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Islamic Discourses	1
<i>Christopher Clohessy</i>	
Eschatology and Politics in Augustine’s “City of God”	25
<i>Rodney Moss</i>	
Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15: Paul’s Reasoning and our Questions	42
<i>Jan Lambrecht</i>	
Reflections on the Significance of Thresholds in Everyday Life	57
<i>Rex van Vuuren</i>	
List of Contributors	69

Islamic Discourses

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AN INTRODUCTION TO MUHAMMAD AND TO ISLAM

Here are some basic ground rules underpinning any study of Islam. The first is that principles should not be judged by practice: for religion is one thing and decadent human behaviour quite another – and the truths inherent in a particular Faith are not effaced or negated by the misbehaviour of its adherents¹. This essay concerns the way in which Islam interprets itself, understands itself and articulates itself according to its own texts: not the Islam of the demagogue or the suicide bomber, but the Islam that is the product of fourteen hundred years of prayer, scholarship and erudition.

The second principle is this: that I have a profound and healthy respect for Islam even without being able to accept a large number of the tenets of the Islamic faith. At the same time, I am not an apologist for Islam: I desire to do what the Church does: to find whatever is good and holy in Islam and to recognize the hand of God at work in the hope of building the sort of relationship that can only happen when ignorance, misinformation and prejudice is dispelled.

Addressing young Muslims in Casablanca, in August 1985, Pope John Paul II stated:

“The Catholic Church regards with respect and recognizes the quality of your religious progress, the richness of your spiritual traditions. I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them².

And in the Philippines in 1981, the Pope addressed the Muslim community with these words:

“I deliberately address you as brothers: that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family...but we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs³

In spite of the Pope's words, there remains a major obstacle on the practical level of Muslim-Christian dialogue in terms of the nature of God. The question as to whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God is more complex than it appears.

We are faced immediately with a linguistic problem: Islam is articulated in the Arabic language (in terms of the text of revelation and the sayings and reported actions of Muhammad)⁴. Arabic has no capital letters so that a translation into any other language leaves us faced with a dilemma in terms of certain key phrases such as 'islam' and 'muslim.' The Arabic word 'islam' means 'to submit or surrender oneself to God', whilst the Arabic word 'muslim' refers to one who is surrendered or submitted. Linguistically, they have acquired new meanings: 'Islam' refers to a socio-religious phenomenon that arose in Arabia as the sixth century turned into the seventh, whilst 'Muslim' refers specifically to a member of that socio-religious phenomenon. Christians and Jews are certainly 'muslim' (with a small 'm') in the sense that an integral part of their faith system consists in the submission of oneself to God and his law: the Christian's or Jew's nature, if he or she faithfully adheres to the principles of the faith, is 'islam' (with a small 'i') in that it is submitted.

One of our problems with the Arabic text of the Qur'an is precisely this: when God speaks of 'islam' and 'muslim', does he mean a state of being or does he mean a particular socio-religious phenomenon? For example, in the fifth chapter of the Qur'an, verse 3, God declares:

This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam.

Most translators leave the word 'Islam' untranslated in the text and use a capital letter, suggesting the seventh century socio-religious phenomenon. But since there is no capital letter in Arabic, it could equally mean that God has perfected religion by insisting that human beings submit and surrender to him. Furthermore, a few verses later, (5: 48) in a discussion about Jews, Christians and Muslims, God declares:

For each We⁵ have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed he could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you, He hath made you as you are. So vie with one another in good works.

A strong suggestion is that God himself is the author of religious pluralism: that he did not will everyone to be part of a particular

socio-religious phenomenon.

This, together with other texts we shall see, suggests that Jews and Christians **do not** have to join the socio-religious phenomenon called Islam, but that Jews, Christians and Muslims must submit themselves to God and must accomplish good works.

According to Islamic theology, **Islam begins not with Muhammad but with the first human being**, whose inner nature (*fitra*) is ‘muslim’ (totally submitted to God). But over the generations, humankind loses this original submissiveness, causing God to send a whole line of prophets (only a handful of whom are actually named in the Qur’an).

It is the task of these prophets, one of whom is Jesus the son of Mary, to call humankind back to its original state of ‘islam’ or submission. With the arrival of Muhammad, understood by Islam as the last in the line and thus the seal (*khatim*) of the Prophets, and with the revelation of the Qur’an comes the final perfection both of religion and of the previously revealed texts: the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel, all of which, according to Islamic theology, have been corrupted by their adherents (*tahrif*)⁶.

Islam roots itself therefore in a text and in a person. Muhammad is an Arab born in the sixth century: by all accounts he is a religious man and something of a natural mystic, since he sets time aside to go on retreat.

It is difficult to separate what is historical from what is hagiographical in his early life: it is also difficult to interpret correctly everything that the Qur’an tells us of him (bearing in mind that the Qur’an is not a biography of the Prophet). For example, the Qur’an describes him with the word ‘*ummi*’ (7: 157-158): originally, the Arabic word meant ‘common folk’, the sense being that Muhammad was sent to those who had no sacred text. Later, it was also translated as ‘gentile’ (i.e. non-Jewish) prophet or as ‘illiterate’, ‘unable to read or write.’⁷ The word remains problematic both in its meaning and in its content. Translated as ‘of the common folk’, it gives the sense that Muhammad is the prophet of those who, unlike the Jews and the Christians, have no revealed scripture.

Translated as ‘unlettered’ (the more modern meaning of the word) it serves to prove the miraculous nature of the Qur’an, which is not the work of Muhammad, but of God alone.

It is while on retreat in a mountain cave in 610 that Muhammad begins to receive the revelations, through the medium of the archangel Gabriel, that will

last for the rest of his life. These revelations, as we shall see, show a clear development of doctrine and practice: from the purely spiritual and theological to matters concerning politics and law, as Muhammad ceases to be a Prophet only and takes on the role of statesman and community leader.

However, Christianity has generally had a negative view of Muhammad. So, it was to the eighth circle of hell that Dante, unable to “*allow Muhammad an independent religious vision*” confined the Prophet for a particularly unpleasant eternity.⁸ History has subsequently shown that Dante was a little xenophobic, and that he represents a category of thought inimical to Muhammad that has been continuous through history and comprises a sprinkling of saints, a healthy number of popes and rulers, and a hefty dose of politicians, writers and academics.

In spite of this discovery, history - at least from the side of Western analysis - has until now found itself unable to rescue Muhammad from the fate assigned him by Dante and, amongst other things, this represents a deep wound in the integrity of Western Christianity. Admittedly, it is difficult to speak about the life of Muhammad, and for a number of reasons:

1. For one thing, Muslims have a particular perception of him and of the faith he brought that non- Muslims, no matter how objective they try to be, simply cannot emulate. And for a person who does not share the Islamic faith and legacy it is hard to deal with this topic without being influenced by the heritage of prejudice which we carry with us.

This, writes Karen Armstrong, despite the fact that now, more than ever,

“the barriers of geographical distance, hostility and fear, which once kept the religions in separate, watertight compartments, are beginning to fall⁹

as people begin to discover the riches in the faith of ‘the other.’

2. Considering the limited sources about his life, there has to be a continuous process of separating facts from the countless myths that have grown up around his person. About the early life of Muhammad, prior to his call to be the Prophet of God, we have little reliable information. The Qur’an, which is certainly not a biography of Muhammad (any more than the Gospels are of Jesus), together with the *hadith*, combine as the primary source of information about his life after the revelations began. How objective they are is an entirely different question.
3. And thirdly, the life of the Prophet can be (and is) viewed through numerous filters. Not all of these are academically honest, and many of

them would contain hidden agendas. For example, his beginnings were disadvantaged from a socio-political perspective.

Added to this was his apparent dissatisfaction with Arab paganism and his concerns for justice and the future of humanity. One author writes that

“the Prophet’s mind was tormented by problems concerning the situation and destiny of man: this drove him into periodic retirement and contemplation.”

10

Furthermore, he was born into a period of Arab history that seemed characterized by malaise, by spiritual restlessness and a hunger for something more.

All of these ingredients, in the eyes of some analysts, would comprise the perfect platform for a man to launch himself (or be launched by others) into the special status that comes with being ‘a receiver of messages from God.’ In fact, there is some evidence from the Prophet’s life to suggest that he does not fall into this category: but it remains an example of one of the numerous filters through which his life and prophetic office could be viewed.

Whatever the filter, with even the barest of facts and without the particular perception and understanding that comes with the Muslim faith, it’s hard to deny that religiously and politically, Muhammad was quite extraordinary and achieved the incredible.

Even an inability to accept his prophetic status cannot alter this fact: indeed, it rather enhances the quality and extraordinary nature of the man to disavow the possibility of special divine assistance.

ON THE PILLARS AND CREED OF ISLAM

Islam is constructed upon five pillars (*arkan*) of practice and six creedal articles. The pillars are well-known:

1. The testimony of faith: *I bear witness that there is no god but God and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.*

These words lie at the heart of Islam, because they define clearly the strict the strict monotheism upon which the whole Islamic system rests. There is only one God: he has no partner, no intimate companion and certainly no offspring.

Such a thing, God having a son, is incomprehensible and constitutes the most serious sin in Islam: the sin of ‘*shirk*’ (the joining of partners to God).

The recitation of this testimony of faith before two witnesses is enough to constitute one a Muslim (that is, a member of the religion of Islam).

2. The daily prayer: five times daily, either in the mosque or wherever one finds oneself. It is a highly ritualistic prayer, but this should not fool us into thinking that it is insincere or only an external act. The prostration that forms the basis of the prayer ritual is a clear statement of how the Muslim relates to God: not as child to a Father but as servant to a Master, in submission.
3. The fasting during the month of Ramadan. The Muslim fasts for almost exactly the same reasons as a Jew or a Christian: to magnify God and thank Him for His guidance, for inner purification and as a means of understanding the hunger of the poor. The Ramadan fast is combined with more intense prayer and other good works, as we ourselves experience in Lent.
4. The almsgiving is not unlike the tithing or dedicated giving of some Christians communities: the Muslim gives annually a certain percentage of their material possessions. The percentage is scrupulously fixed by legal experts at generally 2½%, with certain categories applying: and the beneficiaries of such almsgiving are carefully listed in the text of the Qur’an.

The ‘*hajj*’ or **Pilgrimage to Mecca** at least once in the lifetime of every Muslim, with its concomitant ceremonies. The Pilgrimage is really a great penitential act that, if performed well, grants remission of all former sins.

It is also an important social event, in which millions of Muslims from every part of the Muslim world and with all their various understandings of what Islam is and how it should be lived, come together as one great family, absolutely unified even in the way they dress. One cannot begin to fathom the huge exchange of ideas and information that takes place in such a gathering: a pilgrim might come away imbued with the strictly reformist Islam of Saudi Arabia, or the revolutionary Islam of Iran, or the more mystical Islam of one of the North African countries, carrying such an interpretation back to his own community.

Together with these practical pillars are the six doctrinal or creedal

articles that every Muslim must believe: these will be immediately recognizable because of their proximity to Christianity and Judaism. Every Muslim must believe:

- ◆ in God (with the strict monotheism of Islam)
- ◆ in God's angels
- ◆ in God's scriptures (not just the Qur'an: also the Torah, Psalms and Gospel, even if their adherents have corrupted them, all of them revealed by God).
- ◆ in God's prophet-messengers (the '*nabi*', an inspired prophet without a particular mission/message, and the '*rasul*', who brings revelation from God: among the latter are Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad among others)
- ◆ in the Last Things (resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell)

The **tradition** forms another textual basis of Islam: distinct from the Qur'an and not on the same level as the Qur'an, this bulk of material (the *hadith*) constitutes the saying and deeds of Muhammad, **as seen or heard by his early companions** (such seeing and hearing is vital for verification) and from which Islam draws much of its teaching and legal prescriptions.

Islamic law (*sharia*) and **jurisprudence** (*fiqh*) derive both from the Qur'an and from the *hadith*, either because the legal principle is directly stated, or through analogy or consultation between legal experts. But the way that the *sharia* is understood and exercised from place to place is filled with great variety. This is partly because Islam has no central authority, losing it with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate (this in itself constitutes a major problem: who defines what Islam is and what it is not? Who defines the exact meaning of a Qur'anic text? Who defines orthodoxy?). The variations in legal practice also have to do with the various **Schools of Law** that have arisen, each with its own unique blend of understanding and practice:

- ◆ the *Hanafi* School: broadminded, although not lax, this school likes to appeal to reason
- ◆ the *Maliki* School: general utility and the common good
- ◆ the *Shafi'i* School: attempts to combine tradition with the consensus of the community (not just scholars) and uses reasoning by analogy to a large extent
- ◆ the *Hanbali* School: strictly traditionalist (predominate in Saudi Arabia)

THE QUR'AN AND REVELATION IN ISLAM

The first revelation of the Qur'an (the Arabic means 'recital' or 'recitation', giving us some clue as to the intended purpose) came down to Muhammad while he was in retreat in a mountain cave on 17TH Ramadan 610. He was already about forty-years-old, and these revelations would continue, with some breaks, throughout his life until his death in 632.

The command to Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel, the medium of these revelations, was that he must recite: this word (the Arabic imperative) recurs frequently throughout the text and begins what is almost certainly the first part of the Qur'an to be sent down (chapter 96):

Recite! In the name of your Lord who created, created mankind from a clot!

It is for Muhammad to recite what comes down to him. What comes down is the perfect Qur'an, that is written for eternity on a tablet in heaven: Muhammad receives an exact copy of the heavenly original. His followers memorized the texts, writing some of them down as they were received. It was only after the death of the Prophet, faced by the danger of the death of the those who have memorized, that the Caliph ordered the whole text be put together. This led to seven versions each at variance with the other, until the Caliph 'Uthman¹¹ decided upon one version and ordered the others destroyed¹².

The order in which we now find the written Qur'anic text is quite certainly not the order in which it was revealed. The order of revelation is important, and is what Islamic theology refers to as the science of the occasions of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*), in other words, the context of each verse.

Historically, it seems clear that the revelations came down in a number of different periods:

- ◆ The first period of Mecca (610-615) – preaching to the Arab polytheists
- ◆ The second period of Mecca (615-619) – affirmation of the new community
- ◆ The third period of Mecca (619-622) – increased polemics with the Jews and Christians
- ◆ The period of Medina (622-632) – the establishment of a new and distinct community

A careful study of the text in its order of coming down offers us a number of insights:

- 1) That there is a clear development of doctrine: part of this would include the idea that an earlier verse is abrogated by a later verse.
- 2) That Muhammad's own character develops from prophet-messenger bringing a message of strict monotheism, to prophet-statesman who has to formulate rules and structures for a new society. We discover that increasingly the text is an answer to specific questions and problems faced by Muhammad, including the question of how to deal with the Jews and the Christians.
- 3) That the verses concerning the Jews in particular and the Christians in general grow quite unfavourable, depending again upon the context of revelation.

Apart from the denials of God taking a son¹³, nothing negative is said about Christianity or Christian belief about Jesus in the earliest chapters. In fact, just the contrary. From the beginning of the Medina period the references to Christians are more nuanced and objections are made to some of their beliefs and to their exclusiveness. The most adverse statements are all concentrated in chapters **nine** and **five**. Maurice Borrmans writes:

When dealing with the Qur'an, it is quite easy to understand that, transmitted little by little over a period of twenty-three years (610-632) according to the 'occasional causes of Revelation' (asbab al-nuzul) (hence the 114 suras, some from Mecca and others from Medina), it proposes verses more or less in relation to the social and political organization of the first Muslim community.¹⁴

Historically, certain rudimentary elements cannot be denied: the frustration of Muhammad by a stubborn Christian community that would accept neither his message nor his prophetic office; the serious divisions within that Christian community; the revealed scriptures possessed and read by both Christians and Jews; and the difficulties of the Muslim community in a minority status amongst old and well-established religious communities.

In our reading of the Qur'anic text we are faced with a number of problems: one of them is the theology of what in Arabic is termed *naskh* (abrogation, referred to in 2: 106 with the idea that God substitutes something better): in other words, one particular verse of the Qur'an is regarded as *nasikh* or abrogating an earlier verse.

While many of the earlier and more generous verses of the Qur'an in favour of the Christians are held by some scholars to be *mansukh* (abrogated),

Islam is unable to produce an official list from any central authority that offers a definitive list of verses abrogated by other verses. Furthermore, we are bound to ask: if a verse is abrogated, then it can no longer be regarded as the definitive word of God. How then are the abrogated verses still in the Qur'anic text? Are these abrogated verses, since they now teach something invalid, still to be found on the tablet in heaven upon which is inscribed the eternal Qur'an? I mention this matter only because it impacts upon verses dealing with the status of the Christian in the Islamic worldview¹⁵.

A further problem is that we find **apparent** contradictions in some of the Christian texts, in other words, those verses dealing with Christians. Again, some of these apparent contradictions are explained away in terms of abrogation, but they are an obstacle in any serious study of the texts.

ON THE CHRISTIAN TEXTS IN THE QUR'AN

The Jews and the Christians (but never the Muslims) are quite often referred to in the Qur'anic text as the 'people of the Book'¹⁶ or 'People of the Scripture': this, because together with the new Muslim community, they are those who have received a revelation in textual form from God.

From the very start of Islam there was an intermediate category standing between those who were Muslim and those who were unbelievers or polytheists: a group who were neither Muslim nor pagans.

They are the Jews and the Christians, the 'people of the Book.' This title is not immediately acceptable for Christians: for while the Muslims root their faith in a book, we don't: ours is rooted primarily in a person – Jesus as Son of God – and after that, in the text of the Bible. But for now, the title suffices to differentiate between the various groupings found in the Qur'anic text. There are two other Qur'anic expressions that we need to know in terms of the texts concerning Christians. The first is *shirk* and the second is *kufr*. Many Muslims are inclined to give the same meaning to both words, but linguistically this is incorrect. The first, *kufr* means literally 'do deny a gift or pleasure' and really signifies 'disbeliever' (not 'unbeliever': rather, a bad believer, whose faith lacks something essential). The word *shirk* means the adding of a partner to God: it is the most serious sin in Islam. The Qur'anic text is not always clear as to whether Christians are *kufr* or not or whether they practice *shirk* or not: generally, it seems that they are not practitioners of *shirk*, and this has important consequences for Muslim-Christian relations.

Let us turn to some of the texts concerning Christians in the order that

they came down:

Chapter 29 Verse 46:

And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save as such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed to us and revealed unto you: our God and your God is One, and unto Him we surrender.

- ◆ The verse suggests that there are **some** Christians and Jews who do wrong and, accordingly, others who do right! This seemingly inane point is in fact exceedingly important in terms of how Muslims look upon Christians and Jews.
- ◆ Muslims believe in all the books of God (Torah, Psalms, Gospels and Qur'an): Christians do not believe in the Qur'an and therefore practice *kufur*. The phrase 'our God and your God is One' is difficult to translate from the Arabic original. Does it mean that they are one and the same God? Does it refer to the unity of God? Is the text saying, 'We are monotheists and you are monotheists' or is it saying 'we believe in the same God as you'? It is not clear.

Chapter 10 Verse 94:

And if thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee.

The strong suggestion of this verse is that Muhammad ought to go to the Jews and the Christians for clarification or for information, or at the very least to those who had read and knew the Old and New Testaments.

Chapter 2 Verse 62:

Lo! those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans – whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right – surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve.

- ◆ This text makes it abundantly clear that Jews and Christians need not join the socio-religious grouping of Islam in order to be saved.
- ◆ The term Sabaeans is unclear: it appears to refer to a Judeo-Christian sect, also called the Mandaeans, who lived around southern Iraq and who practiced Baptism.

Another group had the same name but were pagans: they survived for a long time under Islam by claiming to be the Sabaeans of the Qur'an.

- ◆ This text is repeated, with slight variations (the order is turned around to read 'Jews, Sabaeans and Christians' and no mention is made of any reward) in 5: 69.
- ◆ It sounds distinctly as if as long as Christians and Jews believe in God and the Last day and do good, it is enough for salvation. They do not have to enter the Islamic religious system.

Unfortunately, a later verse **appears** to negate all of this: **chapter 3 verse 85:**

And who so seeketh as religion other than al-Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.

This verse raises some serious problems:

- a) Does 'al-Islam' here means 'surrender' or does it mean the socio-religious grouping of Islam? Pickthall, whose translation we are using and who invariably leaves the word 'Islam' untranslated in his rendering of the text, here translates it as 'the Surrender to God.'
- b) Does this verse abrogate the two earlier ones we have just read, both of which suggest that Christians and Jews need not convert. If they are abrogated and no longer valid, why do we find them in the final written text of the Qur'an?

Chapter 5 Verse 48:

For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given to you (He hath made you as you are). So vie one with another in good works.

'Each' refers to Jews, Christians and Muslims. However, some Muslim scholars insist that it refers not to Jews, Christians and Muslims, but rather to 'each' Muslim.

- ◆ The inference is that not only does God accept religious pluralism, but that he willed it!
- ◆ Jews, Christians and Muslims must outdo one another in good works. It could be intimated, according to this verse, that while God intended every human being to be submitted to him (islam), he never intended every human being to join the socio-religious phenomenon called Islam.

"Thus according to the Qur'an, the difference between the three Abrahamic religions is not an expression of human sin and imperfection which must be

restored by the efforts of a religion. The plurality of the three Abrahamic religions corresponds rather to God's will. Each religion has been shown its own way by God. Granted, the individual religions are subject to a divine 'test'...but no-one is required by God to go over into the camp of another (certainly not by force).¹⁷

Chapter 5 Verse 51:

O you who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them.

- ◆ The Arabic for 'friends' here is the plural form of '*wali*', which has the meaning of 'benefactor', 'patron', 'close associate' or 'protector.' It is curious that the text should avoid the general Arabic word for 'friend' and use instead a word that is so much complex and richer in meaning.
- ◆ This is not a happy verse, but could it be abrogated by the one that follows?

Chapter Five Verse 82:

Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks and because they are not proud.

- ◆ This verse is very hard on the Jewish people, whom it lumps together with the idolaters (the word used for idolaters is '*shirk*', in other words, those who add partners to God)
- ◆ Concurrently, the Christians are not only regarded with warmth, but are not lumped together with those who add partners to God!
- ◆ The Qur'an is anti-monasticism and anti-celibacy: yet Muhammad retains a curious and gentle fascination for monks and for the clergy!
- ◆ While in a number of parts of the Qur'an it is unclear whether the Christians are regarded as true monotheists, semi-monotheists or polytheists, this verse seems to resolve the doubt (despite its strong and unacceptable anti-Semitic thrust).

The zenith of anti-Christian sentiment is seen by some in 9: 29, the 'verse of the sword.' It is the 'command of Allah', and as it stands, it is an ambiguous statement, difficult to translate. Pickthall renders it as:

Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His

messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.

The word ‘fight’ is derived from the verb ‘to kill’, so that perhaps it is better and more honestly translated as ‘strive to kill.’

But there is some ambiguity: Pickthall has placed at the beginning of the sentence what should in fact come at the end (‘those who have been given the Scriptures’). As it stands, it is dichotomous: those who have been given the Book do (in all likelihood) believe in Allah and the Last Day, although they don’t follow Muhammad’s religion or forbid what God has forbidden through him. Accordingly, the sentence is better read as:

- a) **Fight against those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day** (this is the first group against whom battle must be waged)
- b) **those who do not forbid what Allah and His messenger have forbidden and do not follow the Religion of Truth among those who have received the Book** (the second group comprises those who have received the Book but neither forbid what Allah has forbidden nor follow the Religion of Truth).

The harshness is somewhat tempered by the words ‘until they pay the tribute readily’, suggesting that it is the paying of the protection tax (*jizya*) by minority communities (Jews and Christians) rather than forced conversion to Islam that will end the strife. As it is, the verse is the hinge on which rests the protective status of Christian and Jewish minorities living in Islamic countries.

Chapter Two Verse Two Hundred and Fifty Six:

There is no compulsion in religion.

- ◆ This verse comes down late – at the end of the third period of Mecca or at the beginning of the period of Medina, and thus offers us some hope. No-one may be forced to convert or to practice any particular religion.

Whilst in Islam there is an exclusivist formula - ‘one God, one religion’ - at the same time the Qur’an recognizes the older ways of salvation which preceded Islam. Granted, the Qur’an expressed massive criticism of certain representatives of Judaism and Christianity, but neither religion is simply vilified as pure error or unbelief. And granted, for the Qur’an not all religions are of equal value, and Jews and Christians are invited to convert to Islam as the only true religion. But at the same time the Qur’an speaks out from beginning to end for the co-existence of Torah, Gospel and Qur’an.

A number of verses are affirmative and favorable: we can begin by saying

that there is a clear indication in several Qur'anic texts that every member of a revealed religion who practices his religion with sincerity will be saved (**2:62, 2:112, and 5:69**). The issue of these verses appears to be that the important thing is not whether one is Jew or Christian but that one is surrendered or submitted and does good deeds

In the verses less favourable to Christians, it is not Christianity that is denigrated in these and other verses, as much as some of its representatives.

We need to end with a word about **chapter nineteen, the Chapter of Mary.**

- ◆ Mary (Mariam) is held in great esteem by the Islamic world. Her name is mentioned more often in the Qur'an (34 times, often in the title 'Jesus son of Mary) than it is in the Bible, she has a chapter of the Qur'an named after her and she is the only woman whose proper name is used in the text. She is never designated 'virgin' in the Qur'an (or in the Bible) but both texts assume strongly such a state.
- ◆ Together in the Qur'an, Mary and Jesus are a 'sign' to the world. But her Qur'anic importance is precisely as mother of Jesus: she has no other role to play, and her attitude is one of humble acceptance of the part assigned her by God. She is held up as a believer and as one who guarded her chastity. She is also defended against any slander spoken against her. Later Islamic tradition came to see her as sinless as it does all the prophets.
- ◆ Miriam is consecrated to God as a child and set apart in the midst of her family by such a consecration. God then sent 'Our Spirit'/'The Spirit of Us' to her in the form of a perfect man. Many Islamic scholars would hold this 'Spirit' to be Gabriel. Throughout the Annunciation story, Mary's chastity is upheld: at no time is there even a hint of sexual activity between her and the angelic visitor. Jesus is conceived by God's all-powerful word: God simply says, 'Be!' and it is.
- ◆ When it comes to the birth of the child and later the defense of Mariam against her family's accusations of harlotry, it is the child, speaking from the cradle, who vindicates her and declares who he is. He is a servant of God, blessed by God, dutiful to the one who bore him and upon whom God has enjoined prayer and almsgiving.
- ◆ Later, this same chapter will deny categorically that God has or could have a son.
- ◆ The chapter contains ninety-eight verses, and could be divided as follows:

- ▶ Verses 2-15 (the story of Zechariah and his son John).
- ▶ Verses 16-33 (the story of Mary and her son Jesus – *Isa* in Qur’anic Arabic, although Arab Christians would only ever call him *Yasu*’).

These verses include an Annunciation account that is close in many of its elements to that of Luke’s Gospel.

- ▶ Verse 33 and following – somewhat different to all that has come before.

ON THE MYSTIC TRADITION IN ISLAM

The name Sufi almost certainly takes its origin from the Arabic *suʿf* (wool): the mystics took to wearing a woolen ‘habit’ and thus the Arabic ‘*tasawwuf*’ (‘to put on wool’) came to mean ‘mysticism’ (rendered as Sufi in English).

In terms of the life of Muhammad, we must trace the elements of mystical prayer:

- ◆ his mystical or prayerful bent
- ◆ his search for God in a mountain retreat
- ◆ his encounter with God/Gabriel
- ◆ the interruption of the revelation (*fatra*) seen in mystical terms as ‘purification’ analogous to the ‘dark night’
- ◆ the testimony of the *hadith* to his love of prayer and his practice of poverty

The First and Second Century of Islam

The first and second centuries of Islam are characterized by the ascetics reacting against the wealth and worldliness of the Islamic rulers.

There is a ‘flight’ from the world: not a complete flight, as in the Christian monastic sense (although there is the possibility of the influence of or a type of parallelism with Christian monasticism), but rather, an attitude or withdrawal from public affairs, and a refusal to commit oneself to a definite political option or to accept the new lifestyle of the conquered lands. The mysticism of the first century is encapsulated in the personality of *Hasan al-Basri* (642 – 874).

The mysticism of the second century is encapsulated in the personality of *Rabi’a al-Adawiyya* (713 – 801), one of the first great woman mystics of Islam.

The **Third Century** sees the development of the schools of mystical thought: this period sees personalities such as *al-Bistami* (801 – 874) and *al-*

Hallaj (858 – 922) whose life marks the crisis between orthodox Islam and the Sufi way. In this period we find the beginning of the idea of a mystical ‘path’ (*tariqa*) consisting of stations (stages of perfection reached by human effort) and states (given by God, without human effort). The path leads from self-effacement to subsistence in God.

The Fourth and Fifth Centuries of Islam

The fourth and fifth centuries of Islam are marked by the development of theories on the mystical path. *Al-Ghazali* (1059 – 1111) attempts to synthesize orthodoxy and the Sufi way, which becomes more widely known, with concepts such as the ‘love of God’ made acceptable to orthodoxy. The Sufi way ceases to be an experience and becomes a science: later, its techniques become an end in themselves.

Under the influence of Greek philosophy (Plato and Plotinus) and of Gnosticism (from Iranian religions), the Sufi way begins to express relationship with God not in terms of **union** (two distinct beings uniting) but of identity (no real distinction between the beings):

- ◆ in **union** (*al-Hallaj*), God and man conspire to give a united witness to God’s transcendence and unity (i.e. a unity of witness – *wahdat al-shuhud* – indwelling)
- ◆ in **monism** God and man are one being (*wahdat al-wujud*) – there is a unity of existence. God alone really exists, while creation emanates from him as his shadow: mysticism consists in becoming aware of this underlying identity of self with God. This finds a philosophical expression in *Ibn ‘Arabi* (1165 – 1240) and a poetical expression in *Galal al-Din Rumi* (1209 – 1272). These two would influence all subsequent mysticism.

The Sixth Century of Islam is characterized by the development of the Sufi Orders (brotherhoods). Mysticism becomes a technique leading to an ambiguous experience of ecstasy, organizing itself in groups (orders) around a founder/teacher/master, each with its own initiation rites, ritual and rule of life. Stopping short of union with God, devotees ask for a vision of Muhammad’s soul (made of Divine light) and ask to be united with this soul. This focus on devotion to Muhammad is especially strong from the twelfth century, as is the rise of ‘saints’, whose tombs and birthday celebrations become all important. There are numerous Orders, some more famous than others:

Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (died 1166 and founded the *Qadiriyya*)

Abu al-Hasan al-Shadili (died 1258 and founded the *hadiliyyas*)

Ahmad al-Rifa'i (died 1183 and founded the *Rifa'iyya*)

The ritual includes prayers based on God's Ninety-Nine Names and verses of the Qur'an (*hizb*), litanies comprising various formulae (*wird*) and 'remembrance' ceremonies (*thikr*), chanting the names of God with rhythmical movements and breath control, leading to a state of heightened consciousness.

From almost the very first hour of Islam, the mystics have been present: those members of the community who, while remaining faithful to Islam, have followed the mystical yearning. Today, Islamic mysticism, although looked upon with suspicion by the orthodox Muslim, not only continues to thrive, but has shaped the growth and expansion of Islam. This mystic streak is known as Sufism. The first three centuries of Islamic mysticism were centuries of endeavour, with the proponents of mysticism grappling with the misgivings and intolerance of those who exemplified 'orthodox' Islam.

Sufism had originated an 'ascetic piety' on the part of certain early Muslim individuals or groups, an inwardness or introspection that had, as one of its chief incentives, the luxurious worldliness that had developed, particularly after the assassination of Ali in 40/661 and the rise of the Umayyad dynasty. This reaction embraced the hope that the Umayyad's would both enforce and themselves observe the *sharia*, thereby rejuvenating the initial spirit of Islam. In this, it was an ethical retreat into asceticism in response to the hedonism and materialism of the society and its rulers. Pious circles, which were in 'resistance to government' gathered for theological discussion, but the period was epitomized by the ascetic life and by devotional exercises rather than by discourse and dialectics.

At no time, either at the beginning or at any later stage, did the proponents of this piety and of the Sufism that was to evolve from it, relinquish their faithfulness to Islam. Mysticism was not an innovative or parallel faith: and never did the authentic Sufi step out of the Islamic community into something new. Sufism was the attempt to express anew, in different formulations, the overwhelming truth that there is no deity but Allah.

132/750 saw the fall of the Umayyad's and the rise of the new Abbasid dynasty: some would hold this to be the start of the peak of Muslim culture and civilization. Nevertheless, the Abbasid's left another legacy: the creation of an arid Islamic legalism. It was the implementation of the law that the pietists had hoped for, but taken to extremes. As a reaction against the legal formulation of

Islam, the early asceticism and ethical piety changed definitely into what is technically known as Sufism. It was a reaction that would evoke a growing disquiet in the purist theologians and legalists: the Sufi ‘inwardness’, with its precarious language and novel ideas (introduced by popular preachers), in opposition to external legalism. It was with the assistance of these popular preachers, with their material borrowed from copious sources, that the random individual piety of the beginnings developed into the Sufism of mass appeal.

From the third century on, in the face of a growing rupture between popular Sufism and its masters on the one hand, and the proponents of Islamic legalism on the other, there were attempts made by sympathetic ‘orthodox’ Muslims to harmonize and unite the two camps (the greatest by *al-Ghazali*, who died in 1111 and is for Islam what Saint Augustine is for Christianity).

But Sufism itself, no longer content with simple piety and asceticism, was developing with new formulae and an inventive terminology. The mystical path (*tariqa*) with its stages and states, exemplified in the lives of the Sufi masters, furthered the transition from the ethical piety of the beginnings to a spirituality that went far beyond the popular preachers.

For the Christian, it is hard not to draw parallels between the Islamic mystics and their Christian counterparts, notably those in the tradition of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. *Rabi’a’s* radiant and joyful faith (for her tears and sorrow are a particular aspect of her spirituality and cannot be seen in the same light as, for example, the gloomy brooding *Hasan al-Basri*) echo Saint Teresa’s desire to be delivered from ‘sad saints.’ *Rabi’a’s* insistence that “the groaning and the yearning of the lover of God will not be satisfied until it is satisfied in the Beloved” evoke the passion of John of the Cross, who desired that God should “tear through the veil of this sweet encounter.” *Al-Hallaj’s* concepts of ‘indwelling’ and ‘union’ cannot but remind us of the basic tenets of the *Sanjuanist* spirituality. The Sufi tendency to use elements like fire to articulate the love of God invokes images of the intensity of Catherine of Siena. And although by no means an indication of anti-intellectualism, the understanding of the mystics (themselves prolific writers) that the true gnosis or knowledge is not attained to through books is later echoed in the same realization by, among others, Thérèse of Lisieux.

But these comparisons are not necessarily invalid. For one thing, as a number of authors point out, Sufism cannot be considered as wholly a

consequence of Qur'anic study: the influences of Christian asceticism and Hellenistic spirituality are undeniable.

Certainly, history cannot deny the obvious contacts between the early Muslims and diverse Christian groupings, including monasticism in its various forms.

ON THE GRIEF OF THE SHI'ITES

The designation 'Shi'a' or 'Shi'ite' is given to the second largest grouping within Islam, after those known as the Sunni: and while the Sunni constitute about 80% of the Islamic world, the 'Shi'a' constitute between 10% and 20%, a significant proportion in terms of numbers. This figure increases to 40% in the Middle East (including Iran) where they are concentrated: and they form a clear majority in Iran, Yemen and Azerbaijan and constitute about half the population of Iraq:

Iran possesses the strongest and most homogenous Shi'a community. About half are Persian-speaking. 20% of the Kurds, most of the Arabic-speaking tribes of Khuzistan and most of the Turkish-speaking tribes (including almost all the Azerbaijanis) are Shi'a.

In Iraq the Shi'a are in the majority (about 55% of the total population), grouped chiefly toward the south of the country around the Shi'a holy places of Karbala' and Najaf. Regarded by the Ottoman officials (up until 1918) as a restless minority, they now enjoy better treatment, but still lack integration in the Sunni-dominated areas.

In the Arabian peninsular the Shi'a occupy an uncomfortable position because of their small numbers and because of the theological hostility of the radical Wahhabi Muslims of Saudi Arabia (where the Shi'a comprise about 7% of the population). In their eyes, the Shi'a mingle polytheistic beliefs and idolatrous practices with the original Islam.

The Shi'a form a majority in Bahrain (about 70%): in Kuwait they comprise about 10% of the total population, in Qatar about 20% and in the United Arab Emirates about 6%.

In Lebanon they form upwards of one-third of the total population. Between 15% and 20% of India's eighty million Muslims are Shi'a, while in Pakistan their number is put at about 12%. The Shi'a of Afghanistan number about 15% of the total population.

In Azerbaijan there are about 4.5 million Shi'a among several hundred million Muslims spread through the ex-Soviet Union. To these numbers one

could add the 4 million Syrian and 900 000 Turkish: except that here were are dealing with the Alavites, who form part of Turkish heterodox Islam (who adopted certain Shi'a practices in the sixteenth century but whose religion does not really conform to Shi'a Islam (no mosques for meetings, no clergy).

Suffice to say that, while they form a distinct minority in the Islamic world, the Shi'a are not insignificant in terms of numbers, and they occupy the most strategic geo-political areas of the Islamic world.

In theory, the 'Shi'a' trace their origin to the time of Muhammad's death: while many claimed that Muhammad left no instructions concerning who was to succeed him (as statesman and community leader, but not as prophet, for he is understood as the last and the 'seal' of the prophets), there were others who insisted that in a last sermon, Muhammad had made it clear that his son-in-law and cousin 'Ali ibn 'Ali Talib was his designated successor.

This understanding was promulgated by the so-called 'party' (i.e. followers or supporters) of 'Ali (in Arabic, 'shi'a'). In fact, these sentiments can be found as early as the Medina period of Muhammad's mission, when some of his companions began to look upon 'Ali (as the nearest in kin and the closest follower) to succeed Muhammad. After the death of Muhammad, these sentiments found an unequivocal expression when 'Ali was rejected as successor (perhaps due to some political considerations).

It was (and remains) the contention of this 'Shi'a' that the Caliph (leader of the Islamic community) should automatically be chosen from among the direct descendants of 'Ali and his wife Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad): that is, from the 'people of the household' (*ahl al-bayt*). To this extent, the Shi'a carefully preserve the names of those who ought to have governed the Muslim world, venerating their memory and carefully preserving their teaching. These they call 'imams', and the imamate is a central and integral theme deeply enfolded in the Shi'a worldview.

Not all the Shi'a are in complete agreement about the number of these imams: the largest Shi'a group name twelve, whilst another group insists upon seven. But the crucial point is that the last of these imams (whether he be the seventh or the twelfth) has gone into a sort of mystical 'hiding' (occultation) and will remain in this hidden state until the end of time, when he will reappear and become the head of the community.

As it was, ‘Ali was not chosen to be Muhammad’s immediate successor: three others¹⁸ led the Islamic community before he was elected, finally, as the fourth Caliph. But the split was already there.

The basic principles of religion (*usul al-din*) are the same for the Shi’a as they are for the Sunni majority:

- ◆ the unity of God (*tawhid*)
- ◆ prophecy (ending with Muhammad as the last prophet and the Qur’an as the last message)
- ◆ the resurrection and the life hereafter

But to these three basics, the Shi’a add two further fundamental principles and consider them necessary for a comprehensive religious consciousness:

- ◆ the justice of God (*adl*)
- ◆ the concept of the imamate

The word ‘imam’ means ‘leader’ or ‘guide’: but in its specifically Shi’a understanding, it represents one ordained by God to continue Divine guidance after prophecy has come to an end. In Arabic, the word ‘*wilayah*’ is used, with the meaning of the special quality of the imam with which he is endowed by God to interpret the inner, esoteric meaning of the Revelation. The root of the word means to be a friend or to be near someone, so that in Shi’a terminology the imam is he who is closest to God in love and devotion and is thus entrusted by him with esoteric knowledge.

The imamate is established on two principles:

- ◆ *nass* (designation) – the imamate is a prerogative bestowed by God upon a chosen person from the ‘people of the household’ and who, before his death and with the guidance of God, transfers it to another by an explicit designation. The Shi’a insist that Muhammad used this principle to designate ‘Ali.
- ◆ *‘ilm* – meaning that the imam is a divinely inspired possessor of a special knowledge not possessed by anyone else and that can only be passed on before his death to the next imam. Thus the imam of the time becomes the exclusive, authoritative source of knowledge in religious matters, without whose guidance no-one can keep to the right path. This special knowledge includes the esoteric (*batin*) and exoteric (*zahir*) meanings of the Qur’an.

For the Shi’a, the imamate has a threefold function:

1. To explain what has been revealed through the Qur’an and has been taught

- by the Prophet, and to interpret the sharia
2. To be a spiritual guide, leading people to an understanding of the hidden meaning of things
 3. To rule over the Muslim community if the circumstances of the time allow him to do so

In Shi'a understanding, the imamate is a covenant between God and mankind: recognition of the imam is the duty of every believer. The imam is the proof of God on earth, and his words and commands are the words and commands of God. He possesses the power of miracles and irrefutable arguments and is the gate and road and guide to God. He is also by his nature a martyr and possesses intercessory prerogatives.

NOTES

¹ See Le Gai Eaton, C. 2000. *Remembering God: Reflections on Islam*, Chicago: ABC International Group.

² See Gioia, F. (ed.), 1997 no. 474. *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

³Ibid.n. 363

⁴The Qur'an and the Hadith

⁵The occurrence of 'we' used in the first person in the Qur'anic text in no way suggests a Trinitarian formula, but is the plural of majesty

⁶Islamic theology uses five distinct concept to articulate this corruption of the original texts: *harrrafa* – to corrupt, distort: *baddala* – to replace, exchange:

kitman concealment: *labsa* – to muddle, make obscure: *lay* – to distort, pervert:

nisyan – forgetfulness.

⁷That Muhammad, a successful businessman almost surely had learned to read and write is contended by a number of esteemed scholars, including Maxime Rodinson

⁸Armstrong, K. 1992:29. *Muhammad*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

⁹Armstrong, K. 1992:29. *Muhammad*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

¹⁰Rodinson, M. 1971:53, *Mohammed*. London: Penguin Books.

¹¹ Uthman Ibn Affan, the third Caliph (died 656)

¹²The Shi'a Muslims see this matter differently, holding to a greater or lesser degree that the whole Qur'an existed in written form before the death of Muhammad

¹³It is noteworthy that the Arabic Qur'an when issuing denials about God having a son, uses the word 'walad' which means a son in a physical sense connected to the idea of procreation. There is another Arabic word for son, the word 'ibn' which carries the

connotation of a spiritual sonship. The Qur'an does not use this term when denying that Jesus is the 'son of God'

¹⁴Borrmans, M in *Islamochristiana* 17 (1991):4 "Plurality and its Limits in the Qur'an and the Bible".

¹⁵The question of abrogation is not expressed with great clarity in Islamic theology: and the disputes among Islamic scholars concerning its precise nature only make it more complex

¹⁶Ahl al-kitab

¹⁷Kuschel Karl-Josef. 1994:193. *Abraham*. London: SCM Press

¹⁸'Abd Allah Abu Bakr (died 634) followed by *Umar Ibn al-Khattab* (died 644), followed by "*Uthman Ibn 'Affan* (died 656). The first four Caliphs (including 'Ali) are called the 'rashidun' (the rightly-guided ones).

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Eschatology and Politics in Augustine's "City of God"

RODNEY MOSS

INTRODUCTION

There is a perennial, almost insoluble tension between the future-oriented thrust of Christianity and the political aspirations of society. On the one hand, the political order addresses an evolving society from within. On the other hand, Christian eschatology posits a destiny surpassing all merely worldly fulfillment.

This article will investigate the future-oriented nature of early Christian political thought in the light of St. Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine dismissed all politics of perfection or any resolution of the multifarious tensions inherent in the world, for uncertainty and insecurity is a basic constituent to every day existence. Further, the gospel is in a state of essential and permanent tension with the world. Our moral strivings, therefore, are fragile, encouraging us to remain flexible and see political achievements as provisional and consequently in need of constant scrutiny and renewal. For this reason, in its essence, the gospel is "anti-ideological and anti-utopian".⁽¹⁾ Thus Augustine's position supports the contention that Christianity is the herald of, and pointer to, the coming kingdom. Therefore, the Christian faith does not transform societies and the world into the kingdom of God. It rather subjects all worldly institutions to a critical scrutiny that arises from the hope of the future kingdom. However, the limitation of all human achievement for Augustine does not release the Christian from political engagement nor encourage political apathy.

Augustine marks the end of classical perfectionism. He is an extremely complex thinker, best understood dialectically. Humanity aspires to truth, yet human limitation permits the human being to know only so much; we live in hope for we cannot achieve self-sufficiency; we seek mastery of control over created things, yet our self-control is limited by our incomplete and indeterminate lives.

The first part of this study will briefly outline the essential elements of Augustine's *City of God* with particular attention to the eschatological nature of the two cities, the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Terrena*. Secondly, this approach will suggest that there are no final political solutions prior to the last day. All is provisional, imperfect and assessed in the light of the Gospel. Thirdly, the contribution of Augustine's *City of God* to political thought, especially contemporary twentieth century political ideology, will be assessed. Although the resolution of God's purposes impinges on time, the final solution is beyond time. Thus, no political system or solution can ever be adequate for the Christian.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL NATURE OF THE TWO CITIES

The *Civitas Dei* does not propound a political programme as such. Augustine's doctrine of the state can be understood only within the wider vision of his particular conception of society. The *Civitas* is not synonymous with *res publica* or the state; rather, the distinction is one between two societies: the society of the *Civitas Terrena* and the society of the *Civitas Dei*. These two societies are the mystical symbols for the good and bad among humanity and the angels. Indeed, Augustine sees the whole course of created existence as a conflict of two loves: what has been called 'a metaphysics of will.'⁽²⁾ The *Civitas Dei* begins with the creation of light and the *Civitas Terrena* with the sin of Satan.⁽³⁾ Book XV begins with the contrary course of the two cities in history. The fall is pivotal; the consequence of the fall that dominates Augustine's thought is reflected in Adam's children, Cain and Abel. Here, two sorts of men are revealed. Though born of the same parents and sharing the same nature, they are characterised by two dissimilar wills.⁽⁴⁾ Thus the *Civitas Terrena* appears in the corporeal world not as a result of creation but as a result of the fall of humanity. The sin **in** Adam has become the property of the whole human race. The locus of the two cities cannot be detected in secular history. Like the wheat and tares they are inextricably intertwined.

It should, however, be clear that the *Civitas Dei* is a judgment upon persons and things: partly contained in history and partly mystical in the sense that it concerns the individual soul's relationship with God, it is an analysis of the plan and purposes of God for mankind that is primarily eschatological.

Augustine indeed saw value in history. History is not cyclic nor is it merely terrestrial. The beginning of the two societies in history is in the sin of

Adam.⁽⁵⁾ The most blatant symbol of the fall is the inversion of the harmonious order established by God.⁽⁶⁾ The notion of “order” and “love” are rooted in the divine nature⁽⁷⁾ and are thus at the heart of Augustine’s thought about society. Disorder is the corruption of order and occurs when the hierarchy of love is reversed or inverted. To live virtuously, then, is to live a perfectly ordered life. However, in the human claim to self-determination, there is a tendency to disperse energy, as Peter Brown would see it, “...in baffling multiplicity of intense and partial loves”⁽⁸⁾. Consequently a moral action has to be situated in a wider framework seeking to re-establish a lost harmony and reaching its fulfilment in a harmonious whole where everything is related to God.

In human unrelatedness to God, then, lies the inability to bring about a truly just society. Consequently, the secular state is punishment for the sin consequent upon the fall. Nevertheless, the earthly city, imperfect and disordered as it may be, is part of God’s purpose for humanity; it is a part of God’s plan that is working out in history. The earthly city’s imperfection is rooted in humanity’s corruption. However, it is necessary for the building up of the City of God. If, as Augustine suspects, it is going to last for many ages, corrupt though it is, it is necessary for the heavenly pilgrimage. It can never be perfected and fully regenerated.⁽⁹⁾ Nevertheless, the worst horrors can be controlled and the world can be made tolerably safe for Christians to live in. The fulfillment of history in the *City of God* is eschatological because it lies beyond history and is revealed when history is complete. This means that all human judgments of events in history are provisional and haphazardous.⁽¹⁰⁾ The revelation of God’s purposes is beyond time. Therefore, the political society set in time is subject to eschatological assessment.

AUGUSTINE’S POLITICAL ORDER

Political activity, for Augustine, gravitates around the problem of humanity’s behavior in politics. In politics we express those orientations that lie far deeper in ourselves. So in the words of D.J. MacGreen, it is observed that,

It is the will, or love enlightened by reason – that orientates a man’s moral and intellectual life towards God, his final end; to material things; and to his fellow creatures considered as persons.⁽¹¹⁾

Augustine’s theory of love lies, then, at the heart of his thought in relation to society. Augustine makes the activity of “love” the specific principle of a people as commonwealth (*res publica*).

His *City of God* must be understood, as Fortin rightly suggests, as directed against the idealism of Plato's work, *The Republic*.⁽¹²⁾

Fortin mentions that,

Plato is essentially right in his estimation of what men ought to do and how they should live in society, but he was incapable of providing the means by which that ideal could be translated into practice.⁽¹³⁾

For Augustine, since the fall, no earthly state can ever possess or even attain true justice.⁽¹⁴⁾ This is not a rejection of the state by Augustine; rather, he rejects the definition of a "just society" and argues that a *res publica* (commonwealth) is a "... multitude of reasonable beings voluntarily associated in the pursuit of common interests (or love)."⁽¹⁵⁾ The state, or the society, exists only to the extent that it is united by a love in which all its members participate. Love, albeit tainted and corrupted love, is the unifying principle of every true society. However, D. MacQueen states that

[a]ccording to Augustine, the earthly city, also possesses a distinctive form of imitation, love and therefore unity. But this imitation is perverse, being both 'privative' and 'separative.' It is 'privative' precisely because depriving the society's members of their common good, it induces them to seek their good within themselves. This self-love is also 'separative' in as much as it alienates and divides each member both from God and his neighbor.⁽¹⁶⁾

As noted earlier (Section 1) the most basic relationship in the divine order is dependence, or relationship to God. Consequently dislocation of order or disorder, has as its most blatant symptom, domination: the need to secure the dependence of others.

Augustine⁽¹⁷⁾ distinguishes between humanity's domination over lower creatures [*potestas naturalis*] in virtue of his being made in God's image and likeness and the non-natural subjection of person over person. There is a loving human subordination belonging to nature in which women are subject to men and children to fathers; however, the subjection of persons to political authority (and slavery) is rooted in human sin.

Humanity has a social existence in terms of nature, but this "natural society" is a society of equals subject only to God.⁽¹⁸⁾ Augustine notes that the Old Testament patriarchs were shepherds rather than kings⁽¹⁹⁾ whereas the origin of kingship is in conquest, domination and the lust for power. Markus notes that "[s]ociety, so we may summarise Augustine's view, has its origins in the order of nature; the state is a dispensation rooted in sin".⁽²⁰⁾ The institutions of the state involving coercion and punishment are brought into

human society by sin; they are both punishment and remedy. They are God's punishment for human transgression and God's providential means for coping with consequent disorder, strife and lack of concord.

Thus the consequence of Augustine's analysis is that the earthly society "is not", that is, it lacks unity, goodness, and hence, being. As it is disordered, it moves towards non-being, and hence evil. On the other hand, although Augustine believes that a true *res publica* is impossible, at the same time he conceives of the state as part of God's divine providence. It has a specific role in human history. It should be noted that Augustine's view of secular society is not consistent. Although at times he seems indifferent, even negative, to secular society regarding it simply as the outcome of humanity's lust for power; to the extent that it preserves life enabling humanity to survive in a disordered world, it is good. Augustine realised that the world was not about to have a cataclysmic ending: it would go on for aeons and Christians would have to come to terms with it. Christopher Morris contends that Augustine, although recognising that earthly society can never be perfect nor restored, acknowledges that it does considerable service for humanity and even for God.

⁽²¹⁾ He writes,

It preserves, in shadowy and broken form, some traces of the heavenly *Ordo*. God is a God of order and willed man to live an ordered life. Some semblance of order can be partially restored, and it is God's intention that the *Civitas Terrena* should do precisely this. ⁽²²⁾

The *Civitas Terrena*, although disordered, uses the state to save humanity from the total anarchy that wickedness would otherwise bring about. A disordered society needs a strong power to restrain the ceaseless conflicts among humankind. The state exists for external order. Its purpose is to inhibit the destructive manifestation of human egotism. ⁽²³⁾ Augustine's concern with the most fundamental needs in a fallen society leads him to find this need in the human desire for peace. He contends that [the] Peace, then, of the body lies in the ordered equilibrium of all its parts; the peace of the irrational soul, in the balanced adjustment of its appetites; the peace of the reasoning soul, in the harmonious correspondence of conduct and conviction; the peace of the body and soul taken together, in the well ordered life and health of the living whole. Peace between a mortal man and his immortal Maker consists in ordered obedience, guided by faith, under God's eternal law; peace between man and man exists in regulated fellowship. The peace of the home lies in the ordered harmony of authority and obedience between the members of a family living together. The peace of the political community is an ordered harmony of authority and

obedience between citizens. The peace of a heavenly city lies in a perfectly ordered and harmonious communion of those who find their joy in God and one another in God. Peace, in its final sense, is the calm that comes from order. Order is an arrangement of like and unlike things whereby each of them is disposed its proper place. ⁽²⁴⁾

Peace, then, is the resolution of tension, the re-ordering of the hierarchy of established powers in the human being and in society. It is an orientation towards love and hence salvation.

Thus the function of the state is to maintain order. It maintains “remedial order”⁽²⁵⁾ that makes possible a temporal peace. This temporal peace is not comparable to the true peace, found only in the *City of God*, that is beyond time. However, the peace and order provided by the state maintains the external conditions necessary for the individual to pursue personal salvation through the grace of God. The Peace of Babylon ⁽²⁶⁾ is thus necessary for the state to attain its goal as an instrument of salvation. It needs a hierarchical principle, a pattern of authority where some rule, while others obey. What is inferior in being must obey the superior ⁽²⁷⁾ in such a way that the father rules the members of his household. ⁽²⁸⁾

So within the state itself, officials of high rank, that is, king and magistrate, exercise supreme control while the citizen body owe them respect and obedience. ⁽²⁹⁾ Thus, an ordered hierarchy of established powers can canalise and hold in check the human lust for domination and vengeance. ⁽³⁰⁾

Therefore, the state exists merely to preserve the external peace and order and **not** to mould the internal desires, activities and beliefs of the citizens. A summary of Augustine’s notion of peace in society is given by S.Wolin in which he states:

To the degree that a political society promoted peace it was good; to the degree that it embodied a well-ordered concord among its members it was even better; to the extent that it encouraged a Christian life and avoided a conflict in loyalties between religion and political obligation, it had fulfilled its role within the universal scheme. ⁽³¹⁾

The institutions of political and social life thus have no real positive or formative value. They hold down the dark and sinful passions of humanity, provide a measure of peace and stability, and move the individual in the direction of a good which transcends the political. Nevertheless, the Christian pilgrim must take note of the state. ⁽³²⁾

THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

Attention will now be focused on the deeper interaction of the state, the Christian and the church. The *Civitas Dei* is strictly not the visible church. It is the *communio sanctorum*, the body of the elect, including within its ranks those of pre-Christian times (including heathens) and excluding on the other hand, many of the baptised.⁽³³⁾

It is moreover the eschatological fulfillment of history; yet now in history the two cities are inextricably intermingled. The visible church militant is then the symbolic and inadequate representation of the *Civitas Dei*.

What then is the relationship between the Christian and the state in the Christian commonwealth? John Burleigh felt that if “Augustine has contributed anything of value to the idea of the Christian state, it is the conception of a region beyond politics where man must look for his chief good.”⁽³⁴⁾ Whatever the state’s positive value, the Christian has an eternal destiny with which the state has no concern. However useful the state may be, it can never be an absolute and ultimate end for the Christian. The rebuilding of the political society is not the ultimate task of the Christian. Indeed, as Augustine understands it, Christianity does not promote solutions to the problem of human society. It is a realm beyond politics. Human progress does not mean a corresponding increase in virtue; material and technical progress may benefit humanity, but it may also destroy it.⁽³⁵⁾ Augustine’s thought has no place for a vision of a politics of perfection. According to Deane, for Augustine, “politics is a realm in which fallible sinful men work but imperfect precarious solutions to recurring difficulties and tensions.”⁽³⁶⁾ There is an inescapable tension between one’s perfection as a Christian and as a citizen. The Christian can never be fully integrated into political life; he moves beyond it in the direction of a transpolitical and other-worldly good.

In the *City of God*, Augustine wished to accommodate the church to its role as the established religion of the empire on the one hand, and yet on the other, to free the church from dependence on any secular framework. The Christian could take part in political activities, render military service and participate in the work of the state as emperor or magistrate. Yet, the state is not sacred and has no absolute value.

Augustine, according to Markus, rejected two opposed and contrasting assessments of the Empire current in the fourth century. One sought to sacralise the Empire; the other, represented by the Donatists, to repudiate the

Empire. One saw the sacral order as relevant to the life of the Christian and political involvement as an unavoidable duty for the Christian in the *saeculum*, the other, placed the true Christian in opposition to the diabolical aspirations of the Empire.⁽³⁷⁾ Augustine opposed the theology of a Christian Empire and all sacral conceptions of society. The Christian, as the Donatists were insisting, can never be “at home” in the world but the separation was not sociological but eschatological in its thrust. There is no possible overall political ideology: Eschatological hope forces the Christian to renounce such an ambition. There is no total unified political response; as Markus expresses it,

Christian hope deflates all ideologies and utopias: in their place it sets provisional goals, to be realised piecemeal, and to be kept flexible, perpetually subject to revision and renewal in the light of political experience seen as an eschatological perspective.⁽³⁸⁾

Augustine was, moreover, revolutionary in his time in discovering that the measure of rational control that humanity exercised over the political environment was limited. The political realm is indeterminate, provisional and subject to irrational human factors that make final political solutions unsafe, and often inhuman. For Augustine, everyday existence was insecure and uncertain. J. Joyce Schuld gives us Augustine’s reasons:

Even in the most loving and noble contexts, however, human beings perpetually fight against the pull of the libido dominandi, their self-absorbed desire to gain power and control over other individuals. Hence, for Augustine, no safe refuge can be found within social life that has been left untouched by agitating tensions and pressures, threats of deception, and inequitable use of dominating force. Some variations of conflict, insecurity and exploitative manipulation are present, at least as hazardous possibilities in all human projects and interactions.⁽³⁹⁾

If, as Augustine has shown, humanity cannot determine itself in conscious and moral intention, how much less can it claim complete self-determination in politics.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF AUGUSTINE’S *CITY OF GOD* TO CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Augustine sees the Christian as a stranger in an uncomprehending land. He is inclined towards a static view of society and disavows the use of power to improve the lot of humanity on earth. He rejected any identification of the church’s destiny with that of the empire. Furthermore, he strongly resisted any

attempt to tie the church to a contemporary societal structure within history. The secular order had a contribution to make to the Church's life. However, nothing essential to the Church's mission can be lost should any partial structure within evolving society collapse or disappear. Augustine's attack on the "sacral" concept of the empire prepared the way for the liberation of society and indeed all politics from civil religion. Society was in the more distant future to become increasingly "secular" and uncommitted to any ultimate loyalty.

Augustine had been unable to formulate the theological and biblical rationale with which to positively and critically evaluate the *Civitas Terrena*. His evaluation was basically negative, because he saw the origin of the *saeculum* in the fall. Tainted, fallen humanity was "disordered." In contradistinction, in classical political theory, politics is perfectable, justice attainable and reason exulted over the will.⁽⁴⁰⁾ For this reason the classicists were in no position to understand the psychological and spiritual poverty of fallen humanity. Augustine's central problem is that of the *dilectio* (the orientation of one's whole personality) which militates against the possibility of a strong measure of rational control over the political environment.⁽⁴¹⁾ In short, Augustine focuses attention upon the will. The will, including the irrational, is emphasised in political theory to the virtual exclusion of societal and political structures.⁽⁴²⁾

However, these irrational factors that beset the political society, according to Augustine, are beyond all but the most basic solution. All that was required of the state to stem these destructive tides within the human psyche was the maintenance of earthly justice, peace and order as manifested in the Peace of Babylon. Thus, as noted earlier, there is little room in Augustine's thought for power to be used to improve the lot of humanity on earth.

Augustine's political theology is not one of undue optimism nor one containing a strong theory of social progress. Humanity lives in a world where nothing as yet seems to correspond to the promise and where there is a continual tension between the "now" in which the promise is proclaimed and the "new" in which the promise is fulfilled. There is no social or political milieu in which the church may find itself "at home." The eschatological hope proposed by the intertwined cities must inevitably lead the Christian to an ambivalent relationship with the world. Both the sociological separation

proposed by Donatists, and the sacral society, are untenable solutions. The church is an eschatological community that lives in the end-time. Thus it is a permanently unsettling force in the sense that it seeks to prevent the “idolising” of present social situations. The gospel is therefore in a state of radical and permanent conflict with the fallen world. It must question all forms of societal order; yet, on the other hand, the believer must be drawn into the political life of his society freed from the restrictions imposed by any ideology or final political solution. The Christian is to obey and support the state but he can give it no final loyalty. He lives and exists in the *Civitas Terrena*, but the *Civitas Dei* is his home.

The Christian is passive before the state because through it God’s hidden ways are revealed; it is part of his plan for a fallen world. However, the church has nothing effective to say to the state. It can encourage the “godly prince”⁽⁴³⁾ but one’s external salvation is unaffected by the quality of political rule. The Christian must look for his final goal beyond the *saeculum*. Thus, Augustine taught Christians to free themselves from dependence upon any existing or future social or political order. Worldly and political values are assessed within an eschatological perspective; that is, in terms of the values of the coming Kingdom. Therefore, no social order can ever be sacred and so beyond critical scrutiny. In the political realm, imperfect, fallible humanity can seek only provisional solutions.

How can Augustine enlighten political theory today? Firstly, transposed into the contemporary world Augustine’s *City of God* alerts Christians that any political system must consider that until Christ comes again, Christian liberation will always be an unfinished process threatened by the power of sin. There is no Kingdom of God on earth before the *eschaton*. Christian hope looks for fulfillment after the second coming of Christ and in this respect differs essentially from this-worldly hope. Until the *parousia*, Christian liberty will always be incomplete and under the constant threat of succumbing to egotism and pride. It is useful to compare some aspects of Augustine’s political thought with that of contemporary theologian of hope, Jürgen Moltmann.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Moltmann sees history as an open eschatological process in God which does not rob mankind of freedom and historical initiative. Rather, it makes creative discipleship in an unfinished world possible. The task ahead is one of radical openness to new possibilities, a breaking free from present incompleteness and, unlike Augustine, the building up of a new reality corresponding better to the promised future.

However, Moltmann's political theology is not one of undue optimism nor one containing a strong social and political theory. Humanity lives in a world where nothing as yet corresponds to God's promises and where there is a continual tension between the *now* (the unfree) in which the promise is proclaimed and the *new* in which the promise is fulfilled.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Secondly, political theology must be indebted to Augustine for his analysis of the social consequences of sin which are "disorder" and "disharmony." There is within humanity, a deep-seated congenital inclination to sin. Augustine's "disordered will" and "variety of loves" provides an awareness of both the individual and social nature of sin.⁽⁴⁶⁾ These insights illustrate that liberation and redemption must be studied at a deeper level, both within the individual and within the social structure of any conceivable society. Therefore, the Christian cannot take seriously a political system that anticipates the liberation of humanity through mere economic and social emancipation. Jürgen Moltmann identifies the present unfree world with negatives: the socially and culturally outcast, those who suffer economic destitution, the exploited environment and those who live in the apathy of personal despair and hopelessness. These "vicious circles of death"⁽⁴⁷⁾ are countered by creative acts which open up these negatives (closed system) and allow creation to reach the potentialities revealed in history in the event of the Resurrection. The unfree world is nowhere more evident than in the political domain. Open political theology makes humanity aware of the contradiction between the hoped for future and the condition of the present.

Thirdly, Augustine's *City of God* advocated an eschatological concept of church and society that would allow the church the freedom to pursue its prophetic challenge to the contemporary world. Thus the church is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic and social system. Christianity is both immanent, in the sense that it becomes part of history, and transcendent, in the sense that it rises above the limits imposed by time, nature and history. This means that the church has to take flesh in the various cultures and systems of humanity and yet not be bound exclusively to any race, nature, particular way of life or political system. For these reasons, political theology may not link the church in any exclusive way to a political or economic system that rejects any other system as incompatible with the gospel message of liberation.

Fourthly, while it is true that Augustine's concern is with the individual's earthly pilgrimage rather than the social dimensions of the liberation from sin - nevertheless, political theology ought not to reject spiritual and intellectual enrichment as "individualism" or "privatisation of faith." It is true that the personal liberation from sin has a social and economic dimension that is intrinsically required for the liberation of the individual. Liberation is freedom from different kinds of slavery, such as cultural, economic, social and political enslavement. However, all of these "slaveries" derive ultimately from sin. Christian liberty arises from the justification of the sinner into a new life of grace. This justification is applied to the individual believer. Therefore, social change also demands a constant need for inner individual conversion.

In conclusion, it could be said that the eschatological approach of Augustine's *City of God* provides a useful and necessary corrective towards a sacralisation of the political order. Utopian political systems, for example, Communism, Nazism and Apartheid South Africa can only gain from Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine espoused an open political theology which makes humanity aware of the contradictions between the hoped-for future and the condition of the present. The eschatological future arouses humanity's hope of transcending every historical and political limitation. Augustine brings to political activity a sensitivity for transcendence and a power of liberation from present political idols. Humanity lives in a world where little seems to correspond to the kingdom and where there is a continual tension between the "old" in which the kingdom is proclaimed and the "new" in which it is fulfilled. The "old" is symptomatic of existing reality, the "new" of the transformation of creation in the *eschaton*. Critical scrutiny from "beyond" is a challenge to any final political solution. Therefore, Christians must be on their guard; all is provisional power to the last day. The eschatological basis of the Christian faith makes it critical of any finality concerning the political order. Mere political solutions are never enough for the Christian. There is more; the Christ who will come again.

NOTES

1. R. Markus, *Saeculum: History of Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, p.167
2. Burleigh, J. *City of God: A Study of St Augustine's Philosophy*, p. 154
3. *St. Augustine, City of God*, xi, 19, p. 225
4. *ibid.*, xv, 1, pp 324 – 325

5. *ibid.*, xii, 28, p. 268
6. *ibid.*, xii, 6, pp 250 – 253
7. *St. Augustine, The Trinity*, c1, 10, 2, p. 212 – 214
8. Brown P.R.I., *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine*, p.32
9. *St. Augustine, City of God*, xv, 21, pp. 360 - 362
10. *Ibid.* , XIX, 17, pp 463 - 466
11. MacQueen, D. *The Origin of the Dynamics of Society and State according to Augustine*, p. 98
12. Fortin, E. *Political Idealism and Christianity in the Theology of St. Augustine*, p. 7
13. *ibid.*, p. 92
14. *St Augustine*, op.cit , xix 21, pp. 468 – 471
15. *ibid.* , xix, 24, p. 478
16. MacQueen, D. op. cit, p.9
17. *St Augustine*, op.cit, xix.14 and 15
18. Morris, C. *Western Political Thought*, p.228
19. *St. Augustine*, op.cit, xix, 12.2
20. Markus, R.A. *Two Conceptions of Political Authority: Augustine, De Civitate Dei, xix.14-15, A Thirteenth Century Interpretation*, p.68-100
20. Morris, C. *Ibid.*, p.228
21. *ibid.*
22. Fortin, E. op.cit, p.9
23. *St. Augustine*, op.cit xix, 13, pp.456
24. Fortin, E. op.cit p.9
25. Fortin, E. op.cit, p.9
26. In classical thought, (cf. Cicero) *Ordo* signifies the internal organisation of reality: reason, harmony, beauty (*de natura deorum* 25:15; 6:16; 18, 48). Augustine takes over some aspects of the classical *ordo* but rethinks it in Christian terms. There we find multiple meanings but the Christian God is the source of the *Ordo*. *Ordo*, in Augustine's thought is the principle in terms of which all created things are moved to their end (*De ordine* 1. 10:28) and the arrangement whereby all things are assigned their proper place. In a fallen world, order has been inverted and the hierarchy of love reversed. In our disordered situation strong power is needed to restrain the resulting ceaseless conflicts of humanity. The state possesses this power and so exists as a remedy for the destructive manifestations of human egotism. It restrains citizens from harmful and criminal acts. Thus it becomes God's plan for a fallen world.

27. Peace is in Augustine's words "... not to be scorned...for, as long as the two cities are mingled together, we can make use of the Peace of Babylon" (De Civitate Dei, xix, 26). Augustine thought that a state possessing the authority to maintain order and peace was divinely ordained for it afforded the individual the opportunity to love and serve God. Without the state, anarchy would ensue and humanity would destroy one another, for their criminal instincts would lead them towards "love of self" rather than love of God. Thus the peace and order provided by the state maintains the external condition necessary for the individual to pursue his own personal salvation through the grace of God.
28. St. Augustine, op.cit xix, 16, pp 463-463
29. Ibid.
30. Wolin, S. *Politics and Vision: Christianity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, quoted in D. Donnelly, "The City of God and Utopia: A Re-evaluation", p. 120
31. The peace provided by the state at least makes a corrupt world tolerably safe. Human laws are necessary for imperfect people – they preserve life and external morality. However, they cannot save souls (De Civitate Dei; xix, 17) for they do not deal with evil wills. In maintaining earthly peace, stability and order, they open humanity to that kingdom of hope, the City of God.
31. St Augustine, op.cit xix, 17, pp. 463 - 446
32. Burleigh, J. op.cit, p 177
33. St Augustine, op.cit; xxii.24
34. Deane, H. *The Political and Social Ideas of St Augustine*, p 222
35. Markus, R.A. *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, p.167
35. Ibid., pp.171-172
36. Schuld, J. Joyce. *Augustine, Foucault, and the Politics of Imperfection*, p1-2
37. According to E.Fortin, Augustine's City of God must be understood as directed against the idealism of Plato's work, *The Republic* (E.Fortin, *Political Idealism and Christianity in the Thought of St. Augustine*, p.7). Fortin maintains that
- Plato is essentially right in his estimation of what men ought to do and how they should live in society, but he was incapable of providing the means by which this ideal could be translated into practice (Ibid., p8)
- In Book xix Augustine turned his attention to the constitutive principle of the res publica (common wealth). In *De Republica*, Cicero had made justice the essence of the state (De Civitate Dei, xix, 21). Augustine opposed this, arguing that if justice in the

absolute sense is required to constitute a true common-wealth, then neither Rome nor any pagan state can be a true commonwealth. There is no true justice where the true God is not worshipped; the only commonwealth would be that where Christ is King (Ibid). Cicero had proposed a definition of a perfect state in its most ideal form. Augustine wished to reduce the definition to its lowest terms, irrespective of its moral character, and to find one which includes even evil people. Since the fall, no earthly state can ever possess and ever attain, true justice (Ibid.) This is not in rejection of the state by Augustine, rather, he rejects the Ciceronian definition of a “just society.”

38. See Note 32

39. Augustine gives little discussion to the merits of various forms of government and nowhere does he produce a theory of the state. There is, however, a passage known as the “Mirror of Princes” where he describes the abilities of a good ruler in the following way:

We call those Christians happy who govern with justice, who are not puffed up with the tongues of flatterers or the services of sycophants, but remember that they are men. We call them happy when they think of sovereignty as a ministry of God and use it for the spread of true religion; when they fear and love and worship God; when they are in love with the Kingdom in which they need fear no fellow-sharers; when they are slow to punish, quick to forgive; when they punish, not out of private revenge, but only when forced by the order and security of the republic, and when they pardon, not to encourage impunity, but with the hope of reform; when they temper with mercy and generosity the inevitable harshness of their decrees (De Civitate Dei, v, 24).

Augustine further favours a series of small states, living side by side in peace and contentment, such as a “League of Nations”. This is likely to provide greater peace and equity since it is based on the model of the Civitas. The institutions of political and social life thus have no real positive moral value.

40. See Note 3

44. Consult: The Church is the Power of the Spirit

London: SCM Press, 1977

The Crucified God

London: S.C.M. Press, 1974

The Experiment Hope

London: S.C.M. Press, 1975

Religion in Political Society

New York: Haper and Row, 1974

Theology of Hope

London: S.C.M. Press, 1977

45. Moltmann, J. *The future of Creation*, pp. 121-122

46. See Pages 4 and 5

47. Moltmann, J. *The Crucified God*, pp.329ff

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Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15

Paul's Reasoning and Our Questions

JAN LAMBRECHT

The title of this lecture is "Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15: Paul's Reasoning and Our Questions". I will try to present a rather compact analysis of this lengthy chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and trace the line of thought as carefully as possible. There will be, however, some brief pauses in order to indicate possible discussion points or difficulties, that is, in order to formulate reflective questions.

The pastoral constitution on the Church in the world, *Gaudium et Spes*, discusses human activity within the world in its chapter three. Here there is talk of "a new heaven and a new earth":

"We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity. Nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away. But we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart.

Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ. What was sown in weakness and corruption will be clothed with incorruptibility. While charity and its fruit endure, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity" (no. 39; *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, London, 1967, p. 237).

This short paragraph contains no fewer than eleven references to the New Testament, of which eight refer to the letters of Paul (Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians). The text has the appearance of a string of scriptural citations.

The contemporary reader asks him- or herself what the meaning of "the liberation of creation" or "the new earth" actually might be.

The scriptural language, particularly when it involves the end of the world or the renewal of the world, with its images and claims, puts us face to face with many problems. What about 1 Corinthians 15?

It is apparent that this chapter constitutes a well delineated whole. There is a solemn new beginning in verse 1 ("now I would remind you, brothers and sisters...") while the parenthetical verse 58 is without any doubt a conclusion. The subject matter treated in this section clearly differs from that in chapters 12-14 and that of chapter 16. The unifying factor, in terms of content, is the resurrection.

A threefold division of 1 Corinthians is suggested by the caesurae, the breaks in verse 12 and verse 35. The first unit (vv. 1-11) deals with the resurrection and appearances of Christ; the second and third units (vv. 12-34 and vv. 35-58) treat the resurrection of believers. In verse 12 the particle *that* occurs twice: "that" there is a resurrection of the dead is proved by the fact "that" Jesus is risen from the dead. From verse 35 onward the *how* of the bodily resurrection is dealt with: see the double question in this verse: "how" are the dead raised and "with what kind++ of body" do they come? Moreover, these two units conclude with an exhortation in the second person plural: see verses 33-34 and verse 58).

THE RESURRECTION AND APPEARANCES OF CHRIST (15:1-11)

To focus on the main argument of 1 Corinthians 15 and situate the function of verses 1-11 within the chapter one has to pay special attention to verse 12b: some Corinthians say that there is no resurrection of the dead. That is the issue. The disproof of this heretical opinion is what Paul is aiming at in the chapter.

Line of Thought

Verses 1-11 are written within the framework of such a refutation. Three affirmations - or perhaps better, concerns - control Paul's line of thought in these verses.

First of all, in verses 1-3a as well as in verse 11 Paul stresses his thesis, that is, the preaching of the same gospel, the *basic elements* of which he cites in verses 3b-5. The sameness of the gospel is indicated, as it were, vertically by reference to the delivering and receiving of the tradition in verses 1-3a (for the terminology, cf. 11:23) as well as horizontally by the emphasis on the common gospel in verse 11 ("whether then it was I or they,

so we proclaim [everywhere] and so you have come to believe").

Within that tradition Christ's resurrection is central. This appears clearly not only from verses 5-8 (witnesses) but also from verse 12 ("now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say...?"). This commonly held belief in the past resurrection of Christ is the starting point and ground of the argument about the future resurrection of Christians.

A second emphasis concerns the reality of Christ's resurrection. We find this unmistakably behind verses 5-8. If that event were not real, if it had not occurred, how could Paul use it in his reasoning? We may regard the list in verses 6-8 (or 5b-8) as an *expansion* of verse 5 (or 5a). All appearances of the risen Christ mentioned in verses 5-8 establish and validate what is said in verse 4b: Christ is risen.

The third idea or assertion is rather a *digression* found in verses 9-10. Paul may be the last and least apostle but qualitatively he is a true apostle. Already in verse 8 he writes "last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." Then, in verses 9-10, Paul explains that emphasis. He admits his unworthiness (v. 9) but he also stresses his work, harder than that of the others; God's grace toward him was not in vain (v. 10).

Some Comment

a) There is a consensus concerning the traditional character of verses 3b-5. The extent and vocabulary of the confessional formula, however, are disputed: "to the twelve" (v. 5b) probably still belongs to it. The tradition is very old. Its provenance may be Antioch; some postulate Damascus or even Jerusalem.

The pre-Pauline statement consists of four clauses; the first (death) and third (resurrection) are long, the second (burial) and fourth (appearances) brief.

It would seem that the burial and appearances confirm, as it were "prove", the reality of the saving events of Jesus' death and resurrection. Thus, to the basic original antithetical elements "Christ died and rose [or was raised]", burial and appearances have been added. Further added material includes the soteriological expression "[died] for our sins", the twofold "in accordance with the scriptures" (with probable reference to Isa 53 in verse 3b and perhaps to Hos 6:2 in verse 4b) and the time

indication "on the third day" (probably pointing not to an exact date but to God's saving intervention "quickly").

The traditional credal formula "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (v. 3b) cannot but remind us of what Jesus said at the Last Supper: "This is my body that is for you" and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (11:25 and cf. Mark 10:45: "... the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many"). As elsewhere in his letters Paul refers to Christ's sacrificial death for our sins (cf. for example Gal 1:3-4 and Rom 3:24-26).

A moment ago we said that burial and appearances confirm the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet in a recent study "Das Begräbnis Jesu bei Paulus und die leibliche Auferstehung aus dem Grabe" (Wiss. Unters. NT, 135, Tübingen, 2001, pp. 119-183), Martin Hengel convincingly shows how the clause "and that he was buried" does not only historically confirm the death of Jesus, but is also needed for the following statement on Jesus' resurrection: without burial of the dead body, bodily resurrection would make no sense!

b) In verses 6-8 Paul expands the list of witnesses by means of several "then's" (*eita* or *epeita*, already in verse 5b) and by "last of all". Verses 5-8 provide an impressive list. The data of verses 6a and 7 are also traditional but Paul himself is probably responsible for the wording and structure.

This applies above all to verse 7 which is parallel to verse 5: James and all the apostles, Peter and the twelve. For Paul, the number of apostles is greater than twelve (it includes, for example, James and Barnabas and Paul himself), yet "all" and "last of all" betray that in his opinion the number is closed.

It is possible that the mention of James points to his authority in Jerusalem after Peter had left the city. "Christ appeared to..." may thus have functioned as a legitimating formula. Such authentication, however, could not have possessed any value if the authenticity of the appearance was in doubt.

Verse 6b is striking in this regard. Paul seems to say: if you do not believe me you can ask those who are still alive. The apologetic, humble, but at the same time self-conscious tone of verses 9-10 should not go unnoticed.

A first question must be raised here: Was the resurrection of Christ believed by all Christians in Corinth?

- a) The majority of scholars assume that in Corinth all Christians believed in Christ's resurrection. How can you be a Christian if you doubt this central point of the Creed? Furthermore, in 1 Cor 15 Paul uses Christ's past resurrection as the ground and the fundament for his reasoning about the future resurrection of the Christians. If that basis is not solid, the whole building collapses.
- b) Yet the way Paul refers to Christ's resurrection seems to indicate that in Corinth there may be doubt. One should consider the following the data that suggest uncertainty:
- (1) verse 1: "I would remind you";
 - (2) verse 2: "If you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you";
 - (3) again verse 2: "unless you have come to believe in vain";
 - (4) compare, in verse 11, the present tense "so we proclaim" with the past tense "so you have come to believe". Perhaps one may ask: "do you still believe?"
 - (5) verses 6-8: the long list of the witnesses (six instances) perhaps equally betrays the presence of (some) doubt concerning Christ's resurrection. Corinth needs to be confirmed by the list of the appearances.

THE "THAT" OF OUR FUTURE BODILY RESURRECTION (15:12-34)

Verses 20-28 are usually regarded as the central subdivision in the second unit. Verses 12-19 and 29-32 correspond to each other in structure and content, so that the unit presents a concentric structure with, at the end, a parenthetic conclusion: see verses 33-34.

Verses 12-19

In verses 12-19 Paul draws out the implications of a supposed denial of the resurrection. For this argument he uses a series of interrelated conditional sentences that may be summarized as follows:

- (1) an indignant question (v. 12);

- (2) negative hypotheses and consequences (vv. 13-15 and 16-18);
- (3) finally, a concluding conditional period (v. 19).

Paul's indignation indicates that in his opinion the *protasis* ("if Christ is risen") implies the resurrection of the dead (*apodosis*). Already in verses 12-19 (as in vv. 20-22) Paul sees Christ's resurrection as the basis for the future resurrection of Christians. In two parallel steps (vv. 13-15 and 16-18) Paul then argues that denial of the resurrection of the dead involves denial of the resurrection of Christ (v. 13 and v. 16) and that such denial has negative consequences for Paul and the apostles (the kerygma they preach is in vain, v. 14b; they are false witnesses of God, v. 15), for the Corinthians still alive (their faith is in vain, v. 14c and v. 17b; they are still in their sins, v. 17c), and for the dead (they have perished, v. 18). Then in verse 19 Paul concludes his series of conditional periods. If hope is confined to this life, then we (Paul and all Corinthians?) are the most miserable of all people.

Our second reflection concerns the logic in verses 12-19.

- a) It is often said that Paul reasons as follows: How can one hold that there is no resurrection of the dead if he knows for certain that Christ is risen? One exception to the general rule (no resurrection) renders that rule logically invalid.
- b) Most probably, however, Paul argues differently. For him Christ, just as Adam, is an inclusive figure (cf. the category of "corporate personality"). If Christ is risen, then those who belong to Christ cannot but follow the first fruits. The risen Christ causes and brings about the resurrection of the Christians. He makes alive, he raises those who belong to him. Of course, this will occur in the future; and finally God will be all in all.

For Christians, resurrection is more than just a possibility; it is a necessity. Here resurrection is a fully positive concept: life without end. It is not a neutral condition before judgment that applies to all people, in which judgment some will be rewarded and others punished.

Verses 20-28

Verses 20-28 contain two steps, each with thesis and explanation (vv. 20-22 and vv. 23-28). Christ is referred to as the first fruits of those

who have fallen asleep.

This statement or thesis (v. 20) is then explained. Christ is compared with Adam. Both represent a temporal and causal beginning: Adam of death for all men and women, Christ of life and resurrection for all Christians (vv. 21-22).

In verse 20 the term "first fruits" points to a temporal sequence (first of a series) as well as to a causal relation between the first and the others. The idea of causality is then emphasized in verses 21-22: by a human being came the death, by a human being comes the resurrection; in Christ shall all be made alive.

The idea of sequence is taken up in verses 23-28 which also opens with a thesis. There will be an order and different groups:

- (1) Christ is the first who is already risen;
- (2) at his parousia those who belong to him will rise;
- (3) then comes the end (*telos*), when Christ hands over the kingdom to God after having overthrown all inimical powers (vv. 23-24). The second and third stages are then further explained; Christ must reign until all his enemies, death included, are put under his feet. Finally, the Son himself will be subjected to God in order that God may be everything in every one (or: in all things, vv. 25-28). In Paul's vision there will be no messianic reign on earth between Christ's parousia and the last judgment. Parousia and judgment coincide.

The two psalm verses that are employed must have been very familiar to the early Christians. In verse 25 Paul thoroughly rewrites Ps 110:1. In this psalm God addresses the king: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool". The major change is the christological transposition. The subject of "until he has put..." is no longer God but Christ. Furthermore sitting at the right hand of God in heaven (an idea present in the same verse of the psalm) is interpreted by Paul as Christ's active reigning on earth. From the resurrection onward Christ is reigning and the purpose of this rule is the subjection of all enemies. Death is included; personified death is the last enemy (v. 26). The destruction of death is resurrection.

In verse 27a Paul quotes Ps 8:7: "He has put all things under his feet". Some commentators hold that once more a transposition should be

assumed. In the psalm it is God who subjected all things under the feet of "humanity" in general. For Paul it would be Christ who subjects all things under his own feet. In verse 28 Paul emphasizes his theocentric vision of the end of history. The Son himself will be subjected to the Father. The ultimate aim is "that God may be all in all".

Verses 29-32

Although in a less regular manner, Paul employs the same style of reasoning in verses 29-32 as in verses 12-19: *protasis* ("if the dead are not raised", vv. 29b and 32c) and *apodosis* (the remaining clauses). It strikes the reader, however, that in this passage Christ's resurrection is no longer mentioned. Paul now links the implications immediately to the denial of the resurrection of the dead. This is probably the reason why the type of implication is also different. In verses 14-15 and 17-18 kerygma, faith, witnessing, and forgiveness of sins were dealt with; here the meaninglessness of Christian practice and apostolic dedication, if there is no resurrection, is brought to the fore. In verse 29 Paul probably refers to a further unknown custom among the Corinthians. Some ask for a second baptism for the benefit of a dead pagan relative or friend. Paul does not judge this custom; he only employs it in his argumentation. In verses 30-32 Paul writes autobiographically. Of course "the fight with wild animals" in Ephesus (v. 32) is meant metaphorically. Notice should be taken of the sarcastic citation of Isa 22:13 at the end of verse 32: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die".

For our third critical question we must go back to verse 22: "for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ". What is the meaning of "all" ('pantes' in Greek) in this verse?

- a) A number of exegetes (e.g., Sven Hillert, Andreas Lindemann, Wolfgang Schrage) state that both "all" point to the whole of humankind. According to them the parallelism of the clauses 22a and 22b forces us to accept such an interpretation. All die in Adam, all will rise in Christ! Can a universal salvation then be expected?
- b) But one must look at verse 23b: "those who belong to Christ", i.e., Christians; and verse 18: "those who have fallen asleep in Christ", i.e., Christians. It would seem that in 1 Cor 15 Paul nowhere

speaks of a universal "being made alive", one affecting believers and unbelievers alike.

Paul writes in verse 49 : "we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven"; the "we" points to Christians. In verse 51 one reads: "we will not all die, but we will all be changed". "All" twice refers to (all) Christians.

One should also consider 1 Thess 4:13-18, esp. verse 14, and Rom 5:18. In the last text there is some tension (just as in 1 Cor 15:22): condemnation for all; justification and life for all (Christians). Here also there is no formal parallelism.

Of course, elsewhere in the NT one finds a universal resurrection before the universal judgment, e.g. in John 5:28-29: "the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice [that of the Son of Man], and will come out - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation".

Verses 33-34

In verses 33-34 the Corinthians are addressed in the second person plural. The parenthetic tone is sharp and polemical. In verse 33b a sentence of the Attic poet Menander is quoted: "Bad company ruins good morals". The last clause of verse 34 ("I say this to your shame") repeats what Paul wrote in 6:5 (cf. 4:14). "Some" in verse 34 recalls the beginning of the unit (v. 12: "some" of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead).

Who are those deniers? There are three main positions.

- (1) A majority of exegetes assume that in a Hellenistic surrounding these Corinthians did not reject the immortality of the soul but only the *resurrection of the body*.
- (2) Others claim that some Christians in Corinth denied the *future resurrection*. These Christians manifest a spirit-filled, sacramentally overconscious, realized eschatology. Reference is made to 2 Tim 2:17-18 where Hymenaeus and Philetus proclaim: "the resurrection is past already" (v. 18).
- (3) However, in our opinion, due attention should be given to verses 29-32 and 33-34. It seems at least possible that,

according to Paul, some Christians in Corinth denied all life after death. There is no *resurrection at all* (cf. the Sadducees in the gospel and the materialists of all times).

THE "HOW" OF OUR FUTURE BODILY RESURRECTION (15:35-58)

Between the introductory question of verse 35 and the hortative conclusion of verse 58 the third unit can be divided into three subdivisions which seem to be concentrically arranged: verses 36-44a (change), verses 44b-49 (the Adam-Christ typology), and verses 50-57 (change). The unit deals with the "how" of bodily resurrection.

Verse 35

"But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'"

The second question of verse 35 concretizes the first.

Verses 36-44a

In the first subdivision (vv. 36-44a) three steps are taken. Can the possibility of change and transformation be shown? Paul first relates an analogy from nature (vv. 36-38); then he comments on the different types of bodies (vv. 39-41); and finally he applies this to the resurrection of the dead (vv. 42-44a). In the first step he appeals to features of common experience: the buried seed and its new body. In the second step he stresses the differing shapes of "flesh" - here the term is neutral - and the variety of terrestrial and celestial bodies as well as their difference in splendour. The application follows in the third step. As with the seed, there is a sowing (dying) and raising of human bodies; and as there is a multiplicity of bodies and of their splendour in the cosmological order, there is also a difference in splendour between earthly and heavenly human bodies.

The earthly body is sown in perishability, dishonour, and weakness; the future body will be raised in imperishability, glory, and power.

This leads Paul to the climax of the argumentation: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (v. 44a).

Verses 44b-49

In verses 44b-49 Paul's argument takes a turn. He now appeals to the authority of Scripture. The conditional period of verse 44b draws the conclusion from verses 42-44a and clearly expresses Paul's conviction: "If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body".

The bringing together of "physical" and "spiritual" in verse 44b must have shocked the Hellenistic Corinthians: a spiritual body, a body under the domination of the Spirit! The conjunction of body-spirit, is this possible?

On the basis of Gen 2:7 an Adam-Christ typology (cf. vv. 21-22) is developed in verses 45-47, and then applied to believers in verses 48-49. In verse 45 the general statement of verse 44b is concretized by means of the two Adams: "'The first man, Adam, became a living being', the last Adam became a life-giving spirit". After "a living being" one expects "living spirit". Yet Paul daringly writes "a life-giving spirit".

The Adam-Christ typology is developed by means of the Jewish concept of corporate personality. In verse 46 the sequence is emphasized: the spiritual does not come first but the physical (differently from Philo's comment on Genesis 1 and 2).

In verse 47 the origin of both men is indicated: from earth, from heaven. Verse 48 shows how the two figures determine the identity of the people they include. Verse 49 then says: As we (Christians) have borne the image of the man of dust, so we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

In verse 48 there are still two separate groups (those of earth and those of heaven). In verse 49, however, only one class of people remains: Christians. They *have borne* (past tense) the image of the earthly man and they *will bear* (future tense) the image of the heavenly man.

Verses 50-57

Within the third subdivision (vv. 50-57) we distinguish two steps: verses 50-53 and verses 54-57. In verses 50-53 Paul first draws attention to the importance of the principle he is about to give: the opposition between the earthly person, living or dead, who is called "flesh and blood" as well as "corruption", *and* the reign of God characterized by incorruption. What is finite, fragile, and corruptible cannot inherit what

is incorruptible. A turn of thought occurs in verse 51; a "mystery" is announced, i.e., a secret truth of what will occur at the end of the age. Paul now focuses his attention more directly (and personally) on the time of the parousia, the glorious return of the risen Christ. He himself expects to be among those who are still alive; yet everyone, living and dead, must be changed. In verse 52ab he quickly adds a few details borrowed from apocalyptic imagery: the change will be instantaneous: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet". It will be an end-time event.

Still focusing on the parousia, Paul in verse 52cd distinguishes between the resurrection in imperishability of the dead *and* the transformation of the living. In verse 53 he resorts to a new image, that of clothing (cf. 2 Cor 5:2-4) in order to explain the transformation (of all) in yet another way.

In verses 54-57 Paul further reflects on transformation. When the indispensable clothing process will have taken place the Scriptures that announce the destruction of death will be fulfilled.

"The saying that is written" introduces a combined quotation. In verse 54 Paul adapts Isa 25:8: "Death has been swallowed up in victory"; and in verse 55 he radically reinterprets Hos 13:14 by giving that text a positive orientation: "Where, of death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting?" The expression "the sting of death" requires comment; it is provided in two laconic, typically Pauline statements on the relationship between death and sin, and between sin and law (v. 56). The annihilation of death is nothing other than the divine victory given to all Christians through Jesus Christ (v. 57).

Verse 58

Verse 58 is the conclusion of verses 50-57 as well as of the whole chapter: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain".

Our fourth critical reflection concerns the question: How must we understand "bodily resurrection" today?

- a) For Paul the answer to the question "with what kind of body" appears to be: a changed, transformed, spiritual, imperishable,

immortal, incorruptable body. "flesh" and "blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of God (cf. v. 50).

- b) For us today two insights, it would seem, must be preserved, (1) the continuity and identity of the whole human person, soul and body, after death, and (2) the faith certainty that there will be a transformed future for all good that is done.

Let me conclude this lecture. 1 Corinthians 15 is a lengthy, contentwise very rich chapter, yet an overall treatment of Paul's view of the future resurrection of believers should study three more passages: 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Cor 5:1-11; and Phil 3:21.

Already in 1 Cor 6:14 Paul wrote: "God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power". It is clear that here, as well as in chapter 15, Paul does not think of a "general" resurrection but of that of "those who belong to Christ" (v. 23).

Therefore our fifth and final critical reflection. There must be a resurrection not only for good Christians, but also for all good people of all times, everywhere. Some would like to go further and speak of a "universal salvation", either because of God's ultimate mercy or because what remains after the self-destruction of all evil is, let us hope, not hell but nothing (in the Book of Revelation a "second death") except, of course, the fullness of eternal life.

Are many Christians, in the radically secularized mentality of today, not tempted to think what some Corinthians said: "there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12)? Yet this Pauline (and genuinely Christian) hope is as central to our faith as the belief in Christ's death for our sins (cf. v. 3b). If for this life only we hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (cf. v. 19).

We should keep repeating the paradoxical saying of Martin Luther King: "Goodness defeated is stronger than evil triumphant". What is true of Jesus Christ and the catastrophe of his cross, remains valid for all his followers. "All will be made alive in Christ" (v. 22b).

We may end with *Gaudium et Spes*: "... while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather

stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family...

... after we have obeyed the Lord, and in his Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured.

This will be so when Christ hands over to the Father a kingdom eternal and universal: 'a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love, and peace'.

On this earth that kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower" (no. 39; *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W.M. Abbott, pp. 237-238).

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APPENDIX II

Structure of 1 Corinthians 15

I. The resurrection and appearances of Christ (vv. 1-11)

- a 1-3a traditional gospel (vertical)
- b 3b-5a confessional formula
- 5b-8 witnesses (expansion)
- 9-10 Paul (digression)
- a' 11 common gospel (horizontal)

II. The "that" of our future bodily resurrection (vv. 12-34)

- a verses 12-19 (negative implications of denial)
 - (1) indignant question (12)
 - (2) consequences (13-15 and 16-18)
 - (3) concluding sentence (19)
- b verses 20-28 (positive exposition)
 - (1) 20-22: Christ and the Christians
thesis (20) and explanation (21-22)
 - (2) 23-28: order
thesis (23-24) and explanation (25-28)
- a' verses 29-32 (negative implications)
verses 33-34 (parenetical conclusion)

III. The "how" of our future bodily resurrection (vv. 35-58)

- verse 35 (the double question)
- a verses 36-44a (change)
 - (1) 36-38: analogy from nature
 - (2) 39-41: different types of bodies
 - (3) 42-44a: application
- b verses 44b-49 (the Adam-Christ typology)
 - (1) 44b: conclusion
 - (2) 45-47: Adam-Christ
 - (3) 48-49: application to believers
- a' verses 50-57 (change)
 - (1) 50-53: mystery of transformation
 - (2) 54-57: reflection on transformation
- verse 58 (parenetical conclusion)

Reflections on the Significance of Thresholds in Everyday Life

REX VAN VUUREN

INTRODUCTION

In order to survive and sustain human life we spend much of our bodily strength, wits, time and effort to find solutions to overcome the barriers and the limits which nature puts on us. Our desire and will to overcome these barriers constitutes the world of labour and work which in its turn give rise to technology and science. In addition to natural barriers, boundaries and borders, there are artificial man-made barriers. In order to protect their resources and territory, clans, tribes, communities and nations create borders and boundaries. Boundaries, for example border control posts and city walls, are sites of power which keep in or keep out. Where as science and technology are required to overcome natural or physical barriers, primarily but not exclusively, politics and economics are required to erect or delineate and negotiate man-made boundaries and borders.

On the other hand the boundary between self and other takes the form of a threshold. Thresholds are maintained through an ethical awareness and spiritual sensitivity. Moral codes embody our attempts to protect the vulnerability of thresholds. Thresholds point to openings and the possibility to step over or cross-over a border or boundary. Thresholds allow for transition from one place to another, one mode of being or activity to another. Thresholds also allow for endings with the possibility of new beginnings. Post-and-lintel, with doors attached to hinges, are literal openings in walls and also serve as metaphors by which we articulate the intersubjective world of us and them, self and other.

The topic of thresholds has a wide reach and much has been written about barriers, boundaries, limits and thresholds. This family of phenomena have been explored and studied by many scholars from many disciplines. Notably, architecture, anthropology, psychology and a variety of disciplines

studying religion and culture. The natural sciences study the barriers we encounter in the natural and material world. Scientific discovery and invention serve to overcome barriers. From a human and social science point of view a threshold is a metaphor used with a vast range of culturally meaningful connotations to describe human actions and relationships. In certain contexts the use of the terms barrier, boundary, limit and threshold are interchangeable. To understand barriers as belonging more to the natural world and thresholds as belonging more to the human world has been worked out convincingly by Bernd Jager(1996 and 1997).

This presentation is based on the observation that thresholds are so intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life that we easily take them for granted. We are inclined to live so fast, become so absorbed by the demands of everyday living that we do not notice the psycho-spiritual significance of thresholds. Three questions will guide our reflections: how do thresholds manifest; what is the function and significance of thresholds and what are the consequences for us as human beings if we cannot depend on the threshold or if we cannot sustain the middle where inside and outside meet?

THE MANIFESTATION OF THRESHOLDS

A description of a few scenes and events will serve as a beginning of the answer to the first question.

1. Two groups of boys who are busy playing soccer get into a dispute about an off side call. The dispute heats up and takes on a confrontational character. In the heat of the moment one boy, a leader in one group, draws a line in the dirt and challenges the other side with the threat that if any steps over this line they are all in for a fight. This line in the dirt is in no way an efficient barrier but calls a halt to the desire toward any territorial expansion by the opposition, who also would like to stick to the rules. In this context, any member of the opposition knows the consequences of unthoughtful and impulsive action. This line embodies the threshold between a world governed by unwritten codes of the world of play and a world of chaos which could ensue. This challenge, embodied by the line, cannot be overstepped without some form of ritual and verbal action. The threshold drawn as a line in the sand announces a world of difference between chaos and destruction and playfulness within boundedness.

2. I made an appointment to see my bank manager. After I parked my car I walked toward the bank. The first threshold I encountered to enter the bank was the turnstile door. I hesitated, not only because I needed to pace my movements through the turnstile but I was at the same time anticipating the nature of the meeting with the bank manager, especially wondering if I would be received with the qualities of hospitality: kindness and friendliness. Walking through the entrance hallway I encountered the next threshold, a lift or elevator which would lead to the office of the bank manager. Arriving at his office, I went to the desk of his secretary. I once again hesitated before I announced myself. She is the doorkeeper. I step back and wait. I wait for the other's presence and to be invited in.

These actions take on many forms and have a long tradition in all cultures. Any stranger or guest has to wait, to tarry at the threshold. In western culture, as in many cultures, when being invited to a festive or celebratory occasion at the house of a member of the aristocracy, the major-domo, a man in charge of a royal or noble household, enquires who we are, invites us in, asks us to wait and then announces us. A butler or steward also serves this function.

3. In building constructions post-and-lintel is a skeletal system, the simplest and oldest way of constructing an opening. Two vertical or upright members, the posts, hold up or support a third horizontally laid member, the lintel or beam, across their top surfaces, creating a covered space. All structural openings have evolved from this system, which in its pure and oldest form is most visible at Stonehenge, 2,500-1,500 BC, more than 4 meters high, and located on the chalk downland of Salisbury Plain, about 120 kilometres west of London near the town of Amesbury. In Athens, the Parthenon, 447- 432 BC, is an expression of the beauty of early stone post-and-lintel colonnades. All the major variations of creating artificial boundaries and entrances through post-and-lintel such as a colonnade, pergola, portico, loggia, peristyle, portals and pronaos contribute to expressing the intention to mark or separate the possibility of moving from one qualitatively different space to another.

At different portals and entrances to numerous large mansions, estates and castles one notices many decorative artefacts in form of large, strong animals symbolising not only the power of the owner of the house but also embodying the protection of the thresholds.

Gates, portals, colonnades, doors and walls mark the boundary or line, or

better, a threshold between a chaotic outside and an ordered inside. In this light van den Berg (1969) is correct when he defines architecture as "the art of the boundary".

4. In studies of Scripture we encounter the post and lintel as a threshold for the first time in the account of the Passover, the account of God's rescue of the Israelite slaves from bondage in Egypt which comes to a dramatic climax in Exodus 12. They were to sprinkle the blood of a slaughtered year old lamb on the "sides and tops of the doorframes" of their houses (Ex 12:7, NIV); this would prevent a "destructive plague" from entering and striking the firstborn sons. The blood sprinkled on the doorframes protects and purifies those within.

The threshold between people and God is embodied through the design and creation of the ark, the altar, the tabernacle and the temple. Jager (1998) argues that the altar is the archetype of all thresholds. These thresholds gave rise to certain tasks. There were special gatekeepers for the ark (1 Chr. 15:23-24). In early pre-exilic writings there is mention of a small number of "keepers of the threshold" of the temple. In two passages they are described as "guarding the thresholds" (1 Chr. 9:19) and "porters of the thresholds" (2 Chr. 23:4). Their duties were to watch the threshold of the temple (2 Kings 22:4) and collect money from the people in order to "pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord." Sometimes women kept the door (John 18:16-17). This relatively humble task would be a joy for any servant in the house of the Lord to stand at the threshold, "to be a doorkeeper" (Ps. 84:10) (The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962). From a Christian perspective, the ultimate threshold, the middle between people and God, life and death, is the Cross and grave of Christ.

An answer to the first question could read as follows: Thresholds are everywhere and ever present. Thresholds, whatever form they take, reveal themselves throughout our lives as we grow or move from one place to another, one culture to another, one phase to another, one level to another, one status to another and one relationship to another. In every transition we make we must negotiate a threshold. Every choice we make involves a transition or transgression of a threshold. Thresholds manifest as attempts to sustain the middle where the inside and the outside meet. Thresholds are required to

sustain relationships. Considerations for the well-being of the other and respect for the other require the dependability of the threshold.

In this light Jacques De Visscher (1998: 11) is correct when he states that the dialogue about thresholds has no end.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THRESHOLDS

Let us focus on post-and-lintel as well as doors as explicit forms of the threshold toward articulating an answer to the second question: what is the function and significance of thresholds?

The members of building construction teams view post-and-lintel simply as a functional and measurable building reference which must comply with certain physical conditions. For an architect they are a small component of a whole. On the other hand Verhoeven (1998: 13-21) points out the ambiguity of a threshold by showing that it is true to say that post-and-lintel are not only "an architectural minimum" but also "symbols with a far reaching field of meanings".

The experiential dimensions of thresholds lead Verhoeven to claim that as an architectural minimum post-and-lintel is woven into the network of the symbolism of the meanings of thresholds. Post-and-lintel, as an object of architecture and a technique of building, is taken up in our everyday existence and connects with our pre-reflective experience and understanding of thresholds. With great insight Verhoeven asserts that the meaning of thresholds, which belong to our primary and original experience of the life-world, precedes the functional and technical use of post-and-lintel as a form of the threshold. Epistemologically the attempt to understand human living requires an understanding of the language of experience of thresholds.

I am led to a reflection on doors and their many meanings. A doorway is a metaphor in itself, but physically it is an entrance to a building, house or a room, the door itself being that movable part which closes the opening. It has come to mean a way in, a way out, a way to get something, a way of access. The threshold, then, is a place of leaving behind and entering, a transition, a new starting point. While concretely a door is the functional solution to transition and to the need to keep in and to keep out, figuratively it reflects a new access to and disclosure of the world.

Bachelard (1969: 224) reminds us of the expressive presence of the doors in our life and the stories they tell:

How concrete everything becomes in the world of spirit when an object, a mere

door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors once closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.

Similarly, Lang (1984:141-142) describes some of the contexts and meanings of the opening and closing of doors:

Doors close to tell us of our rejections or another's isolation, doors swing wide open like broad smiles to welcome our approach or doors sternly bar our way, imprisoning us by becoming impenetrable walls. Doors punctuate our tearful farewells or joyfully celebrate our reunions, doors dramatically slammed reveal scenes of anger or resemble whispers when tentatively unlatched. Doors call us to an intimate enclosure when life's struggles become too demanding or threatening and embrace us in conviviality and familiarity, protecting us from the elements, the dangerous wilds and the anonymous. Through this portal the world comes to meet us: trusted neighbours, new friends, invited guests, intrusive salesmen, the afternoon breeze (and) the setting sun...

In the work of Franz Kafka, for example in the parable "Before the Law" which appeared in The Trial (1956), waiting before a door is one of the central themes. His literary work provides us with a fascinating inquiry into the psychology of doors - closed doors, open doors, anonymous doors, concealed doors, fake doors, secret doors.

Think of the many proverbs and expressions in which doors figure: to darken someone's door; to go from door to door; to find the doors always open; to force an open door; to open the door to something; to shut the door in someone's face; to show someone the door - and then, of course, between you, me and the door post, and behind closed doors.

Doors interrupt our progress; block us momentarily in our movement toward our intended goals. Unless doors are left perpetually open, we are not allowed to stride forward indefinitely on a totally self-determined course.

With more time and space and more phenomenologically exact inceptions, the dialectics of inside and outside could multiply with countless diversified nuances. The reduction or exaggeration of the dialectics of inside and outside leads us to psychopathology. Mental illnesses may be manifest in a loss of boundaries between inside and out, or in an extreme form of closure or defensive enclosure.

In claustrophobia and agoraphobia the line of demarcation between inside and outside is aggravated. When the invitational character of the exterior and interior world is frustrated a door can become a barrier which interrupts our movement toward others - "... to be refused access to the interior, denied access to others is to be "obsessed with the door" (Lang, 1984, p. 146).

The phenomenologist Von Gebsattel (1958: 172) describes the case of H., a compulsive patient, who suffers from a "threshold disturbance". He cannot finish anything because "the inner life-historical articulation is missing from his outer action, and therewith the experience of completion". Likewise, in discussing the historical development of our theoretical understanding of obsessive-compulsive illnesses, Rümke (1967, p. 108) claims that an earlier used concept of "closure inadequacy" deepens our understanding of the world of the obsessive. The obsessive patient does not succeed in completing a task; he gets stuck and is then caught in the drive to repeat actions without the ability to "break through" the repetitions.

Another kind of "threshold disturbance" is the "loss of boundaries" which is well known to clinicians dealing with suspicious and delusional patients. A patient suffering the loss of boundedness (Afr: begrensing) is overpowered by the destructive appearances to him of the world around him. He loses the sense of being bounded, even of his own body and experiences being invaded by others, unprotected from the piercing and penetrating looks of others. The paranoid world is one in which exploring, fighting and travelling have become almost impossible and, instead, the person feels defenceless, and attacked from all sides.

The British child psychiatrist D W Winnicott (1971) is known best for his descriptions of the space that grows between a mother and her infant to facilitate the infants' transition from absolute to relative dependence and eventually to independence. Winnicott's research on the transitional spaces of childhood opened up our understanding of the inauguration and emergence of a sense of self and of symbol. The threshold of this transitional space is our first opening up to and moving into experiences of being and becoming through the holding and using of objects or things in this world. Winnicott's work on early childhood reveals the thresholds we cross throughout our lives. Our transitions from here to there are always to something somewhere. Threshold disturbances are failures to make the crossings.

The loss of boundedness we suffer means we have either lost the shore

we are moving from or the shore we are trying to reach. The space between the thresholds becomes a gap, fearful and imperilling, even harbouring madness.

As we step over the threshold we enter the domain of the other, an ethical domain of right and wrong, a domain gendered as him or her, a generational domain of young and old, a domain of the dead, the living and the not yet born. The threshold between the living and the dead takes the form of a grave. Between the gods and humans it takes the form of an altar (Jager, 1998). An intersubjective world where the humanities, arts culture and religion flourish has opened up (Ulanov, 2001). Church doors for example, have provided, by virtue of their scale, location, and the materials used for their construction, important and impressive artistic works throughout the Christian centuries. Church doors have served simultaneously to glorify God and to instruct the illiterate; and, as the threshold to the sacred, they have prepared the faithful for their spiritual experience within.

Reflecting on the spiritual dimension of doors, Jesus' parable of the sheepfold is one Biblical image that comes to mind. In a surprising double metaphor, He identifies himself as both the shepherd and the door to the sheepfold. This is the place where the sheep find safety: "I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved". Through the door these people "will go in and out and find pasture" (Jn 10:9). The rhythm and mutuality between safety and freedom is revealed in the parable, reinforced by the personal presence of the Shepherd. Respect for thresholds is mutual in the Word and is evident in the much-quoted words of the risen Lord, in the vision of John on Patmos: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock..." (Rev 3:20).

Thresholds invite us to linger or tarry at the threshold and then walk over or cross over slowly. This moment of delay where we linger before moving is from a temporal point of view the main invariant constituent or characteristic of thresholds. Whether the movement is from the private to the public space or from the public to the private, the threshold appeals to a necessary delay, a moment's lingering at which we can think, make a judgement, assess the situation or ask a question (Verhoeven, 1998). The threshold is simultaneously a moment and a place. It is a moment of delay and place of discernment and distinctions. Thresholds call to halt our unthinking taken-for-granted attitudes and actions (Jager, 1997).

When a threshold as a location is honoured it can re-locate us from ourselves to something beyond, from our inescapable rootedness in our limited personal sensibilities to an order beyond the self, seeing ourselves as part of a larger order (that can make claims on us).

Thresholds as architectural markers are placed thoughtfully. Therefore they are carriers of intentions, marking the passage between spaces. They fulfil a function together with a door. Door and threshold belong together.

This *ritardando*, or postponement is a crucial moment of importance in the whole of our culture. Symbolic thinking evokes this moment of retardation, this standing still at something which we can heed or also bypass. The threshold is made as an invitation to stand still, tarry and reflect. Symbolic thinking is only possible at the threshold. Thus the threshold has, as an architectural given also a ritual, holding and beholding function (Verhoeven, 1998: 14) (Own translation).

The invitational character of thresholds slows us down. If we accept the invitation we stand still, tarry and reflect then gather or collect ourselves - a rite of passage - before we cross over in the expectancy of the appearance and presence of an *other*.

If we are to become well differentiated individuals who live creatively then the boundary between self and other in its ordinary manifestations must take on the form of a threshold. The threshold embodies the relationship between husband and wife, parent and child, between friends as well as neighbours not only as a given but more precisely as an achievement. In Jager's (1997) view a threshold is a symbol of a human relationship that not only embodies the possibility of a relationship or its realisation but also constitutes the relationship. Thresholds and related transitional phenomena anchor and enrich our experiences of living.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT BEING ABLE TO DEPEND ON THE THRESHOLD

So far we have argued within an attitude reflecting respect for the *other*, evoked by the discovery of the threshold as a spiritual principle of which the altar and the table of Communion is a symbol. In the domain of human interaction the threshold is a symbol or an archetype of hospitality and encounter or conversation (Jager 1997). Respect for the threshold is the condition for the respect of the *other*.

The opposite attitude also exists. This attitude is one which has no

respect for and does not want to be reminded of any social or spiritual delay. In this attitude a culture which prefers not to honour the “law of the threshold” and where people become “a law unto themselves” undermines and deforms much which inspires us and secularises everything and all cultural products. In this way we can discern a propagation of the "lowering of thresholds", access without any limitation and transparency of all institutions - a world of uncontrollable masses or rigid bureaucracy, a world of totalitarian regimes, anarchy and terrorism. Through his description and analysis of the origin and inauguration of the *Centre Pompidou* in Paris Van den Berg (1989) has convincingly demonstrated how the notion of the "lowering of thresholds" also manifests itself in modern architecture.

For Jager (1996) the "law of the threshold" forbids us to make use of force or trickery to gain our way and places on us the demand to arrest our self-interested progress. The threshold should be seen as essentially the entryway to a place of festive, celebratory and playful disclosure that bids all those who are gathered within its embrace to express themselves and to endeavour to come fully into each other's presence. Seen this way, Jager (1996) concludes that only the threshold holds out for us the prospect of a fully human world.

What should be clear from these thoughts is that that for a variety of cultural and psycho-spiritual reasons we depend on thresholds. Ann Belford Ulanov (2001) provides an evocative and illuminating analysis of how negotiating thresholds respectfully is an indication of beings who desire a creative and sustained interior life. Thresholds serve a double edged purpose: First, respect for thresholds restrains the ruthlessness of broken-up and destructive drives such as gluttony, lust, greed, anger, envy and sloth. Second, honouring thresholds allows for a space of caring and authentic encounter so necessary for human welfare.

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The idea of founding a Catholic university in South Africa was first mooted in 1993 by a group of academics, clergy and business people. It culminated in the establishment of St Augustine College of South Africa in July 1999, when it was registered by the Minister of Education as a private higher education institution and started teaching students registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is situated in Victory Park, Johannesburg and operates as a university offering values-based education to students of any faith or denomination, to develop leaders in Africa for Africa.

The name 'St Augustine' was chosen in order to indicate the African identity of the College since St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was one of the first great Christian scholars of Africa.

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