but its origins. The thematic parallels between Gen 3 and the experiences of ordinary children are precise and therefore, I suggest, are not likely to have arisen by chance. The simplest explanation is that the Bible's primordial myth of sin and punishment was fundamentally shaped by the situation of children in the culture from which the myth emerged, that is, the culture of ancient Israel.

This shaping process could have occurred through several possible mechanisms. First, the author of Gen 3, or of its underlying oral tradition, could have deliberately portrayed themes from childhood. Second, the author might have naturally but without conscious awareness portrayed these themes. Third, a perceived divine revelation or even a simple dream could have been the source of childhood symbolism in the story. It is not uncommon for dreams to symbolically portray salient themes from waking reality. For an author reared in the culture of ancient Israel, themes of childhood disobedience and punishment certainly would have been salient. The author might have used this unconsciously generated symbolic material in the creation of the story. Fourth, Gen 3's parallels with childhood might have developed gradually, in evolutionary fashion, during the oral transmission of the story. The parallels could have emerged—to apply Darwinian terms—through a process analogous to "natural selection." During this process, emotional resonances from childhood could have provided the "selective pressure" that led to the emergence and preservation of particular traditions. Any of these four mechanisms, or any combination of them, could account for childhood parallels in Gen 3. Other mechanisms are also possible. Note that these mechanisms can account for either the production of a new narrative, or for the symbolic modification of an existing narrative, including one with roots in another culture.

Leaving aside the question of which mechanism or mechanisms might have been involved, the overall thesis that Gen 3 was deeply shaped by patterns of mundane childhood experience is not new. For example, as we have seen, Hermann Gunkel in his Genesis commentary holds that the biblical narrator chose to "portray" and "model" aspects of Gen 3 on the situation of children.[28] E. A. Speiser, in the passage quoted earlier, writes that the biblical author has "evoked" the "childhood of mankind itself." The precise intention here is less clear than in Gunkel, but Speiser may also be asserting that the biblical text was patterned on actual childhood norms. More generally, it is taken for granted in biblical scholarship that social context—that is, the patterns of ordinary human interaction in the culture from which a religious tradition arises—can shape a religious text in fundamental ways. Genesis 3, I suggest, provides a striking, specific example of this kind of influence.

Let us now step back for a moment from Gen 3 and again focus on more general overlaps between the psychological experiences of believers and those of children. I noted previously that when a parent threatens physical punishment for disobedience, the child can view the threat as either justified or unjustified.[29] As I described, when the child views the threat as justified, he or she can continue to see the parent as good and loving. In contrast, if the child views the threat as unjustified, the child undermines his or her positive valuation of the parent and now sees the parents' threat, or even the parents themselves, as bad, evil, or persecutory. I also described how, even if the threat is initially viewed as unjust, the child cannot readily maintain a conscious image of the parent as bad, for doing so can lead the vulnerable and dependent child into an unsustainable stance of direct opposition to the parent.

Believers, especially Christian believers, are in a similar situation.[30] Like children, believers are at risk of punishment for disobedience—that is, divine punishment for the disobedience of Adam. Like children,

28. See the quotes from Gunkel at the beginning of this essay. On the deliberateness of the narrator's decision, see Gunkel, *Genesis*, 14: "The narrator intends to present…"

29. Actually, I discussed the child's responses to punishment itself, not to the *threat* of punishment, but the point is the same.

30. In the Jewish context, the punishable disobedience is not that of child-like Adam, but of the individual Jew or the Jewish people as a whole. Also, in the Hebrew scriptures, and in Judaism in general, the potentially punishing God is less specifically (or singularly) a Father than in the New Testament. For these reasons, theological parallels with childhood are in Judaism somewhat less precise and ramified. Thus, aspects of my argument are most directly relevant to Christian believers, though many points apply also to Jewish believers to a greater or lesser extent.

believers must obey the will of the Father if they hope to avoid punishment. Like children, believers do not make the rules governing punishment and cannot escape from them. Like children, believers know that, while obedience may be essential if one is to avoid punishment, the Father's decision to punish is his alone and is not constrained by the believer's actions. As a result, believers, like children, understand that freedom from punishment ultimately depends on "grace"—that is, the unilateral, unearned gift of the Father. Like children, believers can view the Father as just or unjust, righteous or persecutory. Like children, few believers can sustain a mental image of the Father as unjust or persecutory.

There are practical reasons for this last fact, the inability of the believer to sustain a negative Paternal image. These reasons themselves parallel the pressures leading to idealization in childhood. For example, if the believer views the Father's threat of punishment as unjust, he or she will resent God and tend to rebel against him. Yet rebellion was the sin of Adam and is the reason the believer is at risk in the first place; additional rebellion would only add to the believer's troubles. Even to *think* that God's actions are unjust is to put oneself at risk, because no thought is unknown to the Father. The situation of the child, who cannot effectively dissimulate his or her true feelings, is almost identical: for the child who cannot conceal inner states and perceptions, the parent is in effect omniscient.

Beyond these practical reasons, the believer is not likely to see the Father as unjust because the believer already sees himself or herself as sinful. As discussed earlier, a child reared with corporal punishment will almost necessarily develop, for purely psychological reasons, a profound sense of guilt. As the child grows and is taught religious concepts, his or her sense of childhood psychological guilt merges with and is experienced as sin. The deep emotions of childhood are psychologically assimilated to the theological context. This transformation in the individual's experience of guilt occurs readily because the guilt, in both childhood and the religious context, is fundamentally the same: a sense of personal culpability or "badness" associated with an awareness of one's tendency toward willfulness, especially with respect to the father/Father. Once this transformation occurs, the believer will feel that punishment by God, the Father, is just. For if one views oneself as guilty, the threat of punishment will be experienced as righteous retribution, not persecution. Such is the perspective of both the child vis-à-vis the natural father and the believer vis-à-vis the heavenly Father.

These same points can be made differently. A child who is beaten will develop a conviction of personal guilt. The child will internally incriminate the self and justify the father. As the child grows, he or she will project or "map" childhood experiences, thought processes, and emotions onto the religious realm, thus forming an image of a heavenly Father that corresponds to the image of the natural father. Once this divine image is formed, the child-now-adult will relate to this Paternal image in much the same way that he or she related to the natural father early in life. If as a young child an individual sees the self as guilty and deserving of punishment, so will the believer, as an adult, tend to attribute to the self theological sin and see this sin as worthy of Paternal punishment. Thus, I suggest, the believer's image of the divine Father, like the child's image of the human father, is an *idealized* image. God and His punishment is Just, the believer is sinful and worthy of punishment—never the reverse.

Put yet another way, the believer does not and, for very practical reasons, *must* not form independent moral judgments about the activities of the heavenly Father—just as the human child does not, and *must* not, pass independent moral judgment on the natural father. This suppression of moral judgment is an essential feature of idealization, for to idealize is to judge everything as good, whereas to pass moral judgment is to discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong. A child who uses independent moral judgment, who applies to the parent the categories of right and wrong, is *by definition* no longer idealizing the parent. A child who judges the parent or the parent's actions negatively, as morally wrong or evil, and communicates that judgment either explicitly or implicitly, engages in the most blatant impudence imaginable. As we have seen, such insubordination is proscribed and punished with utmost severity.

And this leads us back to Gen 3, for the situation of ordinary children—whose free moral judgment *must* be suppressed—finds remarkably precise expression in the Garden narrative. The disobedience of Adam and Eve took a specific form: eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. To eat something is to internalize it, to acquire it in the deepest sense, to make it part of oneself. To acquire the "knowledge of good and evil" means to become a person who distinguishes right from wrong—that is, a person who exerts independent moral judgment. As we have seen, this is precisely what the child must *not* become, for to exercise moral judgment can lead to insubordination and punishment. To exercise moral judgment is to create an internal standard that guides one's perceptions and actions. Such a standard is utterly incompatible with blind obedience to the parent—yet blind obedience is *exactly* what is required.

The singular prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil can now be understood as a precise symbolic expression about the situation of children, for children *must not eat that fruit.* The violation of the prohibition by Adam and Eve, the primordial children, depicts what has happened, time immemorial, when actual children have attempted to exercise free moral judgment: they have been punished. The particular designation of the forbidden tree ("of knowledge of good and evil") thus provides a highly specific symbolic focus to the story of childhood disobedience and punishment that is portrayed in Gen 3 as a whole.

Notice, too, that the story as a whole and the image of forbidden fruit portray two different aspects of the child's experience. The story as a whole symbolically portrays the *external* situation of children, for when children disobey they are punished. The element of forbidden fruit symbolically portrays the *internal* psychological and moral situation of corporally punished children, for these children are compelled to idealize the parent and are effectively proscribed from exercising independent moral judgment.[31]

Let us go one step further in analyzing the image of the forbidden fruit. We previously considered verses from the Pentateuch which showed that children in ancient Israel may have risked death if they were insubordinate or persistently disobedient. Such children could not dare to form independent judgments about the propriety of their treatment. These children were absolutely forbidden, at risk of death, to "eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Notice that the risk of death itself appears in the Genesis story: "From every tree of the garden you may eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for on the day you eat of it *you will surely die*" (2:17). Here in Genesis we may be observing, as narrative myth, reflections of an actual historical situation that confronted children in the culture: the fact that forming independent moral judgments could lead to death. Put differently, Gen 2:17 may well be portraying as symbolic narrative the very

31. I earlier raised the possibility that unconscious processes, possibly including dreaming, might provide the ultimate source of the childhood parallels in Gen 3. It is perhaps thus worth noting that the image of forbidden fruit is just the kind of rich, complex, and precise symbolic image that one sometimes finds in dreams.

The childhood inculcation of blind obedience, and the suppression of an internal moral standard which is entailed by this inculcation, has implications that extend far beyond the realm of religion. For example, this suppression may lie at the root of the obedience to authority observed in the experiments of Stanley Milgram, and during the Hitler era. For penetrating discussions of this general topic, see Miller, *For Your Own Good*, and Morton Schatzman, *Soul Murder: Persecution in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1973).

same historical reality that is expressed as legal injunction in Deut 21:18–21.

Notice that this understanding of the source and ultimate meaning of the text makes sense of the otherwise problematic fact that eating the forbidden fruit does not prove lethal to Adam and Eve, and certainly not on the day that they eat it. Read as a simple narrative, God's assertion of the fruit's lethality in Gen 2:17 cannot be reconciled with the survival of Adam and Eve. On a basic level, the story loses coherence.[32] But when Gen 3 is understood in its social-historical context of childhood, and the story itself is understood as a symbolic narrative that reflects that context, the difficulty is resolved.

Conclusion

The situation portrayed in Gen 3 applies, to one degree or another, to virtually all children who have been reared with corporal punishment. These children at first may have angrily protested their punishment, seeing it as an evil, an injustice. But they quickly learned that this reaction was unacceptable. These children were taught, often with stark brutality and overwhelming force, that moral judgment of the father is taboo, that moral judgment itself must be considered a monopoly of the parents.[33] The unconscious mind grasps symbolic meanings that the conscious mind cannot readily identify. This innate symbolic capacity helps explain how the myth of Adam's sin arose historically and why for countless generations it has resonated so powerfully in the Western consciousness.

The thesis that Gen 3 was fundamentally shaped as symbolic myth in response to the situation of physically punished children provides a single, parsimonious explanation for several striking aspects of the story. It provides a level of narrative coherence and contextual reference that is difficult to attain otherwise. Specifically, it explains broad parallels, in the story as a whole, with the child's (external) experiences of disobedience and punishment. It explains specific parallels, in the image of forbidden fruit, with the child's (internal) psychological and moral situation. And it renders meaningful the divine assertion that the fruit is lethal, by showing that this assertion, when understood psychologically as symbolic myth, may have been literally true in the historical context from which the myth emerged.

32. The view that the biblical author is in Gen 2:17 explaining the origins of human mortality in general is contradicted by the text itself. First, as discussed, the death in question is explicitly immediate ("on the day"); second, Gen 3:22 clearly implies that Adam and Eve are already mortal, apparently by nature.

33. This monopoly is itself reflected in the story. See Gen 3:5 and 3:22.

More generally, in the course of this exploration, we uncovered a set of remarkable overlaps between the experienced realities of corporally punished children and those of religious believers. This degree of overlap is unlikely to have arisen by chance. Instead, the overlap suggests that major elements of religious teaching and myth, including foundational concepts of religious sin, may have arisen as reflections of mundane childhood experiences of parental coercion and violence. Further, these extensive and precise overlaps make it likely—perhaps even inevitable—that the most painful realities of childhood would become psychologically superimposed on and confounded with religious perceptions and experiences.

With the Jawbone of a Donkey: Shame, Violence and Punishment in the Samson Narrative

Daniel J. Terry

In an interview with a violent inmate known only as "Chester," prison psychiatrist James Gilligan asked: "What do you want so badly that you would sacrifice everything else in order to get it?" The usually inarticulate Chester rose to his feet and coherently replied, "Pride. Dignity. Self-esteem… And I'll kill every [person] in that cell block if I have to in order to get it! My life ain't worth nothing if I take somebody disrespectin' me and calling me [names] and going Ha! Ha! at me. Life ain't worth living if there ain't nothin' worth dyin' for."[1]

In his 1996 book, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, James Gilligan offers a theory on the origin of violent behavior based on his interviews with criminally violent males.[2] According to Gilligan, much of what appears to be anomalous or inexplicable regarding violent behavior is actually predictable and understandable given a certain set of conditions. The primary condition is that the individual must feel that the survival of their self is in jeopardy. Individuals intuit that a threat to the soul or self is far greater than a threat to the body; indeed, people will readily lay down their lives when they feel who they are is at stake. For many, the sacrificing of their body is a small price to pay in order to "save face." The priority humans place on honor and self-respect over physical comfort is, according to Gilligan, humanity's most unique and potentially dangerous attribute.

Gilligan views violence as a public health issue, with shame acting as the pathogen of this preventable disease. In his discussions with violent men, Gilligan simply asked them why they committed the acts they did. In subtle and overt ways, the men spoke about the feeling of shame as

1. James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 106.

2. Ibid. The bulk of my summation is from Chapter 5, "Shame: The Emotions and Morality of Violence."

the motivating factor.[3] Repeatedly, they attribute assaulting others to feeling disrespected or humiliated by them. Gilligan assesses that for these men violence represents an attempt to mitigate the shame they feel by replacing the feeling of shame with its opposite—pride. Violence toward others is an attempt to secure dignity and honor for oneself by physical force, and to gain these things from those in whose eyes the perpetrator feels shame.

Often, those who are violent feel an acute degree of shame over feeling shame in the first place. Gilligan puts it this way: "[T]hey feel ashamed—deeply ashamed, chronically ashamed, acutely ashamed, over matters that are so trivial that their very triviality makes it even more shameful to feel ashamed about them, so that they are ashamed even to reveal what shames them."[4] For such men, a self-assured persona of bravado or cool indifference is a way to compensate for the inner depletion they feel. This persona garners the respect and deference of others through toughness, thereby propping up their fragile sense of self. But when others do not mirror respect back to them, rage often results and violence ensues, often out of the most trivial of circumstances.

Ironically, those who commit violent acts demonstrate an unusually strong wish to be loved and taken care of.[5] This is coupled with strong feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Often there is a strong desire for intimacy with others and an inability to achieve it. Because of shame, one intuits the need for nurture and yet paradoxically is not free to seek it, for to do so one would have to be "needy" and to be needy is to be confronted with the shame of dependency.

I propose to read the Samson narrative through the lens of Gilligan's shame-based theory of violence in an attempt to account for the violence in the narrative. I bring to this task the hermeneutical principle that all behavior is meaningful and communicative, and is the enactment of purpose or desire. While the characters in the Samson narrative may or may not state the meaning of their actions, those actions nevertheless speak a language all their own. Throughout this text, inner states not expressed in words are revealed through the medium of physical action; that is, action betrays thought in the text. My concern is with who says

3. Gilligan (ibid., 105) states: "Some…do not tell me in words; and many may not understand why they committed the violence that sent them to prison. With them I have had to decode the symbolic language of their violent acts, like a cryptologist, or an anthropologist who tries to decipher the meaning of a bizarre and gruesome ritual. Still, surprisingly many men do tell me, simply and directly."

4. Ibid., 111.

5. Ibid., 131.

and does what in the narrative, believing that this basic inquiry will reveal the Samson narrative to be revelatory regarding basic motivations for criminally violent behavior among males. I contend that throughout the narrative runs an undercurrent of shame, which accounts for the violence therein.

After a brief phenomenological description of shame, I will analyze the Samson narrative in such a way as to reveal the shame-motivated violence therein, thereby demonstrating the interpretive force of Gilligan's theory. After my textual analysis, I will briefly address some implications arising from the catastrophic ending of the narrative; namely, how the suicide/murder enacted by Samson at the end of Judg 16 serves as a cautionary tale regarding the use of shame as a punitive measure against the criminally violent.

Shame: A Brief Phenomenological Description

Shame functions dialectically. It is alternately concerned with both hiddenness and exposure. As it pertains to hiddenness, shame has the function of insuring personal modesty, privacy and propriety. It serves a discretionary function by establishing boundaries against invasive actions that would violate the dignity and integrity of the individual. This point can be traced as far back as Nietzsche.[6] Exposure, on the other hand, carries with it the connotation of visibility, of being the fixture of another's gaze. We might call this "disgrace shame." Disgrace shame concerns the exposure of some discrediting fact, quality or characteristic that, if revealed, would be harmful to the psyche. This type of shame makes plain the intense human desire for protection and privacy from painful self-exposure. One thinks of embarrassment or humiliation in this regard. Feeling ashamed is the experience of self-deficiency accompanied by a painful self-consciousness that generates the need to hide one's true self as a result of perceived failure or powerlessness.

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (trans. Marianne Cowan; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966), section 40, 46–47. In commenting on the place of masks and concealment, Nietzsche writes: "The things of which one is most ashamed are by no means the worst things; not only cunning is found beneath a mask; there is much goodness in guile… Such a concealed one, who instinctively uses speech for silence and withholding, and whose excuses for not communicating are inexhaustible wants and encourages a mask of himself to wander about in the hearts and minds of his friends. And if he doesn't want it, one day his eyes will be opened to the fact that the mask is there anyway, and that it is good so. Every deep thinker needs a mask."

The feelings of insecurity and inferiority generated by shame cause the shamed person to act in ways that reveal a fragile sense of self. One may, for instance, take on a posture of exaggerated self-importance or inflate one's accomplishments in an attempt to subvert feelings of impotence and unworthiness. Such a person often projects a "tough" or self-assured persona. Shame is an intrapsychic phenomenon that arises from "losing face" or social approval. While shame is often triggered by an environmental stimulus, the stimulus serves to reinforce negative self-thoughts that already exist. Shame can also be a group or communal phenomenon, especially among those members of social classes deemed less important in a particular culture. If a particular race or class within a society is systematically degraded, for instance, shame may result individually and collectively.

Violence and the Undercurrent of Shame in the Samson Narrative

In Timnah, outside Israelite territory, Samson sees a Philistine woman who pleases him. His request that his parents "get her for him" presents a problem, of which the parents are well aware; marrying "outside the fold" is far from ideal, especially when there are plenty of candidates within Israel. In their plea to Samson along these lines, his parents use the term "uncircumcised" to describe the Philistines. "The foreskinned ones" may be a better translation, one that reflects accurately Israelite disdain toward their oppressors.[7]

The level of violence in the story is a clue to the underlying group hostility at work. Prolonged exposure to shame in the form of discrimination, minimalization, poverty, and the like, take their toll on the psyche and often result in rage, which easily leads to violence.[8] Studies reveal that self-castigation results not only when the gifts and contributions of groups are ignored, but also (and perhaps especially) when the liabilities and limitations of those groups are held up for exposure.[9]

These facts highlight the importance of recognizing Philistine dominance. Their cultural sophistication and (apparent) psychic and physical mastery of the Israelites is a thread running through the narrative. The

7. Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 204.

8. See Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 157–160; also, Edward Wimberley, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 37–40.

9. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

Philistines dwelt in cities along fertile plains, and enjoyed the advantages of cultivated fields.[10] The people of Samson, on the other hand, dwelt in the hills and paid homage to the elite city-dwellers. In addition, Philistine women demonstrated their cultural sophistication with expensive jewelry, clothing, and cosmetics. The shame of deprivation and oppression for the Israelites was exacerbated by the demonstrations of cultural superiority on the part of the Philistines. Samson's exploits would be the means by which the community's shame would seek to be undone, and replaced with pride. This, the narrator tells us, was the Lord's plan, for "he (the Lord) was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines" (14:4b).[11]

Samson's riddle in Judg 14 is of interest to this discussion. Samson has chosen a Philistine woman to marry, despite the urging of his parents to choose a wife from among the Israelites. At the Philistine version of a bachelor party, Samson propounds a riddle to his thirty Philistine companions. He states that if they give him the correct answer during the course of the seven-day wedding feast then he will give them thirty linen tunics and thirty sets of clothing. On the other hand, if they fail to solve the riddle then they are to give him the same. They agree to this, and invite his riddle. Samson speaks: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something weak" (14:14). The reader knows what Samson's audience does not; prior to the bachelor party Samson encounters a lion and kills the lion with his bare hands. A short time later, he passes by the carcass and eats the honey from a swarm of bees who have taken up residence in the carcass.

Scholarly work abounds as to the possible meaning of this riddle in particular, and the place of the riddle motif generally within folk tales. I would draw the reader's attention, however, not to possible meanings of the riddle, but to its presence in the text in the first place. Why would Samson, why would anyone, propound a riddle to his companions during a bachelor party? Elements worthy of consideration are: (1) the presence of Samson's riddle, which highlights a concern with things private, with concealment and hiddenness; (2) what is at stake in the wager—clothing—further serves to draw our attention to the ideas of hiddenness and disclosure insofar as clothing serves the literal and metaphorical function of coverage; (3) Samson poses a riddle that not even the sharpest audience could solve insofar as the riddle is based on his personal experience.

10. James Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 18.

11. See Schneider, *Judges*, 204. Schneider contends the deity needed to seek a pretext because the Israelites no longer sought relief from their oppression. They neither sought justice through direct confrontation, nor did they cry out to their deity. All textual quotations are taken from the NRSV.

While riddles typically demand ingenuity and creative thought, they are nevertheless grounded in knowledge that is generally accessible. In this case, however, a solution to Samson's riddle depends on information available only to Samson or perhaps an eyewitness to his encounter with the lion (14:6). Further, the Philistine answer to the riddle ("Who is as strong as a lion?") is really no answer at all. Its murkiness only adds to the original deception surrounding the wager.

Samson's riddle represents an attempt to elevate himself in the eyes of cultural elites. His riddle is sophisticated, he thinks, as are (presumably) his companions. Samson believes his bet to be secure for only he knows the answer. This is the adult (though equally immature) version of the childhood taunt, "I know something you don't know!" With his pretentious riddle, Samson momentarily achieves a sort of justice as it pertains to his status in the eyes of the culturally elite. He secures a degree of pride for himself through the hidden and obtuse nature of the riddle, while exposing his companions to the shame of ignorance regarding its answer. In this way, Samson seeks to mitigate the powerlessness of his social position by elevating himself and simultaneously bringing the Philistines down a notch. The dialectic of hiddenness and exposure is further revealed in the stakes of the wager.[12] The winner receives an additional set of clothing (that which covers and hides nakedness), while the loser is forced to give away covering. The wager is curious in another sense as well. Should he lose, Samson will be forced to give away thirty sets of clothes to the Philistines. If the thirty Philistines win, they each will have to give only one set of clothing to Samson. Samson structures the terms of wager in such a way that he bears by far the greater risk. This raises the question: What will Samson do with thirty sets of clothes? How many outfits does one wildman need? If this sounds absurd, it is. Samson's wager is reckless at best. Its grandiosity betrays Samson's immaturity, which is fully revealed when he eventually loses the wager.

But first, the Philistines must save face. They must answer the riddle at any cost, we can surmise, because their response to not knowing its answer is to threaten violence against Samson's new wife: "Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's house" (14:15). Faced with this threat, Samson's wife reveals the secret knowledge needed to solve the riddle. But the threat itself is curious.

12. Literary critic Mieke Bal has an excellent discussion of secrecy as it pertains to Samson's riddle. Her work in this regard helped me tie the emotional dynamics at work in secrecy to the dialectic of shame. See Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 42.

How is it that ignorance regarding a riddle—an objectively benign circumstance—could elicit such a threat? This is the riddle of the riddle.

Feelings of shame are often precipitated by what would appear to be trivial incidents, ones that on the surface appear to be "no big deal." This is the case because one contends not only with the original source of shame (in this case, ignorance regarding a riddle's answer), but the shame one feels that such a minor incident could elicit such a strong reaction in them.[13] The Philistine threat of violence in response to ignorance demonstrates a truth about violence: the triviality of the provocation explains the incongruity of the reaction to it. Indeed, it is the very silliness of the event that makes it so deadly serious. Not knowing the answer to Samson's riddle is only the cause of the Philistine threat in the narrowest sense of the word. Rather, it is their desperate need to "save face," to rescue themselves from the metaphorical death of humiliation, that causes them to threaten one of their own with physical death.[14]

Convinced that her countrymen mean business, Samson's wife convinces him to reveal to her the meaning of the riddle. She then tells her countrymen. They in turn shame Samson with a riddle of their own that takes a jab at Samson's overactive libido. Samson responds, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle" (14:18). Samson's crude response has sexual overtones suggesting suspicions of sexual infidelity on the part of his new wife, though he blames the companions rather than the woman.[15] The "Spirit of the Lord," according to the narrator, then seizes Samson. He promptly kills thirty men, takes their garments, and gives them to those who solved the riddle. Thus, he grudgingly pays off his wager without really losing; that is, he gives his companions their due but not before brutally killing some of their countrymen as a means of securing the clothing he owed. In this way, Samson is able to satisfy his debt and stave off utter humiliation in the eyes of those who exposed the answer to his riddle. The irony here is palpable—the cheaters cheat Samson out of his attempt to cheat them. In "hot anger" he returns to his father's house, and his wife is given to his best man.

This is the second time God "seizes" Samson just before an act of violence, though it is not the last. The first occurs early in Judg 14 when he tears apart a lion after the Spirit comes over him. Future portions of

13. Helen Merrill Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 42.

14. Note the usages of words associated with death when describing a shaming or humiliating experience: "I could have died!" Or, "I was mortified!"

15. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 43.

the narrative also acknowledge divine activity as the impetus for Samson's campaign of violence against the Philistines. How are we to account for this? The attribution of divine sanction for violence fits a pattern noted by criminologist Jack Katz. The typical homicide is an impassioned attempt to sacrifice another for the purpose of achieving the "Good."[16] It is not uncommon for a murderer to attribute an element of righteousness to their cause. It is thought that the balancing of the cosmic scales of justice requires this particular score to be settled. Samson is not violent all the time, but only when he is "seized." Of course, his being seized without exception corresponds to his need to distance himself from feelings of humiliation and shame. Samson does not choose to be seized by the Spirit any more than he chooses the mad rage that results in death for those he finds threatening. He is, on the contrary, acting in accordance with what the Good (or in this case, God) demands. The narrator's attribution of divine sanction leads us to believe that something redemptive is afoot in the narrative, when in fact it is not. In the end, all we are left with is a dead hero. The likely insertion of divine sanction by the narrator serves only to perpetuate the violence of the narrative by turning God into a divine accomplice.[17]

That Samson has rejected his new wife would be a reasonable conclusion in light of his return to his father's house after the murder of the thirty men. But soon enough he returns to his wife (15:1) and expects to find her waiting. The fact that he brings along a young animal as a gift indicates his desire to reconcile. He now appears ready for a relationship. Upon arrival, he finds that she has been given to his companion by her father, who cites Samson's rejection of her as his reason for doing so. The father offers his younger daughter to Samson instead, a not-so-subtle jab at Samson's level of maturity. Samson does not respond to this offer, but only says, "This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame" (15:3). The use of the phrase "this time" suggests a momentary outpouring of guilt for his previous murderous romp, but that what he is about to do will be justified. Samson cannot endure this rejection.

Samson's physical prowess stands in contrast to his inadequacies in the ways of love. Under pressure, his wife reveals his secrets to her countrymen. He is shamed not only by having the integrity of his marriage undermined, but also by the revelation that his riddle was too

16. Jack Katz, *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 12.

17. A point made by Phyllis Trible in a lecture given at Wake Forest University, October 22, 2001.

pretentious.[18] That the riddle is unsolvable without special knowledge reveals Samson's insecurity, which stands in stark contrast to his physical prowess and exploits. Samson's emotional strength is dependent on his ability to conceal his insecurity, and the destruction of this strength occurs through publicity and exposure, as in the case of the riddle. At the moment his lack of emotional strength is revealed, he becomes powerless and loses control. Since he cannot acknowledge the deficiency he feels, he must take by force what he cannot seem to achieve naturally—the respect of others.

Samson performs an act of economic violence upon the Philistines by burning their grain harvest. He then returns to Judah, where he is corralled by his kinsmen and handed over to the Philistines. They cannot afford to harbor a fugitive. Samson submits to this only after his kinsmen promise not to harm him. At the meeting, the Philistines come shouting and conveying their jubilation at the sight of Samson. He cannot bear the scorn of their cries. As the Lord seizes him, he seizes the jawbone of a donkey and with it kills a thousand men.

As the Philistines sought to expose the secret of Samson's riddle, they now seek to expose the secret of his physical strength. Delilah attempts to coax the truth out of him on behalf of the Philistines. This plan makes sense, for while Samson is invulnerable and defensive outwardly, he clearly has a weakness for women. Only in the arms of a woman can he let down his considerable hair. To Delilah Samson reveals what drives him, and what would become of him were his secret exposed. With each attempt to woo him, Samson reveals more of his secret to Delilah.[19] He inches toward self-revelation and vulnerability. Four times (16:7, 11, 13, 17) Samson tells Delilah that were his strength revealed he would "become weak, and be like anyone else." Of course, his repeated attempts to connect intimately with women—three in three chapters—reveal he is already "like anyone else" in his need to be loved.

Samson is convinced that he is special, as is the narrator who reveals to us the remarkable circumstances surrounding his birth (13:2–7). His Nazirite status further demonstrates this. Apparently, it is the terror of normality that drives Samson, and the secret that he is only as special as the dullest razor must be guarded. Samson seems aware of this to some degree; he is at least able to articulate his fear of weakness and being "like anyone else." Samson's narcissism is on full display in those

18. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 46.

19. Susan Niditch, "Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 608–24 (615).

moments when his special status is not mirrored back to him, or worse, when he is blatantly disrespected. On these occasions he resorts to violence to reinforce his ego. By behaving in a way that is active, independent, powerful and aggressive, Samson seeks to negate the power of his looming fear—namely, that he is as passive, dependent, and impotent as anyone else.[20] Samson's violent responses to being shamed or slighted demonstrate that his loss of honor or self-esteem is experienced subjectively as the death of self. Out of self-protection he mortally wounds those who threaten him emotionally, and his failed attempts to achieve intimacy with any woman other than a prostitute only serve to confirm that he is less of a man than he appears.

Samson's apparent virility and masculinity are his most striking features. As a literary character he fits the folkloric model of the Wild Man.[21] His uncut hair is his signal trait. He is incredibly strong (14:5–6), he masters animals (15:4–5), sleeps in rock crevices (15:8), eats wild honey (14:9–10), and uses tools drawn from the animal world (15:15). His forays into the company of the cultured expose his awkwardness, not to mention his secrets—the greatest of which is his hair.

There is a universal association between hair and sexuality, with hair often serving as a symbolic substitute for sexual potency.[22] The shearing of Samson's hair is, symbolically, a sexual stripping and subjugation.[23] His greatest strength, his source of identity, has been taken from him. Not only this, but it is taken by deception. He has been duped. Samson the wild man is domesticated by (who else?) a woman, and his worst fears are realized. Minus his hair he is indeed "like anyone else." The strength provided by his hair previously allowed Samson to fend off feelings of shame by striking out against those who occasion his feelings of stupidity and impotence. With his defenses literally shorn off, he is left with the shame of having revealed his greatest secret.

It is a dilemma that brings Samson to this point. The promise of intimacy lures him closer and closer to Delilah. Samson is in an emotional bind, symbolized by the ropes he says will have to bind him in order to secure his secret. To risk the exposure of intimacy with Delilah is to risk losing the mask of hyper-masculinity behind which he hides. This

20. Gilligan, *Violence*, 82.

21. Gregory Mobley, "The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997): 217–33 (228).

22. Edmund Leach, "Magical Hair," in *Myth and Cosmos* (ed. John Middleton; Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History, 1967), 77–108 (77).

23. Niditch, "Samson," 616.

dilemma hinges on shame-management; whether to hide and conceal, or expose and reveal. Samson has already been "burned" once by love, and in symbolic retaliation he burns the crops of the Philistines while they burn his former wife and her father. Can he risk the shame of humiliation again? Samson gambles and loses, and with the shearing of his hair he is stripped of his strength—an intolerable development for a wild man.

The Spirit of the Lord goes the way of Samson's hair. He is powerless to defend himself and is seized not by God but by the Philistines. They gouge out his eyes, revealing that they too are motivated by shame in seeking revenge. The symbolic function of the blinding of Samson is to rid literally from existence the gaze in which the Philistines and Delilah feel ashamed. Delilah tells Samson twice that he has mocked her by not telling her the truth regarding the secret of his strength. To be mocked, or made a fool of, is to feel shamed. Clearly, Samson has also shamed the Philistines. He single-handedly killed scores of them and ruined their harvest, and he does so with grandiosity and boasting. But why blind Samson? Of all the things the Philistines might do to him, they choose to pluck out his eyes. This action is a concrete, nonverbal expression of magical thinking that communicates the idea that if Samson's eyes are destroyed, then the shame he caused them will be destroyed as well.[24]

The shaming of Samson continues in the manner of his imprisonment. The Philistines shackle him and force him to become a mill slave in prison. This entails grinding grain with a hand mill, a practice considered particularly degrading in that either animals or women usually performed it.[25] What better way to humiliate and ridicule a hyper-masculine man than to force him to do the work of women and animals? Samson's domestication is complete. Like other prisoners in ancient Mesopotamia, Samson was punished in such a way as to reduce him to a state of complete effeminacy.[26]

24. Ibid., 59–66. Gilligan makes this point in describing his assessment of a particularly gruesome murder. The assailant had run into an old high school classmate in a convenience store. She subsequently offered him a ride home, during which he took out a knife and stabbed her to death. He then mutilated her eyes and threw her out of the car. His justification after the fact was, "I didn't like the way she was looking at me."

25. K. van der Toorn "Judges XVI 21 in the Light of the Akkadian Sources," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 248–56 (249).

26. Ibid.

Implications

The essence of criminal punishment has consisted of pursuing congruence between act and punishment.[27] In the past, this has taken the very concrete form of punishing the criminal by destroying or mutilating the organ or body part with which the crime was committed; at other times, the goal was to mutilate the body part of the criminal that he had injured in his victim. Cutting off the hand of a thief comes to mind.

Over the centuries the subject and object of punishment has shifted from the body to the soul. No longer (for the most part) are criminals subjected to physical maiming; rather, it is their souls that are maimed. Michel Foucault quotes a man named Mably who wrote, during the French Revolution, "Punishment, if I may so put it, should strike the soul rather than the body."[28] The most vicious way to strike the soul is through the punitive shaming of humiliation and degradation.

Life within prison is maintained through the legalized violence of systemic manipulation and control. Such an environment is fuel to the fire for the pathologically self-conscious person. The unfortunate result of most punitive approaches to imprisonment is that they stimulate the violent urges that led to imprisonment in the first place. Our high rates of second and third time offenders should come as no surprise given the fact that most prison environments end up socializing people to be as violent as possible.[29] The result is more violence, not less. For evidence of this, we need only look to the numbers: the prison population in America is six times what it was thirty years ago in spite of our much publicized "war on crime" and the drastic expansion of the prison system.[30]

The tragedy of Samson, in striking fashion, bears this out. Violent, insecure, and unable to secure the intimacy with others he seeks, Samson is finally captured and imprisoned. His imprisonment is designed to humiliate and shame. He is symbolically castrated by being forced to perform domestic work. His eyes are plucked out so that his captors will no longer have to endure the shame they feel when he looks upon them. Such acts on the part of the Philistines only serve to reproduce the social

27. Gilligan, *Violence*, 141.

28. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Pantheon, 1977), 16.

29. Gilligan, *Violence*, 155.

30. Elliott Currie, *Crime and Punishment in America* (New York: Metropolitan, 1998), 3.

and emotional contexts that led to violence initially. They unwittingly guarantee their own undoing by their inability to stop the cycle of shame and violence. The stage is set for a tragic ending, and Samson bides his time…

Desiring to "make sport" of Samson, the Philistines bring him out for the sake of entertainment at a temple festival. His hair long again, he prays for divine infusion, begins pushing the temple pillars, and literally pulls the house down on himself and his enemies. "So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life" (Judg 16:30).

Biblical Terrorism

Dan Merkur

The Hebrew word *nābîʾ*, "prophet," has the etymological meaning "called one," in reference to the person's calling or vocation by God.[1] The cognate *nabiʾutum* has been found in a cuneiform text at Ebla in Syria well prior to the Israelite period, where it designated a minority type of ecstatic.[2] The Hebrew term originally gained currency among the northern tribes of Israel in reference to members of fraternities that called themselves the *bĕnê hanĕbîʾîm*, "Sons of the Prophets."[3] The earliest of their group activities to be mentioned in surviving legend involved Samuel and Saul in the late eleventh century B.C.E. William Albright argued that North Israelite prophetism originated as an expression of a religious revival movement that Samuel headed.[4] The corporate organization of the *nĕbîʾîm* radically transformed the religion of ancient Israel, leading to the retroactive application of the term *nābîʾ* to individuals who had historically been termed *rōʾeh*, "seer, visionary"; *hōzeh*, "seer, visionary"; *ʾîš hāʾĕlōhîm*, "man of God"; *qōsēm*, "fortune-teller, soothsayer," or had had no formal designation.[5] The Sons of the Prophets were, I shall argue, a terrorist organization that ended the pre-monarchic era by imposing kingship on the tribal confederation. Two centuries later, the fraternal organization entertained similarly political ambitions toward

1. William F. Albright, "Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement," in *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition* (ed. H. M. Orlinsky; New York: Ktav, 1969), 49–176 (154).

2. G. Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *Biblical Archaeologist* (1976): 44–52 (49).

3. James G. Williams, "The Prophetic 'Father': A Brief Explanation of the Term 'Sons of the Prophets'," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1966): 344–48.

4. Albright, "Samuel," 155, 166. See also David Noel Freedman, "Between God and Man: Prophets in Ancient Israel," in *Prophecy and Prophets: The Diversity of Contemporary Issues in Scholarship* (ed. Yehoshua Gitay; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 57–87 (59).

5. David L. Petersen, "Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature," in Gitay, ed., *Prophecy and Prophets*, 23–40.

the monarchy of northern Israel. Once the relevant biblical data are assembled, they provide surprisingly rich evidence for a psychoanalytic understanding of ancient Israelite terrorism.

For the purposes of this essay, I will define terrorism as a military practice that is aimed to shock, frighten, horrify, and dismay much more than it is aimed to inflict physical damage. Lenin stated, "The purpose of terror is terror." Whether the tactics of inflicting terror are morally appropriate or inappropriate, whether they are employed in a cause that is just or unjust, and who makes such adjudications, are not questions that I shall here explore.

Stronger than a Lion

The symbols, values, and psychodynamics that characterized the biblical tales of the Sons of the Prophets occur in the legend of Samson, which is a collection of oral traditions of various ages that are set several generations prior to the era of Samuel and Saul.[6] Samson is said to have received the spirit of Yahweh in "the vineyards of Timnah," a Philistine town (Judg 14:1–3, 5a). Judges 14:5b–6 goes on to record:

> When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, behold! A young lion roared against him! Then the spirit of Yahweh prevailed over him, and he tore it apart as one tears a kid. Yet he had nothing in his hand. He did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Immediately after a young lion roared at Samson, the spirit of Yahweh prevailed over him. The verb *tiṣlaḥ*, "prevailed," might also be translated "succeeded," "overwhelmed," "vanquished," or "conquered." Imbued by the spirit with extraordinary physical strength and prowess, Samson slaughtered the lion with his bare hands.[7] Nothing in these verses indicates how the story is to be taken; but the prophet Amos later commented:

> The lion has roared;
> who will not fear?
> Yahweh God has spoken;
> who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:8)

6. George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 313–14.

7. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel* (Anchor Bible 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 182–83.

Whenever the spirit of Yahweh "prevailed over" Samson, he possessed superhuman strength and prowess. Samson regularly exhibited his spiritual power through violence. When Philistines at his wedding correctly guessed the solution to his riddle, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" (Judg 14:18), Samson believed that his wife had betrayed him and took violent revenge against the Philistines: "When the spirit of Yahweh prevailed over him, he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men of the town, and took their spoil and gave the festal garments to those who had told the riddle" (Judg 14:19a).

Being overwhelmed by the spirit of Yahweh was again the cause of extraordinary battle prowess in a further portion of the legend of Samson:

> He came to Lehi, and the Philistines were shouting to greet him. Then the spirit of Yahweh prevailed over him, and the ropes which were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of an ass, and put out his hand and seized it. With it he slew a thousand men. (Judg 15:14–15)

The prevalence of the spirit of Yahweh has been discussed in anthropological terms both as "spirit possession" and in relation to the evidence of shamanism in the Bible.[8] I would like to suggest, however, that the prevalence of the spirit of Yahweh was an instance of the similar but different type of religious experience that was classically termed "enthusiasm." The religious category was applied to experiences as varied as narcissistic rage and dissociative states. A transliteration of the Greek *enthousiasmos*, "inspiration, frenzy," the term derives from *entheos*, "full of or inspired by the god." Its classical examples were the Pythian priestess's experience of Apollo's inspiration at the Delphic oracle and devotees' experiences of frenzied sexuality and violence in the cult of Dionysos.[9] George Moore interpreted the prevalence of the spirit of Yahweh as an experience of "overmastering power; an access of divine rage in which he was irresistible."[10] Max Weber wrote more explicitly of "warrior ecstasy" and compared Samson with the Irish epic hero

8. Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1979): 321–37, and *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Shamanistic Features in the Old Testament," in *Studies in Shamanism* (ed. Carl-Martin Edsman; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 90–96; Thomas W. Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), and *Cultural Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

9. James D. G. Dunn, "Enthusiasm," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Lindsay Jones; 2d ed.; New York: Macmillan, 2005), 4:2804–809.

10. Moore, *Judges*, 331.

Cuchulain and the historical Norse berserkers: "Their ecstasy makes them plunge themselves into the midst of the enemy in a frenzy of bloodlust and makes them half unconsciously slaughter whatever is around them."[11] These suggestions deserve to be treated seriously.

Furor bellicus, "war anger," and the type of military exploit that it produces are distinctive phenomena in the history of religions. We know them best in the context of Indo-European cultures of the Iron Age. The Norse *Ynglingasaga* states: "As to his men, they went without cuirass, wild like dogs and wolves. They bit their bucklers and were as strong as bears and bulls. They massacred men and neither iron nor steel could prevail against them. This was called 'berserker furor.'"[12] Norse berserkers, "bear shirt wearers," were devotees of the god Odin. They dressed in animal skins and acquired the powers of the animal spirits as their own.[13] Eliade explains:

> A youth did not become a berserker simply through courage, physical strength, endurance, but as the result of a magico-religious experience that radically changed his mode of being. The young warrior must transmute his humanity by a fit of aggressive and terror-striking fury, which assimilated him to the raging beast of prey. He became "heated" to an extreme degree, flooded by a mysterious, nonhuman, and irresistible force that his fighting effort and vigor summoned… The ancient Germans called this sacred force *wut*, a term that Adam von Bremen translated by *furor*; it was a sort of demonic frenzy, which filled the warrior's adversary with terror and finally paralyzed him. The Irish *ferg* (literally "anger"), the homeric *menos*, are almost exact equivalents.[14]

Berserkers were a Norse instance of a custom that was widely distributed among Indo-European speaking peoples.[15] The Old German sources speak of *Männerbünde*, "men's societies." The Indo-Iranian term *marya*, "young men," was used for troops of warriors who were also called *vrka*, "wolves."[16] In both Indian and Iranian texts, their prodigious strength

11. Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), 94.

12. As cited in Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (trans. A. Hiltebeitel; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 141.

13. Ibid., 141–42.

14. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (trans. W. R. Trask; New York: Harper & Row, 1958; repr., Harper & Row, 1975), 84.

15. Georges Dumézil, *Horace et les Curiaces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942; repr., New York: Arno, 1978), 11–33.

16. Bruce Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 125.

was acquired by drinking the psychoactive juice of *soma* or *haoma*. The term *Haumavarga*, "Haoma-wolves," was anciently used of some Scythians.[17]

An implicit practice of shape-shifting was attributed to the Myrmidons in Homer's *Iliad* 16.155–63:[18]

> But Achilles went meanwhile to the Myrmidons, and arrayed them
> all in their war gear along the shelters. And they, as wolves
> who tear raw flesh, in whose hearts the battle fury is tireless,
> who have brought down a great horned stag in the mountains, and then feed
> on him, till the jowls of every wolf run blood, and then go
> all in a pack to drink from a spring of dark-running water,
> lapping with their lean tongues along the black edge of the surface
> and belching up the clotted blood; in the heart of each one
> is a spirit untremulous, but their bellies are full and groaning.

The practice of animal transformation was an adaptation to the circumstance of warfare of religious practices that originated in hunter cultures in connection with the animal spirits of shamans and the ritual hunt.[19]

A legendary remembrance of ecstatic warfare played a role in the classical Mystery of Dionysus. *The Bacchae* of Euripides has the prophet Teiresias, the retired king Cadmus, and the women of Thebes go out to a forested mountain to celebrate the rites of Dionysus. Cadmus' grandson Pentheus, the reigning king, attempts to suppress the cult by imprisoning its leader Dionysus, and his Asiatic followers, the Bacchae. Dionysus claims to be the god disguised as a man; Pentheus regards him as the god's prophet. By some miracle, Dionysus and the Bacchae escape from jail. Dionysus next suggests that Pentheus disguise himself as a maenad, or female devotee of Dionysus, and observe the Mystery rites himself. Pentheus does so. When Pentheus complains that he cannot see the rites, Dionysus bends a fir tree to the ground, seats Pentheus on its top, and slowly releases the tree into the air. In the meantime, a state of ecstatic possession or enthusiasm grips the maenads.

17. Ibid., 130–31.

18. Ibid., 126–27.

19. Stephen O. Glosecki, "Wolf of the Bees: Germanic Shamanism and the Bear Hero," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 2 (1988): 31–53, and *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* (New York: Garland, 1989). For hunter culture antecedents, see Karl W. Luckert, *The Navajo Hunter Tradition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975); Dan Merkur, *Becoming Half Hidden: Shamanism and Initiation Among the Inuit* (2d ed.; New York: Garland, 1992), 306, and *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 70–83.

> This is a god of prophecy. His worshipers,
> like madmen, are endowed with mantic powers.
> For when the god enters the body of a man
> he fills him with the breath of prophecy.[20]

The maenads, who are led by Pentheus' mother Agave, presently recognize him as an intruder profaning their secret rites and they murder him. In their ecstasy, the women perceive Pentheus not as a man but as a lion, and they tear him apart with their bare hands, dismembering him. When Agave returns to her senses, she becomes aware that Dionysus has made her slay her son.

Euripides located the death of Pentheus on Mount Cithaeron, "there where the hounds tore Actaeon to pieces" (l. 1292). The allusion implied that the goddess Artemis' transformation of Actaeon into a stag and his killing by hounds referred to a Mystery that was similar to the transformation that Pentheus undergoes while wearing doe-skins. The maenads described Dionysus as a god of the hunt. Agave states, "Bacchus the hunter lashed the Maenads against his prey" (ll. 1191–92). The chorus of Bacchae reply, "Our king is a hunter" (l. 1190). In his capacity as god of the hunt, Dionysus acts secondarily as a god of war.

> He has usurped even the functions of warlike Ares.
> Thus, at times, you see an army mustered under arms
> stricken with panic before it lifts a spear.
> This panic comes from Dionysus. (ll. 302–305)

In cultures that practice the ritual hunt, predatory species, the practice of hunting and masculinity may be ascribed to a god, while the game animals and femininity are attributed to a goddess. Men's fraternity with predators may extend to dietary taboos on all carnivorous species.[21] Part of this pattern persisted in the Mystery of Dionysus: "The fawnskin was one of the special characteristics of Dionysus and his female votaries, while the skin of the panther was more commonly worn by the Satyrs and other male companions of the wine-god, as well as by the god himself."[22] The dietary consequences persisted in Israel. The biblical division of clean and unclean species observes similar lines, with herbivores edible and predators proscribed.

20. Euripides, "The Bacchae," in *Euripides V: Electra, the Phoenician Women, the Bacchae*, Vol. 1 (trans. E. T. Vermeule, E. Wyckoff, and W. Arrowsmith; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 298–301.

21. Luckert, *The Navajo Hunter Tradition*.

22. John Edwin Sandys, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885), 93.

The legend of Samson shares three prominent motifs with *The Bacchae*. Just as Samson bursts apart the bonds with which the Philistines imprison him, Dionysus cannot be held in jail (ll. 615–18, 643–44) and causes the chains that imprison the Bacchae to snap apart (ll. 444–49). Just as Samson is a Nazirite who may not cut his hair, Dionysus wears his hair long, forbids it to be cut (ll. 493–94), and requires Pentheus to wear his hair long as well (ll. 830–31, 928–34). And just as Samson tears apart a lion with his bare hands, the maenads, led by Agave, use their bare hands to tear apart Pentheus, whom they temporarily think to be a lion (ll. 989–90, 1141–42, 1173–74, 1185, 1196, 1214–15, 1279–84). In addition, both the Hebrew and the Greek stories portray ecstatic states of *furor bellicus*.

The final episode in the legend of Samson parallels not *The Bacchae* but Homer's *Iliad*. Cyrus Gordon notes:

> The wrath that is most akin to the wrath of Achilles is the "Wrath of Samson," who because his wife has been given to another, goes on a destructive rampage and refuses to behave rationally until he has slain many a Philistine (Judg 15:1–8). This has all the elements of a Homeric *menis*: the affront, the dire consequences, and the dissipation of the rage only after mad acts of vengeance.[23]

The Hebrew and Greek parallels were not accidental. The Philistines descended from the Aegean immigrants known archaeologically as the Sea Peoples.[24] Archaeological remains led Yigael Yadin to suggest that the biblical tribe of Dan, of which Samson was a member, descended from the Sea Peoples.[25] Dovetailing with these archaeological findings, the Bible portrays Samson's parents as converts to Yahweh (Judg 13). The Samson legend, with its riddle, "What is stronger than a lion?," concerns the initiation of a second-generation devotée of Yahweh into *furor bellicus* in the vineyards of Philistine Timnah—let us interpolate, into the Mystery of the Philistine wine god, the Philistine equivalent of Dionysus. Although Samson encountered a lion and mastered the practice of *furor bellicus*, he adapted the ecstatic warfare to the god of Moses by replacing the animal spirit with the more abstract conception of the spirit of Yahweh. The legend alluded to the rejection of the Philistine wine god by having Samson's mother forbidden vine products

23. Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: Harper & Row; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 271.

24. Nancy K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: The Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250–1150 BC* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978).

25. Yigael Yadin, "And Dan, Why Did He Remain in Ships?," *American Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1 (1968): 9–23.

for the duration of her pregnancy (Judg 13:4, 7, 14). The rejection of the wine god is also implicit in Samson's status as a *nāzîr*, literally "one who is vowed (to divine service)."[26] He was presumably subject to an early form of the Nazirite laws (Num 6:1–21) that forbid both hair cutting and vine products.

Ahab and the Sons of the Prophets

The tradition circle that was responsible for transmitting and/or reworking the legend of Samson may be identified with the prophetic brotherhood that was active historically during the ninth-century war of Ahab, king of Israel, with Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. When Ben-Hadad besieged Samaria, Ahab paid him tribute. When Ben-Hadad also demanded that Ahab open the city for his men to loot, the elders of Samaria refused and the siege continued. On the advice of a prophet, Ahab attacked Ben-Hadad and won the battle. Ben-Hadad escaped, but Israel captured horses and chariots in spoil. Again, acting on a prophet's advice, Ahab prepared for a spring campaign when he inflicted a thorough defeat on Syria. Ben-Hadad was captured, but Ahab released him after negotiating terms and making a covenant of peace (1 Kgs 20:1–34). The Sons of the Prophets now withdrew their support from Ahab. Lest we misunderstand what sorts of prophets the story intended, the legend interpolates their characteristic symbolism:

> And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of Yahweh, "Strike me, I pray." But the man refused to strike him. Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall kill you." And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and killed him. (1 Kgs 20:35–36)

The deadly attack of the lion is a further instance of the initiatory motif that we have encountered in the legends of Samson. The ethics of the tale are also notable. The narrative approved of the first prophet's fanatical demand to be provided with a convincing disguise. His fellow (sons of the) prophets was said to have sinned by being too squeamish to inflict a bloody wound on request.

Following the symbolic allusion to the prophets' initiations, the legend resumes its main concern:

26. Albright, "Samuel," 161.

> Then he found another man, and said, "Strike me, I pray." And the man struck him, smiting and wounding him. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me, and said, 'Keep this man; if by any means he be missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.' And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." Then he made haste to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. And he said to him, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'" And the king of Israel went to his house resentful and sullen, and came to Samaria. (vv. 37–43)

The man spoke on behalf the Sons of the Prophets as a group. To their thought, Ahab had proved insufficiently bloodthirsty to be considered truly devoted to Yahweh. They contemptuously withdrew their support and announced their intention to seek his death. Because the success of an assassination depended on forestalling blood revenge by murdering all potential avengers, the Sons of the Prophets were announcing their intention to exterminate Ahab's kin and partisans. Under these conditions it is scarcely surprising that Ahab struck first, with the intention of exterminating his opponents before they accomplished their goal. The prophets were slaughtered (1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14).

Elijah, Elisha, and Northern Prophetism

The legend of Elijah's contest of animal sacrifices with the prophets of Baal ends with Elijah murdering the prophets whom he defeated (1 Kgs 18:40). Not only are the ethical values notable, but the legend continues with Elijah urging Ahab to return home before rain made travel impossible. When Ahab complied, Elijah performed a feat of physical endurance in the best tradition of ecstatic warfare[27]: "And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of Yahweh was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab until the entrance of Jezreel" (18:45b–46). The distance has been estimated at seventeen or eighteen miles.[28]

27. James A. Montgomery and Henry Snyder Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 307.

28. Ibid., 306.

Rather than speak of "the spirit of Yahweh," the legend credits Elijah's feat to "the hand of Yahweh." Here, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 3:15; Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 3:14, 22; 8:1) and in Akkadian and Canaanite literature, the hand of the deity had negative connotations.[29] Because Elijah's legend was told from a perspective that was critical of northern Israelite prophetism, we may presumably trust its admission that Elijah began his career as an ecstatic warrior in the northern mode.

The later attitude of the school of Elijah to northern Israelite prophetism is indicated in a legend of Elisha and some boys from Bethel:

> He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of Yahweh. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys. (2 Kgs 2:23–24)

Commentators have been puzzled by the moral implications of Elisha cursing children for insulting him. If, however, we treat the narrative as a satire, it ceases to be inconsistent with the portrait of Elisha in other biblical passages. The "small boys" may be interpreted as Sons of the Prophets—small because they are "Sons"—who, according to other episodes in Elisha's legend, were located at both Bethel and Jericho (2 Kgs 2:3, 5). Their veneration of the Nazirite Samson informs their mockery of Elisha's baldness. The motif, contrasting hairiness with baldness, was a comical means by which to express doctrinal controversy. Elisha's response may similarly be treated as a symbolic expression of a doctrinal concern. Because the attack of a lion or a bear had an initiatory significance for the Sons of the Prophets, Elisha's ostensible curse consisted of wishing the boys to undergo the initiatory ordeals of their own choosing.

Micaiah ben Imlah

Ahab's demise is narrated in the legend of Micaiah son of Imlah, another ninth-century prophet who was active in the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahab later prepared a campaign against Syria, he sought an alliance with Judah against Syria. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, agreed, but also requested that Ahab "inquire this very day for the word of Yahweh" (1 Kgs 22:5). The request for an oracle obliged Ahab to restore the prophets to favor. Some four hundred prophets took the occasion to display their loyalty to Ahab by predicting his victory against Syria (22:2–6). Their cultic behavior was significant:

29. J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971): 244–51.

> The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. Zedekiah the son of Chenanah had made horns of iron for himself, and he said, "Thus says Yahweh, 'With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.' " All the prophets prophesied so, and said, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; Yahweh will give it into the hand of the king." (1 Kgs 22:10–12)

The prophets prophesied as a group, in public, in the sight of the two kings. They were not proclaiming oracles whose contents they had previously attained in private. They were experiencing ecstatic states even as the two kings watched. The reflexive (Hithpael) conjugation of the verb *mitnabʾîm*, "prophesying," literally means "were making themselves prophesy" and indicates that their ecstasies were self-induced. Zedekiah son of Chenanah was the prophets' leader. With his iron horns, he symbolically enacted the prophecy that he proclaimed. The other prophets followed his lead. Gray suggested that the prophets practiced "imitative magic in word and, in the case of Zedekiah, in symbolic action" with the intention to lend moral support to Ahab's policies.[30]

When Jehoshaphat asked whether there were any further prophets, Ahab replied that Micaiah ben Imlah always prophesied against him. Jehoshaphat insisted that Micaiah be summoned. When Micaiah arrived, he reported a symbolic vision: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace' " (1 Kgs 22:17). Zedekiah responded with outrage:

> Then Zedekiah the son of Chenanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, "How did the spirit of Yahweh go from me to speak to you?" And Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into a room within a room to hide." (1 Kgs 22:24–25)

Zedekiah's denial that the spirit of Yahweh had gone from him to Micaiah suggests that Zedekiah exercised what we would today term hetero-hypnotic powers when he led his followers in a group ecstasy. Because Micaiah had not been in his presence, Zedekiah implied, Micaiah can have had no access to the spirit of Yahweh and cannot have prophesied. Micaiah responded to Zedekiah's claims about the transmission of the spirit of Yahweh by asserting that Zedekiah would not understand the true nature of the spirit of Yahweh until he went into an inner sanctum to hide himself. Micaiah referred to an oracular technique,

30. John Gray, *I & II Kings* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 449.

aimed at provoking mental imagery through sensory deprivation, that was consistent with the appearances of Yahweh to Moses (Lev 16:2; Num 7:89), Joshua (Josh 7:10–15), and Samuel (1 Sam 3:1–15) in the darkness of the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle. Micah was evidently an oracle of the visionary type that was favored in the southern kingdom of Judah. The legend of Micaiah concludes with a report of Ahab's death in battle (1 Kgs 22:34–38).

Further controversy stories that similarly pertain to differences in prophets' techniques of ecstasy include Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp, with Moses' endorsement despite Joshua's opposition (Num 12:26–30), and the prophesying of three of Saul's messengers, and lastly Saul himself, as they were on their way to Ramah and not yet in the presence of Samuel (1 Sam 19:20–24).

Samuel the King-Maker

The biblical portrait of Samuel is composite and its separation into coherent sources is controversial. I would like to suggest that a group of passages portray Samuel in a fashion that was consistent with the historical activities of the Sons of the Prophets in the ninth-century period. The narrative presumably claimed a venerated figure of pre-monarchic legend as a precedent for the Sons of the Prophets during their conflict with Ahab. Samuel's opposition to the gods of Canaan, the Baals and the Ashtaroth (Judg 7:3–4) may have been consistent with ninth-century polemic in the northern kingdom. The portrait of Samuel in vv. 5–11, as a revival preacher who was forced to take arms in order to defend his right of religious congregation, may again reflect conditions in the ninth century B.C.E. At the same time, aspects of the legend are archaic. Samuel anoints Saul as *nāgîd*, an obsolete term that derives from the verbal root *gdd* and had the etymological sense "assembler, musterer, organizer (of the militia)." Albright renders it "military commander," but "warlord" might better capture the nuance.[31]

Samuel's designation of Saul as *nāgîd* includes instructions to join the prophetic brotherhood:

> [You shall] come to the oak of Tabor; three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept from their hand. After that you shall come to Gibeah of God, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. There, as you come to the city, you will meet a band of

31. Albright, *Samuel*, 164.

> prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying. The spirit of Yahweh will prevail over you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man. Now when these signs meet you, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you." (1 Sam 10:3–7)

At Gibeah, where priests of the House of Eli were keeping the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 7:1; 2 Sam 6:3), Saul was to meet a "band of prophets" and prophesy among them:

> When they came to Gibeah, behold, a band of prophets to greet him! And the spirit of God prevailed over him, and he prophesied among them. When all who knew him before saw, behold! He prophesied with the prophets. The people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is also Saul among the prophets?" And a man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"… Saul also went to his home at Gibeah. With him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched. But some worthless fellows said, "How can this man save us?" And they despised him, and brought him no present. But he held his peace. (1 Sam 10:10–12, 26–27)

The narrative's claim that Samuel sent Saul to prophesy among the prophets may be set aside. The proverbial sayings attest to a different sequence of events. The name *sha'ul* means "requested." The saying "Is Saul also among the prophets?" can also mean, "Is it also requested among the prophets?" The response was a further play on words. Because the father of the Sons of the Prophets was the title of the brotherhood's leader, the response, "And who is their father?," signified "And who [but Saul] is their leader?"[32] The revision of the legend of Saul, which had Samuel both designate Saul as king and induct him into the prophetic brotherhood, reflected ninth-century ambitions, rather than eleventh-century history. The legendary relationship of Samuel and Saul reflected the desired relationship of the Sons of the Prophets and Ahab. Historically, however, Saul had been the father of the Sons of the Prophets.

The ninth-century revision of the legend of Saul was also responsible for the extant form of the legend of Samuel's birth. According to the biblical text, Samuel was dedicated by his mother, prior to his conception, to become a Nazirite. However, the many wordplays on the name Saul in the legend of Samuel's birth (1 Sam 1:17, 20, 27–28; 2:20) indicate that a legend of Saul's birth has been retold of Samuel.[33] It was Saul and not

32. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 184.

33. Ibid., 65; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 65.

Samuel who, like Samson, was historically a Nazirite. The birth-legend accounts for Saul's name, "the requested one," by reference to a barren woman's prayer for a child (1 Sam 1:27); but the narrative is contradicted by the words of her prayer, which says "the barren has borne seven" (2:5), as though her barrenness were well in the past. Saul's name, "the requested one," is probably better understood in the context of the *leitmotif*, "when the people of Israel cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who delivered them' (Judg 3:9; compare 2:16, 18; 3:15; 4:3; 6:7–10; 10:1; 10:10–11:1). By asserting that many judges had been effective saviors, the *leitmotif* indicates the sense in which Saul's claim was anciently understood. Because Saul named his son Jonathan, after Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses, whose descendants were priests at the high place of Dan (Judg 18:30), we may infer that Saul identified with Moses. As *the* Prophet, father to the Sons of the Prophets, Saul may have fancied himself a prophet like Moses. Not only was he Israel's first anointed king, its literal *mōšiaḥ*, "anointed one" (1 Sam 2:10), he was possibly also its first messiah, its first leader of a messianic movement.

The narrative in 1 Sam 9–10, which describes Samuel as a "man of God" and a *rōʾeh*, "seer," portrayed him as a sacrificial priest who provided oracles, but did not portray him in a fashion consistent with the "band of prophets…with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre, before them, making themselves prophesy" (1 Sam 10:5). The type of prophecy in which Saul engaged was instead described by means of the same technical expression that was used of Samson, "The spirit of Yahweh prevailed over him" (10:6, 10). Saul was then to "do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you" (10:7). The tale mentions only briefly what Saul did. He "went to his home in Gibeah." Other chapters in the Bible that favor David over Saul are a good deal less euphemistic in their account of the event. Saul and his men butchered the Philistine garrison at Gibeah, provoking Philistia to war. Next, they fled to Gilgal, where they attempted to muster the tribes of Israel under Saul's command (13:3–4).

The next portion of the king-maker legend again concerns both Samuel and Saul. When Nahash the Ammonite besieged Jabesh-gilead, Saul heard of the Transjordanians' plight (11:1–5) and reacted dramatically:

> The spirit of God prevailed over Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. He took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!" Then the dread of Yahweh fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. (1 Sam 11:6–7)

Inspired by the spirit of God, Saul took it on himself to muster the tribes of Israel. He allowed no neutral positions. Anyone who did not muster at his command would be considered an enemy. Saul's dismemberment of the oxen may have been a magical rite that was intended to instill fear and hurry the mustering of troops.[34] At the same time, the central rite of the cult of Dionysus was the dismemberment and consumption of the raw flesh of an ox.[35] However it may be interpreted, Saul's message to the tribes of Israel was an act of intimidation.[36]

The king-maker narrative reaches a dramatic climax with a speech by Samuel that commands Saul to exterminate the Amalekites and to destroy all of their property (15:1–3). Saul subsequently defeats and destroys all of the Amalekites except their king, Agag, whom he takes captive and brings, together with all valuable spoils, to Samuel at Gilgal (15:4–9). When Yahweh tells Samuel that Saul's behavior was unsatisfactory (15:10–12), the stage is set for a confrontation. Saul arrives, fresh from a victory over Amalek, proud to display the proofs of his triumph. Samuel immediately cuts short Saul's boasts and begins to upbraid Saul for bringing the Amalekite king Agag and the more valuable spoils to Gilgal, to be sacrificed to Yahweh there. When Saul replies that he had done what Yahweh had commanded, Samuel insists that Saul had been ordered to destroy all the Amalekites and all their possessions where he found them. This Saul had failed to do. Saul acknowledges Samuel's position, but he defends the propriety of his departures from Samuel's orders. He had wanted to bring Agag to be destroyed at Gilgal in a ritual sacrifice to Yahweh. He had also yielded to his men's desire to bring the better sheep, cattle, and goods to be destroyed through sacrifice at Gilgal. Samuel counters that the issue of sacrifices was irrelevant.

Interestingly, Samuel's poetic rebuke of Saul contains a wholesale condemnation of the pre-monarchic divinatory tradition of the Elid priesthood to which the historical Samuel belonged.

> Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
> and to hearken than the fat of rams.
> For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
> and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (1 Sam 15:22d–23b)

34. Michael A. Fishbane, "Studies in Biblical Magic: Origins, Uses and Transformations of Terminology and Literary Form" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1971), 180.

35. Euripides, *Bacchae* (ed. E. R. Dodds; 2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), xvi–xix; Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (trans. J. Hamilton and B. Nagy; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 54.

36. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 203.

For Samuel, the issue was Saul's disobedience of direct orders (1 Sam 14:13–23). The king-maker narrative takes for granted that both men accepted that Samuel had the authority to rebuke Saul. It implies that even though Saul was king of Israel, Samuel outranked Saul within the prophetic movement. The narrative had Saul acknowledge his guilt. It also had Samuel refuse to accept Saul's apology and insist on denying Saul the kingship. Samuel acted like a superior officer demoting a junior for disobeying orders. Then he turned to go. Saul attempted to delay Samuel in order to be able to plead with him. He laid hands on Samuel, and Samuel's robe tore by chance. Samuel treated the tear as an omen, corroborating his prophecy that Yahweh was denying Saul the kingship. Saul treated the event differently. Having been disowned by Samuel, he had no further reason to defer to him. Saul no longer requested, he demanded that Samuel render him public honor. Samuel was intimidated and complied (1 Sam 15:24–31).

The legend's understanding of the relative authority of prophet and king are self-evident. The roles that Samuel and Saul enacted in the legend form a precise parallel with Ahab, his capture of but failure to execute Ben-Hadad, and his subsequent rejection by the Sons of the Prophets (1 Kgs 20). The revision of the legend of Saul that became the extant tale of Samuel the king-maker was presumably propaganda to raise support for the Sons of the Prophets in their struggle with Ahab.

Left unspoken in the legend are the reasons for Samuel's unwillingness to accept Saul's apology. Saul had erred through seeming trivialities, and he had apologized. Saul was nonetheless denied the kingship. What was so unforgivable? The final verses of the passage imply an answer:

> Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag the king of the Amalekites." Agag went to him cheerfully. Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before Yahweh in Gilgal. (1 Sam 15:32–33)

Samuel's sudden violence provides perspective on his relation to Saul. In bringing Agag to Gilgal for Samuel to sacrifice, Saul had proved that he lacked the bloodlust of a terrorist. Similarly, in yielding to the popular will to sacrifice also the sheep, cattle, and more valuable spoils, Saul had displayed an unwillingness to intimidate the nation. His verbal deference to Samuel and his willingness to apologize further proved him unfit to rule. He lacked ruthlessness.

The final portion of the legend of Samuel completes the career of the king-making prophet. Samuel returned home to Ramah and did not see Saul again until the day of his death (1 Sam 15:34–35). However, Yahweh sent Samuel to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem on a secret mission. When Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, Yahweh selected David, the youngest (16:1–12). "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. The spirit of Yahweh prevailed over David from that day forward" (1 Sam 16:13a). According to this narrative, Samuel both anointed David as king and initiated him into prophetic ecstasy.

The legend of David's defeat of Goliath takes up the same theme by referring to David's initiation. When David is introduced to Saul, the shepherd boy claims to be a lion-killer in order to obtain Saul's permission to engage Goliath in combat:

> But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." (1 Sam 17:35–36)

The fantastic account of pulling a lion's beard can be treated as an exaggeration of folklore. It can instead be read, however, as David deliberately making an extravagant point in order to alert Saul that he spoke of lions and bears in a sense that was symbolic rather than naturalistic. On this interpretation, David here claimed that he too had been initiated in the tradition of Samson.

This interpretation of lion symbolism is supported by David's lament on the occasion of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, which is generally regarded as a composition by the historical David, dating around 1000 B.C.E.[37] In the lament, David referred explicitly to Samson's riddle. He wrote:

> Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
> In life and in death they were not divided;
> they were swifter than eagles,
> they were stronger than lions. (2 Sam 1:23)

37. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel* (Anchor Bible 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 78–79.

The distribution of lion symbolism in the pre-monarchic and early monarchic eras tends to the same effect. Archaeological remains from the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 B.C.E.) portray the lion flanking a goddess. Remains from Iron Age I (1200–925 B.C.E.), which includes the early Israelite eras of Samson and Saul, portray lions with either female or male deities. The style of at least one example indicates either Philistine or Sea People, rather than West Semites. Similar cultic images persisted but became less frequent in Iron Age II (925–586 B.C.E.). The association of lions with deities disappeared almost entirely in Iron Age III, the period of the Babylonian exile and Second Temple of Jerusalem.[38] The persistence of leonine iconography possibly bears an inverse relationship with the origin and growth of the motif as a biblical metaphor. As the practice of leonine spirit possession disappeared, leonine imagery became available for metaphoric use.

In biblical poetry, dating perhaps to the eleventh century B.C.E., lion symbolism was applied to the tribes of Dan and Gad in the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33:20, 22) and in the Blessing of Jacob to the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9).[39] Samson was a Danite. Judah, from which David hailed, neighbored to the south of Dan's original location by the coast, near Philistia. Gad, in the northern part of the Israelite holdings in Transjordan, neighbored to the southeast of Dan after the Philistines displaced the Danites from the coast; Elijah hailed from the area. Laish, "Lion," was the original name of the city that the Danites renamed Dan following their move to the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee (Judg 18:7, 14, 27, 29). The place name was presumably used by the Danites for what was initially a base camp and not yet synonymous with the high place and other central institutions of the tribe. Chephirah, "Young Lioness," was the name of a Gibeonite city within the tribal boundaries of Benjamin (Josh 9:17; 18:20; Ezra 2:25; Neh 7:29; compare Neh 6:2), immediately to the east of the original coastal location of Dan and north of Judah. Saul and Jonathan were Benjaminites. Lion symbolism was also prominent in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:29, 36) and on Solomon's ivory throne (1 Kgs 10:19–20). The geography of lion symbolism may indicate the distribution of *furor bellicus* among the Israelites prior to its transformation by Samson into a devotion to Yahweh.

38. Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 81, 89, 94, 97, 107.

39. Frank Moore Cross Jr. and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 97.

The eleventh-century *nābîʾ* movement that brought Saul to kingship may conceivably represent the original historical popularization of Samson's innovation: an ecstatic warfare fully equal to the animal transformations of the Philistines. Like Samson, however, Saul indulged an overweening pride, blinding rage, and reckless military adventurism until the Philistines hunted him down and killed him. Where Samson had been a lone adventurer, Saul built a nation only to take it to ruin with him. The embarrassment that he proved for his partisans accounts for the embellishment of his legend with tales of fatal flaws: the insufficient ruthlessness of the king-maker legend, and his sinful consultation of the medium of En-Dor (1 Sam 28:3–25). We come nearer to the historical truth with the evidence of Saul's characterological narcissism—not only Saul's monarchic ambition and his fatal underestimation of the Philistines, but also his murderous fits of jealous rage against David (1 Sam 18:6–11), which cost him the support of Judah, as well as the absurd symbolic venality of his demand of a hundred Philistine foreskins as a bride price for his daughter Michal (1 Sam 18:25–27). Whatever we conclude about Samson and Saul as individuals, their examples became role models for the systemic terrorism and cruelty of prophetic brotherhoods that remained going concerns until the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom in the seventh century B.C.E. (1 Kgs 13; Amos 7:10–17).

Psychoanalytic Reflections

Even at a distance of three thousand years, the psychology of biblical terrorism is recognizable and coherent. Scholars assume that Samson, "the sunny one," was also remembered as the minor judge "Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an oxgoad" (Judg 3:31). Anath, the Canaanite warrior goddess, was ancestor to the unnamed "Syrian goddess" whose ecstatic priests castrated and lacerated themselves during her rites.[40] Centuries earlier, adverse political circumstances favored the externalization of her devotions in the form of terrorism. In the eleventh century, Philistia expanded, driving the Danites from the Mediterranean coast and encroaching on neighboring Benjamin. Samson, a Danite initiated into ecstatic warfare, retaliated, killing Philistines and burning their grain fields, granaries, and orchards (Judg 15:4–5). Saul, a Benjaminite, organized the prophetic movement and the tribes of Israel in order to field a unified army under his own kingship. In the

40. Harold W. Attridge and R. A. Oden, *The Syrian Goddess (De Dea Syria) Attributed to Lucian* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

ninth century, the threat of Syrian encroachment brought the Sons of the Prophets to prominence, initially in battle but later in opposition to Ahab.

Feeling humiliated and humiliating others, paired passive and active forms of a single emotion, were pivotal to the dynamics. Samson was personally humiliated by his wives; he responded by humiliating the Philistines. With the dismemberment of the oxen, Saul shamed the tribal militias into mustering under his command. He experienced the fame of David as personal humiliation, and demanded a bride price of foreskins that would shame the Philistines. Samuel shamed Saul by rejecting him as king. The Sons of the Prophets considered it shameful for a man to be unwilling to wound a comrade in order to disguise him, and they humiliated Ahab by warning him of their intention to assassinate him. Elijah humiliated the prophets of Baal through a contest of sacrifices before he slaughtered them. Zedekiah felt humiliated by Micaiah's independent prophesying, and retaliated by hitting him in the face.

Consistent with the sensitivity to humiliation was an ideology that involved idealization. Ecstatic merger with the spirit of Yahweh represented an ideal state of consciousness. Whatever behavior emerged during the ecstasies was considered divinely ordained and ideal; neither pragmatism nor ordinary moral scruples provided caution. The idealization extended to social organization. The Sons of the Prophets were led by a prophet whom they called their Father who mediated the spirit of Yahweh to them. Saul created a kingship for himself, seizing power from clan elders by provoking Philistia to war.

Like humiliation, obedience occurred in passive and active forms. Prophetic ecstasy accomplished a perfect obedience through the surrender of the body to control by the indwelling spirit of God. In their turn, the prophets demanded obedience of others. Saul demanded a muster under his kingship, and Samuel legendarily demanded Saul's obedience in military and ritual matters. The Sons of the Prophets demanded military obedience of Ahab, and Zedekiah's hetero-suggestion of the dancing prophets' hypnotic states may be seen as an enforcement of obedience.

Both humiliation and disobedience were punished ruthlessly. Samson murdered Philistines when his riddle failed, his wives betrayed him, and so on. Saul punished David for his fame, sending him into danger and finally attempting repeatedly to murder him. Saul's hunt for the fugitive David became an obsession that drove David to ally himself with Philistia. In legend, Samuel denied Saul the kingship over a minor deviation from his orders. The Sons of the Prophets rejected Ahab over his political pragmatism.

Both Saul and the ninth-century prophets showed a marked preference for war over peace in the furtherance of their politico-military ambitions. The viciousness and murder that they routinely inflicted on others indicate the severity of the tyranny that they suffered in their unconscious fantasies. The pairing of suffering aggression and identifying with the aggressor suggests an unconscious Oedipal wish to murder a tyrannical father, together with guilt over the fantasized crime. An unconscious wish for the mother accounts, in part, for the radical splitting of allies and foes. Saul and the Sons of the Prophets insisted that all who were not devoted to their spirit were enemies whom they would kill; and the Sons of the Prophets and Elijah contrasted Yahweh with Baal as though a contender might threaten the supreme God. The title *baʾal*, "husband," was preferred to the name Hadad for the god whom the prophets hated. It was the father's function as mother's husband that was unconsciously hated. Blending Oedipal and pre-Oedipal levels of development, the unconscious wish for sex with the mother manifested as a wish for a mystical merger with the spirit of Yahweh. This wish to reverse separation-individuation implies a pre-Oedipal attitude to the mother.[41] Shamgar's devotion to the goddess Anath may be treated as confirming the unconscious gender of Yahweh's indwelling spirit.

Intimidation was a deliberate policy. The attacks of lions had initiatory significance in the legends of Samson and David; the motifs were also prominent in the legends of the encounters of the Sons of the Prophets with Ahab and Elisha. Here too, passive into active or identification with the aggressor may be observed. Samson was a mass murderer and arsonist. Saul murdered the Philistine garrison at Gibeah, provoking Philistia to war, and then dismembered oxen in order to intimidate the tribes to muster under his command. A Son of the Prophets had himself wounded to better frighten Ahab when he promised him his death.

When the spirit of Yahweh "prevailed over" Samson and Saul, the men accomplished extraordinary feats of physical strength and military prowess. Elijah outran Ahab's chariot. The dissociative states were presumably advantageous for their anesthetic properties. However, the full force of *furor bellicus*, involving prodigious feats of strength, was likely always a rare achievement. The more customary experience would have been an ecstasy whose inspirations ranged from mild stimulation to overwhelming compulsion.

41. Compare Dan Merkur, *Mystical Moments and Unitive Thinking* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999); Mortimer Ostow, "Psychodynamics of Spirituality," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytical Studies* 1 (2004): 47–60.

Furor bellicus could accommodate dissociative states and narcissistic personality disorders, but it depended on neither. Prophets were able to access otherwise inaccessible, split-off parts of themselves when they merged with their mothers in unconscious fantasy.[42] The merger fantasies had their basis in a phase of moral development prior to the resolution of the Oedipus complex, when the onset of concrete operational thinking permits generalization from pre-Oedipal empathy with the mother to a universal application of empathy.[43] By creating and maintaining a split-off psychic state, where pre-Oedipal morality is quarantined from later moral values, loyalty to religious sublimations of the mother can coincide with ruthlessness toward everyone else. Using older psychoanalytic terminology, one might speak of "regression in the service of the ego" that evades the "capacity for concern" by reverting to the stage of "pre-ruth" (and pre-ruthlessness).[44] The concept of "regression" is inadequate, however, because both an original, innovative sublimation and, in Coleridge's phrase, a "willing suspension of disbelief" are integral to the spirituality. Because the access to selected pre-Oedipal memories is not truly a regression, *furor bellicus* can integrate the dyadic merger fantasy with the triadic structure of the Oedipal complex.

Recourse to memories that antedate concrete operational thinking disposes *furor bellicus* to a concreteness that transforms what might otherwise be experienced playfully as make-believe into an apparent existential reality. The reification of the religious fantasy, its conversion from an illusion into a delusion so that it ceases to be a hope and faith and instead becomes an experience and self-evident truth, is further facilitated by the capacity of dissociative states to reify fantasies.[45] Devotees' surrender to the spirit of Yahweh provided a delusional sense of security that manifested not only in euphoric ecstasies, but also in dissociation,

42. Michael Eigen, *The Psychotic Core* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1986).

43. Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (trans. H. Weaver; New York: Basic Books, 1969), 96; Eugene J. Mahon, "The 'Dissolution' of the Oedipus Complex: A Neglected Cognitive Factor," *Psychoanal Quarterly* 60 (1991): 628–34.

44. Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Exploration in Art* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952). See also D. W. Winnicott, "The Depressive Position in Normal Emotional Development," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 28 (1955); repr. in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis: Collected Papers* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 262–77.

45. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1971; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Ronald E. Shor, "Hypnosis and the Concept of the Generalized Reality Orientation," *American Journal Psychotherapy* 13 (1959): 582–602.

depersonalization, indifference to danger, ruthlessness toward others, and unconscious enactments of aggression. Hypnosis was used cultically to facilitate the manic defense; but magical or performative actions, such as Saul's dismembering the oxen and Zedekiah's dancing while wearing horns, may be understood as symbolic enactments of the manic defense.

The indifference to danger that formed part of the manic defense coincided with unconscious suicidality. Samson was a literal suicide, bringing down a Philistine temple on himself and his captors. Saul provoked Philistines in war until he was slain. The Sons of the Prophets needlessly warned Ahab of their intention to murder him, which gave him the opportunity to kill them pre-emptively. The unconscious suicidality indicates an unconscious need for punishment that was symptomatic, I suggest, of unconscious moral revulsion for the values that the prophets consciously held.[46]

The psychology of biblical terrorism was not the product of individual characterological psychopathology. It was a phenomenon of group psychology. People suffering narcissistic pathologies may have self-selected to become prophets, but the fraternal organization cannot be explained adequately in individual terms. Biblical terrorism was a transgenerational cultural phenomenon. It was historically derivative of older religious practices in the Aegean and/or Canaan; and prophetism was practiced in northern Israel for five centuries.

A single initiatory experience of ecstasy sufficed to constitute "prophesying" (1 Sam 10:19) in the legend of Saul, where prophetism was not a way of life but only an initiation into the spirit of Yahweh that was the secret of Samson's riddle. The practice of prophetism was a Mystery cult that compared with the classical Mystery of Dionysus. The Mysteries were rites of initiation that individuals undertook by choice as an adjunct to their general religious practices.[47] In some cases, such as the Mystery of Dionysus, initiation was followed by practices of group ecstasy.

The growth of the prophetic movement would presumably have depended on occasions and locations when men from different clans and tribes gathered together. The mustering of tribal militias for war would have been a major occasion for proselytizing. The hazing, shaming, and boasting of men preparing for battle would have been ripe ground for initiations that both intensified humiliation and encouraged a manic

46. Neville Symington, *Narcissism: A New Theory* (London: Karnac, 1993).

47. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

defense against it.[48] The deliberate infliction of massive trauma during puberty initiations in order to transform gentle boys into ruthless hunters and warriors has been amply documented by psychoanalytic anthropologists.[49] Because trauma paralyzes thought, trauma has the capacity to concretize or reify religious doctrines, transforming hopeful beliefs into delusional convictions; and the concretizing effects of trauma are longer lasting than dissociative states.[50] Although Samson and Saul may have suffered narcissistic character disorders, the conduct of rank and file Sons of the Prophets is sufficiently explained by military inductions that amplified and traumatized the ordinary phallic narcissism of male competition.

Ecstatic warfare in ancient northern Israel fulfilled the psychological function that Freud credited to religion in general:

> [Religion's] technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner—which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcibly fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more.[51]

48. Cf. Chana Ullman, *The Transformed Self: The Psychology of Religious Conversion* (New York: Plenum, 1989); Arthur J. Deikman, *The Wrong Way Home: Uncovering the Patterns of Cult Behavior in American Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1990).

49. John W. M. Whiting et al., "The Function of Male Initiation Ceremonies at Puberty," in *Readings in Social Psychology* (ed. E. E. Maccoby et al.; 3d ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1958), 359–70; John W. M. Whiting, "Socialization Process and Personality," in *Psychological Anthropology* (ed. F. L. K. Hsu; Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1961), 469–507; Gilbert Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981); Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Rituals of Manhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Theodore Lidz and Ruth W. Lidz, *Oedipus in the Stone Age: A Psychoanalytic Study of Masculinization in Papua New Guinea* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities, 1989); Gilbert Herdt and Robert J. Stoller, *Intimate Communications: Erotics and the Study of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

50. Sigmund Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" (1926), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 20 (ed. James Strachey, with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson; London: Hogarth, 1959), 87–172.

51. Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1930), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21 (ed. James Strachey, with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson; London: Hogarth, 1961), 64–145.

As his generalization applies to biblical terrorism, Freud's diagnosis was overly positive. Under wartime conditions, eccentric pathological personalities such as Samson and Saul may have seemed great heroes of the wars of Israel. Their initiations and practices of ecstatic warfare may have been widely imitated. By exacerbating devotees' senses of shame and guilt, the initiations induced both identifications with the aggressor and manic denials of distress. Men who could not otherwise have brought themselves to kill in battle became able to do so, not through courage but through dissociation. The disorder was similar in kind to, although milder in intensity than, both post-traumatic stress disorder and thought reform or brainwashing. Ecstatic warfare was a culturally induced psychopathology, an instance of what Rangell called "the syndrome of the compromise of integrity."[52] Healthy conscience was repressed while consciousness engaged in savage persecutions of both self and others.

Importantly, modern armies achieve similar ends with recruits in boot camp. Terrorism is, I suggest, nothing more than an extreme case of the normative insanity of war.

52. Leo Rangell, "A Psychoanalytic Perspective Leading Currently to the Syndrome of the Compromise of Integrity," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 55 (1974): 3–12. See also Rangell's "Lessons from Watergate: A Derivative for Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalysis Quarterly* 45 (1976): 37–61, and *The Mind of Watergate: An Exploration of the Compromise of Integrity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).

The Transgression of Aggression: Learning to Love the Hate in the New Testament (and Ourselves!)

Michael Willett Newheart

Introduction

Aggression. It's such a grrreat word. Say it with me: "Aggression." Once more with feeling: "AGGRESSION." Yes, it is such a great word. It begins with the ubiquitous schwa sound—"uh," as if one is hesitating about what one is going to say. Then there is the "grrr," as one expresses one's anger and rage, becomes the tiger ready to pounce. Then there's the "eh," like we're proud, and it ends in "shun," which we do with those whom we're angry with. We shun or stun, sometimes with a gun. Aggression, yes, it is a great word.

As I was thinking about this essay, a rhyme came into my head: Aggression is transgression; aggression is transgression. So our parents, our society, and our religious community teach us. But what if the transgression is against aggression, that is, when we seek to suppress aggression, then we are denying a vital human energy, and thus "sinning against our very humanity."

This essay is a meditation, a midrash on a chapter in Naomi Goldenberg's book *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body.*[1] It is Chapter 10, entitled, "Anger in the Body: The Impact of Idealization on Human Development and Religion."[2] In my essay, then, I will first summarize Goldenberg's chapter, with special attention to her treatment of Melanie Klein's view of aggression. Then I will turn my gaze at the New Testament and the role that aggression plays in the Gospel of John. Finally, I will consider how aggression functions in our exegesis. It is my hope that we might love the hate that we find in the text and in ourselves.

1. Naomi Goldenberg, *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon, 1990).
2. Ibid., 156–71.

Goldenberg: Anger in the Body

In her chapter "Anger in the Body," Naomi Goldenberg argues that "the suppression of the body in religious traditions is linked to the displacement of aggression in those traditions."[3] In order to support this thesis she turns to the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who she says contended that aggression is an innate instinct. Klein began her work with very young children. In contrast to our picture of the infant as happy and satisfied, Klein presents a picture of the infant as angry and aggressive. The infant is angry that the breast is taken away or gives bad milk or a variety of other reasons. (My colleague Ron Hopson suggests that aggression is derivative; it is a response to disappointment or frustration.)

Anger leads to anxiety because the infant is afraid to express anger. The parent might respond with anger and kill the infant. Anger, then, is experienced within one's own body. The infant, then, experiences ambivalence—both love and hate—toward the parent. In order to protect oneself, infants project their aggression onto others, a psychological process known as splitting. So, there are the good parents and the evil strangers. Infants idealize parents in order to control fear of them and anger toward them.

Klein contends that aggression is essential to life, but it must be experienced in its proper context, that of love. Klein, then, encourages us to hold both hate and love together and therefore lead more balanced and caring lives.

Taking Klein as her cue, Goldenberg contends that religious traditions have attempted to suppress aggression through denying the body and honoring the soul. She says that the separation of the body from the soul is really a separation of anger from love. When this is done, we look for a scapegoat. While God is good and nonsensual, the devil is evil and sensual. And Goldenberg maintains that women are often the object of aggression in religious traditions. She writes, "I suggest that Christianity finds it impossible to cherish bodies in general and female bodies in particular because anger felt to reside in the body poses a threat to images of an all-perfect God."[4] Goldenberg points to Catholicism's difficulty with the physical body of Mary. She also contends that the extreme idealization which results from the concept of an all-good God conceals terror and rage at a parent. She suggests that a way that religious traditions deny the aggression of the parent and aggression toward the parent is through the idea that parental violence leads to immortality, an idea

3. Ibid., 156.
4. Ibid., 165–66.

present in the traditional formulation of the doctrine of the atonement. In such a way, Christians deny their own anger. Goldenberg concludes, "We cannot learn to stop hating women without learning to stop hating human flesh."[5] She links the denigration of the body with the centrality of aggression in human life. She encourages us to acknowledge our hate as well as our love, our flesh as well as our spirit.

The New Testament: John as the Gospel of Love (and Hate?)

I think that Goldenberg has struck a mountain of platinum by in-Kleining us to see the pervasiveness of aggression in Christian traditions. Let us turn to those foundational Christian traditions, the books contained in the New Testament, where we find not only love but also hate. Specifically, I would like to consider the Gospel of John, upon which I am writing lessons for the fourth volume of Abingdon Press' *The Pastor's Bible Study*, which is part of the New Interpreter's Bible enterprise.[6] Although John is often called the Gospel of love, central to it is hate. Adele Reinhartz has recently given attention to love, hate, and violence in John. She, of course, focuses on the hate directed toward the Jews in the Gospel. I think that we are all familiar with that picture: In the Gospel of John, the Jews seek to kill Jesus (5:18); they are children of the devil (8:44); they expel Jesus' followers from the synagogue and even kill them (9:22; 16:2); in calling for Pilate to kill Jesus, they say that they have no king but Caesar (19:15). This is not a particularly pretty picture, especially since we have no evidence that Jews were doing any of this to Jesus or his followers. Indeed, contemporary Johannine scholarship has expelled the expulsion theory. In other words, Jews did not throw Johannine Christians out of the synagogue, thus providing the context for the dark picture of Jews in the Gospel. The expulsion theory seems to be the most recent example of anti-Judaic New Testament scholarship. I think that the most we can say is that the first readers of the Gospel of John felt alienated from the synagogue leadership, perhaps because their message of Jesus as the Messiah was not received. Their response to this rejection was aggression expressed textually toward the Jews. But I would like to put it in a broader context, for I contend that the aggression toward the Jews is part and parcel of two things: aggression toward the body and idealization of Jesus.

5. Ibid., 170.

6. David Albert Farmer, ed., *The Pastor's Bible Study*, Vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

Jesus is certainly idealized in the Gospel of John. He is the Word become flesh (1:14); he and the Father are one (10:30). He is the great I AM, bringing bread, life, resurrection, vine, light, shepherd, the way and truth. His death on the cross is glorification, a lifting up, in which he returns to God. As Goldenburg notes, extreme idealization suppresses aggression. Is the community of the beloved disciple angry, even enraged, with Jesus for leaving? They cannot express that aggression toward Jesus. So they divinize Jesus and demonize the body. And this body is their social body, the Jewish community to which they belong. But also they demonize their own physical body. After all, the flesh is useless; it is the spirit that gives life (6:63). Yes, the Word becomes flesh, but it is not real human flesh, as Ernst Kasemann said some years ago, because it is flesh that does not eat, that thirsts only to fulfill scripture, that speaks in strange ways to his mother and other relatives, and that dies an almost painless death and returns to live forever. Indeed, his followers too will live forever; they will die and be raised up or not die at all. They are not of this world, like he is not. Their flesh is not real human flesh either. The body, the flesh, is denied; it is the object of aggression.

Goldenburg suggests that hatred toward the body is acted out in hatred toward women. Certainly this is not true with the Gospel of John, where women have an important role in the Gospel. We think of Mary Magdalene, who received the first resurrection appearance, Mary and Martha, whom Jesus loves, and the Samaritan woman, who brings her entire village to faith in Jesus. But wait a minute: let's look more closely at those women: Mary Magdalene is eclipsed by Thomas. Though Martha gives the confession that the Gospel is looking for, she protests when Jesus says to open Lazarus' grave. The Samaritan woman becomes dispensable after her village comes to faith. So maybe the Gospel's suppression of aggression comes out in hatred of the Jews, denigration of the flesh, and at best ambivalence toward women.

And what role does the imperial context play in Johannine aggression? Expressing aggression toward the Romans turned out to be suicidal for the Jews in the revolt of 66–70. Perhaps aggression toward the Jews, the flesh, and to some extent women was displaced aggression toward the Romans. So, an instrument of Roman torture and execution becomes the vehicle for the Son to return to the Father. And placed on the cross are the Jews, women, and one's own body. The Johannine Jesus says from the cross, "Behold your mother, your brother, and yourself."

Loving Our Hate

And what do we do with our own aggression? Do we live it out through hating our bodies, as we sit in uncomfortable chairs for hours and hours listening to passionless papers? Do we idealize the mind and the soul, forgetting that both are based in the body? Do we live out our aggression through our relationships with women, who do not speak in this section? Only asking. And what about our relationships to other members of our social body? Who are the Jews for us, those folks who we say are trying to kill us though they give us life?

Perhaps we can only be sensitive to the hate and violence in the New Testament if we are sensitive to its role in our lives. It is not something that is back there or out there, but in here, in our midst.

Conclusion: A Hermeneutics of Rage

I suppose what I'm calling for is a "hermeneutics of aggression," a "hermeneutics of rage." I remember the book of ten years ago *The Politics of Rage*, about George Wallace.[7] When we hear about the "politics of rage," we think about the politics of someone else, someone who's expressing their anger in ways that we don't agree with. Might we say that all politics are politics of rage and that all our hermeneutics are a hermeneutics of rage?

To close, I will return to my rhyme:

> Aggression is transgression.
> Aggression is regression.
> Aggression is digression.
> Aggression is…progression.

7. Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

Part II

The Bible Within Cultures of Violence

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Submit or Else!
Intimate Partner Violence, Aggression, Abusers, and the Bible

Ronald R. Clark, Jr.

The Dilemma of Anger, Aggression, and Intimate Partner Violence

Families caught in domestic violence and faith communities addressing this issue face a dilemma while trying to confront abuse. Due to a lack of understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner violence, it becomes difficult to confront abusers who have been taught to use texts to subordinate females and their families. The problem is further compounded when we associate intimate partner violence with anger, rather than power and control. Anger is an emotion and a response one displays when anxious. Anxiety creates many emotions, but anger can be one that is used to intimidate and control others. When anger is used to control others, the problem is not anger itself but the need and desire to control others.

Intimate partner violence is a growing problem in the United States as well as other parts of the world:

- In America, two to four million women have indicated that their spouses or live-in partners physically abused them each year.[1]

1. The statistics vary year-on-year, but the range of reported statistics falls between two and four million women. Angela Browne, *Violence against Women: A Majority Staff Report*, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate (October 1992): 3; P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2000). Online at http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf (accessed June 3, 2010); Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: Berkeley, 2002), 7.

- Twenty to twenty-five percent of all women report that their partners have abused them at least once.[2] One out of four American women report having been raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, live-in partner, or date at some time in their life.[3]
- Twenty-five to forty percent of dating couples experience physical violence.[4]
- Hospital emergency rooms indicate that twenty to thirty percent of women seeking treatment are victims of battering.[5]
- Every day in America at least three women are murdered by their husband or intimate partner.[6]
- Throughout the world, one in three women have confessed to having been beaten, coerced into sex, or experienced other forms of abuse.[7]

2. Evan Stark and Anne H. Flitcraft, "Spouse Abuse," *Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health Source Book* (1985); Sarah Glazer, "Violence Against Women," *Colorado Researcher* 3 (1993): 171. For a more statistic-based analysis of domestic violence in America and other countries, see "Physical Assault on Women by an Intimate Male Partner, Selected Population-Based Studies, 1982–99, Table 1," *Population Report Series L: Number 11* (accessed April 27, 2009). Online: http//:www.infoforhealth.org/pr/l11/l11tables.shtml.

3. *Ending Violence Against Women: Population Reports*, Series L. Number 11, 27.4 (December 1999). See also the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, *Intimate Partner Violence* (October 2003), n.p. (accessed May 22, 2009). Online: http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/IPV-FactSheet.pdf; Samantha Levine, "The Perils of Young Romance," *US News and World Report* (August 13, 2001): 46; National Women's Health Information Center, *Violence against Women* (September 2001), n.p. (accessed May 22 2009). Online: http://www.womenshealth.gov/violence.

4. Sherry L. Hamby and David B. Sugarman, "Acts of Psychological Aggression Against a Partner and their Relation to Physical Assault and Gender," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 968.

5. Mary Susan Miller, *No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women by Their Men* (New York: Random House, 1995), 7.

6. Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence from 1993–2001* (February 2003). In 2000, 1247 women were killed while 440 men were killed by intimate partners. Rosa Estrella suggests that every fifteen seconds a spouse kills his wife. See Rosa Emily Nina Estrella, "Effects of Violence on Interpersonal Relations and Strategies that Promote Family Unity," lecture given at *LaFamilia Unida: La Fuerza Del Futuro 4th Annual Power in Partnership Bilingual Conference*, June 20, 2003, Portland, Or.

7. *Population Report Series L*. Estrella reports that fifty per cent of women of the world are abused by a spouse and that four million women are involved in sex

- Domestic violence is estimated to be much higher within the United States military than within civilian families.[8]

Intimate partner violence not only affects the spouse who is targeted by the abuser, but it also affects the children in the home:

- One-third of abused women indicate that they were abused the first time during pregnancy.[9] Research suggests that this may contribute to low birth weight of infants and other negative effects for infants.[10]
- In a study done by Boston Medical Center over, one-third of children reported seeing violence by fathers against mothers when a parent reported that no violence occurred.[11]
- Children brought up in abusive homes have a higher risk of being abused.[12]

trafficking. The statistics vary from country to country. Estrella indicates that 20.8 % of women in the Dominican Republic report having been physically abused while Palacios reports that in El Salvador four out of five women live with violence in their families. See Maria Aracely Linares Palacios, "Strategies for Working with Latinos Who Have Experienced Family Violence," lecture given at *LaFamilia Unida: La Fuerza Del Futuro 4th Annual Power in Partnership Bilingual Conference*, June 20, 2003, Portland, Or.

8. Christine Hansen, "A Considerate Service: An Advocate's Introduction to Domestic Violence and the Military," *Domestic Violence Report* 6 (2001). The study suggests that in 1985 one in three military spouses were victims of abuse. In 1987 research indicated that military victims were four times more likely to be choked into unconsciousness. A study done at the Pentagon from 1992 to 1996 also indicated that domestic violence in the military occurred at a rate five times higher than that among civilians. While serious incidents decreased from 1997 to 1999, the amount of moderate to severe domestic violence incidents increased. The results suggest that domestic violence in the military is much higher than in civilian families. Also see Marianne Szegedy-Maszak, "Death at Fort Bragg," *US News and World Report* (August 12, 2002): 44.

9. Jacquelyn C. Campbell, "Correlates of Battering during Pregnancy," *Research Nursing Health* 15 (1992): 219–26; Campbell et al., "Why Battering during Pregnancy?," *Clinical Issues in Perinatal and Health Nursing* 4 (1993): 343–49. As many as 324,000 women each year experience intimate partner violence during pregnancy. See J. A. Gazmararian, et al., "Violence and Reproductive Health: Current Knowledge and Future Research Directions," *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 4 (2000): 79–84.

10. Carol J. Adams, *Woman-Battering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 12.

11. Boston Medical Center Pediatrics, "Child Witness to Violence Project" (accessed April 27, 2009). Online: http//:www.childwitnesstoviolence.org/care_givers/for_caregivers_facts.html.

- It is estimated that three to five million children per year witness an assault on their mothers.[13]
- "Around forty percent of abusive men extend their pattern of behavior to other family members."[14]

The dynamics of abuse and intimate partner violence involve power and control rather than anger. This power and control includes coercion, fear, terrorism, and intimidation.[15] Unfortunately, anger is commonly associated with abuse. Those who are not aware that anger is a response to anxiety or the fear of losing control over others suggest that the problem with abuse is anger. Therefore, treatment for the abuser often involves *anger management* or *drug and alcohol* counseling. This method of therapy suggests that the abuser should focus on controlling or managing his anger and supposes that this is the major cause of his abusive behavior.[16] According to Tavris,

> The harder we try to pin down one explanation, the more certain we are to fail. The reason, I will argue, is that anger is not a disease, with a single cause; it is a process, a transaction, a way of communicating. With the possible exception of anger caused by organic abnormalities, most angry episodes are social events: they assume meaning only in terms of the social contract between participants.[17]

12. A national survey of more than 2000 American families reported that 50 percent of the men who abused their wives also abused their children. Jennifer Talbot, "Children Witnessing Domestic Violence" (lecture presented at the *Working with Abusive Men* workshop, Portland State University, Portland, Or., May 2002).

13. Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 8.

14. Bancroft, *When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Witnessing Abuse* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 2004), 53.

15. The Oregon Domestic Violence Council has defined intimate partner violence as: *A pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship. These behaviors include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Tactics of coercion, terrorism, degradation, exploitation, and violence are used to engender fear in the victim in order to enforce compliance*. Multnomah County Health Department, *Domestic Violence in Multnomah County* (February 2000): 2.

16. Females make up 85 to 90 percent of reported abuse in intimate partner violence. See Callie Marie Rennison and Sarah Welchans, *Intimate Partner Violence*, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (May 2000): 1. Due to the prevalence of male perpetrators I have chosen to refer to the abuser in the masculine gender. While I acknowledge that females have been convicted of abuse (both in the heterosexual and Gay–Lesbian communities), the high majority of reported abuse still involves men battering women.

17. Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (rev. ed.; New York: Touchstone, 1989), 19.

We tend to view abusers as angry people who are *out of control*.[18] One reason for this misperception is that we have come to believe that only angry, violent people abuse others. Media reports focus on the violent or lethal cases of domestic violence. This suggests to many that abuse must only involve physical violence. Therefore, we do not take seriously the concerns of those who are verbally, emotionally, and psychologically controlled and question whether or not they are being abused. Yet, abuse is about control. The goal of abusers is *control*. Abusers react to anxiety in a dysfunctional manner. They may use anger or other emotions to gain control of a situation or another person. Abusers can also use apologies, self-pity, and sympathy to control a situation. Victims find themselves caught in a cycle that is reinforced by guilt, fear, intimidation, and, unfortunately, love:

> One of the earliest lessons I learned from abused women is that to understand abuse you can't look just at the explosions, you have to examine with equal care the spaces *between* the explosions. The dynamics of these periods tell us as much about the abuse as the rages or the thrown objects, as the disgusting name-calling or the jealous accusations. The abuser's thinking and behavior during the calmer periods are what cause his big eruptions that wound or frighten.[19]

The Power and Control Wheel, developed by the Duluth Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota (Fig. 1 [overleaf]), illustrates how abusers use various tactics of power and control to subordinate others.

Abusers use various methods to control their partners and close friends/relatives. Anger is only one of many methods that an abuser uses to engender fear and coerce their partners into submission. They use intimidation, male privilege, coercion, emotional and psychological abuse, children, or minimize their abuse so that their partner may continue in an emotional bond or relationship with them. This causes the victims to develop what is known as *traumatic bonding*. Traumatic bonding creates an emotional dependence that a victim has on their captor, or one who

18. Beverly Engel, *The Emotionally Abused Woman: Overcoming Destructive Patterns and Reclaiming Yourself* (New York: Fawcett, 1990), 47, states: "The emotionally abusive person has an agenda, and that agenda is to be in control. In his attempt to be in control he will dominate, suppress, tyrannize, persecute, and attempt to conquer anyone he relates to on a consistent basis. Among his repertoire of control tactics are insults, denigrating comments, derogatory words, threats, and constant criticism, along with an extensive array of other intimidating behavior designed to make others feel inadequate and helpless." See also Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 112.

19. Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 137–38.

terrorizes them, which causes them to seek validation, support, love, and emotional strength from this abuser. Abusive individuals use power over others to control them and enforce compliance. They may use anger to control others, but when this becomes ineffective, they try something else.

Figure 1. *Abuse "Power and Control Wheel"*[20]

Those victimized by the abuser find themselves caught in a relationship that becomes cyclical. The abuser seems to control the cycle and victims become powerless in this swirl of emotion and violence (Fig. 2). The abuser expresses anxiety over losing control of those in relationship with him, causing him to try to become more controlling and abusive. This also causes the family to become *tense* and afraid. The abuser begins to act aggressively in order to control the family and terrorize them. This

20. Used with Permission, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, http://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheelgallery.php.

is considered the violent *storm* phase of the cycle. After this the abuser expresses remorse and guilt for his actions. This *calm after the storm* phase may be short lived or extend over a period of months. This is the period during which the abuser blames the victim or victims for the tension and storm. The cycle then begins again and many times escalates unless intervention occurs. "It seems absurd that a relationship that is supposed to be based on love can become violent and demeaning. The incredulity is stretched even further when the relationship does not dissolve but instead continues in a cycle of apparent forgiveness and sentimental love followed by increased violence."[21]

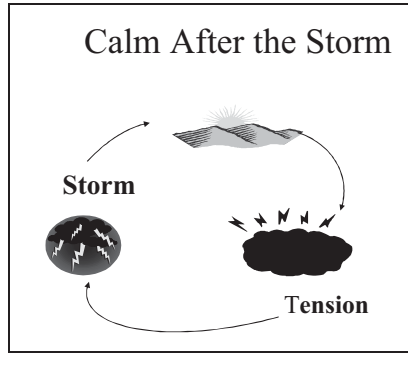

Figure 2. *Cycle of Abuse*

Since anger and aggression have been effective for abusers, in controlling others, they develop a worldview that supports intra-relational competition, hostility, control or domination of others, inequality, and negation or neglect.[22] Abusers lack the desire or ability to encourage equality, partnership, mutuality, intimacy, and validation in their partners.

Abuse, and the Biblical Texts

Those who abuse others, who are involved or familiar with teachings from within the Judeo-Christian faith communities, have found weapons to control their partners in some of the sacred texts. While these texts in no way support abuse or power over intimate partners, they are used by abusive men (and sometimes the community itself) to further subordinate women.

21. David J. Livingston, *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 7.

22. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize it and How to Respond* (2d ed.; Holbrook, Mass.: Adams Media, 1996), 42.

Divorce

In Mal 2:16, Yahweh states:

> כי־שנא שלח אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל וכסה חמס על־לבושו אמר יהוה צבאות
>
> I hate divorce, says Yahweh the God of Israel, and one who covers himself with violence, says Yahweh of hosts.[23]

Many, especially clergy and abusers, have used this text to tell victims that God does not approve of divorce. Therefore, victims have no other option but to stay in the relationship, accept the abuse, and hope for change. The text seems to be difficult to reconcile if we take the view that God is opposed to any divorce. But is the text meant to enslave spouses in violent relationships?

The setting of the book of Malachi suggests that the nation of Judah has returned from Babylonian/Persian captivity. As time passed, they began to return to the ways of their former generations by neglecting the sacrifices and practicing idolatry (Mal 1:1–6). While Yahweh was the offended husband in Hosea, Yahweh became the offended wife in Mal 2:11–16.[24] Israel had married a foreigner and begun to practice injustice. The people of Israel again practiced the same behavior that caused the previous divorce. How was God to respond to this behavior? "Judah has acted treacherously (or faithlessly בגדה) and committed an abomination in Israel and Jerusalem. Judah has profaned what was holy to Yahweh and loved the daughter of a foreign God" (Mal 2:11).

First, *God practiced divorce against those who profaned the holy covenant* (Isa 50:1; 54:6–7; Jer 3:8). In Ezra 10:11, Ezra and the Jewish leaders encouraged the Jewish men, who were married to foreign women, to divorce their foreign wives. If Mal 2:11 suggests that the Jewish men may have been married to foreign wives, then what are the implications of this text?[25] In Mal 2:16 God was displeased with divorce. However, this does not suggest that God was not willing to practice it.

23. Other versions of this text provide different translations. The Septuagint translates the verse, "If you hate her, divorce her." For more information on the validity of this translation one can consult Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1272.

24. For texts that suggest God as mother/wife/female, see Isa 42:14; 46:3; 66:9–13. While John 4 suggests that God is spirit, female imagery is used of God as well as male imagery. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90.

25. Mal 2:11 states: "Judah has married the daughter of a foreign god." This can have two interpretations. First, the text can suggest that the Jewish men were married

Second, *the Malachi text may not be discussing literal marriages*.[26] The term "covenant" (ברית) was used throughout Malachi to refer to the Jewish nation's relationship to Yahweh:

1:2	I have loved you
2:4	Warning about breaking the *covenant* with Levi
2:5	*Covenant* of life and peace, Levi respected me
2:8	You have turned from me
2:10	Why do you profane my *covenant*?
2:10	One God made them both
2:11	Judah has *broken faith* and married the daughter of a foreign god
2:12	The Lord will cut him (Judah) off
2:14	False tears, remember the wife of your youth (Yahweh)
	Broken faith with your wife (Yahweh)
2:16	I hate divorce so *do not break faith*

These texts indicate that the Jews were dishonoring their master, father, and wife.[27] The wife of their youth was to be Yahweh. Judah had left Yahweh and cleaved to another woman or god (probably the goddess Asherah).[28] Yahweh was challenging Judah in court, like an angry hurt wife, and warning Israel that they were about to be divorced, something God did not wish to do. The final statement was: "Guard yourself in your

to foreign women. Second, the text can mean that the Jewish nation is again involved in idolatry. Biblical scholars support both interpretations.

26. For more on this debate, see Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998): 422–43; David Clyde Jones, "A Note on the LXX of Malachi 2:16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 683–85; Beth Glazier-McDonald, "Intermarriage, Divorce, and the *Bat-ʾel Nekar*: Insights into Mal 2:10–16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 603–11; David Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 195–206. Against this interpretation, see Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 27–47.

27. In some cases Yahweh is referred to as the female partner. See Peterson, *Zechariah*, 203; and Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 97–103. In Proverbs, wisdom is seen as feminine and is also the first creation of God (Prov 8–9).

28. In Jer 44 the Jews who were left after the third Babylonian captivity turned from God to worship the *Queen of Heaven* (Asherah). It seems that the Jews in Malachi's day are again returning to this deity. See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 294–95; Smith, *History*, 109–10. Julia M. O'Brien also believes that the Jews have again been involved in idolatry to Asherah; see her *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentary; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 300–302.

spirit and *do not break faith*" (ובאשת נעוריך אל יבגד, Mal 2:15b). This interpretation is more in line with God's view of divorce (an aggressive action to protect the sanctity of covenant), but it does not suggest that God will not allow divorce.

Another interesting point in this text is found in Mal 2:16. "I hate divorce" (כי־שנא שלח אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל), says Yahweh the God of Israel, "and one clothing/covering themselves with violence/lawlessness" (וכסה חמס על־לבושו אמר יהוה צבאות), says Yahweh Almighty, "so guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith." While God may not wish to divorce the people, God equally hates violent/lawless individuals. Malachi indicates that the Jews were showing partiality in the law (2:9), committing injustices (2:17), oppressing the poor (3:5), and practicing evil (3:15). Many abusive men have failed to read these sections of the text. In my work with abusers and survivors, this text is commonly used to control victims and promote that God is angry with the wives for leaving, divorcing, and filing a restraining order. Few, however, admit that God would be angry with them for their violence, controlling behavior, and oppression.

Malachi 2:16 does not suggest that God is angry with divorced people. The text also does not suggest that people cannot divorce their abusive spouses. The text is a warning to those who are unfaithful *and violent* in their relationships with Yahweh and *other humans*. The text also suggests that Yahweh calls for relationships to promote peace, respect, and honor for both parties.

Matthew 19

Jesus also spoke on the issue of divorce. In Matt 19 he said, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." This seems to some to be the only reason Jesus gives for divorce. There are a few considerations on this point. First, Jesus was speaking to Pharisees who were questioning him and trying to find a reason for divorce. This is evident in the collection of rabbinical writings and traditions circulating around the time of Christ.[29] Jesus was not criticizing the Jews, but rather the corrupt leadership that came from some of the Pharisees and leaders. The Jewish rabbis had developed a complex method of validating divorce that in many ways victimized the women. In Luke 16:15–18, Jesus accused them of trying to justify themselves and he used divorce as an example of this:

29. *M. Giṭṭin* is a large tract that gives suggestions concerning legal divorce and gives the reasons why one might divorce a spouse.

> Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς ἐστε οἱ δικαιοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὁ δὲ θεὸς γινώσκει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὅτι τὸ ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὑψηλὸν βδέλυγμα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου ἀπὸ τότε ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται καὶ πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται εὐκοπώτερον δέ ἐστιν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πεσεῖν πᾶς ὁ ἀπολύων τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ γαμῶν ἑτέραν μοιχεύει καὶ ὁ ἀπολελυμένην ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς γαμῶν μοιχεύει.
>
> He told them, "You are the ones who practice righteousness before other men but God knows your heart—because what is praised before men is an abomination in front of God. The law and the prophets were until John. From then the Kingdom of God was proclaimed and everyone fought violently to get into it. Heaven and earth may end but not one small part of the law will fall. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another is practicing adultery and the one who is divorced from a man and marries is practicing adultery."

In the above text the Pharisees had kept silent concerning Herod's marriage to his brother Philip's ex-wife. John the Baptist was confrontational concerning this "re-arranged marriage," and he was murdered. Jesus, here, is confronting the Pharisees who interpret the law for the king and yet seemed to have ignored that the Kingdom rests on God's law, not the political alliances formed by Rome, Herod, and his new wife. The text was not meant to be a commentary on marriage but a challenge to the political powers of the Pharisees and God's Kingdom.

Both the Matthean and Lucan versions of this passage suggest that Jewish men, especially Pharisees, sought reasons to divorce their wives and further victimize them. The Jewish practices of divorce had also become highly influenced by the Greco-Roman culture and its freedom for men to divorce and abandon their wives.[30]

Jesus' discussion concerning divorce and remarriage was not designed to be a discussion of all forms of divorce but a prohibition against men victimizing their wives, something that had become common practice in the first century. The Apostle Paul further discussed issues of Christian marriage in 1 Cor 7. Paul suggested that marriage was important for men and women in order to share sexual intimacy and fulfill each other's sexual desires (1 Cor 7:1–6). According to this text, marriage was still a covenant that required *both* husband and wife to work together for love, security, and faithfulness.

30. Santiago Guijarro, "The Family in First-Century Galilee," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 42–65 (46).

Concerning the issue of mixed marriages, a Christian married to a non-Christian, the Christian was not to seek a divorce if the unbelieving spouse were willing to stay in the relationship: "To the rest, I say (not the Lord), that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she is willing to live with him, do not divorce her.[31] If a woman has a husband who was an unbeliever and he was willing to live with her, do not divorce your husband" (1 Cor 7:12–13). This became a problem because Roman society was quite different from the Jewish and Christian communities in respect of morals, marriages, and family. This fact was especially true concerning husbands and their treatment of wives and children.[32] Roman men were often allowed to be promiscuous and harsh with their families.[33] Roman wives had also been given many freedoms and could divorce their husbands and remarry.[34] Yet the Christian also had the right to expect to be treated fairly and honorably even in a mixed marriage. Paul believed that the Christian spouse should still expect faithfulness, loyalty, and respect even from the non-Christian spouse. In 1 Cor 7:12–14, Paul suggested that keeping the marriage together (meaning that both people agree to live with each other) brought a sense of holiness to the family. Paul was calling the mixed marriages legal and ritually pure according to Jewish standards.[35] As 1 Cor 7:14 puts it, "For the husband makes the unbelieving wife holy (ἡγίασται) and the wife makes the unbelieving husband holy, otherwise your children would be unclean (ἀκάθαρτά) but now they are holy." Christians were encouraged to work together with their non-Christian partners to bring holiness, love, and purity to their families. This was a great witness for Jesus.

This would not have been possible in every marriage. In mixed marriages where the unbelieving spouse was not willing to honor Jesus

31. Paul is giving a list of teachings for various individuals in the church. He addresses the married (7:1–7); the unmarried (7:8); the married (7:10, but in light of 7:12 these would both be believers who are married); and then the rest (7:12 who are the ones married to non-Christians).

32. For more information on this distinction, see Russ Dudrey, "'Submit Yourselves to One Another': A Socio-historical Look at the Household Code of Ephesians 5:15–6:9," *Restoration Quarterly* 41 (1999): 27–31.

33. Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influences of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 82–85.

34. Seneca (*De beneficius* 3.16.2) suggests that some of the women counted time by the number of husbands they had married and divorced.

35. Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, "Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, the Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of the Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 711–44.

and live in a healthy covenant (as described in 1 Cor 7:1–9), the Christian spouse was not bound to the marriage. Actually, Paul wrote: "But if the unbeliever wants to depart, let him depart (εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται χωριζέσθω), the brother or sister is not bound in this for God has called us to peace. How do you know, wife, if you can save your husband and how do you know, husband, if you can save your wife?" (7:15–16). Χωρίζεται is a command to "*let him go*." Paul also mentions that God had called spouses to peace. Paul's concern was for the Christian who would be subjected to sin through the other spouse. Christians are not expected to let their abusive spouses rule the home and bring violence to the children. The children need to be holy and live in a house of peace. The Christian has every right to demand and expect peace and respect in their home. The Christian has the right to confront an abusive spouse and say, "As long as we are married, this behavior will not continue."

Submission and Marriage

Ephesians 5

One concept in the biblical texts is that God seeks to develop relationship with humans. I find that in domestic violence, the victim, usually the woman, is blamed for causing the marriage to fail. Faith communities suggest that she needs to keep the marriage together by forgiving and enduring the abuse and oppression her husband manifests. Many churches and leaders attack the victim because they feel that the burden falls on her. This is a misunderstanding of covenant. In many cases the burden falls on the husband.

One passage that seems to illustrate this is Eph 5:21–33, which is built around this fundamental principle: submit to one another out of fear/respect for Christ. Christian marriage involves shared power. Both partners respect and submit to one another because they have a deep love for each other. Whether the text is attributed to Paul or a Deutero-Pauline author, this verse suggests that husbands are called to be "countercultural" in their relationships with their wives. However, the text is used by abusive men as well as some male Church leaders who suggest that a woman has no option but to submit to her husband—regardless of his oppression: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph 5:22–24). The text does not support abuse or oppression in a marriage. First, this text was written with women as the intended recipients, therefore it

should not be quoted by husbands toward their wives. It is likely that this is such a short section because women in the first century were typically submitting to their husbands. However, in light of evidence concerning Roman women, the plea only suggests that the wives should continue to respect their husbands.[36]

This does not teach that women are doormats; it suggests that men and women mutually submit to each other (5:21). Additionally, the Spirit (1 Cor 14:32) is submissive to the prophets. God's Spirit can be controlled and silenced by human beings. This does not indicate that the Spirit or God is less than human beings. Submission says nothing about status; it is only an act of giving, support, and encouragement. Women and men submit to each other (Eph 5:21) in the ways God has shown them through love, peace, compassion, and joy:

> Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (5:25–33)

This longer section was written to husbands. In domestic violence the problem is that husbands do not act like Jesus or God. A man who hits, humiliates, rapes, or verbally abuses his wife is acting contrary to the God who created him. When talking with men, we use this passage of scripture and discuss their behavior as compared to Jesus. In the early Church, God/Jesus was the model for husbands and fathers. It should be the same today. Husbands should initiate love and practice compassion toward their wives. They should not use biblical texts to subordinate their wives; rather, men should serve their spouses. Since God initiates covenant and seeks to bless those in covenant, husbands must reflect this nature in their covenants, marriages, and relationships. The Church needs to call these men to repentance and accountability. God does not maintain

36. For more information on the New Roman Wives, their rebellion in the Roman culture, and Paul's encouragement for the female Christian community, see Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 17–30.

a relationship through force, coercion, or control, but by love, persuasion, and forgiveness. Men must practice love, compassion, honor, and mercy in their relationships with others, especially their partners (Exod 34:6–8).

The city of Ephesus also had as its "head," Artemis, a hybrid goddess whose worshippers focused on her fertility blessings. Jesus as "head" was the one who united Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11–20; 3:4), the cosmos (1:10), the Church (1:22), husband and wife (5:32), nurtures the body (3:15; 5:29), and gives himself up for others (5:2, 25). This sacrificial, unifying, and nurturing nature of Jesus seems to be parallel to Artemis the head and great mother of Ephesus. Likewise, husbands were also challenged to imitate this maternal nature of Jesus as they also nurtured their wives and children (5:29; 6:4). Abusive and controlling men are called by the text to treat their wives with respect, honor, and gentleness. Men, like Artemis and Jesus, are expected to be concerned for women and children and not to demand submission from them.

Maintaining a relationship means that men and husbands should act righteously. To oppress the poor and weak is a sign of unrighteousness. Marriage is about empowerment rather than power and control. In 1 Pet 3:7, we read that husbands who are not considerate with their wives may not have their prayers heard. Marriage should help both partners become better and feel better about themselves: "If mutuality is one of the aims of love between adults, then people need to ask themselves how their own acts of self-sacrificing love either further mutuality or reinforce roles and structures of domination and subordination."[37]

Theological Obstacles to Leaving Abusive Relationships

The dilemma for victims in faith communities is further magnified when their communities contribute to the problem by enabling abusers to continue to subordinate their partners through the sacred texts. In my work with faith communities I have, sadly, found that many encourage women to change their abusive husbands by submission and staying in the marriage.[38] This fear of divorce and unwillingness to accept divorce

37. Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does it Do to Women?," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care* (ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 304–21 (317–18).

38. For a more detailed discussion of marriage and divorce, interpretations of these texts in light of abuse, and a defense for abuse victims leaving their abusers, see Chapter 6 of my book *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology of Domestic Abuse* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2005).

as an option seem to provide fewer resources for women seeking to be safe from their abusive husbands. It is also important to note that women who leave their abuser and are married are at greater risk of being murdered than those escaping who were previously cohabiting with or divorced from their abuser.[39]

Another theological roadblock involves *children and parenting*. The negative statistics on single parent homes, the current emphasis on the traumatic nature of divorce on children, and the fear of raising children alone create an environment where the woman feels compelled, for the sake of the children, to keep the marriage together.[40] Faith communities also struggle to treat divorced women and single parents as part of their spiritual community. Our society as well still attaches a stigma to those who are divorced. While biblical texts such as 1 Cor 7:12–16 and Matt 18:5–6 encourage spiritual adults to do what is best for children, the fear of divorce continues to encourage women to stay with their abusers. The abuser also continues to terrorize the children during visitation and while he is separated from his partner.[41]

Finally, the over-emphasis on the *crucifixion and suffering* of Christ by many faith communities continues to promote a sense of *victimization* within the Church, as well as among victims. The continual display of the trauma, abuse, and suffering of Jesus becomes a stumbling block to those traumatized by abusers who seek safety, justice, and healing in their faith communities by leaving their abuser. In many cases victims are re-traumatized by the graphic accounts of the cross. Many victims have also been encouraged to suffer with Christ rather than feel a sense

39. Ruth E. Fleury, Chris M. Sullivan, and Deborah I. Bybee, "When Ending the Relationship Does Not End the Violence," *Violence against Women* 6 (2000): 1363–83.

40. Bancroft, *When Dad Hurts Mom*, 321, states: "Children are far better off—as a number of studies demonstrate—living in peace with their mother than being exposed to a man who abuses her. In fact, the studies indicate that children are better off living with a single parent than being around parents who fight frequently even *without* abuse… The research that purports to show how damaging single mothering is to children has failed to control for income and for prior exposure to abuse, so that the difficulties observed are actually the effects of poverty and of the fact that many children witnessed abuse while their parents were together—and that is why the mother is now single."

41. This has led many batterer intervention specialists now to require abusers to have supervised or no visitation rights with their children when the partner leaves them. Bancroft is one of these specialists, as is Jack C. Straton, "What is Fair for Children of Abusive Men?," *Journal of the Task Group on Child Custody Issues of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism* 5 (2001): 1–10.

of freedom because of Christ's sufferings. Rather than the faith community emphasizing the justice and hope found in the resurrection of Christ (Rom 14:17), many call the victim to consign herself to carrying the burden and suffering in the family with the hope that this will produce mutuality and equality in her relationship (Luke 9:23–27).

Confronting the Issues of Intimate Partner Violence

Abusive men often develop a personality that further contributes to their abusive tendencies and their view of themselves. Characteristics of abusers involve narcissism, low self-esteem, emotional immaturity, compulsive tendencies, and emotional distance from both females and males.[42] They tend to believe that relationships are a competition and increase their emotional distance from other men. They lack any male accountability and search out those who can be controlled. These men not only control their partners, they control how others see them.

Many abusers have been given a negative view of females due to their environment and childhood issues. Below is what might be termed an illustration of the *Manhood*, box defining what a "real man" is assumed to be (Fig. 3).

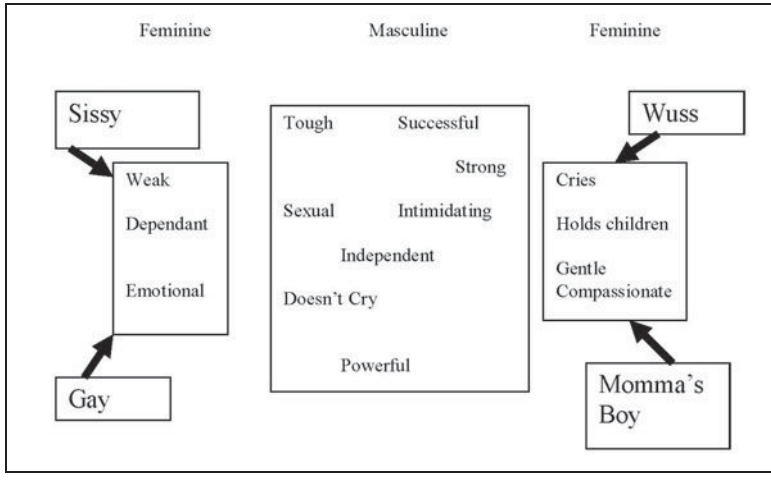

Figure 3. *Man Box: What is a Real Man?*

42. Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 42, 72; James Newton Poling, *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 27.

The characteristics listed above involve the current societal view of manhood. In Fig. 3, those terms that stand in contrast to what constitutes *a real man* are used to describe women or homosexuals. Female and homosexual terms are used for young boys/men who display behavior that is not "manly," or is seen as "opposite" to the nature of a "real man." Therefore, young men grow up viewing women as opposite or exhibiting behavior that is unacceptable for a man to display. In other words, men are raised to hate, fear, and disrespect women and others who exhibit *non-manly behavior*.

Abusers are men who have deep insecurities, not because they hate women, but because they have not been taught (by family, culture, or society) to be in touch with their true feelings. Any "feminine" emotions within them are suppressed or rejected. In some faith communities, men have not been given permission to feel the vast array of emotions placed within them by God and modeled by both Yahweh and Jesus Christ. These men, instead of seeking to become intimate and emotionally close with women, tend to compete, dominate, and/or distance themselves from those who hold qualities they have been taught are inferior.

Young men are commonly taught that anger is a socially acceptable emotion. Anger is an emotion which young men are encouraged to practice, it being a response to anxiety that is practiced and accepted in the culture of the *real man*. This is a stereotype that is prevalent in popular culture.[43] Abusive men use anger because it has become effective in manipulating others, controlling their partners, and continuing to mask their true feelings and lack of self-esteem. In confronting abusers, issues of power and control, self-esteem, and views concerning women need to be addressed both biblically and sociologically.

A New Paradigm

Biblical studies can have a tremendous effect on the prevention of abuse, power, control, and intimate partner violence. The issues that abusers face are prevalent in all forms of relationships, leadership, and cultures. Power and control lie at the core of many dysfunctional relationships and

43. Two excellent resources for this are the video by Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise* (Northampton, Mass.: Media Education Foundation, 1999); and Paul Kivel's book, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 1992). For further discussion concerning this issue in the Evangelical faith community, see my book, *Am I Sleeping With the Enemy: Male and Female in God's Image* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade, 2010).

need to be addressed in all human beings. In the faith community, a new paradigm, one of mutuality, peace, and compassion can be presented to families caught in abuse.

First, power and control must be transformed to *empowerment*. In my work with Community Against Domestic Violence, a non-profit organization committed to creating awareness in the community of Portland, Oregon, we have begun to train faith community leaders to address power and control issues in sermons, lectures, and classes. People are to be empowered and empower others. The fruit of the Spirit involves self-control as well as love, peace, patience, gentleness, and kindness (Gal 5). The book of Proverbs was originally a collection for future leaders, possibly in a school, who were taught to practice righteousness and justice (צדק and משפט, Prov 1:2–6).[44] The leaders were taught that patience, a willingness to accept rebuke, and being slow to anger were qualities deeply respected by the community and Yahweh (10:8, 17; 13:1; 15:31–32).

The relationship of husband and wife, in the Christian community, is one of mutual submission (Eph 5:21) where the wife submits to the husband by loving and respecting him, and the husband equally submits to the wife by loving her with a passion that empowers her to feel safe, respected, and loved. This is modeled by Christ's love for the Church. Yahweh, in Ezek 16, also displays this love, for the people of Israel. Since the Spirit also submits to the human prophets (1 Cor 14:32), we understand that submission includes a mutual relationship where both work together out of respect and community. God does not display power over, but empowers, the creation and humans. Empowerment is seen in mutuality, respect, and encouragement in intimate and other relationships.

Second, the biblical texts *redefine masculinity*. In a world where gods were both male and female, Yahweh claimed to be one God. Yahweh was a warrior, but most often reflected compassion, love, was slow to anger, and was gentle (Exod 34:6–8). While these characteristics were typically

44. These terms (righteousness and justice) apply to social justice in the community. See J. Bazak, "The Meaning of the Term 'Justice and Righteousness' in the Bible," *The Jewish Law Annual* 8 (1988): 5–18. Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 44, states: "When the prophets refer to *mishpat* and *tsadeq* they do not mean merely that the judges should judge accurately. They mean primarily that the officials and landowners should act on behalf of the poor." For more on Proverbs and wisdom schools, see my article "Schools, Scholars, and Students: The Wisdom School *Sitz-im-Leben* and Proverbs," *Restoration Quarterly* 47 (2005): 161–77.

feminine in the ancient East, Yahweh claimed to reflect these in the divine nature. It was for this reason that Jonah refused to go to Nineveh: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Jonah 4:2). In Isa 66:10–14, Yahweh offered to carry Israel in the bosom and nurse them. Yahweh gave birth and comforted the children of Zion. Yahweh is neither male nor female but is Spirit (John 4) and reflects a nature that lies in both men and women from the time of creation. Genesis 1:25–27 indicates that both men and women are in the image of God.

Feminine language is used also in the New Testament. Jesus' touching of women and children, using eunuchs as models of the Kingdom, and leaving his family would have made his masculinity suspect in the Roman world.[45] Various characteristics of the Spirit would also have been considered feminine in the Roman world (Gal. 5:16–24). Paul's use of feminine and masculine family terms in 1 Thess 2:6–12 indicates that the ministry of the Church carries the nature of God to both male and female.

In Gen 21:25–28, male and female were complements (נֶגֶד) rather than opposites. Masculinity is diverse and should be open to acceptance of others and the willingness to use one's giftedness to empower others to be what they were created to be. Humans are called to help others rather than to be alone. Men and women were created to be together and live in harmony. Humans were not created to dominate but to care for the world (Gen 1:25–30). The new paradigm, based in the nature of Yahweh, revealed to the Christian community in Jesus and the scriptures, and supported by the Spirit is meant to empower males and females to reflect the glory of the God's creation. Divine power is shown by patience rather than control. Empowerment is the model for human relationship rather than abuse, control, and manipulation.

45. Ron Clark, "Kingdoms, Kids, and Kindness: A New Look at Luke 18:15–17," *Stone Campbell Journal* 5 (2002): 235–48; Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

The Quiet Storm: Explaining the Cultural Context of Violence Against Women Within a Feminist Perspective

Carol Klose Smith and Darcie Davis-Gage

Intimate partner violence knows no boundaries. All individuals, regardless of class, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and religious belief may be victims of violence in the home.[1] One of the largest paradoxes within this essay in the examination of religion and intimate partner violence is that within religious circles, the family is considered sacred; however, that does not mean that they are always safe.[2] Conservative Christian theology holds strongly to the belief that the family is ordained by God and claims that the union between man and woman is for life and blessed by God. This union is sometimes even called a covenant.[3] This holy union is for the procreation and instruction of children and to share in life's journey, through good times and bad. However, the reality is not as it appears at first glance. Intuitively, one would assume that in a Christian home, with its inherent value structure, families would be safer than the average secular home. In fact, abuse is found in equal measure among all families, regardless of religious beliefs.

Any discussion of domestic violence needs to begin with the clarification of terms. Such terms as "domestic violence," "courtship violence," "spousal abuse," "marital violence" and "intimate partner violence" have been used interchangeably but often mean different things in different

1. See M. P. Lindquist, "Beaten into Submission," *Clergy Journal* 80 (2001): 16–17; and M. L. Stirling et al., *Understanding Abuse: Partnering for Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

2. N. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1–39.

3. For instance, see M. N. Eilts, "Saving the Family: When is Covenant Broken?," in *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough* (ed. A. L. Horton and J. A. Williamson; Boston, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988), 207–14; and D. J. Livingston, *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Communities* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 1–64.

contexts. For the purposes of this essay, the authors refer to the term intimate partner violence. This term is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a way to unify terminology among researchers studying violence in the home and is slowly becoming the accepted standard in the field. In 1999, the agency published a definition of intimate partner violence which encompasses threats and acts of physical and sexual violence, as well as psychological and emotional abuse that occur in the context of a relationship.[4] This term is used to denote all partnerships, regardless of marital status and sexual orientation, yet distinguishes these from other extended family relationships. While the authors acknowledge that intimate partner violence occurs in homosexual relationships and may involve women as batterers, this essay will focus upon heterosexual relationships in which the male is the batterer.

The relationship between religious beliefs and intimate partner violence is complicated. The incidence and prevalence rates of intimate partner violence appear to indicate that religion does not have a strong or direct influence upon occurrence.[5] A national study conducted in 2001 by Ann Annis and Rodger Rice found that among a random sample of adult members of the Christian Reform Church, twenty-eight percent had experienced at least one form of abuse.[6] In a more recent study conducted in the Northwestern United States, approximately forty-six percent of the participants had experienced some type of intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime.[7] These figures are close to national secular samples examining the prevalence of intimate partner violence in the home. Current information from the National Coalition Against Domestic

4. P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2000, n.p. (cited February 5, 2008). Online: http://www.ncadv.org/files/domesticviolencefacts.pdf.

5. See J. P. Bartkowski and K. L. Anderson, "Are there Religious Variations in Spousal Violence?" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, New York, 1996); M. E. Brinkerhoff and E. Grandin Lupri, "Religious Involvement and Spousal Violence: The Canadian Case," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31 (1992): 12–31; and C. B. Cunradi, R. Caetano, and J. Schafer, "Religious Affiliation, Denominational Homogamy, and Intimate Partner Violence Among U. S. Couples," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002): 139–51.

6. A. W. Annis and R. R. Rice, "A Survey of Abuse Prevalence in the Christian Reform Church," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 3 (2001): 7–40.

7. R. Drumm et al., "Intimate Partner Violence in a Conservative Christian Denomination: Prevalence and Types," *Social Work and Christianity* 33 (2006): 233–51.

Violence indicates that approximately twenty-five percent of women living in the United States will experience intimate partner violence sometime within her lifetime.[8]

However, many studies use regular attendance at church to measure religious commitment, which is usually defined as regular attendance at a worship service. Regular church attendance is not an accurate measure of whether one holds conservative religious beliefs. One study examining religious beliefs and not just attendance at a worship service found that men who hold more conservative theological views than their partners are more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence.[9] Although more research remains to untangle this complex issue, what is clear is that being in a religious community does not protect (insulate) one from violence that occurs in the home, and that some tenets of the conservative Christian belief structure (e.g. the condemnation of divorce) restrict a woman's options if abuse happens.[10]

While this essay cannot possibly be comprehensive in its scope or presentation, the goal is to examine the paradox of intimate partner family violence in conservative Christian homes from the sociocultural and feminist perspectives. While religion can empower women to resist abuse and gain an important social network, religious beliefs, scriptural teachings, and conservative Christian theology can also serve to condone the violent behavior of the abuser.[11] The sociocultural perspective examines the larger picture within American society and the acceptance of violence, maybe even the condoning of violence as perpetrated by Judeo-Christian belief structures. In order to understand the literature within the field of intimate partner violence, it is helpful to place a framework upon the various angles in which this topic is addressed.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory focuses upon the individual and the interaction within the social/cultural contexts.[12] This theory imagines a series of concentric circles where the individual is at the center (the microsystem). This is the environment in which an individual lives and includes the immediate family. The next movement

8. Tjaden and Thoennes, *Extent, Nature and Consequences*.

9. C. G. Ellison, J. P. Bartkowski, and K. L. Anderson, "Are there Religious Variations in Domestic Violence?," *Journal of Family Issues* 20 (1999): 87–133.

10. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 1–39.

11. W. L. Collins and S. E. Moore, "Theological and Practice Issues Regarding Domestic Violence: How Can the Black Church Help Victims?," *Social Work and Christianity* 33 (2006): 252–67.

12. U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

outward is the immediate social environment, including schools, faith-based organizations, and neighborhoods (the mesosystem). The next ring includes the community in which one lives: local government, social networks, local industries, and so on (the exosystem). Finally, in the outer ring is the common culture, which includes society's dominant beliefs and ideology. One precept of this theory is that all of these systems are nested with bi-directional influences that operate together to impact an individual's development.

Thinking Sociologically about the Risk Factors of Violence

Using the bioecological systems theory as a framework to examine intimate partner violence, one can state that most examinations typically focus on the microsystem and to a lesser extent the mesosystem perspectives. With the exception of some feminist analysis, most discussions of interpersonal violence focus on research questions centered on the individual and relationship factors rather than the patriarchal society in which we live. This perspective is used to understand why violence occurs within the home as well as to facilitate individuals' psychological treatment through the process of recovery. The microsystem perspective is dominated by the psychopathological/biological explanations of intimate partner violence, which concludes that individuals who engage in and endure this type of violence in the home are psychologically disturbed. Who would commit such violent acts against individuals they claim they love and have sworn to protect? Who would possibly endure such treatment, when they are personally being harmed? Shame, embarrassment, guilt, and fear keep women from telling others about the violence. Abused women often blame themselves for not being a good enough wife or mother. If only they did things as they "should," all would go well and the violence would stop. For example, Mary Van Leeuwen places the female victim in a position of responsibility for leaving the abusive relationship and questions a woman's morality for remaining in an abusive relationship. She poses a simplistic description by stating that women "can become so concerned about preserving existing relationships that their personal morality gets reduced to whatever will please or placate the significant others in their lives."[13] This viewpoint fails to consider the context of intimate partner violence and how little power women have in these types of relationships.

13. M. S. Van Leeuwen, "Christian Maturity in Light of Feminist Theory," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 16 (1988): 168–82.

When a woman finally has the courage to tell another of the abuse, she runs the risk of being doubted, ridiculed, called a liar, or accused of trying to influence future divorce proceedings. Could a partner who seems so nice in other contexts actually be violent at home? The answer—though few are willing to admit it—is yes. Or alternatively, if the proof is compelling enough to support the claims of violence, then the abuser has psychological problems. The abused individual is labeled passive-dependent and the abuser as lacking impulse control.[14] Critically, this examination of biological and psychological factors in the understanding of violence is helpful for only those individuals who are violent in all spheres of their lives. Biological or psychological explanations cannot be referenced when people use violence sporadically—specifically, against family members but not against strangers, acquaintances, or friends, or in situations for power or control.[15] Because psychological explanations, as their hallmark, examine behavior that occurs across situations and is out of the immediate control of the individual, they simply do not adequately explain a large majority of those who engage in or endure this type of violence.

The microsystem perspective is dominated by the family systems perspective. This perspective examines the communication interactions within the family and the impact of one's family of origin upon the transmission of violence from one generation to the next. This perspective has contributed to the notion of power and control within the family. Power from a family systems perspective is defined as the way in which a family makes decisions and who in the family makes the decisions. Control is the amount of power exercised over the other members of the family, or the level of personal autonomy within the family.[16] Both power and control exist within all families. It is the lack of balance of power and control that is the hallmark of families experiencing violence in the home. Significantly, homes impacted by intimate partner violence are very likely to be homes with one decision-maker holding all of the power.[17] This perspective shows that use of violence within the home

14. M. Bograd, "Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse: An Introduction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* (ed. K. Yllö and M. Bograd; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1988), 11–26.

15. D. R. Loseke, "Through a Sociological Lens: The Complexities of Family Violence," in *Current Controversies on Family Violence* (ed. D. R. Loseke, R. J. Gelles, and M. M. Cavanaugh; 2d ed.; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2005), 35–46.

16. H. Goldenberg and I. Goldenberg, *Family Therapy: An Overview* (Belmont, Calif.: Thompson Brooks/Cole, 2008), 1–24.

17. For further information on this topic, see Ron Clark's "Submit or Else! Intimate Partner Violence, Aggression, Abusers, and the Bible," in the present volume.

involves an interactional dynamic where the abuser intentionally intimidates the abused in order to subjugate her into acting, reacting, or making decisions as the abuser intends. For example, an abusive partner arrives home from work to a house that is not clean, resulting in a physical confrontation. The next day, the victim cleans the house trying to prevent a repeat of the previous night, and the abuser arrives home and becomes physically violent because dinner is not on the table. The family system perspective, with its reliance on interactional dynamics, attempts to explain the action of both parties for a violent action only perpetrated by one partner. While this perspective has contributed greatly to our understanding of intimate partner violence within the home, it is not complete. The weakness of this perspective is the implication that the abused individual has a role within the interactional dynamic. Often in homes with intimate partner violence the interactional patterns move in one direction.[18]

The mesosystemic perspective examines the immediate social environment in which the violence occurs, and has added to the concept of intimate partner violence through the examination of intrafamily or intraindividual stressors. This perspective has highlighted the impact of an individual's ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other outside factors that contribute to the problem of violence within the family. Research since the 1970s has positively linked such factors as economic decline and holiday stress with increases in incidence of family violence. In fact, with the current economic decline scholars are predicting an increase in family violence. In addition, the exosystem perspective examines local response to intimate partner violence. Law enforcement, legal systems, shelters for abused women, and counseling all contribute to assist families who have experienced violence.

Most broadly, the bioecological system theory examines the culture in which we live. Culture can be understood as encompassing the beliefs, values and worldviews, behavioral norms, and social role expectations that provide direction, purpose, and life-meaning among a particular group.[19] The conservative Christian culture celebrates family values, and these are generally articulated in terms of a patriarchal family structure with stereotypical gender roles.[20] Theories informed by feminism are excellent in examining the social conditions and forces allowing and even encouraging the victimization of women by men.[21] Although culture

18. Loseke, "Through a Sociological Lens."

19. E. G. Schlesinger and W. Devore, "Ethnic Sensitive Social Work Practice," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 22 (1995): 29–58.

20. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 21–35.

21. Loseke, "Through a Sociological Lens."

is certainly a broad concept, the remainder of this essay will attempt to highlight the complex gender issues that surround violence in the home and its interplay with this belief structure.

A Feminist Perspective

We approach this essay from a feminist perspective. Feminist theory encompasses a wide variety of perspectives, all of which stem from the fundamental insight that gender is an essential component of every individual's lived experience.[22] This perspective is useful because it considers intimate partner violence in a complete contextual system and takes all system levels into consideration. Feminist theories attempt to describe women's varied experiences of subordination, analyze the cause and effects, and prescribe changes. These theories have been at the forefront in giving voice to women who have experienced abuse at the hands of their partners. In fact, feminist theory about intimate partner violence has become so endemic that many authors writing today do not always recognize nor acknowledge the contribution of feminist writers to this issue. According to Lisa Goodman and Deborah Epstein, thinking about intimate partner violence has relied upon three essential principles that are common to a wide range of feminist theoretical perspectives: Political enterprise, women's experience, and women's experience as rooted within complex social realities.[23] The various forms of feminist theoretical thought have focused on different aspects within a violent relationship. Specifically, this essay will explore intimate partner violence from four feminist theoretical traditions: liberal, cultural, radical, and multicultural.

First, feminism by nature is a political enterprise, with the goal of social transformation. This principle is rooted in liberal feminism and aims to describe the societal response to intimate partner violence and to examine and evaluate recent reform efforts. Liberal feminism focuses on inequalities in legal, political, and educational arenas. Understanding intimate partner violence from this perspective analyzes the problem on the mesosystem and exosystem level and promotes changes in laws and policies. One example of such a change is the mandatory arrest policies adopted by local and state governments. For years, the primary goal of law enforcement was to mediate domestic disputes. Mediation provided

22. L. A. Goodman and D. Epstein, *Listening to Battered Women: A Survivor-Centered Approach to Advocacy, Mental Health, and Justice* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2008).

23. Ibid.

a calming down period and a referral process for the disputants which resulted in little change to the dynamics within a violent relationship. One now-classic Minneapolis experiment studied the impact of law enforcement on perpetrators of domestic violence.[24] Those arrested as a result of their violence saw a lower incidence of repeat violence. For those who had experienced informal dispute resolution or who were asked to leave the scene demonstrated no changes in recidivism. This one change in the law sent a very clear and consistent message to batters; namely, that physical violence to a partner is a crime and no longer acceptable.

Second, feminist theory tends to flow from women's experiences. Feminist perspectives are based upon careful and active listening and placing value upon each individual woman's voice, which is a concept from cultural feminism. Cultural feminism tends to value traditional feminine characteristics, such as caring and cooperation, and lobbies for these qualities in relationships, which potentially alters the dynamics where intimate partner violence threatens. Cultural feminism focuses upon change within an individual's beliefs rather than political reform.[25] Change is targeted at microsystems rather than the mesosystem or exosystem (e.g. programming that focuses on strengthening couples' relationships and teaching communication skills).

When a woman's experience and being is not validated and valued, radical feminism is useful in explaining the power dynamics of intimate partner violence. Research conducted on intimate partner violence has shown that couple violence is repetitive, and over time each violent episode becomes more severe. Radical feminist researchers contend that violence within a relationship is part of a system of coercive controls, a system of fear, through which men maintain dominance over their partner.[26] The idea of violence as coercive control was inducted from day to day work with battered women as they sought to make sense of the violence experienced in their lives. As a result, the control model of domestic violence was developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. This model, known as the "power and control wheel," is shown in Fig. 1.

24. L. W. Sherman and R. A. Berk, "The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault," *American Sociological Review* 49 (1984): 261–72.

25. R. D. Hanser, "Feminist Theory," *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence* (ed. N. A. Jackson; New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2007), 611–14.

26. K. L. Anderson, "Gender, Status and Domestic Violence: An Integration of Feminist and Family Violence Approaches," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (1997): 655–69; R. P. Dobash and R. E. Dobash, *Violence against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 1–30.

Figure 1. *"Power and Control Wheel"*[27]

The model highlights the pervasiveness of control tactics within the violent relationship through an examination of all aspects of one's life. When one examines these coercive and control tactics in detail, a picture of intimate partner violence as domination emerges.[28] The coercive control model of intimate partner violence is an important theoretical alternative to the psychopathological explanations of violent behavior. It identifies violence as a tactic of entitlement and power that is deeply gendered, rather than a symptom of some deep psychological disorder. Violent behavior may be socially entwined with patriarchy and religious belief structures.

27. Used with Permission, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, http://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheelgallery.php.

28. K. A. Yllö, "Through a Feminist Lens: Gender, Diversity, and Violence, Extending the Feminist Framework," in Loseke, Gelles, and Cavanaugh, eds., *Current Controversies on Family Violence*, 19–34.

In addition, multicultural feminist theory relies heavily upon the insight that a woman's individual personal experience tends to be rooted in complex social realities. Although gender is a critical force shaping women's opportunities and experiences, its impact is moderated by its intersection with other self- and socially defining characteristics, such as ethnicity, culture, social class, age, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, and personal history. A focus on gender alone fails to illuminate the crucial impact of these other defining aspects of women's lives. Although we limit our discussion to battered women (as opposed to male victims), we understand that survivors of partner violence are not a homogeneous group but a diverse collection of individuals from a variety of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Some scholars contend that middle class professional men maintain power and control in their households through their control of economic resources, whereas these resources are not as freely available to working class men when women enter the work force.[29] Thus, socioeconomic inequality plays is considered to be a factor within situations of intimate partner violence. This idea is known as resource theory.[30] In short, when economic control does not work within a family, violence may be the alternative. In fact, one area of assessment among counselors of intimate partner violence is the amount of control their partners exercised upon shared personal finances. In most cases involving violence in the home, all resources were controlled. The idea that violence was the only form of control with these relationships is simply not accurate.

Feminist theories at their very heart believe that men and women should be equal within political, economic, and social milieu of society. At first glance, one may assume that conservative Christian ideology with its focus on maintaining patriarchy and feminist theory with its focus on equality would have very little in common. In fact, feminist scholars have made an impact upon the way in which intimate partner violence is seen within our society, the laws by which we govern batterers, and the counseling services provided to both the batterer and their victim. Steven Tracy points out that Christian conservatives are often so adamantly opposed to feminism that they refute legitimate research findings that link intimate partner violence to male authority and power within a relationship.[31] However, while many ideological differences

29. Anderson, "Gender, Status and Domestic Violence"; E. Stark and A. H. Flitcraft, *Women at Risk: Domestic Violence and Women's Health* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996).

30. Loseke, "Through a Sociological Lens."

31. S. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 573–94.

exist between feminist scholars and conservative Christian theologians, several ideas may actually be held in common. According to Van Leeuwen, many Christians can support the ideas of equality as long as the focus is not on obtaining a quick divorce.[32] Additionally, many traditional Christian religions would likely embrace the ideas of cultural feminism, since cultural feminism does not espouse that culture and socialization are the root cause of gender differences, but instead inherent biological differences. The female characteristics of nurturing, caring, and empathy are illustrated in the Bible. Regardless of the specific feminist theory to which one adheres, all feminist theories contend that women must have equality if society is to be free of discrimination, oppression, and violence against women.

Traditional Ideology

Much progress has been made in recent years in helping individuals impacted by intimate partner violence. The silence and the denial that surround this issue is slowing eroding; however, there is still one factor that impedes progress toward assisting the individuals impacted by family violence: traditional ideology.[33] Since this ideology is endemic to our society, it is the outermost ring of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory: common culture. Briefly summarized, traditional ideology is a term for a broad range of internalized beliefs and actions favoring the acceptance of a patriarchal social structure.[34] Patriarchy is a social organization marked by the supremacy of the male head of the household. The dominance of the male with the power in the relationship and the subordinate position of the female is a hallmark of this type of social structure and has a strong link to homes with spousal violence. In essence, it is the combination of a belief in male authority and power, the objectification of women, a sociocultural system that creates economic dependence upon men, and the ability of batterers to use force with relatively few legal or social consequences that accounts for why spousal violence is so pervasive and why a disproportionate number of the victims are women.[35] In a study conducted with violent couples, Christy Telch and Carol Lindquist found more stereotyped sex-role attitudes and

32. Van Leeuwen, "Christian Maturity."

33. M. D. Pagelow and P. Johnson, "Abuse in the American Family: The Role of Religion," in Horton and Williamson, eds., *Abuse and Religion*, 1–12.

34. M. D. Pagelow, *Woman Battering: Victims and Their Experiences* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), 109–44.

35. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 21–35.

more traditional roles of marriage.[36] In a study of non-clinical couples, LaVerne Berkel, Beverly Vandiver, and Angela Bahner found that individuals who endorsed traditional gender role attitudes were more likely to support the use of violence against women.[37] When a highly traditional world view adopted by men who have exaggerated needs for dominance is mixed with inadequacy of meeting these needs in more socially acceptable ways, there is a fertile ground for violent behavior.[38] These beliefs and social order are sustained and reinforced through various institutions in our society, including and specifically the pervasive conservative Christian theology belief structure. Russell Dobash and R. Emerson Dobash, in their groundbreaking study, *Violence Against Wives: A Case against the Patriarchy*, describe the connection between intimate partner violence and religious beliefs this way:

> The seeds of wife-beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship between women and men has been institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family and is supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system, including a religious one, that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, and sacred.[39]

An issue that must be addressed is how religious traditions, including Christian theology, has through the ages constituted a powerful force in supporting the hierarchal relationships and promoting negative attitudes toward women.[40]

Laws in ancient Rome defined traditional marriage roles. "The man was the absolute patriarch who owned and controlled all properties and

36. C. F. Telch and C. U. Lindquist, "Violent Versus Nonviolent Couples: A Comparison of Patterns," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 21 (1984): 242–48.

37. L. A. Berkel, B. J. Vandiver, and A. D. Bahne, "Gender Role Attitudes, Religion and Spirituality as Predictors of Domestic Violence Attitudes in White College Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 45 (2004): 119–33.

38. J. M. Alsdurf and P. Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989), 81–95.

39. Dobash and Dobash, *Violence against Wives*, 33–34.

40. See, for example, M. Fortune, "The Nature of Abuse: Workshop on Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence," *Pastoral Psychology* 41 (1993): 275–88; D. Hull and J. Burke, "The Religious Right, Attitudes toward Women and Tolerance for Sexual Abuse," *Journal for Offender Rehabilitation* 17 (1991): 1–12; A. G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2005), 1–25; Livingston, *Healing Violent Men*; and Pagelow and Johnson, "Abuse in the American Family."

people within the family."[41] As Roman laws began to define who controlled and had authority of others, a new religious group known as "the Christians" gained converts and power. Roman laws gave husbands the legal "right" to beat their wives. Implicit within this law is the belief that wives needed to meet some standard set by their husbands; those who failed to meet such standards were given punishment established by the husband. In the 1700s and 1800s, British common law viewed assault on one's wife as acceptable as long as no visible marks remained or if inflicted by a stick no thicker than a thumb—hence the phrase "rule of thumb." This appears to be an early attempt at legislation that both acknowledges a husband's right to chastise and correct behavior through the use of corporal punishment while at the same time defining what was right and proper for the moderate use of force.[42] Christian churches at the time supported the husband's dominance over one's wife. Advocacy for the submission of wives to their husbands can be found in the writings of Martin Luther, John Knox, and John Calvin. For example, Martin Luther admitted "boxing" his wife's ears when she got "saucy," and stated, "The rule remains with the husband and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command."[43] M. K. Bussert also quotes John Calvin's response to an abused wife that "she must bear with patience the cross which God has seen fit to place upon her; and meanwhile not to deviate from the duty which she has before God to please her husband, but to be faithful whatever happens."[44] These teachings, while a product of the past, continue to be powerful in the present.[45] The ideas of headship, submission, and sacrifice continue to be powerful in today's conservative Christian culture and when applied to the issue of intimate partner violence can be destructive as well. While imbedded within its history, beliefs, and culture, it is important to state that the Christian religion does not sanction intimate partner violence. Instead, what one finds clinically are conservative Christian men who abuse their partners, using the Bible and its scriptural teachings to distort and support their rationalizations and provide justifications for violence.[46] These distortions are used

41. R. P. Dobash and R. E. Dobash, "Wives: The 'Appropriate' Victims of Marital Violence," *Victimology* 2 (1978): 428.

42. L. Nored, "Rule of Thumb," in Jackson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence*, 611–14.

43. Martin Luther, cited in J. M. K. Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (New York: Division for Mission in North America, LCA, 1986), 11.

44. Bussert, *Battered Women*, 12.

45. Pagelow and Johnson, "Abuse in the American Family."

46. Collins and Moore, "Theological and Practice Issues."

to coerce and maintain control within a relationship and therefore are of profound importance for understanding the phenomenon of intimate partner violence within Christian families. In the following sections of this essay, an examination of headship, submission, and sacrifice are offered as examples of conservative Christian theology that has been at times misinterpreted and used in such a manner. Clearly, these beliefs alone do not cause abuse, but may be the foundations that in conjunction with other factors combine to create an environment in which abuse may occur and, where it does, make it difficult for women to receive the help they need.

Headship, Submission, and Sacrifice

The distribution of power can be skewed in the conservative Christian home.[47] The subordination of woman to man is taught in many conservative Christian religious affiliations as God's divine plan for human partners. The interpretation of Gen 2–3 establishes women's secondary and subordinate nature to man because she was created from him.[48] This hierarchical structure of man over woman is termed "headship" within some conservative religious denominations. Carolyn Heggen points out that the Gen 1 account, which supports mutuality and equality among men and women, goes largely unnoticed.[49] Instead, much of the scriptural interpretations in church regarding marriage and family life are based upon principles extracted from the Gen 2–3 account.

Two basic arguments have been raised regarding men's superiority to women's inferiority and sinfulness. First, the order and manner in which men and women are created (man first, woman from man) signals women's inferiority to man. And second, the image of woman as an agent of chaos; a woman disobeyed God, brought sin to humankind, and thus earns punishment for women thereafter.[50] This is the way in which patriarchal conceptual vocabulary is clearly seen as reinforcing a social

47. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 81–95; Livingston, *Healing Violent Men*, 47–60.

48. A. Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 28–31.

49. C. H. Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse," in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scriptures Can Be Used to Hurt or Heal* (ed. C. C. Kroeger and J. R. Beck; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 15–27.

50. C. Ess, "Reading Adam and Eve: Re-Visions of the Myth of Woman's Subordination to Man," in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (ed. C. J. Adams and M. M. Fortune; New York: Continuum, 1995), 92–120.

order. When a woman disobeys the higher authority, she is properly punished for such disobedience.[51] By implication, if a woman disobeys a man she may likewise be legitimately punished and corrected, by violence if necessary. Notable in this account is the role of man. Men are portrayed as the misled innocent and then later the arbitrator/sanctioner of right and wrong. The inherent logic of headship says that since men have the right to dominance and control, they have the right to enforce that control. In the extreme, the headship idea implies that the word of the man in the household should be trusted as God's voice; the spiritual head.

The New Testament also demonstrates the same themes. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, "wives, submit yourself to your husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph 5:22–25). In this passage the "head" of the household is responsible for knowing right and wrong and is not to be questioned. In fact, questioning the head of the home is akin to rebuking God.[52] M. P. Lindquist points out abusive men with strong conservative Christian theology backgrounds often cite the passage from Ephesians to their spouses.[53] Self-professed conservative Christian men often use the Bible and its scriptural teachings to support their rationalizations.[54] As a resource for spiritual living, the Bible can provide a powerful support and strength to individuals who are struggling with their personal issues. On the other hand, when taken out of context, scriptures can be interpreted in ways that control, degrade, and manipulate women.

Patriarchy defines women's and men's roles in very specific ways. The husband devotes himself to providing economic resources and has a leadership position within the family, while the wife devotes herself to the home and is supportive of the family.[55] Patriarchal family structure requires that women subordinate their needs to the needs of men and children, and men provide the financial resources for the family. Girls are consistently socialized to become nurturers whereas boys can use

51. R. R. Ruether, "The Western Religious Tradition and Violence against Women in the Home," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (ed. J. C. Brown and C. R. Bohn; New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 31–41; D. M. Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical 'Headship,'" in Kroeger and Beck, eds., *Women, Abuse, and the Bible*, 28–57.

52. Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse."

53. Lindquist, "Beaten into Submission."

54. L. L. Ammons, "What God Got to Do with It? Church and State Collaboration in the Subordination of Women and Domestic Violence," *Rutgers Law Review* 51 (1999): 1207–69; Collins and Moore, "Theological and Practice Issues."

55. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 28–39; Livingston, *Healing Violent Men*, 47–60.

violence in order to solve conflicts. The use of violence to enforce control is intrinsic to patriarchal culture.[56] It is little wonder that battered women come to believe that if they were just "better" wives or caregivers then the violence would end. This can cumulate in the victim engaging in self-blame for the battering, looking at their behavior as inciting violence—a perspective shared with the abuser. This shared mindset is filled with faulty logic. Rarely do women or men individually ever hold the batterer accountable for his violence. Before the 1990s society rarely held men accountable either. Some claim religious communities have done very little to address the injustices done to women by the men in their lives.[57] This has been referred to by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark as the "Holy Hush."[58]

The family structure endorsed by the conservative Christian religious framework is a top down construction, with chain of command placing women in a "powerless" position.[59] Family abuse of any sort is an "abuse of power…where a more powerful person takes advantage of a less powerful one…with abuse gravitating toward the relationships of greatest power differential."[60] While power in and of itself is not destructive (anymore than firearms alone maim and kill), and while certainly not everyone with power abuses it, power in the wrong hands has great potential to hurt others.[61] Giving undue power and authority to one individual over another person is, to say the least, dangerous. The attitudes of one's partner toward power and control may be a critical factor in dating violence perpetration. Violence may be a result of disagreements about who should have influence in the relationship and who will make the decisions.[62] Kersti Yllö's qualitative analysis of secular couples found that the rate of intimate partner violence in couples where the husband

56. A. M. Moore, "Moral Agency of Women in a Battered Women's Shelter," in Adams and Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children*, 172–84.

57. C. C. Kroeger and N. Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 1–37; Livingston, *Healing Violent Men*, 47–60; N. Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home: The Interface Between Religion and Domestic Violence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (2004): 303–10.

58. Kroeger and Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse*, 15.

59. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 42–50.

60. J. Wolak and D. Finkelhor, "Children Exposed to Violence," in *Partner Violence: A Comprehensive Review of 20 Years of Research* (ed. J. L. Jasinski and L. M. Williams; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1989), 73–112 (75).

61. Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 35–37.

62. S. A. Kaura and G. M. Allen, "Dissatisfaction with Relationship Power and Dating Violence Perpetration by Men and Women," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19 (2004): 576–88.

dominated the relationship was 300 percent greater than for egalitarian couples. She concluded that "regardless of context, violence against wives is lower among couples where there is a relative equality in decision making… In general, domination of decision making by husbands is associated with the highest levels of violence against wives."[63] This correlation between violence and unequal distribution of power has been confirmed in a nationwide study of family violence.[64] Notably, the higher proportion of *shared* decisions made by a couple seems to be linked with lower rates of violence.[65]

Critics may point out that speaking of submission is just an academic way of stating that the couple has individual conflicts of interest. However, as Yllö points out, this conflict is deeply engendered and the husband's perceived entitlement has strong institutional support.[66] Our understanding of intimate partner violence can only be understood within the context of gender and power. It infiltrates our society and is a concise statement about feminist theory and research. When one examines the day-to-day nature of families living in a violent atmosphere, the control tactics used by the batterer reveal that intimate partner violence is about domination of the batterer and the submission by the victim.[67] Any discussion about submission to wives can bring waves of guilt and self-recrimination. How do conservative Christian theologians resolve the fact that submission is seen to have a biblical mandate, while research reveals that submission by battered women may actually provoke the abuse? The fact is that an ever-growing body of clinical evidence suggests that the single worst action a victim of intimate partner abuse can take is to submit to an abusive partner. The battered woman's understanding of submission will have a profound impact upon how she chooses to respond to the abuse.[68] On the one hand, some women try submitting to abuse in an effort to preserve their marriage, while others hold to the belief that God placed them in this situation in order to help their husbands control their violent tendencies. In such circumstances, the wife believes that staying with the abusive partner saves not only the husband, but also the marriage. Compounding all of this is the notion that divorce is a failure and, at worst, a sin.

63. Yllö, "Through a Feminist Lens," 24.

64. M. Straus, R. Gelles, and S. Steinmetz, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1980).

65. Berkel, Vandiver, and Bahne, "Gender Role Attitudes."

66. Yllö, "Through a Feminist Lens."

67. J. Ptacek, "How Men Who Batter Rationalize Their Behavior," in Horton and Williamson, eds., *Abuse and Religion*, 247–57.

68. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 81–95.

Martyrdom and Victimization

Although there is no direct evidence indicating that violence is more frequent or more severe in families of faith, religious women may be more vulnerable when abuse occurs. Because of their beliefs and values, they are less likely to leave, less likely to seek secular assistance from counseling and shelters, more likely to believe their partner will change and stop being violent, and commonly express guilt over their failure to their families and their God.[69] To be fair, many women, whether they are religious or not, are reluctant to see their abusive marriages end. While there is no clear-cut answer as to why women stay in an abusive relationship, the more compelling question is "What in this community or situation is keeping her there?"[70] Women may fear change, a lack of companionship, financial insecurity, reprisals by the abuser to themselves and their children. They believe that they will never be free of the batterer's dominion.[71] The fear of violence or even the threat of violence is often used to control the behavior of the battered woman. Fear of more violence is a very real fear; the most dangerous time for a woman leaving a battering spouse is shortly after they depart.[72] Some women cling to the hope that the batterer will change and needs just another chance, while others harbor notions of being that perfect wife and thus not "earning" the abuse. This notion is reinforced by the batterers themselves. Many batterers consistently believe that the violence inflicted upon their spouse was the result of "not being good at cooking, for not being sexually responsive, for not being deferential enough, for not knowing she should be silent, and for not being faithful."[73] This pattern of fault finding is the underlying justification used by the batterer to condone violence, and is often adopted by the victim to take blame for the abuse. In addition, for religious victims of abuse, these beliefs are commonly reinforced by conservative Christian family values, values which see the woman's role as wife and mother as central to her self-worth while at the same time condemning divorce. Often, the text of Mal 2:16—"'For I hate divorce!' Says the Lord of Israel…"—is used to reinforce this notion.

69. Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home."

70. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 81–95; Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 37–54.

71. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 1–24; Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home."

72. Goodman and Epstein, *Listening to Battered Women*.

73. Ptacek, "How Men Who Batter Rationalize Their Behavior," 253.

One of the most difficult aspects of working with women who have been battered is the mindset that has been adopted for the relationship to survive. This mindset is often shared by both the victim and the batterer and can become so extreme that the victim will blame herself for the abuse. When a sufferer of abuse takes the position that divorce or separation is not an option, they then adapt to the violence rather than seek a new beginning. Ironically, the idea of starting over and being safe is often more frightening than staying with the abusive partner. The fear of the unknown, the belief that one cannot succeed without a husband's financial support, and having been told that in a divorce they will lose everything (i.e. house, children, social contacts, etc.), leaves women feeling powerless and without a way out. Ideological beliefs that deny women the ability to divorce place them in a vulnerable position within our society and intensifies the helplessness of a difficult situation

Moreover, there are explicit conservative Christian beliefs that make it particularly difficult for victims of spousal violence to ask for assistance and seek available community resources.[74] Paramount among these is the notion that suffering is redemptive. One of the basic tenets of conservative Christian faith is the theology of atonement, a theology which encourages martyrdom and victimization, and which has at its core the image Christ on the cross obediently suffering and acceding to his father's will. In his silent suffering, Christ is lauded as the hope of the world. For those who have been shaped by conservative Christian beliefs, self-sacrifice and obedience are not mere virtues—rather, they are the very definition of a faithful identity.[75] The conservative Christian is to be "like Jesus"—an imitation of Christ. Their duty, first and foremost, is to obediently and willingly endure pain. The image of quietly suffering and enduring is compelling, embraced by many conservative Christian women who are victims of intimate partner violence.[76] The conservative Christian perspective that teaches women about submission and the sanctity of marriage sends an implicit message to victims to stay in unhealthy, violent homes and to remain in the marriage longer than they should.[77] Such statements as "We all have our crosses to bear" are

74. Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home."

75. J. C. Brown and R. Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," in Adams and Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children*, 36–59.

76. M. Fortune, "The Transformation of Suffering: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in Adams and Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children*, 85–91.

77. P. Alsdurf and J. M. Alsdurf, "Wife Abuse and Scripture," in Horton and Williamson, eds., *Abuse and Religion*, 221–27.

often evoked to explain why a woman does not seek safety or leave the abusive situation. This view of suffering as a means to redemption and salvation is interwoven within the lives of conservative Christian women who are being treated unjustly.[78] A study of men within batterer treatment programs revealed that men of faith appealed to the Bible as support for their violence. The most common word they used was "submit": "She will not submit, she did not submit, she should submit."[79] The irony is that, in part, Jesus died standing up for those individuals who were being treated unjustly. Jesus died out of love for his people. However, one aspect that is not often discussed with regard to Christ's example is his submission. Submission is often confused with surrender within some interpretations. Yet submission is only possible when one has the power to choose surrender. Jesus' strength was the power of the choice he made, choosing to submit to the will of God.[80] In an abusive situation, the victim is rendered powerless through intimidation, threats, and fear of future harm. The victim, without options, trapped by economic circumstance and fear for self and her children, is not submitting—she is enduring. She is not choosing from a position of strength—feeling helpless, she is taking the path of continued pain and anguish.

The notion of selfless love has been criticized as problematic for women involved in violent relationships.[81] To be sure, this is one of the paradoxes found among battered women. The love and hate, the affection and the assaults, the pleasure and the wounding, continue within relationships with intimate partner violence.[82] These feelings are often intensified with increasing isolation found in many abusive relationships. Many a battered woman will persist in returning to increasingly dangerous situations, citing this as the very model of Christian love. Yet there is evidence that far from improving the situation, her refusal to protect herself has the opposite effect on her partner, encouraging continued and often more serious abuse. As Sarah Bentley points out, self-sacrifice could be of value if it enhanced or created mutual love. And yet, for the battered woman, increased submissiveness tends to reinforce the

78. M. Fortune, "The Transformation of Suffering: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in Brown and Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 139–47.

79. A. Shupe, W. A. Stacey, and L. R. Hazelwood, *Violent Men, Violent Couples: The Dynamics of Domestic Violence* (Boston, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987).

80. Pagelow and Johnson, "Abuse in the American Family."

81. S. Bentley, "Bringing Justice Home: The Challenge of the Battered Women's Movement for Christian Social Ethics," in Adams and Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children*, 151–71.

82. Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 37–54.

batterer's claim that he is right when he assumes the position of dominance and control.[83] Selfless love in this situation does nothing for anyone and only reinforces the destructive behavior. In fact, the very qualities lauded as feminine—sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, and meekness—reinforce the notion that women are powerless.[84] The qualities that conservative Christianity idealizes for women are those society labels as characteristic of a victim.

Forgiveness

Any discussion of the healing journey for women of intimate partner violence eventually comes to the issue of forgiveness.[85] Forgiveness and reconciliation is a complicated issue for those who have survived abuse, including intimate partner violence. No other advice is given so consistently to conservative Christian victims of intimate partner violence. Forgiveness is an act that encourages victims of intimate partner violence to let go of the immediacy of the trauma and allow for second chances.[86] Victims of abuse are pushed to forgive quickly and reconcile with the batterer.[87]

Although biblical texts such as Luke 17:3 suggest that repentance by the offender must precede forgiveness, it is God's unconditional forgiveness of sinful humans that is held up as the model for the victim of intimate partner violence. This viewpoint derives from the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12; Luke 11:4), and is used as support for the belief that our forgiveness by God depends upon our willingness to forgive others. In a similar vein, the parable of the unforgiving servant found in Matt 18:23–35 is often interpreted to mean that a person cannot receive God's forgiveness unless one is able to forgive others. The belief in unconditional forgiveness, or forgiveness without repentance, is harmful for individuals struggling with intimate partner violence.

When unconditional forgiveness is combined with intimate partner violence one gets a confluence of dynamics that is potentially harmful. In order to understand the synergistic nature of forgiveness and intimate partner violence one needs clearly to understand the cycle of abuse. One of the most influential writers on interpersonal violence, Lenore Walker,

83. Bentley, "Bringing Justice Home."
84. Brown and Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," 40.
85. Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home."
86. M. Fortune, "Forgiveness: The Last Step," in Adams and Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children*, 201–6.
87. Heggen, "Religious Beliefs and Abuse."

recognized the cyclical nature of abuse common within the dynamics of the violent behavior. She described a three-stage cycle of abuse. The first stage is the build-up of tension. During this stage many victims will describe increasing tension within the relationship. This "walking on eggshells" phenomenon may be a reaction to an increase in the frequency and intensity of verbal complaints, hostility, and criticism, all of which culminate in the acute battering stage, the violent event that is marked by uncontrolled physical violence. This stage is abrupt and may only be several minutes in length. Violence may involve pushing, shoving, using a weapon or club, throwing things, and/or blocking an exit, and so on. Rage at the victim both physically and verbally is common. This would be the typical point at which concerned neighbors may call the police or family. It is also the point at which a victim may leave the batterer. Finally, in the last stage, also known as the honeymoon stage, the abuser is loving and contrite, sorry for his behavior. If the batterer fears that his partner may leave, he makes promises aimed at keeping the relationship together. Such promises may involve pledges to seek help, to change behavior, and always the promise never to hit his partner again. Eventually, this stage ends and tension begins to escalate once more. Gifts and tokens, such as flowers or jewelry, are given to soothe the victim. As the cycle continues, the explosion phase may become more intense and more physical—for some, even deadly—and the honeymoon becomes shorter and shorter.[88]

As the victim processes the after-effects of the acute violence, the batterer courts his spouse. If the victim rushes to forgiveness by interpreting the honeymoon phase as repentance, the likelihood of recovery is poor. Repentance cannot be confused with self-loathing and remorse. In short, intimate partner violence is a repetitive cycle. Changing the pattern of abuse is not accomplished through good intentions and saying the right things; it involves time, hard work, and therapy.[89] Forgiving does not necessarily mean returning to or trusting the batterer. Trust that is violently broken takes time to heal. Forgiveness and reunification for the couple are separate decisions for the survivor of abuse. In the results of a non-random survey of one hundred pastors, Rev. A. Miles points to two emergent themes for pastors engaged in counseling those experiencing intimate partner violence: the importance of saving the marriage at all costs and the temptation of providing a quick-fix solution.[90] The rush to

88. L. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).
89. Fortune, "Forgiveness," 215–27.
90. Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 137–39.

forgive the batterer and potentially restore the family allows the cycle of abuse to continue and places the victim in harm's way.

The Christian tradition, with its emphasis on "preserving the family" and "forgiveness," has placed the battered woman in a no-win situation. If she chooses self-preservation and leaves the relationship she is condemned by her faith tradition, while if she chooses to stay and forgive she is perpetrating the cycle of abuse. It is very interesting that by her actions, rather than the actions of the abusive partner, she is seen as breaking up the family. Given the secrecy and shame of violent relationships, many congregational members are not aware of the dynamics when someone decides to leave a marriage. If the woman leaves, the batterer may be seen as the innocent party. The victim may be ostracized for her decision. So, in a real sense, the woman who chooses not to be battered loses not only her partner, but often the very support and comfort that could be found within her faith and her faith community. Furthermore, if she chooses to break the silence and share her story of abuse at the hands of her spouse she runs the risk of not being believed. "How can someone we know be violent in such a way to his spouse?" The victim becomes a liar, the instrument of a failed marriage, and an outsider to her faith community. In a situation in which the victim has chosen to become a survivor, she is now blamed for the situation.

Ironically, it is while a batterer is seeking forgiveness that the victim may appear to have the most power: a choice. However, given the ideology of forgiveness that is espoused by conservative Christians, what choice does she really have? If she chooses to forgive, it usually means reconciliation, without the requisite therapeutic work on the part of both the batterer and victim—and so the cycle of violence will continue. If, on the other hand, she chooses not to forgive at that time, she may feel she is not being a good conservative Christian. Pushing for quick forgiveness trivializes the victim's depth of pain and suffering, but also relieves the batterer of responsibility for his actions and steals the opportunity for the perpetrator to do the necessary work that will enable him to heal and stop the violence.[91] The rhetoric of the conservative Christian community—with its basic assumption of the sanctity of marriage and the ideology of forgiveness—does a disservice to families who have experienced violence. Belief in submission and sacrifice can derail the attempts of the secular authorities counsel and help the family. While the Christian community must continue to encourage and support the notion of lifelong commitment and marriage, there must be a balance and understanding of

91. Fortune, "The Transformation of Suffering"; Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes at Home."

the dynamics of abuse. Simplistic notions of forgiveness and reconciliation do not work in families that a ravaged by violence and abuse. The rush to reunite a family affected by interpersonal violence merely affords the batterer a further opportunity to do yet more damage, and places the family in harm's way once more.

Conclusion

Intimate partner violence is about the abuse of power and control. Its focus is not on the meaning of love, mutual concern, and equality, but on living in an atmosphere of fear, disrespect, and violence. When women are verbally, emotionally, and physically attacked, and when such acts of violence are justified with scriptural references, where is the faith community? It is puzzling that readings of scriptures that encourage and condone male power within relationships are widespread and well known, whereas more egalitarian interpretations of the same scriptures that appear in other mainstream denominations as well as academic writings and are not as widely cited.

We live in a society in which the solving of problems and frustrations through violence is accepted. Our violence-prone society particularly disrespects the feminine. When such cultural inclinations are reinforced and condoned by religious teaching, they become even more influential and dangerous for women. No human institution has the power to influence relationships between men and women like organized religion. Particularly, nothing has the ability to define "women's roles" and to punish women who step outside the narrowly defined roles and violate the rules of patriarchy. In order to end intimate partner violence, we as a society need to embrace egalitarian relationships and stop upholding the dominance–submission model. We as a society must find a way to be together without subjugating half of the population. This equality among people is essential for all of us to live in peace within our homes. These concepts and ideas are not outside the realm of Christian thought. In fact, Gal 3:28 reveals such a shift from patriarchy to egalitarianism when it says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one with Christ Jesus."

The Deadly Search for God: Absolute Aggression in the Heritage of the Bible

Matthias Beier

1. *Introduction*

What happens in humans when they kill in the Bible, often in the name of God? That is the central question of this essay. Based on the work of Eugen Drewermann, today's most prolific German theologian and psychotherapist, I will try to show that the Bible portrays absolute aggression in the name of God as a desperate attempt to regain the lost relationship with God. Drewermann's monumental analysis of the Yahwist account in Gen 2–11 will serve to illustrate this thesis. My 2004 book, *A Violent God-Image: An Introduction to the Work of Eugen Drewermann*, presents both Drewermann's lucid analysis of the relationship between escalating fear and violence in the misguided attempt to replace the lost absolute hold in God and his interpretation of the de-escalating vision of trust and nonviolence of Jesus of Nazareth.[1] Drewermann's work developed in the context of post-Nazi Germany and attempts, to some extent, to understand why a nation steeped in Christianity could follow with widespread theological sanction an absolutely aggressive and (self-)destructive leader and why it continues to serve millions today as a justification for violence in the name of God.

At the heart of Drewermann's interpretation of escalating violence in the Bible is the observation that humans are driven to violence by absolute fears rather than by willful hubris or disobedience. In the whirlpool of fear the God-image turns adversarial, competitive, and ever more distant. It is not God but the human image of God which changes in an escalating climate of fear and violence.

This essay will proceed by first spelling out four primary levels of interpretation Drewermann employs, then illustrating his interpretation in

1. Matthias Beier, *A Violent God-Image: An Introduction to the Work of Eugen Drewermann* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

a brief walk through key stories of the Yahwist account in Gen 2–11, and concluding with hermeneutical implications for the interpretation of aggression in relation to God in the Bible.

2. *Levels of Interpretation*

Drewermann's analysis of the relationship between the escalation of fear and violence and the desperate yet failed search for God proceeds on four main levels: exegetical, psychoanalytical, philosophical, and theological. On the *exegetical* level, he first studies the texts in terms of the motifs and traditions the biblical writer picks up and the redactional reinterpretation and differentiation of the material within the overall theological intention of the author. On a *psychoanalytical* level, he follows an analysis of psychosocial themes in the story in light of developmental psychology, which draws on, among others, (neo)Freudian, object relations, Jungian, and Adlerian perspectives. Because our focus is on the negative development of aggression in the name of God, this essay will confine itself to those psychoanalytic interpretations that describe the maladaptive psychological themes in the story. Drewermann uses psychoanalytic theory with its notion of developmental stages and of unconscious dynamics as a hermeneutic phenomenology of alienation from God. This does not mean that the stages of escalation of violence are either inevitable nor that they are tied to either a particular physical or psychological age. It does mean, however, that Drewermann finds forms of development in the alienated relationship with God which both resemble and differ from psychosocial development in relation to parents and society.

On the way to a theological interpretation, Drewermann next moves to a *philosophical/daseinsanalytic* interpretation. The philosophical analysis looks for ontological questions the story addresses. In this perspective, questions of being or non-being, of individual and community as such are explored. Drewermann brings interpretations by Kant, Hegel, Sartre, Heidegger, and *daseinsanalysis*, among others, to bear on the biblical texts. Particular weight is given to a philosophical interpretation of the psychoanalytic findings in terms of Sartre's existential psychoanalysis and social philosophy.[2] Existential psychoanalysis shows that any psychological desires, for example, oral, anal, Oedipal, "in the last instance are based on ontological structures" of being and the experience

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (trans. with an Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes; New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (New York: Verso, 1991).

of the lack of being.[3] What appears in psychoanalytic perspective as a temporal succession of different psychic stages presents in philosophical perspective a logical sequence of alienation and violence that characterizes the ontological structure of human existence without God. This sequence, in turn, can find expression in psychological dynamics.

Finally, the *theological* analysis looks for how questions of being and non-being of individual and community are portrayed in the text in relation to God and particularly how individuals and communities attempt in various ways to fill this lack of being with something less than the source of being. The theological perspective uses all previous modes of interpretation in order to translate the meaning of the biblical author into categories that can relate this meaning into today's experience. "We need to utilize a historical form of thought in order to understand a historical intention (that of Yahwist); but the intention itself, if it should concern us rather than remain purely historical, needs to be expressed in categories of our thought."[4] Drewermann's theological interpretation is influenced much by the early Kierkegaard.

As we proceed with a brief overview of Drewermann's interpretation of the escalation of violence and the loss and compensatory replacement of and search for God, I need to make a big disclaimer here. Drewermann presents his balanced interpretation of Gen 2–11 (J) in three thick volumes over a span of a total of 1,978 pages. He uses plenty of other methods which I cannot address here, such as cultural-anthropological comparisons, nature mythological, ethological, and sociological levels of interpretation. Even in the levels of interpretations presented, he draws on a vast number of authors who cannot be mentioned here. This overview inevitably simplifies and should not be taken to confine Drewermann's complex interpretations to a few neat boxes. The only thing that would do justice to his work is a direct reading of his works.

3. *Genesis 2–11 (J) as a Story of the Loss of God and the Desperate Compensatory Search for God*

We will now take a look at nine of the key Yahwist stories in Gen 2–11 on the four different levels of interpretation. A table summarizing the interpretations is attached in an Appendix to the present study. We will

3. Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen.* Vol. 3, *Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in philosophischer Sicht* [*Structures of Evil*. Vol. 3, *The Yahwist Primordial History from a Philosophical Perspective*] (5th ed.; Paderborn: Schöningh 1986), 220.

4. Ibid., 3:353.

go through each story in light of two particular questions: how God is portrayed and how human aggression changes as the God-image changes. As a primeval history, Gen 2–11 (J) claims to express something common to all humans and to all of humanity.[5] It presents the prototype of how the fall-out with God drives humans into a conscious flight from God and an unconscious compensatory search for an absolute hold, lost in the break with God, which takes the form of God-substitutes in which either the self or the Other or parts thereof are absolutized.

Exegetically, Drewermann details in the first volume of *Strukturen des Bösen* [Structures of Evil] that despite the presence of motifs of cultural achievements and the spread of human (pro)creativity, the Yahwist portrays primeval history theologically as a whole not as a story of progress but rather as a progression of alienation from God, a deadly history away from God in which humans tragically seek to replace the God whom they continue to seek in everything they do.[6] The Yahwist's account of Gen 3–11 expresses "a central theological understanding of humans without God."[7]

Psychoanalytically, Drewermann observes in the second volume that just as the primeval story is divided in two by the story of the Great Flood (Gen 6–8), so ontogenetic development in psychoanalytic perspective is "divided" in two by latency. And just as conflicts before the latency period center mainly around the individual child and her or his parents, so conflicts in stories before the Great Flood center mainly around relationships between individuals/families and God, while stories subsequent to the Great Flood focus on societal conflicts in a world without God. While Drewermann does not make the absurd claim that the Yahwist would have been aware of the two-part developmental structure of his primeval historical account, he does claim that the apparent resemblance between the Yahwist's story and psychoanalytic developmental psychology offers us a paradigm for understanding how human reality develops apart from God.[8] In the psychoanalytic interpretation these stories can thus be treated "as if the relationship between God and humans could be read without difficulty like a relationship of father and child or mother and child [in (neo)Freudian fashion] or of consciousness

5. Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen.* Vol. 1, *Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetischer Sicht* [*Structures of Evil*. Vol. 1, *The Yahwist Primordial History from an Exegetical Perspective*] (6th ed.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), XXVI.

6. Ibid., 1:2.

7. Ibid., 1:6.

8. Beier, *Violent God Image*, 55–59.

and the unconscious [in Jungian fashion]".[9] As I have shown in my book *A Violent God-Image*, the theological interpretation may not rashly identify the psychological with the theological but rather use it as a phenomenology that can help to shed light on the affective significance of the spiritual relationship with God.[10]

a. *Genesis 2:4b–25: Paradise—In Conscious Harmony with God*

We begin with the story of paradise in Gen 2:4b–25. In conversation with other biblical scholars (especially Westermann, Haag, Trilling, Wolff, Buber, von Rad, Steck, Gunkel), Drewermann presents an *exegetical* portrait of the human experience of God as Creator and ground of being. Humans are created from dust (2:7), but in unity with God this is nothing to be ashamed of. Dust (עפר) expresses, among other things, the natural finitude and nothingness of humans (cf. Gen 18:27 [J]; Job 4:19, 30:19), which as such is not problematic.[11] Humans are naked but not ashamed of their nakedness (2:25) before God. Their life is created through a divine breath which connects human life to God. The world within which God created humans is a place of harmony, a garden in which they live together without fear, shame, or domination, in which they are in intimate conversation with animals (2:19) and work to till and protect (שמר) the garden without finding labor as burdensome (2:16). God gives humans permission to eat from all of the trees in the garden, with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The explanation for this prohibition, that on the day they eat from that tree they will die, is portrayed not as alarming; rather, it is spoken "within a climate of a reliable sense of security."[12]

Psychoanalytically, the themes in the story of the primordial unity of humans with God and of humans with each other correspond to the early oral stage characterized by sucking and grasping reflexes. In this pre-ambivalent "schizoid position" (Klein), the mother's breast and the ego are not yet differentiated. *Philosophically*, this state has been interpreted not only as a unity of a person with inner and outer nature but also as a state of spiritual unreflectedness (German Idealism), an interpretation Drewermann vigorously disputes in light of the theological analysis. He

9. Eugen Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen.* Vol. 2, *Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in psychoanalytischer Sicht* [*Structures of Evil*. Vol. 2, *The Yahwist Primordial History from a Psychoanalytic Perspective*) (5th ed.; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1985), 555.

10. Beier, *Violent God Image*, 52.

11. עפר can also refer to the grave (Ps 22:30; Job 17:16; 19:25).

12. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 1:19.

sees Gen 2 *theologically* as an expression of unity with God which is experienced in unity with fellow humans and with external nature. While this description can rightly be seen as a portrait of the human being as "a child of God," Drewermann emphasizes that "what J portrays in Gen 2 as a unity with God does nowhere have traits of a childlike innocence or infantile lack of enlightenment. Genesis 2–3 deals with two opposite 'states': to be with God or to be without God."[13]

b. *Genesis 3:1–24: Eve and Adam—The Emergence of Fear and of a Violent God-Image*

What disrupts this state of primordial harmony? Paying close attention to the apparent emotional dynamics in Gen 3, Drewermann's exegetical analysis concludes that harmony with God is disrupted by fear—or, more precisely, by the way humans respond to the natural emergence of fear. The story uses the metaphor of the serpent to represent that which introduces fear and distortion into the original image of God as the source life. Though the Yahwist picks up mythic traditions from Babylon or Egypt which connect the serpent to motifs of fertility, the biblical writer consciously uses the serpent not as a fertility motif but rather as something created by God and related to the experience of nakedness. The serpent's attribute as "cunning" (Gen 3:1) is related etymologically to the motif of nakedness (v. 7). The Hebrew words for "being naked" and for "cunning" (also: wise) share the root, ערום. In Gen 3, the "wisdom" the serpent has to offer is hence a particular kind of awareness of nakedness which bestows the kind of "knowledge of good and evil" God wanted to spare humans: an awareness of nakedness that produces a sense of being "ashamed of oneself."[14] The knowledge of good and evil that the Yahwist has in mind is not the acquisition of sexual desire or knowledge, nor the moral capacity to distinguish good from evil, but rather the theological awareness that the world, including oneself, *is* good or evil depending on whether one sees it with or without God. Knowing good and evil here means knowing the world as devoid of meaning, as devoid of ultimate significance and hold apart from God. The word "hold" (German: *Halt*) is central in Drewermann's reading of Gen 2–11. It connotes not only the passive experience of holding or of a foothold but also the active grasping for support by the subject. Drewermann emphasizes that the need and search for a hold has a biological basis, as evidenced, for instance, in an infant's instinctual "drive to cling."[15] As we humans become aware of

13. Ibid., 1:74.
14. Ibid., 1:72.
15. Beier, *Violent God Image*, 63, 341.

ourselves and experience longings for absolute security, this need for hold becomes a metaphysical need for absolute hold. It is the experience of a world without something absolute to hold onto which God wanted to spare humans in the story. In the ancient Middle East, especially in Egypt, the serpent also was associated with death and nothingness.[16] The knowledge the serpent promises is a knowledge of life pervaded by nothingness.

Psychoanalytically, Gen 3 presents in the symbols of tree and serpent preo-Oedipal themes of separation desire and anxiety during the later, oral-sadistic stage, and Oedipally sexual desire and anxiety in relation to parental figures. The temptation by the serpent presents the fear and desire of destroying the mother by biting into the breast. Ambivalence emerges. The story portrays a defensive regression to the stage of oral sadism, which revives narcissistic dynamics responsible for the theme of wanting in omnipotent fashion to be like God.[17]

Philosophically, Gen 3 has typically been interpreted as the step from being in a state of unreflected innocence to the emergence of self-awareness. This becoming conscious (Kant), falling out of being-in-itself (*Ansich-Sein*) into being-for-itself (*Fürsich-Sein*) (Hegel, Sartre) is experienced as a fall that gives rise to existential anxiety due to a "lack of being" (Sartre). The knowledge of good and evil consists in recognizing one's nakedness, that is, the radical nothingness and contingency of one's being (*Dasein*), in Sartre's terms, "the lack of being" as such.

Theologically, however, "sin" does not automatically follow from the fact that nothingness stirs absolute fears, which is already implied in the reference to loneliness in Gen 2 that leads God to create a companion for the first human, but that humans in their fear lose sight of God who is the only source who could truly calm those fears. Humans in Gen 3 get lost in the fear stirred by the symbol of nothingness, the serpent, and fall prey to the temptation and illusion to try to calm the fear of nothingness through their own efforts. The eating of the fruit is an attempt to "stop up" the lack of being which apart from God is something that has to be hidden and defended against. "The sin of humans begins existentially really with a distortion of human 'orality' into the boundless, infinite, God-like, as Yahwist portrays it in Gen 3:1–7."[18] Since the lack of being has ultimate quality, it can only be "stopped up" by an ultimate being. While humans apart from God try to stop up the lack of being—sensed in the form of an underlying existential despair or shame—by finite means,

16. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 1:77.
17. Ibid., 2:165–69; Beier, *Violent God Image*, 77.
18. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 2:327.

they unconsciously seek in all their efforts to restore the state they were in during unity with God.[19] The tragedy is that the serpent has cunningly portrayed God as an absolutely withholding and untrustworthy being by suggesting that God had forbidden humans to eat from *any* of the trees. Despite the humans' initial defense of God (Gen 3:2–3), this added taboo—not even to touch the tree—indicates that the attempt not to lose the connection with God is already shaped by fear and an emerging desire to fill up the lack, in just the fashion the serpent intimates. Humans lose God not because of a willful heart or a bent toward disobedience, but rather out of the very fear of losing God. The guilt of humans in the story lies not in being afraid of this possibility but in the failure to turn to God for help and in the desperate attempt to deal with the fear on their own, which eventually means that they have to attempt desperately to provide their own ground. This guilt is a guilt of freedom under the dynamic of fear, which Drewermann finds well illustrated by Kierkegaard's comparison of the fall with the experience of dizziness.[20] Eating the fruit seems to promise to let them be like God as they strive to avoid the feared loss of God and then undo actual loss. The consequence is not physical death, but a view of life through the lens of the lack of being, through death.

By trying unsuccessfully to fill their lack of being without God, humans are now ashamed of their nakedness, finding it obscene and trying to hide it. This view turns all of creation, which has as such not changed from Gen 2 to Gen 3, into a source of misery. Work and love, both present already in Gen 2, only now appear as punishments. The mutuality between lovers meant to be an antidote to loneliness now first turns into a source of the domination–submission dynamic. Similarly, harmony with inner and outer nature, the natural state of things, is transformed into a sense of adversity in relation to inner and outer nature. The image of God has been turned into a narcissistic and withholding omnipotent competitor who at the same time is not truly omnipotent, since the serpent suggests that God actually is afraid of the knowledge humans would gain. The protector God has turned into an adversary. The wise guide for being has become a strict moral watchdog for dos and don'ts. Yet, despite these distortions, humans retain a sense of God as one trying to protect them even as they are falling away from God.

19. Ibid., 1:161.

20. Ibid., 3:438–39; Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (ed. and trans., with an Introduction and notes, by Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson; Kierkegaard's Writings 8; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 61.

c. *Genesis 4–16: Cain and Abel—The First Killing Motivated by a Search for God*

Cain and Abel introduce the first attempt to regain the lost unity with God through sacrifice to God.[21] Sacrifice in the name of God betrays a sense of mistrust that before God one is not good enough as one is. One then has to offer God of one's best efforts in order to be recognized and accepted (v. 6). "Beyond Eden," God appears as the ultimate player of capricious favoritism and the Other as the ultimate competitor for God's ultimate recognition. When the Other seems to "win," murderous rage emerges within (v. 7) and aims at the liquidation of the competitor. This first instance of absolute aggression in the Bible emerges as Cain feels he unsuccessfully competed for absolute recognition from God in a climate characterized by a sense of lack of such recognition. Cain is theologically "the child" of Adam and Eve: his murder of his brother presents a qualitative progression following from the original alienation from God.[22] The tragedy of this story is that in the very process of sacrificing the best for God, humans become murderers.[23] Genesis 4 shows that when "humans kill each other they actually do not fight for possessions or similar things but for God and God's blessing, and that it is precisely the separation from God" which lets God's blessing be misunderstood and turns the experience of the world into misery.[24] "Ultimately human annihilation of each other concerns God. It is God who was and is ultimately meant when people become deadly enemies to each other."[25]

Psychoanalytically, the story contains elements of the anal-sadistic stage in which shame and self-doubt emerge as developmental challenges. While the story of Cain and Abel harbors the mythological motif of the opposites of light and darkness, it differs from mythological stories in that it does not have a story of "resurrection" after the killing of one of the brothers. For the Yahwist it is, then, no story of salvation, but one of doom.[26] Underlying the competitive conflict is a sense of inferiority (Adler) which humans feel after the loss of God (parents). Whether one's sacrifice is accepted or not comes to signify whether one exists or does not exist.[27]

21. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 1:121.
22. Ibid., 1:146.
23. Ibid., 1:131.
24. Ibid., 1:133.
25. Ibid., 1:138.
26. Beier, *Violent God Image*, 87.
27. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 2:272.

Philosophically, the Cain and Abel story introduces the master–slave dynamic described by Hegel and elaborated by Sartre as the sado-masochistic structure of intersubjectivity. The Other is experienced as a threat to my being by revealing the obscenity of my *Dasein* and thus as proof of my superfluousness and non-necessity. "The actual philosophical problem of Gen 4:1–16 is for J not an issue of intra-species aggressiveness but the question why the drive structure of humans must produce murderous consequences if the human being no longer finds enough hold in God."[28]

Theologically, murder in the process of sacrifice is a consequence of the state of alienation from God and its concomitant sense of an ultimate lack of justification for one's existence. The Other becomes the absolute competitor for the lost but needed absolute recognition from God. It is "the feeling of being rejected by God" which "first creates the deadly envy" among humans.[29] "Beyond Eden God appears to humans…where God blesses as unjust and confusing, as capricious and unpredictable,"[30] killing the Other is done in the hope of drawing God's absolute recognition back upon oneself.[31] Attempts at solving the sadomasochistic dynamic of this competitive conflict play out theologically in two basic ways. Either the self is divinized and the Other is treated as nothing and nobody, or the Other is treated as God and the self is treated as nothing and nobody. These two modes of being compensating for the lack of God subsequently form the basis for all interpersonal and group dynamics in Gen 4–11. What would cultural-anthropologically seem to be progress, namely that Cain builds the first city, is for J an "artificial substitute for the lost paradise… What people really seek, when they build houses and cities, psychoanalysis says, is not the improvement of external living conditions, — they seek in the last instance the security in the bosom of their lost mother; they seek, J says theologically, security through protection by their God."[32]

d. *Genesis 4:23–24: Lamech—Confusing the Self with God*

In Lamech's "song of the sword," the need for an absolute foothold, for God, is displaced onto the self's power to scare others. While Cain's murder of Abel was something new and had even some traits of an accident, for Lamech, the descendent of Cain, murder has become second

28. Ibid., 2:293.
29. Ibid., 1:125.
30. Ibid., 1:133; cf. 1:124.
31. Ibid., 2:272.
32. Ibid., 2:306.

nature and "characterizes what a just man is."[33] Lamech outdoes God by threatening not only "sevenfold" but "seventy-sevenfold," that is, absolute vengeance. He thus puts himself above God and aggressively seeks God in himself. He rules over life and death, "better" and more brutal than the God of Cain. For Lamech, God "practically no longer exists" or, if God exists, God "is a weakling."[34] With Lamech's attitude, the Yahwist introduces the prototype for "the cruelties of history" apart from God: any "increase in cultural, technical and political progression must go hand in hand with an increase in the terror of mutual killings as long as the spirit of Lamech remains the foundation for history."[35] The consequences of the fall from God have now reached a new level: from shame and fear of each other (Adam and Eve) to fearful and murderous envy and competition of the other (Cain and Abel) to the use of fear and terror as a means for survival and the control of the Other (Lamech). "Fear of death is supposed to preserve life."[36] Those who instill most fear are from now on praised as heroes of humankind.

Psychoanalytically, the song of Lamech presents themes of phallic aggression that express all the features of the male Oedipus complex: "God" represents for Lamech, then, the father who has to be outdone while the women he tries to impress represent the mother. Underlying Lamech's aggressive self-overvaluation of his "sword" is a defense against fear of castration. *Philosophically*, Lamech no longer consciously seeks to fill the lack of being through recognition from the absolute source of life, God, as Cain had tried to do, but displays a greedy desire to fill the lack of being himself by pretending to be the ground of himself. He spreads fear and terror to those who encounter him in an attempt to conquer the fear and terror of his own *Dasein*. The absolute level of his vengefulness is vengeance for the lack of *Dasein* and thus ultimately aims at God. "Without God, every human *Dasein* desires revenge for the narcissistic wound merely to be a creature, a nothing."[37] The maxim of his behavior is "Get rid of your own fear by instilling fear in those who make you afraid!"[38]

Theologically, Lamech's hyper-aggressive male self-divinization, however, has its reason ultimately not in a presumed aggressive-instinctual nature humans share with other primates, but rather in the turn away

33. Ibid., 1:156.
34. Ibid., 1:157, 158.
35. Ibid., 1:156.
36. Ibid., 1:158.
37. Ibid., 3:302.
38. Ibid., 3:408.

from God which turns this instinctual nature into a tool for absolute terror.[39] In contrast to Freud, Drewermann writes, that "God" is not merely a product of the Oedipus complex but has "beyond the psychology of religion an absolute existential significance: if humans do not accept the figure of God as foundational for their existence they must compete against God and need to replace God. God is the one who can either transform the contingency of humans into a freely wanted and justified *Dasein* or remains a cipher for that which humans need to become in order to find themselves bearable, but at which they must constantly fail since they can never become God."[40] Lamech's infinitization of aggression occurs in response to ultimate existential terror which turns the law of fear into a desperate mode of survival.

e. *Genesis 6:1–4: Human Daughters Marry Sons of God—Confusing the Other with God*

The story of human daughters marrying sons of God represents a clear example for the search for union with God. But here humans seek God in a kind of fertility cut off from the creative source of life. This "marriage" does not unite "with God but only with 'sons of God'—which can be paraphrased to mean with distorted images of God, with a myth of God—and hence ultimately [it] actually divides from God."[41]

Psychoanalytically, the passivity in which the human daughters are chosen by the divine sons points to an interpretation of this story as an expression of the female Oedipus complex in which the girl wishes to receive a child from the "big" father whom she hence "divinizes" within a patriarchal culture.[42]

Philosophically, Gen 6:1–4 presents the counterpart to the story of Lamech. In the marriage with the sons of God humans attempt to fill their lack of being by fleeing into the Other. The Other is sought as absolute ground for one's *Dasein*. The sexual overvaluation of the Other is "only the external aspect of the sheer desperate longing to lose oneself in another in order to flee from the boundless anxiety stirred by one's own lack of hold."[43] *Theologically*, the need for absolute hold, for God, is displaced in this story onto human generative abilities. Without God any anxiety seeks "infinity, bypasses the human, and wants the Other as God and hence actually only aims at oneself. It confirms in everything only

39. Ibid., 2:329.
40. Ibid., 3:307.
41. Ibid., 1:182.
42. Ibid., 2:344, 350.
43. Ibid., 3:312.

the foundationlessness of all its foundations."[44] The silence of God in both Gen 4:23–24 and Gen 6:1–4 indicates that the more humans are caught in the fangs of absolute existential fears, the less they are able to trust God as a dialogue partner who could provide the ultimate foundation of existence which humans now seek forever unsuccessfully in themselves or in others.[45]

f. *Genesis 6:5–8:22: The Great Flood—The Collapse of Individual Pseudo-Divinizations*

After humans have banned God, the source of life, from their world, their world comes to an end and God is seen as the one who has given up on humanity but for a single family. Drewermann emphasizes that Gen 6:6 shows God as affected by human opposition: "The heaviness (בְּעִצְּבוֹן) with which humans were cursed for sin (Gen 3:16–17) also affects God in that God reflexively takes it upon God's self (וַיִּתְעַצֵּב) (Gen 6:6)."[46] While God is portrayed as regretting the creation of humans, this regret is not due to a mood of God but "is carried into God through human opposition."[47] "Good and evil come in the last instance from God's own self, depending how humans relate to God. Protection or annihilation, salvation or doom, security or deadly threat—both lie in God, and it depends on the behavior of humans how God *appears* to them."[48] After the flood God vows never to destroy the earth despite human "evilness" (Gen 8:21–22). With this J wants to say that God from primordial times, that is, from the ground of our existence and history, has decided to tolerate the world and humans despite the evil that comes from within humans.[49] The "key intent of the Yahwist story of the Great Flood is… that God has once and for all prohibited God's self to destroy the earth due to humans and that we hence can understand our *Dasein* only as saved through grace."[50]

Psychoanalytically, the story of the flood which brings an end to the world represents themes of the latency period, in which the "Oedipus complex" becomes dissolved and parental imagos are introjected in the form of the superego.[51] As Drewermann states:

44. Ibid., 3:314.
45. Ibid., 1:189.
46. Ibid., 1:211.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 1:219 (emphasis added).
49. Ibid., 1:224.
50. Ibid., 1:229.
51. Ibid., 2:413.

> Psychoanalytically the meaning of the story of Noah thus would be this: in the background stands the Oedipal wish, directed against the father (God), for union with the mother. This wish would bring the annihilation of the son by the father. Since the punishment by the father and the wish for union with the mother have equal strength, with the Oedipal incest tendency eventually even gaining dominance—the son remains alive, the annihilation fails—, hence a symbolism covering both contradictory tendencies must be found that expresses both how the son is punished *and* how he unites with his mother. Such symbolism is present in the image of the flood and the floating arch.[52]

Philosophically, the story of the flood expresses how the absolutizing of the self or the Other does not hold and eventually breaks down as the ultimate finitude and groundlessness of both one's own and the Other's *Dasein* becomes inevitably apparent. It expresses the failure of the attempt to create for oneself an absolute foundation and reveals the futility and absurdity of *Dasein*. Another possibility for the justification of human existence emerges in the sparing of Noah and in God's regret for destroying the earth. *Theologically*, the Great Flood reveals that a life without God as the source of life is a life without any ultimate hold. With this realization, God is experienced as the ultimate destroyer—destroyer of the false life that provided a kind of pseudo-security. After the breakdown of a false life, Gen 8 shows God as regretting the destruction and choosing mercy over destruction once and for all.

g. *Genesis 9:18–27: Canaan's Curse—Slavery in the Name of God*

The story of the three sons of Noah from whom "the whole earth was peopled" (Gen 9:19) begins to show how the Yahwist sees all of human history in alienation from God as pervaded by dynamics of shame and violent suppression of the Other. Canaan is cursed and enslaved in the name of God because he saw his drunken father Noah lying naked in a tent. Themes of voyeurism, homosexuality, and shaming characterize the story, which marks the beginning of the second part of Yahwist's primeval history and which shows how "the fall from God, which turned being human as such into 'evil', now repeats itself in the basic structures of historical existence."[53] Drewermann uses the notion of the "corporate personality" as a tool for interpreting how what happens to individuals in this story actually portrays what happens between peoples.

Psychoanalytically, the story of Canaan's curse picks up again on sexual themes, just as early puberty is seen as the stage in which sexual-

52. Ibid., 2:395.
53. Ibid., 1:206.

ity re-emerges as a developmental focus after the period of latency. After reading the story with cultural-anthropological comparisons, Drewermann sums up by saying that it deals "with a defense against the wish to castrate the father, with the repression of the mother goddess, and with the not-to-be questioned singularity of God as an almighty heavenly father—all of this, no doubt, on the background of a strict patriarchal family system."[54] In addition, Noah's exhibitionism and the voyeurism of Canaan point psychoanalytically to homosexual strivings in which the son, rather than replacing the father, wants to replace the mother and take her place in relation to the father.[55] *Philosophically*, Gen 9:18–27 portrays sadomasochistic existential dynamics as the fate of nations. "The basic theme of human fear and shame is again picked up and applied generally into the social-historical arena."[56]

Theologically, however, Drewermann argues that what Sartre describes in his social philosophy as the inevitable structure of human history, Yahwist presents as a picture in which "under the conditions of the absence of God, it *must* simply be part of the basic structures of human history that one people asserts itself through suppression of another, so that the theme of fear and shame receives collective significance and becomes historically powerful."[57] Now God is invoked by "the father" to justify the slavery of Canaan and to bless his two other brothers. No direct speech by God is reported in the passage. Humans more and more are confusing their projection of God with the reality of God.

h. *Genesis 10: Nimrod—The Patriarchal Ruler as God and the Dispersion of Humanity*

Nimrod is named as the figure symbolizing the birth of oriental kingdoms through belligerent conquest. Drewermann notes that the Hebrew text in Gen 10:8–9 presents a word play between "warrior/hunter" (גבור) and a general word for "man" (גבר)," which indicates that Nimrod is known for a masculinity expressed through aggression. "God" in this story is seen only as a mirror of one's own divinized heroism bent on building empires. *Psychoanalytically*, Drewermann reads the story of Nimrod as the reappearance of phallic aggression, which first was introduced in Lamech's "Oedipal" song of the sword but now gains historical-political dimensions. In a history without God, Drewermann reads this story to mean that the "Nimrods" create a history of "people who

54. Ibid., 2:458–59.
55. Ibid., 2:464–65.
56. Ibid., 2:381.
57. Ibid., 2:381.

remain forever pubescent."[58] The dynamic in Nimrod parallels the psychosocial stage of puberty in which genital sexuality gains significance "for the shaping and coping with external reality."[59] While the story of Canaan portrayed a certain homosexual tendency, "connected with phallic-exhibitionistic and aggressive (castrative) strivings, we now find that this developmental direction continues in the figure of Nimrod: castration fear is answered by 'male protest'… [T]he passage of Gen 10:8–12… expands the theme of suppression and inferiority into the glorification of the male hero; it thus provides the psychic background of the political origins of the rule of violence."[60] Drewermann calls this compensatory masculine heroism against the fear of inferiority the "Nimrod-Complex" and finds psychoanalytic application in the cases of Alexander the Great and Adolf Hitler.[61] We might easily apply it to the heroic attempts at Empire which we witness in today's so-called "only remaining superpower."[62]

Philosophically, the story portrays suppression and intolerance as the foundation for national group formation. It presents a political philosophy in which the stronger party rules and which elevates domination to the level of heroism. The emergence of political violence appears in Nimrod as a necessary development in human history which aims, in Sartre's terms, to overcome the fear-invested seriality of unorganized groups. With the term "seriality" Sartre describes a collective that, unlike a group, is not organized but is rather constituted by isolated individuals who are sharing the same material conditions or objects and who affect each other like a series but without directly intending to do so.[63] The classic example Sartre gives is of people waiting in line at a bus stop who do not know each other. Listeners of the same radio station or workers in factories producing parts for cars would be other examples. Without knowing, the people of a series affect each other. For instance, if not enough people took the bus, potentially no bus would run. For Sartre, seriality objectifies us, turns subjects into powerless "others," and hence threatens and negates our subjectivity. For instance, we become just "someone in line" for the bus. Or we become just someone competing for resources. Group formation is an attempt to overcome the impersonal, objectifying seriality and to substitute it by shaping the material

58. Ibid., 3:384.
59. Ibid., 2:485.
60. Ibid., 2:484.
61. Ibid., 2:488–504.
62. Robert Jay Lifton, *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003).
63. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

conditions through a shared project in which each member of the group chooses to participate. The formation of a political state with which citizens consciously identify is an attempt to overcome seriality. "But as the negation of fear-invested seriality by means of political organizations only internalizes anxiety in form of mutual violence, every formation of a state takes into itself in the field of fundamental lack at the same time the forces of its own demise."[64]

Theologically, the Yahwist expresses "that people can never 'grow up' in a history which is supposed to replace God and that they will maintain the 'Oedipal' competition with the father throughout life. Such history, completely devoid of God, again and again needs and brings forth 'saviors' of the kind of Nimrod, although those saviors always only help to speed up the demise: a people without God will always put people as gods on the throne; all psychical infantilisms then inevitably appear intensified in the collective."[65] What appears philosophically as the inevitable and necessary use of violence in the building of human history is portrayed by the Yahwist as something that only seems to be necessary; in reality it would not need to exist without the fall from God.[66]

i. *Genesis 11:1–9: The City and Tower of Babel—Human Society as God*

In the story of the tower of Babel the collective aims to prevent the disintegration of human society by making a name for itself through reaching to heaven in a common cultural achievement (Gen 11:4). The motivation is not "pride" but fear that everything will fall apart unless humans try to rule the entire world from one place in the way God is imagined as ruling from heaven. What God opposes in the story is not the cultural progress of the invention of brick (Gen 11:3), but rather the use of such cultural achievements to reach heaven, that is, the impossible attempt to substitute God through human creations and human society.[67] What is key in this story is "that humans are concerned with creating a center that unites them because they have lost their unifying center in God…and believe they could artificially create a center which replaces God."[68] This story again presents the reversal of aim and result which has been observed in many of the preceding biblical stories: "humans strive to build an artificial paradise and basically attempt to restore the original situation or try to re-establish on their own the unity (with God) from

64. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 3:387.
65. Ibid., 3:384.
66. Ibid., 3:386.
67. Ibid., 1:299.
68. Ibid., 1:301.

which they have become separated throughout the entire development of the Yahwist primeval history."[69]

Psychoanalytically, the story of the building of the tower of Babel describes dynamics which emerge in adolescence: "fleeing from individuality into unity with others in spontaneous work for common ideals which surpass anything that can be achieved, in an attempt to strive with knowledge and expertise for the creation of a higher and better world than the one found, the realization of which brings the hope to take the place and role of the parental (paternal) authority."[70] Genesis 11:1–9 thus, developmentally, presents "the last step toward becoming an adult."[71]

Philosophically, Gen 11:1–9 presents the failure of the attempt to overcome seriality by means of the creation of human groups:

> We have seen how Sartre traces the group dialectically out of seriality: as the impossibility of life necessitates in the powerlessness of seriality the negation of the negation and hence a new affirmation, the group constitutes itself as a common action where each person carries out through the Other his own doing and in the self the doing of the Other, namely first in the spontaneous action of the fusing of the group and later on the basis of the oath in form of organized group practice. For the first time a "We" exists without the fear of objectification and the transcending of my transcendence.[72]

Theologically, the building of the tower of Babel fails to bring the God-like unity of humanity "because without God any historical attempt at human union against the constant danger of seriality must collapse due to immanent anxiety."[73] Unlike Sartre, Drewermann stresses that "the danger of seriality actually expresses historically the *lack of God*, who would be the only one able to guarantee the absolute value of our personhood against the objectifying tendencies of seriality, and that humans hence, without knowing it, fail in the futilities of social group formation ultimately due to…the absence of God."[74] The struggle to restore unity ultimately aims at restoring the lost unity with God. Yet "one cannot come to God by forcing the unity of humanity; a unity of humanity could only come about if one comes to God."[75]

69. Ibid., 2:519.
70. Ibid., 2:523.
71. Ibid., 2:524.
72. Ibid., 3:387.
73. Ibid., 3:391.
74. Ibid., 3:394.
75. Ibid., 3:394–95.

4. *Hermeneutical Implications*

In the Foreword to the philosophical-theological *Strukturen des Bösen*, Drewermann calls for a comprehensive interdisciplinary study of biblical texts in theology. "The basic conviction of this work," for Drewermann, is that it

> should become general practice of theological reflection that exegetical hermeneutics can not (any more) do without psychoanalysis, that psychoanalysis in turn needs philosophy, that for the sake of overcoming human anxiety philosophy must open itself to theology and, vice versa, that theology as the integral truth of both is only real in the unity of psychoanalysis and philosophy, of feeling and thinking.[76]

Applied to the study of the relation between absolute aggression and the search for God, a few hermeneutical implications follow for application either in reading biblical texts or in discerning the meaning of the use of God-language in any setting for the justification of violence.

1. Overall, *psychoanalysis* and *daseinsanalysis* are inevitable as phenomenologies to understand a dynamic of increasing alienation from God and the increasing self-mutilation of the human psyche and human society under the spell of fear and terror. The theological *projections of human ambivalences into the God-image* can and need to be undone through the application of psychoanalytic and philosophical analysis of unconscious or latent dynamics behind conscious and manifest content. Without a psychological hermeneutic of the Bible we either need to put God on trial for the way we see God or reify God in form of our projections.

2. Close attention needs to be given to the question whether an image of God evokes *fear rather than trust*, which usually indicates that an image of God presents a psychospiritual or psychosocial distortion of God rather than an approximation to the reality of God. The important exception is, of course, where the God of trust and grace is perceived as a threat to false certainties of a religion based on fear. The prophetic images of God as well as Jesus' words of woes aimed at a hypocritical religious attitude are a case in point. Even the religious justification of the death of Jesus on the Cross for alleged blasphemy is an example of how a fear-based image of God plays out in the killing of the one who lives out a nonviolent God.

76. Ibid., 3:LXIV.

3. When the Bible mentions a human character's relationship to God, our interpretation of this "revelation" needs to ask within *which emotional, existential or social philosophical lens* is God perceived by the person or the group the person represents. This applies to what the character says about God as well as to direct speech or appearances to the character by God. When God appears in the Bible, it is always an appearance to a human subject. Hence the view of God must not be disconnected from the experience of the human actor in the story. To do so would mean a docetic disembodying of God and ultimately the disavowal of the revelation of God to humanity in the Bible. When God appears, for instance, to condone, implement, or call for genocide or other forms of absolute aggression in the Bible (cf. Exod 14:28; Num 31:3, 7–8, 15–17; 2 Kgs 2:23–24), we need to ask what lack of being is motivating those who execute such violence, or leads them to suppose that "God" has brought such violence upon others on their behalf.

4. In addition to psychoanalysis and *daseinsanalysis*, the theological interpretation of scriptural texts and of references to God should strive to apply all available anthropological sciences, something which Drewermann has aspired to by including exegetical-historical, cultural-anthropological, nature mythological, ethological, psychoanalytical, sociological, philosophical, and theological interpretations. His works since the 1990s have also included biology, cosmology, neurology, and systems theory in a dialogue of theological interpretations of biblical and doctrinal texts.[77] Such a radical *anthropological* reading does not reduce the God of the Bible to a mere anthropological illusion, but rather takes seriously the

77. Eugen Drewermann, *Glauben in Freiheit oder Tiefenpsychologie und Dogmatik.* Vol. 1, *Dogma, Angst und Symbolismus* [*Liberating Faith, or: Depth Psychology and Dogmatics*. Vol. 1, *Dogma, Fear, and Symbolism*] (Düsseldorf: Walter, 1993); *Jesus von Nazareth: Befreiung zum Frieden* [*Jesus of Nazareth: Liberation for Peace*], *Glauben in Freiheit*, Vol. 2 [*Liberating Faith*, Vol. 2] (Zurich: Walter, 1996); *Der sechste Tag: Die Herkunft des Menschen und die Frage nach Gott* [*The Sixth Day: The Origin of Humanity and the Question of God*], *Glauben in Freiheit*. Vol. 3, *Religion und Naturwissenschaft*, Part 1 [*Liberating Faith*. Vol. 3, *Religion and Natural Science*, Part 1] (Zurich: Walter, 1998); *...und es geschah so: Die moderne Biologie und die Frage nach Gott* [*...And It Was So: Modern Biology and the Question of God*], *Glauben in Freiheit*. Vol. 3, *Religion und Naturwissenschaft*, Part 2: *Biologie und Theologie* [*Liberating Faith*. Vol. 3, *Religion and Natural Science*, Part 2: *Biology and Theology*) (Zurich: Walter, 1999), *Im Anfang... Die moderne Kosmologie und die Frage nach Gott* [*In the Beginning... Modern Cosmology and the Question of God*], *Glauben in Freiheit*. Vol. 3, *Religion und Naturwissenschaft*, Part 3: *Kosmologie und Theologie* [*Liberating Faith*. Vol. 3, *Religion and Natural Science*, Part 3: *Cosmology and Theology*] (Zurich: Walter, 2002).

fact that when humans talk, feel, think about, or experience God, it is always within and *by means of* the parameters of human conditions.

5. We need to read biblical texts developmentally and ask questions such as "Is there development in the God-image within a particular story, a cluster of stories, or even an entire book of the Bible?" As shown above, such development is particularly evident in Gen 2–11, but it has important overarching theological significance for interpretations of any writing on God.

6. When we interpret stories about God, each of us brings our own existential and psychological experience into the picture. We do not speak of God abstractly. Rather, when *we* speak of God in the Bible we are immediately immersed in the question of our own experience of God. As in psychoanalytic practice, when a patient speaks about someone else's experience she or he always speaks about her or his own experience as well. Drewermann presents a hermeneutical model that always includes the subjectivity of the reader—not just the conscious, rational subjectivity of Bultmann, Tillich, and the structuralists, but also the unconscious subjectivity of feelings and existential needs.

7. In order to counter the escalating dynamic of fear and violence that turns God into the justifier of absolute aggression, humans in search of ultimate meaning need the reality of a nonviolent and unambivalently good God who accepts humans in their fears and their compensatory hostilities and provides through an ultimate holding environment a way out of the vain and violent compensatory forms of divinizing self, the Other, or the group.

[See overleaf for the Appendix]

Appendix: Developmental Themes in Genesis 2–11 (J)

Adapted by M. Beier from the tables appearing in Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen*, 1:LXXXIV–LXXXV; 2:547–48; 3:482.
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Yahwist primeval history (exegetical)		*Stages of libido development (psychoanalytic)*				*Philosophical interpretations of development*	*Theological development (consciously away from God; unconsciously in search of God)*	*God-Image*
Images	*Themes*	*Organizational stages*	*Age*	*Characteristics*	*Associated neurosis*			
1. Gen 2: Paradise	Primal unity of humans with God	Early oral (sucking-) stage	0–1/2 "schizoid position"	Mother's breast and ego not differentiated; mother-child dyad; objectless autoerotism; preambivalent	Schizoid disorder; schizophrenia	Unity with inner and outer nature; State of spiritual unreflectedness	Unity with God, with oneself and with nature; being a child of God; [J does not explicitly mention the negative version of paradise, but it is in a way "the background of all other stories in J primeval history" (Vol. 3, 486); self both as God and as demon; despair of finitude as lack of infinity]	Creator; source of life; intimate, person; harmony of self with God, no heteronomy; God wants to spare humans knowledge of a world without ultimate hold

2. Gen 3: "The fall" through eating and expulsion	Separation; anxiety; guilt feeling and punishment; shame; banned and cursed existence	Later oral (cannibal-istic) stage	½–1 "depres-sive position"	Total introjec-tion of object; destroying through biting and devouring; basic trust vs. basic mistrust	Depression; melancholia	Becoming conscious; reflection of anxiety in consciousness; *nakedness*: recognition of the nothingness and contingency of one's being (*Dasein*); infinite longing for being	Fall from God; inner and outer nature become ambivalent; *Dasein* is trans-formed from a blessing into a curse; *nakedness*: obscenity of *Dasein* without God; despair of infinity as lack of finitude (Kierkegaard)	Fear of God; God as withholding *all* trees; serpent distorts God-image; God as adversary; ambivalent image: protects from further harm
3. Gen 4:1–16: Cain and Abel	Sacrifice; rivalry, competition; murder; fratricide in the search for justification before God	Anal-sadistic stage	1–3	Letting go or holding on; annihilation of the object; ambivalent; autonomy	Obsessional neurosis	Master-slave dynamic (Hegel); sadomasochism as structure of intersubjectivity (Sartre); the Other as threat to my being, as revelation of the obscenity of my *Dasein*, as proof for the superfluousness and non-necessity of my existence	Human divisiveness and adversity in a state of alienation from God; despair of necessity as lack of possibility (I must be, instead of: I may be)	God as in need of sacrifice in order to give recognition; God as capricious, partial, arbitrary

4a. Gen 4:23–24: Lamech's "song of the sword"	Exhibition of male aggressiveness; fear of vulnerability; revenge, defiance, and outdoing God; divinization of one's own being	Male Early genital (phallic) stage; Oedipus complex	3–5	Active love of the object; exhibition love and hate next to each other; competition with the father (male); change of the object (in the girl: father instead of mother); family romance	Hysteria	Revenge for the lack of *Dasein*; the Other appears as opponent; Greedy desire to fill the lack of being and to be the ground of oneself, to be like God	Divinization of one's own *Dasein* without God; despair of possibility as lack of necessity (God as possibility—choice of possibility without God)	God appears to be me; I am like God
4b. Gen 6:1–4: Human Marriage with the sons of God	Female wish for unity with the divine and for the birth of strong children; divinization of the being of the Other in the fall from God	Female				Desperate search for some hold in the Other; the Other appears as God, as absolute ground	Divinization of the Other as substitute for God; (God as possibility—choice of possibility without God)	God appears to be the Other

5. Gen 6–8: Great Flood	End of the world as punishment; the catastrophe of existence	Latency stage	5–10	Dissolution of the Oedipus complex; introjection of parental imagos	End of phases foundational in the etiology of neurosis	Emergence of the groundlessness of *Dasein*; "futility" and absurdity of *Dasein*; failure	Life without God as a life without any hold	God as the destroyer
6. Gen 9:18–27: Canaan's crime	Voyeurism; homosexuality; shame as reaction formation	Early puberty	10–12	Resuming of sexual development; object love with the inclusion of genital love		Suppression and intolerance as foundation for national group formation (Sartre)	Historical violence emerges socially in a field of alienation from God	God as against sexual desire
7. Gen 10:8–12: Nimrod, the hero	Conquest; rule of violence (hunting)	Puberty	12–18	Identity formation, against feelings of inferiority and doubts of the value of the self				Fear as God; the God of my group is stronger than the God of your group, will wipe you and your group out
8. Gen 11:1–9: Building the city and the tower of Babel	Unity against isolation; unity through a common goal; diligence and achievement	Adolescence	From about 18 on	Idealism; self-confidence; aim-orientedness; social grouping		Powerlessness of passive group seriality and the necessary failure of human groups	The overestimation of human existence; human society as substitute for God	Society as God; God against society

"A Destroyer Will Come Against Babylon": George W. Bush's Oracles Against the Nations

Dereck Daschke

John J. Collins's presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2002—a trenchant overview of the nature of divinely legitimated violence in the Hebrew Bible—concludes with a reflection by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes had long been driven by his own righteous certitude in the cause of abolition, but the devastation of the Civil War had chastened him. Collins explains, "By the end of the war he had drawn a different lesson, that certitude leads to violence. The Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation."[1]

Collins's address took up the themes of violence and certitude, roughly one year after the attacks of September 11 (hereafter, "9/11") and deep into the run-up to the Iraq War four months later. In this period the religious violence of Islamic terrorist networks had changed the world, in no small part by engaging a new and untested American president who was no stranger himself to the transforming power of religious certainty. In fact, faced with such global challenges, George W. Bush seemed quickly to find a seriousness of purpose and a steadfastness that, while lacking in much of his life, would become the trademarks of his first term in office and of his understanding of his role as a "war president," as he termed himself in his successful re-election effort in 2004. In his dealings and decision making in response to 9/11, including the invasion of Iraq, friends and critics alike would agree that the singular characteristic Bush displayed above all others was certitude.[2] There was a

1. John Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas, the Bible, and the Legitimization of Violence," in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 1 (ed. J. Harold Ellens; Westport, Conn.: Praeger), 11–33 (26).

2. Several notable sources that document the centrality of certainty to Bush's persona include the extraordinary *New York Times Magazine* report by Ron Suskind

clarity of motivation and even a kind of inner peace that being the commander-in-chief in the Global War on Terror granted Bush. Psychologically speaking, it is in this role that Bush felt most self-actualized; he was fully his true self.

But, as Collins (and Holmes) suggest, this certitude cannot be divorced from its war context; moreover, it must be seen as a predominant factor in not only the poor planning and indefinite continuation of the war in Iraq, but also the apparent disconnect—some would say indifference—Bush had with regard to the actual violence and deaths his decisions brought about on both the American and Iraqi sides. Some point to the pacifism deeply ingrained in Bush's overt Christian faith or even his own strongly held stance against abortion and stem cell research in his support of "a culture of life" as evidence of hypocrisy or disingenuousness. His "warmongering" would thus prove that he is not really the Christian he professed to be, or that his conspicuous displays of morality were just for show, a political calculation to appease his evangelical base. In any case, there was nothing either "true" to his self or morally righteous about his cold-hearted decision to bring the world's mightiest military down on a country that had not attacked it.

Yet, if we follow Collins's argument that biblical morality itself imparts a dangerous but completely authentic certitude about operating in the world, it dissolves the apparent contradiction between Bush's faith and his actions. In fact, the president's rhetoric regarding 9/11, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and the War on Terror in general, on closer reading, begins to resemble nothing short of the attitude and some of the very language of the prophets of the Old Testament as they railed against the crimes of wayward nations. These prophets, we will recall, felt no remorse in consigning whole nations to God's wrath at the time of his Judgment, or "The Day of the Lord." At places, eschatological warnings edge toward the apocalyptic, and the warnings of the prophets take on a more dualistic cast, presenting, as Bush does in the War on Terror, the conflict at hand as a battle between Good and Evil. Ethicist Peter Singer, who examines the president's dualistic ethical mentality, observes that "Bush's difficulty in admitting that he is wrong is rooted in his moral certainty that he knows what is good, and what is evil." Singer goes on to

called "Faith, Certainty, and the Presidency of George W. Bush" (n.p. [accessed May 30, 2009]. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html); *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*, the thoroughgoing inside look at the presidency published by Robert Draper in 2007; and Bob Woodward's trilogy charting the rise and fall of the effectiveness of Bush's certitude on the war front, *Bush at War* (2002), *Plan of Attack* (2004), and *State of Denial* (2007).

suggest that "this certainty stems from his religious faith."[3] This view of the world is often known as "Manichean dualism," even if it is found in much of the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature that preceded the third-century prophet Mani who gives the outlook its name. (On a related note, scholar Hugh Urban sees the secrecy of the Bush White House as a result of "Manichean certitudes."[4]) It is clearly in that Manichean spirit that Bush famously declared, shortly after 9/11, to the nations of the world, "You are either with us or against us in the fight against terror."[5]

Adopting religious or apocalyptic rhetoric is hardly new in times of war, and when facing the threat of devastating terrorist attacks, a leader will want to evoke moral clarity and exude confidence in a time of such fearsome crisis. So why argue that these stances and statements impart anything about Bush's psychology, personality, or "self," let alone that they reflect a biblical stance toward the world influenced by Old Testament prophecy? The answer is two-fold. First, one can look to Bush's own understanding of his "call" to do the work of God in public office, especially after 9/11. Second, the particular expression of his certitude after 9/11 through the prosecution of the war in Iraq recalls so many prophetic themes, attitudes, and motifs that it suggests a kind of unconscious or cognitive structuring of Bush's behavior when placed in the role to which he was "called" by God. In other words, as a performer

3. Peter Singer, *The President of Good and Evil: Questioning the Ethics of George W. Bush* (New York: Dutton, 2004), x.

4. Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 192–93, quoted in Hugh Urban, *The Secrets of the Kingdom: Religion and Concealment in the Bush Administration* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 44.

5. This particular phrasing, which became something of a shorthand slogan for Bush's unilateralist approach to the War on Terror, is from a November 6, 2001 press conference with French President Jacques Chirac ("You are either with us or against us," CNN.com/US, n.p. [accessed May 19, 2009]. Online: http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror). But the same gauntlet was laid at the feet of the world in his address to a joint session to Congress nine days after the 9/11 attacks: "And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime" ("Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," The White House (September 20, 2001), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html. All online references to President Bush's speeches archived at whitehouse.gov were accessed between June 2008 and January 19, 2009. With the inauguration of President Barack Obama on January 20, 2009, these archives are no longer available at the stated Web addresses.)

on the world stage, Bush enacts a deep-seated but appropriate role to express his message, one that touches the very core of his self-understanding and gives him strength but which also leaves little room for revision, reflection, or empathy.

Many of Bush's critics look at his character shortcomings, such as his lack of curiosity, arrogance, unearned certitude, overt religiosity, merciless moralism, and warmongering, and conclude that this man is too superficial and hypocritical to be worth understanding very deeply; or that the entire religious air he puts on is a Machiavellian ploy to manipulate the country into enriching his and his inner circle's oil interests. To the contrary, this study indicates that these apparently disparate and dysfunctional aspects of Bush's personality are all facets of the same distinctive trait: a readiness to take on a kind of prophetic role, tied deeply to Old Testament scripture, as the moral leader of a righteous nation that is confronted with a clearly defined battle between Good and Evil. In this role, violence, war, and death disappear as real-world concerns to be managed, minimized, and even avoided. They are instead the predictable consequences for enemies of life, liberty, and the God who provides them.

Bush's "Calling"

George W. Bush's faith and its role in his political life has been at equal turns celebrated and derided. For the grandson of a United States senator and son of a war hero, oilman, congressman, Republican National Party chair, Ambassador to the United Nations, head of the CIA, Vice President, and finally President of the United States, Bush's lack of ambition and its concomitant lack of independent success in any of his adult endeavors were nothing short of astonishing to the family and their close associates. His cousin John Ellis described Bush's achievements in the first half of his life as "on the road to nowhere at forty… You have to really understand how much his father was loved and respected by so many people to understand what it would be like to grow up as a namesake… [A]t every stage of [life] he was found wanting."[6] This sense of failure, combined with a recklessness with alcohol, did not bode well.

However, at forty, Bush stopped drinking and started to put together a series of successful deals, leading to his ownership of the Texas Rangers,

6. Sam Howe Verhovek, "Is there Room on the Republican Ticket for Another Bush?," *New York Times*, Sect. 6 (September 13, 1998): 52, quoted in Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of George W. Bush* (Lake Mary, Fl.: Charisma House, 2004), 56.

which became a springboard to the Texas governorship. Just prior to the start of these successes, Bush was moving toward a faith commitment to Christianity allegedly sealed by no less than the Reverend Billy Graham. His reflection on the impact of his religious awakening is telling. In his campaign autobiography, *A Charge to Keep*, Bush declares, "My faith frees me. Frees me to put the problem of the moment in proper perspective. Frees me to make decisions that others might not like. Frees me to try to do the right thing, even though it may not poll well. Frees me to enjoy life and not worry about what comes next."[7] The sum of Bush's strengths and weaknesses as a leader, especially as Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces, may very well be contained in this statement of faith. For Bush, true freedom is only achievable through true faith, and the great benefit of this freedom in the everyday arena is in decision making and problem solving—which is to say, freedom from doubt and indecision, but also a freedom from the counsel of others, expert opinion, or even the will of the people in a democracy. Most of all, this is a freedom from worry about future consequences. If the decision is made with the certainty of faith, then the decision will be right, regardless of its outcome. As Stephen Mansfield, author of *The Faith of George W. Bush*, puts it, "He believed in action. He just needed to know in which direction to act. Once his faith began to point the way, the gap between action and thought narrowed."[8] Bush, though notoriously unreflective in the traditional psychological sense, nonetheless reveals clearly his own self-conception in his actions, at least in as much as he acts through faith. Mansfield further concludes, then, that Bush's faith "liberated him to be who he really was. His faith gave him the genuine version of what he wanted when he drank…[making him] free to live as large as his God allowed."[9]

Yet Bush's conviction is rooted in more than simple trust in God. As the providential quality of his good fortune following his dedication to Christ might indicate, at various points in his life, faith in God was inextricably wedded to a keen sense that he was also to be the Almighty's instrument at a crucial time: a *calling*. The first chapter of *A Charge to Keep* returns to the theme of Bush's tenure as governor as a calling to fulfill a plan larger than his own ambitions: "I could not be governor if I did not believe in a divine plan that superseded all human plans."[10] Later he describes a sermon he attended just before his second inauguration as

7. George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep* (New York: Morrow, 1999), 6.
8. Mansfield, *Faith*, 73.
9. Ibid., 77.
10. Bush, *Charge*, 6.

governor. It pleaded that people were "'starved for leaders who have ethical and moral courage'… America needs leaders to do what is right for the right reason. It's not always easy or convenient for leaders to step forward…remember, even Moses had doubts." In response, his mother told him, "He was talking to you." This sermon "challenging [him]…to assume the mantle of leadership…calling on [him]…to use whatever power we have…to do good for the right reasons," clinched his decision to seek the presidency in 2000.[11] Mansfield concludes the episode relating that Bush called televangelist James Robison to say, "I've heard the call. I believe God wants me to run for president."[12]

Worth noting here, too, beyond the extraordinary connection between Bush's belief in a divine plan and his conviction that it involved his ascension to the highest political office in the free world, is the prophetic imagery infused with it. The sermon that secured Bush's rededication to being a public servant in service of the good, the right, and God's will was, after all, a sermon on the call of Moses, reluctant leader who nonetheless led the People of God out of greatest oppression. And like the prophet Elisha, he was to "assume the mantle" of leadership (2 Kgs 2:13–14). In Bush's own words, he was compelled to seek the presidency to fulfill a calling with a distinctly prophetic foundation. Therefore it is absolutely no surprise that after 9/11, he told Karl Rove, the central architect of his ascension to the presidency, "I'm here for a reason."[13]

Thus, when Bush alluded to his communication with God, he was not implying that he literally heard voices and followed their commands (*contra* the Old Testament experience, to be sure). He categorically rejects such an understanding of speaking with the Divine.[14] Yet he did clearly stake his moral rightness as a leader on the ability to discern God's will and therefore bring the country into alignment with it. Glenn Greenwald, in his analysis of the Bush presidency through the president's Manichean "good vs. evil mentality," asserts that "[w]hat is relevant for understanding the president's mind-set is that he himself believes that he is mandated to act in accordance with God's will, that he is able (at least with respect to certain critical matters) to discern that will, and that he is, in fact, acting in accordance with it by virtue of the course he has

11. Ibid., 9.

12. Mansfield, *Faith*, 108.

13. Singer, *President*, 99. Singer also notes that Bush was seen as called to this office at this moment in history by others, as at the convention of National Religious Broadcasters, where he was lauded as "God's chosen man for this hour in our nation."

14. Glenn Greenwald, *A Tragic Legacy: How a Good vs. Evil Mentality Destroyed the Bush Presidency* (New York: Three Rivers, 2008), 65.

chosen."[15] Which is not to say that Bush himself has not occasionally blurred this distinction. In a meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas covered by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Bush proclaimed, "God told me to strike at al Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did…"[16]

Bush and Prophecy: Two Psychological Observations

What would it mean to identify the significance of your place and actions on the world stage in this way, especially for someone so resistant to introspection, "psychobabble," and "navel-gazing"?[17] Bush presents what could almost be called an anti-psychology, in which the usual grist for the analytic mill of remorse, regret, deferred action and satisfaction, and ambivalence are virtually non-existent, replaced by a supremely confident yet rigid adherence to a course of action and the role that makes it possible.

When Bush connected with this role, the change in his thought processes was manifested in a distinctly different way of speaking. "You can tell the issues that really get Bush going, because he talks about them differently, more passionately: education, AIDS relief, freedom. They happen to be ones that can be viewed more clearly through a moral lens. That's how he sees the world," writes Associated Press reporter Ben Feller.[18] Bush is most comfortable and certain playing out a clear role in a crucial story, much like those of the prophets standing up against the wicked and corrupt who would resist the will of God. If Bush's leadership style is akin to a performance in the prophetic mode of the Old Testament, then a key to understanding him might be found in the field of narrative psychology.

Narrative Psychology and the Prophetic "Script"

Before he turned forty, and in the presidency before 9/11, Bush was adrift, with no clear cause to give him focus and meaning (some would say the same about his presidency *after* 9/11). But quitting drinking and finding Christ gave him just such a personal story—the archetypal

15. Ibid., 58–59.

16. Ibid., 61.

17. Mansfield, *Faith*, 73. The *New York Times* describes his decision to stop drinking as made in "a characteristic way: decisively, impulsively and without much evident introspection" (Verhovek, quoted in Mansfield, *Faith*, 73).

18. Ben Feller, "How Bush's Personality Shaped His Legacy," *MSNBC*, n.p. (accessed May 19, 2009). Online: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28482517.

Christian story of the lamb, lost and found—that then set him up for the next chapter, played out on the national and global stage, the man of God who confronts evil and does not back down, even as those he seeks to help reject him. As indicated by the story that catalyzed Bush's thoughts about seeking the presidency, the story of Moses resonated with his calling to office. This connection between public and private narrative was confirmed and reinforced by others, including his mother. "For Bush, religion is not simply an accidental or secondary aspect of his political persona and his administration: it is central and definitive, providing a kind of guiding narrative for his entire decision to run for office and for most of his domestic and foreign policies."[19] He was an avid student of the Bible during the time up to and after his conversion, and the Christian process of repentance and redemption is inseparable, especially in the Protestant tradition, from the prophetic models of Moses, Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and any of the other major critical voices of the Old Testament. Almost unavoidably, the stories of the prophets of Israel would also have been available to Bush as models of righteous speech and action in times of crisis.

Narratologist Manfred Jahn makes the connection between external stories, such as those of the Bible, and internal stories that "are stored in memory and performed in the mental theory of recollection, imagination and dream."[20] He notes,

> There are a number of observers who view stories and storytelling as psychological and cognitive *forces* rather than as *forms* of communication or entertainment. Thus Eric Berne, a psychoanalyst, argues that a person's life plans are "scripted" on fairy-tales. Daniel C. Dennett, a philosopher, claims that "everyone is a novelist" writing his or her life story. Paul Ricoeur, a literary theorist, argues that life and identity are "in quest of narrative." Roger C. Schank, an Artificial Intelligence pioneer (and co-inventor of the "script" concept), suggests that human memory is a database of stories. Finally, Mark Turner, a cognitive critic, holds that "most of our experience, or knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories."[21]

19. Urban, *Secrets*, 32.

20. Manfred Jahn, "'Awake! Open your eyes!' The Cognitive Logic of External and Internal Stories," in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences* (Stanford, Calif.: CSLI Publications, 2003), 195.

21. Ibid., 198 (emphasis in original). Daniel C. Dennett, "Why Everyone is a Novelist," *Times Literary Supplement* (September 16–22, 1988): 1016; Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (ed. D. Wood; London: Routledge, 1991), 20–33 (20); Roger C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence* (Evanston: Northwestern University

Whereas prior to 9/11, Bush's overt identification with biblical narrative models may have been more abstract or focused on narrower issues, the onset of the War on Terror invoked a very concrete situation of ultimate significance that authoritatively closed the "cycle of narrative" between Bush's self-image as president and the stories of the moral leaders of ancient Israel that he had embraced as part of his Christian conversion. In this context, the prophetic script would clarify both his identity and his role at exactly the moment the rest of the world, and even the sense of moral order, became more chaotic. Bush could play the role of the stalwart man of God leading a nation against evil, but only when the times called for that narrative script. The certitude at the heart of the prophetic script gave voice to Bush's own. As demonstrated below, both the prophets' and Bush's certitude could go hand in hand with intimations of violence, an identification nowhere made clearer than in Bush's repeated assertions during his 2004 campaign for re-election that "I am a war president." By seeing himself in this role and presenting it as the context for his presidency, Bush built on the prophetic script by articulating an American story, familiar from the actions of Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt (not to mention Bush's favorite exemplar of leadership, Winston Churchill), that places violence in an acceptable historical and moral framework.[22]

Reinterpretation of Prophecy in the Visionary Mode

Just to make clear, this study does not suggest that President Bush is channeling messages for the supernatural world or falling into mantic states of divination to produce this identification between personality and message. Even as Bush may align himself, consciously and/or unconsciously, with this ancient form of address and the globe-spanning drama intimated by it, he is still adapting a pre-existing message to his own ends. Yet an authentic reinterpretation of prophecy in a new setting can also be a form of prophetic speech in its own right. For instance, within the Dead Sea scrolls, the *pesharim* present the original communiqués between God and his prophets as being continuous with the Qumran community's situation in the second century B.C.E.; therefore the message was "really" meant for their times. Apocalyptic agitators and biblical

Press, 1995); Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), i.

22. The scriptedness of the Bush presidency, in fact, was often quite literal at times, going beyond what had been typical presidential administrations' efforts at message and event control, "blurring the distinction between the genuine and the fake" (Urban, *Secrets*, 143–44).

interpreters ever since have concluded that the dictates of the ancient prophets actually applied to them. It just takes the eyes to see and the ears to hear the message that way, an understanding of God's plan that essentially describes Bush's own.

Michael Lieb, building on the work of depth psychologist Carl Jung, places the original revelatory experience and the authentic reinterpretation of it within the same psychological state, which he calls the "visionary mode." For Jung, prophetic expression derives from a place so primal it almost lays beyond personal psychology, in the realm of archetypes and mythology, in this case the ancient Holy War tensions between cosmic good and cosmic evil.[23] The interpreter of prophecy becomes a party to the original revelation even in its reuse in a new setting:

> [T]he hermeneut generates a new text with its own claims to authority. From the perspective of the visionary mode…the exegete of the visionary is not only the purveyor of interpretive strategies but, in effect, the means by which those strategies find renewed authority within the hermeneutical milieu that the new interpretation provided for them. In the encounter with the primal text through which the vision announces its presence, the hermeneut authorizes the visionary event anew. His interpretation becomes the new text of that event.[24]

When President Bush contemplated communicating what he felt on 9/11 and how he and his nation would act, he had access to a set of messages from scripture that summed up that stance in a definitive and unwavering way, and in proclaiming these ancient warnings to tyrannical nations of his own world, Bush engaged the visionary mode in his own right. Thus in speeches and press conferences, in ways that often escaped him in other settings, he was able to convey authority, legitimacy, and, yes, certitude as he took on evil in the world.

Oracles Against the Nations

Given this way of seeing prophetic authority undergirding the most strident aspects of his presidency, the prophetic meme most helpful for understanding Bush's mixture of politics, religion, and warfare following 9/11 would be the oracle against the nation. This "oracle" (Hebrew: משא, meaning both "to lift up" and "to burden") is associated with an ancient Holy War mythology in which God leads or sends his armies—some-

23. Michael Lieb, *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4–6.

24. Ibid., 8.

times hosts of angels, sometimes nations of men—into battle against rebellious peoples.[25] Such prophetic diatribes are prominent in the Major Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as Zephaniah, Nahum, and Amos, and other Minor Prophets. Several of these oracles are, fittingly, against Babylon, the Judean arch threat and destructor. Perhaps it is mere coincidence that this country that became the archetype for national tyranny and Godlessness to this day is located in modern-day Iraq—but the symbolism of facing down a "Babylonian" enemy was surely not lost on Bush or his supporters versed in biblical prophecy.[26] When Bush made the case for war against Saddam Hussein, he cast the Iraqi dictator as the enemy of "the civilized world" who has left peaceful nations no choice but to face him down:

> In Iraq, a dictator is building and hiding weapons that could enable him to dominate the Middle East and intimidate the civilized world—and we will not allow it. This same tyrant has close ties to terrorist organizations, and could supply them with the terrible means to strike this country—and America will not permit it. The danger posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons cannot be ignored or wished away. The danger must be confronted. We hope that the Iraqi regime will meet the demands of the United Nations and disarm, fully and peacefully. If it does not, we are prepared to disarm Iraq by force. Either way, this danger will be removed.[27]

Weeks later Bush's declaration of war against Hussein's regime proclaimed that

> All the decades of deceit and cruelty have now reached an end. Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within forty-eight hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our

25. Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 258. For a discussion of the scholarly debate over the origins and *Sitz-im-Leben* of the oracles against the nations tradition, see John B. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament: Studies in the Oracles about the Nations* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), 4–12.

26. This point was underscored in a May 2009 *GQ* story on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's "Worldwide Intelligence Updates" for President Bush, which utilized cover sheets featuring a photo from the war effort in Iraq accompanied by a correspondingly militaristic biblical quote, including several from the prophet Isaiah and one quoting the vision against the Babylonian king in Dan 5. The story, "And He Shall be Judged" by Robert Draper (*GQ* [June 2009], n.p.) is found online at http://men.style.com/gq/features/landing?id=content_9217; a slideshow of the cover sheets ("Onward, Christian Soldiers!," *GQ* [June 2009], n.p. (accessed May 19, 2009). Online at http://men.style.com/gq/features/topsecret.

27. George W. Bush, "President Discusses the Future of Iraq," The White House (February 26, 2003), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html.

> choosing… Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you… We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free… The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near.[28]

His acknowledgment of the biblical frame around his the War on Terror was perhaps starkest at the end of his "Mission Accomplished" speech aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2002. Eulogizing those who lost their lives in Operation Iraqi Freedom to their compatriots in battle, he stated,

> Their final act on this Earth was to fight a great evil and bring liberty to others. All of you…have taken up the highest calling of history… And wherever you go, you carry a message of hope—a message that is ancient and ever new. In the words of the prophet Isaiah [61:1], "To the captives, 'come out'—and to those in darkness, 'be free' [דרור]."[29]

28. George W. Bush, "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq within 48 Hours," The White House (March 17, 2003), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html. One might object here that Bush's speeches are neither personal formulations nor impromptu expressions of deeply held convictions, as he is reading material crafted by one or more speechwriters (for many of the speeches examined here, that man was Michael Gerson). In some ways, this concern parallels the debates about the unity of a particular prophetic corpus, for instance the book of Ezekiel, which shows evidence of multiple scribal hands or even a prophetic "school" at work in the composition of the received text. Thus, working back to "an author" is impossible. Engaging this debate fully lies outside the scope of the present study. However, the process of writing a speech for any president is collaborative, with the intent of capturing the essence of his communication patterns in a hyper-realized way—in other words, to sound like the president would, only more so. Bob Woodward (*Plan of Attack* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004], 86) describes Michael Gerson in *Plan of Attack* as "like Bush…a self-described evangelical Christian and 'compassionate conservative'" who "admired the way the Bush didn't shy away from injecting his religious convictions and moral conclusions into speeches. Gerson had developed his style, honed in the numerous September 11-related speeches he had drafted for Bush, that fused biblical high-mindedness and the folksy." Gerson was thus using his personal similarities to Bush and his admiration of the president's leadership attributes to bring out in speeches words and phrases the president would be comfortable and confident in using, thus making him most impressive, both in style and in substance. The speeches may not have been written by Bush, but they were for all intents and purposes Bush's *words*.

29. George W. Bush announcing the end of military operations in the liberation of Iraq, quoted in Bruce Lincoln, *Religion, Empire, and Torture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 98.

This style of inveighing against nations and their leaders continued throughout Bush's presidency. When the administration's attention turned to Iran, the next country in the declared "Axis of Evil," Bush laid similar groundwork for a military confrontation against an obstinate nation in his 2008 State of the Union Address:

> Since 9/11, we have taken the fight to these terrorists and extremists. We will stay on the offense, we will keep up the pressure, and we will deliver justice to our enemies… Our message to the people of Iran is clear: We have no quarrel with you. We respect your traditions and your history. We look forward to the day when you have your freedom. Our message to the leaders of Iran is also clear: Verifiably suspend your nuclear enrichment, so negotiations can begin. And to rejoin the community of nations, come clean about your nuclear intentions and past actions, stop your oppression at home, cease your support for terror abroad. But above all, know this: America will confront those who threaten our troops. We will stand by our allies, and we will defend our vital interests in the Persian Gulf.[30]

Bush's language to the enemies of the United States (particularly Iraq) is echoed in the oracles against the nations tradition. For instance, one may look at the words of Jeremiah:

> Flee out of Babylon;
> leave the land of the Babylonians…
> For I will stir up and bring against Babylon
> an alliance of great nations from the land of the north.
> They will take up their positions against her…
>
> "A sword against the Babylonians!" declares the LORD,
> "against those who live in Babylon
> and against her officials and wise men!"
>
> At the sound of Babylon's capture the earth will tremble;
> its cry will resound among the nations.
>
> The sound of a cry comes from Babylon,
> the sound of great destruction from the land of the Babylonians.
> The LORD will destroy Babylon;
> he will silence her noisy din.
> Waves of enemies will rage like great waters;
> the roar of their voices will resound.

30. George W. Bush, "President Bush Delivers State of the Union Address," The White House, January 28, 2008, n.p. (accessed September 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/01/20080128-13.html.

A destroyer will come against Babylon;
her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken.
For the LORD is a God of retribution;
he will repay in full. (Jer 50:8–9, 35, 46, 54–56)

The prophet Zephaniah, like Bush, even provides the possibility of exemption for those in the nation who do not ally themselves with their leader's wickedness:

Before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff,
before the fierce anger of the LORD comes upon you,
before the day of the LORD's wrath comes upon you.
Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land,
you who do what he commands.
Seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger.
(Zeph 2:2–3)

Similarly, Bush's declaration of military action against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, in its reference to terrorists burrowing into caves, may allude to both the apocalyptic Rev 6:15–17 and the prophet Isaiah (2:10–11).[31] Both of these passages also convey another aspect of the prophetic Holy War tradition that Bush also incorporates to great effect: the Day of the Lord.

Bush announced that the military invasion of Iraq would begin "at a time of our choosing." This formulation evokes "The Day of the Lord," the impending day of wrath, that the Hebrew prophets warned against so frequently, such as in Isa 13, Ezekiel, Joel (where the tradition predominates), Amos (where the invective is turned against the prophet's *own* nation), Mal 5, and the above passage from Zephaniah. This event represents a transformative moment in human history, when God's anger is finally unleashed on all those nations that have not heeded his prophets' warnings. In one example that captures the sense of impending force to be brought against a single rogue nation, the prophet Isaiah proclaims:

Listen, a noise on the mountains,
like that of a great multitude!
Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms,
like nations massing together!
The LORD Almighty is mustering an army for war.

31. Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 30–31.

> They come from faraway lands,
> from the ends of the heavens—
> the LORD and the weapons of his wrath—
> to destroy the whole country.
> Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;
> it will come like destruction from the Almighty. (Isa 13:4–6)

In the passages cited above, the prophet seems to bring the moral weight of God's creation down upon a people so wayward they threaten the order of existence itself. John Geyer notes that Jeremiah's oracles, for example, imply "the cleansing of the whole earth before the restitution of order and the reign of God in justice and righteousness can begin."[32] Bush's "coalition of the willing" perhaps lacked the size and status of God's army of nations, but the parallels in the rhetorical demonstration of an international show of force, then and now, are unmistakable.

"Shock and Awe" Morality

The oracles, like many apocalyptic visions and Endtime scenarios, no doubt contain some element of *Schadenfreude*, revenge fantasy, and even Bush's "macho swagger." In fact, the overwhelming divine force brought to bear emerges as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the genre: "A particularly important part is played by terror caused by God himself, a panic confusion and demoralization of the enemy, whose effect was to paralyze their confidence in their fighting powers and so lead them to compass their own destruction."[33] This description of the Day of the Lord uncannily foreshadows the psychological effect intended by the "Shock and Awe" doctrine that defined the initial stage of the invasion of Iraq:

> For shock to be administered with minimum collateral damage, key targets of value must be neutralized or destroyed, and the enemy must be made to feel completely helpless and unable to consider a meaningful response. Furthermore, the enemy's confusion must be complete, adding to a general impression of impotence.[34]

For some, this intimation of terror and violence undercut the moral power of the prophets. "The condemnation of foreign powers plummets to the depths from what is thought to be the heights of the ethical teaching of the eighth-century prophets whose message challenges their

32. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 3.

33. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 98–99.

34. Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (Charleston, S.C.: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 71.

own people much more than it sounded doom for others."[35] This criticism parallels the accusations that Bush eschewed America's own ethical, moral, and legal traditions of engagement with the world and squandered the good will that united the U.S. globally and domestically after 9/11. Surely the doom and gloom of the oracles against the nations paint a very narrow picture of this genre, but with a full appreciation of their context that reflects both condemnation of and lament over the loss of a just order, these prophecies can speak directly to a post-9/11 world.[36]

If Bush's own "oracles against the nations" exercise a prophetic role within a biblically based narrative of his presidency, he could view himself as an extremely moral actor even as his actions and stances came across as bellicose, led to war, and were condemned in many quarters as immoral. At the beginning of the last year of his presidency, Bush travelled to Israel and visited the site of the Sermon of the Mount, where Jesus himself fused a radical ethic to a prophetic call. A reporter confronted him on the disjunction between Jesus' blessing of peacemakers and Bush's image as a warmonger, to which he responded, "[W]e'll see what history says. I happen to believe that the actions I've taken were necessary to protect ourselves and lay the foundation for peace."[37] For Bush, as for the Old Testament prophets, history is the final revelator of God's moral plan upon the earth, and all human actions will be judged only in relation to this final standard.

Justice, Freedom, and the American Way

Central to the moral certitude that defines the prophetic stance is the sense that the justice and righteousness that have been long denied suffering peoples will be restored after the Day of the Lord. Bush is no doubt attuned to the Old Testament prophets when he declares, "God is not on the side of any nation, yet we know He is on the side of justice."[38] In addition, in some of the prophetic books the end of the reign of the tyrannical nation signals a new birth of freedom for oppressed peoples. Indeed, the great narrative of the Jewish people, the tale of liberation from slavery known as Exodus, is perhaps the single most important paradigm of restored freedom and justice in the world, having been

35. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 6.

36. Ibid., 6–7.

37. Dan Froomkin, "Bush, the Blessed Peacemaker," Washington Post (January 16, 2008), n.p. (accessed January 10, 2009). Online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/blog/2008/01/16/BL2008011601865.html.

38. "President Bush Marks 53rd Anniversary of National Day of Prayer," quoted in Singer, *President*, xi.

transformed into a metaphor for spiritual release in Christianity, the guiding principle for settling a new continent among the Puritans in the New World, and part of the self-understanding of those leading the democratic experiment known as the United States onto the world stage.

Thus, in both the ancient Jewish traditions and in American history, justice and freedom are intimately related, and both are, ultimately, requisite conditions for peace. Accordingly, the absence of such conditions under an oppressive ruler justifies war against that tyrant; it is an inevitable consequence of disregarding God's moral order. Compare Jeremiah's proclamation against such tyranny with Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, delivered just four months after 9/11:

> Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom [דרור] for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim "freedom" for you, declares the LORD—"freedom" to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth. (Jer 34:17)

> The advance of liberty is opposed by terrorists and extremists—evil men who despise freedom, despise America, and aim to subject millions to their violent rule. Since 9/11, we have taken the fight to these terrorists and extremists. We will stay on the offense, we will keep up the pressure, and we will deliver justice to our enemies… Yet in this war on terror, there is one thing we and our enemies agree on: in the long run, men and women who are free to determine their own destinies will reject terror and refuse to live in tyranny. And that is why the terrorists are fighting to deny this choice to the people in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Palestinian Territories. And that is why, for the security of America and the peace of the world, we are spreading the hope of freedom.[39]

The stark, clear choices ahead for America and the world demand, for Bush, the kind of divine certitude espoused by the prophets of God who confronted the same unrepentant evil in the nations of their times. Bush affirms in his Second Inaugural address, "There is only one force of

39. George W. Bush, "The President's State of the Union Address," The White House (January 29, 2002), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html. Bush's State of the Union addresses, not surprisingly given the thesis of the present study, have been one of the places where his "prophetic mode" has most consistently been on display. In fact, when he recycled the "we will deliver justice to our enemies" line in the 2008 address, the Washington Post media critic Tom Shales described its presentation as being "with a kind of Old Testament thunder." See Tom Shales, "The State of the Union? It's Fine by the President," *Washington Post* (January 28, 2008), n.p. (accessed January 10, 2009). Online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/28/AR2008012803218_pf.html.

history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom."[40] America, because of its moral standing and its democratic system of government, is in a unique position to bring freedom to these nations. Not that freedom is a largess granted by America *per se*, Bush cautions—"Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity."[41] Even as Bush may defer to God as the ultimate source and guarantor of freedom in the world, it is clear that he sees America as its defender and champion. It is a cause which he has taken up on the country's behalf as president—one that was understood during the American Revolution as "The Sacred Cause of Liberty."[42] Occasionally, though, Bush assigns a more divine role to the U.S. itself, as when he substitutes the country for Jesus or God in certain Biblical allusions. Perhaps most strikingly, in his September 11, 2002 speech commemorating the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Bush spoke about America's role as light in a world of darkness, paraphrasing the first chapter of the Gospel of John. In so doing, Bush replaced Jesus, as the incarnate Word of God, with America as the light of the world. "In one simple step Bush moves from nationalism to idolatry, envisioning America as the Word made flesh, America as the one sent by God into the world. That such language suggesting the divinization of America can come from the lips of a sitting President, and one who claims the Lordship of Jesus at that, is nothing short of astonishing."[43]

As these quotations about America's role and meaning in these conflicts suggest, the intended audience for these hard-line diatribes is as much domestic as it is foreign; in fact, probably even more so. Rather than instilling fear in targeted nations or even the impetus to comply with

40. George W. Bush, "President Sworn-In to Second Term," The White House (January 20, 2001), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html.

41. George W. Bush, "President Delivers 'State of the Union,'" The White House (January 28, 2003), n.p. (accessed June 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html.

42. Nathan O. Hatch presents a rich, thoroughgoing early history of the wedding of civil and religious millennialism around the concept of God-granted freedom in *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

43. Jeffrey S. Siker, "President Bush, Biblical Faith, and the Politics of Religion," SBL Forum (May 2006), n.p. (accessed January 10, 2009). Online: http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=151; see also Urban, *Secrets*, 47.

America's demands, a more likely and even desirable result was to rally support on the home front by playing up national unity, pride, and residual animosity toward "the enemy."[44] The prophets of ancient Israel employed this rhetorical technique as well, vilifying a foreign nation as a threat counter to one's entire way of life. On the war oracles of Jer 46–49, Duane Christensen suggests that "the prophet's primary concern was apparently that of shaping foreign policy within his own nation relative to the foreign nation in question."[45] However, one of the key distinctions between the biblical *Sitz-im-Leben* of these oracles and Bush's appropriation of them is, in fact, the degree to which such proclamations could have an actual impact on foreign policy and relations. To be sure, part of the legacy of biblical prophecy is that the prophet goes unheeded, allowing disaster to strike despite repeated warnings from God's messenger (Jonah is one notable exception to this pattern). The American president, on the other hand, heard these ancient admonitions in a very different context, not in the tenuous position of a small country caught in the path of powerful nations and expanding empires (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon), but as the leader of the sole remaining "superpower" in the world and the most powerful military force in history.[46] In Bush's re-reading of the prophetic narrative—in his own prophetic (re)vision—he is the leader who finally heeds the call and rallies the world to take action. By executing a war only dreamed of by the ancient prophets, Bush closes the narrative cycle, becoming both the speaker of the prophetic message and its primary hearer, and inventing himself as a new kind of Godly leader on the world stage, one both humble enough to heed the call and confident enough to follow through on it to its logical (and eschatological) conclusion.

44. This attention to a "true" audience for Bush's oratory also calls to mind the recognition of its frequent "double-coding" of statements, such that the base of like-minded conservative Christians with "ears to hear" can be assured that their policy expectations of the president are being fulfilled, even as Bush articulates an apparently different message to a different audience. See, for instance, Bruce Lincoln's dissection of Bush's announcement on October 7, 2001 of military action against Afghanistan in response to 9/11, finding therein specific biblical allusions that "helped Bush assert the religious nature of the conflict in the same moment he sought to deny it" (Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 30).

45. Duane L. Christensen, *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel: Studies in the Oracles Against the Nations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Berkeley, Calif.: BIBAL Press, 1975), 260.

46. I gratefully acknowledge the insights of my friend and colleague Matthew Goff of Florida State University on this point. Matthew Goff, personal correspondence, March 3, 2009.

It is this powerfully self-reinforcing style of rhetoric that fuses the certitude of prophecy with Bush's own certainty in this very specific context. He was called to be president at this time for this reason, to confront evil, not to be passive in the face of it, whether because of the traditional apocalyptic expectation of God's intervention or, as he might speculate about his Democratic critics, liberal proclivities towards mealy-mouthed diplomacy and "appeasement." *The New Republic* summarizes the view of Bush and others around him on this divine task, as it were:

> After September 11, James Merritt, then-president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told Bush that he had been chosen by God. Bush nodded. (Fred Barnes reported this encounter in *The Weekly Standard*, concluding, "The stage was set for Bush to be God's agent of wrath.") As *Time* reported, "Privately, Bush even talked of being chosen by the grace of God to lead at that moment." Claiming you've been chosen by God to lead the world in a titanic clash of good versus evil is pretty much the definition of messianic.[47]

Whether or not one would be inclined to call Bush "messianic," the moral clarity of this role, of course, both invites and reinforces the power of religious certitude. It is perhaps ironic, to say the least, that it is also exactly this moral certitude that, as noted in the introduction to this study, leads to violent actions taken in light of this role, which discredits them in the eyes of others. The brutality that stemmed from Bush's dualistic, good-and-evil worldview undermined America's moral standing in the world and seriously hobbled his presidency.

Peter Singer examines the contradictions among Bush's moral image, actions, and demeanor, concluding that because of the president's certainty in the rightness of his moral take on the world, Bush could not articulate any mistakes in his presidency, even after the invasion of Iraq—which had cost four thousand American and upwards of 100,000 Iraqi lives by the time he left office—failed to uncover any weapons of mass destruction; nor could he find empathy for any harmed by his actions.[48] Singer titles his exploration of the apparent contradiction

47. Jonathan Chait, "The Messiah-Complex Complex," *The New Republic*, n.p. (accessed September 1, 2008). Online: http://www.tnr.com/toc/story.html?id=74274e4e-fac5-40a6-bf8f-0d64e812d632&p=2.

48. U.S. troop deaths total 4,247 as of this writing, according to the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (n.p. [accessed February 22, 2009]. Online: http://icasualties.org/Iraq/index.aspx). The statistics regarding Iraqi deaths are far more difficult to verify, as the U.S. has not officially endeavored to keep or advertise such a tally. The nonprofit Iraq Body Count (n.p. [accessed February 22, 2009]. Online: http://www.iraqbodycount.org) puts the civilian toll between ninety and one hundred thousand.

between Bush's unyielding public promotion and embodiment of a moral stance and his disinterest in the effect of that stance on human lives *The President of Good and Evil*. As he notes on its second page, not only does the president discuss good and evil in public statements incredibly frequently (in his first three years in office, roughly thirty percent of the time), but he uses these categories as nouns roughly five times as often as he does adjectives. That is, he rarely uses good and evil to judge what people do. "This suggests that Bush is not thinking about evil deeds, or even evil people, nearly as often as he thinking about evil as a *thing*, or a force, something that has a real existence apart from the cruel, callous, brutal, and selfish acts of which human beings are capable."[49] Perhaps paradoxically, Bush's actualization of evil as a tangible force in the world in fact made it an ideal, an abstract, something without history, context, or the ability to change or be influenced. Mansfield observes regarding Bush's *casus belli* against Iraq, "[H]e preferred to call Saddam an 'evil doer.' This forms the case for war. Saddam is evil. He threatens good people… Removing Saddam is a moral act. Case closed."[50] By the same token, then, the response to the presence of evil takes on the same qualities of abstraction and divinity, where human events do not play out as the result of human agency but as the grand working of the Cosmic Drama on earth. He told the United Nations (U.N.) in 2002, "History has an Author who fills time and eternity with His purpose. We know that evil is real, but good will prevail against it."[51] Because the world is demarcated in such an idealized way that can cast no shades of gray, Bush could proclaim, wholeheartedly, that "There is no neutral ground…in the fight between civilization and terror, because there is no neutral ground between good and evil, freedom and slavery, and life and death."[52] Or more simply, "You are either with us or you are against us."

Whatever the significance of this Manichean view of the world as a religious orientation, such a stance can only limit a leader's options on the world stage. From this perspective, an enemy cannot be negotiated with or influenced by the political and diplomatic means normally at

49. Singer, *President*, 2.

50. Mansfield, *Faith*, 145–46; quoted in Urban, *Secrets*, 176.

51. George W. Bush, *We Will Prevail* (ed. *National Review*; New York: Continuum, 2003), 22; quoted in Urban, *Secrets*, 58.

52. George W. Bush, "President Reaffirms Resolve on War on Terror," The White House (March 19, 2004), n.p. (accessed September 1, 2008). Online: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/03/20040319-3.html; quoted in Urban, *Secrets*, 58.

one's disposal. Thus an unrepentant enemy requires a singular kind of confrontation—war. "[W]ith his insistence on the need to use military force and the 'burning fire of freedom,' Bush also seems to invoke a more violent, premillenarian confrontation between good and evil as the necessary sort of tribulation before God's divine plan can be realized here on earth."[53] A Bush family member, in fact, told a family biographer that the president sees the war specifically as a religious war: "[T]hey are trying to kill the Christians. And we the Christians will strike back with more force and more ferocity than they will ever know."[54] Former Bush administration official Bruce Bartlett echoed exactly the same sentiment to journalist Ron Suskind, explaining "This is why George W. Bush is so clear-eyed about Al-Qaeda and the Islamic fundamentalist enemy. He believes you have to kill them all. They can't be persuaded, they're extremists, driven by a dark vision." Then Bartlett adds, chillingly, "He understands them, because he's just like them."[55]

War can mean any number of things. Wars can be necessary; they may even be noble on occasion. There may be wars to end further bloodshed or secure freedom. There may be wars to end all wars. There may be holy wars to enact God's plan or preserve the purity of a people or place on earth. But all wars are violent, and cause pain, loss, death, trauma, and suffering. And the more wars are idealized and fought for the benefit of ideals and abstracts, such as honor, freedom, or purity, the less the actuality of the violence of war plays a part in one's thinking about it. In such circumstances, "the enemy" is not a group of people that has made a decision to oppose you or to declare war against you for a complex set of reasons. Unlike other human beings, the enemy is incapable of rethinking their actions even if the political landscape were altered or the right kind of moral suasion applied. Negotiation, diplomacy, and extending human rights and protections are useless against "evil-doers." They "do evil" because they *are* evil—not sinful, which is a state open to change through repentance—but evil, categorically.

Perhaps the greatest irony in Bush's emergence as a Manichean warrior or a presidential prophet is that he campaigned for the presidency as a "compassionate conservative." His father famously rebuked Ronald Reagan, the man who was still his boss and soon to be predecessor, over his Cold War saber-rattling by calling for a "kinder, gentler nation" in his

53. Urban, *Secrets*, 175. The phrase "burning fire of freedom" recalls the "refiner's fire" of the Day of the Lord in Mal 3:2.

54. Peter Schweitzer and Rochelle Schweitzer, *The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 517, quoted in Urban, *Secrets*, 48.

55. Suskind, "Faith, Certainty, and the Presidency of George W. Bush."

acceptance of the Republican nomination for president. George W. Bush the candidate, both gubernatorial and presidential, ran to address some areas of social policy typically anathema to Reagan Republicans, such as poverty and education.[56] However, in the aftermath of 9/11, Bush showed himself to be the true heir to Reagan as a president with a Bible-based view of evil on the world stage, although now America was not just bringing the fight to an "Evil Empire," the Soviet Union, but to Evil itself, wherever it lurks, threatening Freedom.[57] Yet as the grandiosity of the moral objective grew, Bush's compassionate focus on the quality of the human lives under his care diminished. While in general the prophecy in the Bible is predicated on the possibility for change, there are also times, then as now, when God's patience (and, presumably, the messenger's) has been exhausted; the wicked ones had ignored all the opportunities for repentance and compliance with God's will. Bush insisted during the build up to the war in Iraq and then justifying it afterward that Saddam Hussein had been given numerous opportunities to comply with U.N. mandates and to assist with weapons inspections. Yet, according to the president, the Iraqi leader had always either defied international demands or come up woefully short in his efforts. Recalling Moses confronting Pharaoh, or like Ezekiel being prepared by God to speak to the rebellious exiles in Babylon, Bush steels himself to match his perception of those with whom he is dealing: "But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house" (Ezek 3:8–9). As Bartlett states (noted above), Bush understands his adversaries, because he is just like them.

Singer analyzes two areas of the pursuit of the War on Terror where this absence of empathy goes hand in hand with a violence that hardly seems the product of righteousness *or* democracy. The first has to do with the cavalier disregard for the impact of "collateral damage" and civilian deaths in the war in Afghanistan, brought to light in Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*. Singer observes that according to Woodward's account, "Bush was more concerned with the public relations aspect of such damage than with probing whether more could be done to avoid it," suggesting that placing more emphasis on the Taliban's atrocities would provide balance to coverage of civilian deaths.[58] The second area involves the dismantling of the legal system of rights and protections

56. Singer, *President*, 9–11.
57. Urban, *Secrets*, 175.
58. Singer, *President*, 57; Woodward, *Plan*, 272–73.

afforded prisoners of war and enemy combatants by international law (especially the Geneva Conventions) and by American legal, moral, and democratic principles. Not only did the Bush Administration's rejection of *habeas corpus* protections discard one of the oldest and most foundational principles of the state's recognition of the value of individual human life, but once detainees had been denied any legal status in any court of law, torture was inevitable—and so was death.[59] (According to the non-partisan watchdog group Human Rights First, at least ninety-eight detainees have died in U.S. custody in Iraq and Afghanistan.[60]) While the administration has always maintained that none of the "enhanced interrogation" techniques were acts of torture, and that, categorically, America does not torture, all available evidence contradicts this stance. In fact, Bob Woodward reported in the last week of the Bush administration that

> [t]he top Bush administration official in charge of deciding whether to bring Guantanamo Bay detainees to trial has concluded that the U.S. military tortured a Saudi national who allegedly planned to participate in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, interrogating him with techniques that included sustained isolation, sleep deprivation, nudity and prolonged exposure to cold, leaving him in a "life-threatening condition."[61]

To torture a suspect without the benefit of due process, rules of evidence, and an impartial and fair environment in which to determine culpability itself presumes certainty, the certainty that this individual is guilty of the crime of which he is accused. Worse, however, is that in many cases where torture has been found to have been used in interrogations in the War on Terror, not only has no such legal system ever existed, the detainees are not even accused of crimes. They exist as the perfect enemy in a Manichean battle—ubiquitous, irredeemable, interchangeable; a part that contains the whole. To strike against one is to strike against them all; the death of one is a harbinger of the death of them all and the evil they embody.[62] They have no circumstances, no family, no life prior to their intersection with the war and U.S. military forces,

59. Singer, *President*, 81–84.

60. "Torture: Quick Facts," n.p. (accessed May 19, 2009). Online: http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/us_law/etn/misc/factsheet.htm#_ednref2.

61. Bob Woodward, "Detainee Tortured, Says U.S. Official," Washington Post A01 (January 13, 2009) (accessed January 19, 2009). Online: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/13/AR2009011303372.html?hpid=topnews.

62. On this point, see Bruce Lincoln's epilogue to *Religion, Empire, and Torture*, especially pp. 102–3. Lincoln, *Empire*, 97–107.

except in as much as it was spent planning to inflict violence of its own against the forces of freedom. They "hate our freedoms," so they cannot be offered them, no matter how universal our human rights are.

Because of their categorical exclusion from mercy as an "evil-doer" who has opposed both the gift of Freedom and the nation that is Freedom's ambassador and protector, they will be subject to extremes of pain, humiliation, even death. The prophet Zechariah describes similar consequences for the enemies of God's Chosen Nation: "This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths" (Zech 14:12). The same glee Bush expressed as a presidential candidate when he talked about executing criminals in Texas he also revealed when talking about the deaths of individuals suspected of being involved in some way with terrorist threats against the U.S. "All told, more than 3,000 suspected terrorists have been arrested in many countries. Many others have met a different fate. Let's put it this way—they are no longer a problem to the United States and our friends and allies."[63] Singer comments, "The president of the United State was referring to the fact that agents of his administration were killing people without any judicial process at all. He appeared to be proud of that fact."[64]

Conclusion: The Judgment of History

Prophecy and history are intimately bound together in the ancient Jewish tradition, so much so that the court histories of Israel and Judah's kings, with their implicit and explicit judgments on their adherence to God's will and moral standards, are included in the prophetic division of the Hebrew Bible (*nevi'im*). The rightness of one's relationship with God, in other words, can only ever be revealed, ultimately, by history; history is a form of prophecy.

Bush has long indicated that history would be the final judge of his actions as president. This long view emerged especially (some might say only) when his popularity began to plummet and the situation in Iraq started to descend into chaos.[65] As I finish this piece on January 19, 2009, during the last day of his presidency, Bush's approval ratings hover

63. George W. Bush, "President Delivers 'State of the Union'" (January 28, 2003), quoted in Singer, *President*, 84.

64. Singer, *President*, 84.

65. Greenwald, *Tragic*, 67.

around the low thirty percents, his party ousted from the White House, the Democrats expanding their majorities in both houses of Congress. He is anathema in his own party—so much so that he did not even appear in person at the Republican National Convention in 2008. Yet such rejection would never serve to temper or chasten the confidence of a man doing God's work. "On several…occasions, the president has…suggested that his unpopularity was *not* a sign that he had gone astray and should change, but rather, that he was on a righteous course, and resistance to his policies and presidency were a by-product of his unyielding commitment to battling Evil."[66] Like so many before him, he leaves as a prophet without honor in his own country, but with the certitude that the unfolding of God's work—and America's—over time will reveal that his unpopularity is, in fact, a sign that his certitude was morally, and divinely, justified. And thus, so was his violence against the nations.

66. Ibid., 65.

Sent Ahead or Left Behind? War and Peace in the Apocalypse, Eschatology, and the Left Behind Series

Ronald R. Clark, Jr.

A couple once sat in my office for counseling. This "seemingly" happily married couple within two weeks was separated, not speaking to each other, and preparing for divorce. Mary indicated to Sam, two weeks previous, that she realized her father had abused her as a child. Sam was supportive but did not know how to help. Sam was a retired FBI detective and had experience with abuse, but did not have the ability to nurture others to healing. Mary felt that he was cold, unconcerned, and inattentive to her grief. Within two days Mary had accused Sam of abusive, sexual, and controlling behavior in their marriage. By the end of the week she felt that Sam had constructed a plot to sabotage and silence her. She did not trust her doctors because she felt that Sam controlled them. She did not take her prescription medication because she felt that Sam was poisoning her. Two months after we met she was institutionalized on her doctor's recommendation. Within the week she had filed accusations that the psychiatric ward of the hospital was controlling, manipulating, and abusing her. She felt that the government also had made an attempt to control and monitor her behavior. She realized that Sam was not the culprit and wished to return to him. Sam, through all this, had followed our advice of being supportive and, when necessary, keeping a distance from Mary.

This is an example of what Sigmund Freud called negative transference. In the case of Mary, a trigger incident began this process. While her refusal to continue her prescription drugs further exaggerated the condition, it is still an example of transference. The realization that a deceased father had been abusive exposed repressed memories that were projected onto Mary's closest male relationship (her husband). In the initial stages of the reports, we operated to protect Mary, but the quick progression and intensity of the accusations and stories became an indicator that she was projecting her past experiences onto Sam. The

transference of this fear and anger to the hospital and staff also gave us another example of this type of projection.

Mary's negative transference was triggered by a painful memory of trauma by her father. In my discussions with her, she was highly paranoid and angry. She would not be controlled and saw me as the person who was helping her find freedom (another form of transference). Her view of God was one of comforter, although weeks earlier she saw God as a controlling father. I found that as long as I was neutral and gave her freedom to choose, I was not targeted as another abuser. Mary's deepest fears and resentments for being controlled were displayed in her reactions to follow any advice that her friends or I gave to her. She, in her mind, was fulfilling her wishes to be rebellious, independent, and free.

Transference involves placing the feelings from our past about others or ourselves upon an analyst, friend, or family member. This phenomenon can occur through the triggering of an emotional moment or painful memory. An individual may have hidden their anxiety from those closest to them, until they feel threatened or aware that they have been traumatized by others. They may identify that past experience with an existing person in power. Transference can also be a coping skill for someone under crisis, trauma, or intense emotional fatigue.

In this study I wish to discuss how transference has been used in the popular series of novels Left Behind (hereafter referred to as LB). This series, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, has not only become one of the most popular selling Christian/fiction series, but continues to promote the transference of American fears upon other nations while being disguised as a spiritual text. The theology of the LB series continues to project the anxiety expressed by Evangelical American Christians, much as Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* did in the 1970s.

Transference in the Book of Revelation: Sent Ahead

The book of Revelation continues to be a popularly read, misread, translated, and mistranslated book in American Christianity. No other book has spawned the vast number of commentaries, novels, and fictional accounts as Revelation. The book has been used as a proof text for the *Eschaton*, the salvation of Palestine, the vindication of America, fictional horror movies, or the end of the world. However, in its ancient context, the Apocalypse of John does transfer the wrath of God upon the current kingdom of Rome. It identifies the suffering of the early Christians with their God and savior.

While the identity of the Beast, false prophet, and suffering is debated in the popular literature on Revelation, most scholars suggest that John was writing about a very real, present, and current problem in the first-century Church. The text gives evidence that John's revelation would happen in the very near future through the use of terms such as "soon," "at hand," and "short time" (Rev 1:1, 3; 3:11; 12:12; 22:7, 12, 20). John warns the reader that they might be punished by the plagues described in the book if they do not fully report the story (22:18–19). The text also suggests that the early readers were facing present suffering (1:9; 2:3, 8–10, 13, 19; 3:8, 10; 6:9). The story represents the style of *apocalyptic literature* (hereafter referred to as AL) that was very common in the ancient world.

John Collins suggests that apocalyptic literature in the ancient world had three common themes.[1] This style of literature reflected and was a response to a *crisis*. These stories were created and circulated among communities that faced threats of suffering and trauma. AL is born out of suffering and crisis. Second, the texts communicated that this crisis would involve *divine authority*. God prepared to intervene and make things right by promoting justice, peace, vengeance, balance, and vindication. The writer/recipient communicated that someone was in control of all events and life. Many of the visions of the writer/seer were interpreted by angelic beings who became "tour guides" in the visionary experience.[2] Finally, the texts were designed to bring a sense of *comfort* or *consolation* to the *community*. These three themes (crisis, divine authority, consolation) provided a sense of hope and comfort to the reader.

AL also created a bridge between the heavenly world and human world.[3] The heavenly world communicated to humans that the divine

1. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 41, states: "David Hellholm has proposed that the definition of apocalypse in *Semeia* 14 be emended by the following addition: 'intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority.'" Collins is here referring to David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting* (ed. A. Yarbro Collins; Semeia 36; Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), 13–64 (27).

2. Dan Merkur, "The Visionary Practices of Jewish Apocalyptists," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*. Vol. 2, *From Genesis to Apocalyptic Vision* (ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 317–47 (317).

3. Collins (*Apocalyptic*, 5) states: "Specifically, an apocalypse is defined as: 'a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is

powers would intervene in the natural course of events to set things right. This was communicated through a mediator (usually angels) and through symbols or metaphors that needed to be interpreted by the writer or community. Yet, AL was concerned with addressing the current crisis and providing hope for the community, rather than predicting the end of the world. As Witherington suggests,

> Eschatological ideas are not necessarily the heart of what apocalyptic is all about, for such ideas are found in many types of early Jewish and Christian literature, and there are apocalypses that do not really focus on the final form the future will take… The very heart of apocalyptic is the unveiling of secrets and truths about God's perspective on a variety of subjects, including justice and the problem of evil, and what God proposes to do about such matters.[4]

Suffering existed for a short period of time as the community eagerly waited for God's justice. The "end" addressed the end of the crisis and the time when justice comes by the hand of the divinity.

Revelation contains these themes as it addressed a current problem in Asia Minor among the Christians of the first century. First, the *crisis* of Revelation involved suffering, death, persecution and/or torture of the Christians. This persecution came as a result of the pressures of idolatry, worship of a world power, social pressure, and apostasy in the threat of death.[5] The historical evidence of Asia Minor, during the first century, points to the presence of Caesar worship, especially the three cities Ephesus, Pergamum, and Smyrna.[6] Ancient coins discovered in Asia suggest that Ephesus boasted about its status as chief city of Rome.

mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.'"

4. Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34.

5. The pressure from unions and associations as well as families was part of this persecution. Hemer and Worth suggest that the majority of persecution resulted from various combined social pressures and local civic pride. See Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (The Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 11; and Roland H. Worth Jr., *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* (New York: Paulist, 1999), 112–23.

6. For more on Roman Imperial worship in Asia and Revelation, see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

While there is a question as to whether Ephesus or Pergamum was the capital of Asia Minor, it is clear that these cities were in a struggle for power.[7] The readers of Revelation also sought vengeance against these forces of evil.[8]

The Ephesians also seemed to be proud of their status in Caesar worship as compared to their patron goddess Artemis. Ephesian coins have been found which display the temple of Artemis flanked by an Imperial cult temple and a temple to Roma—suggesting that Artemis was still supreme. The Greek phrase (ΕΦΕΣΙΑΝ ΠΡΩΤΩΝ ΑΣΙΑΣ, "Ephesus, first in Asia") also shows the Ephesian boasting concerning their prominence in Asia. Likewise, it seems logical that Pergamum and Smyrna, while getting the shaft from the Roman Empire, would be somewhat hostile to those not supporting the worship of the Emperor cult.[9] Laodicea hosted gladiator games while Pergamum, Philadelphia, and Smyrna had gladiator training schools.[10]

Second, Revelation communicated that *God is in control*. According to Koester, Revelation does not move linearly. The entire book consists of a series of cycles, which celebrate the triumph of God. These six cycles each end with a vision of God's throne and divine intervention in the crisis of the early Church (4:1–11; 7:1–17; 11:15–19; 15:1–4; 19:1–10; 21:1–22:5).[11] These cycles both threatened and assured the reader that God was in control.[12]

Finally, Revelation provided *comfort and consolation* to the reader through the visions of judgment. The readers were told that they were to suffer, endure, stand firm, overcome, and die because God will bring false Roman religion to ruin. While this does not seem very comforting, the early Church was reminded that they will be rewarded for their faithfulness (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) with the promise of the one who overcomes (ὁ νικῶν). This reward was not only for those who died for their witness, it was also for those who live through the persecutions.

7. Worth, *Cities*, 47.

8. Charles T. Davis III, "Revelation 17: The Apocalypse as Psychic Drama," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*. Vol. 3, *From Gospel to Gnostics* (ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 213–30 (215).

9. It is also in these cities (Pergamum and Smyrna) where the persecution of the Christians seemed to be the most intense of the seven churches (Rev 2:9–10, 13).

10. Worth, *Cities*, 26–27.

11. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 39.

12. Ibid.

Transference in this book occurs due to these three themes of AL. While the book claims to be a revelation of Jesus, it does represent the deepest fears of the early Christians in their daily lives. First, *the suffering of the Church was a present reality*. In Jesus' message to the seven churches they were told that God was aware of their suffering. The Ephesians have persevered (2:3) for the name of Jesus; the Smyrnians were being slandered by the Jews (2:10); those in Pergamum were grieving the loss of Antipas (2:13); those in Thyatira endured suffering (2:19); and those in Philadelphia were losing their strength (3:8).[13] The early Church was experiencing pain, suffering, persecution, weariness, and rejection. Laodicea, Pergamum, and Thyatira were also in danger of falling back into sin (2:14–15, 20–21; 3:14–18).

The hero of the book is none other than the Lamb of God. In the narrative he is portrayed as a slaughtered lamb (5:6, 9); one who had shed his blood (1:5); one who died and lives again (1:5, 18); and one who empathizes with the early Christians. John, likewise, suffered and endured with them (1:9). The early readers had a chance to see themselves and their suffering in a God who was not blind. Revelation gave the suffering Church the chance to transfer their pain and feelings of abandonment to God, as well as the writer, who identifies with them in their weakness. The implied message was that "I have suffered as you."

Second, the *anger and cry for vengeance from the community* were also embraced by the book. The community that grieved the loss of loved ones and feared for their own lives sought satisfaction. When the fifth seal was opened the victims of persecution cried out for vengeance. This vengeance was a cry for justice: "How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (6:10). These victims were told to wait for others to die as they had (6:11). Throughout the book the community cried out for justice and was told to be patient, wait, and endure. When the dragon (Satan) was thrown to the earth the readers were warned that the dragon was angry and will attack them. The message of hope was dismal: "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints" (13:10). This quote from Jer 15:2 was also used regarding the Babylonian captivity, but here suggests that God again would allow the enemy to attack the faith community. In Revelation, however, the community was not being punished for their sins, though they were still encouraged to remain faithful.

13. The presence of gladiator schools in three of these cities also would add tension to Christians. See Worth, *Cities*, 27.

Yet the hero also identified with the suffering people. The hero, as a slaughtered lamb, continually reminded them that he has risen, was dead, is alive, and will reign (1:8, 17–18; 4:8; 7:10; 11:15; 16:5). He persevered and endured the torture and slaughter of from his enemies. He, in the end, will return to enact vengeance on the enemies of the Christians and will make things right. The cry for vengeance of the community was embraced by the slaughtered savior who had earned the right to reign and bring vengeance.

Finally, *vengeance satisfied the community in the fall of this Roman beast*. While the Roman Empire lasted for another few centuries, the crisis of Revelation seems to have been addressed during the first century. The promise of fulfillment happening soon, quickly, and shortly suggests that God promised relief to their suffering within their generation. The contrast between the beast's army and Lamb's army suggested that God would answer the prayers of the saints, as well as their cries for vengeance. The soldiers in the Lamb's army have God's name on their foreheads, also died and rose to life, and will be protected in the great battle. The army of the beast has their god's name on their foreheads, follows the one who seemed to raise and die (13:3, 12), and will die in the great battle. While the saints will rise to a new life, the beast's army will be devoured by the birds and in the fire. The anger and vengeance of the community will be satisfied in the great battle. The slain lamb became the mighty warrior and defeated the Roman military machine.

These three examples of transference (suffering, anger, and vengeance) were a method for the suffering Christians to identify with the Lamb of God. Jesus also suffered. Jesus also cried for vengeance. Jesus, however, is the only one who is worthy of vengeance in the book. While the suffering Church was called to identify with Jesus and pray for the dead in Christ to join his army, they have no ability to act in vengeance—this is left to the Lamb. Violence is not an option for the reader. However, this third step is what I call the point of transformation in the book of Revelation. While the suffering community is called to be patient, they do have the opportunity to respond, although without violence.

The book shows us the patience of God during the cycles of punishment. John illustrates this through the comparison of Christ and the community. First, the Christ is able to judge because he was slaughtered (1:5; 5:9, 12), he is righteous and just (15:4; 16:5, 7), and he is given the authority and reign over the earth (11:15; 12:10). Second, those who have refused to repent and heed the warnings from the throne are no longer without excuse (16:9, 11). Jesus has set the pace for judgment. Only he can judge. Only he can enact vengeance. Only he can punish.

Yet, the suffering Church has the option for transformation. They can continue to persevere. They can continue to witness. They can fulfill the promise of hope to all people.

The comparison of the two cities is another interesting parallel in this transformation. While the Lamb and his army square off against the beast and his army, their people/cities are passive. The city of the beast (Rome) is the object of God's wrath while the city of the Lamb (faith community) becomes the bride. The city of Rome (prostitute) was dressed with expensive gaudy clothes. She was drunk. She has committed adultery and murdered innocent people. She was dark and full of violence and bloodshed. She was destined for destruction. People were encouraged to go out of her because she will be destroyed. They were to flee the brothel because it was empty, violent, and powerless. Roman religion fell short of providing true righteousness and hope.[14] The contrast to this woman was the bride of Christ. She was dressed in precious, beautiful, costly clothes and ornaments. She was truly honorable and beautiful. She was safe, bright, and a place of peace and rest. She was destined for honor and glory. People were encouraged to enter her. She was not the new prostitute of the world but the new mother of the world.

It is in this city where transformation happens. The city is the people of God, the Church, the bride of Christ. In this city Gentiles enter, experience healing, and see the glory of God. Even more, this city has thick walls but no closed door. It is odd that the city's most important form of defense is left open. All people were welcome and invited to enter and experience God's healing. Those on the outside were still called to enter, repent, and receive healing.[15] The book ends with an eternal message: Jesus is the judge, not us. Yet, we continue to invite all people into the city not for judgment, but for healing, restoration, and salvation. The suffering congregation transforms, not by judgment and vengeance, but through outreach, the healing of others, and the worship of a forgiving, protective, and patient God. The Church of the first century struggled with what it meant to be *Sent Ahead.*

Transference in the Left Behind Series

LB has also found a way to transfer the unique experiences of modern American readers, especially Evangelical Christians, to their version of AL and story. First, *the crisis is not an existing crisis*. While Revelation

14. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 131.

15. Notice that the first individual listed in the description of those in the lake of fire are "cowards" (δειλοῖς, 21:8).

historically addressed an existing crisis, the LB series creates or imagines a crisis. The personal crisis that the reader first encounters is the crisis of those who have not been taken to heaven because they were not truly faithful to the Christian faith. The characters experience a crisis in their personal faith, which means that those who openly disbelieved and those who openly believed but were hypocritical in their faith were left behind on earth. Throughout the story some acknowledge hypocrisy or unbelief and become part of the team destined to resist the beast. While the reader may identify with some of the characters, those of the true faith cannot. Those with whom they may identify are gone and only memories in the story. The reader who does not believe or has a personal crisis of faith is the target of the story. They are in crisis and need to turn to God. As Davis writes, "End of the world plots arise to consciousness when we have an inner psychic need or desire to break free from an outmoded map of reality."[16] Such a reader will likely identify with LB.[17]

The global crisis is also an imagined or created crisis. The public crisis that the characters face is one that reflects American fears since the Cold War. Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* and *Armageddon* books were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. These books placed the beast in Russia. At the time, America's biggest perceived threats were Russia, China, and Communism. LB has placed the beast (Nicolae Carpathia) in Romania, where he is an active participant in the European Market and UN.[18] While some feel that these organizations threaten the economy and autonomy of the U.S., they do not represent an actual crisis *per se*. These entities only truly threaten the U.S.'s priorities in greed, capitalism, and foreign policies. The UN's desire for world peace has always challenged the U.S. to find another way to peace and foreign diplomacy, something the nation still struggles to accept. Yet, in LB, unity, peace, and a global economy are the devil's way of conquering the world. The prince of peace is no longer Jesus, but a Romanian dictator who wants to rule the

16. Davis, "Revelation 17," 215.

17. Amy Frykholm (*Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 89–96) suggests that many readers identify with the male hero named Buck (played by Kirk Cameron in the movie *Left Behind* and the sequel *Tribulation Force*). She indicates that LB is guilty of gender bias, noting that the females in the series are dependent, helpless, and indecisive as compared to the males, who are strong, confident, and encourage the women to "submit" to their leadership.

18. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995), 436; *Tribulation Force* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1996), 350; *Nicolae* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1997), 180; *Apollyon* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1999), 105; *Armaggedon* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2003), 298.

world. LB imagines a crisis that is only a crisis to most Evangelical American Christians, a crisis which concocts and predicts suffering, persecution, and torture.

Carpathia not only represents the former Communist countries, he also represents progress, liberalism, and secularism. He unites countries, uses global communication, forms a global healthcare system, and tries to adopt a united currency. Darryl Jones indicates that Carpathia, the LB Antichrist, represents the antithesis to the Evangelical Church's fundamental stance on the Bible.[19] This is grounded in Evangelical fears concerning a changing culture and society. Carpathia embodies the issues that threaten the American Evangelical Church. As Jones points out in his article, seventy-one percent of LB readers are from the American South and Midwest.[20] Having been a minister in the Midwest, I find that the Evangelicals of these regions tend to be more concerned and anxious about progressive political issues in America and look for a return to the "good old days" of conservatism.

Second, in LB *God seems incredibly silent*. The characters do have signs or manifestations from God, but they seem to be left to their own devices to stay faithful. God's vengeance is not seen until the end. Throughout the books God does not speak and promise vengeance. The survivors are left to gather an army, evangelize, re-interpret scriptures, find hidden messages, and resist or take down the Romanian world ruler and his cohorts. While the books tell us that God supports their work, Jesus is no longer the hero. The characters are the heroes and carry the hopes and dreams of the reader. The reader who may have faced a personal crisis now has the chance to respond. They are expected to inform people about the prophecies and the end of the world and gather a faithful army before it is too late. They are to act and develop a resistance movement. This contrasts with the hero of Revelation who calls the reader to persevere, suffer, and wait for God to intervene.

Finally, *LB does not provide the comfort and hope that are seen in AL*, namely Revelation.[21] While the series compiles and reinterprets various

19. Darryl Jones, "The Liberal Antichrist—*Left Behind* in America," in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context* (ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Crawford Gribben; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 97–112 (104–5). See also, in the same volume, Andrew Pierce, "Millennialism, Ecumenism, and Fundamentalism," 79–95 (89–91), where Pierce suggests that millennialism is used by Fundamentalists to express conflicts between their theology and that of their surrounding culture.

20. Jones, "The Liberal Antichrist," 98.

21. Amy Frykholm and Damian Thompson suggest that both Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians do not see LB or the emphasis on the End Times as doom and

texts throughout the Bible, it does not provide a sense of comfort for the reader. One might suggest that the hope of heaven is the comfort that the reader of Revelation receives. AL, however, is focused on the end of a period of suffering. The reader does not wait for God to one day make things right at the end of the world. The reader expects God to intervene and act soon. The reader, suffering in crisis, looks to a day of justice in their near future. This has already taken place in heaven and should happen soon. While the language may be metaphorical, the message is clear. God and the Lamb, not the Christian, will intervene and destroy the evil powers in order to bring justice from the throne to the earth.

LB, on the other hand, promises that a just world will not coexist with evil. While it may exist in the remnant community on earth, it will not reign over the whole land until the wicked are destroyed. This will only happen in the end of time. Comfort and consolation only happen in death or at Armageddon. Those who are left behind are not the ones who endured suffering; they are the ones who disobeyed. Their role is to find faith and oppose the false prophet and Beast. Their time on the earth is a time of repentance and political action. They are called to confront the evil rulers while on earth.

It seems that transference in LB is not the same as that in Revelation. In Revelation the reader is experiencing a real public crisis and seeks justice and vengeance. These feelings are transferred to Jesus, who also suffers death and seeks justice and vengeance. In the end the reader is reminded that the transference stops here while the Lamb takes vengeance on the evil rulers. The reader, however, perseveres by continuing to be a witness to the Lamb whether there is persecution or freedom. All people are to be welcome to the city and have a chance to change. The book's eternal message is not the establishment of heaven, but the continual call for the Gentiles to wash their robes, come into the community of faith, and eat from the tree of life. It is also seen in the community's strong stance to resist violence and stay relational.

LB transfers the fears and concerns of Evangelical America into the story of the last days. While some of the readers may be experiencing personal crisis of faith, the public crisis is imagined and created. The enemy is still Eastern Europe, communism, the rising value of the Euro, liberalism, feminism, secularism, and any other power that threatens the

gloom but actually a chance for hope and urgency for action. See Frykholm, *Rapture Culture*, 173–74; Damian Thompson, *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 114. However, Thompson does suggest (*Antichrist*, 148–50) that evangelism did peak in the 1980s and '90s and decreased with the "failed prophecies" at the turn of the century.

U.S. and American Evangelicals. Yet, we are blind to the fact that other nations consider the U.S. to be the Beast. The cry for vengeance does not rest in the Messiah but is now a fear of world peace, power, and global governments. The Lamb and God, in LB, are shockingly silent and in the background. The heroes are humans (actually Americans—and mostly white middle class males), rather than the Lamb who was cut down in his prime. Male courage, female submission, and American ingenuity will prevail and endure in LB. The heroes such as Buck Williams, Pastor Bruce, and Rayford Steele hold a very fundamentalist view concerning sin, justification, and salvation.[22] They are men who are strong and become leaders in the resistance movement. Chloe (Rayford's daughter and Buck's wife) is strong, but, as with other women, is encouraged to be submissive, endure, and let the men lead. They operate in a chaotic world, choosing between good and evil. Yet the world of good believes that the Bible is the only guide to God and scriptural interpretation is the path to freedom. Justice will only happen at the end of the world. The only hope for justice is a bloody war that will destroy those who set up organizations that try to establish peace. Salvation is not dependent on God but on correct interpretation of Revelation and the Prophets. Those who bring peace and threaten mainstream Christian religion are the enemy.[23]

Even more disturbing for me is the lack of transformation that can occur in LB. While Revelation calls the community to continue to witness and invite others into the city, LB only warns people of the judgment of God. While Revelation displays the mercy, patience, call to repentance, and comfort of God, LB displays warning, judgment, and the coming end of the world. LB may claim that it can offer transformation to those who read the books, but this does not seem likely. An invented and distorted crisis, human heroes, and the hope for an end of the world that has historically been misjudged do not provide the reader with hope. Readers look for crisis and persecution, rather than relief. Hope turns to despair, despair turns to longing, and longing returns others to their former path. Extended time can destroy our hope. In the end LB only represents the anxiety of many Evangelical American Christians living in a changing global economy.

22. This is extremely evident in a discussion between Buck, Rayford, and a friend concerning sin and salvation in the movie *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force*, director Bill Corcoran, Cloud Ten Pictures, Niagara Falls, N.Y., 2002.

23. Davis ("Revelation 17," 228) states: "If unchallenged by a critical hermeneutic, the Christ–Antichrist story invites an eisegesis that justifies violence against both Christians and non-Christians… The Christ–Antichrist archetypal plot is toxic when it is projected as political boilerplate upon one's enemies."

However, the book of Revelation caused readers to transfer their anxieties to the true hero of the book. The Lamb suffered as we have and is worthy to take our feelings and cries for vengeance into battle. Yet, it is God who enacts the vengeance, not us. God gathers the army—we are simply sent ahead, not left behind. The early Christians struggled with the fear of God or the fear of the Roman Empire. The crisis was real, not imagined. Salvation lay in their trust in the Lamb of God, not human ingenuity. The Church of Jesus was not left behind but sent ahead to proclaim the victory of the bloody risen Lamb. The Church was sent ahead to call their communities to repentance. The Church was called to witness this Jesus through endurance, resistance, and loyalty to the Kingdom. Their witness was not to the correct interpretation of biblical texts; it was speaking the message of God and calling the world to repentance. Fear did not drive the Church; rather, it was a realization that they did not suffer alone, nor were they abandoned or left behind:

> ‘Η γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστιν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προηετείας
>
> The witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy… (Rev 19:10)

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