

Holding hands and bearing arms: A continuing challenge for global religious communities.

by
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Introduction:

The last one hundred years has been a time in which scientific research has yielded unprecedented life-saving contributions, but at the same time probably more violent actions have been perpetrated by human beings on each other than ever before.¹ All too frequently these conflicts have arisen amongst and between communities known as the ‘children of Abraham’ who have a common monotheistic religious history. Furthermore, each of the three faith traditions are being challenged by those passages in their holy scriptures that can be interpreted selectively to justify actions of aggression and rejection; at the same time, each has scriptural justification for initiatives that can lead to reconciliation and understanding of difference. One example of a variously interpreted scriptural passage in the Christian Bible is the *Parable of the Pounds* in the Gospel of Luke. This parable has been interpreted in many different ways over the past two millennia. Sometimes it has been cited to justify exploitation, polarisation and division while at other times it has been seen as a prophetic stimulus for moral rectitude and passive resistance in the face of political and religious oppression.

The parable will be explored in terms of its literary context along with the socio-cultural contexts of its past and present audiences. A particular focus will be on the way in which early Christian scholars understood this parable when Christianity was a minority sect in the Mediterranean world in comparison with later interpretations that emerged within a context of politically dominant Christendom. It will be asserted that the interpretation and contemporary impact of ancient religious writings such as this parable are highly dependent on the interpretive lens employed by readers at the time. Finally, it will be suggested that the contemporary post-Christendom reader must be open to reviewing critically some of the commonly accepted readings of influential New Testament texts that justify oppressive actions and be open to differing interpretations that offer an understanding of affirmation and permission, in their embrace and even celebration of human difference. It will be argued that an alternative reading of the *Parable of Pounds*, for instance, opens a pathway to the kind of social capital that can embrace unity within diversity and promote the fair distribution of resources amongst contemporary global human communities.

Reading the Parable of the Pounds

There has never been a single commonly accepted homogeneous theological understanding within the contemporary Christian Church, let alone between

¹ See Karen Armstrong, *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World*. (Macmillan, London, 1988) 1-4.

and amongst all three of the monotheistic religions. One of the greatest barriers has been a commitment to the literal inerrancy of Holy Scriptures that leads to a reduction of every situation of conflict into ‘a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil’ with the result that some religious groups define themselves over and against whomever, or whatever, is different.² These proclamations of exclusivist faith understandings automatically relegate all other political or religious thought, including secular humanism, into categories that may be perceived as ‘unacceptable’ or ‘other.’³ The complexity underlying the social and religious movements that influence these mindsets should not be underestimated. At a time when globalisation is an economic and increasingly political reality, religious influences such as these have the potential to impact, both positively and negatively, vast numbers of people. An example of one such passage in the Christian Bible that has been used to justify the accumulation of wealth as a divinely ordained blessing, and the destruction of dissidents as a logical management response, is the *Parable of the Pounds* found in the Third Gospel of the New Testament writings which is assumed to have been authored by a man named Luke.⁴

The Third Gospel was probably written about a decade after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem 70CE. It was a time when the traditions of Judaism were being re-examined in the search for a future identity that would offer hope and meaning for Palestine’s dispossessed Jewish communities. Christianity, as a separate religious identity, was not yet a fixed concept and the followers of Jesus Christ constituted just one of the many sects of Judaism in Palestine at the time. It was a time when the Jewish-Christian author, possibly a priest traditionally known as Luke,⁵ sought to reframe the remembered stories of Jesus so that these diverse newly developing sectarian communities could embrace each other as companions, and even siblings, who shared together the same history.⁶ Luke’s Gospel is the sole source for several significant stories told by Jesus that focussed on the use of wealth, social privilege, and cross-cultural human relationships. They include the well-known *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, and the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, along with others about a *Rich Fool*, a *Shrewd Manager*, and a *Rich Man and Lazarus*.⁷ The *Parable of the Pounds* is not as well known, and although it almost certainly has a source in common with the *Parable of the Talents* found in the Gospel of Matthew.⁸ In Luke’s Gospel, however, the parable is situated in a totally different narrative context and has the potential to tell a more confronting story.

² Karen Armstrong, *The battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) xi

³ Armstrong, *Battle for God*, 86.

⁴ *Luke* 19:11-27

⁵ Rick Strelan, *Luke the priest. The authority and author of the Third Gospel*. (Aldershot UK / Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008) 1.

⁶ Craig A. Evans, *Luke*. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1990) 7. See also Bruce W. Tuckman & Mary Ann C. Jensen, ‘Stages of small group development revisited,’ *Group and Organizational Studies*, 2 (1977): 419-427.

⁷ *Luke* 12:16-21; 15:11-31; 16:1-8, 9-13.

⁸ *Matthew* 25: 14-30

The Gospel commences with stories of Jesus' birth, infancy, and childhood with a distinctive emphasis on Jesus' priestly family connections and their regular observance of the traditions of Israel. The narrative then proceeds to describe Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing in the Galilee region and, in spite of the concern of others, his determination to return to Jerusalem, a place depicted as one of both hospitality and threat, of divine presence as well as absence. As the Lucan Jesus journeys along the way, his followers are consistently challenged to revisit their religious roots and to seek its distinctive ethical base. This produces the potential for hospitality to be given and received freely, no matter whether it is between friends or with perceived enemies;⁹ the forgiveness of debts will result in renewed relationships between lender and debtor on an equal footing;¹⁰ and the sharing of resources amongst the community will result in benefits for all.¹¹ The *Parable of the Pounds* then addresses all of these ethical elements and is told as Jesus' journey reaches its last stage on the way to Jerusalem.¹² It is followed by stories of active confrontation with political and religious authorities, confusion and distress amongst Jesus' followers, and then the arrest, trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem.

In the *Parable of the Pounds*, the Lucan Jesus tells a story about a ruthless, wealthy, and widely despised, community leader who goes overseas to seek enhanced political power for himself. Before leaving his own country, this so-called 'nobleman' gives ten of his slaves ten pounds each with the direction that they should 'Do business with these until I come back!'¹³ Then on his return, after receiving the political power he had been seeking, this newly appointed 'nobleman-king' calls his slaves to account. The responses of only three of the ten slaves are mentioned in the parable. The first is rewarded with control over ten cities for having doubled the value of the nobleman-king's investment in him, then the second is commensurately rewarded after showing that he had increased his allotment by fifty percent. Finally, the focus shifts to a third slave who accuses his master of fraud and duplicity, revealing that instead of investing the money he had been allocated. He states clearly that he has preserved and then returned the ten pounds he had been given because he refuses to exploit others in order to produce enhanced wealth for his newly appointed master-ruler. The parable finishes with a challenging statement. From the mouth of the newly empowered ruler comes the words, 'I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. And as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my

⁹ Luke 10: 1-38; 13:10-18; 14:1-23; 15:1-32; 18:35-19:20

¹⁰ Luke 11:1-4; 16:1-31; 17:1-4

¹¹ Luke 11:5-9; 12:13-31; 18:18-27

¹² Luke 19:11-27

¹³ Luke 19:13. Following the English translation of the original Greek in *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Copyright © 1989.

presence.’¹⁴

Most Christian commentators see the Nobleman-King as a positive character and affirm the shrewd productive investments by the first two slaves. Consequently, the third slave is seen then as an antagonistic character because he failed to make gains from the money entrusted to him. But careful attention to some of the intertextual elements in the *Parable of the Pounds* reveals some interesting connections and suggests an alternative reading is possible. The third slave character, who is consistently defined as ‘other,’ a term employed in the Third Gospel three times more often than in the other Gospels. This ‘other’ slave is depicted carefully wrapping in a cloth the deposit he had received from his master and burying it. Interestingly, in this action the author aligns him with Mary, the mother of Jesus in the Lucan birth narrative, who wraps her newly born baby in a cloth and places it in a manger.¹⁵ Following an earlier source from Mark’s Gospel but adding an element of dissent, Luke describes Joseph of Arimathea as a member of the Jerusalem religious council, and depicts him taking the crucified body of Jesus, wrapping it in a linen cloth, and then reverently placing it in his own unused tomb.¹⁶ Another literary connection can be found in the Lucan passion narrative where Jesus is judged by his religious elders on the basis of words uttered ‘from his own lips,’ thus echoing the judgment on the third slave who, according to the nobleman-king, was ‘judged by his own words’.¹⁷ The result is that both characters, the Third Slave and Jesus, are condemned by the same pragmatic judicial system that puts its own interests before those of others.¹⁸

Interpreting the *Parable of the Pounds* by noting these intertextual elements is not antagonistic to the narrative flow of Luke’s Gospel but allows a continuity with the revelatory proclamation of tolerance and mutuality implicit in the prophetic charge to Israel that it be a ‘revelation to the Gentiles.’¹⁹ It also echoes the imperative to ‘love one’s neighbour as one loves oneself’ that is illustrated in the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*.²⁰ The ‘other’ slave, who refuses to be compromised by the nobleman-king in the *Parable of the Pounds*, can be seen as a faithful reflection of the Lucan Jesus who also refuses to exploit his neighbour for personal gain. The characters of both the slave and Jesus are depicted as being determined to retain the mutuality and interdependence of reciprocal generosity in a society of ‘limited good’,²¹ holding on to what the author perceives as the true tradition of Israel at a time

¹⁴ Luke 19:26-27

¹⁵ Luke 2:7

¹⁶ Luke 2:7; 23:53

¹⁷ Luke 19:22 ; 22:71

¹⁸ For a more extensive exegetical analysis see Merrill Kitchen, ‘Rereading the Parable of the Pounds: A social and narrative analysis of Luke 19:11-28,’ in *Prophecy and passion. Essays in honour of Athol Gill*. David Neville (ed.) (Hindmarsh SA: Australian Theological Forum, 2002) 225-246.

¹⁹ Isaiah 52:10//Luke 2:32.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18 // Luke 10:27.

²¹ George M. Foster, ‘Peasant society and the image of limited good,’ *American anthropologist* 67, 2 (1965): 304-305; and Halvor Moxnes, *The economy of the kingdom of God. Social conflict and economic relations in Luke’s Gospel*. (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1988) 75-98.

when others, for their own gain, may well have been aligning themselves with a number of different power groups in order to retain their authority and power in the midst of evolving new religious expressions.

Another interesting contextual element when reading and interpreting the *Parable of the Pounds* is the historical reality that the parable was written at a time when memories of Archelaus and Antipas, two ambitious, ruthless sons of King Herod the Great, may have still been burning in the minds of the Gospel's earliest audience. At the time of their influence, in the early first-century, Roman hegemony over the region of Palestine controlled its economy and fostered mutually productive connections with Jewish collaborators.²² After the death of Herod, these ambitious sons appealed to Rome for the right to rule over their father's territory. Having received imperial consent, according to the historian Josephus, Archelaus returned and massacred more than three thousand worshippers on the Jerusalem Temple during a Jewish feast.²³ In light of this historical context it is not difficult to see why some of the earliest commentators on the Gospels such as Irenaeus, interpreted this passage quite differently to later scholars living in the eras after the Emperor Constantine had embraced Christianity.²⁴ The pre-Constantinian interpreters of the Christian scriptures tended to understand narrative characters such as princes, kings and rulers as exemplars of abuse and repression. Their heroes were those who resisted ruling powers rather than those who collaborated. After Constantine, when the ruling power was on the side of the church, Christian scholars tended to read the same parables in reverse. The kings and rulers became god-like heroes and the uncooperative characters were seen as treasonous, exemplars of revolt.

Reading the parable of the Pounds Today

A survey of interpretations of the parable by a range of Christian scholars over the last century shows a continuing bias in favour of the wealthy characters.²⁵ It

²² See Josephus *Life of Flavius Josephus* 68-76 in *The works of Josephus*. trans. William Whiston (Peabody MA: Hendrickson), 1987:23-26; also Séan Freyne *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323BCE to 135CE. A study of Second Temple Judaism*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 165-170.

²³ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 2.1.1 – 8.1.1 in *The works of Josephus*, 511-525.

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Against heresies*. Book 1, VI.4; Book II, XXIV.3 in *The ante-Nicene fathers*. Volume 1. eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 324, 411-412. Also Frédéric Manns, 'La Parole des Talents: Wirkungsgeschichte et racines Juives', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 65 (1991): 346-358 extensively reviews the interpretations of the *Parable of the Talents* in the Patristic writings commenting in passing on the *Parable of the Pounds*. See also Eusebius, *De Theophania* cited in William D. Stroker, *Extracanonical sayings of Jesus*. (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 45.

²⁵ See for example J. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. (London / Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1950) 473-478; I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*. NIGCT (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 700-709; Eduard Schweizer, *The good news according to Luke*. trans. David E. Green (Atlanta GA: John Knox Press), 1984, 292-296; J. Massyngbaerd Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest. Jesus and Violence in Luke*. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1984), 108-109. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*. (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1227-1233; Michael Goulder, *Luke. A New Paradigm*. Vols I and II, (Sheffield UK: JSOT Press, 1989), 683; Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 285; Joel B. Green *The Gospel of Luke*. NICNT (Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 1997), 673-680. But note that the dissonance was recognised over a century ago by German

also assumes that the accumulation of wealth is evidence of faithful service. The slave-owning, nobleman-king character is perceived then to be an allegory of a God who presumes uncritical loyalty with the right to destroy any who question the ethics of such a rule. Consequently, the disobedient 'other' who refuses to comply with the directions of such a God, is seen as disobedient and having failed to meet the divine expectations is judged appropriately. In addition, the characters of all of those who had objected to his pursuit of power are publicly, and justifiably, killed at his command. These objectors are seen by most New Testament commentators as representing anybody who has been found guilty of failing to welcome Jesus as Messiah.

In terms of the human search for significance and power, little has probably changed since the eras of the Herods and Constantine. Certainly, Christianity, 'whether colonized or colonizing, has not existed in abstraction from empire.'²⁶ Instead of standing prophetically with the risk-taker or whistle-blower who would confront exploitative powers, the political and religious bodies of Christendom have always been tempted to invest their social and spiritual capital into 'imperialistic ambitions' often with the aim of 'conquest and expansion, not in terms of any sort of joint exploration with other traditions.'²⁷ Furthermore, in spite of the growth of a secular academy and an inherent individualism underlying most contemporary Western societies, an element of communal religious and economic fundamentalism continues to have a powerful influence. Some citizens continue to see their own rulers as 'saviours', and even regard themselves as specially chosen people.²⁸ They may be outraged when other local, national or global groups question their claims of special privilege. Of course, it is possible that a group response to such challenges may lead to thoughtful reflexive actions that result in harm minimisation but, all too often, the reactions can be manifested in ethnic cleansing, focussed oppression and even terrorism in an attempt to retrieve group honour in the face of perceived global shame.²⁹ Unfortunately, any effort

theologian Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910), 472-495. Later commentators recognising the dissonance include Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*. trans. S.H.Hooke, (London: SCM Press, 1966), 46-47; Luke Timothy Johnson, 'The Lukan Kingship Parable (Lk 19.11-27)', *Novum Testamentum* 24, 2 (1982):139; Ignace de la Potterie, 'La Parole du Prétendant à la Royauté (Lc 19.11-28)', *A Cause de l'Évangile. Études sur les Synoptiques et les Actes*, (Paris: Cerf / Publications de Saint-Abdré, 1986), 641; James M.Dawsey, *The Lukan Voice. Confusion and Irony in the Gospel of Luke*. Macon GA: Peeters Mercer, 1986), 96-97; J.D.M. Derrett, 'A Horrid Passage in Luke Explained', *Expository Times* 97 (1986): 136-138; Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom. Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel*, (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 73; Brendan Byrne *The hospitality of God. A reading of Luke's Gospel*. (Strathfield NSW: St Paul's, 2000), 152-153.

²⁶ Catherine Keller, 'The love of postcolonialism: Theology in the interstices of Empire,' in *Postcolonial theologies: Divinity and empire*. eds. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, (St Louis MS: Chalice, 2004), 223; see also Bernard Lewis, *The multiple identities of the Middle-East*. London: Phoenix, 1999, 26-28.

²⁷ Keith Ward, 'Convergent spirituality,' in *Christianity in the 21st century*. ed. Deborah A. Brown (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 49.

²⁸ Armstrong, *The battle for God*, 368.

²⁹ For a discussion on the social values of honor and shame see Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, 'Honor and shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal values of the Mediterranean world,' in *The*

to win individual human rights for people perceived to be enslaved by tyrannical dictatorships in honor-shame societies is likely to result in further tyranny and the further destabilization of their hierarchical social, economic and political structures. Furthermore, even minority fundamentalist movements can use their small numbers to influence critical decision-making. As a result, individual human rights risk being extinguished when the imposition of militant religious regimes enact their regimentation and cruel judgment.³⁰

Sadly, there are religious groups in the 21st century who continue to claim the language of the medieval crusades. They label others, even including some within their own faith tradition, as the equivalent of infidels and traitors. It is not merely a clash between modernist and medieval thought as much as a syncretistic meshing of reason, revelation and social formulation influenced by the kind of immediate anxious perceptions generated in times of threat and rapid change. In the present global community, there continues to be some powerfully influential religious bodies, once conceived by medieval ecclesial systems in 'scholastic, doctrinal formulations' and administered by exclusivist clergy.³¹ Unless these religious bodies take the risk of voluntary powerlessness and engage in open dialogue with others from different traditions, their particular interpretations of the Holy Scriptures will continue to be used to justify privileged positions along with the control of power resources for particular benefit rather than the common good. In the twenty-first century, these controlling resources include educational facilities, military armaments, power generating industries, agricultural developments and border protection constraints. The eyes of the world are able to penetrate in a way never seen before. Satellite dishes and television antennae dominate the rooftops of Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, Baghdad, Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem today just as they do in all other cities in the region. At the same time as millions of people in Europe, the USA and Australia are watching the daily breaking news; millions of others throughout the Middle-East (including refugees) are seeing the same images through Hebrew and Arabic providers as well as from large Western providers such as the BBC and CNN. This common electronic bond links human beings around the globe, but reactions to the received images will differ depending on the way each viewer processes the information. While the anxious in some regions of the world will have their anxieties assuaged by images and discourses of trustworthy power and feel empowered to hold hands with those who are different, there are others whose outrage will be intensified by the same discourse and who will take up arms against those perceived as the enemy 'other.' It doesn't matter whether the anxious viewer is American or Iraqi, Australian or Afghani, Zimbabwean or South African, Jewish, Christian or Muslim - this stark human reality has been demonstrated over and over again in all people groups throughout all human eras.

social world of Luke-Acts. Models for interpretation. ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 25-65.

³⁰ Armstrong, *Battle for God*, 86.

³¹ Walter Bruegemann, *Testimony to otherwise. The witness to Elijah and Elisha.* (St Louis MS: Chalice Press, 2007), 28.

In terms of global harmony and longevity, it is important to remember that there are liberal capitalist structures and economic hegemonies that appear, for their long-term survival, to be heavily dependent on natural energy resources that are often geographically situated in the lands of their perceived enemy. If amicable access to high-dependency products such as oil becomes impossible, it seems inevitable that a move back to potentially world-threatening nuclear energy resources will occur. Such a scenario can be resisted by those who have the power to make change. Like the ‘other’ slave in the *Parable of the Pounds* there are significant voices within each of the Abrahamic faith communities that offer pathways towards the development of mutually beneficial concepts of hope. By imaginatively integrating the perceived polarities, perhaps a retained truth embedded in the Gospel paradox can be embraced once again inspiring an attitude of reception, appreciation and hospitality to the ‘other’ in the hope that these actions will be reciprocated with responses of grace.

Perhaps the *Parable of the Pounds* could be transliterated for the 21st century reader thus:

“A political leader went to an international gathering of leaders from the twelve most powerful nations in order to gain appointment as his country’s representative. He summoned ten of his advisors, and challenged them to recruit as many supporters as possible for his ultra-conservative nationalist agenda. But an ecumenical inter-faith delegation of religious leaders of his country, who were deeply concerned about his policies, sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to exert his racist and sexist policies in our country.’ On his return, the first came forward and said, ‘Global leader, I have recruited ten of the world’s most powerful media magnates to your cause.’ He said to her, ‘Well done, good advisor! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of the multi-million dollar Global economic portfolio I now have.’ Then the second came, saying, ‘Global Leader, I have recruited the five wealthiest people in the world to your cause.’ He said to him, ‘And you, take charge of the Global Trade and Industry portfolio.’ Finally, another came, saying, ‘My Leader, here is your written request of me. I folded it up and put it in an envelope, for I refuse to abuse others for my own political ambitions, I am fearful of you, because you are a very ambitious and ruthless man; you are taking what you did not earn, and you are attempting to reap what you did not sow.’

The Global Leader said to him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked advisor! Then turning to his bystanders he commanded, ‘Take his position from him and give it to the head of Global Economics.’ But the religious leaders who were also standing by said to him, ‘Global Leader, stop constantly rewarding the exclusivist racists all the time!’

To which retorted, ‘I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine—these undermining ecumenical inter-faith religious leaders—bring them here and silence their voices by getting rid of them.’”

The Lucan Jesus held closely to the tradition of Israel and refused to conform to the demands of corrupt religious and political powers. Ultimately, it cost him his life. At the same time a new awareness began to emerge, and a paradoxical power from a stance of voluntary powerlessness stimulated new religious reformations to emerge from the cradle of Israel. It did not stop the cycles of violence that have continued to whirl over millennia, but it did offer alternative pathways for human relationship –ways of holding hands with each other and respecting difference rather than bearing arms in order to eradicate the other.

The cost of holding hands rather than bearing arms may be heavy, but there are many from the whole gamut of world religions in the last century who, for the benefit of all humanity, have refused to exploit the other. Almost sixty years ago, Nelson Mandela urged South Africans to ‘break out of the vicious cycle of dependence imposed on us by the financially powerful’ describing the oppressors as people who ‘dare to fashion the world in their own image.’³² These words cost him his freedom for 27 years. For Martin Buber and Jonathan Sacks, from the Jewish tradition, it is about saying ‘thou’ before saying ‘I’ or ‘we.’³³ Emanuel Levinas, in his essays on Judaism writes,

‘The justice rendered to the Other, to my neighbour, gives me an unsurpassable proximity to God . . . One follows the Most High God, above all by drawing near to one’s neighbour, and showing concern for “the widow, the orphan. The stranger and the beggar,” an approach that must not be made with “empty hands”.’³⁴

The teachings of the Qur’an also frame this ethic of mutuality and reciprocity in the language of ‘holding hands.’ As Dr Ghazi Salahuddin Atabani points out, ‘Rather than indulging in sterile polemics with Christians and Jews, Muslims are encouraged to hold hands with them in spreading monotheism, adhering to virtues and abstaining from vices.’³⁵

It is in the encouraging words and actions of people such as these that, in putting the needs of other before our own, we can hear the heartbeat and feel the hand of God.

³² Nelson Mandela, ‘No easy walk to freedom’ address. August 21, 1953. *In the words of Nelson Mandela*. Jennifer Crwys-Williams (ed.) Secaucus NJ: Carol Publishing, 1998, 16.

³³ Martin Buber, *I and thou*. R. G. Smith (trans.) New York: Macmillan, 1987; Jonathan Sacks, *The dignity of difference. How to avoid the clash of civilisations*. (London/New York: Continuum, 2003), 151.

³⁴ Terry Veling, ‘In the name of who? Levinas and the other side of theology,’ *Pacifica* 12 (1999):292, citing Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 18, 26.

³⁵ Ghazi Salahuddin Atabani, ‘Islamic Shari’ah and the status of non-Muslims,’ *Religion, law and society. A Christian-Muslim discussion*.ed. Tarek Mitri (Geneva/Kampen: WCC Publications / Kok Pharos Publishing, 1995), 64.

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