IS CHRISTIAN MORALITY UNIQUE?

Part 1

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A Focus on Money, Power and Relationship

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Abstract:

Is Christian Morality Unique: Part 1? is an overview of the extent to which the three commandments of "Thou shalt not kill", "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and "Thou shalt not steal" are threaded through the writings of St Paul and the Synoptic Gospels. These writings show an attempt to try to "idealise" the commandments. People are encouraged to avoid cruelty and violence and try to improve the self-determination of others. They are challenged to avoid fornication and impurity and instead nourish their own social relationships and those of other people. They are encouraged to give to others rather than steal from them.

At the end of Part 1 of this research project whether or not these encouragements show a "unique" morality on the part of Christianity remains an open question. Common sense and the teachings of other religions provide similarities to it. It is in Part 2 of this research project that the social structures of Christianity will be analysed in order to further test and demonstrate whether or not Christian morality really is "unique".

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Acknowledgement is given to the academics who have indirectly assisted in this project especially Noel Ryan SJ (R.I.P.) who was teaching Sociology of Religion at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne in the 1980's. Fr Ryan sparked an interest in the impact that Greek Philosophy has had, on western societies up till the present time.

Thanks is also given to four potential Supervisors (including three Professors) who at various times were prepared to help in the writing of a Ph D thesis. Unfortunately on each occasion there was a failure on my part to find the required second Supervisor

with a New Testament background. In retrospect, given the subject matter of the discussion that follows here, a question could be raised as to whether or not finding a second, New Testament Supervisor around Melbourne was possible anyway.

Acknowledgement is also given to the assistance of Biblical Scholars around Melbourne. These include teachers at Melbourne University, the United Faculty of Theology, Australian Catholic University and the University of Divinity who helped over the years by providing courses that covered both Old and New Testament Scripture studies.

Preface

The following pages were started after four separate and unsuccessful attempts to find a second Supervisor for a thesis that could provide a "peer review" of a semiotic gospel analysis that is set out and and discussed on the Reality Search web sites (cf. www.gospelsociology.org) Another "thesis," titled Is there a Critique of Greek Philosophy in the Gospel? (available on these sites as well), was written and published as a response to an earlier, second Supervisor search. Some of the material in Is There a Critique of Greek Philosophy in the Gospels? has been developed further in the pages to follow. This developed material is mainly with regard to discussions on Matthew and Luke.

The question Is there a Critique of Greek Philosophy in the Gospels? was actually the trigger that gave rise to the whole Reality Search gospel analysis in the first place, quite some years ago now. The second question, being dealt with here, about the uniqueness of Christian morality, arose after the Reality Search analysis was compiled, formatted and set out in the Realty Search web sites. This same question about the uniqueness of Christian Morality also arose and was explored while doing further, post graduate gospel studies.

It is expected that in Part Two of the present research project, there will again be a reliance on the Reality Search analysis as with "Is There a Critique of Greek Philosophy in the Gospels", but in this case different examples from the analysis will be used. The ultimate aim in all these research endeavours has been to demonstrate that the semiotic Reality Search analysis of the gospels and Acts is in fact a credible one. Also, in wider contexts and social forums of the present day, this analysis should be able to help people towards a better understanding of the social structures behind differing, even conflicting societies, with their different and at times conflicting value systems.

The text of the Reality Search analysis has been based on the literal translation of Reverend Alfred Marshall, as found in The R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament (1968). Permission for the use of this literal translation on the web sites has been obtained from the British Treasury. The major text of the analysis consists of a paraphrase (done by myself) that is based on Marshall's translation and the Greek text.

Contents

Introduction

The question "Is Christian Morality Unique?" raises further questions, namely how can one find an answer to this? There are a couple of obvious possibilities here. It may be possible to take a hard look at Christian communities and the "ethics" that they appear to be based upon. Or , a research project could go back to the acknowledged source texts of Christianity, that is, the gospels. Do the the gospels put forward key values and a key approach to these that answer the question?

In a follow through here, a few further challenges come up. What about the background structure of the Christian communities themselves that are reflected through the gospel writers? And, what sort of discipline(s) would be needed to do an sociological analysis of these original gospel communities?

Inevitably the question of New Testament interpretation comes up here. If a credible type of answer is to be found to our leading question, then a "credible" approach is needed in a study of the primary source documents of Christianity. At present the dominant method of gospel interpretation is described as "Historical Critical Exegesis". [1] This approach to interpretation involves an in-depth search of the history that lies behind a particular section of text. It also involves the translation and understanding of the original wording that is used by a writer. This Historical Critical Exegetical approach or "method" as it is called, is precise, clear-cut and is described as being "scientific". It is described by the Catholic Pontifical

[1] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins,* Vol 23, n.29 (Washington: C.N.S., 1994) 500.

Biblical Commission, writing in 1993, as "the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts." [2]

But, one has to note, the Commission also describes the "method" as "diachronic" (i.e. looking at one small section of text at a time). How does this fit with a "synchronic" overview that makes a "sweep" of a whole text (and indeed a number of whole texts). The Commission points out the value and need for a synchronic approach to Scripture as well. But, inevitably there is likely to be some sort of clash of disciplines here. Also, the credibility of a synchronic approach that is taken in Scripture interpretation would be automatically undermined by the apparently higher status given by the Commission to "historical critical exegesis".

However, even with this duality in interpretation, it may be possible to isolate some values that were key to the approach taken by the first Christian, gospel-based communities? It may be possible to consider the approach early Christian writers took. These values could then be compared with those found in other world religions in order to clarify whether or not the value system of Christianity could be described as 'unique". It may in fact be found that it is not so much the "uniqueness" of these key values that characterise Christian morality after all. Rather it may be the basic social structures in which the key values are practised that mark off the Christian approach to morality as being truly "unique".

In Part One of the research project to follow, an attempt will be made to explore whether or not there are "key" values in Christianity and what sort of approach has been taken towards them. Then in Part Two there will be an exploration of what sort of basic social structures have been set out in the gospels.

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[2] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 500.

These structures form the basis from which Christians practice their morality. At the same time during this research, what will be constantly kept in mind, is the tension and credibility factors that exist amongst the various approaches to gospel interpretation.

It is proposed in Chapter One to clarify an underlying "problem" of interpretation further with some explanation of what the "historical critical method" of interpretation entails and the status given to it by Scripture Scholars. An article on the same subject will be critiqued in Chapter Two to further explain the method and the constraints its dominance imposes on other, synchronic approaches to interpretation, especially it seems, to structural analysis. The article to be considered was written by one of the most famous proponents of the historical critical exegesis method, Joseph Fitzmyer. Fitzmyer was an editor of the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary.* [3]

In the Chapters to follow despite a critique being made of the Fitzmyer's article and the method of "historical critical exegesis," this approach will be used to "isolate' key morality values in the writings of Paul, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Particular attention will be given to the writings of Paul. He wrote approximately twenty years after the life of Jesus Christ and about twenty years before the gospel of Mark was written. [4] Paul is considered to be the first Christian theologian and he largely shaped the emergence of the early church. Some consideration will be given to his influence on the writing of the synoptic gospels as well.

In Part Two of this research project, the question about the sociological structure of Christianity will be addressed. The approach used in this exploration will be the structural,

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[3] *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* R Brown, J.Fitzmyer, R. Murphy, editors (London: Chapman, 1989).

[4] Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 2005) 382-3.

synchronic method of gospel interpretation called "semiotic analysis". The analysis to be used here will help to uncover the distinctive uniqueness of the communities of the synoptic gospel writers. This semiotic analysis of the gospel texts in Part 2 will show that the basic social structure of Christianity is in fact a hybrid. As Paul himself said, it is based on both Judaism and Hellenism (cf. Eph. 2:1-19) . Christianity as such therefore contains the advantages of both types of societies. Both types of societies provide a framework for its morality. The analysis in Part 2 will also show however, that a Christian society can "tip" into the extremes of either of the societies that it is based upon. At least a positive factor about this is that given its hybrid base Christianity should have the resources to re-emerge in a more balanced way. The "lynch pin" that holds these two types of societies together is the "living authority" and 'living word" which is found in the living person of Jesus Christ.

Part 2 beyond the scope of this present Part 1, deals with a problem facing the user of semiotic analysis. This is its apparent lack of credibility amongst Scriptural scholars. Because of such a "blockage" Part Two of this research project provides critique of "historical critical exegesis" based on the philosopher Gadamer and his book *Truth and Method*. Gadamer was highly critical of an over-reliance on "method" as such, in the pursuit of truth. [5] On the one hand he barely mentions "historical critical exegesis" and Scriptural interpretation in *Truth and Method*. But he demands a wider approach to be taken in the interpretation of any text so that interpretation reaches beyond history and language. In doing this he points out that the significance of history for instance can only be determined with the passage of time. He also points out that language is "alive" and thus any one 'definitive' interpretation of wording has to be inaccurate.

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury,2013) (First published 1975).

The background of Gadamer's demand for a wider approach to interpretation will be used Part Two to justify the further exploration of the hybrid nature of Christianity. In particular this will be explored in the gospel of John. Also this further study will explore the on-going, pivotal role of the living person of Jesus Christ.

In the Part Three of this overall research project some consideration will be given to the implications of Christianity's unique structural background which determines the uniqueness of its morality. In this Implications section there will be observations of the dilemma of the Catholic Church that took place after the Vatican II Council in the 1960's. It is suggested that so much of this upset could be described as a shift that took place within the Catholic Church. It moved being a law-dominated type of society (cf. Judaism) into the more rationalised approach of Hellenism?

In the Implications Section of Part Three, the presence, status and role of Religious Life will be briefly considered. The three key social values, isolated and elaborated upon in Part One, in fact have parallels to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that are taken by members of a Religious Order. Thus, given the key roles these values have in Christianity, the vows taken by Religious place them at the very heart of the church. Religious are therefore challenged to "mirror" the role of the Church in the world. They should pose an "extreme form" of the service that the gospels challenge both Christians and indeed industry itself to take on. As regards industry. The gospel morality challenges industry to empower people's self-determination. It challenges industry to strengthen people's social support systems. It challenges industry to provide for material necessities. All these activities come under the headings of power, relationship and money. The challenge to service extends beyond the family and the extended family to 'all the world'.

PART ONE

A Literature Search Using Historical Critical Exegesis

Chapter One a Problem and a Proposal

A Problem

Reference was made in the Introduction to an on-going problem of interpretation in this research project. Diachronic and synchronic approaches to gospel interpretation involve two different disciplines. The diachronic approach requires historical research into "historical facts" and a clarification of the meaning of wording that is used in a text of the gospel. A synchronic approach on the other hand takes a wider and more literary view of a text, such as the interplay of wording and an underlying line of logic that undergirds the text.

The first approach of historical critical exegesis requires a student or article writer to cover such aspects as the historical/social situation of the original writer, the form of the text and parallels with texts elsewhere. It also involves searching out the authenticity of the text being studied - its purpose, influences from outside etc. Also again, it requires consideration of the dates and credibility of early manuscripts containing the text being studied. The diachronic approach of historical critical exegesis involves study of one small section of textat a time.

A ‘synchronic” approach to interpretation is more akin to literary appreciation. It allows the view that there is no one “correct’ interpretation of a text. Rather, the imagery, tone, rhetoric and structure of the whole all play a part in interpretation. For instance, people in the decades after the life of Jesus, would have recalled stories about him for an illiterate audience who were sitting around and possibly working with their hands. In such a situation the ‘performer’ recounting the stories was likely to be using literary devices in common use at the time. Such devices would include what is called inverted circles or “chiasms”. Chiasmus involves the arrangement of words, grammatical constructions or concepts (including stories) into what is called an inverted circle (cf. ABCDCBA). This literary ‘construction’ would allow a performer to then recall stories in a sequence that would be easier to remember. In the first century CE the use of chiasmus in story-telling was common and it was basic to re-telling the stories of Homer. These days one of the problems regarding interpretation arises if someone goes looking for chiasmus in gospel texts (and finds it). It is unlikely that the parallels of possible paragraphs would be accepted by either an examiner or editor. This approach is not considered to be “scientific” enough. Rather it is classed as “conjecture”.

In the paragraphs to follow here, four examples are given from the actual experiences when a “clash” along these lines occurred with examiners and potential editors.

1. In the description of a possible “inverted circle” which paired two paragraphs, a link was made between a donkey carrying Jesus in the gospel of Mark and Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus. In pointing out such a pair (along with a wider context of pairs) it was considered that this parallel would have been sufficient to help a performer recall the stories and also the key point that was common to both of them. However the examiner disagreed.

2. In the gospel of John, when providing the description of a possible inverted circle of water images, a parallel was made between Jesus asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water and Jesus calling out "I thirst" on the cross. Again an examiner disagreed. The examiner said that in the case of the meeting with the Samaritan woman, Jesus did not explicitly say "I thirst".

3. On another occasion when some possible inverted circles were included in a gospel analysis, the editor of a journal stated that 'Inverted circles are out of fashion and it is unlikely any editor would be interested in publishing something about them." One would have thought it important to consider whether or not inverted circles were "out of fashion" when the gospel stories were being re-told and later written down!

4. In yet another instance of an inverted circle (or chiasm) being downgraded is as follows. In the gospel of Mark, the section about the Passion of Jesus extends from Mark 10:31 to Mark 16:8. This passage contains thirteen sets of paragraph pairs with "paragraph hooks" that show responses to Jesus. The central paragraph here is about a woman who anoints the feet of Jesus. The story is a key part of the gospel story because it was Jesus' acceptance of the woman's remorse that, according to the text's construction, triggered the decision of Judas to betray Jesus. In an article written for a publication that focussed on feminist interpretations of the gospels, the inverted circle was discussed to show how it highlighted the woman's action, especially as Jesus responded to her in turn. Jesus said "Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in all the world, what this woman did will be re-told as a memorial of her." (cf. Mk 14:1-9). But the article was not accepted. The reviewers said that they liked the article but 'unfortunately' it was based on "conjecture".

Again, one has to wonder here how "out of fashion" these chiastic literary constructions were with the original story-tellers?" We know that inverted circles or "chiastic structures"

are found throughout established works of literature in vogue during the first century CE.[1] The works of Homer are an example of this. In the 2nd Century BCE Cicero wrote to his friend saying, "I'll be like Homer and put the cart before the horse." [2] One is also tempted to wonder how acceptable to present-day editors, would be the approaches that were taken to interpretation by the original gospel writers. Would Paul, the gospel writers and for that matter Jesus himself, have met the standards of today's historical critical exegetes? It appears that what fits in with the original performance of the text, in the original communities of the gospels, does not fit with present-day Biblical interpretation.

Further, one needs to ask to what extent it makes sense, that one type of discipline, namely the diachronic, Historical Critical Exegesis method of interpretation, should be used to discern the merits of a quite different, synchronic approach to the gospels. In particular this question applies to the synchronic approach of the structural analysis which is called "semiotic analysis". [3]

The biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders, in her book *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* has said that New Testament Studies needs a hermeneutic, that is, a framework for understanding.[4] It appears that as yet, there is an impasse about conflicting

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[1] Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). 97.

[2] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* ed. T. Page and W. Rouse, Trans. B. Winstedt (London: William Heineman, 1919)
http://archive.org/stream/letterstoatticus01ciceuoft/letterstoatticus01ciceuoft_djvu.txt

[3] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 504.

[4] Cf. Schneiders, Sandra. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. 2nd ed. Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1999.

approaches to the gospel text and this impasse has still not been resolved. [5]

The conflict that exists between diachronic and synchronic approaches to Scripture are not so evident in some of the definitions of these approaches (other than semiotic analysis) that are put forward by the Catholic Pontifical Commission. For instance the Commission describes "narrative criticism" as a synchronic approach to interpretation. [6] In the use of this approach, for example in Francis Moloney's book *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* an overview of the whole gospel is made according to narrative criticism. At the same time there is an allowance for detailed analysis of the text cf. historical critical exegesis. [7] A conflict in approaches is not so apparent here. Another example of a synchronic interpretation given by the Commission is "rhetorical analysis" also described by the Commission as a synchronic approach. [8] This method has been further developed by Vernon Robbins into "socio-rhetorical" criticism. [9] As with narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism also allows for a detailed "diachronic" analysis of the text. In fact socio-rhetorical criticism, is described as an extension of historical critical exegesis.[10] Thus it is less likely to be found as a contradiction to this.

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[5] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 22-23.

[6] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 503.

[7] Moloney, Francis, J. *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, evangelist* Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers 2004.

[8] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 502-3.

[9] Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984,

[10] Cf. Stephen Barton, "Historical Criticism and Social-Scientific Perspectives," *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for interpretation,* Joel Green, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Carlisle: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and The Paternoster Press, 1995).

But not all synchronic approaches described by the Commission sit so easily with historical critical exegesis. The case in point which is to be focussed upon in Part II in this research project is structural/semiotic analysis. This has a focus on the wording and "environment" of the text alone. In this sense it does not look outside the text itself. However, as the Commission points out it needs to take the general historical situation of the writers into account. [11]

Not only does semiotic analysis apparently contradict the approach of historical critical exegesis. There is also some conflict with the synchronic approach of narrative criticism. For instance an examiner who favours narrative criticism would expect the underlying story to flow through the sequence of the text from one chapter and verse into the next. But a semiotician exploring inverted circles in the structure of a text, could have the paragraphing structure of the text as as moving from the first paragraph of a section, paired with the last one, then the second paragraph paired with the second last one etc. Technically there may still be a flow-on in the overall narrative as its underlying structure "comes backwards" . But a narrative critic would have to accept the possibility of this paragraph inversion in the first place and they would not be looking for this.

Given the biases in interpretation that exist, it is not surprising therefore that a 'warning' by an editor should be given as mentioned above, that a writer is unlikely to find a publisher for material about inverted circles. These are "out of fashion". Odd but practical advice. But one asks the question. "How can a literary device in use before and after gospel stories were written down be "out of fashion?" But it seems such a question is almost irrelevant in present-day scholarship.

[11] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 504.

A Proposal

The above discussion may lead one to think that the "Historical Critical Method of Exegesis" cannot be 'trusted' to uncover every level of interpretation in the texts of the New Testament. True. But since the use of this method of interpretation in recent decades, has led to great discoveries statements about the "method" made by the Catholic Pontifical Commission in "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" need to be taken on board. The Commission says. "The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts." [12]

[12] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 500.

Chapter Two

A Critique of J. Fitzmyer's article on Historical Critical Exegesis

Joseph Fitzmyer's article "Historical Criticism: its role in biblical Interpretation and Church Life" lauds Historical Critical Exegesis. [13] But Fitzmyer's praise of the method also shows up some of the problems of this dominant method being used in the interpretation of Scripture. For instance he insists that ".the historical method is per se neutral."[14] But, as the philosopher Gadamer has pointed out in his book *Truth and Method*, any "method" of research is designed and takes place in the wider, historical and social context of a researcher.[15] It is in this wider context that research questions are formulated. Such questions will "steer" the course of the research.[16] Therefore, research and method are a sub-section and minor part of an overall historical situation. In this sense a "method" as such cannot be neutral.

In the article it appears Fitzmyer does not see "the method" in this way. On one hand he refers to presuppositions taken by those in the past who attacked Christianity using the "method." He also refers to presuppositions that are taken in the present day by scholars who use the method in a spirit of faith. But he appears to assume presuppositions can be either "taken on

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[13] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: its role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life", *Theological Studies 56* (Baltimore: Theological Studies Inc. 1989), 244-259.

[14] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: its role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life", 255.

[15] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* cf. 579.

[16] Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 86-7.

board" or deliberately avoided. He says "Because the historical critical method is per neutral, it can be used with such faith presuppositions."[17] Thus because he appears to assume presuppositions are something one can choose or reject they, and the whole cultural milieu that would influence such a choice, are thereby made secondary to the "method". Fitzmyer talks of new approaches to interpretation saying, ."None of them is a substitute for that fundamental approach (of historical critical exegesis) – nor can they be allowed to replace it." [18]

In making the above statement he again appears to overlook the fact that the overall social context in which a researcher lives and works is largely beyond his or her control. He also appears to overlook a fact about the "truths" portrayed by a society that is heavily dependent upon allegory and metaphor in its way of communicating. The texts of such a society are not likely to be understood, when the discipline of historical critical exegesis is the final arbitrator of whether or not an interpretation of such texts is valid.

It seems Fitzmyer fails to see his own "presuppositions" or rather pre-judgments in this discussion. Such a pre-judgment is his assumption that "the method" is basic and other approaches to the Scriptures are only refinements of it. To reinforce his position he uses a quote from Pope Pius XII.

> For Pius XII realised that the "spiritual sense" of Scripture, clearly intended by God could not be something other than the "literal meaning of the words, intended and expressed by the sacred writer" .... (Fitzmyer goes on) this is precisely

[17] Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism and its role in Biblical Interpretation and church Life," 255.

[18] Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism and its role in Biblical Interpretation and church Life," 255.

> what the properly oriented use of the historical critical method can and does achieve... [19]

On the one hand the quote from Pius XII does appear to support a focus on the meaning of words as stressed in historical critical exegesis. But, strictly speaking, the quote does not take into account the wide range of literary devices used by writers of Scripture. What about the use of irony when the chief priests poked fun at the "kingdom" of Jesus while their own Temple in Jerusalem, around the time of Mark's writing, was being destroyed ((Mk 15:32)? What about the hyperbole used by Jesus in Matthew cf. " If your right eye causes you to stumble pluck it out." (Mt 5:29)? What about the metaphors used in a description of hell (Mt 13:60)? What about the use of parables etc.? One also wonders about the context in which Pius XII made the statement about "the literal meaning of words".

In the context of the discussion above in Chapter One, - about rejection of semiotic analysis, it is an odd thing that a "method" that claims to be based upon historical investigation downplays the meaning of texts that were written with literary devices in common use at the time.

Fitzmyer uses the authority of the Church to support his view about the primacy of the Historical Critical Method. He refers to the writings of Pius XII and he also refers to writings of the Catholic Pontifical Biblical Commission..[20] These quoted writings of the Commission pre-date Fitzmyer's article of 1989. However a later statement was produced by the

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[19] Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism and its role in Biblical Interpretation and church Life," 256.

[20] Biblical Commission, "On the Historical Truth f the Gospels" appendix *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers* (New York: Hamsey, N.J., Paulist, 1982) 97-140.

Commission in 1993, that is, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church".

The position of the Commission in 1993 takes in a wider view of interpretation. This wider view would acknowledge that scholars have given up trying to rediscover the historical Jesus in the gospels. [21] The state,emt reflects a realisation that there is a separation between the gospel texts and what actually went on in the life of Jesus. Thus the gospels not only recount the historical life of Jesus. They are also an interpretation of it. Fitzmyer himself concedes this to some extent. He says that historical critical exegesis can assist in sorting out differences between what happened at the time of Jesus and what was going on with later writers.[22] But one also wonders here if he thinks the method is so effective in sorting out the "differences" that it can in fact reveal the historical Jesus.

Regardless, an interpretation of the life of Jesus, written towards the end of the first century CE could also include a "metaphoric" interpretation of the life of Jesus. For instance one could wonder if the gospels are setting up some sort of overall, unified "paradigm" at the back of or undergirding their texts in order to present the nature of the Kingdom of Christ. The gospels claim this has been introduced. Such an extended metaphor or "paradigm" could be set out in the underlying structure of the texts. Thus gospel structures could present, as it were, a "constitutions" for the Church as the "Kingdom" of Christ, in a way similar to that of Plato's *Republic* and the large number of city constitutions that were collected by Aristotle.[23]

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[21] Schweitzer, Albert. *Quest for the Historical Jesus,* translated by William Montgomery. Great Britain: A and C Black Ltd, 1906.

[22] Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: its role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life", 252.

[23] Aristotle, *Politics and Athenian Consitution,* edited and translated by John Warrington (London, J.M.Dent, E.P. Dutton, 1959)

To explore the possibility of a structural paradigm, one would need to rely upon other methods of interpretation of the gospels besides that of historical critical exegesis. Also, alternative method or methods would need to have more status than "only" being a refinement of the Historical Critical Method which is how Fitzmyer sees them.

As regards Fitzmyer's article "Historical Criticism: its role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life." In 1993, four years after the article's publication (1989) and as alluded to above, the Catholic Pontifical Biblical Commission published its own article on the subject - "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church." Fitzmyer then wrote a commentary on this statement. [24] It appears he was not complementary about the Commission's endorsement of structural/semiotic analysis. In fact in one of his notes he commented about semioticians "pulling a rabbit out of a hat" He contrasted their approach with the reliability of Historical Critical Exegesis. [25]

In its statement the Commission admitted there are limitations to historical critical exegesis or "the method". In this sense, it was qualifying Fitzmyer's uncritical support of it. In fact there is a peculiar parallel between the title of Fitzmyer's article "Historical Criticism: its role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life" (1989) and the title of the Commission's statement. "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church." (1993). One wonders if the Commission was deliberately qualifying Fitzmyer's article.

A few reflections about the historical background of the Church at the time may be of help here. The head of the Commission was Cardinal Ratzinger. Ratzinger was

[24] Cf. Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": text and commentary* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995)

[25] Fitzmyer *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": text and commentary*

nicknamed by sections of the Church at the time as "the Rottweiler". This was because, on behalf of Pope John Paul II, he was highly critical of tendencies within the Church to tip into the extremes of a Communist or a totalitarian type of philosophy. John Paul, who had had personal experience of the extremes of both Nazism and Communism in Poland , was hyper-sensitive about these. Apparently he was also an admirer of Gadamer's criticisms of over-reliance on "method". When Gadamer died in 2002 John Paul II sent a condolence telegram to his family.[26]

In the overall context of the Commission's statement, some of this deals with fundamentalism and it also has reference to Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics".. So there was an attempt to clarify questions about interpretation in general, beyond that of diachronic and synchronic approaches. But at least it attempted to clear up this difference.

The Commission said that the Historical Critical Exegetical method of Scriptural interpretation is, by its nature, diachronic. It said there needs to be further exploration of synchronic approaches to Scriptural interpretation. Such approaches would include narrative analysis, rhetorical analysis and structural analysis. The Commission also urged the exploration of sociological and other approaches to the gospels. [27]

In this way "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" raises the status of "synchronic" approaches to Scripture such as structural/semiotic analysis. Thus the status of such a approach to Scripture was raised from being a "refinement" of

[26] Chris Lawn, *Gadamer: a Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 17.
[27] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 504

the the historical critical method, to being a necessary and complementary approach to it.[28]

However at the same time Commission continued to endorse 'the historical critical method of exegesis" as being basic to Scriptural interpretation. To repeat the quote used above and to extend this, .

> The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts." ....."Holy Scripture.....its proper understanding not only admits the use of the method but actually requires it. [29]

With this stated position the status given to an approach such as semiotic analysis was, in a sense, qualified. In this sense there appears to be some endorsement of Fitzmyer's article of 1989, when he says that whatever "refinements" may be used, it must be the method of historical criticism that has the final say as to whether or not an interpretation of Scripture is valid [30]

The Commission warns that the findings of semiotic analysis should be in accord with a historically correct background to the text. For a semiotician this proviso may simply mean that it is necessary to use common sense here. The semiotician may not necessarily see this as "downgrading" structural/semiotic analysis. But for a historical critical exegete, who is an examiner or editor the proviso could be used to reinforce their own bias against semiotic analysis.

The problem that emerges here from the overall statement of the Commission is that a diachronic method of interpretation is

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[28] Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 504

[29] Biblical Commission ""The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,", 500.

[30] Cf. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism and its role in Biblical Interpretation and church Life," 255.

not the same as a synchronic method of interpretation. But in practice, in academic circles, the established diachronic method is still used to judge a synchronic approach to interpretation. Therefore when examiners mark papers or editors choose material for publication, the final arbitrator of the quality of an interpretation finishes up being the diachronic approach to Scripture.

This comes back to the question of allegory. To what extent is an allegorical exploration of a text accepted in academic circles? It is an irony that Plato, arguably the originator of the rationalistic approach in Western philosophy and academia, fell back himself on the use of myth in his arguments against sophists. [31] Even he found that rationalism, like the historical critical method, can only go so far.

Moving on. Whatever about the above arguments about the "best" method of approaching Scripture, in the chapters immediately to follow here, in this Part One of *Is Christianity Morality Unique?* it is mainly the historical critical method that will be used for interpretation. It will be later on, in Part II of this research project, that the basis and indeed credibility of "the Historical Critical Exegetical method" as such will be discussed at length. An alternative or at least complementary approach to interpretation will be used and assessed.

In this Part One of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* an effort will be made to try to isolate out from New Testament texts, the key moral values that were carried into the formation of early Christianity. The approach to these values that evolved in those early years will also be considered.

[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 352

Chapter Three

Paul's Isolation of Three Key Social Commandments

Historical critical exegesis will be used in the next few chapters. A major aim here is to examine the way in which Paul, the first Christian theologian "shaped the map" of Christian morality. Later this same method of interpretation will be used to explore how the synoptic writers, following on from Paul, continued on with the morality "map" that he had drafted. Paul was preaching and writing in the 50's CE, [32]. This was about twenty years after the death of Jesus and about twenty years before the gospel of Mark was written around 70 CE. It was at this time that Jerusalem and its Temple was being destroyed by the army of the Roman Empire.[33] In this Chapter Three and then in Chapters Four and Five, areas of Paul's writing on key morality issues will be singled out and considered. The overview of Paul's writing will include his letters to the Thessalonians, Philippians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans. Also Paul's challenge to the "spirit people" of Corinth and the implications of this will be given special emphasis.

As one could expect, a "map of morality" re-designed from the Judaic one by Paul the Pharisee, would put the Commandments of Moses in a central position. The Decalogue or Ten Commandments as they are known would therefore be an

[32] B.Ehrman "Paul as pastor," *Yale Bible Studies Series* (New Haven, USA: Yale university) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVatCd_1xM [accessed march 2016].

[33] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, evangelist* lx.

obvious starting point for Paul. For clarity and as a re-cap, the Ten Commandments as set out in the traditional "Penny Catechism" of the Catholic Church are as follows:

I am the Lord thy God

1. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me
2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
3. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day
4. Honour thy father and thy mother
5. Thou shalt not kill
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery
7. Thou shalt not steal
8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour
9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods [34]

The themes of "money, power and sex" are reflected by the three social commandments of "Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not kill and Thou shalt not commit adultery" (cf. Mk 10:19). Note that these commandments are numbers seven, five and six in the Catholic list above.

The themes of money, power and sex are continually touched upon in the letters of Paul but in a way that is rarely explicitly noticeable. For instance he would change around their order of sequence. Paul was avoiding legalism. Thus he could be talking about donations, self-determination and relationship or parallel topics even while these three commandments and his interpretation of them underlie his thinking. Thus on the one

[34] Plenary Council, *Catechism: Issued with Episcopal Authority for General Use in Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Catholic Truth Society, 1937) 28.

hand the three commandments are not being explicitly mentioned. But an indirect elaboration of them is being made.

The way in which these commandments are constantly, but indirectly referred to can be seen in the following six examples:

1. In the letter to the Philippians Paul warns against people who go against the commandments. He says "Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame." (Phil 3:19)[35] Metaphorically, these parallel the three key commandments mentioned above, that is, "Thou shalt not kill" (in terms of destroying their own destiny),. "Thou shalt not steal" (in terms of giving priority to their own material benefits), "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (in terms of their shameful conduct).

2. In the first section of the letter to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 1:1-2:13, Paul has pointed out the example of his own life in facing opposition, rough treatment and insults (2:2-3). An indirect reference is thus made here to "Thou shalt not kill". He also says he has avoided delusion, immorality or deception (2:3) (cf. Thou shalt not commit adultery). He has not sought flattery or money (2:5) (cf. Thou shalt not steal) .

3. In 1 Cor. 4:8 Paul said the Corinthians as "freedmen" and in such newly found freedom, social security and wealth in Corinth, were themselves 'filled, rich and like Kings'. Thus there is an echo here of their satisfactions in the area of social relationships, wealth and power. Paul then contrasts the situation and attitude of these wealthy Corinthians with the poverty, homelessness and weakness that has been deliberately taken on by the apostles of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

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[35] *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament.* Intro. Comm. Schott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

Again the themes of poverty, aloneness and powerlessness are raised.

4. In 1 Cor. 5:11 Paul lists vices of people (even so-called brothers). He says they could be "guilty of immorality or greed, or be an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber." He also says because of their bad influence these people should be avoided. Apart from idolatry (worship of other gods), it appears the vices he lists here are again, failings in the areas of sex, money or power. The first two vices of "immorality or greed" have a fairly obvious connection to the sixth and seventh commandments. The last three "vices" on the list of such 'polluted' people, that is, "reviler, drunkard or robber" actually fall into the category of the fifth commandment of "Thou shalt not kill". How so? These vices all perpetuate abuse. They include verbal abuse, self abuse through drinking or robbery with violence. As regards this latter vice, in standard translations of the text, it is not immediately obvious that it falls into the category of the fifth commandment. [36] For instance the word "robbers nowadays does not have the same connotation of violence as the word "rapacious" which is the RSV's literal translation of the Greek word used by Paul, that is, ἅρπαξ . Nor are translation of this word ἅρπαξ into "robber" as strong as Matthew's use of this same word when he talks of "ravenous wolves" (Mtt 7:15). But in the literal translation of the word, Paul the moralist map-maker implies violence here. Thus in his list of vices here, he is keeping to the three categories of social sins relating to sex, money and power. Also as in some of his other references to these commandments he changes around their order while extending the range of words used to describe them.

5. Later on in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 Paul again sketches out a shadow of the three key social sins (and implicitly their

[36] *The Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments*, RSV Catholic Edition (London: Nelson, 1966).

reversal) cf. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, not catamites, sodomites, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor (violent) robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." In such a list as with other lists, Paul also includes idolatry. He knew he needed to deal with this particular failure amongst Gentile converts at length and in particular the Corinthians. In dealing with idolatry a special focus and approach would be needed and Paul takes this in 1 Corinthians (to be discussed further). But in the above list of vices he still groups the three key social sins together

In 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Paul starts with sins against chastity ("neither the immoral,... adulterers, catamites, sodomites"). Then he lists sins related to theft and greed ("nor thieves nor the greedy"). Then he lists sins of violence, including self-abuse and abuse of others ("drunkards, revilers and the 'rapacious' cf. ἅρπαξ"). [37]

6. In his letter to the Romans Paul challenges his readers/auditors.

> You then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?
> (Rom. 2:21-23)

In this context the first question ties in with education and helping people's self-determination (cf. "Thou shalt not kill"). The link-ins with "thou shalt not steal or commit adultery" and their connection with the seventh and sixth commandments are more obvious.

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[37] C. G. Kruse, "Virtues and Vices," *Dictionary of Paul and his letters: a Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).

7. In Romans 13;9 Paul mentions the three commandments, this time explicitly, that is, "You shalt not commit adultery. You shalt not kill. You shall not steal."

8. The letter to Titus, apparently from Paul, also reflects this sort of focus. The letter begins with a salutation by Paul. However the scholar Holladay says this letter to Titus (between 70-90 CE) was probably written after Paul's death. [38] Yet even so, one finds that an "isolation" of the three social commandments is being carried forward. Thus the letter shows that character traits required by these commandments are incorporated into the range of qualities expected of a church leader....

> "he must be irreproachable, never an arrogant or hot-tempered man, nor a heavy drinker or violent, nor out to make money: but a man who is hospitable and a friend of all that is good...." (Titus: 1:7-8).

The wider context in which Paul presents this "thread" of the three key commandments will be discussed in pages to follow. According to David Horrell in his *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* even though there may not be a "story" as such in Paul's letters, there is in fact a "narrative" which appears to underpin his varied statements and arguments on specific topics.[39]" In this sense he develops his theology across his letters. This includes his moral theology and his continued focus upon the three key social commandments. .

One of the ways in which Paul develops his moral theology is to put focus on the need for moral behavior as such. He appears to put particular focus on one or other of these three

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[38] Cf. Holladay *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament:* 382-3.

[39] David G. Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul,* 2nd ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 58.

key social values in a particular letter. In his letter to the Thessalonians, arguably his first letter, he introduces the need to work at morality and the imitation of Christ.[40] In Philippians there is special emphasis on the generosity that these people showed towards himself and thus their "reversal" of the commandment "Thou shalt not steal". In Galatians Paul stresses the importance of self-determination. In this case, such a theme echoes the meaning behind "Thou shalt not kill". In 1 Corinthians the theme of the body and relationship permeates this letter (cf. "Thou shalt not commit adultery") In the case of 1 Corinthians, when he is dealing with the theme of the body, Paul also confronts the "spirit people" and their tendency towards self-worship because of the Stoic idea that they have been adopting. This is the notion that people automatically possess a "divine spark" which they carry on beyond death.[41] Paul's confrontation with this Stoic idea brings up his support of the first commandment of the Jewish Decalogue, that is, "Thou shalt not have strange Gods before me." (Exodus 20:3).

[40] Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*... 382-3.
[41] Marcus Aurelius, (Emperor of Rome 121-180) *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius*, translated by Meric Casaubon (London: J.M.Dent, 1906)

Chapter Four

Paul's Themes of Generosity, Self-Determination and Respect for the Body

a. The Introductory Letter of Thessalonians

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is possibly his first letter. He does not necessarily have a focus on one or all of the social commandments mentioned above. However this letter does put the pursuit of virtues associated with these commandments into an "end-game" context. Observing them is required for a following of Jesus and a share in the resurrection of Jesus.

It is generally agreed that this letter of 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul. [42] The letter is complete in itself although some scholars believe there was an earlier letter that has been fitted into the text and it can be found in 2:13-4:2. If such was the case the section of 1:1-2:12 as we have it now, was originally followed by 4:3 to the end of the letter. [43]. The earlier section of the letter (if it is earlier) talks about how Timothy has visited the Christian community at Thessalonica in the place of Paul. He has brought back the good news that the people there are continuing on with his teachings about faith and love (1 Thess.3:6). However it should be noted here is an omission of the word "hope". In ordinary parlance faith, hope and love are mentioned together. But it appears that Paul

[42] J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2012), 14.
[43] Earl J. Richard *First and Second Thessalonians.* Vol 11 Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 249-267

needs to deal with the lack of hope in Thessalonica in particular and he does this in the ”later” section of the letter. He crystallises his thoughts about it in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

What was the historical background of Thessalonica and its place in the Roman Empire? It was a city that cultivated its friendship with the Romans, both in the past and into the future. They remained loyal to Octavius at the battle Philippi (42 BCE) and consequently Thessalonica became a “free” city (cf. Acts 17:5-6).[44] As a Hellenistic city it therefore had a wide range of religions and cults and these included worship of the Roman Emperor. [45]

In his letter to the Christian community there, Paul praises the people for their responsiveness to his message and their goodwill (c f 2:13). At the same time, he recognises that they have been facing pressure from their neighbours, acquaintances and possibly family members, because of the new behaviour they have now adopted as Christians.[46] Paul talks of himself suffering the same sort of treatment as they have suffering from their countrymen. (2:14) [47]

The general format of 1 Thessalonians shows that Paul treats these people as being immersed in Greek culture. Thus his writing is structured on standard Greek letter-writing with a friendly greeting (1:1) and affectionate farewell (5:28). [48] He

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[44] J. Terence Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians" in *Jerome Biblical Commentary,* ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 227.

[45] Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians, 227."

[46] Edward Adams “First Century Models for Paul’s churches: Selected Scholarly Developments since Meeks” *After the first Urban Christians: The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-five Years Later* Edited by Todd Still and David Horrell (T. and T.Clark International 2009), 61

[47] *The Jerusalem Bible: New Testament,* Gen. Ed. Alexander Jones(London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967).

[48] G. H. R. Horsley and Stephen Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1977*

also shows that as the leader of the community he has a relationship with these people. He is trying to retain this bond. The scholar Terence Forestell notes that Paul uses the word "brothers" as a term of Christian endearment twenty-one times in the letter.[49] His letter to the Thessalonians also echoes writings of the time such as that of a “protreptic” letter. [50] A protreptic letter shows how new members of a Philosophical school were expected to adopt the new and specific types of behaviour associated with that school. Such a letter would also help community solidarity. [51] Usually a caring solicitude would be shown in a protreptic letter in order to help newcomers adapt and keep to the new and adopted lifestyle. [52] Thessalonians, with their Greek; culture, would have been familiar with the practice of moulding people's behaviour. Also, it was a standard practice for members of an association at the time, to clarify their commonly shared values. At the practical level this would be something essential in the practice of ancient trade. [53]

In the letter it appears that, possibly because of feedback from Timothy (Paul’s co-worker), the Thessalonian community had been having problems in particular with the Christian prohibition against fornication (4:3). Fornication was a practice that was intrinsic to some of the worship cults where there was Temple prostitution.[54] Apparently at least some

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(North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre Macquarie University, 1981), 61-63.

[49] Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians," 227.

[50] Neil Elliot and Mark Reasoner, eds. *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 68.

[51] Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, 68.

[52] Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, 69.

[53] Richard S. Ascough "A Question of Death: Paul's Community-building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Boston, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis 2004), 518.

[54] Ralph F. Wilson, "The Command and Blessing of Holy Sex (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12), j *1& 2 Thessalonians Discipleship Lessons* (Loumis, CA: JesusWalk

voices connected to the community were objecting to the prohibition against fornication and these voices were possibly coming from former friends or associates.[55] Paul's response to their objection was clear - "anyone who objects (to the prohibition against fornication) is not objecting to a human authority, but to God who gives you his Holy Spirit" (4:8).

In the Greek culture of the time (with its range of cults) it was not unusual for men to go outside a marriage for sexual experiences. In such a social context an interpretation of the Jewish commandment of "Thou shalt not commit adultery" could be understood as a prohibition against sexual intercourse with someone who was already married. Temple prostitutes did not appear to be married so it might be understood by some Thessalonians that these prostitutes were therefore available. Paul is "raising the bar" of observance of this commandment here, moving the bar of morality about (sex with married persons) to fornication (sex with unmarried people). .

In the first section of the letter 1:1-2:13 (as noted above) Paul has pointed out his own example in facing opposition, rough treatment and insults (2:2-3). He has avoided delusion, immorality or deception (2:3) and he has not sought flattery or money (2:5) . Thus as community leader he is not asking for standards of behaviour from the Thessalonians that he has not practiced himself. He has only sought their well-being (2:11-12).

The last Chapter of the letter, the passage of 4:18-18 begins with addressing a further concern which was apparently expressed by community members. What about their possible separation from loved ones who have already died? Such a separation undercut their sense of hope. In the Hellenistic background of Thessalonica there was respect shown to the

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Publications) (http://www.jesuswalk.com/thessalonians/04_sex.htm [accessed 1 April 2014].

[55] Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul,* 73.

dead. The many social structures of a Hellenistic city included associations providing for the respectful burial of its members. [56] Paul had already taught the Thessalonians about the coming of Jesus Christ in the Parousia. But people wanted to know if their lost loved ones would also rise and be reunited with themselves at such a time (4:13).

It appears here that Paul needed to develop his own thinking about the Parousia event and the letter to the Thessalonians is a step towards this process. [57] How so? The later letter of Philippians refers to a change "in our lowly body" (Phil. 3:20). In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul gives further clarification about this when he talks of a "spiritual body" that is, the inner man that undergoes daily renewal (2 Cor. 4:16) . In the letter to the Romans, possibly Paul's final letter, he talks of an inward participation in Christ's risen life as experienced in the here and now (Rom. 6:3.)[58]

In the section of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (as mentioned) possibly written before these other letters, Paul puts forward an understanding of hope that reaches beyond death and makes the difficulties of leading a Christian lifestyle worthwhile. He bases this hope on the belief that "Jesus died and rose again" (4:14). He teaches the Thessalonians that all the community members, including those who have already died but who have based their lives on the moral teachings of Jesus, will also share in his resurrection. Such a "fact" puts the Christian community members at an advantage over "other people who have no hope" (4:13), presumably because others can only rely on the benefits of belonging to the Roman Empire.

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[56] Ascough, "A Question of Death: Paul's Community-building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4;13-18," 510.
[57] Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context*, 14.
[58] F.F. Bruce, "The Epistles of Paul" *Peake's Commentary on the Bible,* ed. Matthew Black (London: T. Nelson 1962), 929.
[58] Rosemary Canavan, *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 82.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that "At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command and the Lord himself will come down from heaven" (4:16). Actually, in terms of the social background of the city, such a statement compares this coming of Jesus with the coming of the Roman Emperor. Paul is playing on this sort of coming by the Emperor. People in a Greco-Roman city were given constant reminders of the might of the Roman Empire and Emperor.[59] But Paul reminds them that despite all the benefits that friendly links with Rome could confer on the Thessalonians , these benefits were far out weighed by the advantages of connection with Jesus Christ. A relationship with Jesus, developed through the observance of the commandments ensured well-being, not only in this world, but into the next life as well.

The verse of 4:18 develops the section of 4:13-18 into a climax of hope. People are assured "we (including loved ones who have died) shall stay with the Lord for ever."(v. 18).

The imagery of Paul's mention of being "taken up in the clouds" fits in with his own Jewish background. [60] Furthermore the use of this imagery helps him to incorporate into the text, the hope of the Jewish people as well. As the commentator Bonnie Thurston notes, "Paul had a genius for choosing language that had connotations in both the Jewish and Hellenistic ideational worlds." [61] The mention of being "taken up in the clouds" also recalls Elijah, a prominent figure in Jewish tradition who was taken up to the heavens in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). Actually the gospel of Luke, written about thirty years later, continues on with such a reference to

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[59] Candida R. Moss, Joel S. Baden, "1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 in Rabbinic Perspective' in *New Testament Studies,* 58 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 199.

[60] Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon,* Vol 10, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 88.

Elijah (Luke 4:26). The inferred allusion to Elijah in 1 Thessalonians 4:18-18 is a reminder, that as far as equality is concerned, Gentile converts can enjoy the same sense of hope that Jews have enjoyed and more.

In the verse of 5:8 in the letter there is a further allusion to the Roman Empire and its benefits. Paul says "let us put on faith and love for a breastplate and the hope of salvation for a helmet" (5:8). Mention of such Roman army symbols was a further reminder to the Thessalonians that, rather than having to reject the positive aspects of Roman Empire membership, they could in fact endorse these aspects even while developing them further. (cf. "so that you are seen to be respectable by those outside the Church," 4:12).

The key point about hope in the passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is that participation in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ does not depend on whether or not one has died in a physical sense. Rather, it lies in the extent to which one has adhered to the moral lifestyle that was taught by Jesus Christ. Paul is urging people to act as Jesus acted and in this way they will share in his resurrected life beyond death.

This theme in 1 Thessalonians of needing to “work at” an identification with the morality of Christ was to be developed further in his letters to follow.

b. The Letter to the Philippians and the Theme of Generosity

According to Paul, a key element of the identity of the Philippians in Christ, relates to their understanding of the spirit of the Commandments, especially the need for material generosity. In his letter to the Philippians, instead of taking a legalistic approach, Paul puts a focus on the rationale

behind the commandments. He also warns against people who go against the commandments, saying "Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame." (Phil 3:19)[62] This echoes 'Thou shalt not kill, steal or commit adultery'

In the letter to the Philippians Paul takes a thematic approach to the commandments. In the case of this letter there is an undergirding of the seventh commandment "Thou shalt not steal." He expresses a special relationship of trust with these people (Phil 1:5-6). They had helped him financially at a time when other churches did not appear to recognize the need for this (Phil 4:15). He is grateful for their generosity. In contrast to this connection with the Philippians, when a church such as at Corinth was ready to help Paul financially, he would not accept their help(1 Cor. 10:14- 15). It appears his refusal in this case was not a matter of the money itself but the attitude with which the Corinthians were offering the money (1 Cor. 3:10). He saw an immaturity in them. Amongst this community as a group, and definitely amongst some of them as individuals, there was likely to be a misinterpretation that the money being given was on the basis of a client paying an employee. By contrast, the Philippians had shown Paul they supported him because they were concerned about his welfare. Thus he not only appreciated the money but the spirit in which it was given. In this sense their gift was a reversal of the law requirement of the commandments "Thou shalt not steal" (cf. Mark 10:19).

Paul not only expressed his gratitude to the Philippians for their financial contribution. He also he cited what could have been an already established "prose-hymn" used in Emperor worship. In such case he adapted this hymn to clarify the role of Christ cf.

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[62] *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament.* Intro. Comm. Schott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

> "but emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, ...And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."
> (Phil 2:7-8).[63]

The hymn about Christ in Philippians 2:6-11, is known as *kyrios*, which is a Hellenistic term. [64] The hymn in fact presents Christ in stark contrast to the Emperor. [65] Paul's use of the hymn in the letter shows he was making an effort to present his message in such a way that it would appeal to people and yet challenge them and their Hellenistic culture. I n his use of the hymn he actually touches upon the whole framework of meaning that related to the Emperor. He transfers this framework of meaning about the Emperor, towards an understanding of Christ.

Throughout the letter to the Philippians Paul continues to elaborate on the meaning of this transferred meaning of the hymn. He emphasizes that the true gospel invites people to adopt the mind of Christ and thereby be prepared to sacrifice their own self interest for the benefit of others. He says "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4-5). It would be in such a way that the "body of Christ", that is, the community or *ekklesia*, would be strengthened.

These points made in the letter, relate to the social background of the times. In his book, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Jerome Murphy O'Connor explains how Paul had to face, in his travels, the dangers of being on the road. There was a constant fear of bandits, despite the *pax romana* imposed by

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[63] Adela Yarbro Collins, "Psalms, Philippians 2;6-11, and the Origins of Christology," *Biblical Interpretation 11, no ¾* (Worchester: Brill, 2003), 372.
[64] Bonnie and Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon,* 85.
[65] Fitzmyer *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle* (New York: Paulist Press, c. 1993), 104.

the Roman Empire. For instance Murphy O'Connor describes the difficulty of sleeping in taverns. Here there was apparently some protection. But there was also the fear that those people beside you would take what little money you may have. Murphy O'Connor says that Paul would have realized that such people would steal, not necessarily out of malevolence, but for their own survival. He knew that values in the wider society were such that it meant people had to inflict theft and even violence on others for their own welfare. He realized there was a need to build up communities where the self-giving of members was so embedded into the tenets of the membership that there was no longer a need to exercise this sort of violence in order to survive.[66] Paul's 'map of morality' was geared towards this. Thus giving towards the material security of others was being encouraged.

Paul's interpretation of the prose-hymn in Phil 2:6-11, as with all his teaching, was strongly influenced by the vision and voice of the risen Christ that he had seen and heard on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3- 5). This incident occurred when Paul was going to Damascus to imprison Christians. Suddenly a light appeared and a voice said "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). After this vision he spent the rest of his life trying to understand and explain how it was that the Christians that he was pursuing were so intimately identified with Christ. The vision showed that Christ saw them as an extension of his own being. In the vision Christ was telling Saul that it was he Himself that Saul (renamed Paul) was persecuting.[67]

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[66] Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 101.

[67] Joseph Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 8.

Paul's letters, as in the case of the letter to the Philippians, were addressed to a smaller group of people rather than to a large number. The letters themselves were a deliberate literary composition.[68] Basically Paul was trying to influence the behavior of the people that the letters addressed. [69] In the case of the letter to the Philippians, this could be viewed as a type of family letter with strong parallels to other family letters written in the Greco-Roman culture at the time.[70] Thus, as with his letter to the Thessalonians, there is the standard, Greek format which included a greeting, thanksgiving, the body of the letter and a greetings/farewell.[71] On the one hand Paul had been raised as a Jew. But the very framework of the letters he wrote shows how he was trying to communicate with readers/auditors in the Greco-Roman culture and he was using ideas that were familiar to them.

Paul's letters, as described by Richard Earl in *The first and Second Thessalonians*, were written to influence and guide the behavior of members in a way similar to that of a Philosophical school.[72] At the time, members of such a school, were not only expected to agree with the thinking of the letter but also to adapt their behavior to it. In this context behaviour distinguished the identity of people. A protreptic letter such as this would also be encouraging newer members to stand fast in the new lifestyle they were adopting. In the case of Philippians and the concern they had shown for Paul's material welfare, they were also being encouraged and shown

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[68] J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context*, 13.
[69] Earl J. Richard, *The First and Second Thessalonians,* Vol 11, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 68.
[70] Angela Standhartinger, "Join in Imitating me" (Philippians 3:17: Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3" *New Testament Studies* 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 425.
[71] Raymond Collins "The First Letter to the Thessalonians" *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, c.1990), *772.*
[72] Richard, *The First and Second Thessalonians,* 69.

how this generosity would help them to imitate as he himself did, the self-giving of Christ.[73]

The theme of a "reversal" of the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" is focused upon in this letter but is also dealt with in the context of other issues facing this community. Therefore the themes of "Thou shalt not kill and Thou shalt not commit adultery" are also raised. In the letter to the Philippians Paul and his co-workers including Timothy who is co-writing the letter, realize that in Philippi church members form only one group of people. There are also a number of other groups in the area and some of these have also been going around preaching the gospel and/or philosophy (cf. Gal 1:6-10).[74] Paul is conscious that their interpretations of the gospel differ from his own. For instance some "preachers" to which the church at Philippi would offer hospitality, would not necessarily be preaching the gospel of Christ crucified.[75] He therefore says, "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh" (Phil 3:2) One wonders if he was referring to anyone in particular here At the time, in Corinth for example, there were itinerant Hellenistic Cynics who travelled around in a way that had similarities with what Paul was doing.[76] But some of these people were over-permissive, and even decadent in their behavior. They could have been included in this warning of Paul. A warning against people who practiced witch craft could also have been included here. There were others again who wanted to impose circumcision on Gentile believers so that the external

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[73] Margaret M. Mitchell, "1 and 2 Thessalonians," *The Cambridge Companion to Paul,* ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52.
[74] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 366.
[75] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians,* 370.
[76] F.Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 90.

law, rather than the mind of Christ, would determine their behavior (cf. Gal 6:12-13). Thus there is the reference to those who want to "mutilate the flesh". Warnings against such a range of people and the 'gospels' they preached was a theme that not only occurs in the letter to the Philippians. It also occurs in Corinthians, Galatians, Romans and other letters of Paul as well.

In his letters Paul is trying to nurture church members into the "mind of Christ" that is, the attitude of Christ towards the commandments. In this sense he "side steps" talking about the commandments directly. Rather he wants to emphasize it is in the "mind of Christ" attitude and behavior as expressed in the hymn to the Philippians (1 Phil 2:6-11) that the identity of the Christian is to be found.[77] This hymn links in a Christ-like identity with creation itself. "every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10). [78] Christians also need to believe that by the adoption of such a "mind of Christ" they will be able to "break through" into a new life as a "body of Christ", and into a new type of society. As Murphy O'Connor outlines "What Paul wanted to get across was that the society of the time was oppressive in its most basic elements, and in its very structure." [79] Paul wanted his readers/auditors to form a new type of society.

The letter to the Philippians appears to deal in particular with a reversal of the commandment "Thou shalt not steal." What about Paul's particular focus on a "reversal" of the commandments of "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery" ?

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[77] Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle,*105.
[78] Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 13.
[79] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 208.

c. Galatians and Paul's insistence on Self-determination

Paul's letter to the people of Galatia, differs markedly from his letter to the Philippians. On the one hand, he is elaborating further on his initial presentation of Christ in the *Kyrios* hymn of Philippians (Phil. 2:6-11). Also, he is addressing an explicit group of people. But in the case of the letter to the Galatians he is confronting them. There are people there who not only have views different from his own. They have also been involved in "back-biting." Paul. In Galatia, people were slipping back into the Judaic practice of circumcision and they were also trying to practice the complexities of the Judaic law. Paul confronted these people and stressed the need for self-determination. His challenge to the Galatians relates to a reversal of "Thou shalt not kill."

When this letter was written, Paul's opponents had taken explicit action to undercut not only his good standing in the community but also his leadership influence there. The church at Antioch, which was in Galatia, was included in this shift of loyalty. [80]

According to Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had been sent as delegates from Antioch to a Jerusalem Council. This Council was largely about the need or not, for Gentile converts to be circumcised. After the Council the two were sent back to Antioch. to give a report to the Church there about the decisions taken. According to Acts 15:31 the Antiochene church welcomed both Paul and Barnabas and the outcome of the Council. But the letter to Galatians, shows that Paul's relationship with the church was quite

[80] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,*158.

different from the description given in Acts.

A historical question is raised by scholars trying to work out the time the Jerusalem Council was held and the time the Galatian letter was written. Did this come before or after the Jerusalem Council? On the one hand it shows Paul's attack on people from Jerusalem including Peter the Apostle, who like others, was no longer eating with the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:11-13). This may suggest the Jerusalem Council came after the public confrontation with Peter rather than before it. If the Council did come after the confrontation and it did succeed in resolving the issue of a separation between Jewish and Gentile converts, then the letter could fit in with Luke's positive description of the Council's outcome (Acts 15:32). For instance if the Greek word *de* in Gal 2:11 were translated as "on the other hand" rather than with the word "but," this could suggest that the confrontation with Peter was before the Council took place.

However, the letter appears to actually mention the Council in Galatians 2:2 (cf. "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas"). This verse suggests that the Council was before the confrontation with Peter and others rather than after it. Also, the abrupt statement of Paul "Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you" (Gal. 3:1) also suggests the confrontation with Peter (Gal 2:11) came after the Council because they had reversed their previous behavior.

If such is the case further questions arise. For example how long after the Council did the confrontation take place and what led to the change in approach on the part of those in Galatia. Murphy O'Connor says that the Jerusalem Council was in 51CE.[81] Carl Holladay says the letters of Philippians, 1 Corinthians and Galatians were written around 54-55 and from

[81] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 349.

an Ephesian prison.[82] Fitzmyer agrees with this date.[83] But Ellis says Galatians was written late in Paul's life.[84] A discussion about the time of writing has relevance to the key point Paul was trying to make in the letter because it puts this into its historical context.

The historical context raises the question as to why were people wanting Jewish converts to eat apart from Gentile converts and why did either they, or others, want Gentile converts to be circumcised? There is mention of "certain men came from James" (Gal.2:12). These influenced Peter and even Barnabas against eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-13). Joseph Fitzmyer points out that it was not necessarily the same group of people who were agitating about eating with Gentile converts who were also insisting on the circumcision of Gentile converts. Fitzmyer also notes that Lightfoot had suggested people insisting on circumcision may have been connected to the Essenes. He notes that Lightfoot's suggestion about this group of people was made before the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts in the 1940's. These manuscripts are associated with Essenes.[85] The manuscripts (found after Lightfoot's suggestion) endorse the possibility of an Essene influence in Galatia.[86]

Murphy O'Connor provides a reason why James and his friends thought that Jewish converts eating apart from Gentile converts was not as important as obviously Paul

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[82] Carl R.Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, 382-3.

[83] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 237.

[84] Peter Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters,*(Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 174.

[85] Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* 194-5.

[86] Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," 237.

thought it was. This was because of the political background of the time. On the one hand the Temple at Jerusalem in the 50's CE may have appeared very established and busy. It was the centre of the significantly large Jewish diaspora of from four to eight million people.[87] This was arguably about 10% of the Roman Empire's population.[88] But in reality there were real insecurities for Jewish people at that time in Jerusalem in the 50's CE. For instance in 39-41 CE the Emperor Gaius ordered the legate of Syria to erect a giant statue of the Emperor as Jupiter in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. As it turned out, the Jewish King Agrippa persuaded Gaius to change his mind.[89] But there was a realization amongst Jews in general that their political position could be precarious. There could also have been a general consensus amongst Jews that a protection against such vulnerability would have been for them to "stick together." James therefore could have wanted to strengthen the identity of Christians of Jewish origin by insisting on a more exacting observance of Jewish practices and fellowship identity amongst them.[90] In any case, in the churches of Galatia and elsewhere, people would have been attending house- churches. They would have naturally gravitated towards those places where there were people with a similar background.

But Paul thought differently about this.

At the end of the letter to the Galatians he dwells on reasons why some people had been trying to impose circumcision on Gentile converts. He says it was "that they may not be

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[87] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 142.
[88] Cf. Arguably West Hunter "Jews in the Roman Empire" https://westhunt.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/jews-in-the-roman-empire/ [accessed 12 Dec 2018]
[89] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 139.
[90] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 141.

persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Gal 6:12). This implies that such people thought it was "safer" to have a Jewish identity rather than a Christian one. Why so? A threat of persecution by the Emperor Gaius was not the only political issue that could have been behind the Galatian confrontation. When Rome burned at the time of Emperor Nero in 64 CE., the blame was put on Christians. This resultant savage persecution of Christians was not to take place until 64 CE. But by 54-55 CE Nero was already in power. People were aware of his increasing savagery. Christians were becoming more aware themselves that they were only a tiny and therefore vulnerable minority. Even Gentile converts, including those in Galatia, may have thought it was safer to identify themselves as circumcised Jews. Thus they readily accepted the influence of the "Judaizers." In his own life Paul had personal experience of their fear of persecution. He had been imprisoned himself and would have been keenly aware of the possibility of having to face "the wild animals at Ephesus" as he put it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:33).

Despite possible arguments in favour of Gentile converts being circumcised, Paul insists that by undertaking circumcision Gentile converts were side-stepping the challenge of "living in Christ." They were allowing themselves to be manipulated. In the letter he talks of his own past experience in saying "to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." (Gal 2:5). This same truth of the gospel meant that Galatians would need to be prepared to face death for the gospel. As set out in the hymn to the Philippians, just as Christ was ready to accept death, so these people were challenged to die if necessary, in imitation of Christ. Such a challenge would apply to all converts within the Galatian church,, whether they be of Jewish background eating apart from Gentiles or Gentiles who were preparing for circumcision..

In both cases, Paul was opposed to what was happening in Galatia. He viewed the Eucharistic unity of eating together as being essential to the on-going self-giving that is integral to community membership in Christ. This sort of stress on the importance of self-giving within a freedom framework showed he wanted a covenant based on that of Abraham rather than the regulations of Moses. [91]

Paul challenges Gentile converts for failing to realize that if they think of themselves as being justified through circumcision and their adherence to the Jewish law, then the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been in vain (Gal 2:21). The very act of undergoing circumcision would mean they were making a statement that it is the external Jewish law that justifies them rather than their own living in the self-giving spirit of Christ (Gal 2:16). Paul recalls the faith of Abraham who was justified because of his faith in the promises of God rather than because of adherence to the law. As it was, the Mosaic "law" as Jews knew it, came about four hundred and thirty years after Abraham (Gal 3:17).. [92] Paul says this law was introduced so people would know what was wrong (cf. in particular 'thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal') But now that Christ had come, they no longer needed the detailed stipulations that had been added to the commandments over the years. In fact by the time of Paul, these stipulations had developed into a whole network of laws that Peter himself had said he could not observe (Acts 15:10).

Paul also observes that if Gentile converts adopt circumcision and what this implies, then they would also need to adopt the Jewish law in all the complexity. Paul reminds them that the

[91] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 209.
[92] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 209.

law itself, according to Scripture, is under a curse when people fail to keep the whole it (Gal 3:10).

In this situation what annoys Paul most of all is the interference and manipulation by "Judaizers" of the self-determination of the Gentile converts. The coming of Christ had given his followers a freedom and self-determination that some people were now trying to take away from them. We are reminded here of one of the three key social commandments, that is, "Thou shalt not kill." "Killing" in the wider, metaphorical sense, includes the manipulation of people to the extent that their self-determination and their "freedom" is denied to them. In the letter Paul writes of "false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus that they might bring us into bondage." (Gal 2:4). He claims that such people were trying to take away the freedom and self-determination in Christ that community members in Galatia had enjoyed.

The communal context of what was going on here was important. As Murphy O'Connor says, "freedom is a property of the community, not a possession of the individual."[93] Thus, taking away such a freedom would destroy the authenticity and identity of the community as a whole. In his criticisms about such a denial of freedom Paul avoids explicit mention of the commandment which was at issue here, that is, "Thou shalt not kill." But again, as in the letters to the Philippians, the theme of such a commandment undergirds the content and tone of the letter.

[93] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 209.

d. 1 Corinthians and Respect for the Body

If one could argue that Paul was dealing with a theme about poverty and a reversal of "Thou shalt not steal" in his letter to the Philippians, and a reversal of "Thou shalt not kill" in his letter to the Galatians, then one can pick up similarities along the same lines in his first letter to the Corinthians. Here, he deals with a theme of "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

On the other hand Paul's "family" letter-style in his letter to the Philippians" stands in contrast to the writing style he uses in the first letter to the Corinthians. He chastises the Corinthians cf. "And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?" (1 Cor.: 5:2). But at the same time, he continues in his efforts to train people into keeping the spirit of the commandments and the mindset of Christ..

In the case of the Corinthians, Paul develops a theology about the body and the implications of this for the community as a whole. He shows that respect for one's body exists behind the commandment of "Thou shalt not commit adultery". This commandment is dealing with relationship as such.

Paul had warned the Philippians against visiting preachers, and it is soon apparent in the letter to the Corinthians that some of these preachers, especially Cynics with their Greek Stoic background, had already been influencing the community in Corinth. [94] In Paul's reprimand about a man living with his father's wife he points out that even by pagan standards this behavior was unacceptable (1 Cor. 5:1). He says such a man should be expelled from the community (1 Cor. 5:13). Given that Cynics were prepared to "chuck out" social conventions and one wonders about there influence in

[94] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 303.

this matter.[95]

Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians, as in his other letters, is primarily related to the behavior of a group of people. In the case mentioned above misbehavior had been reported back to him by others. Paul used this system of "reporting back" in order to keep in touch with the communities he founded. Timothy for instance had given a more favourable report about what was going on with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:6). But with regard to the Corinthians situation reports had not been good. In the wider context and as Ronald Fung points out, the sexual morality of the society of the time was "sheer chaos." This was not only noted by Christians but even by the pagans themselves.[96] To Paul it appeared that the community in Corinth was slipping into the behavior of those who lived around them. It was therefore not surprising that sexual misconduct was being reported.

As noted above, Paul's letters as a whole are mainly about behavior rather than preaching. However in 1 Corinthians he not only deals with individual behavioral issues relating to "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He also puts this in the wider context of his own theological understanding of the "body of Christ". Two understandings of both the body of the individual and the corporate body of the group are being linked together. Again this theology about the body is ultimately based on Paul's experience of Christ's revelation to himself when he was on his way to arrest Christians at Damascus. In this experience a voice called out

> Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he

[95] Cf. David Padfield, "Corinth, Greece in the New Testament," (Zion, Illinois: Church of Christ) http://www.padfield.com/2005/corinth.html [accessed 29th May 2016].

[96] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 253.

> said, “Who are you, Lord? And he said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. (Acts 9:4)

Both the individual follower of Christ and the corporate body of his followers were identified with the person of Jesus himself.

In the outlining of his ideas about "the body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians Paul especially warns against the use of prostitutes. He points out that the Christian is part of the body of Christ, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:15). Then he uses the image of the sacred Temple to describe the body of a Christian as a temple of the Holy Spirit. He points out that by being joined to a prostitute this sacred Temple of the body is being defiled "For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.” (1 Cor. 3:17).

He also reprimands the community because of their behavior at the community meal of the Eucharist. He says “It is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.” (1 Cor. 11:20). For him, this community meal should be a time when the corporate body of Christ finds expression and it is strengthened by the "self-giving" of its members. But in Corinth there was not a genuine sharing of love here. [97] The Eucharist, as Paul recalls, is the re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26). It is therefore a time when members of the body of Christ should express and re-affirm their readiness to give of themselves for the benefit of others - even to death on a cross, cf. "you proclaim the Lord’s death.” (1 Cor. 11:26). Paul notes that in Corinth that there are some people who are bringing food to the Eucharistic service and then eating it amongst themselves rather than sharing this with all of those present. In a practical way he accosts them “What!

[97] Jerome Murphy O’Connor *Keys to First Corinthians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 226.

Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Elsewhere in the letter he again chides the wealthier members of the Corinthian community who apparently consider themselves to be superior to others, including himself, "You are held in honor but we in disrepute." (1 Cor. 4:10). . Apparently, their attitude towards himself was related to the fact that Paul had been earning a living as an artisan rather than relying on payments from the Community. Thus some of the wealthier members of the community, who were more likely to have been educated, were looking down on him (1 Cor. 4:10). Their attitude fitted in with the ideas of some philosophers of the time who despised manual labor.[98] Thus some such people were wanting to leave Christianity and its teaching in the realm of ideas only.[99] However, Paul insists that they should apply themselves to developing a mindset and a lifestyle that is based upon the giving of oneself to others. He puts himself forward as an example to imitate here (1 Cor. 4:17) – even if he is viewed by these people as a lowly artisan.[100]

Paul insists that unity in a community of Christ needs to be based on mutual respect, regardless of one's background. It appears some people would have preferred to align their thinking with that of the preacher Apollo (1Cor. 1:12) rather than Paul. Apollo in turn was strongly influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo.[101] On the other hand, as regards Apollo, it appears that with all his brilliance as an orator, he himself supported Paul's mission. His position on this appears to be reflected later in the letter to the Corinthians

[98] Murphy O'Connor *Keys to First Corinthians*, 227.
[99] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 303.
[100] Richard S. Ascough, "A Question of Death: Paul's Community – Building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18," *Journal of Biblical Literature* no 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 517.
[101] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 173.

when Paul says that Apollo was not prepared at that stage to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12). Perhaps, one could speculate, Apollo knew of the divisions within the community and he did not want people 'lining up' behind him in opposition to Paul.

In any case, in the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul insists that he has taken on the position of being poor and vulnerable deliberately because he knows that being poor and vulnerable is what is required of him. He is not asking the Corinthians to readily go without food and drink and clothes, or be beaten and not have a home. But he asks them to have the same mindset as himself. Murphy O'Connor describes this mindset as follows: "It was up to each believer to discern how in any given set of circumstances the creative, self-sacrificing love (that had been demonstrated by) Christ should be given reality."[102] In his teaching about the corporate body of Christ or *ecclesia*, Paul points out that some people have one gift and other people may have the opposite gift (1 Cor. 7:7). He reminds the Corinthians that it is all these varied gifts that are needed by the one body or community. Gifts should be directed to the benefit of all. For instance it may be one thing to have the gift of tongues. But if such a gift cannot be interpreted for the benefit of all there is little point in displaying it (1 Cor. 14:26).

Towards the end of 1 Corinthians Paul talks about the "spiritual body" Again he reiterates the need for faith in Christ, that is, the belief that by adopting a Christ-like lifestyle and mindset, one will win out in the end and share in the resurrected life of Christ "but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51. Such a resurrected life in Christ will continue on, even beyond death.

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[102] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life,* 205.

In conclusion, as regards a commandment theme undergirding the letters to the Philippians, Galatians and Corinthians and at a general level, Paul was dealing with critics who were saying that his preaching was an invitation to licence.[103] But in fact, because of his Jewish background his approach indeed focused upon the commandments. These were his 'starting point'.[104] At the same time he was involved with a re-interpretation of these. And, he was also trying to present his focus in such a way that the Gentiles with a Greek philosophic background would understand.

Paul's "re-interpretation" of the commandments relates to a comment made by the scholar Brendan Byrne. Byrne has said "Paul's problem with the law lies in its incapacity to address human sinfulness at sufficiently radical depth."[105] Thus his treatment of the law, whether it be in earlier letters or finally in Romans was an attempt to overcome this. His teaching develops and stresses a mindset of self-giving to others in order to build up a society in which people can be secure without having to steal, commit violence or betray relationships.

[103] Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters,* 201.
[104] Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters,* 4.
[105] Brendan Byrne, *Galatians and Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 181.

Chapter Five

Paul's Challenge to the "Spirit People" of Corinth

Paul's reinterpretation of key social commandments of 'Thou shalt not steal, kill or commit adultery' are threaded through his letters, for instance, as discussed above, in the letters of Philippians, Galatians and 1 Corinthians. But in the case of 1 Corinthians Paul goes further. He attempts to deal with a basic position of Greek Philosophy as expressed in the Greek Stoic idea that people are born with a "divine spark" which is identified with them. Such an idea was affecting the attitude of Corinthians towards their own body. As it was, Stoic belief in a "divine spark" was identified with the human mind. It would have been considered by a Jew to be a form a self-worship. It would conflict with the first of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt not have strange gods before me."[106]

Given the influence of Greek Stoics amongst the community at Corinth which Paul had founded, he uses the letter of 1 Corinthians to come to grips with the difference between the Christian and Stoic approaches. The "Spirit People" of Corinth had been influenced by the Stoics. Paul was attempting to educate them into the mindset of the Christian.

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[106] Plenary Council, *Catechism: Issued with Episcopal Authority for General Use in Australia,* 28.

a. Paul's Eschatological Approach to Marriage and Celibacy

For the *pneumatakoi* or 'spirit people' in the Corinthian community it was the 'divine spark' as they saw it, that really counted in a meaningful life. They considered the body to be of lesser importance. This idea tipped some of them into an attitude of despising the body and with it the institution of marriage. And/or they considered that the use of one's body with prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:16) or the practice of someone living with their father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-2) was of little importance.

The reflections to follow are an exegesis of 1 Corinthians Chapter Seven, especially 1 Cor. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:33-34. These verses show how Paul was developing a "set" of key values for the Corinthian church in relation to marriage cf. "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He was not only selecting out a key value for this commandment. He was also developing a particular type of approach to this and other commandments.

In the case of 1 Corinthians Chapter Seven he was dealing with a community that divided on the issue of marriage and celibacy.

The verses of 1 Corinthians 7:29 and 7:33-34 show that Paul was answering a question that had been included in a lost letter from the Corinthians to himself (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1). [107] He begins his answer in Chapter Seven with the statement "it is better for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1). In this way he seems to agree with a proposal, apparently put by some of the Corinthians, that suggests it would be better for

[107] A. A. Ruprecht, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest," *Dictionary of Paul and his letters: a Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).

the members of the Corinthian community that is, the *ekklesia*, to remain celibate (7:1b). [108] The verses of 7:29 and 7:33-34 appear to continue on with this agreement.

However, on the other hand, much of Chapter Seven deals with modifications to his opening statements on the subject (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2).[109] Paul talks about the rights of the husband and the rights of the wife (7:4). He says and implies several times, that married people should remain as they are (7:10).[110] Then even if, by agreement, they have times of celibacy, he puts limitations upon this (7:5). Overall, the general consensus amongst his conflicting statements appears to be that people should remain as they are. In terms of community-building, staying as they are would actually make for more stability.[111] And, in fact for Paul, a major focus of the letter and the discussion about celibacy is about unity and stability. It is on this same subject of unity that he begins the main part of the letter (1 Cor. 1:10).

Paul's modifications about celibacy show that he is aware of a likely intent on the part of some Corinthians (e.g. spirit people') to not only recommend celibacy for others but also try to impose this on the whole community. This sort of pressure would make the Corinthians church even more divided.[112]

It could be pointed out that this apparent 'plan' on the part of some such Corinthians to make such an imposition on others would not necessarily be the outcome of a Gnostic influence (a later, major problem in the church). Rather, it could have

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[108] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 102.

[109] Ruprecht, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest,"

[110] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 179.

[111] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 179.

[112] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 179.

stemmed from an eschatological error.[113] Paul had already taught the Corinthians about an eschatological future. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7- 8). Such an approach in Paul's teaching fitted in with his whole life and preaching. From the time of the appearance of the resurrected Christ to himself on the way to Damascus he had focused and continued to focus upon Christ crucified and resurrected (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18).[114] For Paul, the fact that Christ had risen from the dead meant that all those people who believe in the resurrected Christ could and eventually would, share in the same sort of existence that Christ has (1 Thess. 5:10, 1 Cor. 1:14)).[115] But he was also acutely aware that bodily existence and present awareness of one's body in the here and now would be key to such a resurrected future (1 Cor. 6:15). [116] In the wider context of his teaching and therefore in this letter in particular, he was putting a stress on the body and the need for its ordered treatment (cf. 1 Cor. 1:15-16). His discussion about celibacy was therefore in the context of restraining those people who thought they were free from concern about it (1 Cor. 6:13).

> On the one hand Paul wanted the Corinthians to be oriented towards the coming of the resurrected Christ. But he also wanted them to be aware of the bodily necessities of the present. In this sense therefore 1 Cor. 7:29 and 7:33-34 could be interpreted as emphasizing a spiritual attitude towards marriage rather than the imposition of a universal celibacy.

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[113] Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 30.

[114] Paula Gooder, "Reading Paul for the First Time with Paul Gooder. Mpg (Nottingham, England: St Johns), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBm-92NNKuga&feature=youtu.be/(accessed March 2016).

[115] Ehrman "Paul as pastor" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVatCd_1xM.

[116] Jerome Neyrey, "Order and Purity in Paul's Symbolic Universe," *Paul in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of his Letters* (Louiseville, KY: Westminister/John Knox 1990), 35.

The ambiguity of Paul's attitude towards marriage and celibacy as reflected in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 is better understood not only in the context of his teaching as a whole but also against the background of Corinth's history and geographical situation. Such a look at background also provides the context in which he grappled with the basic position of the "spirit people". As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Corinth of Paul's time was a relatively new city which had been rebuilt by the Julius Caesar in 44 CE [117] Because of its position situated on an isthmus in Achaia in Greece it enjoyed the benefits of trade between two ports and its people- largely consisted of "freed men". These "freed men" were affluent and upwardly mobile. As a city, Corinth had a Greek cultural background but it was also multicultural with many many deities worshipped there. Amongst the general population the Christian Community would have appeared relatively insignificant. The scholar Murphy O'Connor has suggested a figure of about fifty persons in the community.[118] This "church" existed as one of a number Paul had established in key urban centres around the Roman Empire.[119] But it appears Corinth had more problems than some of these other communities (e.g. at Philippi). Moreover church members were probably meeting in a number of house churches and the plurality of meeting places would have added to the likelihood of divisions amongst them. Moreover the arrival of foreign preachers going around such places would in itself have added to problems in Corinth and resulted in an undercutting of Paul's authority. Paul, with his Pharisaic background had focus upon an ordered "map" of morality. He would have seen this as an intrusion as a form of "pollution" in the community. [120] It seems he was particularly aware and sensitive to the

[117] Talbert, *Reading Corinthians,* xvi.
[118] J. Murphy O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, c.2002) 156-7.
[119] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 10.
[120] Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words:* 52.

popularity of Apollo who was apparently a more eloquent preacher than himself (1 Cor. 2:1). The Corinthians were largely Greek, and they were particularly impressed with the eloquence and "wisdom" displayed by Apollo. But we find that Paul has a satirical "dig" about their esteem for wisdom. He notes their inability to find someone amongst themselves who was "wise" enough to sort out their disputes (1 Cor. 6:5).[121]

The letter to the Corinthians is a rhetorical document with parallels to the many schools of rhetoric that existed at the time around the Empire.[122] But something distinctive about Paul's letters was that they were much longer than other letters of the time.[123] A reason for this and in the case of 1 Corinthians he was trying to move the the community towards unity and towards his own understanding of an eschatological future. At a cursory reading, of 1 Corinthians for instance, one could wonder why it took him so long (six chapters) to reach his answer to the question that the Corinthians had sent him about celibacy. Also in the lead up to Chapter 7 it may appear that he jumps from one subject to another.

But in fact the text of 1 Corinthians. is tightly argued both towards his response to the question of celibacy and to his overall response to Greek Stoicism. One of the distractions for a reader here with regard to tightness of the text could be

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[121] H. W. Attridge "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: Chapters 3-4," "Sex and Courts," *Yale Bible Studies Series* (USA, New Haven: Yale University, c. 2016).http:ark.divinity.edu.au/mod/url/view.php?id=3973/ [accessed March 2016].

[122] Ben Witherington, "Paul the Letter Writer," *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the art and persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, c. 2009), 118.

[123] Witherington, "Paul the Letter Writer," 115.

Paul's chiastic argumentation that consists of statements set out in a circular structure, that is, ABCDCBA[124] Also, at times, the one chiasm can lead into another chiastic statement and there are instances of this at the start of 1 Cor. 7:2-5 as Talbert points out.[125] But this sort of circuitous approach to the question at hand could also reflect one of Paul's attempts to avoid further alienation from these people.

In the closely structured text leading into 1 Cor. 7:27, and 1 Cor. 7:33-34 Paul, with his Pharisaic background, was setting out a cosmological "map." (as well as a moral one) which he hoped would replace that of Judaism and rather centre around the crucified and resurrected Christ.[126] This has already been discussed. In terms of morality he needed to tread a fine line between either over emphasizing idealism (such as amongst the *pneumatakoi* or "spirit people" *)* or, on the other hand, ignoring it.

In setting out his material to "move" the Corinthians towards the acceptance of his own belief system and moral "map" Paul was aware of the spiritual immaturity of these people to whom he was writing (3:1-2). He realized the structure of his letter had to go through a step by step process before reaching a discussion of eschatological celibacy. Thus the letter began in a standard way. [127] But then focus is soon put on deficiencies in the community that showed up in their divisions (1:10)

In steps towards the delicate subject of celibacy, as raised in Chapter 7, Paul reminded the Corinthians it was the crucified and resurrected Christ that united them (1:17)

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[124] Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words*, 27.
[125] Talbert,, *Reading Corinthians:* xv.
[126] Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words:,* 16
[127] Witherington, "Paul the Letter Writer," 113

Then as well as pointing to their immaturity (3:2) he addressed their lack of recognition of his own authority (1:1, 4:8-13). He reminded them that it was he himself who had begun the community and in this sense he was its "father" (4:15) In fact Chapter 7 as a whole, shows a fatherly concern for the Corinthians. This can be seen in the detail with which Paul considers the range of marriage situations and he shows an individualized approach towards the subject.

The tone of the letter in relation to the subject of celibacy was important as well. People were being invited in Ch 7 towards sharing in an eschatological attitude towards marriage. Thus in a sense on the one hand, this consisted of a hierarchical approach to marriage. But Paul said such a 'hierarchy' could be expressed in a range of ways. He proposed that not getting married at all would be better (1 Cor.7:1). But he also said this lifestyle was not meant for all (1 Cor. 7:7). He also insisted that if a person did undertake a celibate life in preference to marriage there should be a free choice on behalf of such a person (1 Cor. 7:17). It would be only through the action of God (rather than "a divine spark") that such a choice would be possible (1 Cor.7:25). Chapter 7 in 1 Corinthians is not only about the observance of commandments as such. It also explores how "the bar" of the commandments can be raised

It is in Chapter 15 that Paul goes on to deal with the priority of the First of the Ten Commandments. This is "Thou shalt not have strange gods before me." [128] The reliance of the *pneumatakoi* on their Stoic belief in a "divine spark" as being part of their own being, tipped them into an infringement of this commandment. Paul needed to

[128] Plenary Council, *Catechism: Issued with Episcopal Authority for General Use in Australia,* 28.

confront this head on.

b. 1 Corinthians 15 and the Need to Rely on the Action of God - the difference between Paul and the Greek Stoics

Paul the "first" Christian theologian, had been a Pharisee and he was imbued with the mindset and learning of a Pharisaic Jew. He realised that the book of Genesis, particularly its first chapters, had set out "a map" of belief for the Jews. Genesis, as with all Jewish teaching, underlined the "Otherness" of God and it stressed monotheism. Paul saw his own role as basing his prime position on Genesis yet at the same time outlining a "Christian" map of morality.[129] This included paramount respect for the opening Commandment "Thou shalt not have strange gods before me." (Exodus 20:3).
In his attempts to re-set a "map" of morality for the emerging Christian communities, he needed to clarify the differences between a "Christian" understanding of one's relationship with the divinity and the understanding that was accepted by the Greeks and in particular the Greek Stoics.[130] When he was writing his two letters to the church in Corinth therefore he would have realised this was an opportunity to clarify these differences.

We recall that at the time the letters were written church members in Corinth were being influenced by Cynics who were itinerant preachers. In some ways these itinerant preachers were like Paul but they were also Stoics.[131] This parallel has been referred to above. Some in the Corinthian church were adopting the same mindset of the Cynic (rather

[129] Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words,* 53.
[130] Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words:,* 50.
[131] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85-6.

than that of Christ). In particular some of them thought baptism that had imbued them with something similar to the "divine spark" that the Stoics were preaching about. Thus they were overemphasising their "spirit" at the expense of respect for their body.(1 Cor. 3:16). Such people were called *pneumatikoi* or "spirit people"

In many ways the topics in the first Corinthian letter lead into its Chapter 15 which is the second last chapter. In this sense Chapter 15 is a culmination of the whole letter. And, it acts as a summing up of Paul's dispute with the "spirit people".

In the chapter Paul points out that God, as Creator, has the freedom to change people's bodies into an incorporeal body which has some of its present physical attributes. But this is still quite different from one's present bodily existence in the world. (cf. 15:51).[132] In terms of his use of literary devices here Paul's line of reasoning in the chapter can be described as 'deliberative rhetoric'. [133] As rhetorical statement the chapter is best understood in terms of its opposition to the *pneumatikoi* or 'spirit people'. Then, in the final summary point in Chapter 15:58 about 'working,' Paul's rhetoric can also be understood in the light of his underlying theme about the importance of moral behaviour. This priority is threaded through all of Paul's correspondence. Morality has to be worked at. It is not just a "given".

Chapter 15 begins by reminding "the brothers" about the gospel that Paul had preached to them. He knew the Christian idea of the resurrection of the body had emotional appeal to pagans. [134] Here, he insists that such a "saving" can only be

[132] A Katherine Grieb, "Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead" *Scottish Journal of Theological Ltd, 56(1):49+64* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).49.
[133] Witherington, "Paul the Lette Writer," 121.
[134] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 181.

realized through the gospel that he has preached (15:2). Paul's gospel is about the self-giving of Christ crucified.

In the earlier chapters of 1 Cor., when Paul referred to the itinerant, philosopher preachers (1:17), he expressed his dismay that the Corinthians were putting himself, Apollos and Cephas on the same level as Christ. (1:12) Later in the letter, in 1 Cor. 15:2 he could pick up on this earlier observation about being compared with travelling philosophers and sophists.[135] He could again recall that he did not have the same showing of oratorical skill as did these preachers. But, as he had pointed out earlier in the letter, it is the crucifixion of the Christ that he preaches and this cannot be expressed in philosophy anyway (cf. 1:17). In the opening verses of chapter 15 people were again reminded of these points.

Paul also points out in 15:3 that the gospel he teaches is based upon the Jewish Scriptures. These Scriptures insist that when a human being is born they are of themselves nothing (in contrast to the Stoic idea).[136] A person's existence and development therefore is entirely reliant on the active power of God.[137] He goes on to remind his auditor/readers that the resurrection of Christ was in accordance with the Jewish Scriptures (15:4). His own preaching in turn has been in accord with the teaching of the first apostles who had personally witnessed Christ's resurrection (15:5-7). He also makes the point that he shares in this authority of the first apostles because he also has been an eye witness to the resurrected Christ (v.8). In making this point he harks back to the vision he had of the resurrected Christ on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:5) He also reminds his audience that they

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[135] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85-6.

[136] Michael Gorman, "Paul's Theology: A Dozen Fundamental Convictions," *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004) 144.

[137] Peter Jones, "Paul Confronts Paganism in the Church: A Case Study of First Corinthians 15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Louisville, Ky: Evangelical Theological Society, Dec. 2006), 731.

themselves have already acknowledged their belief in this resurrection of Christ (v.11),

Thus in the first eleven verses of Chapter Fifteen Paul has recalled key points already developed in the early chapters of the letter. He then goes on to point out that if, as some people are claiming (cf. v.12), there is no resurrection of the dead, then such a position cancels out the fact that Christ rose from the dead. As the scholar Katherine Grieb has pointed out, "they were sawing off the branch on which they were sitting."[138]

In the verses to follow here, Paul claims that it is through the resurrection of Christ that other people can be raised, including those Corinthians who are identified with Christ. Death itself is subjected to Christ who in turn is subject to God. Just as it has been through the power of God that Christ has been raised so also it is through the power of God that "members' of Christ (cf. members of his "cosmic" body) will be also raised (15:20-28). Contrary to the Stoic idea, people cannot assume that their soul will live on without such a saving power of God.

It is at this point in the argumentation of Chapter 15 that Paul sharply rebukes those who say 'Let us eat and drink today; tomorrow we shall be dead" (1 Cor. 15:32) The writer William Walker points out that this quote fits in with pagan Epicureans. The quote is also found in *Ecclesiastes* 8:15 and in *Isaiah* 22:13 where the mentality behind it is strongly criticized. [139] Walker suggests that this reference in Chapter 15 is actually an annotation . However while the quote may appear to break into the logic of the text, it does fit into the wider context of Paul's attack on pagan philosophy. Paul is also making the

[138] Grieb, "Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead" 62.

[139] William O Walker Jr., "1 Corinthians 15:29-34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Quarterly Association of America, Jan. 2007), 100.

graphic point here, that it is not just outsiders but actually some members of the community that have such a disrespectful attitude towards their own body. And, their attitude is affecting the whole group from within. The quotation therefore acts as an indirect accusation that such a position is a pagan position. It does not belong in a Jewish or Christian attitude. The quotation in this part of the letter also recalls the warning in 1 Cor. 5:6 about the damaging effect of yeast in dough and Paul is urging that such "yeast" should be expunged. Thus on the one hand he does not say directly in Chapter 15 that the people with this attitude should be expelled from the community, partly because he is explicitly addressing these people rather than the whole community. But the yeast image is implied here and he further recalls it with the words "Bad friends ruin the noblest people." (15:33). He then states "you should be ashamed" (15:34).

Paul's reprimands, focused around the quotation "Let us eat, drink and make merry," demonstrate that the attitude criticized here, is more than just a mistaken or "over-realised eschatology" as described by writers such as Charles Talbert.[140] Historically, an attitude of disinterest in the body and even contempt for it, eventually led to Gnosticism and this almost destroyed the Church in the first few centuries of its existence. [141]

The attitude being dissected here in the letter is the idea that one's body is in itself an impediment to the release of one's spirit. Paul saw that such a disinterest in the body within the Corinthian church, had the potential to lead to a rejection of the body altogether. As Leander Keck says:

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[140] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 9.

[141] Robert C.Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Nashville:Thomas Nelson Inc, 1975), 241-2.

> Paul shares the early Christian understanding of Spirit as eschatological gift of power; the divine presence is a gift received, not an essence released. (Rom 8:151 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2). [142]

It is here at this point in Chapter 15 Paul again draws on points already made in the earlier part of the letter. In Chapter 2 he had developed at length his understanding of the *pneuma* or "spirit" at length. It was in this chapter that he attempted to confront, as well as build on, the idea of the Stoic "divine spark."[143] His reprimand about "eat drink and make merry" in 15:33 was in that sense already preceded by his earlier clarification about spirit. In chapter 2 he explained that the *pneuma* with which people are born, is the spirit by which they know themselves (2:11). On the other hand people can only know God by the Spirit or *pneuma* of God. This Spirit of God has been given to them but it is also independent of them (2: 13). The writer Clink Tibbs points out that the grammatical shifts in the meaning of the root word *pneuma* in this text of chapter 2 is better understood against the background of a Jewish understanding of "Spirit". He says this gives a clearer understanding than the Greek understanding at the time of the letter or even in the later Trinitarian doctrine of the church.[144] The Qumran texts also have parallels here.[145]

It is demonstrated in such texts that the idea that one is free from moral restraint because the body of itself has no meaning, as expressed in 15:33, has no place in Christian thinking.

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[142] Leander E. Keck, *Paul and His Letters,* Proclamation Commentaries, 2nd ed., ed. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 103.

[143] cf. Jerome Murphy_O'Connor, *Pneumatikoi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), I:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592104.003.0010, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592104.001.0001/acprof-9780199592104-chapter-10 [accessed 20 May 2016].

[144] Clint Tibbs, "The Spirit (World) and the (Holy) Spirits amongst the Earliest," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly,* 70 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Quarterly Association of America, April 2008), 313.

[145] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* 177.

Paul needed to demonstrate further that it is moral living that identifies people with Christ and enables them to live on in Christ after death. He therefore needed to clarify what such a "living on after death" actually meant. He challenges his critics. In the text of Chapter 15, there is evidence that he knows the very wording of erosive statements on this subject that were being made by misled members of the community. In verse 35 he says "Someone may ask, "How are dead people raised?" Apparently the people asking this question were more comfortable with the idea that their soul would live on beyond death anyway because of their possession of a "divine spark." This idea of the "divine spark" also meant that one's body could be easily discarded and there would not be a need for it to be raised. Also, underneath the question of "How are dead people raised?" (v. 35) lies an uneasy truth about the present, historical situation. Even though five hundred people may have seen the resurrected Christ and even though some of these people had now died, as Paul recalled in 15:6, there was as yet little evidence that any of these deceased people had actually been "raised." [146] Paul needed to counter the lack of evidence on this matter.

In dealing with the question "How are dead people raised?" (15:35) he uses the analogy of a seed which has one appearance when planted but which then changes. He says "to each kind of seed its own body." (15:36-38) The auditors/readers of the letter could not deny changes in the appearance of a seed. Moreover this fitted in with Plato's theory of forms. It was likely they were familiar with this theory as they had a Greek philosophic background.[147] A well

[146] Grieb, "Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead," 62.

[147] cf. Michael Vlach, :"Plato's Theory of Forms" *Theological Studies* (http://www.theologicalstudies.org/resource-library/philosophy-dictionary/158-platos-theory-of-forms [accessed 28th May 2016].

known example of an ideal form for instance is the triangle which can be expressed in different ways.

In Paul's imagery of the seed he again takes the opportunity to remind people that it is only through the power of God that any change takes place at all (v.38) Thus he again insists that any transformative change comes about because of the "outside" action of God. This contrasts with the more "static" understanding of paganism and Greek thinking..[148]

Paul prepared for his metaphor of a seed being transformed in Ch 15 37-8 by a metaphor used in Chapters 3 and 4 of the letter. In Chapter Three he had introduced the metaphor of a building (3:10). On the one hand this was a reminder to the *pneumatikoi* that their physical body has similarities to a building which in turn has had a beginning. He then went on to compare the body with God's Temple (3:16) which is sacred because of God's presence in it. Such a presence is reliant on the will and action of God and it is independent of those who may have built the bricks and mortar there.[149] Later on, in Chapter 15, the earlier teaching about the sacred Temple is implied in his teaching about the transformation of the body by God. People of the time, even in Corinth, would understand the significance of this building/Temple metaphor. Pagan converts at Corinth may not have seen the Jerusalem Temple. But this was known and esteemed throughout the Empire.[150] It was also likely that Corinthians knew of Jewish belief in the sacredness of the Temple. For instance Jews were prepared to face death when the Emperor Gaius Caligula was threatening

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[148] Cf. Guido Catogero, Lawrence H. Starkey, "Eleaticism Philosophy" *Encyclopedia Brittanica* (USA: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.) https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eleaticism [accessed 24 Oct 2018].

[149] Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words:* 50.

[150] Lee I. Levine *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Massachusetts: University, 1988), 5.

to put his image in the Temple around 40 CE. [151] The Corinthian letters were likely to be written fairly soon after this event in the early 50's CE.[152] Thus Paul's allusion to the Jerusalem Temple would have been understood.

Some scholars such as William O Walker may consider that parts of Ch 15 such as vv. 29-34 to be an interpolation.[153] This includes a reference to facing "the wild animals at Ephesus" v. 33. But for Paul, as with many Jews, there is a readiness to face death when the stakes are high. In Galatians 6:13 for instance he contemptuously talked of people wanting to force circumcision on converts apparently in order to avoid being persecuted themselves. It was apparently thought at that time (before the destruction of Jerusalem) that being a Jew would be safer for them. His reference to Ephesus in 15:32 "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised.." is a contrast between his own disposition which is 'to the death' as contrasted with that of the self-satisfied disposition of the *pneumatikoi* whom he is addressing here.

In Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, Paul is dealing with the "big picture". He draws on a wide range of practices and rhetorical writing skills. As already discussed, as a Jew and especially as a Pharisee, he would be strongly influenced by the "map" of creation as set out in Genesis in which it is claimed everything has its own time and place. His own teaching on the resurrection was not rejecting this Jewish/Pharisaic urge to map the cosmos and a world view. Rather he was making a

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[151] Global Non-violent Action Database, "Gaius Caligula," (Swathmore, PA: Swathmore College) http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/jewish-peasants-block-construction-statue-gaius-caligula-galilee-40-ce [accessed 28th May 2016].

[152] B.Ehrman "Paul as pastor," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVatCd_1xM .

[153] William O Walker Jr., "1 Corinthians 15:29-34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation," 69.

new map, one that could incorporate people with a Hellenistic background.[154] At the same time this map would be based on the Commandments.

Ultimately Paul finally points out, it is God in his otherness, that determines how resurrection of the body will take place. It could be "in the twinkling of an eye" (15:52).

At the end of Chapter 15 Paul talks about "working" towards resurrection (v.58). He uses the Greek word ***ἔργῳ*** meaning "work" in the broad sense. But he also uses the word ***κόπος*** which includes the meaning of 'trouble and weariness.' Thus the word "work" includes both everyday toil for one's living and also struggles at an ethical level including the task of resisting the ideas of people such as the *pneumatikoi* .

In the overall picture of his life's work, Paul is setting out a way in which the morality of Judaism and and the philosophy of Hellenism can be incorporated into the one community. In 1 Corinthians, especially Chapter 15, he deals with a tendency amongst those of a Hellenistic-background to tip back into the Stoic idea of the "divine spark" being an inherent part of humanity irrespective of a person's morality.

This was an important topic for Paul to deal with. The later gospel writers, especially Luke, would point out the-going tendency of some Christians to tip over (or back) into an over-stress on idealism. In such a situation "Ideas" and the mind/spirit would be given priority over morality, whether this be in relation to the human body or creation itself.

Looking back over the centuries, this has been an on-going problem in Christianity and in those societies that Christianity has influenced. The tendency towards excessive ideals has re-

[154] Neyrey, *" Paul in Other Words,* 53.

emerged in different guises. At present it is often labelled with the suffix of "...ism."

Part 2 of this research project presents an extended précis of *Truth and Method,* a book written by the philosopher Gadamer. In the precis a parallel emerges to some extent between the "divine spark" of the Stoics and the spark of "genius" that was applauded by leaders of the European Enlightenment from around C18th. One is reminded that within Christianity, elements of Greek philosophy and the need to name this live on.

Chapter Six

The Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke

Continuing the Morality "Map" of Paul

a. The Gospel of Mark – 70 AD

The writings of Paul's immediate successors are an indication of the success of his eschatological teaching about morality, that is, insofar as people identify with the morality of Christ, so also will they share in his resurrected life.

There is a fairly general agreement amongst scholars that Mark's gospel was the first gospel to be written down. The year was about 70 AD when Jerusalem was under siege by the Roman Army. It was a traumatic time for the Jews and followers of Jesus alike.[155]

Apart from the time the gospel was written, there is more uncertainty about the place where it was written down. Perhaps it was Rome.[156] The text has indications of a recent fearful history of Mark's background community. This would coincide with Christian fortunes in the 60's CE. In 67 AD after the fire of Rome, Nero the Emperor blamed the Christians for the catastrophe and had them cruelly

[155] Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2008), xv.
[156] Byne, *A Costly Freedom:* xvii.

persecuted.[157] As soldiers went from house to house looking for Christians there were betrayals amongst community members. Fear was paramount and the text reflects this (cf. Mk 10:32-34). Then, around the time of writing the gospel there was disaster amongst the Jews world- wide. Stories about the Jerusalem siege and destruction of the Temple and its whole system of worship would have circulated. Some of the scenes of this disaster appear to be described in the text of Mark's gospel. (Mk 13:1).
In the wider context of the writing of Mark's gospel, stories from the life of Jesus had been talked about during the nearly forty year period between the life of Jesus and the writing down of the gospel (ca. 33-70 AD). For the purpose of re-telling these stories, they would have been compiled and edited at a verbal level. As with other story-telling they would have been re-told and "performed" in house churches.[158] Mark would have been able to work from such a story base.

As a follow-on from our previous discussion of Paul's isolation of three key social commandments in his teaching, the question can be raised. Was there a section or sections in Mark's gospel where these three social commandments are also isolated out and Mark continues on with Paul's "eschatological" interpretation of them? To recall, the three commandments are 'Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal?' (These are numbers five, six and seven in Traditional Catholicism).[159]

Other factors would also be in play here. For instance in the case of Paul's teaching as in First Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor.3:10), he puts himself forward as a model of morality. In

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[157] Cf. Moloney, Francis, J. *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, evangelist* Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers 2004, 9.
[158] Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance* Biblical Performance Criticism 3 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).
[159] Plenary Council, *Catechism:* 28.

the case of Mark, as one would expect, Jesus himself is put forward as the model of morality cf. “come follow me” in Mark 10:21.

This leadership challenge by Jesus in Chapter 10 needs consideration. Consider the earlier context of this challenge in Mark 9:2-8. The section when Jesus takes his leadership team of disciples, Peter, James and John up a mountain. Here Jesus is transformed and his garments become “white as snow” (v. 3). Jesus appears to be speaking to Moses who gave the law to the Jews and Elijah the prophet who went beyond Judaism as when he provided for a non-Jewish widow (Lk.. 4:25).

When Jesus was being transformed on the mount – with his garment “white as snow” there was a voice from heaven identifying him “This is my beloved Son.” (v. 7). After this, in the text, Jesus and the disciples come down from the mountain. Then they are met by another father and son (9:17-18). There is a contrast here. The son here was possessed by a demon (v. 18). The disciples were trying to get rid of the demon while the father looked on helplessly. Jesus intervenes and banishes the spirit. The text then goes on to talk about the situation of children in general (v. 36).. The need for a stable family background is stressed (10:2-16) as also the need for good example (v. 42).

It is in this setting that Jesus points out it is children who have a leadership role in the “kingdom of God”. Thus he says “Unless you become as little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (10:15). Mark’s introduction of “the child” image here, as a model of morality, appears to be a new element to Paul’s teaching. But we still find Paul’s approach is being developed.

Next in Mark’s Chapter 10, a man comes forward wanting to follow Jesus. At first Jesus tells him to keep the

commandments and here we are given an echo of Paul in Romans when he explicitly mentions the three key social commandments (Rom. 13:9) In Mark 10 Jesus says

> You know the commandments: Do not kill, Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother.
> (Mk 10:19)

The man says he has kept the commandments from his youth. (Mk 10:20) The text then says that Jesus looked at the man with love (v.21). Then he challenged him "Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me." (v. 21). As it turns out in the story, the man was quite wealthy. He did not want to take up this invitation and he went away sad (v. 22).

If we analyze out the invitation given by Jesus here it not only appears to be a continuation but also development of the approach of Paul. The man is asked to sell what he has and give the money to the poor. In this sense this is a "reversal" of the commandment "Thou shalt not steal." At the practical level, if the man has no possessions then he is not in a position to set up a household and family. Thus there is an echo here of Paul's teaching here about optional celibacy in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7. Also without being married the man would be a step further away from the likelihood of falling into adultery (cf. "Thou shalt not commit adultery."(v. 19)) Jesus invites the man to "come follow me." (v. 21). In such case the man would be devoting his whole life, like Jesus, to the betterment of others. He would be helping them towards their own self-determination. In that sense this is a call to a lifestyle that is the opposite of "Thou shalt not kill" (cf. v. 19).

Such a "reversal" of the three commandments, turns the negative prohibition of the commandments into a positive

lifestyle that is centred around the following of Jesus and towards an identification with him. Thus in the case of the three commandments which Paul had consistently isolated and moved towards "reversing", we find that Mark the first gospel writer, is taking up the same theme and developing it further.

Historically speaking, we can probably assume that Jesus actually did say something on these lines to a man who wanted to do morally better in his life. Yet the line between leaving "everything" and what actually happened in the life of the early apostles is not quite so clear. In 1 Cor. 9:4-6 Paul refers to the custom of the apostles who took their wives with them on their travels. Only he and Barnabas were exceptions to this practice. Also, presumably the apostles had children. One imagines that responsibility towards children would not allow the first disciples to sell absolutely everything they owned. For instance we read of Jesus going into the house of Simon's mother-in-law. (Mk 1:29-31). We could wonder to what extent Simon Peter was connected to the ownership of this house? Also there is an implied mention of property at Bethsaida, the township of Philip, Andrew and Peter (Jn. 1:44). Jesus and his followers would go there for a retreat (cf. Mk 6:45).

It would appear that over the forty year interim period between the life of Jesus and the writing of the gospel, the invitation of Jesus to follow him had become more crystallized. There were now followers of Jesus who did not have possessions, a home and family or worldly power because they had committed themselves to a following of Christ. There is a reference in Acts to a ceremony in the Temple when there were people taking a "vow" (Acts 21:23). As it turned out this ceremony "blew up" when Jews accused Paul of taking a pagan into the Temple for the ceremony (he didn't!) (Acts 21:28). Secular authorities had to intervene on this occasion to save Paul. But the reference to the taking of

a vow suggests that commitment to a following of Christ was becoming more formalized .

Yet the choice of such a lifestyle remains the response to an invitation. It follows the pattern set out by Paul who had insisted that decisions on the lines of lifelong celibacy would need to be at the instigation of the Holy Spirit. This insistence in 1 Cor. 7 on free choice, parallels Paul's conditions set out in II Corinthians relating to donations. When he is asking people to help the church elsewhere in 2 Cor. 9:5 he insists that this donation is optional.

In the text of Mark, the call to follow Jesus in an 'idealized' way also remains an invitation and an option.

In the setting of the invitation by Jesus in Mark 10 the theme of "the child" is continued. When the disciples ask Jesus about their own status, when they say they have indeed followed him, Jesus uses the term "children" to address them (Mk 10:24). In the gospels there are more such references to "the child" as a model of morality, for example Mt. 5:9, Mt. 18:2-5, Mt. 19:13-15, Lk. 9:46-48, Lk. 18:15-17 etc. Also, at the beginning of both Matthew and Luke's gospels a whole introductory section is devoted to the story of Jesus as a child.

Why the emphasis on "the child"? One point that could be raised here is that as compared with the three key social commandments and the invitation to the (young?) man in Mark Ch. 10, the child is without possessions, a sex life and/or physical power. In a more modern terminology the child in this sense is without money, power or sex, arguably the three key causes of social problems. Mark sets out a ground work for the exercise of a "reversal" of the three key social commandments and "prohibitions". This is used as a springboard for Matthew and Luke.

b. The Gospel of Matthew:

An Exegesis of Mt 5:17-20 and 10: 5-15

The Gospel of Matthew was written from the basis of a Jewish community around 85 CE.[160] It appears to continue on with the focus of Paul on three key social commandments and it develops Paul's approach to these even further.

The following historical critical exegesis of parts of chapters five and ten in Matthew's gospel is largely based on a chapter already published in the on-line book *Is There a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospels?*[161]. However the material is relevant to this discussion about Christian morality as well.

Both the passages of Mt 5:17-20 and 10:5-15 have an anomaly in them. In the Mt. 5 Jesus talks about the need for a strict observance of the commandments cf. "not one jot or tittle" (to be broken) (Mt. 5:18). But a closer look at his teaching here shows there is a strong stress on attitude rather than observance as such. Thus on a first look it looks as though his teaching is aligned with the meticulous observance taught by the Pharisees. But there is something extra and different here.

A second anomaly to be discussed later is that of the sending by Jesus of his twelve disciples to prepare the way for his own mission. Jesus tells the disciples they are only to go to "the lost house of Israel", presumably Jews (Mt. 10:5). But a closer look at the context of this missionary outreach shows

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[160] Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Collegeville, Minn. Liturgical Press, c. 1991), *22.*

[161] Michelle Nailon, *Is there a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospels?* (Melbourne: Project Employment, 2016)

that almost half of the inner circle of Jesus, that is, the twelve disciples, had been heavily involved with the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee. This geographical area was also where Jesus was to cross back and forth across the sea. Because of the social connections with the fishing industry, the industry itself would be the base where the disciples were preparing a "cradle community" The anomaly here is that it appears on the surface that the "cradle community" prepared by the twelve would be based on Jewish membership. True. But it would also be and arguably would be mainly based on the socio-economic network that was operating in a particular industry. In this sense the community so formed was based on a a secular context rather than a Jewish one.

Exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20

To return to Matthew Chapter 5. The point at issue here is observance of "the law". The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 in fact provide a summary of the tension that law observance was causing for the community of Matthew. Jesus is saying that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them (Mt. 5:17). This stated position is a warning to people (such as Jewish scribes) who may be teaching what Jesus would have considered to be a wrong approach to the commandments. Historically, teaching the commandments was a work of the scribes.[162] But Jesus warns in the gospel that his own approach to the commandments differs from that of the scribes and Pharisees. The same warning applied in the time of Matthew. The Pharisees in particular were taking on the role of leadership in the Jewish world and the scribes were involved here.[163]

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[162] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 189.

[163] Ulrich Luz *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew,* J. Bradford Robinson, trans.(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

Scholars such as Francis Moloney say the gospel of Matthew was written between 80-90 CE.[164] Recall the Temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 CE and the remnants of Jewish leadership would have fled to places such as Antioch where there was a large community of Jews. It is thought Matthew's gospel was written in the same locality. [165] Matthew's background community therefore would have had a large membership of Jewish Christians.[166] Who were the Jewish Christians?

At the time of Jesus the Jews had aligned themselves with a range of sub-groups. For instance there were the Herodians, the Essenes, the Sadducees, the priestly caste, the Zealots and so on. Such people would have thought that their base identity was Jewish. Thus they were Jews who belonged to this or that sub-group for example Jewish Zealots. At the time of Matthew, members of his community were also likely to think the same way – despite the efforts of Paul to take a different approach, for example with regards to circumcision. In any case, for many Jewish Christian converts they would have already been circumcised so this would not be an issue for them. They could still think themselves as being Jewish first of all.

There were some advantages to having a Jewish background when trying to understand the teaching of Jesus. For instance they were already familiar with the Old Testament and this should have helped in their understanding of teaching about "fulfilment". At the same time they were conscious of their

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[164] Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990), 37.
[165] Luz *New Testament Theology,* 18.
[166] Luz, *New Testament Theology,:* 147.

wider Gentile environment. Matthew for instance shows a familiarity with the Greek Septuagint [167]

Matthew's gospel argues that Jewish Christians believed Jesus had indeed fulfilled the prophets.[168] In this sense they need not be so reliant on Jewish structures that taught that such fulfilment was still to come. Even while Matthew shows his appreciation of its heritage the Jewish Christians needed to feel more independent of Judaism as such,. Some scholars, for example Ulrich Luz say that by this time these people were no longer attending the synagogue. Also at the same time more people of a Gentile background with only a limited knowledge of Jewish heritage were joining the community. This co-mingling would have meant that Jewish Christians in the community would be feeling and were being viewed by the Jewish mainstream as being more cut off still from their own heritage.[169] Matthew set out to assure them of their own valid identity.

Return to the text of 5:17-20 in particular. When a closer look is given to the text it is realised these sentences rely on their fuller context if they are to be understood. Luz points out the need for reading a passage in its wider context is a characteristic of Matthew's writing.[170]

At the same time there is an anomaly in the verses themselves in Mt. 5:17-20. On the one hand Jesus is putting forward a stress on the detail of the commandments, "not one letter, not one stroke of a letter," (5:18). But in his disputes with the Pharisees he upbraids them for their own burdensome focus on the detail of the law cf. "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to

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[167] William Richard Stegner, "The Temptation Narrative: A Study in the Use of Scripture by Early Jewish Christians." *Biblical Research 25* (1990), 7.
[168] Anonymous. "The Jews in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Matthew." *Scripture in Church* 38, no. 149 (2008),125.
[169] Luz, *New Testament Theology,* 144.
[170] Luz, *New Testament Theology,* 2.

bear, and lay them on people's shoulders" (Mt. 23:4). He accuses the Pharisees of failure to keep the real law. "You brood of vipers. Who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming?" (Mt. 3:7)

The fuller context of the passage, leading on from the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12), shows that there is a connection in 5:17-20 between the detail of the law and the spirit of the law. There is therefore an intermediate point about the people being addressed as being like "salt" (vv. 13-16) and this fits with the emphasis on the spirit of the law. Like good salt affecting all of the food, so a strong spirit in a community affects and strengthens everyone there.

The verses that follow 5:17-20, also give a clarification about what is meant by keeping the spirit of the law. Again there is a focus on the three key social commandments. First there is mention of murder cf. "You shall not kill..." (v. 5:21) This, Jesus points out, extends to the attitude one has towards others cf. ""Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (5:22) Then following this segment, in verses 27-32 Jesus deals with the attitude needed for observing the commandment of "You shall not commit adultery." Here, he accuses "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully....." (v. 28). Then, in the next group of verses (5:33-37) there appears to be an elaboration on the attitude needed behind "You shall not steal." In relation to this, Jesus says "if any one would sue you and take your coat let him have your cloak as well" (v. 40). He continues on "Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you" (v. 42). There is even a challenge here to let go of one's material goods even if one needs them.

The verses to follow apparently throw out an even greater challenge in relation to these commandments. Jesus says, "Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (v. 39) On the level of

practicality one could wonder about this behaviour and it appears rhetorical hyperbole is being used here. But at the same time, given the context with its quote about an "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (v. 38) the hyperbole provides an effective prohibition against revenge and pay back. Rather it endorses the constant theme in the gospels about forgiveness. Forgiveness is primarily about attitude. Harper's Commentary argues that these verses are about love [171]

There is also a connection here with Romans 13:8-10 when Paul is saying the commandments are summed up in "you must love your neighbour." Love and forgiveness are both based on attitude. Attitude is being incorporated here as being intrinsic to an observance of the commandments.

Luz points out that Matthew's gospel has an approach that groups things into three's.[172] In 5:20-42 for instance one is again reminded of the three key social commandments listed by Jesus in Mark 10:19. There is a parallel with Mark here, in the sense that both Mark and Matthew require the followers of Christ to push beyond external observance of the commandments. Consider the words in Mark "You lack one thing" (Mk 10:21). These were addressed to the man who had said he had kept the commandments from his youth. Jesus then challenges him to "Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure. Then come and follow me." (Mk 10:21). This suggests that if people only follow the "letter" of the law (as taught for example by the Pharisees) they are also lacking in something. In Mark's gospel Jesus throws out a challenge to reach beyond the commandments. In Matthew Chapter 5 Jesus elaborates on the spirit and attitude that is required beyond their observance.

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[171] James L. Mays gen. ed. *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* , (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1988), 956.

[172] Luz, *New Testament Theology,* 117-121.

The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 have particular relevance to the historical situation of Matthew's Church which was possibly in Antioch. Antioch was featured in the Council of Jerusalem in about 51 CE.[173] Acts 15 tells of Paul's close association with the Church there. But in the letter to the Galatians, which included Antioch, Paul tells of how he is now estranged from this community. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you...?" (Gal. 3:1a.) He upbraids Peter (and Barnabas) about eating apart from Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:11). In Antioch there was an "over-observance" in external law.

For a re-cap on the environment here, recall some of the discussion about Galatia in the pages above. As regards Galatia, the scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor considers that the group of people exerting pressure for eating apart may have been separate from those persuading the Galatians to undergo circumcision.[174] The historical background shows the Emperor Nero came into power in 54 CE. Carl R. Holladay estimates that Galatians was written shortly after this in 54-55 CE. [175] Paul implies "the circumcisers" were apparently trying to avoid potential persecution by getting Gentile Christians to join mainstream Judaism (Gal 6:12). However after 70 CE and the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem, the situation would have shifted. It was now Jews who would have fear of persecution and death. Therefore, one could assume that around 80-90 CE. social pressure in the Antiochan church towards circumcision was likely to be more relaxed. Also, as stated above, many of the church members would already be circumcised so this was not an issue for them

With the circumcision debate largely behind them, Matthew was in a position to deal more fully with the antinomianism

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[173] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 51.
[174] Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 141.
[175] Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, 382-383.

accusations (i.e. rejection of established moral laws) that had been levelled at Paul and indirectly at Jesus.

He could now elaborate on the meanings of "fulfilment" (v. 17) and "righteousness" (v. 20) and show how these were connected to "attitude." The theme of "fulfilment" actually stretches from the first Chapter in Matthew (cf. Isaiah 7:14) until Chapter twenty-eight when the disciples are challenged to go out into the whole world and make disciples of others (Mt. 28:19) . Thus the idea of fulfilment pervades the gospel and is intrinsic to its themes.

The use of the word "righteousness" also has relevance here. It reflects the efforts of groups such as the Pharisees and Qumran members at the time of Jesus to distinguish themselves favourably from others. But Matthew's use of the word "righteousness" in the context of 5;17-20 has a dimension of irony to it. The word does not describe external observance at all.[176] Rather, Jesus is redefining the word in terms of attitude and, the verses to follow "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (v. 20) elaborate on what sort of attitude is needed for "the kingdom of heaven".

Scholars such as Benjamin Bacon view the text between 5:1 "And he opened his mouth and taught them saying " and verse 7:23 which says "After Jesus had finished these words" as all being part of the one gospel section. [177] Bacon sees the repetition of this one sentence through the gospel as dividing it up into other sections as well.[178] Thus the meaning of 5:17-20 extends in this sense to the whole of the section of Mt. 5:1-7:23.

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[176] cf. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* 71.
[177] Benjamin Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1930).
[178] Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*

Ironically the scholar Luz argues for a fuller reading of Matthew's text (cf. Bacon's sections). Yet Luz appears to consider 5:17-20 on its own when comparing Matthew's approach with that of Paul. He says "The Matthean principle of fulfilment of the Law and the Pauline principle of freedom from the Law, are mutually exclusive."[179] In fact he suggests that in the large metropolis of Antioch, Matthew barely knew of Paul.[180] Luz may see Matthew and Paul as being, in a sense, at odds with one another. But in the full context of the section from 5:2 to 7:28 Matthew is actually putting forward a positive interpretation of the law, one that is based upon attitude. And, this helps to clarify Paul's teaching about law rather giving an opposite viewpoint to his approach.

In Matthew's Chapter Five there is an implication here that the disciples of Jesus in Matthew's gospel are more advanced in being "able to penetrate the mystery of Jesus' identity" than were the disciples in Mark's gospel.[181] Again, one is reminded here of the wider context of the chapter. After the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-10 Jesus says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," (5:17) and here he puts out challenges that go beyond the external observance of the law.[182] For instance he says "If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away..."(5:30). Even if hearers/auditors of Matthew were to take this sentence metaphorically, there is still the implication that severe self-discipline is part of the culture of Matthew's community and the disciples are being told to spread this approach. Such challenges were likely to arouse hostility amongst people who either wanted to downplay the observance of the Commandments altogether and/or those who only wanted detailed external compliance with Jewish law. With the

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[179] Luz, *New Testament Theology,* 152.
[180] Luz, *New Testament Theology,* 147.
[181] Donald Senior *What are they Saying about Matthew?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 91.
[182] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 17.

emphasis here on an ascetic attitude, not only righteousness would be required of the followers of Jesus but a 'greater righteousness.' [183]

There is relevance here to the book by Dale Allison called *The New Moses.* Allison points out a comparison between Matthew's text and the Hellenistic tradition that stressed the need for teachers "to live as they taught." Allison notes how Socrates was the great model for Hellenists. Philo (a Jewish philosopher) transferred this sort of status to Moses. Matthew on the other hand "gives the palm" (of this position as a model) to Jesus. The key point being made here was to establish congruity between word and deed. Thus in Matthew, Jesus is presented as the Torah incarnate and animate law.[184] At the same time there is a shift being taken here from a 'holiness code' to a 'mercy code.' A difference here, it should be noted is that "holiness" relates to one's own spiritual state. "Mercy" on the other hand relates to one's interaction with others. Such a shift would apply to both Matthew's interpretation of the situations of Jesus and the social context of Matthew as well.[185]

Again, there is an underlying theme that observance of the law in Matthew's gospel entails a development in one's understanding of the law.

Exegesis of Matthew 10:5-15

Consider another section of Matthew using the method of interpretation called Historical Critical Exegesis. Matthew

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[183] David M. Bossman, "Christians and Jews Read the Gospel of Matthew Today," *Biblical Theology Bulletin 27, no. 2* (Albany, NY: Biblical Theology Bulletin Inc., 1997), 46.

[184] Dale Allison, Jr, *The New Moses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, c. 1993), 145.

[185] Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology,* 96 (Richmond Va.: Union theological Seminary, 1992), 368-78.

10:5-15 is in the middle of a gospel section in which Jesus sends his twelve selected disciples to "the poor of Israel". He warns them not to go to the Gentiles and not to go into Samaritan towns and villages (v. 5). He also provides a "check list" of the ways in which they are to travel (v. 9) and he tells them to respect any hospitality given to them (v. 12-13). On the other hand he tells them to "shake the dust off their feet" if people do not want to hear their message (v. 14). He gives a warning about those who reject the message (v. 15). This passage goes on to warn the disciples of the conflict which is likely to occur when they preach (v. 17), even between family members (v. 21). Matthew concludes this instruction to the twelve disciples with the words "And when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities (Mt 11:1). According to Bacon's analysis of the gospel, this sentence ends a section.

Most scholars consider that the text of this gospel section 10:5-15 is based on Mark's gospel, as also a source called Q and also material peculiar to Matthew (M).[186] On a cursory reading, the verses of Mt. 10:5-15 may appear to describe the directions of Jesus as being for on a "one-off" occasion. Yet right through the passage there are constant references to a much wider context. This includes the socio-economic situation in which Jesus, and later Matthew, found themselves. There are also some contradictions here as mentioned above. How so?

On the one hand Jesus tells his disciples not to go to the Gentiles (Mt. 10:5). Yet it appears he himself was using Hellenistic social models when telling the disciples how to behave. For example the disciples would move around in ways that were similar to that of the itinerant Cynic preachers whose philosophic background was from the Greek Stoics[187]

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[186] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 5.
[187] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85 pp.

Such similarities imply that in the long term, the message of Jesus and the mission of the disciples would be applicable to Gentile people as well. The passage also includes allusion to the historical friction between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus faced in his own day (cf. 30 CE). There were also similarities here with the historical conflict that was being faced by Matthew and his community (cf. 85 CE).[188] In terms of the immediate text, one can note that the redactions Matthew was making of Mark's text showed up such a relevance to his own situation. Consider. On the one hand Matthew uses Mark's text of 6:8-11 as a base for his text of Mt 10:5-15. But the follow-ups to both texts have a significant difference. On the one hand Mark follows up with the statement "So they went out and preached that men should repent" (Mk 6:12). But Matthew puts a focus on the need to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt 10:16). The implication here, is that the disciples in Matthew's context would be preaching about something that was more likely to arouse hostility than (only) preaching about repentance. We know from the previous chapter five that this would involved teaching about Jesus as fulfilling the law and teaching about how the law should be followed. This was the issue Matthew's community was dealing with.

The statement in Mt 11:1 that Jesus "went on from there to teach and preach in their cities," provides a background social context for the instructions that is given in 10:5-15. In verses 10:5-6 Jesus says "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." With regards to the historical situation of Jesus in saying this, it not only implies that the disciples were to go to Jewish towns. It also implies that they would go to towns and villages where they already had social networks. These places were "their" cities and Jesus would follow them

[188] Harrrington, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 22.

there (cf. 11:1). In their outreach to Jews only, the disciples would build on the networks they already had and basic understanding that people had of the Torah and Law. It would be later on they could go out beyond Jewish boundaries or develop people's understanding of the law further.

On one level Matthew reflects on the social situation of Jesus in the 30's CE. Yet right through the passage of Mt 10:5-15 one can detect the voice of Matthew and his own problems fifty years later. Thus in the front of the text we see the mission of Jesus unfolding. In the under-tone of the text we hear the voice of Matthew and his own concerns.

In looking at these verses in Matthew Chapter 10, both threads of concern are being developed at the same time. Again, consider the story at the "front" of the text. Here one needs to be particularly conscious that Matthew is describing a specific methodology of mission that was being taken by Jesus himself.

An article by K. C. Hanson "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," has special relevance to such a methodology. Hanson brings a different dimension into a discussion about the missionary journey altogether. She points out that the social setting of the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee has been underestimated in importance amongst biblical commentators.[189] Consider. Of the twelve disciples sent out, (Mt 10:5), Simon, Andrew, James and John had a fishing background. Also, Philip came from the same town of Bethsaida and he knew Nathanael (John 1:43-50). Also the gospel shows that Jesus is moving around the Sea of Galilee and crossing backwards and forwards across this sea (7 miles by 12.5 miles diameter). As well, and for a while Jesus himself was living at the fishing town of Capernaum.[190]

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[189] K. C. Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (Albany N.Y.: Biblical Theology Bulletin Inc., 1997), 100.

[190] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 109.

Consider the wider context here. Within the Roman Empire at the time, the fishing industry involved a complex system of networking, not only amongst family members who usually worked together but including amongst labourers and people in other sub-industries. Fishing was regulated by the State. Thus when Jesus was moving amongst a network of acquaintances, many of whom were already known to his disciples, he was also moving within the State-regulated environment of the Greco-Roman Empire. Hanson points out that the sorts of people involved in this fishing industry included a wide range of people. There were fishing families, tax collectors, toll collectors, hired labourers, suppliers of raw goods, fish processors, shippers, carters etc.[191] In other words the first area of mission for the disciples was in their own established networks of people and these operated in a state-regulated industry as well as from a family base.

It made strategic, missionary sense for the disciples to give the message of Jesus to people they knew first of all. For a start the disciples could find out who, amongst these people, was interested in their message. Thus, Matthew adds a sentence to Mark's text by saying "Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy," (presumably of their message) (v. 11 b). In terms of the mission of Jesus, the twelve disciples were building a base of 'believers" that consisted of the economic community from which they came. Then Jesus himself went around these same towns and villages (11:1). He was addressing these same communities where the disciples had already done a ground work of preparation. This consideration throws a different perspective on the assumption that the disciples "only" followed Jesus. Rather they not only shared in his mission, they prepared for it. In their own social context it was likely people were feeling disillusioned with a minute observance of law, such as taught by the Pharisees and scribes. They were also strained by Roman taxes and

[191] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 99.

regulations. Recall that at the Council of Jerusalem Peter stands up and says he found the Jewish law was too burdensome to observe (Acts 15:10). It is likely within the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee, people were looking for a different interpretation of the law – one that would help them deal with the stresses of their situation.

Matthew 10:5-15 gives further indications that the missionary journey of the twelve key disciples is a "step" in the wider context of the gospel. As well as it being a logical strategy for Jesus to send the disciples to the people they already knew, (v. 5) in the early stages of their discipleship it was also unlikely they had the skills or maturity or self-confidence to face people in either a Gentile community or in Samaritan villages. That is, the twelve disciples were not yet ready to move outside the circles of Judaism.

Again, beneath the surface of the "front" story in Matthew about the inadequacy of the disciples there is the undertone of Matthew's own situation. He was likely to consider that his own Jewish-based community was in a similar situation of unreadiness. Thus while the "Do not" narrative of the mission is about the twelve disciples, there are hints that Matthew's community also is being addressed here. Such a hint is apparent when he makes an addition to Mark's text of Mk 6:8 and says "take no gold or silver" (v. 9). This detail reflects that the "implied readers" (thirty years later) come from a more affluent background as compared with than the background of the twelve disciples themselves. [192]

To return to a comparison between Matthew Chapter 10 and the time of Jesus. One of the problems of the people in the fishing sub-industries in the time of Jesus was the unjust tax system. Roman taxes kept workers at a subsistence level. [193]

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[192] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1988), 125

[193] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,"100.

Such economic pressures of people in the fishing industry in the 30's CE also throws light on the meaning of the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." As it was, the system of governance was biased towards wealthier families and the Roman Emperor and there was widespread discontent about this [194] Thus the word "lost" as used by Matthew (v. 6) was likely to include lower classes of the fishing industry whose economic poverty was having a negative affect not only on their religious observance but also on their religious identity. One positive outcome of this would have been that their common plight would have been a factor of bonding amongst them.

An understanding of the fishing social context at the time of Jesus, allows one to accept the likelihood that the wording of the text Mt 10:5-15 does in fact date back to Jesus. It also challenges the idea that the sentence about the "lost sheep of Israel" was added later by Matthew to refer to a mission to Jews because they were scattered amongst the Gentiles. [195] There could of course be a double meaning here.

In any case, whether the phrase about the lost sheep of Israel was added by Matthew or not, it was likely to have a different meaning for the implied reader of the gospel in the 80's CE as distinct from the twelve disciples in the 30's CE. The implied reader would obviously understand it in terms of their own historical situation.

As already mentioned scholars such as Francis Maloney and Jack Dean Kingsbury reflect on the fact that the the gospel was probably written between 85 and 90 A.D. well after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.[196] This was a time of crisis for Jews or "Israelites" as they were also called. There were attempting to clarify their identity. Also as mentioned

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[194] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,"103.

[195] Cf. Douglas Hare *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1967), 146.

[196] Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story,* 27.

above, it is considered that the gospel could have been written in Antioch where there was a large Jewish population.[197] At that time in the 80's CE the Pharisees were emerging as leaders within the Jewish mainstream. Recall that other leadership groups such as the priests and Sadducees had been wiped out around 70 A.D., as also the Qumran community. It was a time of transition. The Pharisees were gradually replacing the rituals of the Temple with detailed observances in the Jewish home and in the local Synagogue.[198] This same period, when the gospel was being written, was also a time of tension between the Pharisees and the Jewish Christians. Matthew and his community believed it was themselves who could provide the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" with an identity by centring identity on the teachings and person of Jesus. They believed they were the true inheritors of the promises of the Old Testament. In the text of the gospel Matthew constantly referred back to the prophets of the Old Testament to show that Jesus had fulfilled their promises.[199] For Matthew's Jewish community, identity should pivot around the Jesus event and for them righteousness would be defined as fidelity to the teachings of Jesus. [200]

But the historical situation of Matthew in 85 CE differed from what his community would have preferred. On the one hand the Pharisees were referring back to the leadership they had given about external observance prior to the destruction of the Temple. Matthew and his community on the other hand had shifted instead to a "mercy code" with an emphasis on attitude and love.

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[197] Daniel W. Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007), 73.
[198] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 15.
[199] Cf. Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law."
[200] Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew,* 74.

Therefore, just as conflict with the Jewish leadership at the time of Jesus was inevitable, so also it was inevitable that in the time of Matthew there would again be conflict with Jewish leadership. In fact, in Matthew's time and around 85 CE a crisis point of conflict was reached. It was then that the Jewish leadership, meeting in Jamnia, put out an edict that required that people who attended the Synagogue to recite a prayer that would curse Christians. Effectively this banned Jewish Christians from the Synagogues altogether. [201]

At the present time there is disagreement amongst scholarship as to whether Matthew's community considered themselves to be still within Judaism or whether by this time they had been expelled from it. But in any case, in such as a situation the community of Matthew could also use the phrase about "the lost sheep of Israel" as referring to themselves.

Scholars such as Saldanarini hold that the gospel was written from within Judaism and for a community that was well acquainted with the Old Testament.[202] This familiarity is apparent in the Matthew's reliance on Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isaiah 50) [203] There are also obvious parallels here with a sense of failure. [204] One would expect such a feeling of failure would exist amongst Matthew's community as it appeared they had failed to inspire mainstream Judaism with the figure and teaching of Jesus. At the same time Daniel Ulrich points out that in any case in Matthew's account of the mission of the disciples, Jesus said not all the missioners would be welcomed by all Jews.[205] This would also apply later on to Matthew's community.

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[201] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15-16.
[202] Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 107.
[203] Vicky Balabanski, "Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24," *New Testament Studies,* 54 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173.
[204] Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew,* 60.
[205] Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," 78.

Consider the expectation echoed in Mt 10:17 with the verse, "they will deliver you up to Councils and flog you in their synagogues," Here the phrase "their synagogues" suggests that by this time Matthew and his community did not consider themselves to be within Judaism at all. Or, at the very least they thought themselves to be one group of Jews as distinct from other groups of Jews. [206]

In any case Douglas Hare says it is apparent in the text that in its past history, Matthew's community experienced a painful rupture with mainstream Judaism.[207] His community would have been feeling increasing isolation from Judaism as such, because at that time most Israelites were opting to follow the Pharisees rather than the Jewish Christians. Senior points out that besides being rejected from the synagogues and the trauma that resulted from this there was also an influx of Gentiles into the community who had little knowledge or understanding of the Old Testament. [208] This point has already been made above.

At the time of Matthew, the Jewish Christian leadership needed to clarify and strengthen the identity of their own community. It is in this context that the instructions given by Jesus in 10:5-15 have particular relevance. In his book *House of Disciples*, Michael H. Crosby says a key to understanding Matthew's context is to recognise the importance of the household structure in the first century Greco Roman world. On the one hand the disciples (both at the time of Jesus and of Matthew) were establishing a community that extended beyond the blood family. The disciples and their recruits

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[206] Anonymous, "Biblical Essay, The Jews in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Matthew," *Scripture in Church 38, n. 149* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2008), 125.

[207] Douglas Hare *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew.*

[208] Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew,* 49.

became in effect members of the household of Jesus. [209] The missionary task given in Mt 10 was an opportunity for the disciples, whether of the time of Jesus or Matthew, to bond more closely and to strengthen their sense of belonging to the household of Jesus. In terms of the text of Mt 10:5-15 it appears that the standards of asceticism "take no gold etc." (v. 9) were directed towards the twelve disciples. But it also reflects that a culture of asceticism and a sense of mission was now applied to all, just as identification with Jesus and his mission was also extended to all.

Re-consider the passage of Mt 10:5-15. There appears to be some contradiction in the statement "You received without pay, give without pay." (v. 7) and then the statement to follow, "the labourer deserves his food." (v.10). This in fact draws a fine line between the acceptance of hospitality and the abuse of it. Sensitivity was required here, and the disciples were urged to move on if they realised they were not welcome (v. 14).

All of these factors show that the apparently "one off" mission of the twelve disciples was in fact a stage in the progress of the disciples themselves towards establishing a missionary base and obtaining a greater bonding and a greater competence and maturity in their missionary outreach. This step would help prepare them for being given the much larger mission of going out to the whole world, cf. the socio-economic world. Thus there is not a contradiction between Mt 10:5 and later at the end of the gospel in Mt 28:19, when Jesus commissions the disciples to "make disciples of all nations." John Meier describes the two texts as showing "difference within continuity."[210] But Vicky Balabanski claims that in fact the gospel as a whole leads into the "Great Commission" that is delivered by Jesus to the disciples at the gospel's end in

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[209] Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples*: *Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, c. 1988), ix.

[210] John Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 30.

Matthew 28:19. [211] Moreover this development towards a world mission runs parallel to the narrative of the gospel.

When Matthew 10:5-15 is read as a "stage" in a process of disciple maturation the reading alters frequent interpretations of the gospel, that claim that Jesus (and Matthew the writer) at first wanted and tried to convert all the Jews into a following of Jesus. Such interpreters argue that there was later friction about this cf. "they (scribes and Pharisees) bind heavy burdens and put them on the shoulders of people. They are not willing to move these things with their finger." (Mt. 23:4) This resulted in a change of viewpoint about missionary outreach. It was then thought that if there were to be any sort of future for the good news it would instead be found in a mission to the Gentiles. Amongst scholars there still appears to be some equivocation about this interpretation. Harrington implies that he agrees with this interpretation when he talks of the "rejection of Jesus (by the Jews) resulting in inclusion of the Gentiles." [212] This can also imply that in turn, there was a rejection of the Jews (or Israelites), on the part of the Matthean community (cf. "shake off the dust from your feet" Mt 10:14). A further inference could be made here that thinking behind such a verse was that the promises of God in the Old Testament would now go to the Jewish Christians and not the Jews. This apparently fits with the verse of Mt 27:25 "And all the people answered. "His blood be upon us and our children." But, as Allison points out, "content demands context," [213] Balabanski as well as a majority of other scholars, now refute this view about rejection of the Jews. [214] In fact Harrington himself contradicts this view when he says that Christians are

[211] Vicky Balabanski, "Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24," 162.
[212] Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew,* 19.
[213] Dale Allison Jr, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation past and present*, 147.
[214] Vicky Balabanski, "Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24," 174.

obliged to share the message of Jesus with all others including and especially with the Jews. [215]

One of the ways the text of Mt 10:5-15 can be understood as describing a "stage" in the development of the disciples, can be demonstrated by looking at the structure of the gospel as a whole. For some time, starting with Benjamin Bacon, scholars have been aware of his proposal that the gospel is structured by sections of narrative followed by sections of a discourse. Bacon pointed out that the repetition of the words "after Jesus had finished (these words)" is a break in the gospel structure. [216] He also suggested that the gospel was written as a "new Pentateuch." Though the latter view has not been widely accepted, his observation of a break in the text "after Jesus had finished these words..." has generally been used as a starting point when attempts are made to work out the gospel structure.[217] On the other hand, some scholars have seen this wording as a transitional statement only.[218]

An observation to support the idea of a "transition" sentence between one part of the gospel's structure and another, is to consider a description apparently of a disciple, just before each statement of "After Jesus had finished these words." Such descriptions appear to show steps being taken by a disciple in the process of becoming more identified with Jesus, "the suffering servant." Thus consider: Just before the first statement of "after Jesus had finished" in Mt 7:28, there is reference to "a prudent man" (v. 24). The next "break" or transitional clause in Mt 11:1 is preceded by "one of these little ones" (10:42). The next break in Mt 13:53 is preceded by a reference to a "householder" (v. 51). (David Orton suggests

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[215] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 144.
[216] Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* , 81.
[217] Dale Allison Jr., "Matthew: Structure, Biographical Impulse and the *Imitatio Christi,"* in F. Van Segbroeck et al. (eds.), *The Four Gospels, Vol. II* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 1203-21.
[218] Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew,* 27.

that the description about a householder (13:52), which also involves the description of a scribe, may have referred to Matthew himself being a converted rabbi.)[219]) The next "break" in Mt 19:1 is immediately preceded by a reference to forgiveness of one's "brother" (18:35). Then, just before the next "break" in Mt 26:1, Jesus says failure to help one of these "least ones" (25: 45) is a failure to assist himself. These five transitional descriptions lead to the final commission given in 28:19 when the disciples are challenged to go out and "disciple" others. In such case they could be described here as "disciplers," especially as the word "disciple" is in the imperative (v. 19). [220] There is a progression from a "prudent" man to "one of these little ones" to a "householder" to "brother" to "one of these least ones" and finally to "disciplers".

The apparent "breaks" between possible structure sections of the texts thus show a gradual development in the maturity of the disciples and their preparedness to go out to the whole world as mandated by Jesus at the gospel's end "Go and disciple all nations" (Mt. 28:19). This gradual development description also braces the Jewish-based community of Matthew in the challenge they face as well in looking outward towards "the whole world" and taking with them an understanding of the commandments that would enable all peoples to observe them.

Some Conclusions about Paul and Matthew

Where does this text fit as compared with the isolation of the three key commandments by Paul, writing in the 50's CE, and

[219] David Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1989).
[220] Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," 71.

later Mark writing in 70 CE.? Recall that in 1 Corinthians Paul had to clarify where the followers of Jesus "fitted" as compared with Hellenists (cf. Gentiles or non-Jews). Many if not most of the latter believed they as persons possessed a "divine spark" which identified them as sharing in divinity as such. Paul had to teach the followers of Jesus they were "possessed" by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit remained (as in the Jewish tradition) completely "other". It was when this sort of difference was sorted out that Paul's teaching about the commandments and morality was given a clearer context. The gospels to follow could then develop this understanding of the presence of the Divine Spirit being within oneself further.

Mark set the groundwork for this in his basic gospel structure (to be discussed further in Part Two of this research project).

With regard to Matthew there are similarities between the situation that is described by Matthew and his own situation later on. But in the case of Matthew his focus was to be on a clarification between Jews and Christian Jews (rather than Christians and Greeks). On the one hand Matthew continued the teaching of Paul in isolating and underlining the importance of three key social commandments, as pointed out in the exegesis of Matthew Chapter 7. Following on from this he then set out to clarify the differences between the followers of Jesus and mainstream Judaism. The context Matthew provides is to stress that the approach of the disciples to the law has to be based on a developing maturity that emphasises the attitude of mercy. This attitude takes precedence over external observances. It is when the followers of Jesus embrace such an attitude that they are able to identify with Jesus and go out into the Gentile world, confident of their own position.

The "cradle community" from which the disciples were to make their outreach consisted of the socio-economic base of a "working world". Such a base would enable the members of

Matthew's community to make an outreach that was just as relevant to the wider world as it had been for the the disciples of Jesus some decades before them. It was to be in the socio-economic forums of the world that the main issues of Christian morality would be thrashed out.

At this stage, an overview of points covered so far would be appropriate. We considered Paul's practice of isolating out the three key social commandments and encouraging people to practice an idealised version of these if they were called to do this by the Holy Spirit. We saw how Mark also isolated out these three commandments and turned them into the challenge of taking on a lifestyle geared towards the close following of Jesus and identification with him. It was here that an association between this lifestyle and that of the child was introduced. We then saw how Matthew in the section above, also isolated out the three commandments. He insisted that the attitude with which these are practiced is crucial. He also fixed the practice of these commandments into the context of the industrialised world.

Where does Luke, the third synoptic writer, fit in with these developments? Matthew was writing for a Jewish Christian society. Luke was writing for a Gentile Christian society and as one would expect his text, also largely based upon that of Mark, would be geared towards his own auditor-/readership and the special challenges that it faced.

c. The Gospel of Luke

Narrative Exegesis of Luke 4:16-30 and Acts 15

In the gospel of Luke we find there is a continued focus on and development of three key social values, based on the 5th, 6th and 7th commandments. Luke not only threads reference to these commandments into the general text. References can also be found in central themes that he develops as well. The passage of Luke 4:16-30 shows that Jesus, back in his home town of Nazareth, infers that he is about to set up a new, inclusive type of society. This passage also shows that the people of Nazareth reject him. Then an exegesis of Chapter 15 of Luke's Acts shows how the Church Council of Jerusalem based the position of the Church on a re-interpretation of the same three key commandments relating to money, power and relationship. In one sense therefore the observance of these commandments was simplified. But at the same time the "bar" of their observance was raised.

Luke 4:16-30
A Narrative Criticism Interpretation

Luke 4:16-30 does not specifically refer to the three key commandments discussed above. But it shows how Luke, the interpreter of Mark 6:1-2, relates the story of Jesus' return to Nazareth. Luke elaborates on this story to show that Jesus wanted to set up a new type of society which would be inclusive. Also there would be a difference from Judaism in the way the commandments would be observed. In the chapter four story as told by Luke, Jesus goes into the Synagogue, (v. 16) reads from the prophet Isaiah, (v. 17) claims that the time Isaiah prophesied about has now come to pass and he (at first)

pleases the people there (v. 21). However Jesus then says he will not be performing miracles in his hometown as expected (v. 23). He says that he, like other prophets is not recognised as a prophet in his own country (v. 24). He points out that Elijah, the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2 in the Old Testament, was not sent to Jews, but rather to an outcast widow in Sarepta (v. 26) (c/f 1 Kings 17: 9-24). These words of Jesus to the people of Nazareth enrage those in the synagogue (v. 28). They hustle him out of the town to the brow of the hill where the town is situated and attempt t throw him over this (v. 29). However Jesus passes through their midst and goes away (v. 30).

The tightly written, dramatic story is set near the beginning of Luke's narrative of Luke-Acts. It is apparent that Luke the writer deliberately took this story from a later section of Mark's gospel (Chapter 6:1-6 a), and placed it towards the front of his narrative. [221] Matthew on the other hand, who also lifted the story from Mark, left it well back in his gospel (c/f Matt 13:53-58).

One wonders why Luke put the story into an introductory position for his Gospel and Acts. The writer L. T. Johnson says that this placement was in order to present Jesus as a specifically prophetic Messiah [222] Parsons on the other hand notes he is heralding a Jubilee Year (c/f. Lev 25) and the start of a new society. [223]

In the wider context of this story about Nazareth there are references to both the Holy Spirit and to bad spirits. Leading up to the story, in Lk 4:16-30, Luke says Jesus "was full of the

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[221] William Loader, *The New Testament with Imagination: a Fresh Approach to its Writings and Themes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 192-194.
[222] Luke Timothy Johnson. *The Gospel of Luke,* Vol. 3, Sacra Pagina, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 77.
[223] Mark Allan Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 86./

Holy Spirit". Then after the temptations by the Devil in the desert, Jesus returned from there "in the power of the Spirit". In the Nazareth episode Jesus reads from Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (v. 18). Later on in the gospel, in the passages to follow this episode, there is a further suggestion of the presence of the Holy Spirit because it is said Jesus teaches with authority. (Lk 4:32) Then Jesus confronts an unclean spirit.

Before and after the event at Nazareth, Jesus is preaching in synagogues. On the one hand it cannot be claimed that this wider section of the gospel shows a clear "sandwich" literary structure as described by the narrative critic James Edwards. The Nazareth event does not interrupt a wider story as with a sandwich construction as for example, in Mark when the journey to cure the daughter of Jairus is interrupted by a woman with a bleeding problem (Mark 5:21-43). [224] But there are at least some parallels here with a 'sandwich' construction. The Nazareth event occurs between episodes of preaching in synagogues. Also there is the sense of Jesus being "impelled by the Spirit," prior to his trip to Nazareth and this kind of 'spiritual' drive appears to continue later on when he is curing all those brought to him in Capernaum (Luke 4:40). Overall, one gets the sense that the Holy Spirit is very much part of the action and the movement of the story. This compares with the view of Parsons who considers that the main actor in the Lukan narrative is in fact God. [225]

The Nazareth story is tightly constructed and has the hall marks of a standard narrative as described by Daniel Marguerat. [226] There is the introductory setting of a synagogue

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[224] Cf. James R Edwards "Markan Sandwiches:The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives" *Novum Testamentum I 3* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company 1989), 193-216.

[225] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* 12.

[226] Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 40-57.

on the Sabbath and the sense of an ordinary meeting taking place there. Even the action of Jesus in taking and reading from a scroll has a sense of normality about it. Then complications (a necessary component of a story) are introduced. Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah showing Isaiah's preference for an outreach to the marginalised and Jesus identifies with this preference (v.22). In terms of the story structure and its wider context, one would expect an implied reader to think that tensions in the synagogue would increase at this point. In fact the mention is made of all eyes being upon Jesus (Luke 4:20) and this does add to the tension. But it appears that the people in the synagogue of Nazareth were thinking that it was they themselves who fitted into the categories of 'poor,' 'captives,' 'blind,' and 'oppressed' as mentioned in the Isaiah reading. There was therefore acceptance and praise amongst them. But at that point Jesus told the crowd that he did not intend to meet their expectations of performing the same miraculous deeds that they had heard he performed at Capernaum.

In the context of the story it appears the people in Nazareth felt entitled to such miracles because of their prior connections to the family of Jesus. In fact it appears they thought of themselves as being "more deserving" than the people in Capernaum. But in actual fact they were not ready to accept Jesus for who he really was. So in a dramatic turnaround, it appears that Jesus in a sense rejects the people in the synagogue before they reject him. He refuses to conform to their expectations. For the implied readers of the gospel (possibly Gentile Christians in Syria) they themselves are challenged at this point to consider their own position. They may for instance think of themselves as poor and marginalised. But Jesus talks of Elijah going to a widow outside Judaism. The underlying point made in the scene is that these people cannot think this puts them into a privileged position. They cannot expect 'instant' miraculous action. Rather they should

accept the true role of Jesus and be prepared to wait for the saving action of God as this unfolds.

In his dialogue with the people of Nazareth, Jesus identifies with the situation of previous Old Testament prophets who also refused to be 'defined' by the people around them. He recalls Elijah the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2. One is reminded here of this key figure whose presence is threaded throughout both Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Elijah for instance is pictured at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13) and in relation to Herod who worries that Elijah has returned through Jesus (Luke 9:18). Again in Acts, at the time of the Ascension, the disappearance of Elijah in a fiery chariot into heaven is recalled when Jesus ascends into Heaven in a similar way (Acts 1:9). At the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends in the form of tongues of fire one is again reminded of the Theophany with Elijah.

The references to Elijah through the writings of Luke, witness to a major theme and concern that Luke and his community are dealing with. This is the theme of succession. What will happen after the ascension of Jesus and Luke's community is gradually taken over more and more by Gentiles? A large part of the Elijah story is also taken up the question of succession. In the case of Elijah it is about his succession by Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). Behind the text of both Luke's gospel and Acts, Luke is asking a similar question. Will these people who have never been part of the Jewish tradition be able to carry on the message of Jesus?

With the mention of Elijah in Luke Chapter 4, there appears to be a clarification that the Jews in Nazareth will not (in any case) be the "successors" of Jesus' mission. Rather, in the immediate context of the Nazareth story, 'succession' to his mission would be carried over to people in Capernaum (a fishing village) as that is where Jesus heads after Nazareth rejects him . In Chapter 4, Luke deliberately draws a contrast

between the people in Nazareth and the people in Capernaum. Those at Nazareth hear him with praise. But the people in Capernaum recognise his authority (Luke 4:32) Jesus tells the people that he grew up with, that what has happened at Capernaum will not be happening for them in Nazareth. Then he goes on to Capernaum, teaches in their synagogue and performs there the miracles he refused to perform in Nazareth. Soon, in Luke's Chapter 5, Jesus begins to single out those specific people who will be the successors to his mission. Capernaum provides a background setting for these people. It was in fact the town of Peter and Andrew, James and John and also Matthew.[227] In one sense, in a Jewish sense, Capernaum was on 'the outer.' It was situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and it was near the highway of the Roman Empire.[228] But here the authority of Jesus was accepted.

In terms of narrative, the rejection of Jesus from the Nazareth synagogue could be described as a "transformative action ". After this Jesus was 'free' of his previous community. The "ousting" of Jesus from Nazareth could also be described as a "pivot" in the story because the people there turn on him so suddenly. Again it could also be described as a story kernel as described by Allan Powell. [229] Why so? It has an essential, causal impact on the events that are to follow. Jesus leaves Nazareth and goes on to preach at the place where he will be recruiting his successors.

In the passage of Luke 4:16-30, Luke the writer, also clarifies the type of tension that will continue to to be threaded through his gospel and Acts between Jesus and the people (mainly the Jews) who expect privilege. Such a tension will continue to be

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[227] BibleWalks.com "Capernaum" http://www.biblewalks.com/Sites/capernaum.html [accessed 30 August 2013]

[228] BibleWalks.com "Capernaum".

[229] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 35-50.

a cause of action and conflict into future years with the mission of Paul, for example in the later debates about circumcision. Such debate almost split the church community. At the more general level, the mutual rejection at Nazareth shows that people cannot expect privilege. Rather they will be expected to both participate in the mission of Jesus and also be part of its succession.

In Luke 4:16-30 there is an 'undercurrent' theme of moving outwards. This fits with the gospel as a whole. Jesus is on a journey and the story here picks up on that. When he passes through the midst of the townspeople on the brow of the hill at Nazareth, there is a sense of direction in his movement and this refers to an on-going theme of moving towards Jerusalem. Such a sense of movement is continued on into the Acts of the Apostles as Paul heads towards Rome and the world at large. The implied reader is challenged here to identify with the movement, join in with it and carry it on themselves.

There is a parallel here with Matthew's challenge thrown up at the end of his gospel to take the gospel and morality of Jesus to the world stage. Yet Luke goes one step further here. In fact he makes this the key goal that is implicitly and explicitly built into both of his books. Luke not only aims for the socio-economic world stage but the political world stage as well. The aim was to create a new type of society.

Luke Continuing on the Morality Themes of Paul

In the latter study an interpretation of narrative criticism (a synchronic method of interpretation) was used. In the preceding pages it was demonstrated, using Historical Critical Exegesis, how Paul isolated three key social commandments "thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, or steal" and wove them into his teaching without explicitly pointing out their connection to the commandments themselves.

One wonders to what extent and in what way, did Luke also pick up the thread of isolating out the three key commandments and then integrating these into the text of Jesus' teaching, again without explicitly mentioning them. One also wonders if Luke continues on the theme of the child in association with these commandments (as presented in Mark) and whether or not he puts his own "stamp" on how to develop observance of these commandments.

To answer a couple of the above questions. Like Matthew, Luke devotes the opening section of his gospel to a description of a child. In Luke's case this child fits in with the Gentile background of his auditor/readers.[230] Some examples are as follows:

A One can also find that Luke does thread into his gospel veiled references to the three key commandments. As in Matthew, the "child" section at the start of the gospel shows the three temptations put to Jesus (Mt 4). The three temptations "echo" the three key commandments. How so? The devil tempts Jesus to multiply stones into bread for material benefit (c/f "Thou shalt not steal"). He tempts him to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple so God, the Father of Jesus would send angels to save him (c/f presumption about one's basic social group). The devil tempts Jesus to worship him in order to gain power over the kingdoms of the earth (cf. "Thou shalt not kill")

B Consider a further example of a veiled reference to the three key social commandments in the text. A man comes into the synagogue and he says **"**I thank you God that I am not grasping (cf. "Thou shalt not kill"), unjust (cf. "Thou shalt not steal") or adulterous (cf. Thou shalt not commit adultery") like the rest of mankind." (Luke 18:9-14)

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[230] Mark Allan Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990),51.

C Another example again of a veiled reference is as follows: In Luke 9:51-62, the background story of Luke continues on as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. Against this background there are invitations made by Jesus to people to follow him. Responses to these show the readiness or otherwise of people to follow him. In Luke Chapter 9 three people come forward with an apparent readiness to do this. But they had reservations. The first says he will follow Jesus wherever he may go. But Jesus warns him "foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." In other words Jesus warns him such a following involves chosen poverty (a reversal of stealing). Another man was invited by Jesus to follow him. But the man replied "Let me go and bury my father first." (that is, wait until his father dies). Jesus answered "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God." There is a veiled reference here to the duty of obedience and one's own self-determination, both of which are associated with "thou shalt not kill." Jesus is asking the man to put his own self-determination (and will to power) aside. Then a third man said to Jesus "I will follow you sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home." Jesus said to him. "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." There is a veiled reference here to say that a following of Jesus means putting this following above the priorities of family living, (cf. thou shalt not commit adultery).

If we pick up on these themes in terms of "money, power and sex", (as expressed in the three key commandments) we find that the teaching of Jesus as Luke presents this not only puts priority on these commandments. It requires the "reversal" of all three key social commandments, changing these from negative prohibitions into a positive lifestyle which enables a follower with Jesus to be identified with him.

Luke's Acts of the Apostles develops this approach further and applies the same approach to the whole church. How so? A pivotal event in which this approach was extended to the whole church is narrated in Acts Chapter 15. In the interpretation of this chapter a narrative criticism of the text will be given as well as a historical critical exegesis. Both approaches fit fairly comfortably together even though narrative criticism is a synchronic method of interpretation while historical critical exegesis is a diachronic approach.

In order to put Acts 15 into its wider context consider an overview of what Luke wrote. He wrote two books for the one auditor/reader whom he called Theophilus (a Greek name). Theophilus was apparently a Gentile Christian community. The first book was his gospel which has been considered and is quoted here. The second book is known as "The Acts of the Apostles". This provides a history of the early life of the Church and its dilemmas. Up to about Chapter Fifteen of "the Acts" the story of the apostles are alluded to as continuing on in the background of the church's emergence. But after this chapter, focus in the story is put instead on Paul. Paul, we recall had not actually met Jesus Christ, but he claimed to be an apostle as well. This was because Jesus had appeared to him with the question "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Paul (who was then called Saul) was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

Paul considered himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). But there is an underlying question running through the gospels and especially in Matthew's gospel as to where the Gentiles stood with regard observance of the Jewish Law. In Chapter Fifteen of Acts, Luke provides an account of a Council at Jerusalem in which this question could be dealt with. Apparently at the Council this question is resolved once and for all (or so they thought). According to "Acts" Paul and Barnabas return after the Council to Antioch with the worked out 'solution' and they are (according to Luke's Acts) greeted

enthusiastically (Acts 15:31). Luke the narrator presents a very positive account of the Council and its aftermath. [231] But was the positivity exaggerated and if so why? Luke in Acts is dealing with a question of succession of membership and leadership in the emerging church. Gentile Christians are taking over the majority of the church membership and church leadership as well. Timothy for instance and as referred to in above pages, was a trusted supporter of Paul and even involved in the writing of his letters (2 Cor.1:1). But his father was a pagan (Acts 16:1). As regards Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council, a positive approach to its outcome would help to encourage the emerging leadership and provide stability.

However Paul's letter to the Galatians (which included Antioch) shows that the Council's "solution" or "transition" to Gentile dominance was not as smooth as Luke would have the reader believe. The discussion on Paul's letter to the Galatians in pages above above demonstrates this. Some of the above discussion points are raised here again and are discussed further below. In Acts 15, it is the apparent church leader James who puts forward the "solution" that the Council had been convened to sort out. Yet in Paul's letter to the Galatians it is apparently this same James who had sent messengers to Antioch who had deterred Peter and even Barnabas from continuing to eat with the Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:13). In Paul's view this separation was a contradiction of the Eucharistic Meal (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-24). As well as the eating conflict going on in Galatia where Antioch was located, there were also people (whether from James or not) who wanted Gentile converts to be circumcised (Gal. 2.. Paul, now with an apparent loss of status in Antioch exclaims "Galatians have you gone mad?" (Gal 3:1)

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[231] Ernst Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes,* vol. 41 of *Studies in Biblical Theology.* Trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964), 66.

Scholars still debate as to whether the Council of Jerusalem came before Paul's letter to the Galatians or after it.[232] But in any case there was a situation of contradiction between Acts 15 and the Galatian letter. One also wonders here if there was more implied in the resolution of the Council of Jerusalem than what all the parties involved in the Council actually realised. Acts 15 says everyone agreed to the resolution (Acts 15:25). But did all of them understand the implications of this? Even to this day there are differences in interpretation (to be discussed below) as to what was implied in the Council's ruling.

The narrative criticism of Acts 15 to follow here in the form of an exegesis, relies to a considerable extent on the methods of the historical critical exegesis approach. The exegesis will consider in particular the resolution of the Council and how it in fact picks up on and develops the thread of the three key social commandments which involve money, power and relationship.

[232] Cf. Charles M. Laymon,ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1971. 748

Chapter Seven

An "Official Policy" in Luke Regarding 'blood, fornication and strangling"

Exegesis of Acts 15:1-35 Using Narrative Criticism[233]

The section of Acts 15:1-35 deals with resolving a Jewish Christian conflict which is a central theme in this second book of Luke. [234]

In simple terms the Jews that had converted to Christianity, especially those of the Pharisee sect, thought that Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised. The verse of 15:1 describes how some people from Judea had gone to missionary areas such as Galatia to pressure Gentile converts into doing this. It appears they gave the impression they were authorised to do so, probably from the "Hebrew" section of the Church led by James (not one of the apostle brothers James and John). The recurring visit possibly from these people had triggered the trip made by Paul and Barnabas from the church in Antioch to Jerusalem and it lead to their request that a Church Council be held to sort out the question of

[233] Note: This exegesis is largely adapted from the same writer of this research project *Is Christian Morality Unique?* that is, Michelle Nailon *Is there a Critiue of Greek Philosophy in the Gospels* (Melbourne: Project Employment, 2016) [www.gospelofmark.org, accessed Oct 2018]

[234] Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Vol 2 The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, c1986-c1990), 28.

circumcision. This question also entailed observation of the many intricacies of Jewish law (15:2).

In 15:24 it was pointed out that the visitors trying to impose circumcision did not have permission from the church leadership to spread this message and this point was included in a letter from the Council that Paul and Barnabas took with them back to Antioch. The letter from the Council also included the decision that was reached by the Jerusalem Church leadership (15:23). However it also appears that the visitors to Antioch who wanted circumcision carried considerable status in the Church. This was evidenced in Paul's letter to the Galatians (c/f Gal. 2:6). Part of the outcome of their influence in Galatia was that their pressure had coerced Peter into refraining from eating with Gentile converts (Gal 2:11). On the one hand this separation may have fitted with a Jewish rule to refrain from eating with Gentiles, or eating their food or entering the houses of Gentiles. But it had serious implications for joint participation in the Agape-Eucharist of the community of the followers of Jesus. Paul pointed out that Peter was in a contradictory position here. In Acts 10:14, (before the Jerusalem Council), when Peter was more obviously the church leader as designated by Jesus, he recounted a vision when he was told "What God has cleansed you must not call common." So Peter's behaviour in Galatia showed a reversal and Paul confronted him about it (Gal 2:11).

The major point at issue in the Jerusalem Council was circumcision (15:1). This painful and even dangerous operation for adults was deterring Gentiles from joining the church. It also implied that people would be obliged to practice all the intricacies of Jewish law as well. A pro-circumcision lobby (whether from Jews or from Christian Jews) was also putting missionaries such as Paul into danger. For instance Paul had been dragged out of Antioch and left for dead after "Jews" (the major source of conflict in the narrative of Acts) had persuaded the crowds to stone him (Acts 14:19).

However despite this opposition, Paul continued to tell Gentile converts that circumcision was not necessary and salvation was to be found through faith or "the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

At the convened Jerusalem Council, Peter recounted how he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descend on Gentile converts in the same way that the Holy Spirit had filled the apostles at the time of Pentecost (Acts 15:8-9). In terms of the story, the participants at the Council should have been familiar with this event showing how God's Holy Spirit, was guiding and empowering the church. The point being made here was that the Holy Spirit came to uncircumcised Gentiles as well as Jews.[235] Also the implication here was that one could not expect to somehow "coerce" salvation from God on the basis of observing circumcision and the myriad rituals and observances that went with it as pursued by many Pharisees.

Peter's experience of the Holy Spirit as recounted in Acts 15 reflected an emerging realisation in the Church that Pentecost marked a new beginning for the followers of Jesus, one that was dominated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself had heralded such a beginning on his return to his native Nazareth, even though the people there rejected him.

In terms of biblical scholarship, Peter's reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost has relevance to the differing views amongst scholars as to whether or not the early Church believed that an "end time" or parousia was imminent. According to Hans Conzelman, whose book *The Theology of St Luke* (1957) has had such influence, the early Church thought in terms of three time phases - that of the Old Testament, the time of Jesus and a time of waiting for his

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[235] Neal M. Flanagan, *New Testament Reading Guide: The Acts of the Apostles,* 2nd ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1964), 6.

return or parousia.[236] Conzelman said at the time of Luke such a time of waiting was becoming more extended and there was need for the Church to clarify its policies and future direction. On the other hand, more recent scholars consider that there was an eschatology in the early church that incorporated the idea of Jesus coming in a spiritual sense, rather than the church needing to wait for an "end-time".[237] Such an opinion appeared to be increasing (within the story in Acts) as the position of the church and its mission became ever more secure and more widespread. It was through the Holy Spirit that God was empowering the successors of Jesus to carry on his mission and bring the good news of the gospel it to all "the nations" (Lk 24:47)

In this setting such a sense of the Spirit would have inspired confidence in church leaders to clarify and make decisions about their future direction as a whole church. The fact that Paul was self-confident enough in his own position to challenge Peter and the leadership in Jerusalem was an indication of this emerging confidence in the church as a whole. Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council also shows the outward movement that was being made towards the Gentiles. For instance mention of "the nations" (that is, the Gentiles) is repeatedly mentioned in the text c/f verses 15:3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 19 and 23.

In terms of interpreting Acts 15 using narrative criticism, it is helpful to keep in mind the observation made by the Catholic Pontifical Commission document of 1993.[238] This describes the value of narrative criticism which is a "synchronic" approach to gospel interpretation. It says narrative criticism

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[236] Hans Conzelmann *The Theology of St Luke,* trans. Geoffrey Boswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 40.

[237] Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 59-60

[238] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,", 497-524

helps to complement the necessary "diachronic" approach of Historical Critical Exegesis.[239] In its discussion of narrative criticism, the Commission points out the need to distinguish between the “writer” and the “narrator”.[240] Thus even while Luke the narrator was shaping the text to give an account of the Jewish Council, at a deeper level Luke the writer, was also organising the presentation of his theological ideas, which may or may not, have been explicitly mentioned in the story. Thus he could have embedded ideas into the story that are not explicitly mentioned or explained by the narrator.

Luke the narrator, was shaping his account of the Council to persuade his implied readers that the Council decision was both credible and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The speeches made at the Council were crafted into a rhetorical style similar to that described by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle.[241] Thus on the one hand the literary tools of Greco-Roman culture were being used even while Luke (through the speakers) was persuading a largely Jewish Christian audience to admit Gentile Christians into their company.

Prior to the presentation of Peter's speech and the Council's decision, Luke mentions the great joy that was given to people in Phoenicia and Samaria when Paul and Barnabas had told them of the "conversion of the nations." (15:3). This “good news" was repeated at the Council as well (15:12). In terms of the characterisation of the story, Paul and Barnabas were themselves adroit in relating the success of their mission to the Gentiles on their way to Jerusalem. Some of their listeners, who were also on their way to the Council, would thus be likely to spread this good news amongst other attendees before the Council itself got underway.

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[239] Pontifical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 502.
[240] Pontifical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 503.
[241] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 97.

Scholars describe Luke's approach to his texts as an optimistic one.[242] This was discussed in the introductory section above when it was pointed out that he would want to give encouragement to the emerging Gentile Christian leaders. At the theological level as well there would also be an overall purpose in this optimism. Luke was stressing the glory and joy of God's on-going, planned action rather than the dimensions of Jesus' suffering. His tone of optimism also helps to keep a sense of momentum continuing on as the story of God's actions unfolds. It might be argued that Luke was failing here to present a theology of the cross. However as Joseph Fitzmyer points out, Luke's theology should be approached on its own terms rather than being compared with the theologies of Mark and Paul.[243] In fact, according to Fitzmyer, Luke never gives any indication of having read the letters of Paul.[244] Fitzmyer's claim can of course be disputed. The text of Acts implies that they knew each other. The "we" passages of the text of Acts (cf. 16:10), claim that Luke was a fellow missionary with Paul and he was a travelling companion on Paul's lengthy sea journey (Acts 27-8). Also at one point in his letters Paul claims "Luke alone is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). But with regard to Fitzmyer's claim, apart from Paul's speeches in Acts (recounted by Luke), Luke's concepts do differ from Paul's as also from the other evangelists.[245]

Obviously, in writing, Luke had his own agenda, even while he was picking up on the ideas of other writers. His gospel for instance shows clear indication that he, like Matthew, relied heavily on Mark.[246] What was Luke's "agenda"? Throughout the narrative of Luke-Acts there is a geographical movement towards Jerusalem in the gospel and then in Acts a similar sort

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[242] Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes,* 66.

[243] Joseph Fitzmyer, intro, trans, notes *The Gospel According to Luke (I-Ix)* (New York: The Anchor Bible Doubleday, 1981), 22.

[244] Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke),* 28.

[245] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 110.

[246] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* 18.

of movement towards Rome At another level there is also the sense that God, the main character, is pushing Jesus and then his successors ever forward and outwards in terms of a Divine "plan."[247] Thus in the gospel Luke presents Jesus as the "hero". Then in Acts the successors of Jesus are also shown to be "heroes" who continue on with God's plan. Darrell Bock has drawn comparisons between the "action heroes" of Luke-Acts and the heroes of the Greek writer Homer, for example in Luke's use of verbs.[248]

In Acts 15:1-35 the sense of movement throughout the text is also evident here. In fact at times it appears to override some of the detail in a way that is more "sweeping" than one would find in Luke's gospel. His style of telescoping events and glossing over negative complexity may add to his 'looser' use of language in Acts.[249] Paul and Barnabas for instance are at the Council, but they appear to have a passive role in the decision making. Then in Acts 21:25 it even appears that Paul was barely aware of the Council's outcome.[250]

This brings our discussion to the proceedings of the Council itself and any possible links here with the three key commandments which have been the focus of our overall investigation.

As mentioned, a close look at the text of Acts 15 raises questions about whether or not all of the people at the Council actually understood what was going on. This lack of awareness is arguably reflected in biblical commentaries to this day that describe the text relating to the Council as very "problematic' [251]

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[247] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 39.

[248] Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man in Luke 5:24," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991),109-121.

[249] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 66.

[250] Laymon,ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible,* 748

[251] Laymon, ed. *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible,* 748.

On the one hand the text of Acts 15:5 says the Council controversy was fuelled by converted members of the Pharisee sect who said that Gentile converts should be circumcised and should be required to keep the law of Moses. The mention of Pharisees here is significant. Pharisees did not simply observe a rule of circumcision. Rather their whole lives were dominated by ritualistic rules that had been linked to the commandments. These rules were like an exterior cover for the ten major commandments of Moses (cf. Exodus 20: 13-15). But it also appears in the gospel that these people assumed by keeping the many detailed rules they would also be more likely to observe the commandments of Moses. This assumption led Jesus in the gospel of Mark to have confrontations with the Pharisees on this very issue. For instance he pointed out the failure of Pharisees to keep the essential commandment about honouring their parents. Rather they were putting their property into "Corban" (a form of dedication) and then saying because of this they did not have to support their parents (Mark 7:11). This is of course against the commandment “Honour thy father and thy mother” (which precedes the three commandments discussed above about “Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal” as recalled in Mark 10) In the context of his reprimand Luke 11:26 Jesus even said that the Pharisees’ Gentile converts to Judaism were finishing up morally worse than they were before. Following this same line of logic that had been pointed out by Jesus in Luke 11, Peter, at the Council of Jerusalem, talked of the inability of both himself and those present to keep the details of "the law." Peter said it was therefore unfair to place such burdens on converts (15:10). His mention of this point shows that he, and presumably many of the people present, also realised that with circumcision, more was being imposed on the Gentile converts than just circumcision itself.

In the text of Chapter 15, after Peter's statement about the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8), the meeting was taken over by another

leader called James. The emergence of James at this point gives some indication of the early church's structure and history. In fact some writers such as Kaseman claim that it was an early indication of the development of "catholicity" in the Church and a move away from the church's original, more flexible shape.[252]

In any case in the story Peter appeared to defer to this leadership of the elders and James, who was now apparently the elected leader.[253] Paul in turn appeared to defer to the leadership of the church in Antioch, given that he was appointed by them to attend the Council. The Antiochene Church appeared in turn to defer to the "Mother Church" in Jerusalem. At least these implications about leadership show that decisions made at the Jerusalem Council showed a united, corporate direction.

On the other hand within the dynamics of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the debate appeared to move from the question of circumcision towards the dietary rules that would have been affecting Gentile Christian participation in the agape-Eucharist. Special weight was given to James' view about this, not just because he was (apparently) Bishop of Jerusalem but also because traditionally, his credentials about law observance were above reproach. [254]

Some scholars such as Richard Pervo claim that Luke primarily wrote for entertainment and edification.[255] But at depth there is more than "just a story" going on in Luke's account of the Council.[256] Actually it is to the credit of Luke's

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[252] Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes,* 132-3.

[253] Black,. Rowley eds. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, 907.

[254] James D. G. Dunn, John W. Rogerson , *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 1245.

[255] Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: the literary genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c1987), 138.

[256] Flanagan, *New Testament Reading Guide: The Acts of the Apostles,* 6.

story-telling skills that someone could think he was mainly interested in story as such.

In any case there appears to be a contradiction in Luke's story of the Council. The chapter begins with the presentation of a heated debate about circumcision that threatens to split the church. But the solution offered in verse 20 does not appear to even touch on this subject! Rather it deals with four requirements that are parallel to those already required of Gentile aliens who are living in Palestine. These entail rules against the pollution of idols including eating meat sacrificed to idols (Lev. 17:8-9), sexual immorality including certain types of marriages (Lev. 18:1-30), eating strangled animals that is, those animals that have not been ritually slaughtered (Lev. 17:13), and also consuming animal blood (17:10-14). [257] These appear to be summarised at the Council by telling Gentile converts they were to avoid "blood, fornication and strangling" (Acts 15:20).[258] It appears this is what the church voted overwhelmingly for "it seemed good to us becoming of one mind" (v. 22) but this was something already set out in Jewish law. So what was the point of the Council?

James diplomatically puts forward the proposal that if Gentile converts avoid these things this would enable them to participate in meals with Jews, especially the Agape-Eucharist, without further cause of disruption in the overall church.[259] According to the Council, its decree on this was to be carried by Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and this (according to Luke) appears to resolve the question at issue (15:25).

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[257] Robert L. Wilken "The Bible and Its Interpreters: Christian Biblical Interpretation," in *Harper's Bible Commentary,* ed. James L. Mays et al (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1099.

[258] Note: The Jerusalem New Testament translates a phrase here as "the meat of strangled animals. But the RSV translates it more accurately as "what is strangled," This latter translation could thereby be understood metaphorically. . " "

[259] Black, H. H. Rowley eds. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible,* 907.

However, it appears that the circumcision question was not really resolved here at all. For instance in the 2nd Century, in Justin Martyr's *Letter to Trypho* the question is (again) raised "[260] Moreover, further along, in the narrative of Acts itself there is still tension about circumcision and full adherence to the Jewish law. For instance, in Acts 21 when Paul returned to Jerusalem he was greeted by James and the elders (v. 8). But now James tells Paul he is being challenged by "tens of thousands of believing Jews who were all zealots of the law." (v. 20). And here, even with the quote about huge numbers of opponents, Luke appears to be understating the sort of pressure that James and the elders were under.

Further complications about the effectiveness of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 also appear, when Luke's account of it is compared with Paul's apparent account of this Council in Galatians 2. Inconsistencies between the two accounts include the inference that after his conversion, Paul only went to Jerusalem twice. But Acts implies he went three times, that is, after his conversion (9:26), in relation to a famine (11:30) and then to the Council (15:2). More significantly, Paul does not mention the "edict" of the Council in the letter to the Galatians even though in Acts, Luke says he was entrusted to take this edict back to the missionary Churches and in particular to the church in Antioch which is in Galatia.

The failure of Paul to mention the Council edict in Galatians is magnified by the special emphasis that Luke gives to this event in the structure of Acts. The Council is placed in the centre of Luke's narrative. It is presented as a decisive turning point in the story and so it acts as a "story kernel."[261] Also, (as

[260] Wilken "The Bible and Its Interpreters: Christian Biblical Interpretation," 58.

[261] Ian Chabay "Narratives in the context of Global Systems Science and ICT" http://ec.europa.eu/digital-

mentioned above) prior to the Council, the Jerusalem Church and the apostles are central to the action. But after the Council, the main actor is Paul and apart from 16:4 the apostles are no longer mentioned. Again, immediately after the Council Paul sets out on his second missionary journey which takes in places such as Asia Minor 15:36, Macedonia 16:11, Athens 17:16 and Corinth 18:1. Thus focus in the Lukan text of Acts has now moved to Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

Given Luke's ability to present accurate background details, one would expect that his account of the important Council to be historically accurate as well, even if, according to the style of the time he dramatised this.[262] According to Powell, Luke was using all three types of the genre of a Greek novel known at the time, that is, history, biography and the novel.[263] Luke also shows flexibility in his ability to shape speeches to fit the viewpoints of the speaker. Thus the earlier speeches in Acts appear more primitive and they echo Semitisms (cf. a Jewish style). But in later speeches, for example at the Areopagus in Athens (17: 21-31), a classical Greek style is being used.[264] Luke also shows sensitivity to people's viewpoints. Thus expressions peculiar to Paul are used in Paul's speeches even though these expressions are scarce in the rest of the text.[265]

All this being the case, one must wonder what dimensions are at work in the speech of James when he presents the Jerusalem Council with an "edict" that is supposed to resolve the

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agenda/futurium/sites/futurium/files/Chabay%20I_Narratives%20in%20the%20context.pdf 4th March 2013., [accessed 20 October 2013].

[262] Martin Hengel, The 'Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century after Christ. In Collaboration with Christoph Markschies, Trans. John Bowden .(London: SCM Press Ltd, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 7.

[263] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 9.

[264] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 25.

[265] Flanagan, *New Testament Reading Guide: The Acts of the Apostles,* 2nd ed., 5.

circumcision crisis but in fact only appears to be about dietary rules.

There appears to be at least two key omissions in the so-called "dietary rules" solution (cf. avoid blood, fornication and strangling). Firstly, it appears that Gentiles are being accepted into the church as if they themselves have little if anything to offer Christianity. Thus on the one hand the Jews have the tradition and strengths of the Mosaic Law. But the Gentiles only appear to have negative customs that need to be prohibited. This omission of what Gentiles can contribute appears to contradict the whole tenor of Luke's writing. His writing for a start was solidly based on the sophistications of Greek culture.[266]

Secondly it appears on the surface that James finds a solution to the present Church crisis by harking back to the book of Leviticus and elsewhere in the Old Testament. This may have carried weight with an audience of hostile Pharisee Christians. But the decision of James ("I have therefore decided..." Acts 15:19) is presented by Luke as being pivotal in the narrative and in the future direction of the whole church. Why then would there not be some reference to the teachings of Jesus himself?

These two "difficulties" plus other problems raised in Biblical commentaries could possibly be explained if there were a connection between the "dietary rules" and "the way" that Paul said he had been preaching. Here as well, there were problems in explanation. A (very) literal translation of Acts 19:23 has Paul saying "Now there was about time that trouble no little concerning the way".[267] In fact Paul's first confrontation with "the way" was in his own misunderstanding of it. In Acts 9:2

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[266] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 24.

[267] Alfred Marshall, trans., *The RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Oxford: Marshall Pickering, 1988)

he was arresting both men and women that he had found to be following the "way".

To pick up on the two points raised above. What would Gentiles have to offer the church that would enable them to make their own response to and interpretation of the law of Moses? The whole of Hellenistic culture of course, cannot be summed up in a few words. But a quick overview would accept that Hellenism was (and is) largely based on rationalism and abstract concepts. Plato's *Republic* for instance was about an idealised society, which was in fact impossible to actually put into practice. But it presented ideals that could be pursued. Thus in terms of the commandments, rather than taking the minimalist approach of 'thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery or thou shalt not steal', these could be interpreted in an "idealistic" fashion. People could push beyond the boundaries of the "thou shalt not kill" and towards the avoidance of cruelty as such. They could nurture respect for the prime social supports of themselves and others rather than 'just' avoid adultery. They could avoid unjust business practices rather than 'just' avoid stealing. They could push even further with such an 'idealistic' interpretation of the commandments. Thus they could move beyond a tribal social structure outwards - towards the universal provision of health care, social security for all and the production and provision of material goods for all. An argument could be developed to show that in the many associations of the Greco-roman Empire it was already doing this sort of thing to some extent and, it provided a framework for a positive approach to the commandments. Arguably present day industry structures are also based on such "ideals."

The question arises. Does this sort of development into a positive approach to the commandments come from the teaching of Jesus? A discussion of this has already been provided above. To recap. The gospel of Mark records a man asking Jesus "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark

10:17). Jesus replies, "You know the commandments; Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honour your mother and father." (Mark 10:19) The man replies that he has observed these commandments since his youth. Jesus then challenges him to "Go sell what you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me." (Mark 10:21) In simple terms the challenge here is to go beyond "do not kill, commit adultery or steal." The same sort of "raising of the bar" of these three key commandments is found in Matthew 5:21-42 and allegorically in Luke when he resists the temptations of devil in 4:1-12. As noted above the devil tempts him to produce material goods v.4 (c/f thou shalt not steal), assume power over others v. 6 (c/f thou shalt not kill) and assume the support of his 'social' group v. 11 (c/f thou shalt not commit adultery). But in the context of these temptations Jesus asserts that there is more to found in life than material wealth, power and social adulation.

With such a positive focus on the key social commandments which have been the focus of our investigations, there would not be the need for the observance of ritualistic details to "protect" the commandments.

While the challenge of Jesus to "raise the bar" of the three key social commandments is threaded through the three synoptic gospels, such a presentation of the law would not have been easy in the environment of Jewish Christians. At the time, most of Paul's problems were caused by Jews, (and arguably) Christian Jews who identified themselves as being Jews. In Acts Paul had said he had problems teaching "the way". Such problems are apparent when he was trying to explain his position before Governor Felix in Acts 24:14. Paul told the Governor he was been trying to live according to "the way" even while his accusers claim he has been a founder of the 'Nazarine sect" (24:14). Paul did not agree with this.

In terms of "the way," which is possibly a key to understanding the edict of Acts 15:20, there are instances in Acts when a full commitment is being made by people along the same lines of the challenge by Jesus to the apparently young man in Mark 10:20. When Paul eventually returned to Jerusalem and James tells him of the hostility "tens of thousands" of Jewish converts all "zealous for the law" this implied that the tension in Jerusalem about law observance was ready to erupt (c/f 21:20). James therefore asked Paul to participate in a Temple ceremony in which some Christians were taking a "vow" (v. 24) in the hope that this would provide an opportunity for Paul to show his respect for the law. But before the ceremony, Paul was seen with a Gentile friend in the street (v. 29). So attendees at the Temple ceremony then claimed that he took this Gentiles into the restricted area of the Temple (v. 28). A riot erupted and the Romans had to take Paul into protective custody (v. 30-32). Later, Paul's nephew found out (apparently from within these same "Christian" circles) that forty plus people had taken a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (23:16). An implied reader of Acts could wonder here if the vow being taken by these people was some sort of "parody" of the vow that had already been taken by four people earlier on in the Temple. One could also wonder if the story is also a indication in the text of the deep hostility that was taken by some Christian Jews towards the "way" of observing the commandments that was being taught by Paul. Luke says it was Asian Jews in the temple who had triggered the riot 21:27. But there were many people who were quickly ready to support them and one wonders to what extent Christian Jews were amongst these protestors – some of the people James had warned Paul about. .

All these surrounding factors in the story of Acts, leads to an exploration of the layers of meaning to be found in the "edict" presented by James to the Jerusalem Council (15;20). On the surface it dealt with some dietary regulations, already set out in the Old Testament. A quick read of this suggests that

observance of these rules would help to smooth the entrance of Gentile converts into the Agape-Eucharistic meal.

But at the same time the edict could have carried a double meaning which encompassed a whole approach to the law based on "the way" as taught by Paul and which was both inspired by and suited to, a Gentile view of the law. It is interesting to note that in the story, when James asks Paul to attend a Temple ceremony in which a vow is taken, James again referred to the edict of the Jerusalem Council (21:25.

> Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.
>
> ((Acts 21:24b-25)

On the one hand it appears from this that Paul still observes the letter(s) of the Jewish law while the Gentiles only have to abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols or which contains blood because the animal had been strangled and from Temple prostitution. However (yet again) recall what Peter had said at the Council about "putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10). Given the situation of mounting tension James may have been exaggerating the extent of Paul's continued observance of the details of the Jewish law. However Paul had – up to his conversion, been a meticulous observer of the law. And, at any rate he certainly knew from his upbringing and earlier life about observance of the details of the law.

This brings us back to the question. Was there a double meaning in the edict of the Jerusalem Council as described in Acts 15? If so what was it? In looking for parallels, one could work out that when James mentions "blood" it could imply

cruelty of all kinds, including of course the blood sports which were so popular in Greco-Roman culture. Thousands of people for instance would attend gladiator fights to the death in local amphitheatres. When James mentions "fornication" he is talking about uncommitted sex as such rather than 'only' adultery with another married person. When he talks of "strangling" he could be picking up on the preaching of Amos whom he quoted at the Council cf. "I will rebuild the tent of David" (Acts 15;16). This comes from Amos 9:11. It was Amos who most loudly railed against unjust business practices

> They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. They that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted" etc
> (Amos 2:6).

This fits in with James' prohibition against "strangling". Why else would he be quoting Amos in support of the rationale of his proposal and before putting this to the Council?

Such an interpretation of Acts 15:20 (about blood, fornication and strangling) would solve many of the difficulties that have been raised by biblical commentators on this text. It would combine the circumcision question with a dietary one and thus deal with the prime purpose of the Council which was about circumcision. It would help to explain why "fornication" was mentioned in this context. It would also tie in with Paul's preaching about "the way" in which he had been teaching observance of the law. It would also help to explain Paul's silence in the Council about this edict. He would not want to elaborate on and draw attention to a secondary meaning of what James was saying given that some people at least at the Council were likely to oppose it. On the other hand it is understandable that the church people at Antioch who included people of Gentile origin were more likely to realise there was a secondary meaning in the edict and they rejoiced about it

(15:31). Another reason why Luke did not discuss Paul's understanding of the edict was that Paul himself was developing his own distinct theology in support of "the way"

Some commentaries such as Peake claim that there could not be a link between dietary regulations of the Jerusalem Council and morality. It says "a simple moral law would not have been transformed into a dietary law." [268]

However it should be noted that an alternative ancient text for Acts 15, that is, the Western text, as distinct from the probably older Alexandrian text, does make a connection between verse 20 and a moral meaning. Ernst Haenchen says that the Western text is about ten per cent longer than the Alexandrian text and he provides explanations for this. It also appears the Western text has a harsher view of Judaism and it emphasises 'Gentile' aspects and Christian differences from Judaism such as theology of the Holy Spirit.[269] In Acts 15:20 the Western text omits reference to "things strangled" and it replaces the phrase with a decree to "refrain from doing to another what you would not want done to you." This phrase gives a moral slant to the other aspects of the decree as well, that is, the worship of idols and the shedding of blood. As Martin Powell points out, "Thus the Western text presents the four restrictions placed on Gentile Christians in a way that **avoids** any reference to Jewish dietary laws." [270]

It may be an unfortunate omission that in most Bibles and therefore commentaries, the version of the Western text for verse 20 is overlooked.

The Western text may appear to be later. However some parts of it do date back to the second century. Also it was cited by

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[268] Black, H. H. Rowley eds. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible,* 909.

[269] Ernst Haenchen *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1971), Intro.

[270] Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* 23.

many of the church writers in the West, for example, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian. [271] Even if the Western text entailed the re-writing of an earlier text this re-writing was a form of interpretation. The people writing the text were "implied readers" living soon after Acts was written and they were still aware of its historical situation. This was a time when there was an emphasis on interpretation taking into account the whole of Scripture as stressed by Irenaeus. Irenaeus was trying to re-claim the Scriptures for Christianity in opposition to the heresy of the Gnostics. This time was before the use of commentaries, as introduced by Origen in the third century. [272] Thus in re-writing an earlier text, the Western text writers could be taking into account the earlier challenge (about raising the bar of the commandments) put out by Jesus and repeated in Matthew and Luke.

In conclusion, an exegesis of Acts 15 shows the extent to which Luke as author was able to provide a narrative that both taught his theology and also presented the complexities that the Church faced in trying to set up a new social system. This social system was not only based on Judaism. It also incorporated the idealism of Greek culture as well. Such idealism was to be seen in its interpretation of the three key social commandments – "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal."

Conclusion about Paul and Luke

In an overall conclusion, we have seen how Paul (in the 50's CE) isolated the three key social commandments and gave them an eschatological dimension. Insofar as one cultivated their spirit the Holy Spirit in turn was able to "grow" a spiritual body within the Temple of one's body and this would share in the resurrected life of Christ. We also saw how, in

[271] Flanagan, *New Testament Reading Guide,* 6.

[272] Wilken "The Bible and Its Interpreters: Christian Biblical Interpretation," 58-9.

about 70 CE at the height of the destruction of Jerusalem and the whole sacrificial system of the Temple, Mark the first gospel writer put out a challenge, as spoken by Jesus, to "sacrifice" one's rights to possessions, family and self-determination in a following of him (cf. Mark 10) In Matthew, again with a focus on these three commandments, the followers of Jesus were challenged to "convert" the attitude with which they obeyed the law and put an emphasis instead on the spirit with which the commandments were observed (cf. Mt.5).

In Luke there was a linkage made between following the spirit of each of the commandments and a following of Jesus. The following of Jesus was to take precedence over concerns about material possession, the comforts of home living and self-determination.

Then in Acts the early Church met in a Council of Jerusalem to clarify its position in relation to the law and the commandments that the intricacies of Jewish law were designed to protect. Acts said the Jewish Council was convened to deal with the issue of circumcision. But instead it came up with a "solution" which appeared to repeat requirements as set out in Leviticus and relating to Gentiles who were living in a Jewish community. This apparent "solution" was unanimously accepted by those present at the Council. To this day it is still apparently accepted as the correct interpretation of this text by many biblical commentaries.[273] The "snag" here about such an interpretation, whether now or in the time of Luke, has been that the circumcision question still appeared to linger on in places such as Antioch (cf. Gal. 3:1). A dietary solution also failed to recognise the contribution that Gentiles could make to the community at a moral level. Rather the "dietary interpretation" has implied that these uncircumcised people

[273] Cf. Black, H. H. Rowley eds. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible,* 909.

remained "outsiders" to the Christian Jews. Also, the text of Acts repeats the outcome of the Council at least three times in the text (cf. 15:20, 15:29, 21:25) in order to apparently stress that there was a real breakthrough with regard to obedience to the law. This resolution would be required of all Christians (cf. Acts: 15:20, 29, 16:4). But if the "solution" only referred to dietary laws it could be argued that Jewish Christians already avoided the consumption of blood and the meat of strangled animals. They already avoided the fornication rituals of pagan temples. So what if anything was in the "solution" for them. Did it even apply to them?

In the exegesis above and in the context of the three social commandments being continually threaded into the text of Paul, Mark, Matthew and Luke, it fits that all Christians, not just Gentile Christians, were urged to avoid "blood" as such, that is, cruelty to any sentient being. All Christians were urged to avoid not just adultery but fornication, that is, uncommitted sex. Indeed as Matthew had pointed out they were all urged to "upgrade" their attitude towards sexuality as such into respect for other persons. Also, by recalling the prophet Amos at the Council and his railing against "selling their sandals " etc. (Amos 2:6), the meaning of the word "strangling" in the "solution" was extended to fair dealing in business practices. Again this requirement would apply to all Christians whether they be of Gentile or Jewish background.

The interesting thing about the threefold "solution" of the Council was that it telescoped the teachings about law from Paul and the gospel writers and others who had preceded Luke. True the Jeruslaem Council would have been convened in the 50's CE. when Paul was still writing.[274] But most scholars claim Luke was writing in the 80's CE.[275] This meant there had been thirty years for the Church to clarify the meaning of

[274] Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament,* (382-3).
[275] Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Acts?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 37.

what had been resolved between the time of the Council and the writing of Acts.

From the time of Jesus there had been a distinctive change in the way that the followers of Jesus would observe the Commandments. Centuries later this distinct "way" of obeying the commandments has become incorporated into Western Culture and the implications of the edict remains. For instance in the writings of Shakespeare, the difference between a Jewish and a Christian interpretation of the commandments was highlighted in the *Merchant of Venice.* Shylock the Jew was ready to take his "pound of flesh" from Antonio. But then he was warned if he made the slightest of deviations from the exact weight his own fate would be the same. Again the spirit of the law takes precedence over its letter.

In the Council of Jerusalem there was a shift from material observance of the letter of the law, to a practice of its spirit. This shift was obligatory for all those people who claimed to be followers of Jesus, whatever their background. It was not an option.

Chapter Eight

The Passion in the Synoptics Gospels and the Three Key Social Commandments

The following chapter consists of three main sections, each devoted to an exegesis of the passion narrative in the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke. Each of these sections will demonstrate how Jesus willingly embraced the harsh reality of destitution (cf. "thou shalt not steal"), the harsh reality of aloneness (cf." thou shalt not commit adultery") and the harsh reality of powerlessness (cf. "thou shalt not kill").

These three narratives of the passion are designed to counter the fears that prompt people to steal, commit adultery or kill. In his passion Jesus deliberately moves towards the very depths of each condition. Whatever the sufferings of his followers, whether they be poor, lonely or powerless, Jesus has been there before them. Whether people be tempted to steal, disrupt the stability of their own or other families or oppress other people, they are challenged by the passion narratives to embrace their situation instead, and to follow Jesus first of all.

In order to consider the passion narratives in the context of a whole gospel it is proposed to extend use of the method of historical critical exegesis, with narrative criticism and socio-rhetorical criticism.

Firstly, a further note on the latter two methods of interpretation. Narrative criticism was described by David

Rhoads in the 1970's.[276] It treats the Scriptural text in a similar way to any other literature. It considers the range of literary narrative methods including the use of "kernals" (pivot points of a story) a "sandwich" construction (that is, a story within a story) and the position of an implied reader and the narrator (even as distinct from the writer). Like socio-rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism is described as a "synchronic" method of interpretation by the Catholic Pontifical Commission of 1993.[277]. At the same time like socio-rhetorical criticism, this method also retains close links with the diachronic historical critical exegesis. For instance a narrative critic falls back on historical critical exegesis when considering details of the narrative.

The method of socio-rhetorical criticism is considered to be an extension of historical, critical exegesis.[278] The method has been demonstrated in particular by the writer Vernon Robbins.[279] Socio-rhetorical criticism has a focus on tensions within a gospel writer's community which impel him to take a particular slant in writing, in order to persuade his community of his particular insight and interpretation. Such a background intention is likely to have been aimed at helping his community cope with particular difficulties in their own historical situation. Also, socio-rhetorical criticism uncovers how at times Hellenistic literary structures and/or traditions of the time are used by the writer.[280] Socio-rhetorical criticism has been described as "synchronic" because the "rhetoric" of a

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[276] David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982).

[277] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,", 503.

[278] Cf. Mack, Burton L. and Vernon K. Robbins, editors. *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels.*Sonoma, California: Poleridge Press, 1989. 197.

[279] Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

[280] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian discourse: Rhetoric, society and ideology*(London: Routledge, 1996).

writer is likely to extend over the whole of a text such as a gospel. [281]

Narrative criticism and socio-rhetorical criticism appear to fit in with and complement historical critical exegesis. But not all synchronic methods of interpretation have such a "fit". Structural or "semiotic analysis" which was also endorsed by the Catholic Pontifical Commission of 1993 does not appear to have the same level of credibility. At this stage in this research project it will be avoided. However it will be dealt with at length in Part Two of this overall exploration of the question "Is Christian Morality Unique?".

At this point there is to be a focus on the more credible methods of interpretation and the themes that these reveal in the passion narratives. At the same time it will be shown that these methods of interpretation raise questions about the beliefs of the gospel writers. However they do not appear to answer these questions adequately. It is therefore proposed in Part II to show how semiotic analysis does provide some answers here.

In the present section, questions to be raised include the following. On the one hand Mark's passion narrative talks about the coming of the Kingdom of God. But Jesus is faced with a situation of total devastation and fear. Matthew's passion narrative explores the trust that Jesus has had in God and in his disciples. But here Jesus is totally alone and deserted. In fact people jeer at his trust in others. Luke's passion narrative faces an underlying question as to whether or not Gentile Christians can take over leadership of the church. But Luke's passion narrative presents Jesus as so powerless.

[281] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 502.

Some scholars claim that the passion narratives pick up on and clarify key themes in the gospels. [282] In fact, in the passion narratives Jesus plumbs the depths of the conditions of devastation, aloneness and powerlessness. Moreover even while dealing with these conditions suffered by Jesus, each writer is reflecting on the dilemma that his own community is facing. In 70 CE at the time scholars consider Mark's gospel to be written, Mark's community was facing the total destruction of Jerusalem and its whole Temple system. At that time many of the followers of Jesus identified themselves as Jews. They therefore shared in the dismay and fear felt by Jews worldwide in the Jewish diaspora. About fifteen years later, in 85 CE. when scholars consider Matthew's gospel was written, Matthew's community was facing a different situation. They were being ostracised from the local Synagogue. Suddenly they were alone. Did they or could they find an identity distinct from Pharisaic Judaism? Luke's community on the other hand, but around the same time, was facing a future with a minimal membership of Jewish Christians. Could this community continue on as the followers of Jesus even while they made an outreach to the whole world?

a. The Gospel of Mark and the Passion Narrative

The biblical scholar Donald Senior points out that the key approach and intention of the gospel writers can be found in the way that they relate the story of the Passion.[283] Senior points out that in general, over the four gospels, there is a

[282] Cf. Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* (Wilmington, Delaware: Glazier, 1989), 116

[283] Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark,* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, c1985), 7.

uniformity in the story of the passion that is not so evident elsewhere. This suggests that an effort is being made by the writers (that is, narrators) to keep a unity in the approach taken here. Thus any deviation from Mark on the part of either Matthew or Luke, demonstrates a particular interest in presenting a particular angle of both the passion and their gospel as a whole.[284]

Matthew and Luke based their narratives on Mark. Thus Matthew 29:33-56 and Luke 23:33-49 begin like Mark 15:22-41. There is the journey of Jesus towards the place of crucifixion, that is, "the rock of the skull". The three accounts of the Passion end after the death of Jesus and mention of women in the distance who are watching what has happened.

By way of introduction it is appropriate to reflect to some extent on the gospel of Mark as a whole as also (again) on the methods of interpretation being used in such reflection. Recall that as Senior said, the passion narrative is likely to "sum up" the central themes of the whole gospel.

Historical critical exegesis, with its heavy focus on history and language shows that the text of Mark has a more "basic" type of Greek wording than the other gospels. This in itself suggests an earlier date than other gospels and it appears to have been written by someone more familiar with another language besides Greek, probably Aramaic.[285] Historical critical exegesis also highlights the constant references to fear amongst the followers of Jesus. In fact scholars consider the gospel ends on this same note of fear as in Mark 16:8, rather than continuing on with Mark 16:9-20.[286] This is because the last section of the gospel appears to have been added later and

[284] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark,* 7.
[285] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* 11.
[286] Cf. *The RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Baskingstoke Hants: Marshall Pickering 1968) 217.

appears to be a synthesis of the endings of other gospels.[287] The method also draws attention to the constant reference to failure in Mark on the part of the disciples. This includes both failure to understand both the identity of Jesus and also the nature of his message about the Kingdom that he proclaims. There is also the sense of betrayal in the text especially by Judas as related in Mark 14:10-11.

These sorts of observations lead scholars who use historical criticism to date the gospel at a time when people were still stinging from the time of Christian persecution in Rome by Nero in the 60's CE.[288] At that time, especially in Rome, people were approached and pressured to betray their whole family and friends who were followers of Jesus. These people were then subjected to a horrible kind of death. It was unlikely that the writer of Mark's gospel was in Jerusalem and then survived when it was destroyed by the Roman army in 70 CE. It has therefore been suggested by some scholars that the place for writing the gospel was in Rome.[289] At the same time Mark 13 shows that the writer was familiar with the way Jerusalem was destroyed and the sufferings of the people there. Suffering and deprivation is a major theme in Mark's gospel.[290]

However, within the overall text of Mark, historical critical exegesis does not necessarily deal with all the questions that it raises. For instance why did Jesus constantly try to silence people who were realising his identity (Mk 8:30). And yet why was he frustrated when they failed to do so (Mk 10:43). Why did the writer appear to have such a poor sense of the geography of Palestine? [291] Even if the writer did not live

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[287] Michael F. Trainor *The Quest for Home: The Household in Mark's Community* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 173.

[288] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*) ,24.

[289] "The Gospel of Mark" *Study resources, Intro to the bible* (Blue Letter Bible) https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/intros/mark.cfm [accessed 24 Oct 2018].

[290] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* xvi.

[291] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist,* 24.

there somebody else could have pointed out the geographical discrepancies in the text. What about interconnections between the theology of Paul (writing in the 50's CE) and the gospel, written about fifteen years later in 70 CE? Mark's gospel was written about fifteen years after Paul's emphasis on the need to accept Hellenistic thinking and membership. These are key themes in Paul's letters which would have been copied and circulated amongst followers of Jesus in general. Paul himself was mainly writing for auditor/readers who were converted Gentiles (c/f Corinthians). Mark, writing later on, must have realised that overall, Gentiles converts were starting to outnumber or had outnumbered Jewish converts. To what extent is there a connection here with the growing "kingdom" of the Church and the mockery faced by Jesus when the chief priests and scribes at his passion mocked its existence (Mk 15:31-32)? Recall that in 70 CE the chief priests and the whole temple system were in the process of being wiped out entirely.

As distinct from historical critical exegesis, consider some of the insights that narrative criticism provides for Mark's gospel and his passion narrative. The scholar Alter for instance points out that repetition is "ubiquitous" in narrative literature.[292] But historical criticism does not necessarily pick up on the significance of such repetitions. For that matter narrative criticism may not show up the full significance of these repetitions either, but it does do this in some ways, for example when a point is being emphasised.

A narrative criticism interpretation of Mark shows the identity of Jesus as "the Christ" (Mk 1:1). This is stated at the start of the gospel by a narrator who appears to be omniscient. The writer Brendan Byrne picks up on this sort of introduction and observes "There is the sense of the Gentile rather than the

[292] Alter, Robert, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic books, c. 2001) 92.

Jewish world as the primary focus of mission."[293] The starting point of the gospel (Mk 1:1) asserts that Jesus is "the Christ". In terms of narrative this informs the implied reader of the gospel about the identity of Jesus. Such knowledge now sits with the implied reader throughout the story to follow. Therefore, because of what they already "know" the implied reader is able constantly to watch the failure of the disciples of Jesus to realise who Jesus was (and is). From this narrative critic perspective the implied reader can also see how the Gentiles appear to be more responsive to the message of Jesus than the disciples are themselves (cf. Mk 7:25-30). It is as if there is something in the message of Jesus that appeals to the searching of Gentile people while the disciples, raised within Judaism, cannot appreciate this.

In the first half of the gospel there is a crescendo of activity in the overall narrative that leads to the point when Peter states "Thou art the Christ." (Mk 8:29) Francis Moloney claims this is a peak in the narrative of the text. After this point there is a falling off in the miracle working of Jesus. It is as if the earlier miracles had been reinforcements about the identity of Jesus and after the definitive statement "Thou art the Christ" the miracles are no longer so necessary.[294]

Narrative critics also note the story-telling skills of Mark such as his use of a sandwich method which breaks into a story with another incident. The use of a "sandwich" construction reinforces a message about the story that is interrupted and then continued. The passion narrative itself begins with the betrayal by Judas. This is interrupted by a woman who bursts into the meal scene and anoints the head of Jesus. Her interruption both contrasts with and appears to trigger the final decision made by Judas to betray Jesus (Mk 14:10-11).[295]

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[293] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* xviii.
[294] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 48.
[295] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* 216.

Such a betrayal would have been a familiar experience amongst those followers of Jesus who knew how whole families had been betrayed by fearful members. Mark's community members were still afraid of betrayal and could identify with Jesus in this situation. But we are left to wonder about the background story here as to why exactly it was this interruption by the woman that became the trigger point for Judas' betrayal.

In the analysis made by Moloney of this anointing scene, he does not see a connection here with a symbolic Kingly anointing of the head (c/f the anointing of King David). However as with other narrative critics, he points out that there connection here with a constant theme in the gospel about the coming of the Kingdom.[296] We still wonder however about the full significance of this.

In contrast to the overall story line about the coming of God's kingdom, the crucifixion presents a stark picture of total desolation. Such a contrast between "Kingdom" and desolation as set up by the writer must be deliberate. Thus on the one hand the story-line may be about the coming of the Kingdom.[297] But the crucifixion narrative appears to demonstrate that it did not come after all. Not even news of the resurrection changes this situation. The women who were told by the angel to take the message of the resurrection back to the disciples, go away instead, in fear. In a word, the gospel for the narrative critic, appears to end in failure (Mark 16:8).[298]

Mark's narrative shows a step-by-step move towards this utter devastation. If one starts looking at the narrative, at the point where Judas betrays Jesus behind his back, the next step in the story is the disciples preparing for the Passover meal and Judas attending this meal. At the time Jesus is well aware of what

[296] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* 176.
[297] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* 176.
[298] Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* 52.

Judas has done. There is a reference to the betrayal in what he says "one of you will betray me" (Mk 14:18) Jesus and the disciples then go to a garden where Jesus asks for the companionship and support of the group. But they fall asleep "And he came and found them sleeping" (v. 37). Then Judas arrives and signals to an armed crowd as to which person they should seize. His signal is to give Jesus a kiss "The one I shall kiss is the man, seize him" (v. 44). Then all the supporters of Jesus fled. Jesus is then questioned and insulted at a "kangaroo court" held by the Jews. He is taken to Pilate where the crowd call out "Crucify him" (15:13). Pilate orders that he be scourged and crucified. But before taking him out of Jerusalem the soldiers play games with him. They put a crown of thorns on him and mock the status of his Kingship (Mk 15:16-20) By the time Jesus was on his way to the crucifixion he was so weakened he could barely carry his cross and someone was forced to help him. Then, even when he was on the cross and stripped naked, people complained about his "mock" title of King. The chief priests, scribes and even passers by jeered at him.

> And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.
>
> (Mk 15:29-32).

The whole narrative of the passion in Mark shows a step by step "stripping away" of every kind of material support. The picture of Jesus on the cross presents the total opposite of kingship. As recalled above, even when women at the tomb were told to tell of his resurrection they went away instead in a state of fear. The narrative apparently provides a step by step descent into total failure. But even here, Mark the writer, as

distinct from Mark the narrator shows a glimpse of ironic hope. As mentioned above, the chief priests and scribes ridiculed Jesus about his "Kingdom". But they themselves in 70 CE, along with the whole Temple system of worship were in the process of being destroyed themselves.[299]

One could wonder if other methods of interpretation could help to provide an answer to the ending of the gospel in apparent failure, yet with Mark's touch of ironic ridicule. The socio rhetorical method of interpretation may hold a key to this enigma. It may help to clarify what Mark actually meant by the "Kingdom".

In order to consider the insights of socio rhetorical interpretation into the passion narrative there is need to make a quick digression and take an in-depth and overall look at 1st century Palestine. This includes an examination of the impact of Hellenistic culture and their literary methods both on the situation of Jesus and the situation of the gospel writer.[300] For instance a socio-rhetorical interpretation, as it appears to have been conducted by the scholar K.C.Hanson, takes a much closer look at the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee than traditional interpretations. This has already been discussed to some extent in pages above [301]

Hanson considers how Capernaum, a base for the ministry of Jesus (c/f Lk 4:31-32 and 7:10), was also at the heart of a fishing industry[302] She notes that the first disciples were from this industry and were intrinsically a part of the family groups who worked here. Others, such as Antoinette Clark Wire note how, in the text, the gospel writer shows that Jesus apparently

[299] cf. Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance*, 48.
[300] Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher:,* 20.
[301] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 100.
[302] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 109

avoids visiting the towns around Galilee and instead of this he focuses on the villages. [303]

These observations show that the followers of Jesus were immersed in the social networks that were based upon the fishing industry. It follows then that the dissatisfactions of the people in this industry would be reflected both in the ministry of Jesus and in the gospel of Mark itself. Some of the pressures as Hanson points out, included the Roman and other taxes that were placed upon these people. She also notes how they were operating in a Hellenistic system, given that the Roman Empire regulated the way in which they worked and therefore lived.[304] These people also needed to grapple with the moral codes of Hellenism that often bordered on cruelty. In fact it endorsed systemic cruelty with its practice of slavery. Thus while most people around for instance Galilee were ethnically and religiously based Jews it was likely that there was considerable fall off from the detailed \ practice of Judaism. It has already been pointed out above that Peter admitted he found the details of the Jewish law impossible to carry out (Acts 15). For somebody such as Jesus who was moving amongst the people in this industry, one could imagine he saw the necessity of some sort of reconciliation between the two world views that the people were living with.

One could imagine in such a scenario there would be the expectation or hope amongst such people that some type of new society could emerge. Was this "the Kingdom" of the Christ?

One of the factors that a socio-rhetorical interpretation of Mark's passion could take into account is that while these people were being caught between Judaism and Hellenism, they were also to some extent practising Jews (despite

[303] Note: Lecture given by Dr. Keith Dyer, Catholic Theological College Melbourne, 2015.
[304] Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 99.

inadequacies expressed by Peter in Acts 15:7-11). The Historian Hengel points out that despite pressures exerted on occupants of the Greco Roman Empire by the "bulldozer" of Hellenism, minimal numbers of Jews dropped away from their religion altogether.[305] It was in fact the loyalty of ordinary Jews to their moral law that distinguished Jews from other peoples and cultures who had been and were being absorbed into Hellenism. There was indeed a desire amongst the people that Jesus was mixing with, to retain the basis of Judaism rather than capitulate. Historically, the Jews of the first century CE and the few centuries before this had as a whole, entered into a deliberate competition with Hellenism. After all, God had directly given them their Law.[306]

In her book Antoinette Clark Wire argues that Mark's gospel had been evolved in continual story-telling and performance over the decades preceding the gospel and after the death of Jesus. The act of actually writing the stories down could have been triggered by some devastating crisis such as the loss of the Jerusalem Temple. [307]

On the one hand socio-rhetorical criticism provides some clues as to the nature of the "kingdom" anticipated by the followers of Jesus. But in itself one could not claim that by using this method, a "definition" of such a kingdom could be provided. However the method of interpretation called semiotic analysis or structural criticism may indeed provide an answer here. But as already stated, because of its lack of credibility, such an exploration will need to be deferred until Part II of *Is Christianity Unique?*

At any rate. Why was Mark so confident about the arrival of Christ's Kingdom – confident enough to appear to make fun of

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[305] Note: Peter's statement about non-observance of the law in Acts 15:

[306] Martin Hengel. *Judaism and Hellenism,* translated by John Bowden. (London:SCM Press Ltd, 1981), 68-9.

[307] Clark Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance*, 48.

the very people who jeered at Jesus when he was hanging from the cross and when everything had been stripped from him "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross " (Mk 16:32).

b. The Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Matthew

The use of Historical Criticism in the interpretation of Matthew's gospel provides a considerable range of insights. However again, a wider range of interpretative methods would also help to demonstrate further that this gospel has a particular focus on the commandment that deals with one's prime social group, that is, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Consider some of the findings of the historical critical method to start with. These show that Matthew's gospel deals in particular with relationships, especially relationships both between Jesus and the disciples and amongst the disciples themselves. It also shows growth in the ability of the disciples to take on responsibility for the message of Jesus. The gospel also deals with the relationship between Christian Jews and mainstream Judaism. At the time of writing (c.a. 85 CE) the Pharisees were emerging as the leadership group within Judaism and their relationships with Christian Jews was becoming more strained.[308] In fact it was around this time that the community of Matthew found themselves to be ostracised from the Synagogue altogether. A decision made by the Jewish leadership at Jamnia prescribed that a prayer should be said in each Synagogue that placed a curse on the followers of

[308] Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave.* A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels. Vol 1 (Doubleday: New York, 1993),360-2.

Jesus.[309] This has been noted in previous pages. The position of Christian Jews within the Jewish Synagogue and Judaism itself became untenable. But for so many Christian Jews, especially those who formed the base community of Matthew's gospel, mainstream Judaism was the group with whom these people had been identified since birth. [310]

The text of Matthew suggests that it was written from the context of a Judaic background.[311] The writer therefore had to come to grips with the issue at hand. Socio-rhetorical criticism helps to uncover the anguish behind the text of the gospel.

Within the text Matthew insists on a Judaic heritage in the background of Jesus and implicitly in the background of his followers, whether of the 30's CE or the 80's CE (including auditor/readers). An indication of this insistence is the on-going recollection of Old Testament prophets and in particular Isaiah e.g. Mt 3:3. This heavy emphasis on prophets in the gospel shows how Matthew's community continues to make their claim on the heritage of Judaism. Indeed, their position as followers of Jesus is presented as the fulfilment of Judaism. Thus Matthew recalls the statement " Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets" (Mt. 5:17). This statement is unique to Matthew [312]

From the beginning of Matthew's gospel the identity of Jesus himself is presented as someone who has grown up within the Jewish community. The genealogy of Jesus is traced back as far as Abraham (Mt. 1:1) Then, soon after the infant narratives in the opening chapters the relationship between Jesus and God is presented in terms of a "Father-son" bond "This is my beloved son" (Mt. 3:17). This identity of Jesus as the "Son of

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[309] Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.
[310] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, 12.
[311] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew,* 13.
[312] Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr, *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 21.

God" is again highlighted in the passion narrative. Like Mark in his passion narrative, Matthew identifies Jesus as the "Son of God". But he also puts emphasis on their relationship of trust. He also ties this in with the present angst that was being experienced in his own community who were being separated from their Jewish roots. It is therefore interesting to note the slight distinction between Matthew and Mark's description of the people who mocked Jesus when he was on the cross. Mark refers to these people as being the passers by, the chief priests and also the scribes who were mocking Jesus about his "kingdom". But Matthew includes "the elders" amongst those who mock Jesus. This shifts the connotations of the text. On the one hand the community of Matthew knew that the whole priestly class and the cultural centre of Jerusalem had already been destroyed. But the "elders" of the Jews, namely the Pharisees, were still in a power-position over Matthew's community. Thus the mockery of the elders at the crucifixion would have relevance in the here and now of about 85 CE. Rather than sounding a note of irony to Matthew's community, it was a reminder to them that Jesus, like themselves, had also been ostracised from mainstream Judaism. The words used in the mockery of the elders and others, "He has trusted in God. Let him rescue him now if he wants him" (Mt. 26:43) reflects that Matthew's community, has now being banned from the group that until now, they had considered to be their family. Judaism had been their prime social support group. But now Matthew's community had to develop a new relationship between each other, a relationship with the resurrected Jesus and a new relationship with God. That is, and here there is a different slant on the irony altogether, - "if God wants them!" They had to be convinced that God did in fact "want them".

In Matthew's emphasis on "trust" in the Passion there is also an echo of the temptations of Jesus at the start of the Gospel, especially the middle temptation (Mt. 4:1-11). In a metaphorical sense it could be argued that the devil's first temptation about breaking a fast relates to material possessions

as such. The third temptation of the devil about power over the Empires of the world relates to power and control of one's destiny. The temptation about angels bearing up Jesus if he throws himself off the pinnacle of the Temple has special relevance to Matthew's community and his passion narrative. It is connected with social support structures. There is a temptation here is to rely on one's social support structures to intervene and "save the day". But the individual (and group) need to find their own way. If Jesus, in terms of the middle temptation, were to throw himself off the temple roof and expect his prime social group (God and his angels) to save him, then there would be a presumption here that conflicts with the true meaning of trust.

In the context of these temptations, the relationship between Jesus and his Father is defined in terms of trust. The words of mockery in Matthew's passion narrative make an allusion to the middle temptation and the deep sense of aloneness that Jesus had now embraced at the crucifixion.

In the above pages of this inquiry into *Is Christian Morality Unique?* and in discussions about the three key commandments the observation has been made, that the terms used to describe these commandments constantly shift around in order to further develop their meaning. This also prevents them from being "locked" into a single phrase that can then be misinterpreted. Thus in the case of Matthew the importance of trust and its connection to social supports is developed.

Throughout the gospel of Matthew there is a constant redaction process of Mark going on in order to explore further the relationships that were being tested in the Passion. Examples are as follows. Mark recounts how Judas kissed Jesus in the betrayal (Mk 14:45). Matthew adds that Jesus asked Judas "Friend why are you here? (Mt 26:50). Also, Mark recounts how "they all... fled" (Mk. 14:50). But Matthew notes that "all the disciples... fled" (Mt 26:56). Also again, it was

Matthew who recalled the warning sent by the wife of Pilate about having nothing to do with this innocent man (Mt. 27:19). Later he goes on to say Pilate claimed to be innocent of his blood (Mt 27:24). Then Matthew notes how the Jews called out "His blood be upon us and our children" (Mt. 27:25). Such a quote reflects the strained relationship between the followers of Jesus at the time of Matthew and mainstream Judaism. Then, at the time of Jesus' death, Mark says "he breathed his last" (Mk 15:37). Yet even here Matthew presents Jesus in terms of relationship. Thus he says "He yielded up his spirit" (Mt. 27:50).

As well as these redactions in the passion narrative There is a gradual preparation and bonding of the disciples amongst themselves and with Jesus that takes place over the length of the Matthew's gospel. This is contrasted with increasing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Thus there are phrases used to describe the Pharisees such as "serpents, you brood of vipers" (Mt. 23:33). In such phrases a culmination of the rejection by mainstream Judaism of the followers of Jesus is reflected in Matthew's Passion. Indeed this rejection is so prominent that some scholars have suggested that historically, the gospel of Matthew has been used as an excuse for on-going persecution of Jews and the anti-Semitism that erupted in World War Two.[313]

In any case, historical critical exegesis and socio-rhetorical criticism show that mainstream Judaism rejected both Jesus and his followers. These approaches to interpretation also show how a gradual development of trust between Jesus and his disciples was taking place. But we are still left with a question as to whether or not Matthew the writer considered the bond of trust here would be strong enough to hold the

[313] Wayne A. Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible: The Strange Case of Gerhard Kittel" in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*. Edited by Hindy Najman and Judith H Newman (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2004), 513-541

followers of Jesus together and on their own, into the future. At the end of the gospel Jesus tells his disciples to "disciple others" and he said that he would be with them until the end of time (Mt 28:16-20). But would the group be strong enough for this? Another method of interpretation (to be explored in Part II) might help to reveal an answer here. But in the meantime, a reader of Matthew's gospel can be satisfied that his Passion narrative has a particular stress on relationship.

c. The Passion Narrative in the Gospel of Luke

It has already been noted that because the Passion Narratives across the gospels are very similar, the redactions of Mark that are taken by Matthew and Luke show up their particular interests.

Mark's narrative shows the stark reality of destitution. This was being faced by all Jews at the time of 70 CE when Jerusalem, its Temple and its worship culture were all being destroyed. Matthew's gospel shows some deviations from Mark to reflect the present situation of Christian Jews who were now being ostracized from mainstream Judaism.

What was the position of Luke's community and how is this reflected in the Passion Narratives? We have already considered how Mark's gospel plumbs the depths of material deprivation as reflected in the commandment "Thou shalt not steal." Matthew's gospel plumbs the depths of social isolation as reflected in the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Does Luke deal with the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" and if so how?

Associated with this latter commandment is self-determination and the empowerment of others. When we consider the text of

Luke's Passion Narrative as compared with that of Mark and Matthew, we find that Luke puts a stress on self-determination. Recall that Luke was writing for a largely Gentile community.[314] In fact the emerging Church was becoming predominantly Gentile. It was having to face up to the question as to whether or not such a community could continue on when it was not only cut off from its Judaic heritage (viz. the Synagogue) but it also had a reduced proportion of members who had been raised as Jews and who were educated in Jewish heritage. Luke presents Jesus in such a way as to show that despite all his powerlessness at the time, he still had some degree of control over his destiny. He was still "passing on" his legacy to his followers and empowering others.

Consider some details of the text. On the one hand all three synoptic gospels begin the passion story with the disciples asking about where the Passover supper should be held (Mk 14:12, Mt..26:17, Lk 22:9)). But in Luke Jesus gives an order to Peter and John specifically to "Go and prepare the Passover supper" (Lk 22:8). It was they who would deal with the details. Then at the supper itself, as distinct from the other two gospels, Jesus again gives an order to the disciples "Take this and divide it amongst yourselves." (Lk. 22:17) Even while on the cross, Jesus exercises power. He shows his power to forgive others "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23:34). And even in the act of dying he exercises self-determination as he addresses God, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 25:45).

Luke's gospel is considered to be optimistic as compared with other gospels and this becomes evident at the time of the passion as well. For instance Jesus says to the repentant thief "Today you will be with me in paradise" Lk. 23:43). [315]

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[314] Mark Allan Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990.51.

[315] Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes,* 66.

In his overall social context and as a writer, Luke is reflecting on the encouragement given by Jesus to the apostles (and the Gentile-dominated church) to take charge. Therefore Luke the writer also appears to make excuses for major players and he appears to downplay their guilt. Thus when Jesus warns Simon Peter that he will deny him in the near future he says "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you." (22:31). Here, blame in a sense, is shifted to Satan. [316] Then when Jesus is in the garden and finds the disciples sleeping, Luke adds an excuse for them, that is, the "disciples sleeping for sorrow." (22:45). Also, while Mark highlights that "they all forsook him and fled" (Mk. 15:40), and Matthew adds to this saying "all the disciples forsook him and fled." (Mt. 26:56), in contrast Luke leaves this desertion by followers out altogether.

Luke also plays down the guilt of other parties. And, he has Jesus addressing them. Thus Mark says a crowd **from** the chief priests and scribes and elders arrived in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:43). But Luke says the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders actually came to the garden themselves. And, Jesus addresses them. (Lk 22:52-3). Luke's Jesus also, in a sense, addresses Peter immediately after Peter's denial of him. The text says "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Lk 22:61). Again, when Luke tells his readers how the chief priests and the rulers and the people cried out for his crucifixion he adds "and their voices prevailed." (23:22). It is as if it was the voices, or the overall governance system itself which allowed the voices to be so loud, that is what determined Jesus' fate. Luke also relates the story of Jesus being sent to Herod. Herod by omission in the text, did not actually condemn Jesus but sent him back to Pilate (Lk 23:6-12). Pilate in turn strongly protested his own innocence of the death sentence and he physically washed his hands of such

[316] Powell, *What are They Saying about Luke,* 48.

guilt as the symbol of this (Lk 23:22-3). Another party to the crucifixion, apparently deemed guilty by Matthew, are the Jews. Matthew has them calling out "His blood be upon us and upon our children." (Mt. 27:24). However Luke leaves out this call. In contrast, Luke adds in another incident which arouses sympathy instead for the Jewish people rather than blame. In Luke Jesus addresses the "daughters of Jerusalem" with a prediction of their own dire experiences to come when Jerusalem would be destroyed in the future (in fact in 70 CE). Thus, even in all his own powerlessness, Luke's Jesus is able to empathise with these women and their future (23:28). Historically speaking, dates have some relevance here. Scholars consider that Luke was writing in about 85 CE. [317] The crucifixion of Jesus took place about 33 CE.[318] The destruction of Jerusalem took place in 70 CE. There is a 37 gap between the Jesus' passion and the time of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. But in 85 CE, fifteen years after the catastrophe, the Jewish population was still reeling from what had happened. In a sense then, it is Luke the writer looking back at what happened, perhaps more so than the historical Jesus looking forward. In any case Luke is presenting the Jewish population here in a sympathetic light and Luke shows the readiness of Jesus to empathise with them. And, as stated above, Luke goes further here because he omits altogether the cry related by Matthew, that is, "His blood be upon us and our children." (Mt: 27:25).

Even while on the cross Luke's Jesus continued to exercise his own self-determination and the empowerment of others. Mark (15::27) and Matthew (Mt. 27:38) mention the two robbers crucified with Jesus and the way they jeered at him. But Luke picks up on another angle here. He tells how one of the robbers chided the other and this robber said to Jesus "Lord remember me when you come into your Kingdom." (Lk 23:41)

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[317] Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke,* 12-13.
[318] Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke,* 12-13.

Jesus promised him… "This day you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43)

Also again, while Jesus was on the cross, as with the Mark and Matthew, Luke records how Jesus was mocked by onlookers. But there is a slight difference here as well. Mark says it was the chief priests and scribes who led the mockery (Mk 15:8). Matthew says it was the chief priests and elders (Mk 27:20). Luke says "but the rulers scoffed at him" (Lk 23:35). Here it is the rulers who hold the power position. Luke's crucifixion reflects the context of a secular society which is nominally at least, based on the governance model of democracy and the voice of the people. In this sense it is the people who are supposed to be the rulers. Indeed in his *Acts of the Apostles*, Luke devotes considerable reflection to the nature and role of "the Word" in such a society. Implicitly in *Acts* his many references and lengthy descriptions of "the word" also relate to the "voice" and authority of the people. Against such a back drop it is therefore fitting that Luke should mention "the people" both in the decision made about the crucifixion (Lk 23:4) and also in the mockery given to Jesus while he was on the cross. Consider the differences. Both Mark and Matthew say "And those that passed by derided him, wagging their heads…" (Mk 15:29), (Mt 27:39). But Luke says "And the people stood by, watching." (Lk 23:35). One is reminded here of the adage that "evil happens when "good people do nothing".

Even in the situation of the powerlessness of Luke's Jesus, when both rulers and soldiers were mocking him, there is still the hint that he is indeed "the Chosen One" which is a phrase they use. Their mockery call to mind the power of the Emperor himself. [319] Thus,

[319] PBS "The Roman Empire in the First Century" (Perrysburg, Oh: Public Broadcasting Service) https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/emperors.html, [accessed 22 Oct 2018].

> And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (Lk 23:35-38).

In the light of the resurrection that was to follow the crucifixion, there is an added touch of irony here. The rulers and soldiers may have thought they were reminding Jesus that it was the Emperor who was the real "Chosen One". But no Emperor could rise from the dead!

What sort of discussion is there about Luke's passion narrative amongst biblical scholars?

A narrative critic such as Powell points out that throughout the text of Luke's gospel, it is God who is the main actor. Powell says there is a "divine purpose" that unifies Luke's two volumes. [320] There is also a movement towards giving over power within the church to the Gentiles. And, there is also a movement towards exaltation.[321] Powell says this is echoed in the crucifixion itself and after Jesus dies. For instance it is the gentile Centurion who gives glory to God (Lk 23:47). This movement towards exaltation extends to the Ascension as well. [322] Thus the first account of the Ascension (Lk 24:51) refers to the disciples, and the second account of the Ascension in *Acts* 1:9 " he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight" refers to the beginning of the Church. Narrative critics claim that overall, the gospel of Luke and *Acts* is not only optimistic but it moves towards an "exaltation" as the gospel finally reaches Rome the ruling centre of the known world.

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[320] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke,* 12.

[321] Michael Trainor, "Matthew's Passion Narrative: The Physical and Sexual Abuse of Jesus (Part One)" *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology* 36, no. 2 (Melbourne, Vic: Sacred Heart Theological College Croydon, 2002), 79.

[322] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke,* 73.

Nevertheless, despite the optimism of Luke's text, there is still a question about how secure the base of the Church actually was in the time of Luke, now that it mainly consisted of Gentile Christians. According to Rhoads, even though Mark's reader/auditor may have expected a parousia, the Church into the future would continue to recognize itself as being on the "edge" of society, always expecting something better.[323] Some critics such as Conzelman claim that there is an implied delay of the "parousia" (the second coming of Christ) which was now being extended into the prolonged Age of the Church.[324] But the narrative critic Powell says that a claim that auditor/readers of Luke thought that the parousia was only delayed is too simple an answer here,.[325] He says that there is need for an increased study of the social and political commitments that were being made in the gospel of Luke that transcend the somewhat simplistic idea of a "parousia". Powell also says Luke's gospel has social and political categories of writing that should be examined as well as its theological dimensions. [326] One could suggest here that an example of this wider dimension that included sociology and politics would be a study of Luke's interest in "the voice" of the people and democracy. In relation to this point of Powell's about social and political implications, Donald Senior points out that another problem that needed to be dealt with in regard to Luke's Gentile-based community was as follows. "The outward thrust of the Gospel could clash with the need for community cohesiveness in the face of the dominant culture and values of the world." [327] Over and above this, a point raised by Conzelmann and a point that a socio rhetorical interpreter would be likely to explore, is whether or not Luke was trying to present a Christianity that the Roman world

[323] Rhoads, *Mark as Story,* 141.
[324] Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 14.
[325] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke,* 43.
[326] Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke,* 82.
[327] Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke*, 24.

would see as politically non-threatening. Conzelmann for instance says that Luke distinguished between the "then" of 33 CE and the "now." of 85 CE [328]

It appears that Historical Critical Exegesis, narrative criticism and socio-rhetorical criticism do show up Luke's optimism and belief in the on-going action of God in the evolving church. They also show up Luke's special interest in power and empowerment as summed up in the commandment of "Thou shalt not kill". However it could be argued that they fail to show clearly if and how Luke resolves the question as to how the community can "move out" into the Gentile world without losing its own cohesion and its standards of morality. Recall for instance Paul's outbursts over the failings of the Gentile Christian Corinthians in the 50's CE. "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans.." (1 Cor. 5:1). Into the future would a Gentile based church as proposed by Luke, need to be upbraided in the same way?

In Part Two of this overall look at *Is Christian Morality Unique?* Semiotic analysis will be used to show how the structure of Luke's gospel and Acts actually do provide a "blueprint" or as Aristotle would ball it a "constitutions" for a Gentile church to model itself upon. This would help to make it more secure.

In the meantime, the exegesis above, show that Luke has particular interest in self-determination and the empowerment of others. Such a control of one's destiny relates to the Commandment of "Thou shalt not kill." By showing that the person of Jesus was able to retain and grow in self-determination there was an endorsement that they also could make it.

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[328] Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke,* 12-13.

Chapter Nine

Comparison with Other World Religions

Conclusion about Uniqueness

In the pages above it has been demonstrated, mainly using Historical Critical interpretation, that there is a continued focus on money, power and relationship in the writings of Paul, Mark, Matthew and Luke. However the leading question of this research project asks how "unique" is such a focus?

A way to explore this question would be to ask to what extent do other world religions also put a focus on the morality of money, power and relationship. An obvious place to start here is Judaism. At the same time a definition to start with, of what money, power and relationship entail, could also be made. Then the likelihood of a focus on these three things in other world religions would become self-evident.

Consider the focus on power. This has ramifications as pointed out above, in discussions about the commandment of 'Thou shalt not kill." (cf. traditionally number five of the Ten Commandments) Paul made reference to this commandment under such references as 'violent theft' (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9). Mark dealt with it in terms of the commitment of one's destiny to a following of Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 10:17-31). Matthew discussed it in terms of belittling the dignity of others (cf. Matthew 5:22). Luke had a focus on self-determination (cf. Luke 25:45). All these approaches touch upon one's life, dignity and freedom. At times in Paul and in the synoptic

gospels the commandment is mentioned explicitly in conjunction with the other two for example in Mark 10:19.

If one discusses power in the general sense (independently of religion), morality concerns about power become self-evident even without the prioritisation of it that takes place in religions. If people want to build a safe society, survival of one's life should be at the head of a values list. Thus it can be assumed that any type of society that is trying to clarify its priorities would put the survival of life amongst its members to the forefront. Such priority is reflected in the animal kingdom as well. Here for example parents are prepared to endanger and even sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their young. Generally even hunting animals such as lions or tigers, do not kill or eat their own species.

Consider the second of the three Commandment being focussed upon here that is, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (cf. traditionally number six of the Ten Commandments)/ This Commandment incorporates relationship as such within one's prime social group. Survival of a species for instance depends on stable and nurturing relationships within the group. Thus again, one could expect that if a social value system were to be viable it would put priority on the stability of marriage. Such a priority would also for instance extend to doubts that people would have, about any lifestyle that uses other people and de-sensitises their ability to form a stable, long-term relationship.

Consider the third of the three commandments 'Thou shalt not steal." (cf. traditionally number seven of the Ten Commandments). This relates to the importance of ownership and material security for both the individual and their prime social group, into the future. Actually it would also connect with the wanton destruction of habitat for non-human species as well. Again, despite obvious failures on the part of present societies in this latter case, one would expect that priority

should be given to to the rights of ownership in any type of viable society.

Such reflections lead us to consider major world religions other than Christianity. Obviously, because of cultural and historical differences in their origins, and insofar as these religions do have a focus on money, power and relationship, then such emphases would be expressed in a range of ways. In the following paragraphs it is proposed to look at the Scriptures of Judaism, of Islam, Taoism, and Hinduism. It is also proposed to consider the basic social structure of Buddhism.

Judaism

In the case of **Judaism**, as already noted, there is a heavy emphasis on all Ten Commandments including "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery and Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20: 13-15).

In the preceding pages here there has been discussion about the Council of Jerusalem in the early Christian Church which took place in the 50's CE. It was argued in this discussion that, "the bar" of the three commandments was raised so as to include cruelty as such (cf. "blood"), uncommitted sex as such (cf. 'fornication') and unfair business methods (cf. 'strangling'). This decision of the Council set a direction for morality in the early church. But does this mean that the prohibitions in Judaism about money, power and relationship only stayed at the bare minimum level of the commandments? Or, was there an attempt within the Commandments themselves to highlight and emphasise these three commandments about "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal" ?

In the Catholic tradition the Commandments of "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal" are numbered as numbers five, six and seven in the list of the Ten Commandments.[329] However if we continue on to numbers eight, nine and ten within the Commandments, we find there are 'echoes' of the same prohibitions that are put forward in numbers five, six and seven. In this sort of repetition it appears that people are expected to extend the prohibitions of the Commandments into their own attitudes as well. Consider. Commandment number eight says 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." This presents a prohibition against the destruction of someone else's reputation and possibly freedom which would affect their self-determination. Number nine says "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife." This extends the prohibition against adultery into one's attitude towards women in general. Number ten says "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods." This extends the prohibition against stealing into one's attitudes relating to envy, jealousy etc. over the property of others.

Thus Judaism itself attempts to put a priority on morality concerning power, relationship and money in a way that has parallels with the emphasis taken by Christianity. In fact it provides a base for the Christian approach. Also, in the psalms and prophets of the Old Testament a "style of approach" to the Commandments was provided to Paul and the gospel writers. That is, attitudes towards these were embedded into ancient texts even while they were not explicitly mentioned.

Consider a couple of passages from Jewish Scriptures:

1. 1 Samuel 2:4-5

The bows of the mighty are broken	(cf. power)

[329] Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* 124.

But the weak are clothed with strength	
Those with plenty must labour for bread But the hungry need work no more	(cf. money)
The childless wife has children now But the fruitful wife bears no more	(cf. relationship)

2. Isaiah 33:15

He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, Who despises the gain of oppression,	(cf. money)
Who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe,	(cf. self-determination and power)
Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed	(cf. violence and power)
And shuts his eyes from looking upon evil	(cf. pornography and relationship)

Islam

Briefly consider **Islam.** Islam, along with Judaism and Christianity, is described as an Abrahamic religion. It is a religion with a heavy emphasis on the moral law as set out in the Jewish Ten Commandments. As in Judaism, Islam has an emphasis on the observance of time. Thus people are encouraged for instance to ritually pray at five different times of the day. The book of Islam, the *Koran* recognises the

validity of the Jewish Old Testament and its Ten Commandments. In fact there are parallels to the Commandments scattered through the Koran, for example,

Cf. Ten Commandments "I am the Lord thy God"	**Koran quotes** [330]
1. "Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me"	"There is no God except one God" (47:19)
2. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord they God in vain."	"Make not God's name an excuse for your oaths"(2:224)
3. "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day."	"When the call for the Friday Prayer is made, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off your business" (62:9)
4. "Honour thy father and thy mother."	"Do good to your parents, relatives and neighbours" (4:36)
5. "Thou shalt not kill."	"If anyone has killed one person it is as if he had killed the whole mankind5:32)
6. "Thou shalt not	"Do not come near

[330] Cf. The Koran Translated with notes by N.J. Darwood (London: Penguin Books, 1990)

commit adultery."	adultery, it is an indecent deed and a way for other evils." (17:32)
7. "Thou shalt not steal."	"As for the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands, but those who repent after a crime and reform shall be forgiven by God for God is forgiving and kind." (5:38-39).
8. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."	"They invoke a curse of God if they lie." (24:7) `
9. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife."	"Do not covet the bounties that God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others" (4:32)
10. "Thou shalt not covet they neighbour's goods."	"Do not covet the bounties that God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others" (4:32)

Over the last fifteen hundred years Islam has evolved in its own way, thus both affecting culture and being affected by it. As it is often pointed out, Islam has many cultural

expressions.[331] Yet here also there is an awareness of the need for controls relating to money, power and relationship. The *Sharia* laws of Islam have a heavy emphasis on marriage stability and there is a strong prohibition against adultery (*Quran* 17:32). There is also an emphasis on the brotherhood of Islam and its members are exhorted to help out the poor (*Quran* 2:273). Such brotherhood is expressed in annual pilgrimages in which people wear the same white clothes as a symbol of solidarity and equality. Thus whatever the wealth of individual pilgrims they wear the same clothes as everyone else. The basic power structures in Islam are based on religious law and the family.[332]

Taoism

Taoism is a traditional way of life that is found in China. It's basic "rule of life" is found in the *Tao Te Chin.* On the one hand one cannot expect to find Commandments from the Jewish or Christian religions to be quoted in such a text. Yet the text actually follows a similar approach that is found in Paul and the gospels. Threaded through the text is an inference that is arguably parallel to that of the three key commandments discussed above. Consider the quotes from the *Tao Te Chin* as follows: [333]

[331] Michael Laffan, "Religious Practices and Cultural Expressions," *Islam in SouthEast Asia* (Asia Society.org), http://sites.asiasociety.org/education/islam_in_seasia/essays-religious.htm[accessed 0 4/09/18].
[332] David J. Jonsson *Islamic Economics and the "Final Jihad*, 131.
[333] Lao Tzu *Tao Te Chien* (London: Penguin classics, 1961).

1. Book One, Chapter 3, Verse 8

Not to honour men or worth will keep the people from contention;	(cf. power)
Not to value goods which are hard to come by will keep them from theft;	(cf. money)
Not to display what is desirable will keep them from being unsettled of mind"	(cf. sex)

2. Book One Chapter 19, Verse 43

Exterminate the sage, discard the wise And the people will benefit a hundredfold;	(cf. power)
Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,And the people will again be filial;	(cf. relationship)
Exterminate ingenuity, discard profit, And there will be no more thieves and bandits	(cf. money)

3. Book One, Chapter 29, Verse 68

"Therefore the sage avoids excess, extravagance and arrogance"

(cf. money, sex, power)

4. Book Two, Chapter 46, Verse 105

There is no crime greater than having too many desires	(cf. relationship)
There is no disaster greater than not being content	(cf. power)
There is no misfortune greater than being covetous	(cf. money)

5. (Book Two Chapter 67, Verse 164)

I have three treasures which I hold and cherish	
The first is known as compassion,	(cf. relationship)
The second is known as fugality	(cf. money)
The third is known as not daring to take the lead in the empire	(cf.power)

Hinduism

Consider Hinduism**.** Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism does not originate from Judaism and its moral base of the Ten Commandments. However the morality focus of Hinduism can also be found in its emphasis on controls over money, power and relationship.

How so? The chief Scriptural texts in Hinduism are the *Gita* and the *Upamioshads*. A key theme in the *Gita* is the imperative that people have to do their duty. The importance of this is spelt out in the *Gita*. Within an extensive story, one section of a family is obliged to go to war against another section of the family because of injustice that was committed by the latter. In such case duty requires people to override, wealth, family connections and personal safety in order to assert justice. Thus, even if the next generation is wiped out and with it the continued remembrance of oneself in the after-life, duty still has to come first.[334]

A quote to follow from the internet shows how the *Gita* parallels the three commandments relating to money, power and relationship.

> In the *Gita* a Pandava brother Arjuna loses his will to fight and has a discussion with his charioteer Krishna, about duty, action and renunciation. The *Gita* has three major themes – knowledge, action and love.[335]

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[334] R.C.Zaehner, *The Bhagavad Gita: with a commentary based on the original sources* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

[335] Note: Google definition from URL
https://www.google.com.au/search?rlz=1C1AOHY_enAU708AU708&ei=MRbNW7isMMzWvAS_pZmoDQ&q=what+is+the+theme+of+the+bhagavad+gita&oq=what

If we think of knowledge as relating to something acquired and action relating to power and love relating to relationship then the parallel here becomes more obvious.

Buddhism

Buddhism is a derivative of Hinduism. Here, there is a more moderate exercise of morality[336]. In Buddhism, the centre of a community is to be found in the monastery. Here monks and nuns are celibate. They are poor and their destiny is bound in with that of the group called the Sangha. Adherents of Buddhism are expected to pattern their lives on that of the monastery. Thus on the one hand individual Buddhists may have personal possessions, self-determination and a life partner and family. But in each of these areas the monastery sits at the centre and value structure of their lives. Thus it puts forward the need for both control and moderation in each of these areas. Such a lifestyle, based on the elimination of desire is described as the "Buddhist Way of Perfection."[337]

Another Topic

In many ways the influence of the monastery on the life of ordinary Buddhists has parallels with the influence that was exercised by Catholic Religious Orders when they were running the local parish or secondary school. This was the

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+is+the+theme+of+the+Gita&gs_l=psy-ab.1.0.0i22i30k1l5.9455.16729.0.20297.57.29.0.0.0.0.290.4501.0j8j12.20.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..49.2.552...33i10k1.0.TgbzldlVRwY

[336] L. Adams Beck, *The Splendour of Asia: the story and teaching of the Buddha* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, c.1927)

[337] Robert C. Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1975), 81.

primary missionary model for Religious Life in the early part of the twentieth century.[338] Such a reflection actually brings us to another topic. The link-in between the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience taken by Catholic Religious and the three key commandments about money power and relationship, should be fairly obvious for a reader by now. But in traditional literature on Religious Life prior to the Vatican II Council of the 1960's (and possibly now as well), there was not (yes not), an obvious link made between the vows and the three key commandments discussed at length above.[339] The reasons why this has been the case is a topic that reaches beyond the scope of this present research project. Therefore the topic can only be alluded to here. But there will be further reference to it in a chapter called Implications at the end of *Is Christian Morality Unique? Part Two.*

Conclusion about the Uniqueness of Christianity's approach

In the above quick overview of major world religions and their parallels with Christianity, one can raise doubts about how unique the Christian focus on money, power and relationship actually is. Hopefully it has been demonstrated that there is a "uniqueness" about the emphases that has been taken by Christians in the way these three Commandments are interpreted and practiced. But one could also conclude that the actual focus on these three commandments is not so unique after all.

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[338] Cf. Stephen Reid, Robert Dixon and Noel Connelly, *See I am Doing a New Thing: A report on the 2009 Survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia* (Fitzroy: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, 2010).

[339] Cf. L. Colin, *The Practice of the Vows* (Cork: The Mercier Press Limited, 1954).

On the other hand, there are two dimensions of Christianity that need to be further explored in Part Two of this research project of *Is Christian Morality Unique?* The first of these relates to the basic social structure of Christianity. This cannot be taken for granted. Thus how does the Christian focus on money, power and relationship play out against its own social context? The second dimension relates to a process of identification. A follower of Jesus is challenged to identify with the living person of Jesus in their practice of morality. How does this take place?

In an effort to respond to these questions in Part II the problem about interpretation of Scripture as raised in the opening chapter, needs to be taken into account. Within the academic world of Biblical Literature there is a dominance of Historical Critical Exegesis in gospel interpretation. This, as already discussed, is a diachronic approach to Scripture. To some extent it can be complemented with synchronic approaches such as narrative criticism and socio-rhetorical criticism. But a synchronic approach such as structural/semiotic analysis is more likely to conflict with the established method of gospel interpretation. But, one could protest, a semiotic analysis of the gospels could demonstrate the underlying social structure of Christianity.

Semiotic analysis has a focus on the way the text uses words in order to construct a framework for itself and develop an overall and underlying line of logic. There is less focus on the historical background of the text or the meaning of the words. Semiotic analysis could show how a follower of Jesus can identify with him through the practice of their morality. It could also come up with what appears to be a radically different approach to understanding the gospels. As someone said when faced with such a semiotic analysis of the gospels, “Now it all makes sense.”

But how does one deal with the disinterest and the lack of credibility amongst the majority of those approached about this "solution"? A quote from a recent article in the "Good Weekend" of *The Age* newspaper may be of some encouragement here:

> In the 1940's, writes Walter Issaacson in *The Innovators*, one of the computer pioneers, Howard Aiken, reassured a student: "Don't worry about people stealing an idea. If it's original, you will have to stuff it down their throats. [340]

[340] Shelley Gare, "The Great Creativity Turn Off" *Good Weekend in The Age* (Melbourne: The Age, 6/10/18), Good Weekend 35.

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