Towards a Christian Ethic of Joy:

Participation in the 'joy of the Master'

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Abstract

Ethics is the study of what is good, right and ought to be done. For the Christian, parameters of what is good, right and to be done are determined by a holy God. Christians participate in the holiness of God, through being “in Christ” and through coming to “maturity, the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

The theme of joy has not received much attention in recent theological and ethical discourse. This thesis explores the nature of joy and the nature of participation in the purposes of God. A Christian ethic is developed in the light of an interpretations of the story of The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:45- 8:11). Joy in participation arises from both relationship and task. It shares in God's joy through right action in the world. The theological foundations for human joy are considered in the light of McFague’s Models of God and Barth’s Church Dogmatics. Brunner's and Hauerwas' insights contribute to a Christian ethic of joy in participation. The prescriptive, deliberative and relational motifs described by Long are integral elements of a Christian ethic of joy in participation. Mature Christian moral action takes place in the freedom of obedience that resonates with the freedom, purpose and joy of the Trinitarian Communion, captured in the phrase: “enter into the joy of your Master” (Mt 25:21, 23).
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Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version as a relatively literal translation of the Old and New Testaments.

* * *

This thesis submitted for assessment is the result of my own work, and no unacknowledged assistance has been received in its planning, drafting, execution or writing. All sources on which it is based have been acknowledged in writing, as has the supervision which I have received in the process of its preparation.

Signed: Date:

Walter Abetz
Preface

After completing a Lay Preacher's certificate (1986) with the Uniting Church in Australia while teaching in an Anglican school, I was drawn to ministry within the Uniting Church. After completing a Bachelor of Divinity I was ordained in 1994. The Uniting Church was embroiled in conflict over sexuality over the next twelve years resulting in an exodus of over 8000 members after the Uniting Church's National Assembly decisions in 2003 and 2006. This time of turmoil raised for me issues of Christian identity, sanctification, legalism and ethics. These areas in turn raised deeper issues in exegesis, epistemology, psychology and theology.

As a senior high school teacher with degrees in physical science (1969) and education (1977), and a graduate diploma in computing (1990), theology became an area of increasing interest with regard to humanity's place in the universe, and the nature of the Christian life in particular. Teaching religious studies for three hours a week to high school students in a Christian School (1978-1982) gave this quest its initial impetus. During this time I noted a link between Leviticus and John 8, in terms of the communal nature of the Law, a triad involving the perpetrator, the people, and God.

This thesis approaches ethics from a deliberately Christian world view, linking ethics with sanctification, the maturing of a Christian life. It may make a contribution to this field from a somewhat unusual angle. The thesis argues that Christian joy be given a place in the Christian discourse on ethics, beyond law, duty, obligation and gratitude.
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Introduction

The Psalmist declares “I delight in the ways of your decrees as much as in all riches.”\(^1\) Nehemiah declares to the returned exiles “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”\(^2\) The underlying psychological principle that joy gives strength was utilised for political ends by the Nazi regime which formulated the slogan “Kraft durch Freude” (strength through joy).\(^3\) Communist regimes used similar propaganda. But in current writing on Christian ethics the link between joy and strength is notably absent. Truly, it may be said, that “the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of light” (Luke 16:8).

Whether due to the bad reputation of joy or not, ethics and joy seem to have become estranged bedfellows, to the detriment, it will be argued, of Christian ethics.

Friedrich Schiller put his finger on the centrality of joy for human living:

Freude heißt die starke Feder
in der ewigen Natur.

Freude, Freude treibt die Räder
In der großen Weltenuhr …\(^4\)

[Joy names the strong main spring
of eternal nature.

Joy, joy drives the cog wheels
of the great wide cosmic clock …]\(^5\)

One may compare Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork …

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More than to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honey comb."\(^6\)

For the Psalmist, the imprint of joy in nature is echoed in human living. His joy and delight is unlikely to derive from particular sentences in the legislation. His joy

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\(^1\) Ps 119:14.
\(^2\) Neh 8:10c.
\(^5\) My translation.
\(^6\) Ps 19:1, 7-10. My italics.
emanates from the perceived beauty of God in the order and purposefulness of creation and the chaos-reducing nature of the wisdom of God reflected in the law. For the Psalmist God's law is a statement of God's glory. The response to God's glory, even God's glory in the law, is joy in participation – “delight in the ways of your decrees.” While hymnody in the Western Christian tradition picks up this theme of joy with vigour, Christian hymnody is beyond the scope of this thesis.7

By contrast with the Psalms, current Christian ethics does not seem to begin with a response to the glory of God. In this vein, *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1967) defines ethics as “the philosophical study of voluntary human actions, with the aim of determining which actions are good, right and to be done (and which actions are bad, wrong and not to be done) that man may live well.”8 Living well puts the focus on humanity, not God.

The focus on voluntary actions in the above definition is problematic. Human action can be described as the result of conditioned reflexes; human brains are programmed through education; choices shape human beings into who they become. Orthodox biblical Christianity posits the possibility of conversion, of moving beyond, or even against, one’s conditioning. This widens the area of human responsibility beyond the narrowly “voluntary”.

Some secular ethics seek their authentication in a consensus of human reason. This need for authentication causes such secular ethics to remain captive to obligation, individual achievement and self-authentication. While a Christian ethic will also raise

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7 Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II, Harmony Edition (Melbourne: Harper Collins, 1999) omits the fifth verse in the original version of Charles Wesley's hymn “Rejoice, the Lord is King” (No 216) which runs as follows:

“He all His foes shall quell, shall all our sins destroy,
And every bosom swell with pure seraphic joy;”

I have not checked whether this omission is an isolated instance or a matter of policy of the Committee.

questions about obligation, achievement and authentication, it is seen to have its teleological authentication from God, and hence a believer is free to enjoy the moral-ethical life through whole-hearted participation in the purposes of God. Such participation has a different quality, a relational quality, that individual achievement or fulfilment lacks.

Virtue ethics is formulated in the context of human flourishing or happiness. Such happiness is a state of mind which generally has a direct cause. Happiness is seen as the result of an individual's circumstances and the result of his or her character. Happiness thus has an heroic individual focus. In the biblical context, joy has a persistent communal dimension. Joy is associated with an outward-looking state of mind, inviting others to enter into that joy. This quality may carry human beings through difficult circumstances. Approaching ethics from this perspective of joy presents a stark contrast with Kant’s categorical imperative and the concomitant sense of duty, or even Aristotle’s goal of human flourishing.

“[D]etermining which actions are good, right and to be done (and which actions are bad, wrong and not to be done)” is a commendable and necessary communal aim, if one wishes to live a good life that is not lived in isolation. But such a determination is fraught with difficulty in a multicultural society, where there may be considerable disagreement about what is “good, right and ought to be done”. If ethics is understood as a general consensus on how to determine what is “good, right, and to be done”, then the question arises, “Is a Christian ethic possible in secular society?” The answer appears to be a resounding “No.” Firstly, there seems to be no generally acknowledged impartial umpire to judge between competing value systems. Secondly, there is no general conception of ethics that would include the Christian ethic, according to Emil
Brunner's careful analysis. This thesis seeks to explore an orthodox biblical Christian ethic in the context of joy. While such an ethic cannot receive a general consensus, as it is predicated on Christian belief, it must be judged on its internal coherence.

Martin Buber offers a story to describe the joy of right action celebrated in Hasidic Judaism. This strand of European Judaism arose in the seventeenth century to revitalise what had become dead orthodoxy.

[The Hasidim] drink to one another, they sing and dance together, and tell one another abstruse and comforting miracle tales. But they help one another too. They are prepared to risk their lives for a comrade, and this readiness comes from the same source as their elation. Everything the true Hasid does or does not do, mirrors his belief that, in spite of the intolerable suffering men must endure, the heartbeat of life is holy joy, and that always and everywhere, one can force a way through to that joy - provided one devotes one's self entirely to his deed.

One of the stories collected by Martin Buber illustrates beautifully the motivation, context and content of what is “good, right, and to be done”. It indicates the direction of this study, “the heartbeat of life is holy joy.”

A number of Hasidim came to Lublin. Before they set out to the rabbi [the Seer of Lublin], their coachman asked them to give the rabbi, together with the slips of paper with their names written on them, also a slip of paper with his name, so that the rabbi will bless him too. They did as he asked. When the rabbi read the slip of paper with the coachman's name, he said: "This man's name is illuminated by a bright light." The Hasidim were astonished. They replied: but this man is naive and ignorant; no one has ever seen him perform a unique good deed. "At this moment," the rabbi said, "his soul is shining in front of me as pure light."

Immediately the Hasidim went to look for the coachman; they did not find him in the inn. They went from street to street; suddenly they perceived a merry group of Jews coming toward them celebrating. First the musicians with cymbals and drums, and after them a crowd of dancing and clapping people, and in the middle the coachman who was loud in his rejoicing and merrier than all the others. To their question as to his recent deeds, he answered: After you left me, I thought I should seek a bit of joy. I strolled around the town, and suddenly heard music in one of the houses. Entering, I found myself at the wedding of two orphans. I drank and sang and rejoiced together with all the guests. But after a while, a quarrel arose and with it confusion; it turned out that the bride did not have money to buy a prayer shawl, which custom required, for her future husband. They were close to tearing up the marriage agreement. My heart could not see the bride's shame, so I took out my purse and found there just enough money for the prayer shawl. This is why my heart rejoiced.

Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The early Masters, tr. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 10. German Pietism, as a strand of Protestant Christianity, arose at the same time and represents a similar movement of reinvigoration, and presented an alternative to the stodgy Lutheran dogmatism of the time. German Pietism seems to lack the abstruse miracle tales.
Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, 309. This is Rivca Gordon's version (See “Joy: A Buberian Perspective” in Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, Winter 2001, Vol 19, Issue 2, 105-116) as Marx appeared to him not sensitive to the nuances in the German. I am grateful to John Capper for pointing me to this article.
This Hasidic story reflects a Jewish value system that is not anchored in abstract principles but in engagement, in participating in the fulfilment of the will of God. *Holy* joy, the heartbeat of life, indicates that a third party, beyond the human participants, is involved in the formulation of what is good, right, and to be done. In the Hasidic story, the coachman actively sought a source of joy outside of himself. He found joy, and he acted in order to widen the joy of others. In doing so he fulfilled God's law to care for the orphan – not so much as a legal injunction in its own right, nor as self-aggrandisement, but as a response to the glory of God’s law. In his action he gave joy to God as the illumination of the coachman's name implies, and thereby completed his own joy.

Hauerwas\(^{12}\) and others have seen formal connections between classical virtue ethics and Christian ethics in terms of character formation.\(^{13}\) Classical virtue ethics is concerned with a *telos*, a purpose or end, and the character of the moral agent is the means to achieve that end. Character is developed and valued in relation to shame and reputation, and *eudaemonia* (human flourishing) in an objective sense. The virtuous person generally acts out of habit, rather than out of deep reflection on every occasion. Christianity also insists on character formation, under the label of sanctification, but the *telos* and the *eudaemonia* as well as the virtues to be pursued will be different.

In the *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth posits a joyful God, a God who delights in creating and in electing his creatures to participate in the kingdom of God. But he seems a little reluctant to speak of human joy and instead frequently settles for gratitude which has a strong undertone of obligation, and for gladness which may at times carry

\(^{12}\) Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians amongst the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University, 1997).

\(^{13}\) Richard M. Gula, *Moral Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) gives a good account of conscience. I will not discussed conscience, as the development of conscience and discernment has much in common with the development of Christian virtue. In a theocentric triadic ethic conscience does not play a definitive role because the prescriptive and relational motifs relativise the notion of conscience as the arbiter of morality.
an attenuated implication of obligation. This thesis argues that the parables of Jesus depict something larger and freer than gratitude, namely, a holy joy that stems from being invited to participate, and from learning to participate with God, in God's purposes, and that such participation brings God joy. The parables indicate that in the kingdom of God “the heartbeat of life is holy joy”.

This study will explore the nature of joy, the biblical evidence for joy in participating with God, the theology of joy, and how the Christian life may be lived in an ethic of joy. This sequence is based on the importance of human experience, the need to test experience against Scripture, and so testing theologies against Scripture and experience, leading to a framework for godly action. This is patterned on the “Wesleyan quadrilateral” of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, which forms an interlocking interpretative framework where Scripture is uppermost.\textsuperscript{14}

This study does not focus on the acts of the moral agent, exploring the boundaries of moral choices in order to avoid evil. Instead it focuses on the moral agent herself and on the habits that should form her character. To use a football analogy, the focus is on the players and the actual flow of play, rather than on the umpire when some infringement occurs and needs to be resolved before play can resume.

The first Chapter does not concern itself with joy directly. Instead it will lay the theological foundation on which an ethic of joy is based. It will argue for a theocentric triadic framework from the history of Israel who is called to be a holy nation. In this structure grace precedes law, and law is seen as further theocentric grace. With the aid of this framework the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8) is investigated, for a threefold purpose. Firstly it illustrates a dimension of the Christian ethical life that is missing in secular ethics, namely a theocentric triadic structure. Secondly, the common

anti-judgment interpretation of the pericope is refuted. Thirdly, the passage highlights a communal requirement of holiness for God’s people. These three matters are foundational to the possibility of a Christian ethic. Chapter two will give a short overview of the nature of ecstasy, joy and happiness, and the problems that arise from a Christian perspective. A survey of secular and Christian understandings of joy will help to clarify how joy in participation could be a basis for ethical considerations. In the third chapter a survey of the ethical life of the believer derived from a selection of the Gospels and the Epistles, will set the perspective from which to critique theological frameworks in relation to ethics. The fourth chapter will critique Barth’s theology of joy within the Trinity and ethics as a human response of gratitude, with reference to John Capper’s analysis of Barth’s theology of joy, and in contrast with Sallie McFague’s *Models of God* in which she offers an alternative construal of reality. Chapter five will outline how holy joy informs Christian morality, drawing on some key issues raised by Brunner with regard to the law and Hauerwas with regard to virtue ethics. The mode of operation of a Christian ethic of joy in participation will reflect the Master's invitation in the Parable of the Talents, “Enter the joy of your master.”

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16 Mt 25:21, 23. In the parable of the talents the Master addresses these words to both faithful servants.
Chapter 1

Morality as holiness: Participation in a theocentric triadic structure

Ethics is “an attempt to answer theoretically the question of what may be called good human action. … Theological ethics can be understood only as an integral element of dogmatics.”¹ Therefore such reflective analysis does not occur in a vacuum. For Christians it does not take place in some space where the Christian confession and its perception of reality are absent. The requirement for God's people to reflect God’s character, to be holy as he is holy, arises out of God’s gracious and merciful creation and further gracious acts in history. The details are documented in the Levitical and Deuteronomic laws of the Mosaic Covenant, and in the Gospels and Epistles for the New Covenant. The theme of holiness is common to both the Old and the New Covenants. In the post-resurrection Christian community the themes of joy and holiness continue to be intertwined, as we shall see in Chapter three.

The special nature of Christian ethics

In Scripture there is no separation between belief and behaviour.² According to Hauerwas, the patristic writers³ did not establish ethics as a distinctive task.

Their explicit ethical reflections were primarily occasioned by their pastoral concerns. Thus they seldom give systematic presentations of the Christian life but engage in a sort of ad hoc reflection, since their primary concern was to respond to the needs of a particular community.⁴

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⁴ Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 53.
Hauerwas goes on to make clear that in the Middle Ages ethics was not pursued as an independent discipline, but simply regarded as a self-evident part of describing our journey with God. Christian ethics originated in homilies and the manuals for penance. Christian ethics, as a critical and reflective discipline, is not an abstract discipline concerned with ‘ideas’ only, but is closely related to belief and behaviour, as are other ethics.

If failing to understand the world as it really is, is already an ethical failure, then from a Christian standpoint, one must give due weight to biblical and theological convictions which make claims about the world, because such claims underwrite Christian ethics. Emil Brunner warns, “The attempt to make a clear-cut distinction between dogmatics and ethics from the point of view that the one is concerned with the Divine and the other with human action spoils both dogmatics and ethics.”5 Because of the close link between belief and behaviour, Hauerwas states, “Theological claims concerning the relation of creation and redemption are already ethical claims, since they situate how one works methodologically.”6

When we lose the particularity of the history of the people of Israel and the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth’s life within that community, we lose the specific context in which grace and law (in that order!), and creation and redemption are situated. Cut loose from their context, Hauerwas maintains, the meaning of the theological terms becomes distorted.

Theological concepts are reifications; they are taken as the “meat”, the point, of Christian convictions. But as abstractions both “nature” and “grace” require more determinative narrative display. There is no creation without the covenant with Israel; there is no redemption that does not take its meaning from Jesus’ cross. Neither are they general concepts that straightforwardly describe or gain their meaning from human existence per se; rather the concepts both of creation and redemption are aids to train us to be creatures of a gracious God who has called us to be citizens in a community of the redeemed.7

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5 Brunner, The Divine Imperative, 84.
6 Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 55.
7 Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 57.
While there is much overlap in desired behaviour stipulated by Christian ethics and other systems of ethics, it is a serious theological mistake to collapse Christian ethics into a “natural law” ethics that needs no authentication from God. In a world groaning in labour pains for the day of redemption (Rom 8:22), “what is” cannot be taken as evidence for “what ought to be”, nor as evidence for “what ought not to be”. Because of this logical difficulty expounded by David Hume, the content as well as the motivation for a Christian ethic must come from Christian belief. The study of Christian ethics requires knowledge of the self, knowledge of the other in community, and knowledge of God. The acceptance of this threefold relationship between individual, community and God minimises ethical failure, in particular, the failure to understand the Christian context in which ethical judgements are to be made.

The call to be holy, as God is holy, must shape Christian ethics. According to Hauerwas, Christians are “to be citizens in a community of the redeemed.” The redeemed are those who are reconciled with God the Father, through the death and resurrection of the incarnate Son. They have passed from condemnation to adoption into “sonship”. This implies membership in a community with the Holy Trinity at its centre. As children they are learning, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to participate in the revealed purposes and life of the Divine family. If this aspect of redemption is ignored, Christian ethics ceases to be Christian. That raises the question of hubris that Christians have a superior moral stance as a people on the way, and non-Christians are inferior, because they are not on the way. Hauerwas answers this.

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8 Enda McDonagh in *The Making of Disciples* (Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier, 1982), 63 writes “the theological dimension [of natural law] as found in Scripture and elaborated by patristic and scholastic theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas, reached the twentieth-century student in the very attenuated form of the moral theology manual which has for the most part disappeared in the sweeping revisions of the last twenty years.”


10 Here arises a tension between ethics for the redeemed through the “new birth”, and ethics for the unredeemed. This matter will be taken up in Chapter 4.
Therefore, claims for the distinctiveness of the church, and thus Christian ethics, are not attempts to underwrite assumptions of superiority or Christian dominance. Rather they are meant to remind Christians of the radicalness of the gospel. For the gospel cannot be adequately summed up by appeals that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, but is meant to transform us by teaching us to be God’s peaceable people.¹¹

For Hauerwas, knowledge of God comes through the Scriptures treasured by the community. He is not concerned about finding the right theological starting points. He focuses on human community, and the story held by the human community.

This implies, moreover, that Christian ethics does not, methodologically, have a starting point. The dilemma of whether we must do Christian ethics out of a doctrine of God, or out of a doctrine of man is a false one. For Christian ethics begins in a community that carries the story of the God who wills us to participate in a kingdom, established in and through Jesus of Nazareth. No matter where it begins theologically, if it tries to do more or less than remind us of the significance of that story, it has lost its way. Theology has no essence, but rather is the imaginative endeavour to explicate the stories of God by showing how one claim illuminates another.¹²

It is Hauerwas’s contention and mine that “revelation involves propositional claims, none of which can be isolated by themselves, but are intelligible only as they form a coherent narrative.”¹³ What follows is a bird’s eye view of that narrative.

Grace and Law

Many people read the “and” in the above heading as an “or” – as if there were a contradiction between the two. It is also telling that the “issue” is generally phrased as “law and grace.” There is some excuse for this order in the light of the Prologue of John’s Gospel, that “the law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). To manufacture opposites out of this verse is precisely what Hauerwas warns against: taking one proposition out of the context of the whole story. I will argue that this order, “law and grace,” subtly displays an inadequate understanding of the story line and theology of the Old Testament.

¹¹ Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 60. Brunner makes a similar point with regard to the threefold purpose of the law discussed in my Chapter 5.
¹² Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 62.
¹³ Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 66.
There is ongoing discussion amongst scholars about how the creation accounts fit together. The narrative in Genesis describes humans as caretakers of creation who were to eat fruit and seeds rather than kill animals for food (Gen 1:28-29). At creation the first human was placed in a garden (Gen 2:8-9). This provision of a garden was grace, undeserved favour. Only then did God impose a restriction within a greater permission: the human was told not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). Provision of the man-woman relationship is grace (Gen 2:23). Distrusting God’s grace (Gen 3:6) brought judgment: the expulsion from the garden and from God’s unmediated presence (Gen 3:22-24). But there is grace embedded in the judgment, the promise of a redeemer. The woman’s offspring will crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15); this flags restoration. After the expulsion Cain murdered Abel; mighty warriors arose (Gen 6:4) and corruption and violence increased on the earth (Gen 6:11). This further violation of God’s instructions (in Gen 1:28) brought further judgment, but even here grace was extended to Noah and his family. Noah was to build an ark for his family to escape the Deluge (Gen 6:17-18). When dry land emerged, God made a covenant with Noah, a one-sided agreement that expressed both God’s grace and Noah’s responsibility in accepting the new permissions granted and complying with new prohibitions imposed (Gen 9). Refusal of Noah’s offspring to “replenish the earth” brought the judgment of the confusion of language (Gen 11:1-9). The life of Abraham stands out as change in approach. Here grace does not precede command. “Leave your own country and go to the land that I will give you, and I will make you a father of many nations” (Gen 12:1-4). Abraham had to trust a promise, and he did so. “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3). Here grace is not a past event but a future event, and circumcision of males is commanded as a token of this covenant (Gen 17:10). God’s grace was not thwarted by the arrival of Ishmael, nor by Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, nor by the family’s move
to Egypt. God proved faithful to the promise made to Abraham. The call of Moses and the miraculous exodus from Egypt are sheer grace. The exodus occurs before the giving of the law at Sinai. God did not expect the Jews to be a law abiding, holy people before he led them out of Egypt. Nevertheless, instructions had to be followed in the preparation for the exodus. Grace came first with the actual escape from slavery and the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey. The law came second, as a declaration of God’s purpose for Israel to be a holy nation, as a witness and reminder of the Creator God to the nations steeped in idolatry. The sin offerings and even the death penalty for certain transgressions were instituted as a means of grace, a way of being restored as individuals and being restored as a community to God’s purpose for Israel. Religious accommodation to surrounding nations brought judgment, as did hedonistic disregard of the law. The return from Babylonian exile was grace – in exile it was difficult, if not impossible, to fulfil the demands of the Mosaic Law. God’s message through Hezekiel was one of undeserved restoration; it had the refrain: “and then you will know that I am God.” The gracious undercurrent in the unfolding narrative of Jewish history is the arrival of the promised messiah who will redeem Israel and the world.

Undeniably, the Jewish law came through Moses. But that does not mean that grace came only at the incarnation with the arrival of Jesus Christ. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not suddenly become full of grace at the incarnation. John rightly declared that the incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is “grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16) and brought in a new covenant that is open to hoi polloi, to Jews first and also to the Gentiles, for whom he laid down his life, a life lived in obedience to God. This covenant continues to impose responsibilities on the human side. Communally, the Church is to be a spotless bride, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Individually, believers are to “put on Christ”, “learn Christ”, to die and be
raised with him in newness of life. God is still establishing a royal priesthood, a holy nation for himself (1 Pt 2:9-10) to populate the new heaven and earth.

Paul’s diatribe against the law arose out of the distortion of the law as practiced by some of the Jewish leaders and their followers. Jesus called them “whitewashed tombs” (Mt 23:27-28). They obeyed the law to achieve a superficial righteousness but neglected “the weightier matters of the law”. For them the law became self-congratulatory compliance instead of habitual joyful participation in God’s redemptive purposes, as it was for the Psalmists. For those leaders, the weightier matter of the law, namely, the love of the God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt into the Promised Land and the love of the neighbour, faded into the background.

The new covenant is new, not because law has been replaced by grace. It is new in that the Holy Spirit is no longer restricted to leaders and special agents of God but is poured out on old and young, even man servants and maid servants (Joel 2:28-29), and even on Gentiles (Mt 28:28:19 and Acts 10:45). The law is written on the heart and mind, and the Holy Spirit will complete the work of redemption begun in believers. True, there is no more animal sacrifice or death penalty in the Church: Christ is the once-for-all offering for sin (Heb 10:1-18); he embodies grace upon grace. The ritual laws including circumcision are remitted (Acts 15). The law is still written on tablets of stone, but also on the mind and the heart (Heb 8:10). One “cannot become a worthy person in any sense that would presume to make [one] worthy of God’s regard.”

Believers have fellowship with Christ through the forgiveness of their sins and the cleansing from unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:8-9). They enter the Kingdom of God as princesses and princes, as a royal priesthood. They “learn Christ” (Eph 4:20) in

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preparation for ruling with him in the new heaven and earth, where all things are made new.

In the Old Covenant God acted graciously and decisively in favour of Israel. In the New Covenant God has also acted graciously and decisively for all humans. Nevertheless, the understanding of God’s *pro nobis* often becomes distorted in theologies which do not recognize law as an expression of God’s grace, as a gift that furthers God’s purpose for the cosmos. James Gustafson warns against a wrong understanding of the *pro nobis* and maintains that the *pro nobis* is not to be understood as the uppermost criteria by which God operates. With regard to theocentricity Gustafson has this to say, negatively:

> Surely no Roman Catholic would say that God was made for man; that would be blasphemy of a high order. Yet the tradition assumes, as does most of the Christian tradition, that the purposes of God are finally for the benefit of human beings. That might be a way of saying many of the same things that one could say if God were made for man.  

Theocentricity is the refutation of the notion that God was made for man, and that God *must* act in our interest. God does not have to do our bidding or work by our standards.  

God works out his purposes, and humans have been given the invitation – which is at the same time a command and an enabling – to joyfully cooperate and so “to enter the joy of the Master.” It is the Master’s joy that is to be entered. We do not generate our own joy and then ask God to join us. This limits the divine *pro nobis*. The “if” needs to be taken into account in the much quoted passage from Rom 8:31-39: “*If God is for us, who is against us?*” If God’s freely offered grace is rejected, if the invitation that is also command and enabling, is rejected, God is *contra nos*.

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16 In *Romans* Paul deals with works-righteousness (law/works/grace), in *Galatians* with covenant-righteousness (law/works/faith). In the Jewish triadic understanding of their relationship with God (see below), what we identify as the moral law, ritual law (covenant) and the covenant relationship, tends to get conflated in Paul. The chief end of pre-Christ Israel is to glorify God through all three. This is a matter for further exploration.
The stories of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and of Simon the Magician (Acts 8:14-24) are illustrations of the *contra nos*, whereas the story of the conversions of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) and of the persecuting Saul (Acts 9:1-19) illustrate the *pro nobis*. Responding to the divine invitation that is both command and enabling moves us from the *contra nos* of the accusation through the law into the *pro nobis* of grace and law (John 1:12). John 3:16-18, 2 Peter 3:9 and Rev 20:11-15 indicate an eternal *contra nos*.

Conversion is this response. It is *metanoia*, a turning towards God, an “in principle” agreement with God, that we are God’s creatures, that God has a right to requisition us for his purposes, so that we are freed to joyfully participate in them. We are converted when we see the law as an expression of grace that flows from God through us to others rather than as heteronomy. There is something communally energising about participating with God as we are requisitioned and enabled, as we reprove one another in love (Lev 19:17-18) and as we provoke one another to love and good works (Heb10:24-25). At that point we learn to communally delight in God’s law and enter the joy of our Master. The law is an expression of God’s *pro nobis*, a tangible expression of God’s grace in the power of the Holy Spirit, but also an expression of God’s *contra nos* for those who refuse the invitation or subvert it to their own ends. To see grace and law as opposites (presumably by sidestepping what is at issue in conversion) is a serious misunderstanding of the history of God with Israel and a consequent misunderstanding of the incarnation.

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17 How the law functions as accusation to bring us to trust in God, how law moves in our perception from a divine *contra nos* to a divine *pro nobis* via conversion is discussed at some length in Chapter 5.

18 Augustine speaks of “daily conversion.” It tends to devalue the crisis of the “in principle” conversion, but highlights the need to daily explore what it means to participate in God’s works today.

19 I have used Barth’s German noun *Inanspruchnahme* “proleptically” as an English verb. This “requisitioning” is further discussed in Chapter 4.
The triadic structure of reflection on moral action

To continue the theological and ethical task which Hauerwas specifies, namely, “showing how one claim illuminates another”, let us consider an Old Testament passage which highlights the Jewish ethical context of making legal judgements. The story of King Jehoshaphat’s reforms depicts the Jewish nation in a relationship with its God through the covenant made at Mt Sinai. As part of his reforms, King Jehoshaphat addressed the newly appointed judges with these words,

Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings, but on the Lord’s behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you, take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes (2 Chr 19:6-7).

The judges were to be aware that they are not to judge in the national interest, personal interest, or other people's interests, but to judge in God's interest, because the nation is God's people. Ethical, moral and legal judgements are to be made in the context of a triadic relational structure: the individual called by God to participate in a community established by God, embedded in the wider creation of God.

When this theocentric triadic structure is ignored, contradictions arise, and joy is lost. Under the Old Covenant, prior to the Easter event, the actions of the scribes and Pharisees demonstrate this in the story of the woman caught in adultery. Under the New Covenant, after the Easter event, the story of Ananias and Sapphira similarly demonstrates this. A common interpretation of the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery paints a picture of the abrogation of moral judgements; one has no right to point the finger at anyone, so to speak. Its popularity on the one hand, and the relative shunning of the story of Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, present a serious problem for Christian ethics. While the literary history of the first story may be questioned, its theological interpretation needs to be addressed because of both its

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popular and academic currency. Jesus' words, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” are misinterpreted to the effect that no one should administer a sentence on anyone else in general, or even accuse another of a moral short coming.21

The passage is generally interpreted from a framework that ignores the historical particularity of the Jewish law.22 To complicate matters, the theocentric triadic structure is foreign to a secular Western mindset. The pericope of the woman caught in adultery illustrates this theocentric nature of the triadic structure of Christian ethics rather well, in story form, and that is a further reason why this pericope was chosen for study.

“Let him who is without sin, cast the first stone.”

There is no doubt that this pericope had, and continues to have, some difficult theological and disciplinary aspects if read without some understanding of the Mosaic Law. For example, Filson summarised the pericope as follows:

While it contains no confession of sin by the woman and no direct word of forgiveness by Jesus, it does express his sympathy for sinners and his insistence that outwardly pious people need to repent of their own sin before they condemn obvious sinners.23

Filson makes a general point here, but he does not engage with the story as it is told, nor does he consider the consequences for Christian ethics. Filson continues,

[Jesus’] reply in effect asked, Which of you is morally perfect, free from fault, really qualified to judge your fellow Jew? Whoever is without sin may go ahead and stone the woman. His writing on the ground, both before and after saying this, was to give them time to think what they were doing. They could claim to be perfect; they did not dare take up the challenge.24

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21 Mt 7:1 is translated “Judge not, that you be not judged.” The context makes it clear that it is a matter of individually pronouncing sentence, rather than a matter of communally establishing that an offence has occurred. In English the verb ‘to judge’ is ambiguous and promotes an unfortunate misinterpretation. Mt 7:16, dealing with false prophets, encourages the disciples to be discriminating observers. “By their fruits you shall know them.” Judgement which establishes that an offence has occurred is encouraged, but sentencing without authority is warned against.


23 Filson, Saint John, 76.
According to Filson's interpretation of the story (and his is not a lone voice), Jesus prevented the administration of justice. No one can enforce the penalties of any law whatsoever, as Jesus requires sinlessness before any judgement can be pronounced and sentence executed. It would make jurisprudence in a Christian society impossible; furthermore, church discipline would be regarded as contrary to Jesus' intention, even though he is reported to have taught it (Mt 18:15-18). Filson does not draw this consequence from his interpretation. Such an interpretation destroys the possibility of Christian ethics and therefore needs to be refuted. Raymond Brown is one of the few commentators who clearly identifies the problem.

Some commentators have used this passage to paint a portrait of the liberal Christ and have turned it into a maudlin justification for indifference toward sins of the flesh. However, Jesus is not saying that every magistrate must be sinless to judge others, a principle that would nullify the office of judge. He rightly appeals to common sense, but he does not proceed to justify his assertion by an analysis of the pericope with regard to this particular issue.

Some commentators avoid the difficulty by not commenting on the passage. Bultmann does not discuss the passage in his *The Gospel of John*, claiming that it is not canonical. Similarly Barth questions the provenance of the pericope in his lectures on John's Gospel (1933); and does not engage with the text. Köstenberger also argues against its recognition as part of the Canon of Scripture and does not exegete the passage.

D. A. Carson in *The Gospel of John*, after enumerating the problems and uncertainties regarding provenance, comes to the conclusion that “there is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred, even if in its written form it did not

in the beginning belong to the canonical books.” Filson offers the conclusion, “This story was a loose bit of tradition which was inserted in the Gospel at a later time to keep it from being lost. Does it represent a real event in Jesus’ life? Possibly so.” The patristic writers also had difficulties with this passage. Jerome had Greek and Latin manuscripts, both with and without this pericope. Its exclusion from the Gospels during times of persecution, yet persisting as an oral tradition, should be no surprise, given the prevalent, anarchistic interpretation. Augustine surmised that the section was removed by those of weaker faith: it makes adultery an easily forgiven sin.

Whatever the history of this pericope, the current insertion point seems appropriate. There is a natural literary progression. In the lead up to this pericope, in the conversation with the temple police, the chief priests and Pharisees asked the temple police, “Surely you have not been deceived, too, have you? Has anyone of the authorities or Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd does not know the law; they are accursed (Jn 7:47-49).” The placing of the pericope after this interchange makes two strong points. Firstly, this pericope is a judicial interaction between Jesus and the lawyers. Secondly, and more importantly, by their own mouths the lawyers will have been condemned at the end of the pericope. They do not know the law; they themselves are accursed. The story is a story of conflict with “the Jews,” based on quite specific legal grounds as verses 7:47-49 intimate.

The story has to be read within the historical particularity of Israel and within the Johannine context. Raymond Brown commented on the historical accuracy of

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29 Filson, *Saint John*, 75.
32 In the early 1980s a minister of religion turned politician commented in the local press on the story of the woman caught in adultery. At the time I happened to be covering Leviticus with a Year 10 Religious Education class. Given this serendipity, I simply ‘joined the dots’.
John’s Gospel contrary to the findings of the Tübingen School. Deborah Rooke in her thorough analysis of the Mosaic Law in regard to marriage, divorce and adultery provides the cultural background from a legal perspective to demonstrate the “androcentric nature of biblical society.” Feminist issues are at the forefront of her discussion and conclusion. While she does not address my theological-ethical concerns, her background research is most helpful and accurate, as far as I can determine. What follows is based on her research, and on Brown’s assessment that the writer of John is not anti-historical or anachronistic.

Witnesses brought the woman to the scribes and Pharisees who wanted to place Jesus in an untenable situation, so he could be handed over either to the Roman authorities or to the Jewish authorities. Jews no longer had the right to pronounce and execute the death penalty: that was the prerogative of the Roman occupation force. To deny the Mosaic Law would bring him trouble with the Jewish authorities. According to John, the trapping of Jesus is the focus for the scribes. In their scheming the Jewish authorities have ignored the theocentric triadic structure of the law from the outset. The reasoning behind this claim will become clear as we continue to analyse the story.

Let us examine the sequence of actions. The scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (Jn 8:4-5). We need to attend to the procedure here. Step one: An accusation was made. Step two: the appropriate law was quoted by the scribes. Step three: a comment was asked for. If this was the historical template for working through cases, it has significance for the second stage of this pericope.

33 Brown, John, xliii. “Yet, at the least, we may say that the abstract language used by Jesus in John is no longer a conclusive argument against the Johannine use of historical tradition.”
34 Deborah W. Rooke, Ciphers in the Sand, 49.
35 Yet Stephen was stoned outside the city (Acts 7 and 8).
Rooke begins to interpret the story in its Jewish setting as supplied by the
author/editor. The Mosaic Law required that both partners in the crime of adultery be
put to death. Most commentators mention that the act of adultery requires two people
but only one of the two offenders was presented. The fact that only one accused was
presented, leaves these commentators puzzled. Jesus had heard the accusation and the
badly misrepresented law on adultery, but he remained silent. He bent down, and wrote
a comment with his finger on the ground (Jn 8:6b). Carson lists the wide-ranging
speculations of commentators over the centuries, as to what Jesus might have written,
but not one of these suggestions reflects the specific legal context. Rooke does not
engage with what is written or how it is written. Martin Scott mentions Schöndorf’s
allusion to the finger of God in Ex 31:18, the closing verse of the giving of the law on
Sinai. Schöndorf claims, “Jesus’ finger would be, in fact is, the finger of God which
writes down the divine Law and thereby expresses his opinion regarding sin.” Derrett
thinks the charge of adultery is trumped up, a position not supported by the text, and
proposes Ex 23:1 (circulating a false report) and Ex 23:7 (do not kill the innocent)
respectively for the two occasions. These are close to the mark in the context of his
speculative assumption of innocence.

Given the lawyers’ gross misrepresentation of the law concerning adultery, and
the allusion to the “finger of God”, I would like to suggest that Jesus, whose food was
“to do the will of his Father” (Jn 4:34) and who was “with God from the beginning”

37 Filson acknowledges this, too, in *Saint John*, 75-6. In the *Church Dogmatics* Barth gives a
commentary that accuses the lawyers of adultery and ignores the absence of the man. See *Church
Dogmatics* III/4, 234-236.
Quoted by Rooke.
(Jn1:1-5), may well have written a corrected version of one of the laws on adultery. The most obvious candidates that emphasize the absence of the man are:

- Thou [2nd person singular, male!] shalt not commit adultery (Ex 20:14).
- If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death (Lv 20:10).
- If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel (Dt 22:22).

In the Mosaic Law, the man was held responsible, as well as the woman.\(^42\) In this instance the law was not applied correctly; the triadic structure was ignored. The Mosaic Law is a gift from God, not to be applied with partiality. Given this strong dimension to the Mosaic Law, writing one of the above texts on the ground should have alerted the lawyers that they were not operating according to law.

When the lawyers did not recognise their error and persisted in questioning Jesus, he said, “Let anyone among you [who was a witness and] who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7b). Procedurally, this implied accusation of sin required to be followed by a statement of the law, and a further comment from the judiciary. The witnesses clearly transgressed against the law concerning adultery by not apprehending the man. To transgress against the law in this way is sin. A secular Western mindset may not regard this as a sin, but from a Jewish perspective, the lawyers as witnesses committed a serious and specific sin against God, namely partiality in the administration of this law.

In this context, it seems rather wide of the mark to suggest that the word ‘sin’ is here being used in the abstract, as Filson does above. If Jesus meant to challenge the witnesses (and judges) about their own sexual peccadilloes, as Carson suggests,\(^43\) Jesus would not have had any need to bend down and write again. Barth steers a middle

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\(^{42}\)Rooke points out that Ex 20:14 is written in the second person masculine, putting responsibility on the man.

The writer of John in a very short pericope has Jesus writing twice. That must make a strong point. Hendriksen claims that their sin is the intent to murder Jesus.45 But Jesus’ challenge is addressed to the witnesses only, with regard to a sin already committed, not an intention to sin. Given the legal context, at stage two of the process, Jesus should be referring to a concrete legal transgression with regard to the law about adultery.

Jesus’ actions here occur in the context of the Mosaic Law. “The hands of the witnesses shall be the first raised against the person to execute the death penalty, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst” (Dt 17: 7). Jesus accuses the witnesses of breaking the law of adultery, but in a different way from the woman (and the man). According to procedure, such an accusation should be followed by the appropriate law that addresses the situation. Their sin needed to be specified by a quote from the Mosaic Law. A second time Jesus chose to write something on the ground, no finger is mentioned. Instead the text states that the scribes and Pharisees “heard” it, and then left. There is a strong implication that Jesus wrote something from the Torah, the first five books attributed to Moses. Rabbinical schools required the law to be memorised. By the time Jesus stopped writing, the fellow rabbis had all departed. It seems they “heard” it more quickly than Jesus could write. The most likely candidates for this second writing in the sand may be:

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice and only justice you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Dt 16:19-20).

or

You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour (Lev 19:15).

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44 Barth, Church Dogmatics III/4, 235. “[Jesus] has obviously compelled [the accusers] to include themselves in one category with the adulteress, and to own that they are no less guilty and worthy of death.” On what basis this happens, Barth does not address.

The first and longer of these texts has the added dimension of alluding to the loss of freedom through Roman occupation. That loss of freedom could be seen as a consequence of not keeping the law as they should. While this reconstruction is clearly speculative, it appears to do justice to the clues in the story, unlike other reconstructions.

It is important to note that the scribes and Pharisees did not leave until they “heard” what Jesus had begun to write. They and the crowd left because to participate in a stoning based on unjust witnesses would compound their sin, and invite blood revenge. The irony of the scribes’ accusation against the people who followed Jesus, that they did not know the Law and were accursed (7:47-49), now comes to the fore.

By the time Jesus stood up again, the accusing witnesses and lawyers had vacated the field. Now there were no witnesses to cast the first stones. By the Mosaic Law, Jesus had no authority to formulate, let alone execute a sentence. He was not a witness. It would be a serious transgression of the Jewish law to condemn the woman in the absence of witnesses. To the secular Western mind, the woman is let off on a technicality, but to the Jewish mind this touches on the essence of God’s purpose for Israel. As Filson correctly notes, there is no confession and no forgiveness. There is now no conviction, not even an acquittal. The case has collapsed. When there are no witnesses, the sin remains hidden and cannot be purged from Israel. To formally forgive her sin would presume her formal guilt. Jesus did not do so. Instead he issued a warning that opened the door to reformation, “and from now on, sin no more.”

Identification of wrong

Brown did not look within the pericope to justify his opposition to the claim that Jesus invalidated all future human judgements. As he notes, such a claim would make

46Rooke, Ciphers in the Sand, 46. False witnesses are identified in this way, if the accusation proves to be false at a later date.
Christian ethics impossible, as does any misreading of Mt 7:1-2 and Luke 6:36-37 with regard to judgement and condemnation. Establishing that a wrong has been done, and pronouncing the appropriate sentence are two separate actions. In order for forgiveness to have any meaning, the prior awareness of a wrong is required. Establishing the wrongness of an action is therefore a critical and necessary step toward forgiveness. Obtaining such knowledge does not constitute judgement in the sense of pronouncing sentence. Nevertheless, acknowledgement of moral wrong is necessary for ethical analysis, and such acknowledgement is intrinsic to the Christian faith in the practice of brotherly and sisterly restoration.

Application of God’s law is not a subjective individual matter, nor is it even merely a matter of social contract. Jewish law is concerned about justice and holiness (the removal of evil) as instructed by God. Misapplication of the law is seen as neither producing justice nor removing evil; it only perpetuates injustice and evil. Judgement as punishment and judgement as a deterrent remain in the background. Judgement is for the purpose of “removing the evil from your midst”, for communal sanctification. For such a concept of justice to flourish, an engagement with God is required. That engagement must permeate the culture, if it is to work properly. In Jewish law, whenever justice is administered, everybody – whether accuser or accused - finds himself or herself before the judgement seat of God.

This story serves to illustrate the theocentric triadic structure of human existence. Firstly there is God’s purpose for the people of Israel: a true and even-handed justice that reflects his desire for the holiness of his people Israel. It is God who authenticates the law and who authenticates right judgement. Secondly, there are individual actors, the accused and the accusers, who are equal before the God who judges both the accused and the accusers. Here the witnesses became transgressors of
the Mosaic Law, by bringing an accusation against the woman only. They operated by something other than God’s law and God’s justice. Thirdly, the people of God who were required to do the stoning must wait until the accusing witnesses have cast the first stones. It is the people who are called on to participate in the removal of the evil from Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures assume and demonstrate this three-way relationship: between individuals and the community, between individuals (accuser and accused) and God, and between the community and God. This three-fold relationship is the framework for the Mosaic Law.

The transgression of God’s law does not bring joy to anybody in this pericope. The Psalmists’ delight in God’s law does not so much lie in its remedial application, but in his and the community’s positive adherence to the law, because the law represents fulfilment of the way life was meant to be lived.

Speculation about whether Jesus would have supported the stoning, if the guilty man had been there with the woman, goes beyond the text and its context. But in relation to grace and law the point can be made that under the Old Covenant, the Law required their death, and that there was no opportunity for restoration of the offenders in the case of adultery. From the perpetrators’ perspective, this looks like a lack of grace. When viewed in the theocentric triadic framework of God, community and individuals in the context of the covenant between Israel and its God at Mt Sinai, there is more to be said. The act of adultery has broken God’s covenant with Israel who has agreed to be a people holy to God. Instead of annulling the covenant with his people, God exercises grace to Israel as a nation by not revoking the covenant and instead asks for the removal of the evil from amongst the people of Israel through the provision in the Law. For the individual the death penalty is harsh but for the nation this law is grace.

47 To the Western mind stoning (or any death penalty for that matter) may be a stumbling block to fully engage in the triadic structure here.
The New Covenant is also based on this three-fold theocentric relationship. To speculate whether Ananias and Sapphira would have been spared, had they admitted to their deceptive scheme, also goes beyond the text. Of course, the New Covenant is one of repentance and restoration, and the “power of the sword” is not granted to the church. In Acts 5 the post-Pentecost believers were meeting and eating together with “gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46). They were “of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32a). Yet, according to Luke, Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the congregation and God by pretending to be as generous as Barnabas. The Apostle Peter challenged them about their dishonesty. They persisted in their lies, and they died. Perhaps the point Luke wants to make with this story is theocentric, that God gracefully requisitions us for his glory and not vice versa. The holiness of the community was damaged and needed to be restored. Attempts to glorify oneself constitute a refusal to participate in God’s holiness. It is a refusal to believe. Our refusal to believe leaves us in a state of condemnation according to John 3:16-18, in a divine and eternal contra nos.

In summary, Christian ethical judgements are to be made in the context of a triadic relational structure of the individual, called by God to participate in a community established by God, embedded in the wider creation of God. The New Covenant is a gracious covenant. As God’s people in the triadic structure, the Church does not hold the power of the sword. The tenor of God’s relationship with Israel and with the Church is one of loving restoration, both individual and communal, to encourage a communal holiness which reflects God’s character and purpose in and to the world. God’s pro nobis is theocentric and not anthropocentric. Legalism and antinomianism in

49 The Spanish Inquisition and its derivatives, as well as aspects of Calvin’s reign in Geneva, are a blot on the history of the Christian Church.
50 This issue will be addressed again in Chapter 3, in the Parables of the Unforgiving Servant and the Talents.
their various guises are corrupted versions of participation in God’s purposes. The Christian and the Church are called to participate individually and communally in God’s redemption of the cosmos. Refusal to participate brings grief. It will be argued that faithful participation in becoming (and being) God’s holy people\footnote{Cf Eph 5:26-27.} brings joy. The interleaving of the relationships between the individual, the community and God is fundamental for a Christian ethic of joy in participation. The next Chapter will investigate the understanding of joy from an experiential perspective before we return to the New Testament to consider the source of joy.
Chapter 2
Happiness, Joy and Ecstasy

This Chapter concerns itself with the notion of joy as a human experience. Joy is multi-faceted, as concept, emotion and state of being. While Adam Potkay, a literary critic and philosopher, suggests that it may be difficult to speak of joy in academia, a general understanding of joy in comparison with happiness and ecstasy is helpful to set the parameters for a Christian ethic of joy in participation. The chapter will also address Robert Johnson’s psychological criticism of the church, namely, that it has repressed the “Dionysian element”. The discussion here seeks an understanding of joy and so to lay a foundation for Chapter three, which explores joy (and reasons for its absence) in the New Testament. While ancient philosophies claim that happiness is the result of a moral life, I will argue that such happiness is not identical with joy. The etymology of biblical words related to joy in Hebrew and Greek indicates the embodied and communal nature of joy. This leads into a brief consideration of the ascetic influences on Christianity. Martin Buber’s story of the coachman will serve as an illustration of joy through moral action.

Lack of openness toward joy

The last century of Western thought was not as open to joy as the Hasidic community of the eighteenth century was. Adam Potkay claims that joy developed a bad reputation in the twentieth century, particularly in Europe. He writes, “Sullied by the strength-through-joy histrionics of Nazi Germany and the Soviet empire, “joy” still

3 Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, 309.
retains a sarcastic ring, especially to European ears." Given this background of manipulative joy, Stanley Kubrick’s film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), based on Anthony Burgess’ novel of the same name (1962), takes the matter one painful step further. Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” is the theme music of the film. The lead character in the film has the “Ode to Joy” playing while he rapes two young women. Aversion therapy is used to rehabilitate the perpetrator. Each time he is tortured, the Ninth Symphony is played. Rehabilitated, he now becomes violently ill each time he hears the “Ode to Joy.”

Cultural misappropriations of joy for political ends by dictators, or even in fiction for the ostensibly ‘good’ purpose of rehabilitating a criminal, make it difficult to speak of joy without undertones of manipulation. Yet the Council of Europe in 1972 chose “Ode to Joy” as its anthem, as did the European Union in 1985. Significantly, it is a word-less anthem. Most Europeans would of course be aware of Friedrich Schiller’s poem *Ode to Joy,* which Beethoven set to music in the Ninth Symphony. The rehabilitation of joy is also reflected in the advertising industry, but with a twist. The advertising industry has trivialised joy. Potkay asks why soap products are marketed as they are, and supplies a tentative answer.

> It might be that executives and admen who affixed “joy” to a dish-washing liquid were really trying to retail small joys (the fulfilment of clean plates), but it is hard to imagine them doing so without parodying some more exalted notion of joy with a sneer at those who do not get the joke.

Here joy has been requisitioned as an instrument to manipulate the mind, to induce a person to buy detergent. In 2013 Cadbury’s chocolate wrappers displayed the invitation “Welcome to Joyville”. Such trivialisation of joy does not promote discourse in relation

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6 When I saw the film in Germany in 1972 I was stunned and then felt confronted for several days.
7 See *Introduction, page 1.*
to a Christian ethic of joy. But it is not only secular culture that has misused joy in this way.

There is an undercurrent in Protestant theology that makes joy compulsory; it is seen as an achievement rather than a state of being. Potkay is suspicious of such ‘joy’.

The joys in which I trust are those “on the road to nowhere”; that is to say, joys that aren’t yoked to some master narrative of progress or growth; joys that aren’t founded on an expectation of the radical change of or departure from - though consonant with the amelioration of - the only place or planet we know. Joys in the here and now, aiming at no definite destination and conscious of the conditions of our lease on earth, are the only utopia we can fairly claim. Potkay does not like joy to be conscripted by any cause. Yet he hints at an ethical dimension of joy, the amelioration of the only place we know.

While Potkay does not explicitly state that Protestant theology is subverting joy to illegitimate ends, he notes that Evangelical Christians have re-appropriated the allure of joy that admen originally took, in part, from them. Joy is the gas in the car of life, according to a Christian Centre billboard I recently drove past in Ocean County, New Jersey, which pictured a “JOY” gage beneath the motto, “Running on Empty?” Potkay suggests that the struggle of Protestant theology to deal with joy and joylessness since the time of the Reformation is still with us. Protestant theology cut itself off from Mother Church (with its pomp, public processions and celebrations) and claimed the Scriptures as the sole guide to faith and life. Joy came to be adduced as an index of the Spirit’s presence in both personal and church life. When an indicative index gains currency, often it transmutes into a normative function. Potkay muses, “Yet even as joy rose to prominence as a free gift that assured God’s presence, it was also addressed, somewhat paradoxically, as an obligation or duty, particularly in its active form of rejoicing.” He claims that Luther described joy as nothing less than a central Christian duty, and that this sense of duty still pervades Protestant Christianity. So joy sometimes

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11 Potkay, The Story of Joy, 73.
appears only as a topic of conversation, as duty. Potkay remonstrates against an ongoing evangelical insistence on joy. He quotes the complaint of Richard John Neuhaus, the former editor of First Things, with regard to three aspects of Protestant culture, “the overly confident claims to be born again, the forced happiness and joy, the awful music.”¹² Joy continues to feature in politics, advertisements, and revivalist religion, and therefore does not fare so well as a topic of academic conversation, compared with happiness. We do well to note Potkay’s concerns about forced joy and manipulation and mere talk about joy, especially in a religious context. Buber, too, highlights the difference between the learned rabbis and the “naïve and ignorant” coachman who, to their astonishment, performed a “unique good deed”. Joy is characterised by action and spontaneity, rather than being a means to an end.

Joy: its psychology

To speak of ethics is to speak of duty, of doing the most good for the greatest number of people, of the law and obedience to it, of virtue, or of “the narrow way that leads to life”. Each of these descriptions implies some hardship to be borne or some effort to be made. To speak of ethics and joy in the same breath is therefore somewhat unusual. A catalogue search by subject of the literature on ethics turned up many links between ethics and gratitude, as well as between ethics and happiness. Searching on ethics and gratitude resulted in lists of works concerned with an ethic of obligation toward others, and searching on ethics and happiness resulted in lists of works related to virtue ethics. There appears to be little that has been written to link joy and ethics.¹³ This raises a question about the nature of joy. In view of potential opposition from asceticism the difference between joy and ecstasy will also be explored.

¹³ John Piper has written several books on the joy of the believer and about the believer’s desire for God. His writings are more devotional than ethical in character. He calls his theology, somewhat provocatively, “Christian Hedonism.”
Joy has an undertone of being somewhat beside oneself, of exuberance and perhaps even self-indulgence. This seems to fly in the face of a sense of duty, and it seems to run counter to the pursuit of happiness through virtue. To complicate matters further, it seems that American English does not make as clear a distinction between ecstasy and joy, as is the case in Australian English, where ecstasy is synonymous with rapture, frenzy and trance – out-of-body experiences. Robert A. Johnson’s book, entitled *Ecstasy: Understanding the Psychology of Joy*, discounts in his discussion of joy the loss of self-awareness and self-control implied by rapture, frenzy and trance implied in “ecstasy”. Yet, at times, he uses them interchangeably. This should be kept in mind when Johnson speaks of ecstasy and joy.

Johnson discusses joy from a psychological view that is steeped in the Jungian tradition of archetypes and Greek myth. He makes some insightful comments about the history of joy in our culture. In the light of his insights, it comes as no surprise that ethics and human joy are not well-connected in theological discourse. In the preface he claims,

> It is the great tragedy of contemporary Western society that we have virtually lost the ability to experience the transformative power of ecstasy and joy. This loss affects every aspect of our lives. We seek ecstasy [joy?] everywhere, and for a moment we may think we have found it. But, on a very deep level, we remain unfulfilled.\(^{14}\)

In Part I of his book he sets out how in ancient Greece Dionysus was the god of wine and revelry. The young Dionysus gets drunk only once, and suffers madness as a result. Hera, Zeus’ wife, helps him recover his sanity. He never gets drunk again. The moral of the story is this: for sensory delight, for consciously living in one’s sensory delight, one cannot be drunk nor out of control. Johnson uses this Jungian reading of the Dionysus myth as an archetype, as one of the ‘first patterns’ that shape us. If these patterns are ignored, and in particular, if the Dionysian archetype is ignored, then we

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\(^{14}\) Johnson, *Ecstasy*, vi.
become mentally ill. Johnson states “The ancient Greek gods live on for us today as symptoms … We no longer have the divine ecstasy of Dionysus, we have addictive behaviour.”\textsuperscript{15} In our cultural background sit both the \textit{fear} of losing self-control and the \textit{desire} to lose self-control. Aristotle’s concept of “continence” indicates that many have to struggle against their desires to be superficially virtuous, and in Kant’s view a moral act is an act against our inclinations.\textsuperscript{16} At first glance, therefore, my proposal for an ethic of joy appears to be an oxymoron, if morality is about controlling our actions by suppressing our desires. But there are deeper issues to address.

Western culture in the early 1900s seemed to have become reluctant to celebrate, partly due to war, but also because it was a “scientific” age. To live in sensory delight was not “scientific”. In the 1920s, Sheldon Cheney, a professor of drama, wrote,

Dionysus has lived twenty-five hundred years. Today a world that had almost learned to scorn him turned back, with the old hunger of the soul, the old impulse to divine living, with not a little of the old wildness. For we later mortals, as we view about us the decay of moralistic religions, the chaos of conquest-mad civilisations and the spiritual bankruptcy of the prosperous-scientific life, we seek again the roads to emotional-spiritual inundation, to ecstasy, to the experience of God.\textsuperscript{17}

Sixty years later, Johnson claimed that we live too much in our heads and not enough in our bodies.

Unfortunately we spend so much time trying to understand the world and ourselves intellectually that we have virtually cut ourselves off from the spontaneous, guilt-free experience of our emotional and irrational natures.\textsuperscript{18}

Johnson is quick to point out that the irrational nature mentioned above is not opposed to the rational. The irrational (better: non-rational) knowledge is knowledge gained by intuition, by unmediated experience, as opposed to knowledge gained from abstracted,

\textsuperscript{15} Johnson, \textit{Ecstasy}, viii.
\textsuperscript{16} Aristotelian virtue ethics makes a distinction between perfect virtue and “continence” (or strength of will). The fully virtuous do right without a struggle against contrary desires, but the continent have to control a desire or temptation to do otherwise. Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse, “Virtue Ethics” in \textit{The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy} (Summer 2012 edn), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 3-4.
\textsuperscript{17} Shelden Cheney, \textit{The Theatre: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting and Stagecraft}. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1939; First published 1929 by Longman Green and Co), ix.
\textsuperscript{18} Johnson, \textit{Ecstasy}, 12.
rational thought. He also distinguishes the sensual world (mere sense perception) from the sensuous world (living the emotions of the sense experiences).

The Dionysian way is to see the world instinctively, on a sensuous, intuitive level rather than an abstract, logical, once-removed way. If one can make the translation from the sensual world, devoid of spirit, to the sensuous world of Dionysus, then one can begin a new era in one’s life.19

While I agree with the basic thrust of Johnson’s argument, I would put it into a Christian context. Traditional Christianity has a parallel view. In continuity with the Jewish tradition, Jesus of Nazareth commanded his followers to love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. Within a psychological context, heart would need to be translated into motivation and will, soul would need to be translated into the sensory-emotive aspect of our being, and strength would need to be translated into embodiment. When read in this light, there is not only room for “the sensuous world of Dionysus” in the Christian life, but it should be a feature of Christian worship, witness and service. Some aspects of the sensuous world of Dionysus should be a feature of what is deemed to be good, to be right, and to be done.

In the epilogue to his monograph Johnson asks “What is joy?” and answers

However, we cannot say what joy is. We must go the further step and discover its true nature for ourselves. When we can make peace with the Dionysian element we will begin to see the glow of ecstasy that enlivens every living thing. And, in the fiery glow of ecstasy, joy can be born within us.20

Johnson fails to make clear the difference between ecstasy and joy. For him ecstasy is not so much a state of being out of one’s mind (as in rapture, frenzy, trance), but a state of exuberance where the body is reluctant to contain the emotion. “To express ecstasy with dignity and consciousness we must meet [the Dionysian element] head on, with a

19 Johnson, Ecstasy, 12. Italics are mine.
20 Johnson, Ecstasy, 97.
joyful spirit of acceptance.” In contrast, Potkay’s usage of ecstasy is aligned with the Australian meaning of the word.

Ecstasy, in turn, is antithetical to the humanist notion of happiness. Although it may be understood as joy at its outer limit, ecstasy nonetheless differs from joy in consisting not of fullness but rather of absence, an annihilation of embodied agency and surrender to the not-I.

One is hardly “absent” when one has dignity and consciousness. One has not “surrendered to the Not-I,” meaning the absence of self-awareness. Johnson places the Dionysian element at the inner limit of Potkay’s ecstasy, and the outer edge of self-control where exuberance occurs. Joy is born in that moment when emotion and motion become one, when there is some significant resolution or embodiment that is also an integration. Jesus’ summary of the Torah, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength implies such embodiment and integration. In Chapter three it is argued that the Gospel writers claim that such integration results in joy, and in Chapter 5 the *ergon* of virtue ethics, the human virtuous functioning in the world, understood in a Christian context, will be shown to be this integration point.

Johnson, using psychological language, makes this point about integration:

Enthusiasm annuls the distance between the pairs of opposites [i.e., the rational and non-rational], and this brings ecstatic joy. A visitation of God, which enthusiasm gives, transcends the duality of one’s life – the either/or – and brings them into a synthesis. This is an experience beyond price. Then for a short time – because this is all we can stand – the opposite ceases to torture us. When we transcend the cross of opposites, we will find ecstatic joy.

He writes, “Joy is another Dionysian attribute that we have managed to water down.”

This is an accusation against the church in the light of the latter part of his book.

As the patriarchal religions gained in power, the old matriarchal ways of Dionysus were diminished and finally lost. … The patriarchal, law abiding religions of the Romans,

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23 This is not the Christian traditional order. The visitation produces the enthusiasm. The enthusiasm does not produce the visitation.
Jews and Christians who succeeded the Greeks did not take kindly to the irrational [non-rational] antics and intoxications of Dionysus.\textsuperscript{26}

Johnson’s differentiation between the Dionysian myth and the myth of Bacchus is helpful. He points out that in 186 AD an edict of the Roman Senate proscribed the Bacchantes in the Roman Empire. He quips that Dionysus has not been seen in polite company since. There is a difference between these two gods of wine. Dionysus is Epicurean; the enjoyment requires full operation of the senses and hence he eschewed drunkenness, according to the myth. Bacchus on the other hand was given to drunken abandon. The unpredictable non-rational Bacchus, given to drunken revelry, had no place in analytical thought or in the preservation of law and order. Bacchus, the Roman god of wine was, in fact, seen as the enemy of it. For sensuous enjoyment, for emotionally enjoying sensory perceptions, one cannot be out of one’s mind, out of control. The failure to draw this distinction may have contributed to the loss of legitimacy of spiritual joy in Western society.

The meaning of “Joy”

Ecstasy, from its Latin/Greek root of \textit{ex} or \textit{ek stasis} means to stand outside oneself. Johnson defines ecstasy in this way: “If I say, ‘I am ecstatic! I am simply beside myself!’ I mean that I am filled with an emotion too powerful for my body to contain or my rational mind to understand.”\textsuperscript{27} This speaks of exuberance, not of a state of mental incapacitation. It is an acknowledgement of a state of being, a state beyond quick analysis. Some of the Old Testament words for \textit{joy}, \textit{rejoice} and similar words have an etymology that resonates with Johnson’s definition of ecstasy and my understanding of joy. The emotion is too powerful for the one who experiences it to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{26} Johnson, \textit{Ecstasy}, 15. Here Johnson argues against himself. Intoxication is too strong a word for a state in which sensuous experience can be savoured fully.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} Johnson, \textit{Ecstasy}, 13. But this does not mean for Johnson that one is out of control. One is still in control of one’s faculties.
\end{flushright}
simply sit still; the body wants to express the emotion in movement, with the mind alert and engaged. Words having this kind of overflowing emotion are listed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong's No.</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1523</td>
<td>gîyl or gûwl</td>
<td>a primitive root, to spin round (under violent emotion)</td>
<td>to rejoice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1525</td>
<td>gîlâh</td>
<td>noun, from 1523-4</td>
<td>rejoicing, joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5937</td>
<td>'âlaz</td>
<td>a primitive root, to jump (for joy), exult</td>
<td>be joyful, exult, rejoice, triumph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7440</td>
<td>rinnâh</td>
<td>noun creaking or shrill sound (grief or joy)</td>
<td>Cry of: gladness, joy, singing, Triumph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7442</td>
<td>rânan</td>
<td>primary root, to creak</td>
<td>Shout for joy, sing aloud, triumph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8643</td>
<td>tᵉruwᵃḥ</td>
<td>From clamour</td>
<td>Acclamation of joy, rejoicing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Other words for joy and rejoicing are derived from more sedate words, such as beauty, delight, being joined with others in a multitude, etc.28

The New Testament vocabulary for joy and rejoicing is more subdued as shown in Table 2 below. One wonders whether there has been a Greek ascetic influence at work, in opposition to a less restrained Jewish way of life. John Navone explores the theme of joy in Luke's Gospel.29 He includes words such as a δοξάζω (glorify), μακάριος (blessed), εὐλογέω (bless), εἰρήνη (peace), εἰφραίνω (to gladden or to feast), μεγαλύνω (magnify) as also speaking of joy. With regard to χαίρω and χαρά Navone points to the infancy narrative, the beatitudes, the travel narrative (9:51-19:27) and the resurrection narratives. “In every case joy is related to the recognition of the present salvation process and is experienced to the measure that one participates in it.”30 This strengthens

my thesis that in the Christian context joy has an interpersonal dimension; joy requires participation. It requires participation in God's purposes and this participation involves others. Here the triadic structure comes to the fore again. True joy requires this participation to be theocentric.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong's No.</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>agalliasis</td>
<td>from exultation, to jump for joy</td>
<td>welcome, gladness, exceeding joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2744</td>
<td>kauchaomai</td>
<td>from boast, vaunt</td>
<td>make a boast, to glory, rejoice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3685</td>
<td>oninemi</td>
<td>from to gratify</td>
<td>to have joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4640</td>
<td>skirta</td>
<td>from to skip, jumo</td>
<td>leap for joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5463&lt;sup&gt;31&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>chairo</td>
<td>primitive verb, from cheer</td>
<td>calmly happy, (greeting) rejoice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5479</td>
<td>chara</td>
<td>from cheerfulness</td>
<td>calm delight, gladness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5485</td>
<td>charis</td>
<td>from graciousness of manner or act</td>
<td>joy, liberality, pleasure, thanksworthiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Happiness and Joy

Augustine in his *Confessions* (ca. 400 AD) noted that all people would agree that they want to be happy. In fact they think that joy is the same as happiness.<sup>32</sup> For Augustine the content of such happiness is this:

Happiness is to rejoice in you [i.e., God] and for you and because of you. This is the true happiness, and there is no other. Those who think that there is another kind of happiness look for joy elsewhere, but theirs is not true joy. Yet their minds are set upon something akin to joy.

We cannot therefore be certain that all men desire true happiness, because there are some who do not look for joy in you; and since to rejoice in you is the only true happiness, we must conclude that they do not desire true happiness.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> There is a misprint in Strong’s *Concordance*, for 1 Th 3:9: given as 5468.


<sup>33</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Book X, Ch. 22-3), 228-9.
For Augustine, true happiness is an orientation towards God. God is the source and object of Augustine’s joy. This stance is radically different from self-absorption about one’s happiness. It may be worth noting that Augustine himself uses joy and happiness interchangeably.

In the light of the above, it may help at this point to make a distinction between happiness and joy. The majority of the Greek words related to joy conjure up not solitude but companionship. The Hebrew words do not suggest isolation either; the Psalmists speak of rejoicing in the congregation. I would like to suggest that joy must have an outward direction, while happiness may have an outward direction. Happiness in everyday usage does not require this sense of community. Of course, such a distinction is not borne out with any great clarity in the dictionary definition of these words. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) defines happiness as

1. Good fortune or luck; success, prosperity.
2. The state of pleasurable content of mind, which results from success or the attainment of what is considered good
3. Successful or felicitous aptitude, fitness or appropriateness; felicity.

and joy as

1. a Pleasurable emotion due to well-being or satisfaction; the feeling or state of being highly pleased; exultation of spirit; gladness, delight. b the expression [my italics] of glad feeling; mirth; c used interjectionally.
2. A pleasurable state or condition; a state of felicity; hence the place [my italics] of bliss, paradise.
3. a A source or object of joy; a delight. b as a term of endearment.

While there is considerable overlap in the definitions, there is also some basis for the distinction I wish to make. The dictionary definition of happiness does not mention expression, as the definition of joy does. Joy involves “the expression of glad feeling; mirth.” In the Psalms such rejoicing has an audience; it is often done in the congregation. Happiness does not require an audience. Further, if joy has an audience, it also has a place where the audience is situated. This suggests embodiment. Of
course, these distinctions are not absolute, as the dictionary definitions make clear, but these distinctions are important for a biblical understanding of joy.

There are some further aspects worth considering. Perhaps happiness is more temporary, and hence an ongoing journey, a pursuit. The American Declaration of Independence announces the pursuit of happiness as a right. The pursuit of joy is never claimed as a right. Joy seems a longer lasting state of mind than happiness. It may be deeper, “an exultation of spirit;” and it is an emotion expressed in community rather than a private emotion related to personal achievement or an event.

In relation to virtue ethics, eudaemonia, felicity or human flourishing is the end or purpose of character formation. Such “happiness” can become a “self-centred goal, the completion of a human character which is then able to stand on its own, as it were, in heroic isolation.”34 Such a concept of happiness stands in stark contrast with biblical joy. This matter will be explored further in the fifth Chapter.

Returning to Johnson's question, “What is joy?” he answers it in this way:

We can say, as the dictionary does, that it is an 'exultation of the spirit, the beatitude of paradise.' We can say that, unlike the ephemeral state of happiness, it is a lasting value that nourishes and sustains the spirit as well as the body. Joy does not induce a craving for more, because it is enough. However, we cannot say what joy is. We must go the further step and discover its true nature for ourselves.35

I also agree with Potkay, who sees happiness as an individual achievement and joy as a gift, the exercise of which carries implications of community. Potkay quotes the Polish poet, Adam Zagajewski, to highlight the difference. “Happiness is for the Declaration of Independence, a political condition, and also for the ending of movies. Joy, by contrast, is an illumination, as in Blake and Wordsworth and Rilke, a benediction, a visitation.”36 Happiness, one may conclude, is more superficial and more individual

34 N. T. Wright, Virtue Reborn (London: SPCK, 2010), 72.
35 Johnson, Ecstasy, 97.
whereas joy is more communal and perhaps life-changing, as “illumination ... benediction ... visitation” imply. Joy requires an ‘other’ for illumination, someone to pronounce the benediction, someone to come and visit, to share a place, a common space, a common purpose.

The loss of joy – should it be regained?

The loss of Dionysus, Johnson claims, has left a void that we fill in the only way we know how: with danger and excitement. Craving spiritual ecstasy [joy?], we mistakenly seek material fulfilment. Johnson calls the symptoms that arise from the loss of legitimacy of spiritual ecstasy [joy?] in Western society “Dionysian malnutrition”. The symptoms he identifies are the following:

We want more things – more cars, more money, more clothes, more drugs, more fun – but we are frightened of touch, of making real contact with another person. We are more likely to take our clothes off in front of a stranger than we are to let down our emotional defences in front of someone we love.

Obviously there are value judgements at work here that others may question. But if these value judgements have some justification, then a serious consideration of why we act inappropriately is in order. Johnson suggests that our inappropriate actions emanate from fear of ecstasy, whether in the sense of exuberance and exultation of the spirit, or in the sense of rapture, frenzy and trance is not quite clear. I take it to be the former sense.

Perhaps we most deeply fear ecstasy because implicit in it is a loss of control [a loss of self-direction rather than self-awareness?]. Surrender, even to the divine, is something our culture does not encourage. Surrender to the divine means crossing over from our well-defined roles and worlds into the realm of the gods, where everything is possible and nothing is explained. … Truly to experience ecstasy, the love of God, would mean to invite profound change, and this we are unwilling to do.

37 Johnson, Ecstasy, 20.
38 Johnson, Ecstasy, 21.
39 Johnson, Ecstasy, 22.
40 Johnson, Ecstasy, 24.
Dionysus is the god [or personified archetype] of wine and ecstasy, liberation and abandon. He is the perennial profusion of colour and life and energy. When we touch Dionysus we touch the irrational [i.e., non-rational, sensuous – see footnote 19] wisdom of the senses and experience joy. Because we shy away from this experience, we get the darker side of intoxication, a confusion of the senses that is far from spiritual. With no sacred means of expression, we can express our need for Dionysus only symptomatically: through substance abuse, child molesting, and domestic violence, muggings, wars, terrorism, madness.

Unfortunately Johnson muddies the waters between conscious and dignified self-surrender on the one hand, and ecstatic abandon and loss of control on the other. Nevertheless, he tries to make the point that Western Christianity needs to carefully review its practices, and perhaps rethink its theology and ethics. He wisely suggests that it is not a matter of giving up analytical thought and immersing ourselves in a bath of emotional delights.

We cannot simply move from the realm of rationality to the irrational [i.e., sensuous] realm of Dionysus and think that everything will be solved. This is either/or thinking. Jung has said that for us the choice is no longer either/or, but either and or. We must touch Dionysus, we must bring him back into our lives in a humanised form, or in denying him we will destroy ourselves.

This is the burden that is on us now. To keep the fine points of our patriarchal world – its order, form, care and structure – and bring the Dionysian back in to enliven it without doing a flip-flop and going to pieces. Only in this way can we begin to move towards wholeness and joy.

Nietzsche’s prophetic assessment of the future of nineteenth century central European Christianity was that it was too repressive. Johnson observes a century later:

Western Christianity is out of balance in this matter of sensation [i.e., rejoicing in our senses]. Jesus was equally spirit and matter, but we tend not to believe that way. This quality [of embodied spirit] in Jesus has been misunderstood so totally that he has, paradoxically, become the chief enemy of the Dionysian element in the Christian world.

Johnson is speaking of popular conceptions here. Nevertheless, this view is paradoxical indeed. Jesus is recorded as wining and dining with tax-collectors and others not...
acceptable to Jewish society. Furthermore, John’s Gospel commences its record of Jesus’ public ministry with his attendance at a wedding, where Jesus miraculously turned water into wine (Jn 2). The Gospel writers do not suppress the “Dionysian” element of Jesus’ humanity, his wining and dining. The Protestant reaction against the church’s gilded statues, extravagant processions, and the opulent life style of the princes of the church at the time of the Reformation may have gone too far, and we are suffering the consequences of a reaction. In the English-speaking world the Methodist tradition of total abstinence arose against a background of wide-spread alcohol abuse. This, too, has complicated the picture.

Johnson claims that by re-introducing the Dionysian element into our culture, we may heal our disease and so ‘reunite heaven and earth’:

For us, our repression of Dionysus has meant our repression of ecstasy. Our over-identification with mind has made us disrespectful of sensation and intuition. … In the West, however, much of the Judaean-Christian tradition has done its best to keep earth and heaven from uniting.⁴⁷

When we deny ourselves the Dionysian experience, we also deny ourselves true knowledge of ourselves, our mates, the life process, joy. We deny ourselves heaven on earth.⁴⁸

From a Christian perspective, this is either a gross oversimplification or a poetic licence to hyperbole. At best, such embodied enjoyment will provide a foretaste of heaven, rather than heaven on earth. Nevertheless, Johnson points out a useful direction. The sustaining and transforming power of sensate emotion, of “en-joyment”, cannot be denied.

Instead of delving into Scripture to gain insights into how to re-incorporate joy into our culture, and presumably re-incorporate it into the Christian faith, Johnson continues with Jungian psychology. He elucidates some important aspects of joy, and describes what joy is not.

⁴⁷ Johnson, Ecstasy, 41.
⁴⁸ Johnson, Ecstasy, 42.
Enthusiasm is truly a divine word because it means “to be filled with God”. Thus to be visited by an enthusiasm is legitimately to be filled with God. The soul is enhanced where the self is activated – a beautiful experience. Joy is part of this. Inflation, on the other hand (and this is a meaning Jung attached to this word), means to be filled with air – generally hot air. Inflation means to be blown up, to have your ego puffed up, to be arrogant. It is always an egocentric experience because one has taken the air, the spirit, and assimilated it with the ego – and then one goes off like the puffed up idiot one has become.  

Johnson advises that if one finds that one cannot stop a flow of energy, then – paradoxically – one must stop it. The Dionysian ecstasy or joy requires the maintenance of self-awareness, otherwise the experience deteriorates into a Bacchanalian event, into the abandonment of full consciousness.

Augustine makes a similar point when he discusses his love of music.

I was enthralled by [the pleasures of sound], but you [i.e., God] broke my bonds and set me free. I admit that I still find some enjoyment in the music of hymns, which are alive with your praises, when I hear them sung by well-trained, melodious voices. But I do not enjoy it so much that I cannot tear myself away. I can leave it when I wish.

This is reminiscent of Paul’s advice to Timothy, that the Spirit of God is a spirit of power, love and self-control (2 Tim 1:7). If there is no self-control, then the Christian tradition speaks of demonic possession, or slavery to the flesh.

Johnson recognises the danger of enthusiasm. He uses the physics of electrostatic induction as an analogy of what needs to happen in order not to be consumed by enthusiasm, by ‘being filled with God’ as he calls it.

Induction is characteristic of enthusiasm. You stand close enough to a source of energy to be energised or warmed or quickened by it, but none of the energy flows into your system directly. … Conduction, in contrast, consists of direct contact with a source of energy – just as if you put a finger into a light socket. … In this way [i.e., induction] we can stand close to God or to the collective unconscious and be safe.

Johnson alludes to Pentecostal excesses which have made many very cautious:

“So how can we – safely – invite Dionysus back into our lives? With enthusiasm! To express ecstasy with dignity and consciousness, we must meet it head on, with a joyful

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49 Johnson, Ecstasy, 48-49.
50 Johnson, Ecstasy, 49.
51 Augustine, Confessions (Book 10, Chapter 33), 238.
52 Johnson, Ecstasy, 50. I do not share Johnson’s idea that the communal subconscious is to be equated with God.
spirit of acceptance.” He admits a major difficulty: to meet head on what one is very cautious about. That difficulty is mitigated by Johnson’s affirmation that such ecstasy has to be expressed with dignity and consciousness. But that means that for clarity’s sake, Johnson’s “ecstasy” should really be called joy. Ecstasy implies being beside oneself, being beyond control. This controlled ecstasy, if dignified and conscious, implies ritual: controlled action in which one can safely savour something with one’s whole being, heart, mind, soul and strength.  

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647) asks the question about the chief purpose of human persons, and gives the response, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.” In the Christian tradition, love for God involves heart, soul, mind, and strength. The integration of these aspects of our humanity in our love for God will bring joy, as Augustine declared. The happiness or joy we yearn for is blocked by resisting this integration. Johnson draws on another religious tradition that make the same theocentric point, “The *Bhagavad-Gita* expresses our dilemma: ‘The world is imprisoned in its own activity except when actions are performed as worship of God.’”

From psychological considerations alone, here are good reasons for revisiting and re-incorporating the element of joy in Christian theology and ethics. Johnson has pointed out the consequences of not doing so. The reasons for resistance are an unwarranted fear of the loss of control and order.

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The Ascetic Influence

As Nietzsche has correctly pointed out, there exists a masochistic subculture of self-denial for its own sake within the Western Church.\textsuperscript{56} Such self-denial stands in opposition to the command to love God with all your being, and to love your neighbour as yourself, as an embodied creature, as *nephesh* (Gen 2:7). If self-denial is seen as a virtue, as an end in itself, to talk of joy as a legitimate Christian experience seems like a transgression of the boundaries. This difficulty may be at the heart of the silence about joy in the literature of ethics.

Augustine’s writings have had a great influence on Western Christianity. In Book X of his *Confessions* and Book XIV of the *City of God* Augustine struggles with the power of the emotions that can well up when he focuses his awareness on sense perceptions. As indicated earlier, he views true happiness and joy as having one’s awareness focused on God.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, to focus on powerful sense perceptions themselves may result in the loss of awareness of God. Augustine reflects on this struggle.

But if I am not to turn a deaf ear to music, which is the setting for the words which give life, I must allow it a position of some honour in my heart, and I find it difficult to assign to it its proper place. For sometimes I feel that I treat it with more honour than it deserves. … But I ought not to allow my mind to be paralysed by the gratification of my senses, which often leads it astray. For the senses are not content to take second place […] with the result that I sometimes sin in this way and am not aware of it until later.

Sometimes, too, from over-anxiety to avoid this particular trap I make the mistake of being too strict. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth [in words] it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer.\textsuperscript{58}

Augustine acknowledges that he has become a problem to himself. He calls it an ailment from which he suffers. Perhaps this ailment arises out of his theory of memory and mind. He believed that memory worked on sense-based categories. Aural

\textsuperscript{56} Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 47-48 [How one becomes – what one is, §§4-5].

\textsuperscript{57} Augustine, *Confessions*, (Book X, Ch23), 229.

\textsuperscript{58} Augustine, *Confessions*, (Book X, Ch 33), 238-9.
memories, visual memories, olfactory memories are compartmentalised in the mind. It seems that he did not entertain the notion that a smell can conjure up a visual memory, or music the truth of words. Without this latter possibility, pleasure in music must become idolatrous; it cannot point to God in its beauty. I agree with his reasoning, but biology has refuted his premise.

The other reason for his ailment seems to be his sole focus on the contemplation of God. The concept of God’s people evoking joy in the Trinitarian Communion by enjoying their human God-given emotions in appropriate ways seems to be absent in this discussion. Psalm 149:4 declares this possibility, “The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns them with salvation.” Nehemiah encouraged the people by declaring, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” They are to give up their grieving and join in God’s joyful contemplation of his people as they return to practise holiness (Neh 8:10). “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you [Jerusalem/Israel] (Isa 62:5).” “I will rejoice in doing good to them [Israel], and I will plant them (Jer 32:41).” On the return of the exiles, Zephaniah proclaimed, “The Lord your God is in your midst, … he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love, he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival (Zeph 3:17).” And all heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents (Lk 15:10).

I am not aware of Augustine ever engaging with the possibility of God loudly singing over his people, when he discusses the human contemplation of God. Yet the Scriptures declare that by participating in God’s purposes human beings will give God joy. A resonating joy arises in the believer from the knowledge that God contemplates his people in their redeemed creatureliness, and that God’s contemplation of them may

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59 Augustine, *Confessions*, (Book X, Ch 8-21), 214-228.
give joy to God.\textsuperscript{60} Loving God with all one’s heart, mind, soul and strength is not an arbitrary command. The command is a loving encouragement which gives joy to those who learn to obey it, and in their obedience to this command they give joy to the Author of the command. This suggests that joy arises out of relationship and action, a common purpose. Joy arises in the place between the actors, in participation.

A paper by Rivca Gordon\textsuperscript{61} explores Buber’s understanding of joy, not by engaging with his philosophical writings, but by looking at Buber's engagement with the Hasidic tradition. The Hasidic communities were led by a zaddik, a righteous one, who taught the Hasidim to see every day as a new beginning in which they could hallow their daily life, in simple deeds such as eating and drinking, working, singing and dancing. Such hallowing was thought to produce light in a dark world. The link between light and joy and good deeds comes to life in the Hasidic stories. The reader is reminded here of the story of the coachman presented in the introduction.

The coachman was not an ascetic. He sought joy in the village. His name was already illuminated by a bright light, as he participated in the wedding celebrations. Presumably the coachman’s soul was shining in front of the zaddik as pure light when the coachman acted as father to the fatherless bride, and “gave himself wholly to a good deed”, supplying all his money for the prayer shawl required by tradition. His heart rejoiced in the joy of the couple and in the salvage of the feast; he continued to celebrate boisterously. In this the coachman is not “beside himself”; he is readily distracted from

\textsuperscript{60} See Paul Fiddes in \textit{Participating in God} (London: Darton, Longman & Todd:2000), 152-199. Fiddes writes of suffering and the vulnerability of God. To speak of humans giving joy to God touches impassibility also. I concur with Fiddes, that impassibility cannot mean a stony-faced God without any sense of engagement – a picture contrary to scripture. Impassibility must be understood as a statement of the mystery of God who is the 'I Am Who I am', who will not be determined by our actions, but chooses to act in freedom.


\textsuperscript{62} It is not clear to me whether Buber personally holds to the Hasidic view of joy described here. But it would be unusual for someone to collect these stories without some sense of approval of them.
his revelry to answer his friends. The story serves as an antidote for every kind of fearful asceticism.

According to this story, joy arises out of acts in the outside world, acts that have a place and context, and acts that are relational. Joy is certainly an emotion, but the emotion itself is not the cause of joy. For the Hasidim, according to the tale, it is an outward responsible act of relationship in context; it is an inter-human event of self-giving in the presence of God. Such an act constitutes a ground for joy. It is a celebration of the glory of God's law. As such, the bride and groom in the story also participate in this joy as recipients, because the sense of indebtedness to the coachman is mitigated by their knowledge that the coachman has acted in accordance with God's law. Joy is underwritten not by one’s achievement, but by the structure of God’s law and purposes. In Chapter three this awareness of God will be shown to be fundamental to a Christian ethic of joy.

For the coachman two ethical ways of life, living by analysing one's duty in accordance with the Law, and intuitively (or perhaps by habituation?) doing what is right, good, and needing to be done, blended into one. He seemed conscious only of what needed to be done to keep God smiling in God's contemplation of this human celebration. His soul shone as pure light before the zaddik, and therefore before God, by implication.

For the coachman duty and delight became the two sides of the one coin, inseparable companions, with delight turned uppermost. The Mosaic Law concerning orphans gives the action authority and authenticity, just as the monarch’s head on a coin gives it authority. In monetary transactions, authenticity of the currency remains in the background of the transaction unless one suspects a forgery, and the number on the coin is enjoyed in the transaction. I suggest that the same applies to truly moral actions.
Delight in the moral action is the “value” in the communal context, just as the numbers on the coin are the value of the transaction when a payment is made. The law that authenticates the values one acts on, remains in the background.63

The contrast between the Hasidic rabbis (the theorists) and the coachman (the participant) reflects the difficulty of talking about joy in abstraction. According to the Hasidic tradition, joy is not so much a topic of conversation, or seeking instruction, as an embodied whole-hearted communal experience that is somewhat “worldly-naive, un-self-aware and un-theological”64 in its practice, but nevertheless deeply ethical in the sense of conforming to that which the Old and New Testaments describe as God's requirements for human actions to be good, right and worthy of being done. For joy to arise, it seems that being precedes analysis; and reality precedes reflection.

The next chapter seeks to show that joy functions in this way in the Christian tradition. The complexity of the understanding of joy in our culture, in psychology and philosophy, would seem to indicate a need for re-examination of the New Testament with regard to the place of joy in the life of the people of God. The Chapter will explore this theme of joy through a selection of texts in the Gospels and the Epistles, in order to get a fresh biblically based perspective on joy as it relates to right action for Christians.

63 See Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Press, 1982). In “Über Wahrheit und Lüge im extra moralischen Sinn”, on pages 46-47 he writes of religious metaphors and ethical values that they are like coins which have lost their *pictures*.

64 Barth's friend Eduard Thurneysen wrote to Barth on 7th December 1923 with regard to Buber, “It is clear he understands our concern … yet at the same time he has something – I suppose, worldly-naive, un-self-aware, un-theological - so that one can read off him [i.e., his writings] all kinds of things, as from a good instrument, things which the all-too-conscious already no longer know.” [My translation.] From Dieter Becker, ed., *Karl Barth und Martin Buber – Denker in dialogischer Nachbarschaft?: Zur Bedeutung Martin Bubers für die Anthropologie Karl Barths* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 64. [My Translation of the title: Karl Barth and Martin Buber - Thinkers in dialogical vicinity?: The significance of Martin Buber for Karl Barth's anthropology.]
Chapter 3
Gospels and Epistles: Invitation to joyful participation.

As indicated in Chapter one, Christian ethics is ‘the attempt to answer theoretically the question of what may be called good and right human action’. The requirement for God's people to participate in God's holiness (being set apart for God’s purpose) is well documented in the Levitical laws and Christian ethics continues in this understanding. The framework in which this holiness operates is established and enabled by God for human beings who are created in the image of God, to be vice-regents of God over creation (Gen 1-2). Jesus’ message develops this theme further, as he speaks of the near, present and coming Kingdom of God. The Apostles speak of Christians being called to reign with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth, that no longer groans for the day of redemption. Jesus told parables to invite broken people in a broken world to return to a way of life that becomes increasingly congruent with the purpose of being God’s representatives now, in anticipation of the world to come. The selected parables, stories and exhortations will illustrate joyful participation (and the consequences of refusal to participate). The Psalmists' perspective of joy in God's law and the Chronicler's perspective of human participation in God's purposes (2 Chr 19:6-7) are therefore a proper background for interpreting the New Testament writings. The New Testament passages selected are not in sequence but in an order that allows for the development of this theme. The passages are chosen because of their theme of joy, their warnings of what not to do, and their bearing on joyful participation with God in his works now and in the fullness of the kingdom to come.

Joy: human and divine

If one loses a theocentric focus, God’s election and the human search for God become readily dichotomised. The three short parables recorded in Matthew Mt 13:44-50 consider the
kingdom of heaven from three different perspectives.¹ The kingdom of heaven is represented firstly from a human perspective, as a passive treasure to be discovered and actively appropriated with joy, secondly from God’s perspective, as an active merchant seeking a passive pearl at great cost with no mention of joy, and thirdly from a Kingdom perspective, as a net cast, an instrument or institution that draws in many fish that will need sorting. This threefold perspective, from the believer’s point of view, from God’s point of view, and from the point of view of the kingdom as an institution, is dynamic. If the kingdom of God is viewed as a static concept, paradoxes and false dichotomies arise. Such dichotomies are “based on a simple mistake – namely, the idea that whatever God does, we do not do, and vice versa. Life (thank God!) is more complicated than that.”² If participation in the Kingdom is seen to involve dynamic relationships, then one can recognize a strong synergy between these three perspectives rather than a paradox. This matter will be discussed further in Chapters four and five.

Only the first of these short parables speaks of human joy. The treasure is hidden in a field, waiting to be found. The treasure is passive and hidden, but accessible. A treasure is not a wage or reward. Rather it is discovered, stumbled across. At first it is reburied, so it can be claimed with integrity. The treasure remains hidden while the discoverer of the treasure goes and buys the land. In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field. If there is joy in selling all that he has, the treasure is deemed worth more than all he currently owns. The person who finds the kingdom of God is joyfully willing to metaphorically sell all he or she has: one gives up self-definition to the extent that what one owns defines who one is. The finding of the kingdom of heaven changes a person's life; it has profound effects on

¹ The commentators I have consulted conflate the first two parables. They do not comment that joy is omitted in the second parable. God is seeking a holy nation to populate his kingdom. Does this omission of joy in Matthew relate to Jesus’ words on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
² N.T. Wright, Virtue Reborn, 222.
the one who discovers it. The exchange is welcomed joyfully, and it requires initiative and persistence on the part of the finder to engage in the process of appropriating the kingdom.

Luke records parables of God seeking out the lost. He places the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15: 1-7, cf. Mt 18:12-14) in the context of the grumbling of the scribes, that “this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them” (v2). Kenneth Bailey gives some background to how shepherding is practised in Aramaic villages. For a large flock there would be two people looking after the sheep, the owner and a hireling. The hireling would have no interest in finding the lost sheep. So the 99 sheep are left in the wilderness with the hireling. The owner finds and carries the sheep – quite a burden – but rejoices nevertheless. He invites his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him. “Just so there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Here the understanding of joy is communal. As Christians worship the triune God, God's joy is always communal as the holy Trinity, and Christians are drawn into the fellowship of the Trinity. The Christian community also rejoices over every sinner who repents.

The parable of the treasure and the parable of the lost sheep seem to be mutually exclusive. The action of the shepherd is determinative – the sheep is passive in being found. Either entering the kingdom happens because God chooses to rescue the lost sheep with no participation from the sheep – it is found and carried – or the one who enters the kingdom participates in the process by reburying the treasure, selling all he has, and he claims the treasure with integrity. One can either claim that Matthew and Luke had different theologies, and their views of Jesus are in conflict, or one can recognise these parables as different

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3 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasants’ Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), Book I, 142-156. Bailey grew up in Palestine. His parents were missionaries in remote Aramaic villages. This has given him a greater cultural understanding of the background to the Gospels and Psalms, hence I heavily rely on his insights.

4 John does not speak of entering the kingdom of God. Instead it is a matter of entering and remaining in fellowship with the Father and the Son, of being born again (John 3), of worshipping in Spirit and in truth (John 4), and of abiding in the vine (John 15).
perspectives on the one reign of God presented by Jesus. The shepherd-sheep metaphor is traditional from the time of King David (Psalm 23). The divine perspective rightly disposes over the creature. The parable of the treasure preserves a theocentric perspective in the fact that the treasure comes from outside the actions and intentions of the finder. There is divine joy in rescuing the sinner (as sheep), and there is human joy in responding to the rescue (appropriating the treasure). Finding the treasure invites participation, namely, to inhabit the new status of being rescued, of having “this treasure in an earthen vessel” (2 Cor 4:7). As we shall see, this is in stark contrast to the unforgiving servant who does not take up residence in his status of being a forgiven debtor.

Luke has a second parable of delight in finding the lost (Luke 15:8-10). Jesus addressed it to the sinners and tax-collectors as well as the grumbling Pharisees and scribes. A woman who had ten silver coins lost one. After a spring clean she found the coin and invited her friends and neighbours to celebrate with her. Joy on earth over a found coin once again comes to expression, not in isolation but in community, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.” Again the coin is passive, because the parable is told from the divine perspective. Again, the joy in heaven is communal. “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” For joy to be joy in the Jewish sense, it requires a celebration: “a blessing, a visitation.” Joy is anchored in relationship and a transaction. It has a meeting ground which must be entered, and on that meeting ground the apparent dichotomy is resolved, God and rescued sinners rejoice together in community.

5 In an anthropocentric society, Jesus provocatively uses a woman as the agent representing God.
6 As mentioned in Chapter 2, “Happiness is for the Declaration of Independence, a political condition, and also for the ending of movies. Joy, by contrast, is an illumination, as in Blake and Wordsworth and Rilke, a benediction, a visitation.” See Potkay, The Story of Joy, 22.
Entering the Kingdom: Ethical dimensions of the barriers to joy

The parables of the workers in the vineyard, the unforgiving servant and the one talent man depict barriers to joy that arise from a mistaken self-interested ethic. One can refuse joy on two accounts: either as a potential recipient of God’s grace, or as a spectator of the outpouring of God's grace on others. In the following stories, “entering into the joy of the Master” is thwarted.

The pericope of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16) is chosen because it illustrates the stifling of joy as spectators of God’s grace. In the previous chapter Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man raised the question of wealth and one’s entry into the kingdom of God. Peter ventured the question, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What will we then have (v27)?” Jesus responded with the promise of twelve thrones for the twelve disciples, and hundredfold reward for any sacrifices made now as a follower of Jesus, and the future inheritance of eternal life. Then comes the well-known aphorism, “But many who are first will be last” (Mt 19:30). Chapter 20 begins with “for” to indicate that what follows is an explication of this aphorism. The parable of the workers in the vineyard contains a rebuke to those who engage in self-centred self-evaluation instead of having their mind set on the kingdom of God represented by the vineyard. It illustrates self-centred engagement instead of an open-hearted participation in a communal venture. The parable challenges those who as self-centred spectators malign God’s generosity as injustice.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner …” The landowner is either not very business-minded, or he is very rich and generous in that he seeks maximum workforce participation, or perhaps there is great urgency to get the crops in before a hail storm or similar threat. The parable gives no indication of the mindset or motivation of the landowner. Jesus’ parables are usually overdrawn to make the point. The landowner employs

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people, day labourers, with varying degrees of commitment to work. The early workers are employed at a fair and negotiated rate. Three hours later, others have turned up in the market place, and he hires them too, at “whatever is right” (v3). Two understandings may be at work here, firstly, that a day’s work receives a day’s wage and anything else will be scaled down in proportion, or secondly, that one needs to feed one’s family and the landowner will look after the needs of workers.  

The same scenario is repeated at noon and at three o’clock. The crazy landowner went out to the market place at five o’clock, and found others standing around (v6). Without any open accusation of unreliability, he asks, “Why are you standing idle here all[?!] day?” The men respond with the obvious excuse, “No one has hired us.” There is no talk about wages this time (v7). They are sent. Obviously the workers are not able to discuss conditions under these circumstances, with only an hour before the end of the working day. The landowner makes no promises.

As a model of the kingdom of God the landowner adopts a strange routine. The latest arrivals are paid first, and the longest-working men have to wait the longest for their pay. The workers are all paid the same amount for greatly varying amounts of work, but all according to agreement, except for those sent into the vineyard at five o’clock who had no agreement. This order caused great consternation amongst those who had borne the heat of the day. The landowner insisted that he had the freedom to be generous to whomever he wanted to be generous (v15). The conclusion to the parable is that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It is noteworthy that willing participation is the landowner’s criterion for payment, not the hours worked.

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8 R. T. France in The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 749 offers this interpretation with regard to the needs of the day labourers. France does not engage in the possibility that the landowner may desire more workers for his vineyard, looking for participation, rather than being merely generous to unemployed day labourers (746-752).
The workers who agreed to work for a denarius seem to have little awareness of the needs of the vineyard; they saw their own needs and desires, and the wealth of the landowner. They were so concerned about what they perceived as an injustice that they rudely challenged the landowner (v12). Negotiating a wage gives dignity. Receiving a generous undeserved gift is charity, not a status symbol. The confusion of the free gift to the latecomers with a wage leads to serious status conflict for those who worked the full day. It seems that a strict duty ethic does not sit well with the kingdom of heaven. Grace, as undeserved gift is declared unjust by those who cling to duty as a means of self-identification. They cannot joyfully enter into the generosity of the landowner.

The theme of God’s generosity figures large in this parable as does the negative response of those who considered themselves better than the latecomers (v12). The story does not mention that the gift to the latecomers brings joy to the latecomers, and that the landowner feels some joy in employing and rewarding them, and feels joy in their joy. Nevertheless, his choice of the workers and his generosity are his glory, even if he is misunderstood (v15).

Barth writes of God’s election and human participation in God’s glory as an outworking of joy within the Holy Trinity and places joy in the context of the glory of God.

God's glory is the indwelling joy of his divine being which as such shines out from Him, which overflows in its richness, which in its super-abundance is not satisfied with itself but communicates itself ... And when man accepts again his destiny in Jesus Christ in the promise and faith of the future revelation of his participation in God's glory as it is already given him here and now, he is only like a latecomer slipping shamefacedly into the choir in heaven and on earth, which has never ceased its praise, ...

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9 These workers omitted any honorific address.
10 See Eph 2:8-10. Paul addresses this same ethical complex in propositional form rather than parable form.
13 CD II/1, 647-8. My italics.
Those who work all day pride themselves on their achievement to such an extent that it blocks this “participation in God’s glory” and they thus stifle any joy in the landlord’s generosity towards others and block any celebration of his glory.

The second parable deals with a similar wrong reaction to God’s generosity, but this time the focus is on the recipient of that generosity, rather than on the spectators. The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35) is preceded by Peter’s question about how often one should forgive a person who is part of the household of faith. Again, the phrase “for this reason” placed at the beginning of the parable signals the elaboration of the theme of forgiveness.

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who …” Accounts have to be reconciled before the king. Early in the reckoning, a servant of the king arrives. He owes the equivalent of 150,000 years’ wages, an obviously hyperbolic amount. The king orders the man and his family to be sold into slavery, and his goods to be auctioned off. The servant throws himself at the king’s feet and pleads with the king to be patient, and that he will repay. The king does not challenge the outrageous assumption about the servant’s longevity, but takes pity on him and releases him from his obligation. “But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him [a hundred days wages], and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe’ ”(v 28). No mercy is shown here. When the report of this incident reaches the ears of the king, the forgiven debtor is recalled, and he is dealt with mercilessly.

The unforgiving debtor is an intriguing character. He is forgiven the debt, but he does not accept this release. He finds no joy in the release. The importance of honour, of “saving face”, is no longer as great in our culture as it is in Aramaic culture. The priority given to

14 The NRSV Study Bible has a footnote indicating that a talent of silver was the value of fifteen years’ wages for a laborer.
protecting one's reputation is a key feature in several of Jesus' parables (Cf. Prov 22:1-2). So for a proud debtor, there is no joy in being forgiven. His reputation as a good steward has been damaged; forgiveness only accentuates the damage. On his way out, he immediately and violently insists on the repayment of a debt.

The debtor asks for mercy in a framework of justice: debts have to be repaid. He does not ask for remission of the debt. His request to be allowed to repay and so maintain his reputation is rebuffed. The king instead grants unconditional mercy. The erstwhile debtor perceives it as a lasting accusation of failure and refuses the gracious remission of debt.

When a person who falls short of an ethic of duty refuses grace, the person may engage in desperate actions. The outward acts resulting from this inner desperation appear hypocritical to an observer, but these acts do not result from an intentional hypocrisy. They result from a theology and ethic that cannot accept grace. For the unforgiving servant forgiveness runs counter to an ethic of duty. If one is permitted an anachronism, he is the misguided existentialist for whom self-authentication is more important than God’s declaration of failure, forgiveness and freedom. The debtor’s stance aborts joyful participation in God’s glorious grace and this stance can have no place in the kingdom of God which primarily exists for God and only secondarily for humanity. Here refusal of God’s grace brings a heavy sentence.

The third parable, the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), brings this matter of self-definition out into the open through the one talent man. The parable belongs to the discourses after the final entry into Jerusalem. It follows the parable of the ten bridesmaids, which highlights the need for watchfulness and preparedness for the eschatological event. The

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16 Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 140-151. In his threefold purpose of the law, he calls this stage the second function of the law. It is the ‘radical law’ that drives the non-believer to despair. This matter is expanded on in my Chapter 4.
17 The reader is reminded of the grace, law and *pro nobis* discussion in Chapter 2.
parable of the talents is followed by the scene of the last judgement. The context is therefore eschatological, speaking of the coming king. But Jesus also spoke of the kingdom being already present among his disciples. To read the parable of the talents in such a way that entering into the joy of the Master is only possible after Christ's return misses the now in the now and not yet of the kingdom of God.

In a way unforeseen in the traditional eschatology, believers live in a curious time of 'overlap' between the old age and the new. Bodily they are anchored in the present, passing age, vulnerable to its onslaught, in the shape of temptation, suffering and death, with 'resurrection' still an object of hope (Rom. 8:9-11, 23); in the Spirit, however, they here and now enjoy the relationship to God characteristic of the new era (Rom. 5:5, 8:14-15).\(^\text{18}\)

On this basis, the parable has relevance to the Christian community here and now.

The kingdom here is likened to a man who summoned his workers to entrust to them some of his property before he went away on a journey. He entrusts amounts of money to them according to their ability. The five-talent person and the two-talent person begin trading straight away and end up doubling the money entrusted to them. They accept the trust placed in them and the implied request to be of service. They cooperate with the master. These two accept the assessment of their master. There is no stifling consideration of overwhelming risks. There is no character assassination of the master. They are at ease with their master; they are in tune with his purposes and his judgement of their abilities. There is thus a tacit acknowledgement of a mutual respectful relationship. The investment entrusted to them is not a gift; yet they are given plenipotentiary powers over the investment. For the servants, the psychological dimension of this relationship between the master and servants, the master’s transfer of money and the workers' acceptance of it, is one of confident, purposive participation. Both servants operate in, and because of, this two-sided relationship. It results in the later invitation to “enter the joy of your master.”

The third worker receives one talent, according to his implied lesser ability. He distrusts himself and he distrusts his master’s estimation of him. He perceives the invitation to participate in wealth creation as a threat, as a poisoned chalice. His relationship with his master does not reflect a two-sided confident participation at the level of his ability, nor of mutual joyful respect, but a relationship marked by a two-sided deficit. In the worker’s own estimation of himself he cannot handle it adequately, so he minimises risk and buries the money. The worker also perceives the master to be unreasonable in asking him to trade with the one talent. The master is seen as having a deficit, as well as the worker seeing himself with a deficit.

After a long time it was time to report. The master said to both the five-talent and the two-talent worker, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave, you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” To “enter into the joy of” another person is a peculiar turn of phrase if joy is merely individual. The phrase certainly implies empathy with the person whose joy is being entered. It also implies a shared purpose. Not only is one happy for the other person to feel some joy, but one is invited to participate in that joy actively, to enter it. Joy here seems to be associated with agreed purposeful action, action enjoyed by both parties, although only one party has the right and authority to issue the invitation.

When the person who received one talent came forward, the atmosphere was not one of joyful mutual contemplation. “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you do not sow and gathering where you did not scatter seed; …” Furthermore, this worker rejected the master's assessment of his ability, “… so I was afraid and hid your talent in the ground.”

In the parable, those who operate in an ambience of joyful participation do not have to relinquish their stewardship on the day of the audit. They continue to administer the funds.
This is indicated by the five-talent worker now being referred to as “the one with the ten talents,” and he receives the unused one talent as well, thereby putting the lie to the accusation that the master reaps where he does not sow, and gathers where he does not scatter.

The contrast presented by the parable is relational: either participate and enter the joy of the master or end up in isolation where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable presents the acceptance of God's estimation of us and his gifts for fruitful participation as the right attitude in action. It also identifies a double-deficit attitude as the source of wrong action, namely, rejecting the master's request and the master’s assessment of his ability. In contra-distinction, open-hearted participation in God's purposes appears to be at the heart of Christian joy.

The relationship of the “faithful” with repentant sinners

Luke’s Gospel has three consecutive stories (Luke 15:11-16:8) that illustrate how one is to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God: the stories of the welcoming father, the elder son, and the story of the dishonest steward. The story of the dishonest steward follows on immediately from the story of the elder son. This trilogy is exclusively Lucan, and Bailey approaches it from the perspective of joyful participation in the kingdom of God. Such an approach seems to be novel, but yields a more satisfactory interpretation with regard to the story of the dishonest steward. The trilogy does not begin with a claim to be a series of parables, nor do the stories end with allusions to what is going on in heaven, as is the case with the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin. These first two stories seem to be encouragements to the listeners to deal with repentant sinners in an appropriate way – like the father, and not like the elder son. The relationship of the elder son with his father is then set over against the relationship of the dishonest steward with his master.

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19 Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 158-206 and 86-118.
In the stories that Jesus told, the hyperbolic nature of the stories make them memorable. The younger son did the unspeakable in Aramaic culture, impatiently asking to be paid out before his father’s death. As the younger son, he was entitled to one third of the estate, the elder (first-born) son receiving a double portion. Relationships must have been strained for the younger brother to seek to leave home with his share of the value of estate. The younger obviously has no sense of duty or social responsibility – and the elder brother is consumed by an overdeveloped sense of duty.

The father remains on the lookout for his younger son, longing for him to return. But he does not go out and search for him. He does not seek him while feeding the pigs. He waits with longing for his return, of his own accord. When the wayward son returns, the father is overjoyed. In Aramaic culture, elderly gentlemen do not run. It would be too undignified. But joy is an emotion that cannot be contained within the body; it spills over into action. So the father runs to meet his son and embraces him, and orders the servants to prepare a fulsome welcome.

The elder son has not yet appropriated the inheritance from his father. He cannot, because if he were to do so, he would have stooped to his brother’s level. The elder son cannot bring himself to celebrate using his father’s substance while his father is still alive. One may surmise that he is working hard to make good the loss of one third of his father’s estate. The elder son lives in a double-deficit mentality. Firstly, his father has not ever given him a lamb to have his friends over (forgetting that his father has divested himself of his property), and secondly his father now wastes the fatted calf (which technically belongs to the elder son) on this no-good son of his. The father is morally culpable in the eyes of the elder son. This story has some echoes of those workers’ attitude who worked all day in the vineyard. Duty cannot tolerate gift. Grim-faced constraining duty blocks confident

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20 The eldest received a double portion according to Jewish custom. Cf. Elisha's request for a double portion of God's Spirit, to be Elijah's successor (2 Kings 2:9).
participation, and hence blocks a joyful relationship. On the positive side, Navone identifies the notion of invitation and participation as key to “the communitarian dimension of the Lucan theology of Christian joy.” But the elder son refuses.

Bailey gives a culturally authentic account of the story of the dishonest steward. The story functions as a counterfoil to the elder son’s lack of confident participation in his father’s estate. Here the dishonest steward confidently and presumptuously trades on the generosity of the master. The master is not blind to the excesses of the steward. The master is rich and generous, but when his reputation is tarnished by the gossip about the steward’s profligacy, he decides that the steward’s position must be terminated.

The steward continues to trade on the fact that his master is generous. To each land holder the steward paints the master as a paragon of generosity, a generosity obtained through the steward’s representations to the master on their behalf. He quickly urges each tenant to write reductions of rent for the land used to raise the crops specified, before the master might begin to reconsider. The master now will have two choices. He can repeal this unauthorised generosity and blame the steward, and he will suffer some damage to his own reputation as a rich and generous man, or he can let the altered contracts stand. For an Oriental, reputation is more important than money. “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold” (Prov 22:1-2). The master chooses “a good name” and enjoys the praise and thanks from those who are renting his fields, just as the dishonest steward has surmised. The story concludes with a question critical of the elder son: If the unrighteous know how to entrust themselves to the generosity of a benefactor, why do the righteous have trouble entrusting themselves to God's generosity?

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24 The high value placed on reputation in Aramaic culture is crucial to a correct understanding of the story.
25 Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 86-109. The details given by Bailey are based on Aramaic culture and are quite extensive. They have been omitted for the sake of brevity.
It becomes clear in retrospect that the elder son has no idea of what constitutes joyful participation in the father's estate. He refuses to benefit from it, because he wants to be better than “that son of his father's”. He personifies the self-righteous unhappy moralist. The dishonest steward is a counter-example to the elder son, demonstrating what joyful acceptance of, and participation in, generosity looks like. The dishonest steward knows his master’s character and trades on it to good effect, not entirely for selfish ends. The reduction in the contracted amounts builds community. The master’s reputation is increased, the master becomes a village hero. The tenants are happy, they have to pay less, and the dishonest steward has made friends. The steward is more than a happy immoralist. He is happy with his achievement, of course. He is commended for his shrewdness by the master, and he is surrounded by a thankful community. Yet he is still recognised as dishonest by the master who, by choice, basks in the reputation of a lavish generosity.

It seems that the story of the dishonest steward was told by Jesus as an encouragement to enter into God's joy, to participate confidently in the generosity of the kingdom, to leave self-definition behind, to participate in God's kingdom with joy. The dishonest steward had a sound understanding of this process of entrustment – and acted presumptuously. Life in the kingdom of God is entrustment without such presumption. It is a source of Christian joy.

Joy in the Gospel of John, Acts and the Epistles

Joy in John's Gospel centres around Jesus the incarnate Word. He works in and with the disciples to fulfil the Father's purpose. In John 15:1-8 Jesus announces himself as the true vine, of which his disciples are the branches, pruned and shaped by his Father, the vine dresser. The disciples are to produce much fruit. Abiding in the vine, participating in the production of fruit, is described as the essence of discipleship. Their acts as disciples now

26 See Psalm 80:7-8 and 14-17. The vine imagery gives a pictorial representation of Paul's phrase being “in Christ”. The believer's identity is in Christ.
occur on the level of friendship, of a joyfully shared purpose through prayer in Jesus' name (v7). Jesus concludes with, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (v11).” Participation in God's purposes remains no longer on the level of servants who simply follow commands of their master without knowing the larger context of their actions (v15).

Jesus' prayer for his disciples emphasises this joyful participation in God's purpose. In John 17:19 Jesus prays, “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word (v20).” By being consecrated in the truth the disciples are commissioned to participate in God's purposes. These two instances in John's Gospel are reminiscent of the words of the master in the parable of the talents, “Enter the joy of your Master.” Joy is the heartbeat of being and acting as a disciple, whether the disciple is one of the twelve, or one of those who later come to believe because of their word.

These two passages frame Jesus' words about pain and suffering for his sake in John 16:20-24. But their sorrow will turn into joy when they see him again (v22), referring to his resurrection appearances rather than the parousia.27 Again the theme is joyful participation in the purposes of God, “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete (v24).”

References to joy and rejoicing occur frequently in Acts and the Epistles, but many are concerned with experiencing healing such as the lame man in the temple (Acts 3:8) and the curing of the demon-possessed and lame in Samaria (Acts 8:8). There is joy, if not exultation, in coming to faith for the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39) and for believers in general (Rom 5:11) in their reconciliation with God. Believers in Jerusalem hearing of the gentile converts rejoice (Acts 15:3), and the Apostle Paul delights in the progress of his charges (1 Thess 2:19-
20, 1 Tim 1:4, Phm 7). There are several instances in Acts where joy in participating in the purposes of God is recorded. In Acts 5:41, the apostles “rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name.” In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas encourage gentile converts to Judaism and some believing Jews to “continue in the grace of God” (13:43). When the leading men of the city stirred up trouble, Paul and Barnabas “shook the dust off their feet” and left Antioch of Pisidia but “the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (v52).” Participation in the purposes of God under the guidance of the Spirit brings joy, even in persecution.

This theme is also found in the Epistles. With regard to joy in participating in the purposes of God, Paul wrote to believers in Rome “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). To the Corinthians he wrote, “... we are workers with you, for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith” (2 Cor 1:24). To the Galatians he pointed out that joy was the fruit of God's Spirit at work in them (Gal 5:22). Paul exhorted the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always: “Again I will say, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:4-7). Paul praised the Thessalonians: “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1Thess 1:6). The writer of Hebrews challenged his audience: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that

28 Aland et al., ed., The Greek New Testament does not confirm the King James Version's translation of Acts 20:24, which reads “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” The words “with joy” are not found in the Greek, and the NRSV also omits the words “with joy”.
would be harmful to you” (Heb 13:17). James wrote, “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4). In 1 Peter 1 the mention of being “born anew ... to an inheritance” (v4) implies family participation. On this basis the author addressed the exiles in the Dispersion with these words: “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9). The theme of participation is reinforced: “But rejoice in so far as you are sharing in Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet 4:13). 29

Participation in the works of God is central in the Christian ethic; such participation results in doing what is good, right and to be done. Ephesians 2:8-10 spells out clearly the expectation that Christians are God's workmanship for “walking” in God's purposes, but the passage does not mention joy directly: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The matter of the believer's cooperation with God, and the believer's contemplation of God contemplating the believer, is outlined in Ephesians 5:8-10: “[F]or once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.” Romans 12 is a similar encouragement to search out the will of God and to exercise one's gifts in the service of God with enthusiasm. In contrast, believers are no longer to “live as the Gentiles live (Eph 5:17)”, who “have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to pursue every kind of iniquity. That is not the way you learned Christ!” (Eph 5:19-20). Only

29 See Mt 5:10 which carries the same theme.
sensitivity to the will of God through prayer and *learning* can lead to joyful participation in the purposes of God. This matter of learning will be taken up more fully in Chapter five.

In an ethic that focuses on rules and duty, or in a virtue ethics that focuses individualistically on character, there is little room for joy. In the outward looking, communal participation in the purposes of the Holy Trinity, moral action leads to joy in the context of the triadic relationship between the individual believer, the human community and the Holy Trinity. Participation in the purposes of God leads the believer into an increasing learning and understanding of what is good, right and to be done in joyfully fulfilling the purposes of God. Joy, even in suffering, is the heartbeat of a Christian ethic.

To summarize, a Christian ethic of joy based on the above texts is different from other ethics. The end or purpose, the *telos* of general virtue ethics is *eudaemonia*, human flourishing. This flourishing is generally restricted to the socio-political dimension of life, but Christian ethics looks beyond the current socio-political situation to the coming kingdom of God, the new heaven and earth. A Christian ethic of joy is anchored in welcoming God’s grace, firstly the invitation to participate in the joy and purpose of an external divine partner and Lord whose indwelling Spirit teaches and empowers the moral agent to participate in that purpose. In a Christian ethic of joy, character is learned just as in a more general virtue ethics. Character is a result of continuing moral actions, namely, the participation in the purposes of God to the glory of God. There is a focus beyond the socio-political community, and this makes the Christian virtues radically different from the more generally recognised virtues. Chapters four and five will explore further the matter of joyful obedience through participation from a theological perspective and an ethics perspective, respectively.
Chapter 4
Construals: Ontology and joy in the freedom of obedience

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, there is much biblical material on joy. Theological discourse on joy must be informed by this material, yet there seems to be a reluctance to engage with the topic of joy in the context of ethics. The relative lack of writing on joy from an ethical perspective may have many reasons.¹ On the one hand, there is a fear of false triumphalism, a fear of fostering an escapism that is unwilling to deal with the hard questions of life. But a Christian’s joy emanates from eschatological salvation – both now richly experienced and not yet – in the call to participate in the worship of God and in the amelioration of suffering in the world. Such participation in the purposes of God militates against any false triumphalism and escapism.² On the other hand, Potkay warns against harnessing joy to a “cause” to manipulate people by transmuting an indicator into a norm.³ I have argued that Christian joy arises in the “in-between” of a relationship. Joy is unmediated; true joy cannot be compelled; it arises from congruence between one’s intuitions about life and how one’s life is lived; joy is indicative of this congruence.

Karl Barth identified theology as language peculiar to the Church. This language is the attempt by the Church to question itself as to whether it speaks truly in what it proclaims. Barth identified three areas of such speech:

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¹ For example, James Alison’s work, provocatively called The Joy of being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), does not list joy in the index, nor does it mention the word again in the text, as far as I can determine.
² In the glowing passage on God’s glory and human joy in CD II.1, 653-5, in the centre of page 654, Barth writes “All this has nothing whatever to do with an optimistic glossing over of the need and the condition of mankind. On the other hand, the latter cannot alter, but is confuted and overcome by the fact that God must be the object of joy.” For Barth, does joy have an object, like happiness, or is it relational?
³ See my Chapter 1 and Potkay, The Story of Joy, 227.
Thus as Biblical theology, theology is the question as to the foundation, as practical theology it is the question as to the aim, as dogmatic theology it is the question as to the content, of the language peculiar to the Church.¹

These areas are interconnected as three overlapping circles, with their centres lying within each other, implying a large and not too disproportionate overlap for each circle with the others. Chapter three dealt with Barth’s first question of foundations. Barth’s third question about content will be answered in this chapter with regard to joy arising from how Christians think and act in an integrated way as a whole persons. The second question about the practical aspect, the aim of language about joy, will be dealt with in the following chapter, but some overlap between Chapters three, four and five is unavoidable, since Christian ethics integrates all three of these aspects of theology. Ethics is practical theology in that it has sanctification as an aim, but it also examines its foundations, and has content. Elsewhere Barth describes ethics in this way:

> Ethics as a theological discipline is the auxiliary science to dogmatics. Ethics searches in the Word of God for an answer to the question about the quality of human action. Ethics, as a special explication of the teaching of sanctification, is a reflection on how far the Word of God proclaimed and heard in Christian preaching achieves a certain Inanspruchnahme of human beings. ²

The term In-anspruch-nahme (literally, a taking into claim) is difficult to translate. Its meaning approximates to the English word “call” or “call upon”, but it has a stronger sense of having a claim made on someone or something. When one is “called”, a demand is made of the hearer. The word “call” contains the possibility that the call may not be heard due to an inner distraction of the hearer, or due to surrounding noise. In contrast, Inanspruchnahme implies that the hearer of the call has already heard the request, and that the one making the request has an implied right to make it.³ The call of God addresses human beings and makes a demand on them as creatures created by

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¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 3.
God and redeemed in Jesus Christ. An exploration of how such *Inanspruchnahme*, such a requisitioning, can be received joyfully is the purpose of this chapter. I engage with Barth as a theologian positing joy in the Trinity. McFague, as an erstwhile Barthian, is also of interest because she and Barth are twentieth century theologians with reversed methodologies and diametrically opposed content. The matter of construal needs to be raised because the theological framework determines both the authenticity and the scope of a Christian's joyful participation in the purposes of God. This chapter will explore this relationship.

Here we face the matter of ontology: in what sense can theology be said to speak of God and the world as reality? Theology establishes a context in which Christians may be joyful. The different construals of the relation of individual to community and to God, and of God's relation to the believer and community will be shown to have significance for joyful and authentic moral action.

The Nature of Construal

Religions, of whatever kind, are more than mere vehicles for ethics. They are celebrations and rituals, grand narratives and systems of meaning that, among other things, give reasons for behaviour considered moral by them. When religion becomes a mere vehicle for ethics, it has consequences. Religion becomes mere duty, and the notions of “entering the joy of the Master” or “the heartbeat of life as holy joy” either become incomprehensible or are seen merely as an imaginative construal, and therefore superfluous. When celebration and grand narrative are disallowed as fabrication, then all that remains is duty and social contract. Christianity is no exception. Writing of the Lutheran tradition of the mid-twentieth century, Jürgen Moltmann offered this critique:

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Theology does not have much use for aesthetic categories. Faith has lost its joy, since it has felt constrained to exorcise the old law with a law of the new. Where everything must be useful and used, faith tends to regard its own freedom as good for nothing. It tries to make itself useful and in so doing often gambles away its freedom. Ethics is supposed to be everything.\(^8\)

Moltmann found this fault in Lutheran theological discourse one generation after the publication of the *Church Dogmatics*. Johnson also laments this paring down of religion to its ethical injunctions as “Dionysian malnourishment”. Entering the joy of the Master is somewhat problematic, if the master-servant or Father-child relationship is deemed non-existent or one that is based solely on obligation.

Our perception and understanding of the world we experience, directly and indirectly, depends on sensation, language and memory: information stored in the brain. In that sense, all our knowledge is construal, an electrochemical and biochemical representation of one's experience of the world. Some of our construals are immediate, others are mediated. When you see some forks and knives on a table you do not say, “I see these implements on the table as knives and forks.” Rather, there is immediacy in your seeing, and you report it as such. You see the forks and knives.\(^9\) On the other hand, when someone is deliberately rude to you, you will see it as a personal attack on you. Some construals are immediate and some are mediated. It is important to be able to tell the difference also with regard to theological construal.

Another matter affecting our perception and understanding is the making of distinctions. When distinctions are made and then falsely insisted on as dichotomies with no common ground between the extremes, such false dichotomies distort reality. The converse is also true. A synthesis of true dichotomies also leads to distortion of

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reality. Because false dichotomies and syntheses may confuse the understanding of Christian joy, this matter deserves some attention.\textsuperscript{10}

The dichotomising of experiential and propositional truth results in a false bifurcation of reality.\textsuperscript{11} Illustrations from computer programming may demonstrate the point with regard to propositional and experiential truth. When the accounts of a business are computerised, the accounts are stored as an electronic construal in the computer memory, or perhaps as a magnetic construal on the hard disc drive. The fact that it is a construal, a representation “only”, is of no consequence to auditors, accountants and cash register operators. Such a representation, however, must be very propositional for it to work, so that the experience of the employees of the business corresponds with the accounts represented by the accountancy package. The package is propositionally designed to be a realistic construal to conform with experience.

A computer game, in order for the program to work according to plan must have a clearly defined logic, just as an accountancy package does. But the experience of the player of the game is not restricted to reality as experienced outside the game. She does not necessarily expect the representation of events in the game to match real events. A game is an imaginative construal, obviously needing some conformity with experience in order to be playable, but there is no need for a one-to-one correspondence with events in the game and experiences outside the game. We do not say the computer game is “wrong”, when a character in the game can teleport to another location or swallow a pill to double her strength. Such imaginative construals of an alternative world are the life-

\textsuperscript{10} Friedrich Schiller's \textit{Ode to Joy} contains these lines with regard to joy,

Deine Zauber binden wieder,  
Was die Mode streng geteilt;  
Once more your magic couples,  
what high fashion split in twain.

blood of virtual reality. Without experience, propositional truth is a mere abstraction; and without some propositional framework, experience is meaningless.

How we live with our construals is another matter worth considering. To give another example of realistic construal, cartographers make maps that are meant to be useful representations of actual locations and regions of space. Yet the maps in the front of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*\(^{12}\) are an imaginative construal, and one can enter into Tolkien's world imaginatively. One can even construct a real location to match Tolkien's imagination, such as Hobbiton\(^{13}\) in New Zealand and physically enter it, and become an actor in the film. When actors remain trapped in their acting, we call them insane. On the other hand, an accountancy package, without a business to apply it to, remains a mere abstract concept and may not deserve the name *construal*, as it lacks concrete content.

It is therefore important to recognise the different pathways of construals – from reality to an alternative imaginative representation implemented in reality (Hobbiton), or from reality to reality (an accountancy package in use, or a flight simulator being used to train pilots). The more imaginative construals can be enjoyed as a form of entertainment. We temporarily escape the frustrations of existence by entering an imagined world of our own construction, whether it be music, a play, a novel, or a computer game.

We distinguish realistic construals from imaginative construals. There is a further possibility with regard to construals. A construal of reality that disallows a particular structure of reality will cause problems. For example, a construal of reality without reference to an adequate concept of time leads to conflict between experience

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\(^{13}\) Coach Tours to Hobbiton continue to be available.
and logic: the framework of Zeno's paradox is inadequate with regard to time. As a consequence, Achilles cannot overtake the tortoise, simply because the tortoise had a head start.\(^\text{14}\)

Most human beings can distinguish between construals that represent error, fantasy and reality. This indicates that it is legitimate to make a difference between inadequate construals, imaginative construals and realistic construals. Erroneous, realistic and imaginative construals involve both experiential and propositional aspects. These two aspects should not be dichotomised.

**Sallie McFague's construal**

In her book *Models of God* Sallie McFague attempts to imaginatively reconstruct God from the assumption that, even in the face of imminent nuclear and ecological disaster, there is a personal force on the side of life and its fulfilment.\(^\text{15}\) Further, she regards patriarchal and monarchical language as outdated and inimical to the survival of life on earth in view of the ecological and nuclear crises facing our world.

> No matter how ancient a metaphorical [i.e., religious] tradition may be and regardless of its credentials in Scripture, liturgy, and credal statements, it still must be discarded if it threatens the continuation of life itself.\(^\text{16}\)

For McFague the human record of God's revelation presented in Scripture is just an earlier form of human introspection; it is what we can say of and by ourselves about God.

I begin with the assumption that what we can say with any assurance about the character of the Christian faith is very little and even that will be highly contested. Christian faith is, it seems to me, most basically a claim that the universe is neither

\(^{14}\) One of Zeno's Paradoxes. By allowing Achilles always to only run to the spot where the tortoise was at the end of the previous interval of time, the intervals of time become shorter and shorter. Time has lost its independence and is subsumed in space, leading to a contradiction with experience.


indifferent nor malevolent but that there is a power (and a personal power at that) which is on the side of life and its fulfilment.\textsuperscript{17}

She operates in strong contrast to Barth's notion of a self-revealing God.

… [B]ut when we try to say something more [about God], we turn, necessarily, to the 'loves' we know (unless one is a Barthian and believes that God defines love and that all human love only conforms to the divine pattern).\textsuperscript{18}

Barth would agree with McFague to the extent that God’s commands are affirmative of human wellbeing,\textsuperscript{19} and that there is very little we can say purely from ourselves about the Christian God. For Barth what God has said to, and done for, humans in Jesus Christ is determinative for human existence in the New Covenant. According to McFague, Paul and John expounded a new covenant triggered by the incarnation. So McFague asks, “What should we be doing for our time that would be comparable to what Paul and John did for theirs?”\textsuperscript{20} Her question is a call to action motivated by the need to rescue the world from nuclear and ecological disaster. “What our time lacks, and hence a task that theology must address, is an imaginative construal of the God-world relationship that is credible to us.”\textsuperscript{21} The need for credibility seems to put epistemology ahead of ontology. She wants to develop credible imagery that speaks of loving care for the environment and imagery that speaks to women, such as mother, friend and lover instead of the more frequent scriptural images of father, king, and lord. She characterises her theology as experimental and as salvific: for, if nuclear war destroys humanity, “the cosmos would have lost its consciousness”.\textsuperscript{22} Her theology in \textit{Models of God} is essentially utilitarian.\textsuperscript{23} If a religion or theology does not lead to salvation of the planet, then it needs to be discarded. She develops the concept of the

\textsuperscript{17} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, x.
\textsuperscript{18} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 192, footnote 37. I think she overstates Barth’s position somewhat. Sadly, aspects of human love do not conform to God’s love.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Church Dogmatics} II/2, 583-630.
\textsuperscript{20} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 30. On what basis can McFague establish another, newer covenant?
\textsuperscript{21} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 32.
\textsuperscript{22} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 77.
\textsuperscript{23} McFague, \textit{Models of God}, 192, endnote 37. Her view is “largely a functional, pragmatic view of truth.”
world as the “body of God” in order to create respect for creation. A negative epistemology seems to precede ontology. She is quite open about her theology being “experimental” and “mostly fiction.”

So we try out different models and metaphors in an attempt to talk about what we do not know how to talk about: the relationship between God and the world, from a Christian perspective, for our time.

By this methodology, God's relationship with the world becomes an imaginative construal from psychological necessity because humans have a notion of God being on the side of life and its fulfilment.

At this point the reader is reminded of the theocentric nature of the Christian framework. The pro nobis found in Scripture is both fundamental in the very act of creation (Gen 1-2) and redemption (Ex 20, Jn 3:16, Rom 5:23), but after the expulsion from paradise this pro nobis is also provisional (Gn 6-9, Jn 3:16-20, Acts 5, note the “if” in Rom 8:28, Rev 22: ). In McFague’s theology, a Christian’s joy would need to result from an imaginative anthropological construal that cannot lay claim to theocentricity.

My thesis is that Christian joy arises from the congruence of one's life with the purposes of a knowable God and from fellowship with this God. In McFague's scheme if there is joy, it results from an imaginative construal, a joy in our power to inhabit satisfying fiction that meets our perceived psychological needs and enunciates ways of saving our planet. Such joy lacks the contact with a knowable personal Other, and hence the space in which the action occurs is not a space between. There is happiness in McFague's construction, but such happiness has no resonating partner at a deeper level;

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it remains an agreement between one's own experimental ideas and one's subjective view of the world.  

27 The desire for full presence, whether in the form of nostalgia for the garden of Eden, or the quest for the historical Jesus, or the myth of God incarnate, is a denial of what we know as adults to be the case. In human existence: such innocence, certainty and absoluteness are not possible.  

Such a functional atheism thoroughly undermines any concept of knowingly participating in the purposes of God. In the context of the Gospels and Epistles, God is understood to relate to human beings from outside of their internal construal. Therefore one needs to look for a realist construal. In entering the joy of the Master the human being resonates in response to a knowable external Other, who is the source of meaning. Entering the joy of the Master is a living, relational joy where epistemology follows on from ontology.

The imaginative nature of McFague's theology substitutes the magnificence of participating in the joy of the Master with a useful notion and a human-divine monologue on the human side. McFague is aware of the consequence of her useful intellectual construal, but the consequence is not seen as an inadequacy by her; on the contrary, it arises as a result of being “adult”. In pursuing her re-constructive approach to theology, McFague follows the theological liberal tradition to which Barth was strongly opposed. He clearly stated this opposition in an address to the Swiss Reformed Ministers' Association in 1956 in these words:

This God who is also man's free partner in a history inaugurated by Him and in a dialogue ruled by Him was in danger of being reduced, along with this history and this dialogue, to a pious notion – to a mystical expression and symbol of a current alternating between a man and his own heights or depths. But whatever truth was gained in this way could be only that of a monologue.  

29 In fairness to McFague, I acknowledge that she tries to bring some sort of encounter back into the model. She proposes the world to be seen as the body of God (69-78). But that leads to quite a different encounter from that characterised in the Gospels.

28 McFague, Models of God, 25. This argument has substance, if one allows the evolutionary paradigm to trump the biblical paradigm. She searches for an “evolutionary ecological sensibility” that is “commensurate … with the Christian faith”(20).

29 Karl Barth, The Humanity of God, 36.
If there is any happiness in a monologue, it tends to be self-congratulatory. As McFague says, “We are trying to think in an as-if fashion about the God-world relationship because we have no other way of thinking about it.” Here epistemology produces a “model”, what I would call a pseudo-ontology. As indicated earlier, if the pseudo-ontology is salvific, she will adopt it as a workable “model”.

The following story highlights the inadequacy of monologues. The Australian philosopher Raimond Gaita recalls a personal experience as a youthful assistant in a psychiatric ward. The patients who “appeared to have irretrievably lost everything which gives meaning to our lives,” were treated brutally by most of the staff. A small group of psychiatrists and nurses worked devotedly to improve their condition because they believed in the “inalienable dignity” even of those patients. Gaita admired these professionals enormously. One day a nun came into the ward.

The way she spoke to [the patients], her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.

Gaita draws attention firstly to the inadequacy of a professional construal that lacks lived conviction, and secondly to the philosophical difficulty of accounting for unconditional love from a purely naturalistic construal of reality. He was confronted by the gap between an abstraction based on what we want to believe to be true, and action based on what we know to be true.

A lived faith conviction results in action emanating from a prior joyous resonance with God's joy. The nun had what Barth called “a rich heart that recognises

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in everything the holy God from whom everything originates.” According to Gaita, the nun's love was palpable. While Gaita would not put it this way, she had the assurance described by John Wesley: “the testimony of our conscience, which we could never have by fleshly wisdom, that in simplicity and sincerity we have our conversation in the world. This is properly the ground of a Christian's joy.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words also fit the nun's actions:

> It is not by ideals and programmes or by conscience, duty, responsibility and virtue that reality can be confronted and overcome, but simply and solely by the perfect love of God. Here again it is not by a general idea of love that this is achieved, but by the really lived love of God in Jesus Christ.

McFague’s framework denies the possibility of such “innocence, certainty and absoluteness” to adults.

If we can indeed say very little about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, then our faith will accord with a construct of our own imaginative choosing. It would be the inward theological parallel to the virtual reality of a computer game. If, on the other hand, this God is the God who reveals himself, and if this triune God is the Creator of heaven and earth, then living in his creation and conforming to the revelation which he provides and by which we are “requisitioned”, would not merely be some useful human construal or entertaining escapism, but truly living in reality. Here ontology is the basis for epistemology. Encounter with God as

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37 Alain de Button, a confirmed atheist and philosopher, commented on the usefulness of religious rituals to deal with the larger milestones in life. He noted the lack of appropriate ceremonies in secularism for forgiving one another, as the Jewish Day of Atonement does. (ABC1, The 7.30 Report, 22nd February, 2012.) Could this suggest that atheism is an inadequate construal?
Creator and Redeemer and encounter with fellow humans as God's creatures is the foundation on which a Christian's joy in and from doing good works rests.\(^{38}\)

Those who embrace McFague's construal put epistemology before ontology. They do not have the immediacy of encounter; it is only an imaginatively construed encounter, in which God gains no admittance to the construction. Imaginative construal does not lend itself to a joy that resonates with the joy of the Master. We consider now whether there is room in Barth's theology for the kind of joy demonstrated by Gaita's nun and Buber's Hassidic coachman.

**Barth's Construal[s]**

Many of Barth's occasional addresses, sermons and papers have a relational aspect to them and make space for a transactional (as distinct from an imaginary) relationship with God as Christians joyfully engages in the purposes of God. Yet the flavour of the *Church Dogmatics* is strongly conceptual and does not adequately explore the theme of human joy in participating in God's joy. This raises the question of whether one should use the plural of construal for the heading of this section.

In strong contrast to Sallie McFague, Barth steadfastly refused to derive the character of God from human introspection. In the Gifford Lectures of 1937-8 he pronounced a resounding No! against natural theology. The problem of autonomous human construal had blighted theology. Barth wanted to re-establish theology as the study of the God who reveals Himself and not as a product of human introspection. The following quote serves as a sample of his understanding of revelation.

> If we know about God as the Lord, it is not because we also know about other lords and lordships. It is not even partly because of this previous knowledge and partly because of God's revelation. It is in consequence of God's revelation alone. But in consequence of God's revelation – as the “alone” tells us – means by the

\(^{38}\)The question arises whether a Christian needs to be a functional creationist (such as Barth) rather than a functional evolutionist (such as McFague).
good pleasure of the divine grace and mercy, i.e., on the basis of God's free initiative and in His mystery, so that in the face of our knowledge of God nothing is left for us but gratitude for the fact that He is and as such He is not hidden from us.\(^{39}\)

Barth is vigilant in pointing out that God as Holy Trinity is revealing Godself to human beings not of necessity, but in freedom, in grace as undeserved mercy towards God’s creatures. For Barth, and for the Church, Jesus Christ is the most explicit self-revelation of God. There is joy in God (as Holy Trinity) in the election of Jesus Christ as the true Man.\(^{40}\) As we have seen, the New Testament writers indicate that the election of other human beings also gives God joy. Because the creating and electing God is a joyful God, it is to be expected that human joy arises out of God's election of human beings. Here ontology precedes epistemology.

Barth anchors God's joy in God's beauty.

If we can and must say that God is beautiful, to say this is to say how He enlightens and convinces and persuades us. It is to describe not merely the naked fact of His revelation or its power, but the shape and form in which it is a fact and is power. It is to say that God has this superior force, this power of attraction, which speaks for itself, which wins and conquers, in the fact that He is beautiful, divinely beautiful, beautiful in His own way, in a way that is His alone, beautiful as the unattainable primal beauty, yet really beautiful. He does not have it, therefore, merely as a fact, or a power. Or rather, He has it as a fact and a power in such a way that He acts as the One who gives pleasure, creates desire and rewards with enjoyment, because He is the One who is pleasant, desirable, full of enjoyment, because first and last He alone is that which is pleasant, desirable and full of enjoyment. God loves us as the One who is worthy of love as God. This is what we mean when we say that God is beautiful.\(^{41}\)

Barth's threefold use of the word “enjoyment” locates joy in God (presumably as Holy Trinity), and identifies the source of God's joy and love in God's beauty. A few pages further on Barth writes

At each point where the idea of glory appears we can apply the test and we shall see that in no case can it be interpreted as something neutral or something which excludes the ideas of the pleasant, desirable and enjoyable and therefore that of the beautiful. … and where it is really recognised, it is recognised in this quality, with its peculiar power and characteristic of giving pleasure, awakening desire and creating enjoyment.\(^{42}\)

\(^{39}\) CD II/1, 76.
\(^{40}\) CD II/2, 611-2.
\(^{41}\) CD II/1, 650-1. Italics are mine.
\(^{42}\) CD II/1, 653.
Barth follows this up with a long list of biblical references referring to the joy of the believer in God and his commandments, and the desirability of God's presence, such as Lk 1:46, Ps 1:2, Ps 112:1, Ps 119:4, Ps 34:8, Ps 145:16, Is 29:19.\(^{43}\) The joy in God's salvation and also joy in God's law are celebrated in these verses, but joy arising from partnership with God does not feature here.

Barth clearly expresses the concept of Christian work.

But if there is a human action which, as an obedient step into freedom as an answer to the call of God, fulfils the essence of human action and the active life, it is the simple but very strange action, which is not at all cheap but which risks and ventures everything as in the purchase of the pearl of great price (Mt 13:45f.), of associating oneself with the community of the coming kingdom and of thus confirming in oneself the necessity of the reality of this community on earth in order that testimony may be borne to Jesus Christ.\(^{44}\)

That such work may involve fellowship and dialogue (e.g., Abraham bargaining with God,\(^{45}\) or Jesus' conversation with the disciples calling them friends rather than servants),\(^{46}\) rather than merely “the necessity of the reality of this community”,\(^{47}\) is not clear from Barth's descriptions of Christian work here. A community is indeed necessary for bearing testimony to Christ but phraseology of “the necessity of the reality of this community” suggests to me idealism rather than realism.

In his Dogmatics in Outline Barth writes about the incarnation in terms which also raise abstract matters of necessity and bypasses Mary's joyful participation in the Incarnation (Lk 1:46-56).\(^{48}\) “Why does the miracle of Christmas run parallel with the Incarnation? A noetic utterance is so to speak put alongside an ontic one.”\(^{49}\)

Again and again the Christian Church and its theology has insisted that we cannot postulate that the reality of the Incarnation, the mystery of Christmas, had by absolute necessity to take the form of this miracle. The true Godhead and the true humanity of

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\(^{43}\) CD II/1, 654.
\(^{44}\) CD III/4, 493. (§55 Freedom for Life, 3. The Active Life). Italics are mine.
\(^{45}\) Gen 18:16-33.
\(^{46}\) John 15:15.
\(^{47}\) “The necessity of the reality” is a peculiar turn of phrase. Is necessity prior to reality? Is this natural theology coming in via the back door?
\(^{48}\) In CD IV/3, 605 Barth has a somewhat colourless view of Mary's willingness to be handmaiden of the Lord.
Jesus in their unity do not depend on the fact that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. ... The one thing obviously belongs to the other.\textsuperscript{50}

Here it seems that for Barth the Incarnation and Christ’s humanity are a prior concept, prior of the mystery of Christmas.\textsuperscript{51} Barth's approach seems to ignores the givenness of Mary in the Incarnation; it seems to undermine the joy of the Magnificat.\textsuperscript{52} It makes the mystery of Christmas illustrative of the concept. He appears to have a structure in mind that sits behind Scripture, where Scripture (as revelation, no doubt) becomes illustrative of the principle or concept. Idealism seems to trumps realism. To my mind that does not quite match Barth's earlier statement in his \textit{Dogmatics in Outline}.

Holy Scripture is the document of the basis, of the innermost life of the Church, the document of the manifestation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ. We have no other documents for this living basis of the Church; and where the Church is alive, it will always have to reassess itself by this standard.\textsuperscript{53}

For Barth, Mary's willingness to become the handmaiden of the Lord is illustrative of the mystery of Incarnation. In Mary's passivity Barth leaves little room for joyful participation in the purposes of God. To my mind, there is no need to postulate some abstract freedom in God to act, because God has already renounced that freedom by binding himself to a promise that the offspring of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

Barth seems reluctant to engage with the theme of human participation in the purposes of God. The metaphor of light does not conjure up a \textit{dialogical} response from the object that is illuminated.

God's omnipotence is the positive meaning of His freedom. Thus His light is omnipotent light, and so omnipresent light. His glory means then, that his self-

\textsuperscript{50} Barth, \textit{Dogmatics in Outline}, 100.

\textsuperscript{51} Dustin Resch, in \textit{Barth's Interpretation of the Virgin Birth: A Sign of Mystery} (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012) studies this matter in some detail. In Mary's 'passivity' Barth leaves no room for joyful participation.

\textsuperscript{52} The matter of Mary's joy in participation in the Incarnation needs further consideration – is it indeed summons, obligation and a certain attractiveness, or is her joy beyond obligation?

\textsuperscript{53} Barth, \textit{Dogmatics in Outline}, 13.
The light metaphor does not carry the quality of a subject-subject encounter. Grateful obedience arising out of illumination does not seem to develop further into joyful participation.

In the earlier parts of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth seems not quite able to move beyond obligation to joyful participation and partnership in the purposes of God. Speaking of the glory of God, Barth explains

It is not merely a glory which is solemn and good and true, and which in its perfection and sublimity, might be gloomy or at least joyless. Joy in and before God – in its particular nature distinct from what we mean by awe, gratitude and the rest – has an objective basis. It is something in God, the God of all the perfections, which justifies us in having joy, desire and pleasure towards Him, which indeed obliges, summons and attracts us to do this.  

Joy as a *concept* has justification in God's joy. If joy is more than a just a concept to Barth here, I wonder why Barth has the order and emphasis wrong. In the experience of the believer, God first *summons*, and then the summons *obliges*. When one engages, there is indeed a further attraction which allows both the summons and the felt obligation to retreat into the background. A partnership obviously has obligations as a fall-back position when the partnership is at risk. But a partnership based on delight, mutual joy and mutual purpose has no need to dwell on obligation, as Barth does here.

Barth speaks of humans as partners with God in his 1956 address *The Humanity of God*. In his avoidance of natural theology Barth is keen to derive the humanity of

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54 CD II/1, 646.
55 CD II/1, 655. Italics are mine.
56 In CD II/1, 11-12 Barth engages with Augustine about “entering the joy of the Master (Math 25:21).” While it is not a matter of *ascendere* and *transcendere*, but of participation in the world here and now, Barth avoids giving credence to joy as an aspect of knowing God. It is only the Word of God that can give knowledge of God, and so joy seems to remain a *concept*. In CD II/1, 656 it is the science of theology which is joyful and beautiful: the *concept of joy* is being developed here.
57 “Inanspruchnahme” does presuppose an obligation to respond (as in 'requisition'), but one does not respond until the summons is issued. Obligation is the *concept* resulting in a practical summons.
God in Christ from his deity, and thus to establish the ground for human participation or partnership with God.

Who God is and what He is in His deity He proves and reveals not in a vacuum as a divine being-for-Himself, but precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as the partner of man, though of course as the absolutely superior partner. He who does this is the living God.  

Here the notion of partnership is raised. While the superiority of God is rightly stressed, there is no mention of joyful participation on the human side.

In Volume IV of the Dogmatics, however, there is an engaging description of the joy of the believer that hints at the joy in participating in the purposes of God.

In clear and sharp distinction from the past which now passes, the future of the new now breaking into his present is a time of rejoicing. [The Word of grace] does not merely raise a universal hymn to joy. What it does is rather to speak of the reason why in all circumstances man can go forward, not sadly or indifferently, but merrily. If on the … ground [of] … the proclamation of the reconciliation and lordship of God … the only positive option is joy, not as an empty abstract cheerfulness, but as thanksgiving and obedience and therefore as thinking, speech and action, as faith, love and hope, as responsibility and service, which corresponds to the concreteness of this reason for joy and which on this basis are to be undertaken and executed with gaiety. Their deep seriousness will consist and be demonstrated in the fact that they are done in this way. And the test or standard by which we may know that man’s joy as that of the new man really rests on this basis will be whether or not this joy radiates itself with the same self-evident necessity as it is his joy, whether or not it extends to others as to himself, whether or not in their case, too, it demonstrates itself at once in cheerful thoughts and words and actions.

Yet the only indication that the “new man” is being contemplated by God, and that there may be a shared joy, is in the words “responsibility” and “obedience”.

Geoffrey Bromiley critiques the view of some theologians who suggest that Barth has no room for Christian works in close partnership with God. “[O]ne wonders why the odd idea persists in some circles that Barth has no concept of Christian works.” The issue clearly is more nuanced than Bromiley's defence of Barth here suggests; it is also more nuanced than Barth's critics allow. Barth clearly speaks of

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59 I am indebted to John Capper for locating this passage for me.
60 CD IV/3, 247-8.
61 Geoffrey. W. Bromiley, Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth, 32.
Christian works, but as he does so, there often seems to be a distance between God and the Christian, because of a great emphasis on the sovereignty of God, and Jesus Christ as the elected human. This emphasis tends to draw the reader away from recognising a subject-subject encounter “in the space between” where Christian works take place with joy because Christians are resonating with God's joy. It is telling that when Barth comments on the Parable of the Talents, there is an extended discussion about the one talent man, but “entering the joy of the Master” does not receive any attention. And in his Ethics he writes, “In all circumstances, even though our sins were as scarlet, and his law condemned us to hell, it is peace, joy and blessedness to be claimed by God”\(^{62}\) Here is the joy of conversion that emphasises the grace of God. But on the next page we read, “A good work is always a work of penitence, a work that is done in repentance and distress and with a cry for mercy.”\(^{63}\) We are *simul iustus et peccator*; but participating in the purposes of God, *always in distress*, goes somewhat counter to the “man who is not unrefreshed by obedience to God,”\(^{64}\) and who is exhorted to rejoice always (Phil 4:4-9). When epistemology precedes ontology joy is lost. When a sometimes one-sided idealism trumps realism, some of the immediacy of joy is lost.

Towards an adequate construal

Barth explored the matter of being truly human and being truly oneself in the *Church Dogmatics* III/2. He did not conceive of a human being as a person who is truly himself or herself in splendid isolation free of obligation. On the contrary, the person who is truly himself or herself is a person in relationship, in encounter with another.

He is not a man first, and then has his fellow man beside him, and is gladly or reluctantly human with him, i.e., in encounter with him. He is a man as he is human.

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\(^{63}\) Barth, Ethics, 109.  
\(^{64}\) CD II/2, 586.
Barth’s conception of freedom to be truly oneself is anchored in the triune God who is free. God is the one in three who offers freedom to participate in the purpose for which human beings were created. This carries with it the implication that human beings are to be with other human beings. A location for joy opens up.

For he [as a human being] is himself, as he stands under this law as the law of his own freedom. When he is obedient to it in this way, as to the law of his own freedom, he realises that ‘with’ – with the fellow man, with the Thou – by inner as well as outer necessity, and therefore gladly and spontaneously. Being together thus acquires the character of something absolutely spontaneous. The encounter thus with Thee is not, therefore, the encounter with something strange which disturbs me, but with a counterpart which I have lacked and without which I would be empty and futile.

In this being with the other Barth describes a dynamic of choice and being chosen.

But that means that there is also an electing and election. Each can affirm the other as the being with which he wants to be and cannot be without. But this leads to mutual joy, each in the existence of the other and both in the fact that they can exist together. For in these circumstances even the co-existence is joy. … It is in this being given and giving to each other there consists the electing and election, the mutual acceptance, the common joy, and therefore the freedom of this encounter – the freedom in which there is no room for those misunderstandings in which both can breathe as they let breathe, in which both keep their distance because they are so close, and are so close because they are keeping their distance.

Clearly for Barth there is joy in being with other human beings in a shared space.

In his 1953 address to the Gesellschaft für evangelische Theologie Barth set out three propositions that summarise the relationship between ethics and joy.

First: God’s freedom is his very own. It is the sovereign grace wherein God chooses to commit Himself to man. Thereby God is Lord as man’s God.
Secondly: Man’s freedom is his as a gift of God. It is the joy wherein man appropriates God’s election. Thereby man is God’s creature, His partner, and His child as God’s man.
Thirdly: Evangelical ethics is the reflection upon the divine call to human action which is implied by the gift of freedom.69

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65 CD III/2, 267-8.
66 This matter of spontaneity in being with other human beings has implications for ethics. Can ethical behaviour be spontaneous, or must it always be reflective in order to be ethical? - This matter will be explored in Ch. 4.
67 CD III/2, 269.
68 CD III/2, 271-2.
69 Barth, The Humanity of God, 65.
Here, election to partnership is emphasised (salvation), and there is an implication of the ongoing partnership in God's purposes (sanctification, amelioration of suffering) as something joyful. But that this joy may resonate with God's joy does not come to expression.

One of Barth's earlier sermons gets close to joyful resonance with God's joy in doing what is right. It contains a striking parallel to the Hasidic understanding of joy. The sermon gives the context of the earlier quote about “a rich heart that recognises in everything the holy God from whom everything originates”. It is difficult to contemplate Barth penning this passage without some inspiration from Martin Buber's Hasidic stories. Becker makes the point that Buber recognised elements of his own thought in Barth.70

“Finally: God brings joy into our lives, true joy. Something luminous fills the person who really knows God. Something that must win the victory over all difficulty and ugliness and wretchedness of existence. Joy in yourself: enthusiasm for the highest goals, confidence even when things do not turn out as straightforwardly as one may at first imagine, courage to oppose everything that will hold you back. Joy in your fellow human being: an empathy that wants to help everyone to have that same joy. Lastly, joy in the world: mature insight into the depth and meaning of everything great and small that occurs around us, pure and sensitive hands that know how to lay hold of the eternal, wherever and in whatever disguise it comes to meet us, a rich heart that recognises in everything the holy God from whom everything originates. Do you know such joy? And if you do not know it yet, do you really have no desire for it? Understand, all this flows from God: the tasks in life, the seriousness of life, and the joys of life. Whoever knows them from close range is a pious71 person. To reach out for these three, that is what it means to live.”72

In this sermon fragment, joy transfuses meaning into the wretchedness of existence because “really knowing God” is not questioned, as McFague does. Joy is not merely personal, but it mysteriously glows in the interactions between persons. Knowing

70 Becker, Karl Barth und Martin Buber, 66.
71 'Pious' here is inadequate. The phrase ‘… ein frommer Mensch' has a Southern German/Swiss undertone of valour: rather than the English undertone of 'being so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly use.'
“what it means to live”, or more precisely, how to live and whom to live for “from close range” is the desire of the Christian.

For postmodern humans, themes such as joy and love do not fit together easily with the theme of obedience. Obedience is seen as heteronomy: servitude is an encroachment on human freedom; it is the very opposite to love and joy. In the Hasidic understanding of joy there is no such conflict. Barth posits no conflict between obedience to God, love of God and joy in God.

Barth maintains that there is something unique about the command of God. Instead of being restrictive, the command of God is permission-giving, permission to live before God; it is the granting of a very definite freedom.

We know who it is that orders here, and what it is that makes this ordering peremptory. It is the God in whom we may believe as the Lord who is gracious to us – gracious in the sense that He gave Himself for us in order that we might live before Him and with Him in peace and joy. And we know what it is that is ordered. We have to live as those who accept as right what God does for us. We do not have to do that which contradicts but that which corresponds to His grace as it is directed to us. We have to believe in Jesus Christ, and in and with the fact that we live in this faith to do the right. The command of this Commander is a permission, and it is fundamentally and finally differentiated from all other commands.

It cannot be said of any other commands in themselves and as such that they are permissions, releases, liberations; that they give us freedom. Other commands, i.e., command of human authority, are not permission-giving, but forbidding according to Barth.

In one form or another, they all express to man the suspicion that it might be dangerous to free him, that he certainly would misuse his liberty, that once liberated, he would only create trouble for himself and others. From the most varied angles they fill him with anxious fears: the intellectual fear of spiritual isolation; fear of the possibility of a world food shortage, a moral fear of his own possibilities; political fear in the face of his own weakness. They use these fears to appeal to him, instilling them into him and holding him in their grip. In essence, their bidding is a forbidding, the refusal of all possible permissions. This is what distinguishes the sphere of these commands very sharply from that of the command of God.74

73 CD II/2, 585.
74 CD II/2, 585.
The refusal of all possible permissions is dramatically highlighted in the sequel to the story of the prodigal son. The elder, “morally superior” son lives in the self-imposed “refusal of all possible permissions”. He accuses his father, “You never ...” The story of the dishonest steward which immediately follows it,\textsuperscript{75} seems to be Jesus’ (and Luke's?) attempt to highlight the stupidity of such a self-imposed “refusal of all possible permissions”\textsuperscript{76} especially by those who think they are children of the light. The dishonest steward knows how to take advantage of his situation in the relaxed generosity of his rich master. But the sons of light do not know how to live in the freedom granted by a superabundant God.\textsuperscript{77} Commands that do not come from God “will betray themselves by the fact that they create, and maintain this sphere of distrust and fear.”\textsuperscript{78} While Barth does not mention these biblical passages explicitly in this context, he comes to the conclusion that “[t]he man who stands under the jurisdiction of all those commands of God and is “not refreshed” (unerquickt) is not the obedient man but the man who disobeys God.”\textsuperscript{79} Such refreshment does not require a subject-subject relationship; but it does not exclude it, either. It may be this ambivalence in expression that leads to too negative a reading of sections of Barth's \textit{Dogmatics} by some, as Bromiley's earlier comment indicates.

Barth makes a clear distinction between the redeemed person and the person who persists in his or her disobedience. By implication, joy is only possible for the redeemed who are refreshed by God's commands. But Barth again approaches the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[76] Note the story of Adam and Eve in Gen 3. God said, “Do not eat of the tree of knowledge.” Eve, presumably taught by Adam, repeats the command as “Do not touch or you shall die.” This is a significant psychological insight into the process of human diminution of the glorious freedom given by God. Such diminution of freedom is the beginning of sin in the story.
\item[77] Cf Eph 3:20.
\item[78] CD II/2, 585.
\item[79] CD II/2, 586.
\end{footnotes}
theme of joyful resonance with God by defining it negatively – the obedient are “not unrefreshed”.

In summary, it seems to me that McFague’s assumption of an inaccessible God and her consequent construal of God is more akin to virtual reality than faith. Because her God is inaccessible, her model is inadequate for an understanding of Christian moral action arising out of joy and leading to joy, where such joy is a resonance with God's joy. The musical analogy of resonance is chosen in preference to that of harmony, because the history and dialogue of revelation Barth refers to above is ruled by God. God is the source of “sound” with which human beings were designed to “resonate”.

Barth's construal of the self-revealing God has room for joy arising from participation in the purposes of God. Perhaps it is asking too much of the unfinished Church Dogmatics, to fully develop this theme. Revelation has ontological force, but at times there seems to be a hint of idealism trumping realism, idealism providing a backdrop to revelation. In the case of Mary and the Incarnation this dissonance is noticeable. This reluctance to speak of Mary's joy in participating in God's joy, as well as the reluctance to discuss the phrase “enter the joy of your Master”, may be a matters for further exploration.

For the believer, Inanspruchnahme, i.e., summons and obligation, a requisitioning, transmutes into joyful participation. For this to occur successfully ontology has to precede epistemology. When idealism trumps realism, joy is muted. Participation conditions the Christian to act, progressively, by habit. The commencement of participation in the purposes of God with God is the beginning of the conditioning that leads to “entering into the joy of the Master” with a “heartbeat of holy joy”. Christian joy in the context of moral action (and vice versa) is resonance with
God's joy. Thus the church's language about joy points to the glory of God, to the glorious freedom of the believer in Jesus Christ to participate in God's purposes, and to God's joyful contemplation of the believer.

Postscript: A musical analogy

Consider a composer approaching an orchestra to play his work. Initially there is a request or summons, and after some conversation and negotiations, it is agreed that the orchestra will perform the work under the composer as conductor. During rehearsal there is much discussion about how the piece should be played. There is an obligation due to the acceptance of the summons to perform the work according to the desire of the composer. During rehearsal the players in the orchestra gain an increasing appreciation of the beauty of the work. When the day of the performance arrives, the players in the orchestra “enter the joy of their Master”, not out of obligation or mere summons. Rather, they come freely; they are attentive to the conductor, because they know that by paying attention to him the work will be played according to the intention of the composer in all its beauty. This intention has become their intention, because they have come to love the composition and the composer. In this context disobedience is deeply distressing and obedience is beautifully refreshing, as they enjoy playing the music. Nothing is further from the minds of the players than that they are required to obey the conductor! During progressive rehearsals, obedience as an end in itself has become a retreating memory. The joy of playing well has taken over, not as an obligation, but as pure joy that is free and spontaneous participation. Joy becomes a motivation for further participation in rehearsals. Paradoxically, such joy arises out of a summons and such unmediated joy was conditioned through frequent rehearsals, out of obligation. The players have entered the joy of the composer.
Chapter 5
Joy in and through participation

Christian ethics is not what one does after one gets clear on everything else.
Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 55.

Hugh Mackay's *Right and wrong: How to decide for yourself* is an example of popular secular ethics. Mackay extols an individualistic ethic of choice.

The new freedom to choose has produced a reluctance to judge.

This is part of a general cultural shift away from prescription and conformity towards the idea that we are all free to choose how we shall live, and that in a diverse and pluralistic society, judgements upon each other’s choices are uncalled for. This is a highly desirable state of affairs from almost every point of view: most religious and moral systems carry warnings against the dangerous and destructive (including self-destructive) effects of being judgemental in our attitudes towards others.

Here the autonomous self is encouraged to make choices and it is assured of the religious moral high ground against anyone daring to question those choices. Any critic is conveniently assigned, by implication, to a minority religious or moral system and can therefore be safely ignored. By stark contrast, the Judaeo-Christian view of loving one’s neighbour demands mutual correction and so seriously limits diversity. “You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself … but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev 19:17-18). Here love includes mutual correction as a part of the theocentric triadic structure of being God’s holy people. The second part in the summary of the Law (Mt 22:36-40, Mk 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28) would therefore carry this understanding forward into the Church. The communal principles for church discipline presented in Matthew 18:15-20 do not call into question the personal and, if necessary, communal assessment of wrongdoing. Mackay’s encouragement to claim autonomy

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1 Hugh Mackay, *Right and wrong: how to decide for yourself* (Sydney: Hodder Headline, 2004).
3 Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 239. The notion of the authentic self “brackets the issue of how we think through our human situation as embodying a common task, in which the sacredness of the authentic self’s account of its own interests is not the beginning and the end of moral discourse.” [My italics.] Mackay exemplifies this bracketting in the above quote.
and diversity and to be “free to choose how we shall live” therefore runs counter to a Christian ethic.

To reiterate an earlier point, the word “judgment” is ambiguous. If the word means “pronouncing sentence”, the Christian faith warns against one person high-handedly pronouncing sentence on another person.\textsuperscript{4} To that extent Mackay has a point. Within the Christian context, communal judgements (even as sentences) are provisional, because they are corrective rather than punitive in essence. It is Jesus Christ who pronounces the final verdict and sentence on the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{5} If the word means “assessment” and implies “need for correction”, then Mackay misrepresents the Christian faith. The parameters of a Christian discerning and corrective ethic are fundamentally different from a popular non-judgmental ethic. A brief review of these parameters may be helpful here.

Chapter one presented the theocentric triadic structure in which the individual is called by God to live in a community established by God that is embedded in God’s creation. This structure includes the moral sphere where law is embedded in grace. The pericope about the woman caught in adultery was adduced to critique participation in the purpose of God under the Mosaic covenant. Proper participation requires from the people a delight in the covenant God made with Israel. Without such delight the law will not be understood as an expression of God’s grace to the people of Israel. The theocentric triadic structure carries similar implications for the Church, called to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and the bride of Christ, under the new covenant in Christ.

In Chapter two the nature of joy was surveyed. Joy is not abstracted from life; it is more spontaneous. Psychologically, joy arises on the boundary of ecstasy and self-

\textsuperscript{4} See Mt 7:1-23 (especially verses 3-5), and footnote 23 in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{5} See the Apostles’ Creed.
control. Joy is “a celebration, a visitation.” When our intuition about life concurs with the way we live, we experience joy. In the Christian context, joy arises out of the experience of God's grace, to be set apart by God, to be his holy people. Such human joy does not only derive from one's contemplation of God and his grace (and law), but also from one's awareness of God's joyful contemplation of faithful human actors in their humanity – *simul iustus et peccator*.

Chapter three considered New Testament passages which explore a Christian’s relationship with God. Joyful participation with God in his purposes for humanity begins with election on God’s side, and on our side with an acknowledgement of our failure, the acceptance of forgiveness and divine empowerment; it is not derived from self-congratulatory effort. Joy arises from the congruence of a person’s participation in agreement with God’s assessment of that person as the Parable of the Talents indicates. Joy also arises from this participation being a foretaste of life in the promised new heaven and earth.

Chapter four made the case for authentic joy in the freedom of obedience. Authentic joy requires a true construal of the world where revelation precedes reason. The behaviour of Gaita's nun points to the difference between a construal anchored in faith conviction and a construal based on abstracted principles such as the psychiatrists held to. The triune God commands humans to engage in *metanoia* and to cease living in ignorance,⁶ thus making it possible for them to enter into the joy of the Master, as people who do what is good right and to be done, individually and in community, in the context of the new covenant.

In this last chapter I seek to sketch how aspects of deontology, consequentialism and character-based ethics may be integrated into a Christian ethics of joyful

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⁶ Acts 17:30.
participation in God’s purposes, namely, living actively in the world in worship, witness and service.

This integration is centred on a Christian adaptation of the Aristotelian concept of *ergon*, the proper functioning of our humanity in congruence with Christian virtue and obedience. Therefore the discussion will not centre on deep moral dilemmas in isolation but on growing into a Christian maturity that navigates through crises with some sense of stability and joy.

The interplay of meta-narrative and ethics

Virtue ethics, consequentialism and law-based ethics are anchored in a variety of philosophies and meta-narratives. Nevertheless, as secular ethics they seem to be basically one- or two-dimensional in the sense that they are either merely personal or merely social conventions, or a mix of both. Current secular ethics emphasises existential choices in which ethics tends to function as a means for creating meaning, or preventing the loss of meaning. The fact of making a choice becomes more important than the context and outcome of the choice. While the choice itself may be motivated by an attempt at self-fulfilment, reflection on the chosen act leads to self-definition and self-authentication, “being true to one’s self” without external reference or challenge.

If ethicists and theologians do not acknowledge a theocentric triadic framework of the matter, they may, by their own autonomous decision, cast themselves (and others) in the role of the “unconditioned conditioners”. For example, they can cast themselves and their followers in the role of heroic rescuers of the terrestrial ecosystem,

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7 Cf. Mackay, *Right and Wrong*. After the initial call to autonomy he raises the matter of respect for others in the last chapter of his book.

8 “I begin with the assumption that what we can say with any assurance about the character of Christian faith is very little and that even that will be highly contested.” Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, x. This, on my reading, would leave the “Christian” in a place of autonomy.

9 See C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1978), 40. The conditioners know what is “best” and impose it on society without accountability to anyone (hence unconditioned).
who accept “responsibility” for the human race as Sallie McFague does in *Models of God*.

Nuclear consciousness, an essential part of the sensibility needed in our time, must come about as an act of consciousness-raising.\(^10\)

If political and economic liberation are intrinsically related to an ecological sensibility, so also is the acceptance of human responsibility for nuclear knowledge, for here also, and with chilling exactitude, salvation must be seen as extending to all people and to our earth: if we do not learn to live together, we will die together.\(^11\)

So McFague looks for “thought experiments” that she believes are “commensurate with the evolutionary, ecological sensibility and with the Christian faith.”\(^12\) Her thought experiment turns salvation into something entirely this-worldly. Furthermore, instead of the Holy Spirit being present in, but distinct from, creation, the world has become a somewhat pantheistic “body of God”.\(^13\) The Evolutionary myth on which McFague draws, thus leads to a different picture from the Biblical myth. They are not commensurate.\(^14\)

To give another example, Peter Singer, from an evolutionary and atheistic paradigm, regards consciousness as the primary criterion with regard to life-and-death choices.\(^15\) As a consequence, an intelligent pig would have more right to life than a seriously mentally disabled human being. He accuses human beings in general of being specie-ist (an extension of race-ist), in always putting human life above animal life. Within such a framework, it is a small step to involuntary euthanasia for some humans; it becomes a “good” in a world of limited resources.

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\(^{13}\) Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, 69-78. MacFague claims her god to be panentheistic.

\(^{14}\) The Evolutionary myth is predicated on the absence of “Intelligent Design”. Unintentional time and chance are the ingredients; it is based on progress, and sees death as a good, removing the ‘unfit.’ The Biblical myth is predicated on a God who speaks and acts intentionally; it is based on deterioration (Gen 3-11, Rom 8), and sees death as a result of disobedience to God. Any ‘middle’ positions dilute the tenets of both myths.

The relationship between the values of a religion (or a world-view) on the one hand, and its story or myth on the other, varies from religion to religion. It is therefore therefore appropriate to explore the connections in Christianity. In so far as Christian ethics is integrally Christian rather than merely humanist, Christian ethics is predicated on the character and salvific action of God. It is God who determines and participates in the framework and content of what is good and right and should be done. God's holiness, God's justice and mercy, God's love and God's joyfulfulness are to be reflected by Christians, because they speak of the character and action of God.

In this regard the objection raised by the Euthyphro Dilemma may need to be addressed. The Euthyphro Dilemma can be re-stated in the Judaeo-Christian context in this way: “Does God command what is good because it is good, or is it good because God commands it?” The first option posits a good apart from and perhaps above God. The second option leads to the conclusion that God is rather like an arbitrary dictator. The attempt to separate God's character from his actions leads to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Lord Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, asserts, “In Judaism, the Euthyphro Dilemma does not exist. ... [The Dilemma] leaves out a third option, namely that God acts only out of His nature” when he creates and when he commands. This is the historic orthodox Christian position as well; God determines and participates in what is good and right and ought to be done. The good is demonstrated in the character and action of the triune God; the good is modelled for humans by the work of the three Persons of the Trinity, most visibly in the second Person incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Christian understanding of being redeemed in Christ, of being born again as sons and daughters of God, and being

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17 MacNamara, *Christian Ethics*, 150.
renewed in their very being by the Holy Spirit carries with it the implications that Christians ought to begin to reflect what the triune God is and does. Christians therefore seek, increasingly, to acquire “the measure of the full stature of Jesus Christ” (Eph 4:13), to learn to live “in Christ” and, in various ways to be taken up into the character and action of God; such learning of the character and action of God, it will be argued, is joyful and relational.

Christian ethics, therefore, utilises already established meaning in context, to inform action. Choices and decisions are made on the basis of a pre-existing given: God’s self-revelation, humanity created in the image of God, redemption in and through Jesus Christ and empowerment to act in new ways by the Holy Spirit. Because Christians already have an identity as a new creation, as diversely gifted children of God, Christians do not seek to establish an identity for themselves by their own acts of autonomous choice. They seek to live out of their status as children of God by learning to participate in the communion and actions of the triune God. Christian ethics is therefore seen in the context of sanctification, believers becoming more Christ-like. They prepare for a future reigning with Christ in a new heaven and earth as they fulfil the call to be salt and light both in the Christian community and the wider society in the here and now.

This religious perspective cannot be set aside in Christian ethics. Edward Long quotes Beach and Niebuhr approvingly:

> Within the variables of Christian ethical theories, there is a constant triadic relation – the “vertical” relation of the believing and acting self to God, and the “horizontal” relation of the self to other selves – a relation to which, so to speak, God is the “middle term.” How and why the neighbor is loved depends on how and why God is

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20 See Eph 5:1. “Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children.”
21 See John 15:15-17.
loved. Thus in Jesus’ summary of the law, the Second Commandment, to love the
neighbor, is described as like or part of the First.  

From this quotation it is clear that Christian ethics concerns itself with allegiance to
God, and more particularly allegiance to Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation. God is
an external authority in matters of what is good, right and to be done.

How that authority is to be understood is a matter which is quite vigorously
contested. Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts that ethical discourse requires external
“authorisation, … [and] does not merely depend on the correct content of what is said,
but also on the speaker being authorised to say it.”

He points out that such authority
exists due to position or office: from teacher to student, judge to defendant, parent to
child; all these work from above to below. From this a significant theological point can
be made: the commandments of God as Creator come from above to the creature who is
below. He continues:

Without this objective order of above and below, and without the courage to be
“above” - which modern people have completely lost - ethical discourse degenerates
into generalities and vacuous talk, and forfeits its character as ethical.

As has been suggested earlier, the “above” and “below” of the Judaeo-Christian ethic is
exemplified in the instructions of King Jehoshaphat to his newly appointed judges, and
in the story of the trial of the woman caught in adultery, where Jesus reminded the
lawyers of the triad of accused, accusers and God, with God being the judge of the
judges. The human “above” and “below” are relativised by God's “aboveness.” Three
of the several marks of a Christian ethic are the acknowledgement of firstly God's
authority in matters ethical and moral, secondly our being enabled to perform what is
commanded, and thirdly the triadic structure of the ethical and moral relationship. This
recognition presupposes a metanoia, a change of heart and mind so that it opens a

23 W. Beach and H. R. Niebuhr, Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1982), 5. The triadic structure described here is individualistic: “other selves”. My
triad instead proposes the people of God as the third element of the triad.
24 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, tr R. Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott. (Minneapolis, MN:
person to admit failure before God, receive forgiveness through Christ, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a child of God (John 1:12). It is a function of the law to bring us to Christ and be changed.

The function of the law

Brunner gives a helpful account of how Christians come to be children of God, and so become imitators of God, participants in the divine purpose. He expounds a dynamic threefold operation of Law: firstly as the Lex which requires compliance, secondly as the radical law which leads to repentance, and thirdly as guidance for faith.26 The Lex consists of the rules and regulations of society which make life liveable, and has much in common with “natural law”. Christians also are exhorted to obey the civil authorities as set out in Romans 13 and elsewhere.27 The Lex is crude and sub-ethical. It requires conformity; refusal to conform provokes compulsion: “But if you do wrong, be afraid, for [the ruling authority] does not bear the sword in vain, for it is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:4). Human beings “need this order as a framework for all the more refined and spiritual forms of life which are obedient to God.”28 The Lex is God's will in so far as it preserves and enhances life in community. Christians receive the Lex thankfully and obey it willingly, even though it reflects God's love and purpose incompletely.

While the meta-narratives of a secular and Christian ethic are different, many actions may, nevertheless, look outwardly identical. However, Brunner points out this difference between the two:

God does not wish to have my obedience as something which is valuable in itself. He wants me, my whole personality, in the totality of all my actions, both inward and

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27 Such obedience may entail suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19), but one may need to obey God rather than human authority in some matters (Acts 4:19-20).
28 Brunner, The Divine Imperative, 141.
He points out that obedience as an abstraction is missing the mark. We are called into relationship with God. Here he touches on the same ‘evil’ that Piper describes more confrontingly:

… [I]f you come to God dutifully, offering Him the reward of your fellowship instead of thirsting after the reward of His, then you exalt yourself above God as His benefactor and belittle Him as a needy beneficiary. That is evil.\(^{30}\)

One must not confuse obedience to God with an abstract legal adherence that so quickly manifests itself in self-justification and that tries to keep God at a distance, so to speak.

Brunner asserts that this realisation “that God wants me, my whole personality” leads to despair. Neither an excess of “good works” nor an excess of religious exercises will salve the bad conscience for holding out against God.\(^{31}\) At this stage the Lex takes on the function of *radical* law. It makes the person aware of God's grace. “If the soul finally turns to God, she discovers that He is no longer the God who demands, but the God who gives and forgives.”\(^{32}\) The experience of the grace of God brings with it the realisation that

the legalistic interpretation of the will of God is seen to be *sin, the sin par excellence*, the desire of man to live his own life in his own way, apart from God. This is the dialectical element in the Law: it leads directly to the true knowledge of God, in order that then, at the moment when the threshold has been crossed, it may be seen in its true colours, as an absolute ignorance of God, as the real enemy to the knowledge of God.\(^{33}\)

This radical nature of the law leads to *metanoia*. The focus changes from the self and the law to the Law-giver. They discover God's love, justice and mercy. In the new covenant the believer is adopted as a child of God in Christ (Gal 3:26), open to the Spirit’s guidance (Gal 5:25). Even though a child of God can be disinherited for

\(^{29}\) Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 145.


\(^{31}\) The parable of the unforgiving servant highlights this extremity of despair that throttles human relationships for the sake of maintaining one's self-righteousness before God.

\(^{32}\) Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 146.

\(^{33}\) Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 146. ‘Legalistic’ here carries the notion of doing an action merely because it is law, without reference to God.
persistent wrong action (Gal 5:21b), God enables his child to perform what he commands. This leads to the third aspect of the Law.

The Christian is invited to participate in the purposes of God. The Christian who has experienced God's undeserved mercy still needs to learn of God's purposes. Salvation has a purpose: Christians, individually and communally, were “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand to be [their] way of life” (Eph 2:10). In these works believers learns to model God's love, justice and mercy, and thereby glorify God. These works are both the means and the ends of sanctification, but not of justification. Christians are already children of God; through the new birth it is “natural” or innate for them be imitators of God (Eph 5:1-2).

Enabling obedience (Phil 1:6) is an expression of God’s love, and so believers are called to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. Obedience becomes a delight instead of a matter of despair. As King David expressed it in the 23rd Psalm, “Lead me in paths of righteousness, for your name's sake.” Delight in God leads to delight in God's will, and vice versa. The *Lex*, the moral law, becomes *guidance* for faith as Paul indicates in Gal 5:16-21 and Eph 4:17-24, even though the law is no longer mentioned. Paul emphasises the relationship rather than the letter of the law, but he clearly does not do so at the expense of the expectations God has of his children.

Brunner concludes the chapter on the threefold purpose of the law with this sentence: “Thus the law exercises us at the same time in discipline, humility, and in joyful, childlike obedience.”34 Brunner highlights that the *Lex* understood as legality quenches the Spirit, but that a sound understanding of the divine imperative leads into joyful obedience. This obedience is joyful because it is based on trust and now shares a common goal with the One who is regarded as entitled to command. Barth came to the same conclusion, but expressed it negatively: “the man who stands under the

jurisdiction of all those commands of God and is not refreshed is not the obedient man but the man who disobeys God.” A legalistic view of the law is burdensome; a relational view sees the law as an expression of God’s grace.

A nuanced concept of obedience

Christians regard obedience to rightful authority as a good ordained by God whether that authority is human or divine.\(^{35}\) The enjoyment of obedience and mutual correction may raise eyebrows in a society that insists on personal autonomy as Mackay suggests above. Hauerwas and Pinches in *Christians Among the Virtues*, as part of their discussion of the traditional virtues in relation to Christianity, raise a question significant for our day: whether obedience is a virtue.\(^{36}\) While they do not mention the Nuremberg Trials, these trials have cast a dark shadow over any discussions of obedience as a virtue. These Trials made it clear that a subordinate can no longer claim obedience to a higher authority as a defence. Thus obedience *per se* is no longer a virtue in Western culture; instead it has the connotation of a moral shortcoming.\(^{37}\) Hauerwas and Pinches indicate that the predicate 'obedient' when attached to a grown-up person has a derogatory flavour in our society.\(^{38}\) Joyful obedience then becomes a contradiction in terms.

Hauerwas and Pinches rightly insist that “one who obeys must ask himself if the one he obeys is worthy of his obedience.”\(^{39}\) While misuse of authority needs to be challenged, as Peter did in Jerusalem (Acts 4:19-20) and as Paul did in Philippi (Acts 16:37-39), the following discussion is restricted to situations of obedience to those exercising proper authority. I will follow Hauerwas and Pinches' train of thought, but

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\(^{37}\) As indicated earlier, McFague demands that religion that does not foster the consciousness in the cosmos must be discarded, i.e., disobeyed.

\(^{38}\) Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 129 and 133.

\(^{39}\) Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 135.
refine their discussion a little to show that joyful obedience is plausible, and can be learned.

Hauerwas and Pinches' concept of obedience is multifaceted. Obedience involves being given a command by another. A command reflects the will of the other. Obedience therefore is a matter of aligning one's will to the will of another and to act accordingly. If one agrees with another person, as equals in insight, on a specific course of action, after some discussion of the pros and cons of various actions, one does not talk of obedience but of agreement. Obedience, on the other hand, implies some inequality in the relationship between the one who commands and the one who is to obey. Here we meet what Bonhoeffer calls the “above” and “below” in ethical relationships. Hauerwas and Pinches concur: “obedience cannot be offered unless to an authority.”[40] They write of a relating to rightful authority from the perspective of the one who obeys, but do not consider the matter from the view of the one who commands. The one who gives instructions is an authority, either because he or she is a rightful authority (by communal statutory appointment) or because the person is informally granted authority through trusting the knowledge, skill and wisdom the person has already demonstrated.

Hauerwas and Pinches appear not to make adequate distinctions with regard to obedience in the case of granted authority and obedience to statutory authority. Statutory authorities usually have some power of enforcement and sanction. Obedience for Hauerwas and Pinches involves agreement with the command, which they term consent. They then introduce the concept of compliance, where the one who is commanded disagrees with the authority, but because of the potential threat of the use of statutory powers or the actual use of such powers, chooses to comply. For them,

obedience is marked by consent,\textsuperscript{41} compliance by dissent, even though the resulting actions are outwardly the same.

It seems to me that obedience in the context of granted authority is usually based on the awareness of a lack of knowledge or skill of the one granting authority to another who acts in the capacity of teacher, source of information, or advisor. The right to command is granted by the one who is awaiting commands or instructions as to what needs to be done to achieve a common purpose, namely, the desired outcome of learning and teaching. Such instruction, if both are adults, is based on rational consent, by both the instructor and the learner. Both have appropriate action in mind, as a common goal. The only sanction such an authority can wield is the discontinuation of the relationship. Since disobedience by its very nature is the refusal to acknowledge the previously agreed common goal, such power is exercised appropriately. Of course, the one who is commanded has the same power to withdraw from the relationship if the instructor or advisor turns out to be lacking in knowledge or wisdom to achieve the agreed goal.

In the context of a rightful statutory authority, the authority usually has granted to it some carefully prescribed statutory powers of enforcement, penalties or sanctions. Education authorities, the police force, the building inspectorate etc. are such statutory authorities. In Australia we talk about compliance rather than obedience, with regard to the commands issued by these institutions. There is of course the possibility that one personally grants these institutions authority, and accepts their superior knowledge and wisdom and therefore consents to be instructed by them. In such a case, the concept of obedience, as used by Hauerwas and Pinches, would be applied appropriately.

\textsuperscript{41} Hauerwas and Pinches, \textit{Christians Among the Virtues}, 134.
Outward obedience may indeed involve compliance with reluctance or even dissent. That is the nature of the Lex. For an adult Christian, recently converted, such compliance toward God is not to be seen as a negative. Once metanoia has occurred, compliance with dissent will lead to obedience; one will see the positive results of one’s own compliance and hear the cheers of the community (Heb 12:1-2), and see the negative results of others’ non-compliance, and have the assurance of “the Spirit agreeing with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:14). Whether one offers obedience with consent or compliance with dissent, outward obedience is the beginning of learning to participate in God’s purposes; it is the laying of the foundation for joy.

Hauerwas and Pinches miss a significant point here, which Brunner has been at pains to elucidate. Brunner asks, “What sort of man is the man who in faith is obedient?” Brunner answers his question at some length.

This very natural question, however, is the point at which so many moralists, and indeed, whole centuries of ethical thinking, have been led astray into the false path of the doctrine of the virtues which is contrary to Christian thought. The true being of a man of faith can never be indicated by human qualities, but only – as is implied in the expression “to be in faith” - by the actual state of his relation with God. We ought rather to ask: Where is the man when he is in his right place? And answer: 'True being' means being 'in Christ;' for 'Christ is my righteousness.' God’s Being in Christ, however – once again not as a quality but as an act – is his being in love.

According to Brunner Christian virtue is not a quality of a human beings (contrary to classical virtue ethics), but is located 'in Christ', and being 'in Christ' as an act and state, rather than a quality. This point would not be regarded as persuasive outside the Christian context.

For Christians it becomes inappropriate to speak of virtue as a human quality in itself. Virtue comes about by participating in the activity of the triune God in the company of, or with the support of, God’s people. When the consent to participate is no

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42 Brunner, The Divine Imperative, 164.
43 In more recent writings about Virtue Ethics, the matter of phronesis and eudaemonia as already morally conditioned concepts blunt Brunner's argument somewhat. See Hursthouse, “Virtue Ethics” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
longer given grudgingly or self-righteously, but with joyful expectation through God’s enabling, it has a dimension of worship about it. The former compliance with dissent has then morphed into the freedom to joyfully fulfil one’s calling. The focus is no longer on one’s own obedience or virtue, but on God.

Classical virtue ethics is interested in cultivating independence in the “magnanimous man”. Virtues derive their intelligibility from communal practices, but they are the virtues of the magnanimous man who is prudent. Hauerwas and Pinches are aware of a focus on the self here. As a corrective, they point out that for Christians this formative community is the congregation, and the Christian virtues are not personal ends in themselves.

… [I]f Christians do go on to affirm an ultimate unity of the virtues, they do best to follow Aquinas rather than Aristotle, who finally calls charity (not prudence) the form of the virtues. Charity, or charity-informed prudence by its very nature cannot exclude the other as an other. … It is essentially a communal virtue, something Christians believe must be had together, and something as well that they cannot call complete until the outbreak of God’s kingdom. Hauerwas and Pinches, like Brunner, end up with a relational understanding of ethics, based on the believer’s relationship with God. While Hauerwas and Pinches move beyond the self and recognise the importance of obedience in community, they emphasise the believer’s relationship with the community of faith. This is, of course, commendable but it has to be asked whether this is enough. A Christian ethic of joy is anchored in accepting the triune God’s invitation to enter the Trinitarian perichoresis, and to participate in God’s purpose for the world, in company with other believers.

It has to be recognised that even such communal virtuous participation in the purposes of God can be twisted away from obedience into “doing God a favour” from a sense of duty. Such self-justifying obedience is evil in the sense that it misses the mark and will never bring true freedom and joy. Barth insists that Christian obedience frees
human beings to become who they are intended to be: imitators of God as beloved children (Eph 5:1). In that imitation Christians grow into the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ. They do not declare their moral independence but joyfully learn to model God in participation.

**Becoming Barth’s “refreshed human”**

While noting some of the pitfalls Brunner highlights, classical virtue ethics has many elements that, with some modification, provide a useful framework for discussing sanctification, for becoming the “refreshed human.” Aristotle’s *Nicomachian Ethics* operates in temporality. Acquiring virtue is a dynamic process. The description of the acquisition could easily be accused of circularity. The *Ethics* describes a process of recursion, of repeating a cycle of character growth, similar to a deciduous tree that repeatedly goes through the cycle of the seasons but at each cycle builds on the growth of previous seasons. “Being born again” and “being imitators of God as beloved children” are metaphors of temporality, learning and growth.

*The Westminster Shorter Catechism* describes the “chief end of man” as glorifying God and enjoying him forever. These are the actions and ends Christians are to grow into. This runs parallel with Aristotle’s *eudaemonia*, human flourishing or happiness. When we act we usually have a purpose in mind, a telos. The ultimate telos for Aristotle is *eudaemonia*. One aims to achieve a particular telos because one believes it will increase one’s happiness. For Aristotle, virtue (*arête*) and human proper functioning (beyond the biological), *ergon*, is both prerequisite and product of achieving a telos and ultimately *eudaemonia*. Virtue is learned through action, because we do not have virtue by nature.

Again, in whatever cases we get things by nature, we get the faculties first, and perform the exercise afterwards; . . . for it was not from having often seen or heard that we got those senses,

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but just the reverse; we had them and so exercised them. But the Virtues we get by first performing single acts, which is again the case of other things . . . Men become builders, for instance, by building; harp-players by playing on the harp; exactly so, by doing just actions we come to be just; by doing acts of self-mastery, we come to be perfected in self-mastery; and by doing brave actions, brave.47

Rowan Williams makes a similar point: “There is no pre-existing ‘inwardness’; where is the real self to be found or made but in the world of exchange – language and interaction.”48 Hauerwas and Pinches aptly describe Aristotle’s ethic as “not a theory but a mode of inquiry that shapes skills necessary for those who would live well.”49 Aristotle’s eudaemonia is restricted to this life, but the “refreshed human” has a joy that continues beyond this life because of the promised participation in a new heaven and earth.

Just as the virtues are sought and practised in an active life, so the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-24: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) is developed in a life that seeks to glorify God by learning Christ. It is precisely the development of this fruit that leads to discernment and wisdom in action, a sound conscience. Just as there is some apparent complex circularity involved in learning the virtues, learning Christ requires a personal growing in knowledge of Jesus Christ, a community that collectively knows Christ better than the individual Christian, and the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:24-25). The Scriptures and the community are means of mentoring and of encouraging a life that is lived in accordance with the Christian ergon, the proper functioning of the human being as a child of God empowered by the Spirit, thereby glorifying God and enjoying him.

The ergon for Christians is to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength in all they do, and to love their neighbour as themselves, as that love is

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49 Hauerwas and Pinches, Christians Among the Virtues, xiii.
described in Leviticus 19:17-18. That love requires mutual correction. If our *ergon* is to be God’s holy people and a royal priesthood, then we should joyfully and perhaps even playfully support each other as God’s children in this communal aim; our *ergon* is a way of life. As the Apostle Paul writes, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:25-26). Instead, “if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1-2). When the theocentric triadic structure is taken seriously, then the Christian communal *ergon* is mutual encouragement and correction. “But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 20-21). Fulfilling our calling in a theocentric triadic structure is not a burden but a joy. It is mutually refreshing.

**Variety of Christian approaches to ethics**

In his survey of Christian ethics Long usefully names three motifs: a deliberative motif, a prescriptive motif and a relational motif.50 Any particular Christian ethics does not necessarily fall neatly into one or other of these three motifs. They are not mutually exclusive even though some ethicists regard them so. I will consider each motif in turn, and then suggest a fourth motif that brings these three motifs under one heading: participation.51

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(i) The deliberative motif

This motif stresses the rational function of human beings. Virtue ethics, conscience and natural law ethics are placed under this heading because they are based on reason. Virtue ethics has a long tradition reaching back to Aristotle but needs to be modified in the Christian context. The purpose of Aristotle's man of virtue is “to live in such a way that he need not be forgiven anything. By giving favours rather than receiving them he insures his invulnerability to a love that might render him dependent.” Jürgen Moltmann deflates this invulnerability with this observation.

A man who values himself in terms of his usefulness to society must consider his life useless when he is no longer needed. Those who equate the meaning of life with having purposes are bound to experience the lack of purpose as meaninglessness. The virtuous “Christian” will suffer this malaise in old age when he or she is no longer useful, and feels herself or himself to be “a burden on society.”

The motivation and outcome for the Christian, however, are not a self-sufficient life but rather a delight in “being in Christ” and so doing God's will. The believer's identity is not tied up in his or her virtue, but it is taken up into “being in Christ”. This stance frees the believer to joyfully worship, and to joyfully obey, whether “laid aside” or “put to doing.” Usefulness to society is not the primary consideration.

Thomas Aquinas developed natural law ethics from a carefully reasoned discussion of the purpose of human beings in relation to the providence of God. Thomas did not regard reason as autonomous, but it was more than merely the servant of revelation. “Natural man can derive a partial, yet valid, knowledge of God by his

52 Hauerwas, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 114.
54 The liturgy of the Covenant Service allows for being “laid aside” as well as being “put to doing”. *Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1988), 74.
reason.” The emphasis on reason highlights intention, choice and consent as important ingredients in moral decisions.

The emphasis in the deliberate motif is on reason to produce a set of norms of universal validity. The deliberate motif, therefore, often morphs into a set of prescriptions. Modern secularisation of natural law ethics cuts morals loose from religion and from the Christian faith in particular, something far from Thomas’ mind. Hauerwas and Pinches are rightly suspicious of modern natural law-based Christian ethics. There is a tendency in such an ethics to relegate the Christianum to the motivating power of an ethical life but not to allow it to shape the content of the ethical life. Hauerwas and Pinches quote from Joseph Fuchs to illustrate the point:

This means that truthfulness, uprightness, and faithfulness are not specifically Christian virtues, but generally human values in what they materially say, and that we have reservations about lying and adultery not because we are Christian, but simply because we are human.

There is no such “simply” for the Christian. The “simply” denies the theocentric triadic relationship between individual, community and God in matters of what is right, good and to be done. Of course, living within this triadic relationship does not make Christians less human; it does not remove Christians from human society; in fact, it arguably makes them more integrally part of it.

Hauerwas makes another point about Fuchs’ methodology. It removes agents from their historical context in which they must learn to be truthful, upright and faithful. He offers the insight that

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56 The understanding of the term 'natural law' has changed considerably from the days of Thomas Aquinas. He assumed God to be Creator of all that is, that creation reflects the glory of God, and creation is groaning due to sin, awaiting redemption at Christ's return. Since the Enlightenment, 'natural law' has developed an increasing independence from God. 'Natural law' today may mean the exclusion of any reference to God.
there is perhaps, a correlation between Christian ethicists' penchant for theological abstractions divorced from the narrative context and the tendency to develop a 'natural law' ethic that is free from historic communities.\textsuperscript{58}

Such an enterprise might make Christian ethics more palatable to the wider human community, but the process would compromise its Christian integrity. When methodological thinking has a penchant for secular “natural law” abstractions and this is carried over into Christian ethics, the content of ethics is no longer linked to God nor to the community appointed by him. Christian ethics then easily degrades into an instrument to justify any particular local cultural content, falsely given universal validity. As a consequence, in such a framework Christians will be encouraged to practise a particular cultural ethic as universally valid, rather than the Christian ethic. Hauerwas adds:

In fact behind the emphasis on the 'human' character of Christian ethics is a deep fear that there might be a radical discontinuity between Christians and their culture. The result, I fear, is that too often natural law assumptions function as an ideology for sustaining some Christians' presuppositions that their societies – particularly societies of Western democracies – are intrinsic to God's purposes.\textsuperscript{59}

At various times issues arise where Christian ethics is at odds with culture-based ethics. In Hitler's Germany the Evangelical Church split on the question of national identity. The Confessing Church refused to bless the “Master Race”, the identity which the German Reich was building for itself. In our day Christians who pursue a particular human rights agenda seek the blessing of the church for their cause. The church is divided on whether blessing such an approach is appropriate or not.\textsuperscript{60}

A Christian ethic that is based on the supremacy of reason runs the danger of becoming too rigidly legalistic and, paradoxically, too culture-bound. When reason operates on unquestioned cultural presuppositions, its claims of universality become

\textsuperscript{58} Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, 58.

\textsuperscript{59} Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, 59.

\textsuperscript{60} The sexuality debate in the National Assembly of the Uniting Church has taken this methodological course since 1994 until 2012. Love in abstraction, divorced from scripture and the way of life of Christian communities, became the justification for same-sex relationships, on the basis of equality and human rights in the face of strong prohibitions in both the Old and New Testaments, and in opposition to the recognition of the complementarity of male and female bodies. The 2012 National Assembly has now asked for a theological conversation.
suspect. This occurs when a Christian ethics becomes independent of its religious roots which previously allowed the particular culture to be critiqued. On the other hand, the deliberative motif allows for morals to be argued for on the common ground of reason, and will therefore be more accessible and agreeable to people who do not subscribe to a Christian world view. “If reason can function in correlation with faith, avoiding both hostility and submission, then a very profound deliberation is possible in Christian ethics.”

It goes without saying that such profound deliberation should also occur within the Christian community.

(ii) The prescriptive motif

This motif stresses the “obedience to the prescribed requirement of biblical injunctions as found in the Ten Commandments, the Exodus Codes, the Sermon on the Mount, and other parts of the Bible.” While one can adduce historical and cultural distance, the historical critical method, and scientific naïveté on the part of the writers of Scripture, in order to invalidate or at least call into question the status of the requirements of biblical injunctions, there is a significant number of Christian ethicists who nevertheless accentuate the prescriptive motif.

Some of the arguments advanced against the prescriptive motif are clearly misguided. Tom Deidon, for example, claims that “if canonicity renders the Bible normative, it must render all of it normative, even when elements in it stand in tension with each other or are mutually exclusive.” Such a lack of nuance fails to understand the unfolding nature of revelation and hence fails to understand the changes brought about by the proclamation of the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ. It also fails to recognise that while the Gospels were written after the resurrection, they largely

deal with events prior to and up to the resurrection, whereas the Epistles deal with fledgling congregations after the resurrection of Jesus. If one tries to 'mine' biblical texts from an undifferentiated collection of biblical injunctions, instead of determining their position in the panorama of the record of God's self-revelation, Deidon's criticism could have some validity but not otherwise.

Divine command ethics utilises the prescriptive motif. Beyond the above objections to it, it is sometimes argued that Divine Command ethics is refuted by the Euthyphro Dilemma: Either God determines good arbitrarily, or God has to comply with what is determined as good apart from God. As mentioned above, a third option against the two offered alternatives argues that God decides what is good and therefore commands it, because it is in the nature of the triune God to command and create and sustain what this triune God determines to be good. Thus the good is not arbitrary; neither is there a good beyond God. Brunner summarised the situation with regard to an independent prescriptive “good” thus:

There is no such thing as an “intrinsic Good.” The hypostatization of a human conception of the Good as the “Idea of the Good” is not only an abstraction in the logical sense; it is due to the fact that man has been severed from his Origin, to that original perversion of the meaning of existence, which consists in the fact that man attributed to himself and his ideas an independent existence – that is, that man makes himself God.64

The position of orthodox Christianity is indeed that this hypostatization is a distortion of existence.

The prescriptive motif highlights Bonhoeffer’s “above” and “below” in the relationship between God and humanity.65 Every relationship has its expectations and its boundaries. In the divine – human relationship it is God as Creator who is entitled to set the parameters of the relationship; he also enables humans to perform what he

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64 Brunner, The Divine Imperative, 114.
65 Whether we respond to God's command or invitation is a moot point. One ignores a royal invitation at one's peril. The rich young ruler was commanded to sell all he had (Mk 10:21), the ones from the highways were compelled to attend the feast when the guests refused to attend (Lk 14:23), and on the Aereopagus Paul declared that God commanded people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).
commands. The prescriptive motif must be supported by the relational motif, otherwise the ethic established from the prescriptive motif alone will be a distortion of existence. It is God who authenticates the good, and the command of God is not an abstraction. It is both regulation and relationship.

God's Command is His free and sovereign act of commanding, which cannot be condensed into a regulation. But dangerous as it is to be in bondage to the legalism of orthodoxy, it is just as dangerous to fall into the opposite error of a fanatical antinomianism, which holds that it is impossible to lay down any rules at all, that it is impossible to have any knowledge beforehand of the Divine Command. The will of God, which alone is the Good, is made known to us in His action, in His revelation.\footnote{Brunner, The Divine Imperative, 122.}

Christian ethics, in line with Jewish ethics, is prescriptive, but it is not a legalism. The story of Naaman illustrates the point. Naaman needed to bow with his aged ruler before the god Rimmon, when his master went to worship in the temple of Rimmon. Elisha offered Naaman peace, even though the second commandment in the Mosaic Law forbade Israelites the bowing down to other gods.\footnote{2 Kings 5: 17-19.} The prescription not to bow down to other gods arises out of God's relationship with the Jews as a holy and distinctive people. Naaman was not a Jew, yet he asked for some Jewish soil to take with him to Syria. His relationship with God was different, and God is gracious. Here we see the prescriptive motif tempered by the relational motif.

(iii) The relational motif

In relational ethics actions are shaped by a sense of engagement and gratitude based on “a living, dynamic and compelling encounter with the source of moral guidance.”\footnote{Long, A Survey of Christian Ethics, 117.} Hebrew ethics is founded on relationship. The introduction to the Ten Commandments states, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery (Ex20:1).” The relational element precedes the prescriptive element, as I argued in Chapter one; it is a matter of grace and law, in that order. Of
course, any relationship needs structure and boundaries. In the relational motif gratitude and involvement on the part of the one who obeys is stressed, rather than the enforcing power of the one who commands. In the relational motif the quality of an action is determined “not by a measure of rightness or wrongness, derived from rational deliberation or from comparison with a code, but in terms of the peer group to whom allegiance is given or the leader who is devotedly served.”

This relational approach sheds light on apparent ethical quandaries concerning some particular stories recorded in the Old Testament. One such story concerns the assassination of King Eglon. After forsaking God, the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance from oppression by King Eglon. Ehud is named as the man whom God “raised up to deliver them.” The Ten Commandments set out the requirement not to murder, but Ehud was “raised up” to assassinate King Eglon and make war against the Moabites. The Israelites killed ten thousand soldiers of the Moabite army. This may offend our Western sensibilities, but the existence of God’s people was at stake, and therefore the promise of the Messiah. The writer of Kings perceived God’s hand in this rescue of Israel; an extreme situation requiring extreme action. That should not be seen as paradigmatic. Kant’s categorical imperative is inadequate for such situations. The Christian God is free to determine what is good and right and to be done. But he does not do it arbitrarily. Relationship implies interaction, if not dependence on a leader or a peer group. Morality derived from a leader or peer group has an inherent weakness. Circumstances may cause an initially imperceptible drift in the group culture. This weakness becomes a strength when the “peer group” or “leader” is the Holy Trinity.

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69 Long, A Survey of Christian Ethics, 120.
70 Judges 3:12-30.
71 Yet it may serve as an ethical precedent. Bonhoeffer was implicated in an attempt to remove Hitler who wanted to exterminate the Jews of Europe in the 1940s.
In the relational motif the focus is on the relationship itself rather than on independent principles and rational analysis. While a relationship is based on principles, and while it can be analysed, these aspects of the relationship are abstractions. A relationship is more fundamental than these abstractions. A significant relationship requires participation and so transforms commands into synergy, not into principles and analysis. In a good relationship one acts aright in a way unmediated by resort to principle and analysis. Henry Clark describes this relationship in provocative terms:

The ultimate Christian conception is not that a man should know how to bear himself in any crisis of experience, and should act out his knowledge, but that he should bear himself rightly without thinking about it – almost as if he could not help it. 72

A historical illustration may elucidate this helpful but provocative quotation. In 2009 a commercial airliner made a “miraculous” emergency landing on the Hudson River with no loss of life. A flock of birds was caught in the engines shortly after take-off. Captain Sullenberger happened to be a gliding instructor and had practised gliding airliners on a flight simulator. His involvement in flying aircraft went beyond the formal requirements of the job. When this crisis arose there were only two minutes left to disaster. There was no time to resort to principles and analysis. His skilled actions were executed “as if he could not help it.” The person who participates in a style of Christian life that is habituated to right action through his or her prior relationship with God, does right as a matter of “second nature.” Such a person will not be left “unrefreshed” in the time of crisis.

(iv) A participatory motif

Participation requires a relationship and a task. From the three motifs above it becomes clear that an authentically Christian ethic of participation cannot be

exclusively deliberative, neither exclusively relational, nor exclusively prescriptive. Yet each of these contributes to a working relationship, to participation. The quality of individual and communal participation in the worship and purposes of the triune God is difficult to describe in abstraction. What precisely constitutes the immediacy or spontaneity in the joyful actions of Gaita's nun and Buber's coachman is elusive.

A little cameo may be helpful, a cameo of an ethically undemanding situation. My daughter at about age four watched me moving gravel in a wheel barrow to fill up some puddles on the unsealed driveway of our two-acre block. Then she asked me whether she could help (the deliberative motif). The next load of gravel was a little lighter for greater control, and she walked in front of me, holding onto the handles of the wheel barrow on either side (the prescriptive motif). For me it was not the number of newtons of force she supplied that was significant. The heart-warming significance of the moment was her willingness to enter into my purpose, to help, to emulate her father's purpose. My daughter did not evaluate the sufficiency or insufficiency of the mechanical force she provided. She offered to participate and she enjoyed participation, and she enjoyed her father’s approval of her offer. When she went back into the house, she told her mother proudly, “I helped Daddy” (the relational motif). Jesus' words in Mt 18:3 touch upon this same issue: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Thurneysen in correspondence with Barth notes that Buber “has something – I suppose, worldly-naive, un-self-aware, un-theological – so that one can read off him [i.e., his writings] all kinds of things, as from a good instrument, things which the all-too-conscious already no longer know.” It is this re-learned spontaneity, this child-likeness, which the “all-too-conscious already no longer know.” This immediacy or spontaneity seems to be both a prerequisite for and a

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74 Dieter Becker, ed., *Karl Barth und Martin Buber*, 64.
consequence of entry into the kingdom of God, for the worship of God and for joyful participation in God’s life and purpose. Here we are once again confronted by a circularity reminiscent of virtue ethics where one has to be already virtuous to become virtuous, a circularity similar to the dynamic growth of a tree during the cyclical seasons from a seedling that has to be a tree to grow into a tree.

Sharing in a particular activity with another person (or persons) is based on a prior relationship which requires some prior prescription with regard to the task and some prior deliberation for it to be worthy of the name participation. When the Ephesians caused Paul some concern with their way of life, he exclaimed, “That is not the way you learned Christ!” (Eph 4:20). If participation in the triune community through and in Christ is something to be learned through imitation (Eph 5:1), then clearly there must be a prescriptive element. Imitation as beloved children implies a joyful, even playful, relationship with parameters for behaviour. The freedom of mature obedience implies learned prescriptions, followed in joyful, prayerful (deliberative) relationship with the Father.

In a participatory ethic, a person’s behaviour is both conditioned by habituation in order to have some of the quality of “second nature” about it, and it has “presence”, open to deliberations regarding the circumstances. The behaviour of Gaita’s nun and Buber’s coachman illustrate this well. Similarly, a Christian’s trained past actions and the thoughtful adjustment of the current action to the circumstances, before and with God, result in joy.

I find it fascinating that this dialectic between conditioned spontaneity and thoughtfulness is reflected in the command of the Old Covenant to keep the Sabbath holy. A Christian ethic of joy may well be habitual for six days of the week, expressed in joyful participation in the purposes of God in the world and knowing God's approval.
The seventh day is set aside for communal worship, simply enjoying being part of God's people, delighting in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and the brothers and sisters of one’s community. In that secure context habit is reinforced and wrong attitudes corrected by consciously reflecting on the requirement of the relationship. Williams expresses this requirement beautifully and tellingly: “What is available is action; judged not according to how it serves to secure a position before God and others, but according to its fidelity to the character of God, its ‘epiphanic’ depth.” 75 Such reflection on “epiphanic depth”, the glory of God, leads to the learned spontaneity for the next six days that brings joy.

If participation is to be joyful, the deliberative motif is an essential ingredient of participation, but reason must not deny the possibility of revelation. Bonhoeffer’s “above” must not be minimised. In a Christian ethic of joy the synthesis of the relational motif with the deliberative and prescriptive motifs provides the framework for lived joyful participation in the purposes of God. Joyful participation in God's purposes in an attitude of worship empowered by the Holy Spirit is always good, right and to be done.

75 Williams, On Christian Theology, 264.
Conclusion

Do not seek joy, seek God. “He rewards those who seek Him” (Heb 11:6c).

A Christian ethic of joy in participation is, as the name suggests, founded in the Christian Faith. Participation implies both a relationship with others and a task. I have argued within the Christian context for a theocentric triadic structure from Scripture: God both commands and enables human beings to participate in the purposes of God in a community established by God, embedded in a universe created by God. The structure is theocentric in the sense that creation exists to declare God’s glory, and that the “chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.” As Creator, God is entitled to set the purpose of creation and of human existence within it. This confirms the “above” of God’s authority and the “below” of human existence. The structure is triadic: it describes a three-way relationship between the individual, the community and God. This structure seems foreign to a Western mindset as the exegetical history of the story of the woman caught in adultery demonstrates, yet this structure is foundational for a Christian ethic of joy in participation

In Chapter one, humanity’s history with God was sketched to show that the relationship between God and humans is one of kindness, judgment, mercy, and restoration. This history shows that God’s acts of grace precede any commands issued by God. Grace precedes command from creation to Abraham. Abraham is the first human asked to exercise faith: God commands him to leave his home and kindred on the basis of a gracious promise rather than a gracious act. Circumcision was an outward sign of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants; the jar of manna and the two tables of the Ten Commandments were the outward sign of the covenant made with the people of Israel at Mt Sinai; and Baptism and the Eucharist are the outward symbols of
the new covenant made by Jesus Christ with his followers, the Church. God’s commands do not come to the Church *in vacuo*, but on the basis of prevenient grace: a very significant relationship arising from the forgiveness of sins and the empowerment to become children of God.

Chapter four raised the question of construal, of how one sees the world, and the difference it makes to how we interact with the world. If we minimise God’s self-revelation in human history we are left with a construal that is essentially utilitarian: an imaginative construal to serve the salvation of the consciousness of the cosmos, as McFague has proposed. Such a construal was shown to be an inadequate basis for true Christian joy. Barth rightly stresses the transcendence of God. He highlights God’s self-revelation in human history, chiefly in Jesus of Nazareth. That revelation comes from the outside, from “above”, with authority and truth. He demonstrates from Scripture that God is a joyful God who elects human beings into the kingdom of his Son. Yet in the *Church Dogmatics* there seems to be a gap. Human joy in the service of God does not figure as much as one might expect. Mary’s joy expressed in the Magnificat in relation to the Incarnation does not receive an exegetical comment, nor does the master’s speech in the Parable of the Talents, “Well done … you have been faithful over a little … enter the joy of you Master.” In his discussion of Christian obedience, Barth uses a subdued double negative: the man who obeys is “not unrefreshed.” Perhaps, his construal of God’s relationship with humanity is too one-sidedly concentrating on the action of God and human contemplation of God (in company with Augustine¹). It does not encompass obedient human actions and God’s contemplation of humans in these actions. Consequently there is little opportunity to consider joy in participation with God.

¹ Augustine’s engagement in the refutation of Pelagianism may have colored his discourses.
Joy is difficult to define. Barth did not define it in the *Church Dogmatics* but related it to God’s glory and beauty. From a psychological point of view, joy results from an intuitive realisation that what we experience is truly congruent with our being; it arises from an integration of will, soul, mind and body. The Hebrew words for joy indicate the involvement of the body in expressing joy through movement and vocalisation. Joy comes when we are able to savour our experience as we experience it. It has some spontaneity about it. In the Christian context, consciously participating in the theocentric triadic structure of life in accordance with the covenant parameters brings joy not only to God but also to the Christian and it builds community. “To walk in the works which God has prepared beforehand for us to do” (Eph 2:10 RSV) is the individual and communal participation God requires. It is a way of life, not merely a matter of weathering occasional moral crises.

This way of life is learned. The metaphors of “being born again” and “becoming children of God” and the expressions “learning Christ” and “being imitators of God” indicate as much. These metaphors and expressions have a connotation not of arbitrary command, but of the relational “above” of supportive parental authority to supervise, encourage and enable participation in life. This learning takes place in the theocentric triadic structure, in response to the commandment to love God with one’s whole person and one’s neighbour as oneself in the light of Lev 19:17-18, where love includes reproving one’s neighbour. This learning is enabled by the Holy Spirit at work in the believer through the reading of Scripture and prayer, through communal worship of God, and mutual correction in a community that also stands under the correction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In spite of our shortcomings, of remaining *simul iustus et peccator*, Christians are to grow in grace, to attain maturity as Christians. The joint task is both to be and become God’s holy people, akin to a seedling both being and
becoming a tree. This communal and individual learning and training, when it works as it is supposed to, will brings joy not only to God but also to the participants. Such learning is the precondition, the purpose and the result of sanctification. It prepares Christians for participation in the new heaven and new earth by participating here and now in nurturing God’s creation.

On their own, each of the three generally recognised motifs in Christian ethics is inadequate to do justice to the description of Christian moral life. The theocentric triadic structure demands the integration of these three motifs in order to adequately represent this learning of how to be God’s holy people, a royal priesthood both for now and the world to come. Participation implies relationship and task. In the Christian context the relationship is grounded in God’s creation and grace expressed in Christ – the relational motif. The invitation to participate in the task of glorifying God and enjoying him for ever implies parameters for the task – the prescriptive motif. Within those parameters there is room for taking account of circumstances – the deliberative motif. The great commandment to love God requires this integration for an ethic to be participatory. We are created in the image of God and restored into “sonship” through the gracious empowerment to become “children of God” again. This creates the possibility of resonance with God who contemplates with joy his children as they grow to maturity, into the full measure of the stature of his beloved Son Jesus Christ. We enter into that joy.

I conclude by considering some connections between this ethic of joy in participation and the moral life of the Christian. This matter will be looked at under three headings.²

² These questions were prompted by an essay by Vincent MacNamara, “The distinctiveness of Christian morality” in Christian Ethics, 149-159.
1. How does a Christian ethic of joy in participation relate to a moral life?

This ethic does not encourage a moral life for its own sake. There is a danger that Christians will seek joy rather than the glory of God. Brunner warns that to lead a moral life in order to be joyful is a distortion of the Christian faith and the quest is bound to fail. Human beings are designed, it seems, to experience joy when life is lived in congruence with God’s purposes for human beings. Thus, to glorify God requires attention to one’s relationship with God in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the prescriptions God graciously provides and empowers us to adhere to, and to the circumstances set before us, so that our actions resonate with being created in the image of God. The moral life will be a life of actively doing good, rather than merely avoiding evil. The triadic structure draws a person into the community, to joyful learning and mutual correction and encouragement in faith and action. The community is and becomes a royal priesthood, a holy people pointing others to God.

2. Does a Christian ethic of joy in participation support and encourage morality?

In so far as the ethic of joy in participation addresses the whole person, it fosters a morality congruent with who we are, as creatures in the image of God. This ethic encourages Christians to glorify God as a way of life. Humans are invited and commanded to participate in their own (re)development according to God’s purposes, which have become their own purposes. As they learn to imitate God, joy arises as “positive feedback.” The triadic relationship envisages joyful mutual correction and provocation to get involved in good works, individually and communally, before God as enabler, encourager, supporter and critic. Because these actions have a common purpose to glorify God, they bring joy in participation. This ethic certainly helps to encourage Christian morality, namely, growing into the full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ here and now and for an eternal destiny. This ethic also supports a general communal
morality in so far as there is an overlap between the content of Christian morality and secular morality.

3. How does a Christian ethic of joy in participation affect the notion of morality?

Christian ethics is distinctive in that it is grounded in the holiness of God, and aims at glorifying God individually and communally. Morality as an expression of human aspirations, such as McFague or Mackay propose, is not central to a Christian ethic. To some extent the Christian faith subverts the public notion of morality. It demands an “above” and “below” in ethical discourse, a matter foreign to popular discourse on ethics.

Christian morality arises out of God's invitation to participate (and our learning to participate) in the action of this Triune God in the world, individually and communally. Thus from a Christian perspective, the notion of morality has its human-sponsored parameters diminished and the divinely-set and revealed parameters accentuated. The moral life becomes a joyful adventure with God in the company of God’s people rather than an individualistic journey of self-justification and self-realisation.

Therefore Christian integrity does not, in the final analysis, consist of following one's own conscience, but is shaped by God. It is God who determines whether one has acted according to the will of God. That will is indicated by the law written on tablets of stone and written on the heart, by the stories in the Biblical tradition, and by the guidance of the Spirit in the need of the moment, all orienting us towards God’s larger purposes.

The Christian ethic of joy in participation runs counter to the Kantian ethic, where doing one’s duty, even against one’s own preferences and inclinations, is morally meritorious. Christians learn to act in congruence with who they are called to be by
God, and if God’s law is written on their hearts, joy will be there in what they are doing, even if the circumstances are difficult. The coachman spent his last money for the bride, Gaita’s nun faced with radiance a group of people exhibiting discomforting behaviour, and Captain Sullenberger made a difficult landing on the Hudson River. Each acted from a formed character in spontaneity, “as if they could not help it,” and in the process brought joy to others, to God and to themselves. Right action is not to be judged by our likes or dislikes. Rather they are developed through practice, underwritten by God’s enabling.

This ethic provides morality with a dynamism, in that it sees the moral agent as open to change, as a work in progress, as God’s craftsmanship. A Christian ethic of joy provides for restoration of those who have lived in separation from God, by welcoming new believers and encouraging them to participate in worship and in the purposes of the triune God. Such participation leads to mutual joy through divine approval. The educative and sanctifying process happens in community, not in isolation, not in an inner world of the self but in the simultaneous interaction between people, and between people and God. It is God who ultimately judges our actions and attitudes. A Christian ethic of joy in participation makes morality a theocentric communal activity.

Entering into the joy of the Master does not require an anxious, superlative ‘best’, but an honest, whole-hearted response that turns mere compliance into joyful obedience. The Psalmist spoke of the offering of an upright heart willing to participate in God’s law.

Unlike happiness and ecstasy, joy requires community. A Christian ethic of joy

\[\text{Cf 2 Cor 9:7} \, \text{“God loves a cheerful giver.” The amount is less significant than the cheerfulness that accompanies the giving.}\]
in participation is not an ethic of abstraction or individualism. The development of morality is seen as a communal mutually corrective task. It assumes the possibility of *metanoia*. This reorientation leads to an engagement in community, a trust in and agreement about the nature and purpose of creaturely existence: to be and to become God’s holy people. The Christian is shaped by the threefold theocentric interrelationship of individual, community and God, opened up by an invitation into the divine *perichoresis*. A Christian ethic of joy in participation acknowledges God's grace-ful contemplation of the Christian, and the Christian's awareness of God's contemplation of him or her. The way lies open through Jesus Christ to experience joy in the privilege of resonating with the Trinity in participating in God’s purposes, here and now and for eternity.
APPENDIX A

The Christian Context to Christian Ethics

CHECK LIST
What are the particular principles to be derived from

1. Creation
   (a) Natural law
   (b) Humans in the image of God
   (c) Virtue/Conscience
   (d) Creation ordinances
   (e) The Fall

2. The Old Testament
   (a) Covenant and law
   (b) Wisdom literature
   (c) The prophets

3. The New Testament
   (a) Redemption
   (b) Kingdom ethics
   (c) Paul’s ethics
   (d) The Pastoral Epistles
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