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Editorial

We are pleased to publish in this edition, the three papers presented at our 2017 Annual Symposium on 'Handling Biblical Violence'

It was originally intended to have an additional paper from Veronica Zundel, looking at how those in the Anabaptist tradition dealt with violence in the Bible. Unfortunately, she was unable to come, as she had to have a serious operation. Those of you who were there will know that we prayed for her. You will be pleased to know that she can now say she is "on the mend".

I recently heard it argued that non-violent direct action, as practised by Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr, only worked because they were challenging authorities who claimed to be Christian. Confronting most modern oppressors, it was claimed, non-violence was not effective. While I would challenge that claim, I pointed out that someone in the Anabaptist tradition would say we should be non-violent, regardless of whether or not it 'works', because Jesus Christ commanded and practised it.

The problem that the Old Testament had for the Anabaptists is not our problem in this symposium. Their problem was not with the violence of God. After all, he is pretty violent in the New Testament, in Revelation!

Most (but not all) Anabaptists were pacifists, following the non-violent teaching and example of Jesus (in Old Testament prophecy, as well as in the New Testament). They could actually appeal to the Old Testament in support of their refusal to bear arms, in that the military victories there recorded were the work of God, not man. (For example, the escape through the Red Sea, where the Israelites are ordered to do nothing to defend themselves; it is God who wipes out the Egyptian army.) To trust in human military strength is to trust in an idol and blasphemously usurp God's place as judge. But that God would one day violently judge the wicked (or even, some might say, was violently punishing Jesus in our place on the cross) was not the problem to them that it is to some Christians nowadays.

The major modern descendants of the Anabaptists are the Mennonites. In March 2004, they held a Theology Forum in London which both Veronica Zundel and I attended. It was to look at non-violent theories of the atonement, in particular J. Denny Weaver's 'Narrative Christus Victor' theory. Since I believe Martyn Smith looked at such theories in his PhD research, it would seem appropriate that he also spoke in our symposium.

Atheists sometimes use atrocities in the Old Testament to lump Christians together with militant Muslims. This is why we also have a contribution on violence in Islam, by a Christian scholar of that faith. It was good news when Islamic authorities in Morocco recently rejected the near universal opinion of all four 'schools' of Islamic law that 'apostates' (e.g. Muslim converts to Christianity) should face the death penalty. They did so, because they were prepared to interpret the Qur'an and traditions about their Prophet within their original historical context, as David Instone-Brewer does for the Old Testament in his paper.

R. H. Allaway (chair)

Is God in the Old Testament 'Nasty, Brutish and Capricious'?

Dr David Instone-Brewer

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Introduction

Roughly when the King James Bible was published, Thomas Hobbes described humans as “nasty, brutish” and with leaders who were liable to be capricious.¹ And the Greek philosopher Xenophanes in the 4th C BCE pointed out that men do tend to create Gods in their own image:

*Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black;
Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired.
If horses and oxen had hands and could draw pictures, their gods would look remarkably like horses and oxen.
Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all sorts of things that are matters of reproach and censure among men: theft, adultery, and mutual deception.²*

So perhaps the authors of Old Testament books simply invented a larger copy of themselves. The impression gained when reading the Old Testament certainly does appear to fit this description. After all, what is more nasty than clearing a homeland for Israel by ordering genocide? What is more brutish than demanding the constant bleeding and burning of animal sacrifices? And what is more capricious than decreeing laws and punishments, some of which are dramatically carved on stone tablets, and then changing them? These three large topics cannot be dealt with in sufficient detail in this paper. The aim of this current paper is to point out some facts that point in different directions, in order to show that this simplistic view is almost certainly wrong and that a more nuanced approach is necessary.

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* xiii.9

² Xenophanes Fragments #16, #15, #11,
en.wikisource.org/wiki/Fragments_of_Xenophanes

Nasty Genocide

Interpreting texts can be difficult

When approaching this subject, like many others, it is important to realise the importance of using context to understand the meaning of Hebrew languages. Biblical Hebrew has a small vocabulary of about 5000 words plus about 3000 rare words. This contrasts with English which has a commonly used vocabulary of about 30,000 words (depending on the type of material) with a total vocabulary of perhaps 1 million.³ This means that Hebrew words and even phrases need to be used in multiple ways which can only be distinguished by context, and a foreign reader should always beware of potential misunderstandings.

English does the same thing, to a lesser extent. For example, here are three quotations that include the word “massacre”:

- * “Hitler massacred three million Jews”
- * “In Putman, the Union Army massacred ten local men for shielding Confederates.”
- * “Australia didn't just beat India, they massacred them.”⁴

These quotations used “massacre” in very different ways: Hitler’s massacre was attempted genocide; the Union Army’s massacre was a minor war crime; and India’s massacre by Australia was a tragic sporting accident (though I may be biased). Actually it could be said that none of these used the word in its ‘proper’ sense. Etymologically, ‘massacre’ comes (probably) from the Latin *macellum*, ‘a butcher shop’, which tells us something about the mode of killing. Modern dictionary definitions also suggest that ‘massacre’ implies killing a mass of people, which tells us something about the numbers killed. So someone who knows English as a foreign language may reasonably conclude that a massacre means butchering a multitude. However, in these examples of actual quotations, the number of people massacred was 3 million, 10 and 11, and the method of their massacre was gassing, shooting and being bowled out.

This warns us to be careful how we interpret texts, and the need to find confirmation for our interpretation. It also suggests that if other methods such as archaeology

³ en.oxforddictionaries.com/explore/how-many-words-are-there-in-the-english-language

⁴ Headline of a news report at at <http://www.mensxp.com/sports/cricket/35226-fortress-india-soked-meet-the-indian-hand-behind-steve-o-keefe-s-pune-test-haul.html>

indicate a different picture, we should be slow to criticise the text as wrong. It is just as likely that our interpretation and understanding of the text is wrong. On the other hand, it is equally faulty to ignore written texts simply because they are problematic. The fact that they contain difficulties and apparent contradictions tend to indicate they are genuine historical documents. Unlike history text books and novels, true historic documents are usually difficult to interpret and misleading, so that they often appear to contain contradictions.

Simplistic accounts and reality

A simple (or simplistic) account of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan goes something like this: The Israelites all escaped from Egypt one day in spring and started walking to Canaan. This journey took 40 years because the older generation were too scared to fight, but a new generation invaded the land, defeated Jericho then swept through Canaan killing everyone.

The reality, as found in archaeological records and in the Bible text, was rather different. The Israelites did destroy Jericho and kill everyone there, and also completely destroyed a few other towns, but most of the original population of Canaan continued living there. The additional towns that were destroyed were Ai (near Jericho), then during the Southern offensive the only city destroyed was Lachish⁵, and during the Northern offensive the book of Joshua refers to capturing several cities but says that only one was destroyed.

And he burned Hazor with fire. ¹² And all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua captured, and struck them with the edge of the sword, devoting them to destruction, ...¹³ But none of the cities that stood on mounds did Israel burn, except Hazor alone (Josh.11.11-13)

This is confirmed by archaeology: most cities were virtually untouched, but Hazor and Lachish were destroyed. Israelites did occupy the land, but not till much later. To start with they were restricted to the hill country and then they gradually moved in and farmed it.⁶

The Bible text actually confirms that the Israelites did not conquer the land for quite some time, and even towns that were supposedly defeated had to be retaken at later dates. According to the account in Joshua 10.39-40, Hebron was already totally defeated: "He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed". This

⁵ The book of Joshua doesn't mention destroying any towns in the Southern offensive, and archaeologists haven't found any destruction except at Lachish.

⁶ T. A. Clarke, "Complete v. Incomplete Conquest: A Re-Examination of Three Passages in Joshua" (*Tyndale Bulletin* 61, 2010)

language is easily misunderstood, just as non-English speakers might misunderstand the English word ‘massacre’. It is clear that this passage cannot mean that the population was wiped out, because a few chapters later the city needs to be retaken.⁷

Another indication that we have misunderstood this language lies within the Bible text itself: immediately following a command to supposedly kill everyone, comes a command to not intermarry with them:

When the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. (Deut 7:2-4)

The phrase “devote them to complete destruction” is a translation of the Hebrew *herem* which is the standard term referring to the total killing and destruction by fire plus the donation of unburnable objects to the Lord.⁸ The subsequent command against intermarriage in this text does not depend on whether or not they obeyed the command of *herem*. The flow of the text is: You must do *herem* AND you must make no covenant AND you must not intermarry with them. These are not three options from which they can pick and choose, but three things they are commanded to do. We cannot determine from this passage whether or not the Israelites obeyed, but it does tell us that *herem* could not have meant killing everyone, because a command to kill everyone would not be followed by another command to avoid making treaties or marriages with the people who have been killed.

There are three options for understanding this and similar passages. First the words should be understood differently to their dictionary definitions, as in the English example of the word ‘massacre’. Secondly, when an account concludes with a statement that everyone was killed, this should be regarded an exaggeration which is understandable within that culture.⁹ Modern politician may make similar claims after a war; they state that the enemy is totally annihilated, and then unashamedly collect forces to defeat them again a few years later. Thirdly, the destruction may indeed be total, but only on specific occasions.

⁷ Caleb is presented as a hero for offering to conquer Hebron (Josh.14.6-15) long after its defeat in Josh.10. See other examples in Ken Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 2003) ch.5.

⁸ See all instances at www.stepbible.org/?q=strong=H2763a.

⁹ Examples in *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* by Paul Copan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), p.171f .

Motives for attacking non-Israelites

Enemy towns may have suffered minimal destruction simply because the Israelite army was not as strong as their enemies. Or it may be that Israel lacked the motivation to attack them. When an ancient Near Eastern army won a battle, each soldier was allowed to rape, pillage and kill as they wished – as still happens today in some wars. The laws recorded in Joshua and elsewhere present a very different picture. They were allowed to kill – indeed they were sometimes commanded to kill everyone – but they were not allowed to rape or pillage.

A soldier who saw a woman he wanted was not allowed to rape her, though he could keep her for himself and take her home. There were complex rules concerning this situation – a period of mourning with accompanying cutting of hair and nails etc.¹⁰ – which may or may not have been heeded. However, the presence of such rules indicated an expectation that a ‘proper’ soldier would not simply take and rape a woman.

The laws against pillage were even more stringent, as illustrated in the story of Achan who supposedly caused Israel’s defeat at Ai by keeping some plunder.¹¹ Whether or not this narrative is accurate or normative, it acts as a disincentive to pillage. Defeat was a constant fear among soldiers, and the perception that this could be caused by pillaging by one soldier would create a strong group-reinforcement of this rule. Just as no sailor would let an albatross be killed lest this doomed their ship, no Israelite soldier would let pillaging occur if they believed this could result in their defeat.

Laws like this removed most incentives for warfare among Israelites. The main motivation for being a soldier was the riches that one might bring home. Julius Caesar was the first general to introduce the practice of paying wages. Before him, the only way to keep soldiers loyal was to regularly let them plunder rich enemies.

These Israelites did not even need to kill people in order to make room in the land. At about 1550 BC, the occupancy of Canaan is estimated to be about 140,000 people.¹² By contrast, the present population of Israel is about 8.3 million. Even taking into account that modern populations are concentrated in cities, the ancient land of Canaan had a relatively small population. There was plenty of land, especially in the hill country where Israel first settled.

¹⁰ See Deut. 21:11-13

¹¹ Josh.7--

¹² <http://www.biblicalresearchbulletin.com/uploads/BRB-2007-2-Fouts-Demographics.pdf>

All this explains, perhaps, why so few towns were destroyed. Most towns simply ignored these strangers who weren't interfering with their livelihoods. Some cities did regard them as a danger, and they called together local men to form armies against them. In this kind of situation the law of Moses records an extremely brutal policy: once they defeated an attacking force, they had to kill everyone – not just the male soldiers, but also their wives and children. Although this killing was limited to a smaller number of occasions, so they might not amount to genocide, wouldn't this nevertheless indicate that the God who gave such orders really was really nasty?

Practical necessities and rules of engagement

The possibilities open to an ancient army were not the same as today. When a modern war ends, the victors destroy the enemy tanks and planes, because otherwise they will be used next year to attack again. In the ancient world, arsenals of weapons did not consist of tanks and planes, and most weapons were adapted from farm instruments.

The most important arsenal of warfare consisted of people. And ancient codes of revenge meant that even children would feel obliged to kill those who had killed their father, once they were old enough to do so. Even widows would be expected to pass this burden of revenge to their unborn children.

Consequently, the sad truth was that it was safer and sometimes necessary to kill all women and children after a battle. This policy was recorded in the rules of engagement, as implied in Joshua and recorded in Deuteronomy:

The city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers whom we sent. ¹⁸But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. ¹⁹But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord. (Josh.6.17-19)

When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. ¹¹And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. ¹²But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. ... ¹⁶ in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction. (Deut.20:10-12, 16-17)

Any modern reader should be rightly horrified by this because in modern warfare it is mandatory to avoid civilian casualties, and soldiers who are captured or surrender are not executed but imprisoned. But in the ancient world, even imprisonment was an unrealistic solution before the invention of mortar. Without constant guarding, any wall or fence could be penetrated by gentle and persistent digging.

So towns like Ai and Jericho, which was right next to where Israel was camped at Gilgal,¹³ had to be completely destroyed and all its population killed, to prevent a deadly attack in the night.

However, a completely different set of rules were in force for cities outside of the land of Canaan. For these, the rules against pillage were relaxed, but so were the rules about killing everyone:

And when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword,¹⁴ but the women and the little ones, the livestock, and everything else in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And you shall enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you.¹⁵ Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of the nations here. (Deut.20.13-15)

These rules may have been idealised, and they may not have been applied uniformly, but they at least provide an insight into the motivation for the killing or not killing of defeated populations. Cities close to where the Israelites lived, who were not willing to live at peace, had to be attacked and their complete population killed. But if a similarly belligerent city was further away, the defeated soldiers were to be killed but the rest of the population was spared, though subjugated.¹⁴

The second rules of engagement – those for a city far away, is best illustrated in Joshua for a town that was actually nearby – Gibeah – whose population sent a delegation pretending to come from afar in order to make a peace treaty. Having been set a tribute of providing wood and water for the worship centre, the treaty was not reneged when the truth was discovered (Josh.9.3-27).

There was no need to kill women and children if a town was far away, because they did not pose any immediate danger. Also, by making them subject with something like a regular tribute, this provided an early warning signal for rebellion.

¹³ Kitchen + TB on returning to Gilgal

¹⁴ Philip Peter Jenson, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*. (Biblical Series 25. Cambridge Grove Books, 2002).

These two sets of rules imply that Israel was told to only kill only as many people as necessary. They only killed men in cities that actually fought them, and if they surrendered they made them into servants and keep an eye on them. Within Palestine the situation was more serious, because they lived nearby, so even women and children were dangerous because they would inherit the obligation for revenge, so they couldn't afford to leave them alive. After all, they didn't have movement detectors, cameras and walls like modern Israel.

No doubt Israel ignored the rules they were given, out of laziness or greed, on many occasions. However, archaeology suggests that they did not energetically pursue their 'invasion' of Canaan. Indeed, they caused so little destruction that most archaeologists would deny that this could be termed an invasion, because it looked more like a gradual infiltration. Whether or not Israel wanted to or succeeded in killing many people, they were not ordered to do so.

They were indeed told to completely destroy nearby towns that opposed them. But those who did not resist their arrival were left alone, and for them the command of their God was to not make treaties with them or intermarry with them.

In the end, according to the Bible text and archaeology added together, only four towns were totally destroyed: Jericho, Lachish (according to archaeology) and Hazor. This could not be called genocide or even attempted genocide.

Brutish Sacrifices

The Old Testament sacrificial system certainly looks brutish. Even though there were different sensibilities in the past, we have the right to ask why God would want the constant bleeding and burning of animal sacrifices.

To start with, some misconceptions should be put aside. In practice, the majority of offerings were non-animal. Offerings of wine, oil, savoury cakes and incense outnumbered the oxen, lambs, and the pigeons brought by poor people. Secondly, the method of slaughter was painless: the blood vessels in the neck were cut with a very sharp knife which causes no immediate pain and quickly brings on unconsciousness. Orthodox rabbis who use the same practice today in kosher abattoirs have codified the traditional rules, and warn that if any error is made that might cause pain, then the meat cannot be eaten¹⁵ – and presumably, in the past, it couldn't be offered as a sacrifice if clumsiness caused pain. Thirdly, in practice there were very few burnt offerings. Most sacrifices were animals killed for food. The 'peace offering', 'fellowship offering' and 'festival offering' were not prescribed, but could be brought by anyone who wished. Only the fat and inedible inner organs were burned, and a portion was given for the officiating priest to cook;

the rest of the carcase was taken home as food for family and friends. Even sin offerings were eaten, though in this case the priests ate it.¹⁶

However, it was still true that some animal sacrifices were proscribed by God, and it is legitimate to ask why God would demand them. The answer lies perhaps in the presuppositions of the Israelites. As far as they were concerned, sacrifices were how you 'did' religious worship. They had come out of Egypt, where the multitude of temples each sacrificed hundreds of animals. An 18th Dynasty text (i.e. from the era of the Exodus) lists the regular offerings at one temple:

*"a thousand of bread a thousand of beer, a thousand of oxen, a thousand of fowl, a thousand of all sweet things..."*¹⁷

Israel, by contrast, had only one worship centre for the whole nation, and only a few animals were killed. In the morning one lamb and in the evening another lamb, and an extra on Sabbath. That's it – except for festivals when there were a few extra. The vast majority of offerings at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple were personal and voluntary offerings that were later eaten as roast dinner. In other words, the Law of God to Moses succeeded in replacing the thousands of sacrifices in Egyptian temples with family celebrations.

Religion is traditional

Moses couldn't completely change people's perception of how to perform worship. They thought that worship consisted of killing things, and the best Moses could do was to minimise it. I don't think we can look down on that society, because ours is very similar.

There is an instructive joke about a rabbi on an airplane during a storm. The stewardess came running up to him saying: People are starting to panic. Please do something religious to make them feel safe." He tried to think of a prayer or ritual which every faith would recognise as their own. Then he had an inspired thought. He took off his hat, held it out in front of him and walked down the plane saying: Let us bring our offering to the Lord".

The point is that this one of the ways that we now 'do' worship: we offer money to God, just like ancient societies bring animal sacrifices in the days before money was invented.

¹⁶ Lev.6.26

¹⁷ *s3hw II* = PT 373 in Faulkner 1969, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd): 123 §655

Religious practices are normally defined more by custom than by theology. Our religious conventions include meeting in ancient buildings, using uncomfortable seating, wearing old fashioned clothing, lighting candles, and embarrassingly bad community singing. Anglican priests have to wear “a surplus with sleeves” for communion because this rule was stated when the church was founded in the 16th C. In those days a ‘surplus’ was worn by everyone, but field workers wore surpluses without sleeves, and the rule meant that a priest should dress more formally when they are at the altar. Methodist ministers follow a different dress code because it was founded later, in the 18th century when a black gown was normal day-wear for academics and other respectable professions. They actually wanted to make the statement that a minister dressed like everyone else, but their dress code became fixed, and it is now very different from everyday dress.

Candles are used in churches for a similar reason – it is what they always used, because churches were built before electricity or gas lights were invented. Fortunately for vegans, we no longer make candles out of tallow – i.e. animal fat – but out of beeswax or synthetic wax.

Also our Bibles are no longer written on parchment – i.e. animal skins. A complete Bible, like Codex Sinaiticus, needed skins from 400 sheep to construct it.

So even without sacrifices, early churches couldn’t avoid killing animals. I did some rough calculations to see how many lambs died to light a church. A single 100W tungsten bulb can dimly light a church. This single bulb puts out the same light as a hundred candles. A single lamb produces one or two pounds of tallow (depending on age and plumpness), so this would make about 30 candles of an ounce each. Tallow candles burn for about 1 hr per oz,¹⁸ so the tallow from three lambs would dimly light one church for about an hour. That means 60,000 lambs were needed to light all the churches in Britain for an hour on a single Sunday evening. In other words, the NT did not end the killing of animals for the sake of worship.

This does not mean that OT sacrifices weren’t barbaric, but there is only so much you can do, even when you are almighty God. The Israelites associated worship with sacrifices, just as we might associate it with hymns and candles. Israel couldn’t be persuaded to drop sacrifices completely but they could be minimised. I don’t think we can blame God for these nasty sacrifices, any more than we can blame God for the songs chosen by modern worship leaders.

Capricious Laws

Was God capricious? Did he change his mind about laws and punishments? I have to admit that the laws in the Bible did change with time, and God was apparently the

author of these changes. For example, polygamy was allowed, then discouraged, and then outlawed by Jesus. Slavery too, was subject to regulations which tend to vary within the OT books. And of course we would have preferred that the law of slavery had changed more – we would have liked it to be banned in the NT. So God does appear to be capricious in that the laws change, and yet the laws did not change enough – slavery was not banned.

Having agreed that laws and punishments did change within biblical times, we should ask why. Is this because God, as described in the Bible, couldn't decide what he wanted? Or should we instead be looking at the reasons for the law – that is, perhaps we should ask what God wanted? What were the purposes of God?

Polygamy and monogamy

It might assume for example, that one purpose of God is for most people to live in families. This is the assumption behind Psalm 68.6: “God sets the lonely in families”. This purpose would be fulfilled by monogamy, because equal numbers of boys and girls are born. However, in some situations the ratio goes wrong due to warfare, dangerous hunting customs, and women generally living longer. Also in non-egalitarian societies there are always many men who are too poor to support a wife. In these situations, the best way to avoid single women is to allow polygamy.

When social situations change, the only way to achieve a constant purpose is by changing the law. The later OT law doesn't state the reasons for allowing polygamy, so this is only a guess at the reason. However, the OT does give a clue about the motivation for allowing polygamy, because in one situation it actively encouraged it: when a husband died young and childless, his brother was encouraged to marry the widow even if he already has a wife. Then, when a son was born and grown up, he inherited his father's property so that he could support his mother. This system worked very well, till the first century when Roman peace meant Jewish men didn't die in war, and relative prosperity meant most men could afford to marry – unless the richer men had already married multiple wives. This situation made many Jews turn against polygamy, but Jesus was the first (as far as we know) to prohibit it as a command with scriptural support. He appealed to how things were ‘at the beginning’ before Moses' Law.¹⁹

¹⁹ Matt.19.4-5. At first glance this is not related to polygamy. However, Jesus is repeating texts used in the Dead Sea Scrolls in an argument against polygamy, and when he quotes Gen.2.24 he adds the word “two” for emphasis. See my "Jesus' Old Testament Basis for Monogamy", in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J.L.North* ed. Steve Moyise, JNTS Supp 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Ac Press, 2000) 75-105

It is not the mark of a capricious God to change the law in order to help society in this way. This is using the law to achieve consistent ends instead of regarding law as being an end in itself.

Slavery

In the matter of slavery, things are much more difficult, because any slavery is abhorrent. We might prefer that the Bible outlawed slavery consistently throughout the OT and NT but instead it consistently allowed it. There do appear to be some inconsistencies in how slavery was regulated in the OT: sometimes slavery was for a lifetime, and sometimes they were released after 6 years. But generally, slavery was ubiquitous: everyone, including the good characters in the OT, had slaves. This is not always obvious in English Bibles, because the word “*eved*” (‘slave’) can be translated “servant”, and the King James Bible never translates it ‘slave’. Even Abraham’s steward Eliezer, who was trusted enough to choose a bride for Isaac, is called an *eved*, and Moses was the *eved* of the Lord.

However, it is confusing if we translate *eved* with only the English word ‘slave’, because *eved* represented a huge range of people in the complexity of ancient Near Eastern societies. The wide range of meanings is evident in Exodus 9.20 where Moses has predicted a deadly hail storm, so “The servants (*eved*) of Pharaoh ...hurried to bring in their slaves (*eved*) and their livestock.” This shows that a slave can own slaves who work the fields that they also own. This is because someone who was a “slave of Pharaoh” had a much higher status than a slave who worked in a field. This illustrates that the word *eved* had as wide a meaning as our word ‘secretary’. A secretary working for a GP is very different from a secretary of a large charity who makes day-to-day decisions on million-pound projects, or the Secretary of State who helps run the country.

There was one concept that united all these different types of ‘slave’, from ministers of state through estate managers and down to farm labours: they had no freedom to decide to work for someone else. They could save money and even get rich, but if they left without permission, they could be punished for running away. They had, in effect, the same status that serfs had in Europe up till the end of the 18th century. All this highlights the fact that we have to beware of simplistic conclusions about slaves.

Laws about slaves in the OT

The different sets of laws about slavery in the OT may not indicate capriciousness or changes within the law. The fact that some laws speak about a lifetime of slavery and some speak of freedom after six years does not indicate a change, but variation – that is, they concern different types of slaves. Inhabitants of towns that attacked

Israel become permanent slaves, like the Gibeonites – though in this case they continued to live in their town and merely supplied wood and water periodically for the Tabernacle. But Israel didn't often conquer surrounding peoples, so they did not gain many slaves this way.

Most slaves in Israel were voluntary. That is, they needed money to pay a debt or for a wedding, and there were no banks to borrow from. So the only way to get a large sum of money was to ask for wages in advance, in return for working the next few years without wages, as a slave. The law limited this practice to six years' wages, presumably to help prevent exploitation.²⁰

The laws about slavery in Israel were based on those of surrounding nations but they were also very different. The biggest systematic difference was that the legal system applied equally to everyone. In other ancient Near Eastern countries, there was one law for high class and one for low class. For example, if you ruined the eye of a low-born, you paid a fine, but if your victim was high-class, you lost own eye.

In Israel, everyone was subject to the same laws and punishments including the King, in theory at least. It should be noted at this point that Israel's punishment of "an eye for an eye" (Ex.21.24) was not as barbaric as it sounds. This could, if you wished, be paid by a fine, because the context implies that fines were payable for any deliberate injury (v.19).²¹

This principle of applying laws equally to all people implies that Israel's law is based on equality. But in this case, why was slavery allowed at all? After all, God was praised for rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt, so why would he allow them to own slaves themselves? By NT times we do find that the buying and selling of slaves is castigated,²² but ownership of slaves is not criticised and Paul sends the slave Onesimus home to the master he had fled from, to continue life as a slave.²³

A partial answer lies in the laws about slavery which were rather different in Israelite law, because all slaves had legal rights. Their owners not only had to feed

²⁰ Deut.15.12

²¹ See more details at

http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/Text/Articles/Sprinkle-Ex21Abortion-WTJ.pdf - Joe J. Srinkle, "The Interpretation of Exodus 21:22-25 (Lex Talionis) and Abortion" (Westminster Theological Journal 55, 1993): 233-53

²² 1Tim.1.10

²³ Philemon 12

them, but the law mandated that they ate with the family, at least during festivals – which were likely to be the best meals of the year.²⁴

Slaves had protection in Israelite law, from injury or unduly harsh punishment. If their master hit them and maimed them, they were released from slavery. This law applied even if their ‘maiming’ consisted of losing a tooth (Ex.21.27). We are, of course, rightly appalled that a master was allowed to hit a slave at all, but we have to remember that in this culture, physical punishment was regarded as the best way to aid teaching, which was why loving parents were encouraged to hit their children. While rightly criticising such practices, it is salutary to remember that some of the last bastions of this philosophy of education resided in the highest Western schools.

In other societies a master was allowed to do what he wanted with his slave, because if he died, it was regarded as merely a financial loss to the master. However, in Israel, if a master killed his slave, he was liable for their murder (Ex.21.20). Being a slave was not easy – you had to be always be ready for a master’s bidding – though even slaves got a day off every week in Israel (Ex.20:10), and a sensible master gave slaves enough food and rest to maximise their productivity. It is therefore believable that some slaves did want to voluntarily attach themselves to a master who treated them well, so there was a special ceremony for extending a six-year term to lifelong attachment (Deut.15.16-17).

In some ways, a slave could be better off than a poor person today. They had a job that came with legally guaranteed food and lodging. They didn’t have to go to a food bank or sleep on a friend’s couch while waiting for welfare payment or for suitable housing. But we must not forget that slaves could not choose to stop working, or choose to work for someone else. This was certainly a practice that we would expect a good God to bring to an end.

Slavery in the NT

Christians recognised a more egalitarian principle, as exemplified in Gal.3.28: “no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus”. The NT did denounce slave selling as one of the worst sins (1Tim.1.10), but the NT does not call for a ban on slavery itself, or demand that all slaves be set free.

We have to recognise that this would have been an inappropriate self-defeating action by Christians. Roman rulers were suspicious of any political activity or even political discussion. The NT period is when the concept of *sub rosa* was born – the

²⁴ The law said circumcised slaves shared Passover, the best meal of the year (Ex.12.44)

agreement that anything which is said in a room would not be reported outside. At some Roman banquets they literally hung a rose from the ceiling to remind everyone there of this code of secrecy. This meant that if any political opinion was expressed, they should not repeat it outside, in case the rulers heard about it. The idea that Christians could criticise slavery – a foundational plank of Roman society – in public or in writing, and survive, is simply naive. The closest the NT gets to criticising slavery in Rome is when Revelation foretells the celebrations that will follow the downfall of “Babylon” (which Christians knew to be a cipher for Rome) who had been trading in “cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.” (Rev.18.13).

The blunt truth is that Christians didn’t make the laws, and couldn’t simply break them. It was illegal to free a slave before they were age thirty²⁵, and Onesimus was presumably younger than that. However, Paul did tell his owner to treat him like a brother,²⁶ so presumably this would include being freed as soon as legally possible. As a freed Roman slave, he would gain the legal rights of Roman citizenship, with all the rights that went along with that status. Some of the grandest tombs lining the Apian Way were built by rich ex-slaves who used their citizenship to do business and become well integrated into Roman society.

The Unchanging Purposes of God

The tragedy is that the church did not continue to advance this purpose of God to bring equality. The stringent laws about slavery in the OT had helped to persuade Jews that it was economically unattractive to own slaves. We see this in those rabbinic-led communities where the law was applied strictly and uniformly. Maimonides said that early rabbis used to make sure their slaves were fed first, in case there wasn’t enough food, because they had a legal right to food, unlike family members.²⁷ Perhaps this was an exaggeration but it shows how onerous the Jewish regulations of slavery were, and why they led most Jews to abandon the practice after the first century.

Tragically the church did not ban slavery when it gained political power in the third century. In general the church campaigned against excesses and preached against exploitation, though some individuals in the church did profit from slavery. It is as if the church was unwilling to change the law, and wished instead to change men’s hearts. It seems that the church regarded the law as unchangeable – and because the law of slavery was in the Bible, this should not be changed.

²⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lex_Junia_Norbana

²⁶ Philemon 16

²⁷ Yad, Avadim 9:8

It is self-evidently not true that biblical laws are unchangeable, because laws in the Bible did change with time. The only thing that can be argued to be unchangeable is the purpose behind those laws. For example, the various laws concerning polygamy and monogamy can be regarded as all promoting a single purpose: to help single unsupported women access the security of being in a family. Similarly the varied and increasingly stringent laws concerning slavery can be seen as having a single purpose: to prevent abuses and eventually persuade owners that keeping slaves was unprofitable. Both are encompassed within the overarching purpose of establishing the equality of all people.

So it is true that the law changes within the OT and even more so into the NT, but this is not because God is capricious. It is in order to achieve an unchanging purpose. When a situation changes, different means are needed to achieve the same end. Changing a law or a constitution is not capricious if you are following a consistent purpose, and God in the OT is not capricious if he demonstrates a consistency in his purposes.

Unfortunately of course, most Bible narratives concern the acts of people, not of God, and people certainly can be nasty, brutish and capricious. Humans suffer from nasty racial prejudices and nationalistic selfishness; they have brutish ideas about how to worship using sacrifices; and they fixate on consistency in law instead of a consistency of purpose for those laws. And paradoxically, churches are sometime particularly guilty of unthinkingly maintaining traditions, instead of identifying the purposes of God and finding the means to achieve them. They are often at the forefront of any conservative movement to maintain the status quo, even when the proposed movement is towards a purpose clearly identified in Scripture, such as the recognition of the equal value of each individual.

In conclusion, God in the Bible is not nasty, brutish or capricious, but humans were, and still are.

How has Islam dealt with violent scripture?

Rev. Stephen Agilinko

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How has Islam dealt with violent scripture?

1. Introduction

The concept of violence, referred to in Islam as the *Jihad* is such a contentious subject on which there is no agreement. For instance, while a majority of Muslims believe that there are verses in both the Qur'an and other theological sources in Islam that authorise violence against non-Muslims, other groups within Islam disagree, such as the reformist Ahmadiyya movement, which subscribes to a pacifist ethic in relation to war, violence and fighting.

In the aftermath of the barbaric events of September 11, 2001, debate has been intense within Islam as to whether the Qur'an does contain verses and passages that sanction the Jihad, understood here as military action against non-Muslims that aims to result in their conversion to Islam. Similarly, outside Islam, non-Muslim scholars have questioned whether a loving God can authorise the massacre of children, women and men.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the key verses and passages on the subject in the Qur'an and to show whether or not they support Jihad theory. To do this, this paper is concerned to do three things. Firstly, to examine the *jihad* from the perspective of the key theological and quasi-theological sources in Islam in order to find out what they really teach about the subject. Secondly, to compare the themes of violence in the Old Testament and the Qur'an and to show what the similarities and the dissimilarities are. Finally, to answer the question whether the God of the Old Testament can be characterised as nasty, brutish and capricious in the light of the outcome of our investigation of the *Jihad* in the Qur'an. The paper is structured around these three key aims.

2. The Jihad in the key theological sources

Generally, a thorough investigation of every doctrine in Islam is done via the Qur'an, the Traditions (*hadith*), and the exegetical tradition (*tafsir*). In some cases, however, the Islamic sources that are examined are determined by the subject that is being investigated. In such cases, three additional key sources may be examined alongside the Qur'an, the Traditions and the exegetical tradition. These additional sources are the life of Muhammad (*al-Sira*), the Book of campaigns or battles (*Kitab al-maghazi*) and the earliest Muslim anti-Christian polemical literature.

For example, one cannot fully understand Islamic Christology without examining the earliest Muslim anti-Christian polemical literature which includes the works of prominent pre-modern scholars like the fourteenth century CE Syrian Hanbali scholar, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE), 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025 CE) and the Islamic who was critical of his own religious tradition, Abu 'Isa al-Warraq (d. 9th century CE). The Muslim anti-Christian polemical works written by these scholars are among the most brilliant theological treatises on key traditional Christian doctrines ever produced. These works also contain a lot more information on Christology and the associated doctrines (Trinity, Incarnation, the Crucifixion etc) than is found in the Qur'an itself.

In view of the points we made above regarding the need for additional sources to be examined in studying some doctrines in Islam such as Christology, this paper shall examine the life of the prophet Muhammad (*Sira*) and the Book of campaigns or battles (*Kitab al-maghazi*) in addition to the three traditional sources we noted earlier in this paper. Some observations about jihad theory are worth noting at this point before we proceed with a detailed analysis of the subject from the perspective of the sources we have noted above.

Firstly, the teaching in the Qur'an on the subject is far from consistent because the meaning of the word itself is fluid. What this implies is that the word may have one meaning in one chapter of the Qur'an and a completely different meaning in another chapter. This point will be illustrated when we examine the relevant texts and passages in the Qur'an on the subject. In other words, whereas the word *Jihad* appears in numerous passages and texts in the Qur'an, it does not have a single meaning throughout the Qur'an. Rather, the meaning of Jihad in any given passage is either understood independently or in conjunction with passages in other chapters.

Secondly, the *Jihad* has historically been interpreted in two ways, namely, juristically and non-juristically. In my dissertation entitled *A Comparative analysis of the Islamic Jihad and the Just War Tradition*¹, I pointed out that the *Jihad* came to denote an armed struggle against non-Muslims from the second century after the Hijira (Emigration from Mecca to Medina by Muhammad and a small band of his followers) by the four schools of Islamic law.² It is instructive to note that this juristic meaning of the word has gained wide currency to the present-day. Despite the fact that, as we shall see below, this meaning does not lack support in the Qur'an, it forecloses any attempt to consider the other shades of meaning of the word. There is a non-juristic meaning of Jihad, which according to Al Ghunaimi, is derived from the Arabic word *jahada* or *juhd* and denotes 'ability', 'exertion', 'power' etc.³

Thirdly, given the present arrangement of the Qur'an in the sense that the chapters, passages and individual verses are not arranged chronologically, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of jihad or its derivatives wherever they occur. To be able to interpret the verses correctly will therefore require a reconstruction of their original contexts within which they were first revealed which are referred to by scholars as the occasions of revelation'

As Reuven Firestone has pointed out, the 'occasions of revelation' are useful in enabling Muslims to determine the historical context within which a particular revelation was given.⁴

Clearly, the 'occasions of revelation' as we mentioned above seem to me to be an exegetical tool that was used and continues to be used by Islamic scholars and exegetes to understand to what occasions either in the life of Muhammad or the early Muslim community that the divine revelations are referring. Sadly, however,

¹ Dissertation was submitted for the award of an M.A. degree in Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster, United Kingdom in 2002, 38.

² Unpublished Dissertation ,

³ M.T. Al-Ghunaimi, *The Muslim Conception of International Law and the Western Approach*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 135.

⁴ Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origins of Holy War in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 48-49.

despite the effort to reconstruct the original contexts of the revelations, scholars and exegetes have not been successful in doing so.⁵

Fourthly, owing to the difficulty in reconstructing the original historical contexts of the life of Muhammad and the early Islamic community within which the revelations of the Qur'an were given, scholars have used another exegetical tool to reconcile seeming contradictory verses and passages. A classic case of this is the meanings of Qur'an 15:94-95 and Qur'an 2: 216. There is a difficulty in reconciling what these two verses teach about the subject of war. In the former, the proclamation of Islam is to be done in a non-confrontational way. In the latter, however, Muhammad and the Muslim believers are permitted to fight their enemies. The exegetical tool that is used to reconcile such texts and passages is abrogation in the sense that new revelations abrogate previous revelations on a given teaching.⁶

Finally, the texts and passages about violence in the Qur'an are to be found in the Medinan revelations rather than the Meccan.⁷ The Meccan revelations largely focus on the key doctrines of God such the oneness of God (*tawhid*), the belief in the prophets, belief in revealed books etc. These Meccan revelations also warn sinners about the Day of Judgement should they fail to heed the preaching of the message of Islam.⁸ By and large, the Meccan revelations are generally devoid of violence against non-Muslims.

Quite to the contrary, the Medinan revelations appear to be those in which the Muhammad and the Muslim community are given permission to wage war against non-Muslims. Marshall has noted that the threats of punishment on non-Muslims and pagans in the Meccan revelations are fulfilled in a transformed form, namely, in the form of armed military campaigns against non-Muslims after Hijira.⁹ The view expressed by Marshall above is further corroborated by Reuven Firestone when he

⁵ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 49-50.

⁶ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 49.

⁷ Meccan and Medinan revelations are categorised on the basis of whether they were revealed before or after 622 CE.

⁸ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 5.

⁹ David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Richmond, Curzon Press, 1999), 118-164.

observes that in the last nine years of Muhammad he participated in twenty-seven battles and deputised fifty-nine campaigns.¹⁰

2.1. The Qur'an

Overall, the teaching of the Qur'an regarding Jihad can be grouped under four main headings. Firstly, however, we begin with the meaning of the word *jihad*. In his book *Jihad: The Origins of Holy War in Islam*, Reuven Firestone notes that the semantic meaning of jihad neither connotes holy war nor war in general.¹¹ Further, he argues that jihad is derived from the root j-h-d which means among other things 'to strive', 'exert oneself' or 'take extraordinary pains'.¹²

The non-military argument in relation to the meaning of jihad we noted above is corroborated by Bonner who argues that when the word is used in the Qur'an, it does not refer to warfare but to any effort 'made for the sake of God and in his cause'.¹³ David Cook appears to be in agreement with Firestone and Bonner when he argues that the literal meaning of the word jihad is 'striving', or 'exerting oneself'.¹⁴ Clearly, these three scholars appear to be critical of the view that the word connotes military combat and are agreed that when the word is used in the Qur'an it does not always connote a military action against non-Muslims.

Secondly, we focus on what the Qur'an teaches about the subject. Four strands of teaching on the subject are to be identified in the Qur'an. We shall discuss each of these strands and also cite the relevant texts that support them. It is instructive to note that the four strands of teaching that will be discussed below are part of the classical evolutionary theory of war is used throughout Muslim scholarship of the Qur'an to make sense of the different texts and passages about war in the Qur'an.¹⁵

Firstly, the Qur'an appears from our reading of some verses to legislate a non-confrontational attitude in relation to how Muhammad should relate to non-Muslims in the preaching of Islam. In other words, Muhammad was not permitted to use any

¹⁰ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 6.

¹¹ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 16.

¹² Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 16.

¹³ Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006), 21.

¹⁴ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2005),

1.

¹⁵ Firestone, *The Origins of Holy War*, 50.

military force to preach the message of Islam. Rather, he was commanded to openly spread the message as seen in the two passages below:

“Profess openly what you have been commanded, and turn away from the idolaters, for We are sufficient for you against the scoffers”
(Qur’an 15: 94-95).

“Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For your Lord knows best who has strayed from His Path, and who receives guidance”
(Qur’an 16:125).

Secondly, some verses in the Qur’an seem to suggest that permission was given to the Muslims to fight to defend themselves against their enemies. In other words, some verses such the two below seem to suggest that the Muslim believers could fight in self-defence.

“Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged...God is Most Powerful for their aid – those who have been unjustly expelled from their homes only because they say: “Our Lord is God”
(Qur’an 22:39-40a).

“Fight in the path of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits for God does not love transgressors” (Qur’an 2:190).

It has been suggested that the above verse was revealed after Muhammad and the small band of Muslims left Mecca for Medina to escape the persecution of the Meccan polytheists.¹⁶

According to Firestone, this revelation was the first verse of its kind that was revealed which granted permission to the Muslims to fight.¹⁷

Thirdly, some verses in the Qur’an appear to give permission to the Muslim believers to initiate a military attack against their enemies provided they observe the ancient strictures.¹⁸ It has been suggested that the ancient strictures were rules that

¹⁶ Firestone, *Origins of Holy War*, 53-54

¹⁷ Firestone, *Origins of Holy War*, 53-54

¹⁸ Firestone, *Origins of Holy War*, 56

governed how warfare was conducted in Arabia before the advent of Islam.¹⁹ Some of these stipulated that war could not be fought during certain months and also not within the vicinity of the ancient sanctuary in Mecca.²⁰ This is evident in the two passages below:

“They will ask you about fighting in the Sacred Month*Fitna* is worse than killingYou will be companions of the Fire and remain there forever” (Qur’an 2: 217).

“ Kill them wherever you find them....for *Fitna* is worse than killing... but do not fight them at the Sacred MosqueBut if they fight you kill them” (Qur’an 2: 191)

Finally, the jihad was prescribed for the Muslim community as an unconditional command to fight. Historically, this group of Muslims for whom jihad was prescribed refers to the earliest Muslim community in Medina. This group consisted of the emigrants who fled to Medina with the prophet Muhammad in 622 CE and the Helpers (Ansar) of the Muslim emigrants who were inhabitants of Medina but converted to Islam. The command to fight is inescapable in the following words in Qur’an 2: 216 below:

Fighting is commanded on you.....but if you dislike something which is good ...God knows but you know not”....(Qur’an 2:216).

“When the Sacred months are over.....kill the idolaters wherever you find them....God is a forgiving, merciful) (Qur’an 9:5).

2.2 The Traditions

It is instructive to mention that the Traditions constitute the second most important sources for studying Islamic doctrine and practice in Islam after the Qur’an itself.²¹ We should also note that the information about Jihad in the Traditions derives from the Qur’an. Usually, there are sections in the major collections of the Traditions about the Jihad and where that is not the case, there are sections that contain

¹⁹ Firestone, *Origins of Holy War*, 38-39

²⁰ Firestone, *Origins of Holy War*, 38-39

²¹ Bonner, 49

information about the *Jihad* nonetheless. We now inquire into what the Traditions teach about the *Jihad*.

The information that is in the Traditions is similar to that which we have just considered in the Qur'an above. However, we shall say two things about the Jihad from the perspective of the Traditions. Firstly, the Traditions teach that Jihad was permanently established till the Day of Judgement.²² Secondly, that the Prophet taught that the Jihad was such a virtuous duty that he said that it was comparable to fasting.²³

2.3 The Sira

The *Sira* literature contains as we noted above, information about the battles in which Muhammad fought in the last nine years of his life. This is why a large portion of the *Sira* is dedicated to the battles in which the prophet Muhammad fought, thus making it necessary for the *maghazi* literature to be written.

2.4 The *Kitab al-maghazi*

Some scholars have characterised the last ten years of Muhammad's life after he emigrated to Yathrib (Medina) from 622 CE to 632 CE as the years of military campaigns and battles. The justification for this characterisation is that these years were spent by Muhammad both leading and commissioning military campaigns against non-Muslims, whether pagans, Jews or Christians. We have already pointed to the observation by Reuven Firestone above that the prophet fought in twenty-seven battles during the last nine years of his life.

4. Closing remarks

We shall make three key observations as we seek to answer the question whether the God of the Old Testament is nasty, brutish and capricious. Firstly, there are similarities in the verses of violence in the Old Testament and the Qur'an. Secondly, it is clear from our analysis that there are verses about the Jihad that expressly command fighting against non-Muslims. Thirdly, we noted in the *maghazi* literature in the *Sira* that Muhammad personally fought in twenty-seven battles.

²² F.A. Klien, *The Religion of Islam*, (London: Curzon Press, 1906), 173.

²³ Klien, *The Religion of Islam*, 173.

We therefore conclude on the basis of the analysis of the concept of jihad in the Qur'an that it paints a picture of God as one who will authorise the extermination of innocent children, women and men. What remains to be said is whether these verses were the direct commands of Allah in the Qur'an given the fact that large parts of the Qur'an reflected important circumstances in the life of Muhammad both in Mecca and in Medina.

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Divine Violence and Salvation

Dr Martyn Smith

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Divine Violence and Salvation.

Frederick Buechner said, “All theology is autobiography” and it’s a quote I frequently use with my sixth-form students. Its sentiment is true not merely of theology, but of every field of thought. None of us can get past ourselves and I admit that everything I’ll say will, by definition, be a reflection of me. Just as your response will be a reflection of you.

Divine violence and salvation is, of course, a big topic, but if you’d have asked me about it thirty years ago when I converted I’d have given definitive, dogmatic answers. I also wouldn’t have been open to answering questions. Three decades later, another adage I put to my sixth-formers is true: you have the answers, I have the questions.

Dawkins famously noted that,

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sado-masochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.¹

In controversialist manner, I contend the only part of this quote I disagree with is, ‘in all *fiction...*’ I don’t consider the Judeo-Christian scriptures fictitious and yet, depending on the lens through which the Bible is viewed and bearing in mind the multifarious perspectives with which each reader comes to the text, I accede to Dawkins that there is an evidential basis for every one of his claims. Conversely, he isn’t interested in *Sitz im Leben* in his interpretation and his criticisms don’t resonate with Christianity per se, but with a fundamentalism unknown to the majority of the religion’s adherents. It’s simpler that way.

¹ R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London: Random House, 2006, 51.

A more nuanced perspective is provided by Schwager, a protégé of René Girard. He notes that, “The theme of God’s bloody vengeance occurs in the OT even more frequently than the problem of human violence. Approximately one thousand passages speak of Yahweh’s blazing anger, of his punishments by death and destruction, and how like a consuming fire he passes judgement, takes revenge, and threatens annihilation.”² It’s undeniable there are a plethora of instances, particularly in the Old Testament, when God used violence. A one-word answer to the question whether God is violent would, in the light of overwhelming evidence, have to be a qualified yes.

Projection and Presupposition

The atheist, Ludwig Feuerbach, provided interesting observations about the human propensity to make what it desires its ‘god’. In this Projection Theory he states, “God did not, as the Bible says, make man in His image: on the contrary man... made God in his image.”³ Feuerbach challenged theism’s view of Godself, hoping to illustrate the futility and arrogance of belief. Whilst he may have failed, he nonetheless shone a light on the human proclivity to construct a suitable, or at least palatable, God. Humans can’t escape incorporating themselves into their perception of divinity. The epistemic chasm between finite humanity and ‘their God’ is unfathomable and includes various conceptual hurdles. In an attempt to lessen this gap, Cotterell suggests that in approaching a biblical text, “...we must be aware of its historical and sociological context. It is that context which provides the ‘presupposition pool’ for the author ...that pool of knowledge, experience and understanding assumed by the author to be appropriate to the anticipated readership.”⁴ Only after taking account of this, he argues, can a reader properly engage with scripture. These ‘worldview glasses’ equip the theologian to effectively exegete and make sense of ancient material, thousands of years after it was written.

This joint issue of projection and presupposition has been demonstrated in my own life. As a young man I was violent, committing many heinous acts, for which I paid the consequences. After experiencing an epiphany on May 11th 1988 at 4am, I had a paradigm shift which led, many years later, to my PhD thesis on divine violence and the Christus Victor atonement model. Buechner’s adage again coming to pass.

² R. Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987, 55.

³ L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, New York: Dover Publications, 2008, 187.

⁴ P. Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness: The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder*, London: SPCK, 1990, 29.

Facing Violence

In my thesis, I defined violence as, "...a potentially irresistible force (whether physical, mental, spiritual or verbal) exerted to achieve a desired end."⁵ I used this model whilst exploring the possibility of violence being ascribed to God in the Bible. During my studies, I ascertained various contextual bases in which divine violence was potentially manifest. The most distinct were these series of texts, where:

- God appears as an irrational being, killing or wanting to kill without apparent reason.
- God reacts to evil deeds perpetrated by humans, and himself takes revenge.
- The wicked are punished by their deeds recoiling on themselves.
- God punishes evildoers by delivering them in his anger to other (cruel) human beings.

I believe God doesn't have to answer to human morality to 'justify' His actions and can instead do whatever He sees fit to accomplish His goals with His creation. I nonetheless re-affirm belief in God's omnibenevolence and whilst my thesis focusses on divine violence, it is built on God's central ontological characteristic of love. Simply put, God is love, but to accomplish His purposes, especially soteriological ones, He'll reluctantly use violence if no other means are available.

The Bible presents a profusion of examples of divine violence, especially, but not exclusively, in the Old Testament. I'll provide two case-studies emblematic of the overall tone – The Great Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah.⁶ In my years as a Christian I've rarely heard sermons on these stories and even when mentioned, the concept of divine violence is hardly ever alluded to. On visiting the Early Learning Centre with my 6 year-old daughter, Ellie, we bought her a model of Noah's Ark. This evoked probing questions from her about the story. We regaled her with a message of God's love and salvation in the face of tragedy, but she wasn't deterred, "But what about all the other people dad - where did they go?" Wanting to be truthful and according to my interpretation and understanding, I told her, "I am afraid they all died..." She was confused. "And what about all the little animals, dad?" I was in too deep to even think of deflecting her, "They all died too, Ellie. Even the little babies drowned..." There are, of course, a great many ways to interpret this story, from a literalistic re-stating, to a liberal expression of morals and lessons. Either way, the story is biblical and its message has to be addressed.

⁵ M. Smith, *Divine Violence and the Christus Victor Atonement Model: God's Reluctant Use of Violence for Soteriological Purposes*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016, 4.

⁶ Genesis 7:1-9:28 and Genesis 19:1-36.

Seibert did so in a forthright manner, noting that,

Understandably, most modern depictions of the story focus primarily on the survivors: Noah's family and the fortunate animals in the ark.⁷ Yet, despite cute songs, child-friendly play sets, and colorful (sic) artistic renderings of the story, "Noah's Ark" is not a happy tale of giraffes and panda bears clambering aboard a floating zoo. It is a story of catastrophic death and destruction that, incidentally, results from a divine decree. Nearly the entire population perishes because God drowns them. It is a disaster of such epic proportions that even some of Hollywood's doomsday scenarios pale in comparison.⁸

Further, according to Jantzen, it is quite simply astonishing that universal acknowledgement of God's blatant violence is not made by Christendom in its interpretation of the Flood narrative. How, she speculates, can an account of divine mercy to the few in the ark be coaxed out of a text which is rather the story of horrific, divine brutality and genocide to the many who perished? She conjectures that such a reading is comparable to a situation in which,

...someone today planned and carried out nuclear holocaust which exterminated all life on earth except for one family and their livestock: should the perpetrator of this deed be venerated for his great mercy?⁹

Depending on one's presupposition pool, some readers might consider these comments controversial and at one level they undoubtedly are. The issue, however, is whether they are *unnecessarily* polemical, or simply honest accounts of a story that is objectively troublesome, regardless of one's interpretative methodology.

⁷ Fish notes that particularly in children's versions of the Flood story a simplified version is presented either in the leaving out of details or by changing the story itself. Indeed, she argues that, "In many books, it has become a story about animals. Some books exclude everything else, even Noah. Some books leave Noah in, and leave out his family. Some leave God out, or replace Him with a radio that tells Noah about the coming Flood. Many books do not refer to a corrupt generation, and so offer no reason for the Flood." V. Fish, 'Literary Themes - Noah and the Great Flood: The Metamorphosis of the Biblical Tale, *Judaica Librarianship*, Vol 5, No. 1, Spring-Winter 1990, 74-78, 74.

⁸ E. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behaviour: Troubling Images of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009, 20-21.

⁹ G. Jantzen, *Violence to Eternity: Death and the Displacement of Beauty, Volume 2*, London: Routledge, 2009, 5.

The Youth of Today

Many have commented on whether the current generation of teenagers might be the first to be un-churched. Certainly, as a teacher for nearly twenty years I have been regularly astounded at their levels of biblical illiteracy. Only a tiny minority attend church and the rest have little or no engagement with Christianity. Anecdotally speaking it is, however, equally astounding to see how the majority of them respond to biblical stories and theology when initially encountering them. On the whole, they are fascinated. When telling my A-level students I would be speaking on Sodom and Gomorrah as part of a talk, not one of them could give even the most basic information about the story.

I therefore quoted from my thesis, to provide context and insight,

Amongst the plethora of incidents of divine violence, including those of genocide in the Old Testament, the account in Genesis 19 nonetheless makes for bizarre reading. Not least in terms of the baying mob and their desire for gang-homosexual rape, the tone then lowered even further by Lot's bewildering offer of his innocent, virgin daughters by way of placating the potential rapists. In a moment of exquisite understatement Turner describes this latter act as, "...quite shocking"¹⁰, although perhaps not quite as shocking as the fact that in his commentary Turner is entirely silent about verses 24-26 of Genesis chapter 19 where God is said to rain down sulphur from heaven. This action kills every inhabitant of Sodom, destroying even the vegetation, the whole plain and its adjoining cities; it is difficult, therefore, in the face of such blatantly aggressive divine acts to countenance the scale of Turner's theological obfuscation of divine violence in this pericope.¹¹

My students were shocked, "Sir, you're a Christian. What do you *do* with that story? How do you respond to *that* God? Do you like him sir?" I answered truthfully, "Not only do I like that God – I love Him!" This flabbergasted them. I then presented various responses Christians have typically given to such stories, to such a God. Some, I told them, simply ignore these passages, or at least their implications to divine violence. This is perhaps why postmodern culture comfortably sells models of Noah's Ark. It's safe. Others deflect from the story, performing hermeneutical gymnastics to separate God from violence. Still others re-interpret the narratives to

¹⁰ L. Turner, *Genesis, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 87.*

¹¹ Smith, *Divine Violence*, 58-59.

highlight the positive elements at the expense of the negative. Finally, some accept the stories as they stand, allowing them to express their face-value meaning. Personally, I have chosen, for good or ill, the latter model, which I perceive to be the least needing of caveat, deflection or re-interpretation. It is also the method least guilty of what C.S. Lewis called ‘chronological snobbery.’¹²

The Patron Saint of Selectivism

This brings us to a fascinating theologian, Marcion of Sinope, born in AD 85, whose influence continues to cast a shadow across the church today. Whether it realises it or not. In fact, his,

Irenic, ‘cherry-picking’ theological and hermeneutical methodology continues in regard to a priori views on Godself and violence which, whilst not so obvious today, nevertheless exist as a means of ignoring, rejecting or re-explaining biblical or theological notions deemed unpalatable to particular theological traditions and perspectives.¹³

Simply put, Marcion found what he perceived to be the ‘Hebrew god’ of the Old Testament unpalatable. This led him to a number of conclusions about the biblical text for which he provided unique ‘solutions’. By way of overview, he,

- Taught that the god of the Old Testament is not the true God
- Believed only Jesus was truly God
- Rejected the theology of the Old Testament
- Made his own church
- Was the first to establish an explicit canon
- Removed all references to the Old Testament from his ‘New Testament’

¹² A friend of Lewis’ Owen Barfield had been seeking to convert Lewis to the perspective of Anthroposophism; Lewis withstood his attempts but admitted that, “...his counterattacks destroyed forever two elements in my own thought. In the first place he made short work of what I have called my "chronological snobbery," the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also "a period," and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.” C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Orlando: Harvest Books, 1955, 207-208.

¹³ M. Smith, ‘Marcion: The Patron Saint of Selectivism’, *Churchman*, Vol 132/1, (2018), 25-34, 29.

Before any are too quick to revile Marcion, a moment should be taken to empathise with him. Anthropomorphically speaking, when appalling new information is revealed about someone we love, it can be easy to sweep the revelations aside, allowing our love to erase their sins. We can then continue loving them in a palatable form. This is the challenge for those condemning Marcion – he only did what every Christian since has done, albeit less radically. In other words, we are all Marcionites who pick and choose those passages, areas of emphasis and denominations, that meet our natural inclinations and preferences.

The individual theologian or preacher may not actively, or even consciously, pursue a Marcionite perspective; they nevertheless advocate his hermeneutic. The corollary is that regardless of awareness or ignorance of Marcion, their choices result in a similarly selective methodology. The danger for theology and Church is that neo-Marcionite rejection or reinterpretation of “unpalatable” Scriptures presents a God alien to biblical perspectives.¹⁴

Two Things

Part of my educational methodology as a Religious Education teacher is to present my students with an interpretative tool which facilitates understanding of otherwise alien issues. When approaching a new concept, they apply a simple twofold-criteria, which I call the Two Things. Firstly, they consider what issue X says about the believer’s perspective of God and His nature; secondly, what response issue X inspires in the believer. Put differently, they reflect on theology and praxeology – what does X say about Godself and a believer’s actions. For example, if an otherwise disenfranchised pupil has to consider why some Jews don’t cut the hair on their temples, they apply the Two Things. If there was a G-d who demanded its followers don’t visit the hairdresser, what does this say about His character? Likewise, what does such an instruction say about how this G-d wants His followers to act? This is, of course, a crude methodology, yet it provides an interesting preliminary insight on the character and demands of the God religious believers claim to know.

In my own studies, I also reflect on the Two Things regularly. When considering Christian soteriology, for example, what might they say about God and His desired human-response when applying them to the three, main atonement model-groupings of Penal Substitution (PSA), Moral Influence Theory (MIT) and the Christus Victor Atonement Model (CVM)? Each set of motifs are, of course, merely human interpretative constructs, produced in a particular era, by particular people, with

¹⁴ Smith, ‘Marcion’, 33.

particular presupposition pools and agendas. They nevertheless provide a means of engaging with and responding to soteriology at a broader level. Assuredly, there is more to the truth than words can convey and yet words are all we have. Is it surprising, therefore, that the juridical mind of Saint Anselm produced PSA, an atonement model that reflects a feudal society and is redolent of a court of law. Likewise, should we not expect the beautiful soul, Peter Abelard, to produce an equally beautiful and bloodless model such as MIT. Finally, shouldn't those tumultuous early centuries after the death of Christ be expected to produce CVM, The Dramatic Model, cast as an eternal cosmic battle between God and His evil nemesis, The Satan.

The fact is that all these models say more about their originators, their presupposition pools and their cultural context than about soteriology per se. Nonetheless, they are the best means we have, given the inescapable human limitations of insight and language. This postmodern principle is demonstrated by Beatrice, a donkey in a play about the holocaust within a novel by Yann Martel. She wryly observes that, "Words are cold, muddy toads trying to understand sprites dancing in a field – but they're all we have."¹⁵ Whilst the observation is useful in expressing the limitations of language, it is poignantly inconclusive as evidence against the efficacy of words, especially ones that contain metaphors; 'spoken' in this instance by a donkey to a monkey in an allegorical novel about the holocaust set on the back of a striped shirt!

All this said, for me, PSA speaks primarily of the God revealed in the Old Testament, whilst CVM better expresses the Jesus Christ revealed in the New Testament.

Conclusions...

What implications might we draw from these reflections? What are the practical and theological ramifications? In his thesis on identity, otherness and reconciliation, Miroslav Volf concludes that, "Preserving the fundamental difference between God and nonGod, the biblical tradition insists that there are things which only God may do. One of them is to use violence."¹⁶ I concur with Volf, yet he is not exempt from presupposition pool and cultural context, because no-one is. The land of his fathers, Croatia, was steeped in bloodshed and he witnessed acts of outrageous human cruelty. For those suspicious of his theological assertions, he challenges them

¹⁵ Y. Martel, *Beatrice and Virgil*, London: Canongate, 2010, 88.

¹⁶ M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, 301.

to imagine delivering a talk in a war zone on the topic: A Christian Attitude Towards Violence. Amongst the audience would be people whose homes had been plundered, burned and levelled and whose sisters and daughters had been raped and their fathers and brothers murdered. He proposes the speaker's thesis should be that since God is noncoercive love, His followers shouldn't retaliate. Such a talk, he argues, would in such a scorched land, invariably die. "And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind."¹⁷ From his presupposition pool, he challenges that of others, because no-one can escape this vicious circle of subjectivity.

From my presupposition pool, I conclude that the God of the Bible, especially but not exclusively the Old Testament, reluctantly uses violence – particularly for soteriological purposes. I assert that the ontologically loving God of the Judeo-Christian scriptures will, when no other options are available, reluctantly exert Himself via violent means to save the lost. That God is willing to act contrary to His ontological disposition is what makes the Christian Gospel *GOOD NEWS*. Further, in fact, the final, cosmic, eternal overcoming of the Satan and his evil realm could only be accomplished via such demonstrably violent means.

These final considerations and conclusions need to be tempered with a quote variously attributed to Anaïs Nin, the Talmud and Immanuel Kant. Wherever it originated, its message is vital: "We do not see things as they are, but as we are." With this in mind, I conclude that the God of the Church is too often understood and portrayed as anaemic, whilst the God of the Bible is more nuanced, earthy and interesting than many of us dare to portray Him. Dorothy Sayers was right when she observed that,

"The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore - on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him "meek and mild" and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."¹⁸

¹⁷ Volf, *Exclusion*, 304.

¹⁸ D. L. Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine*, 82

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RELATING ADVANCES IN KNOWLEDGE TO FAITH WITHIN SOCIETY

Faith, Thought, Science, Secularism and the Gospel of Jesus in relation to Mission to Africa Today

Jim Harries

Jim Harries is the chairman of the AVM (Alliance for Vulnerable Mission) that advocates for the use of indigenous languages and resources in ministry overseas. Jim has a PhD from the University of Birmingham, he has lived and worked in East Africa since 1988. He has published many missiologically related articles and eight books including 'The Godless Delusion' (2017) Contact jimoharries@gmail.com,

So, what do faith and thought, or science and tradition, have to do with mission to Africa? Actually, this article suggests; quite a lot.

The contemporary West thinks that things that happen in life can be divided into two categories, the 'natural', and the 'supernatural'. Not everyone realises that this thinking originates with 16th Century Protestant theologians (Deason 1986:176-178). They had such a high view of God, that they wanted it to be clear that he wasn't dependent on *nature* for his workings. In those days, *nature* wasn't as closely

defined as it is now (Zakai 2007:133). Even, laws of nature, were yet to be invented (2007:136). So, to have said that God is ‘supernatural’, wasn’t so restrictive on God. Nowadays, however, many ‘laws of nature’ have been discovered (or invented). As a result, Western people’s understandings of God’s role have had to be squeezed out of all the things he used to get credit for, like rainfall, childbirth, the sun going around the earth, etc. In fact, today, some people claim not to believe in the *supernatural* at all, thus apparently squeezing God right out of the picture!

When contemporary Western people look at some of the things happening in Africa today, they are amazed! This is because, until recently, no one told Africans that there is something called ‘nature’ that needs to run without intervention from God (now considered to be the ‘supernatural’). In many parts of Africa, those two categories are not kept apart. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that, for some Westerners, some African ‘exploits’ are as a result laughable. It seems incredible to them that African people should believe that *supernatural* things happen! But, hang on, many African people don’t either believe or not-believe in the *supernatural*. They don’t perceive a distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ in the first place. (While 16th Century Protestants were preaching, the ancestors of today’s African people, weren’t paying attention.)

When one realises that the distinction between natural and supernatural, is a (misleading) invention of 16th Century Protestant theologians, yet that it underlies European languages like English, one has to realise that the incredibility of African belief in the supernatural, as perceived by some, is a product of translation into English. (Many common and inherent categories used in English imply that ‘God is not involved’ in certain happenings, e.g. science, thunder, eyesight, intelligence; this makes English ‘wrong’ for Africa, where God is implicitly involved in all of the above.) If instead of hearing them through translation into English, one instead meets African people on their own terms, using their own languages, apparent reliance on magic or the supernatural disappears, and they are actually very sensible. (Not many Western people realise that, because not many Westerners relate deeply to Africans using African languages.) What has stifled Christian mission to Africa, we will suggest at an upcoming conference, is not that African people are ignorant. It is that missionaries have ignored the principle that Christian mission should always be carried out in the light of people’s own languages and worldview, not invented foreign-to-them distinctions, such as that between the natural and supernatural.

It might be noted that, it has to be officially acknowledged that African people *do* perceive the difference between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’, because to do otherwise can have one accused of being racist. Hence policies that are designed to conceal human heterogeneity within Western societies, put in place because in

secular societies no one knows what to do with such heterogeneity, act to further obscure reality on the ground in Africa.

The realisation that the distinction between natural and supernatural is a somewhat arbitrary invention of Western theologians, opens up other reformations and potential reformations in thought. Many Western people are probably well aware, that many roles that have traditionally been those of church ministers, have these days in the West been taken over by 'secular professionals'. Classic in this area, is the whole area of psychology. What is psychology? I suggest, that it is an analysis of who people are, based on the assumption that the role of God has been marginalised as largely irrelevant, which marginalisation has occurred on the basis that he can only exist in the 'supernatural' realm. What happens to psychology, if we undo the above illegitimate segregation of God from normal day-to-day life, so that God comes to have a role in the natural? Well, psychology disappears, or at least is transformed. If, for example, the source of our life, and the basis of our thinking as humans, is inherently theological (as is considered to be the case in Africa), then psychology *must* incorporate theology (or the other way around).

Psychology is one of many things invented by secularism. Yet, secularism as we know it today, is itself an invention. Dictionary.com tells me that secularism is: "a system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship." Secularism is a recently invented thing; before about 1700, the term 'secular', referred to the activities of a priest in the parish (Cavanaugh 2009:74).¹ Western secularism (the term 'secularism' is used differently in other parts of the world. I have in Africa heard it used to describe 'the practice of following prescriptions of ancestral spirits' hence I refer here specifically to 'western secularism') is clearly built on the assumption that because God is supernatural, and the supernatural is 'irrelevant', so then faith and hope in God are unnecessary vestiges that we should excise from the rest of life.

Now, let us imagine, that the peculiar prosperity of the West originates from their historic faith in Christ. These days many 'official' historians are secular, or even those who aren't, are probably required to write histories on the basis of secular assumptions. What has happened to the logic that says that 'faith in Christ' brings about thriving human community? Well, it has been hidden, and excluded from sight! On what basis? On the basis of faith in secularism. So, what if as suggested above, our faith in secularism is misplaced? Then, it may become true again, that faith in Christ has been the most important contributor to human thriving. If it has

¹ <https://www.catholic.com/qa/what-is-the-difference-between-secular-priests-and-religious-priests>

been the most important contributor to human thriving, then the most important thing the West has to give Africa, might be its faith in Christ. Once that is acknowledged, and thus massive secular interventions into Africa are discredited, Christian mission to Africa will once again (or for the first time? I don't know) be the most important way for Europe to engage with Africa.

Laws of nature were invented on the basis that some human-centred observations were previously fallacious. For example, Copernicus told us that the earth goes around the sun, and not the other way around. That realisation proved to be a foundation that led to the discovery (or invention) of lots of *laws of nature*, in the early days often based on apparent movements of heavenly bodies (e.g. see Zakai 2007:142).

Some scientists are now questioning Copernicus. I don't mean that they are questioning whether or not, on a scientific basis, the earth revolves around the sun. But, they are questioning whether actually people function scientifically in the first place. They are questioning, in other words, whether there actually is anything objective about life on which 'science' can legitimately be built. I am thinking especially of the new 'scientific' discipline known as 'cognitive science'.

While this, presumably for the sake of its own reputability, calls itself a science, many cognitive scientists, Lakoff and Johnson being a case in point, actually think that it is metaphor and not 'objectivity' that lies at the root of human understanding. People like Lakoff and Johnson, in that sense, reject heliocentrism (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). They suggest instead that much of our understanding of life comes not from an abstract engagement with the physical world around us at all, but from within our minds!²

All the above to say, that many of the reasons 'mission to Africa' had dropped off the radar screen of many Western people, are now floundering. (That also applies to Christian mission to many other parts of the so-called 'majority world'.) An upcoming conference, to be held at ANCC (All Nations Christian College) is entitled *Vulnerable Mission; what it is, and why we need it*. Vulnerable mission is the practice of Christian mission that utilises indigenous people's languages and resources. I have already mentioned languages above. If one engages with a majority world people using their own language, one bypasses many of the so-called (now

² "the sensory information that we get from the outside plays [only] a small part of what we ... interpret [in the world around us]," suggests Hogenboom

(<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180227-the-woman-whose-tumour-made-her-religion-deadly>), reflecting much contemporary research on the functioning of the mind.

(Note, as suggested above, that Hogenboom interprets this medical case from a supposedly solid 'secular' position, in which 'religion' is the variable. It is almost as if, secularism has become the God that secularists deny.)

discredited) 'enlightenment' issues, that have recently resulted in Christian mission getting bogged down.

So why use 'indigenous resources'? This is because many poor people in Africa are used to the process by which, if someone else has money (or food) to give them, then that is a person (or people) to be praised, and with whom one should always agree. (This is sometimes called the patron-client system.) Hence much of Africa has adopted European languages and education, and is apt to say 'yes' when powerful wealthy (relatively, perhaps) Western people talk to them, even if what they say wouldn't make any sense at all according to indigenous ways of thinking. The way around this block on understanding, is to encourage some Westerners who engage with Africans to not-have money to give to them. Instead, to relate to them 'normally'. The African people can then stop treating them like patrons; always to be praised and agreed with. That enables a Westerner to see where those African people are coming from, and to stop trying to push a logic that doesn't make any sense to them. What 'makes sense' then, in Africa, and this is clear from the way in which many African people (those not trapped in Islam) actually greatly value the Bible and the Christian message, is the Gospel of Jesus.

You are welcome to join us at the conference, (details overleaf) to discuss the above and related insights in more detail.

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Book Reviews

Richard S. Harvey . *Luther And the Jews –Putting right their lies*. Eugene Oregon 2017 Cascade Books 138 pp. Pb. 978.15326.1901.4.

October 2017 was celebrated as the 500th. anniversary of the date Martin Luther posted the 95 theses on the wall of the Castle Church in Wittenberg which started the Reformation. One popular Christian magazine claimed that this event was a discovery that changed the world by unleashing happiness wherever it went. For the Jews, however, it was a different story. Luther was anti-Semitic and some of his writings were reprinted by the Nazis to support their programme for annihilating the Jews of Europe. This study by a Jewish Christian writer seeks to ‘put right the lies’.

As a Christian Harvey has a great admiration for Luther but as a Jew, who can trace his ancestry back to the sixteenth century, he feels a revulsion at the thought of what Luther's writings have generated. He writes, "How could a man of such learning, with such genius, great insight into the key truths of the gospel, who loved the Bible as God's word and who had a profound experience of the grace of God, be so vitriolic and intemperate in his hostility to the Jewish people?" Even if we grant that Luther, as an Augustinian monk, had inherited the prejudices of a former generation and was a man of his time, who was embittered and frequently ill, this does not excuse his intemperate language.

The major part of the book concentrates on Luther's writings. His earlier work, 'That Jesus Christ was born a Jew' was conciliatory in tone. Its objective was to convert Jews to Christianity. In this work he stressed the hardness of heart of the Jewish people, but he also saw them as victims and urged Christians to treat them kindly because they were blood relatives of Christ. After hearing that some Moravian Christians started keeping the Jewish Sabbath as their holy day Luther wrote 'Against the Sabbatarians'. He believed that Christians were being led astray because the Old Testament law had been replaced by the Gospel of Grace and the Jews were being permanently punished for rejecting the gospel of Jesus. From this point onwards Luther became more violent in his verbal attacks. The most outstanding and hostile attack was in 'On the Jews and their Lies' written in 1543 and reprinted by the Nazis. In this work he accuses the Jews of wilfully distorting the Christological interpretation of their Bible, of murdering Christians, poisoning wells, blaspheming against Jesus and the Virgin Mary (calling Mary a 'dung heap' and Jesus the son of a whore) and using the blood of Christian children in their rituals. Because of these abuses Luther called for the destruction of Jewish books, the burning of synagogues and the expulsion of the Jews from Germany.

Luther did not waver in his attitude towards the Jews and even on his death bed was calling for them to be expelled from Germany unless they converted to Christianity.

The final chapters ask what can be done to heal the wounds caused by Luther and perpetuated by his followers. The author freely admits that in recent years Lutherans have recognised the damage that has been done in the past and have sought forgiveness from the Jewish community. He quotes numerous documents from Lutheran sources to support this. He still feels that more needs to be done, not least the removal of the Jew-pig (*Judensau*), which depicts a Jewish rabbi looking under the pig's tail and other Jews drinking from its teats, from the façade of the church where Luther preached. His final chapter imagines "What if (things had been different)?" and that Luther had affirmed the ongoing covenant between God and

the Jews , distanced himself from the anti-Semitism of the Church Fathers and had written the truth about Jewish people?

What are we to make of this book? Many of us Christians would reject the view that Christians are the new Israel replacing the Jews as God's covenant people and would answer Paul's question, " Did God reject his people?" with a resounding "No!" Also we would reject the belief that Jews are cursed because of their rejection of Jesus and denied any permanent home. But what, in the light of Jesus and Paul's teaching, about the continued keeping of the Sabbath, practising circumcision and having kosher food as many Messianic Jews continue to practice? What about the 'lies' of the Jews found in the Mishnah and Talmud which may have contributed to Luther's vitriolic outbursts? These parallel some proposed by Luther in his attack on Jews and include the accusation that Christians were worse than animals, were children of the Devil and had sex with animals. The rabbis, like Luther with the Jewish literature, called for Christian books to be destroyed and that even the best of Christians should be killed. Jesus was regarded as a bastard and a seducer and Mary a prostitute.

I commend this book as an important contribution to the assessment of Luther but it is one that should be approached critically.

Reviewed by Reg. Luhman

David Instone- Brewer *The Jesus Scandals* 2012 Oxford Monarch 191 pp. Pb.
ISBN 878-0-85721-023-5

David Instone-Brewer is one of those rare individuals who is equally at home teaching and writing at both academic and popular levels. He is a senior Research Fellow at Tyndale House in Cambridge where he specialises in Rabbinic and New Testament studies. He is also a Baptist minister and a valued member of the Victoria Institute. This book consists of a series of studies, some of which first appeared as two page articles in the *Christianity* magazine, They take the form of mini-sermons which the author suggests might be adapted and used as talks. Scandals shocked Jesus' contemporaries and continue to do so but they also confirm the truth of the biblical accounts by the 'criterion of embarrassment'. The book consists of three parts dealing with scandals relating to Jesus' life, to his friends and those arising from his teaching.

The apostle Paul wrote about the scandal of the crucifixion which David Instone-Brewer here describes in graphic detail. It was generally reserved for the worst

criminals, although the Romans crucified five hundred Jews a day during the Jewish war against Rome. It was not just the crucifixion that was scandalous. Jesus was suspected of being illegitimate and, as a consequence, would only have been able to marry an illegitimate woman. Even the miracles of Jesus and the resurrection, would have been seen as scandalous because ‘miracles’ were often regarded as scams or that the sufferings people endured were the result of sin. Jesus’ relationship with ordinary people was seen as scandalous by respectable people. He chose a motley band of disciples, unlike those of other rabbis and particularly offended by befriending tax collectors and sinners (a euphemism for prostitutes). It was not only Jesus’ contemporaries that were scandalised. Jesus was scandalised by the hypocrisy and avarice of the Jewish leaders and was not sparing in his condemnation of them. He also speaks out against child abuse, easy divorce and unfair loans.

The author is able to bring the text of the New Testament to light using insights from contemporary Roman and Jewish practice (including the Qumran community). He is able to shed light on the puzzling word *raca* (Mt.5.25-6) and gives a convincing explanation of the meaning of the ‘unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit’..

This little book is easy to read and one that I would wholeheartedly recommend.

Reviewed by Reg.Luhman.

If you have found something you have read helpful, and it is relevant to our objectives, please write a review for us! Contact the editor at drapkerry@gmail.com

Join Faith & Thought Council

We are looking for new Council Members to help direct the activities of Faith & Thought. We usually meet for Council Meetings in January, May and September, normally in London. We are particularly looking for women or men with an interest in biblical archaeology, but applications would be welcome from anyone. Our constitution requires that Council Members sign a short declaration of faith i.e.:

1. I declare my faith in Jesus Christ as my Saviour, my Lord and my God, whose atoning sacrifice is the only and all-sufficient ground of my salvation.
2. I will seek, both in life and in thought, to be ruled by the clear teaching of the Bible, believing it to be the inspired word of God.

If you are interested in applying, or know of someone who might be please contact our administrator on drapkerry@gmail.com

Open Lecture 2019 (advance notice)

Is the BIBLE 'Fake News'

Evidence from Archaeology

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church London WC2H 8EP

Saturday 18th May 2019

10:30am to 4:00pm

More details to follow at www.faithandthought.org.uk

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