

## Restorative Justice: Saul's Encounter with the Risen Jesus

Geoff Broughton

St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra

### ABSTRACT

*The restorative justice movement incorporates a growing body of academic theory and diversity of practice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by wrongdoing. A central feature of most practice is when victims, offenders and community members meet in a face-to-face encounter. This article explores Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road in Acts chapter nine through the lens of restorative justice. By challenging the traditional emphasis on the horizontal relationship that interpret the encounter as Saul's conversion, and the New Perspective emphasis on vertical relationships which interpret the encounter as Saul's calling, the restorative justice lens extends and deepens the understanding of the encounter as 'reconciliation.' The key proposal is that God's restorative justice is enacted by the risen Jesus' simultaneous naming and forgiving of Saul's wrongdoing. The article concludes by revealing in Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus that justice is done and relationships restored.*

### Introduction

An early creedal statement found in 1 Corinthians 15, nominates Peter and Paul as the first and last witnesses of the risen Jesus. These two apostles dominate the early Christian preaching recorded in Luke-Acts. For Peter and Paul, Jesus' resurrection is never far from view. Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road is alluded to, both explicitly and implicitly, about thirty times in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> *What did Paul experience in his encounter with the risen Jesus?* Theology has mostly been concerned to answer this Christologically – who is Jesus of Nazareth, now risen from the dead? While I affirm the answer given in the historic creeds,<sup>2</sup> Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus invites further theological exploration. This encounter can also be interpreted relationally: elucidating the changed or transformed relationship: from enmity to reconciliation, from a relationship violated by some wrong to a relationship restored to its proper condition, where new and unimagined possibilities from the relationship emerge.<sup>3</sup> The relational lens of restorative justice seeks to understand and facilitate how relationships are restored even as justice is done.<sup>4</sup> By a 'relational' interpretation of the encounter of Paul with the risen Jesus, I am not suggesting anything resembling the psychological analysis of Paul's mind or the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul W. Barnett, *Paul, Missionary of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 57-70.

<sup>2</sup> '[Jesus] descended into hell and rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.'

<sup>3</sup> Barnett, *Paul, Missionary of Jesus*, p.72 who observes these features, but is content with the traditional language of conversion. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 12 offers two additional ways of interpreting the movement from darkness to light, according to the New Testament, alteration and transformation.

<sup>4</sup> The most dominant model within the Restorative justice field is the therapeutic process, which has limitations for the theory and practice of Restorative justice as described in See further Geoff Broughton, "Restorative Justice: Opportunities for Christian Engagement," *International Journal of Public Theology* 3 (2009).

encounter.<sup>5</sup> My interest is to explore the anatomy of repentance and forgiveness, conversion and transformation that is offered by the 'changed lens' of Restorative justice.

### Paul's Encounter with the risen Jesus (Acts 9, 22 and 26)

The New Testament provides detailed accounts of the lives, activities and teaching of both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul, yet surprisingly few passages that deal explicitly with the relationship between Jesus and Paul.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Jesus and Paul is critical to understanding New Testament theology,<sup>7</sup> and consequently a considerable burden of scholarly attention has focused on the only place where they met, the dramatic encounter on the Damascus Road. This is recorded in three passages in the book of Acts,<sup>8</sup> and testimony to the encounter by Paul in his letters,<sup>9</sup> notably in Galatians chapter 1 and 1 Cor 15:1-11.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of the Damascus road encounter and its attendant impact on Paul's theology and mission, is a matter of continuing speculation and disagreement.<sup>11</sup> Two interpretations of the Damascus encounter have tended to become dominant over the past two decades.<sup>12</sup> The first and the traditional view, emphasizes Acts chapter 9, interpreted as Paul's 'conversion' and locates 'justification' at the centre of the Damascus encounter (represented by New Testament scholars Martin Hengel, F. F. Bruce and Hans Conzelmann).<sup>13</sup> The second view, and it is a more recent one highlights either the 'calling' of Paul in Acts chapters 22 and 26, giving birth to Paul's 'mission to the Gentiles' (e.g. James D. G. Dunn, Ernst Haenchen) or the 'revelation' that compelled a new belief that 'Jesus was the Messiah' (e.g. N. T. Wright) who are usually gathered together under the 'New Perspective' label.<sup>14</sup> A third proposal, and one

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963). Neither am I interested in exploring affect (shame, empathy etc.), or question of 'conflict resolution.'

<sup>6</sup> Seyoon Kim, "Jesus, Sayings Of," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Martin Hawthorne, Ralph P. Reid, Daniel G. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 487-490 offers the reasons for the paucity and allusive character of Paul's references to the Jesus tradition.

<sup>7</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem Christianity in the Making*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 28 summarises the main questions regarding the relationship. A more optimistic analysis is offered by, David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995). Also good summaries of the issues can be found in Kim, "Jesus, Sayings Of." and John M.G. Barclay, "Jesus and Paul," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Martin Hawthorne, Ralph P. Reid, Daniel G. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Octavian D. Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), p. 209 highlights the narrative features which point towards Acts 9 as the primary Lucan version (which I will focus in this chapter).

<sup>9</sup> Paul W. Barnett, "The Corinthian Riddle: Why the Church Rejected Its Founder," (Sydney: Moore Theological College, 2009), p. 2 who has observed that 'within Paul's letters (excluding the Pastorals) there are thirty or so references to Paul's changed life following the Damascus Event.' For more detailed argument, see Barnett, *Paul, Missionary of Jesus*, pp. 57-70.

<sup>10</sup> See also 1 Cor 9:1. Allusions to Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus can also be found in 2 Cor 4:6 and Philippians 3:4-16. Further detailed analysis occurs across the collection of essays in Seyoon Kim, "God Reconciled His Enemy to Himself: The Origin of Paul's Concept of Reconciliation," in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997). Particularly relevant for this chapter is, Kim, "God Reconciled His Enemy to Himself: The Origin of Paul's Concept of Reconciliation." Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981) and Peter T. O'Brien, "'Was Paul Converted?'" in *Justification and Variegated Nomism 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. O'Brien D. A. Carson, P. T. and Seifrid, M. A., (Tübingen: : Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See the debate following the highly significant essay by James D. G. Dunn, "'a Light to the Gentiles,' or 'the End of the Law'? The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> None of the views presented are as mutually exclusive, but differ in what functions as the theological centre of the Damascus encounter, and therefore the centre of Paul's theology.

<sup>13</sup> See Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1979); F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 232-45 and idem., *Paul, Apostle of the Free Spirit*, Rev. ed. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), pp. 74-82 and pp.113-125; and Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. A. Thomas Kraabel and Donald H. Juel James Limburg, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 70-3. O'Brien, "'Was Paul Converted?'" offers a comprehensive defensive of 'conversion' as the most appropriate category for what happened to Paul on the Damascus Road.

<sup>14</sup> James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 1987) and James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), pp. 346-54; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of*

beginning to attract attention, locates the origins of Paul's distinct theology of reconciliation in the encounter on the Damascus Road. This reconciliation, understood in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions, is advocated by New Testament scholar Seyoon Kim and Yale Theologian Miroslav Volf who follow the earlier suggestions of New Testament commentators C. K. Barrett, I. H. Marshall and Ralph Martin.<sup>15</sup> My understanding of 'God's restorative justice' resembles the third proposal, of 'reconciliation', at several key points. However, it also differs from this proposal in some important respects.<sup>16</sup> I want to show that depicting the Damascus encounter as God's restorative justice offers a fourth approach to understanding the relationship between Jesus and Paul, and also between proclaiming the kingdom of God and Jesus' death and resurrection, and between justice and justification as well.<sup>17</sup>

In order to depict the Damascus encounter as God's restorative justice, I develop a theological interpretation of Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus as suggested by a restorative justice process. Following Volf's creative proposal of, I will consider the features of Paul's experience of God's restorative justice in the face of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Whereas Volf finds, 'a striking fit between the key elements of Paul's notion of reconciliation and the key features of the narrative of his encounter with the risen Jesus' my interest is in the dynamics of Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus that simultaneously affirms justice and restores relationships. The proposal that God's justice is the kind of justice that restores, can be employed as a way of explicating what happened to Saul when he met the risen Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Structurally, I will concentrate on five features of the encounter drawing from Luke's narrative in Acts 9.<sup>19</sup>

### Encountering the Risen Jesus as a Restorative justice process

#### Wrongdoing harms individual people, communities and God

##### a. Lucan narrative (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2)

The Lucan account opens with Saul, the wrongdoer, acting in the name of God. This is how Saul saw himself. It is important to understand that wrongdoing is more than blatant acts of sin, violation and causing injury or harm to others. In Acts chapter 8-9, we confront injustices perpetrated in the name of a

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*the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 389-93 and idem., *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press., 2005), pp.42-9. Significantly, Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles a Commentary* (Oxford,: Blackwell, 1971), pp. 319-239 emphasizes the calling to the Gentile mission, but pre-dates the birth of the New Perspective. Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way*, p. 219 n. 99 can't decide between the two interpretations, 'for many commentators, Acts 9 is a conversion story, while Acts 22, 26, represent call/commissioning accounts.'

<sup>15</sup> Seyoon Kim, "2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and the Origin of Paul's Concept of Reconciliation" in *Paul and the New Perspective : Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 214-238; Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Interpretation* 54, no. 2 (2000), 158-172 who correctly notes that 'Karl Barth is a towering example of one who organizes a good deal of Christian social responsibility around the theme of reconciliation (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1,190).' See also I. Howard Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles* (Sheffield: JSOT Press (an imprint of Sheffield Academic Press), 1992), pp. 166-170, C. K. Barrett, *Paul : An Introduction to His Thought*, 1st American ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), and Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation : A Study of Paul's Theology*, Marshall's Theological Library (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> The theological centre of the Damascus event also determines the best interpretation of Paul's *dikaiōsynē* language.

<sup>17</sup> Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, p.50 recognises the historical significance of Damascus for 'the whole course of earliest Christianity... for Paul stands at, indeed in himself constitutes, that critical juncture - Paul, the Jew becomes believer in Jesus Messiah, the Pharisaic zealot become apostle to the Gentiles.'

<sup>18</sup> See further Broughton, "Restorative Justice: Opportunities for Christian Engagement."

<sup>19</sup> Although a matter of considerable debate in biblical scholarship this can be justified for a theological interpretation. Firstly; Paul W. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 190-193 is correct in identifying the "we" passages in Acts point to Luke's companionship with Paul for the years ca, 57-62, providing access to Paul's earlier career. Secondly; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 439-45 has shown that the three accounts in Acts have much in common, and for 9:1-8 which is being considered here, are virtually identical. Further support for this method of interpretation can be found in Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, and Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM Press, 1997), pp. 31-3 suggestion that at least the kernel of the Damascus vision as reported in Acts goes 'back to Paul's own account of it.'

just cause. This creates the dramatic tension that in the context of Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus. Who or what will convince this wrong-doer that his cause (which he believes to be just), and the actions he takes as just, are not merely uninformed, ill-conceived or deluded, but the source of injustice? By what means or agency will Saul realize that he is a wrongdoer?

Luke sets the scene by establishing Saul's presence at the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58. Saul witnessed first-hand the testimony of Stephen<sup>20</sup>, and in Acts 8:1 approved (*syneudokeō*) his execution.<sup>21</sup> Saul's agreement with the stoning of Stephen, his sympathy with the judgment and action of the mob, prepares us for his actions in Acts 8:2 and 9:1, where Saul is directly engaged in punitive action against the followers of the *risen* Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

The language used to describe Saul's actions in Acts 8:2 prepared the reader for what is to come.<sup>23</sup> First, Saul's action is described as ravaging (*lymainōō*). This indicates more than a legal definition of causing harm, injury or damage encoded in criminal law. It is a more personal sense of wronging someone. It also includes violating a person's body.<sup>24</sup> In Acts 8:3 the body that is being wronged is the early Christian community (*Saulos de elymaineto tēn ekklēsiān*). Saul's persecution was physical and corporate in comparison with the more individual, spiritual and psychological understanding of persecution typical in contemporary depictions.<sup>25</sup> The Christian community is the body of Christ. It was clearly established by, and now exists as, the earthly expression of the risen body of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> Saul's wrongdoing ravages and violates individual people, (house) church communities and God.

Second, Luke notes that Saul's wrongdoing was intentional. That he moved from 'house to house' (*kata tous oikous eispōreuomenos*) reinforces the personal dimension (entering the private space of the home), the corporate dimension (men and women are dragged off) and the ecclesial dimension (the early church primarily met in houses).

Third, Saul 'committed' (*paradidōmi*<sup>27</sup> 'handed over' is preferable) the believers to prison (representing the proper, legal authority).<sup>28</sup> Explanations of Saul's behaviour need to account for his zeal<sup>29</sup> which led to his violent crusade against these early believers, and to substantiate his reasons for 'seeking

<sup>20</sup> Barnett, *Paul, Missionary of Jesus*, p. 49 strengthens the connection even further.

<sup>21</sup> In the background, is the question of why the opposition turned from a moderate "wait and see" approach to violence. Ibid., pp. 48-50 cf. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, pp. 277-8.

<sup>22</sup> The question of why Paul persecuted the church cannot be resolved here. Another recent proposal is that of Mark Nanos, "'Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul's Judaism,'" in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on Paul*, ed. Mark Given (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation. Vol. 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 114 'Saul is described in language that recalls 7:51-52: he is "breathing threat and murder" (*phonou* 9:1; cf. *phoneis* 7:52); he is a persecutor (*diōkeis* 9:4, 5; cf. *ediōxan* 7:52) not only of Jesus' followers but of Jesus himself.' Also Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> There is still a hint of this meaning, though admittedly more ambiguous, in the English word 'to ravage.' See *BADG* p. 481 'of gluttons who, by their intemperance, damage *ten sarka autōn* their bodies... (Epict. 3, 22, 87 *tō soma lymainetai* = he injures his body).'

<sup>25</sup> For early Christians, the background context is described by N. T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan, "The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Explanation? A Dialogue," in *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p.25 'Where is the justice of God when you're looking at the tortured bodies of martyrs?'

<sup>26</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM, 1952) who finds the origins of Paul's theology of the church as the 'body' of Christ in the Damascus encounter.

<sup>27</sup> *BDAG* pp. 614-5 *hand over, turn over, give up* a person; *hand over* to the local courts (Mt 10:17; Mk 13:9) *hand someone over* to the synagogues and prisons Lk 21:12. *eis phylaken put in prison* (Ac 8:3).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Acts 23:33 *and they turned Paul over to him*. This is the legitimate handing over of a presumably guilty person to a civil authority.

<sup>29</sup> Saul's position is confirmed by the expressions found in Phil. 3:5-7; *kata nomon Pharisaios* (concerning the Law, it sets him apart), *kata zēlos diōkōn tēn ekklēsiān* (concerning zeal, for God and God's covenant, e.g. Num 25:1-18), *kata dikaiosynēn tēn en nomō genomenos amemptos*. (concerning righteousness, blameless). Background use of the term zeal in the Old Testament can be found in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 350-4.



to destroy' the church, which he was trying to do according to his own testimony (Gal. 1:13). There is also a need to explain why Saul bothered with letters from the high priest to the synagogues (Acts 9:2)? Luke does not give any hint that Saul considers his persecution as being wrongdoing in any way. To the contrary, Saul is adamant that he is upholding the law, the integrity of Israel and the Temple, and ultimately, God.

Saul sets out to Damascus with a zealous concern for law and righteousness (Phil. 3:5-7).<sup>30</sup> But this zeal for the law and righteousness is transformed by his encounter with the risen Jesus. The final prayer of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, lingers over this story, 'Lord, do not hold this *sin* against them' (Acts 7:60). What will cause Saul to re-interpret his actions as sin, as wrongdoing?

*b. Theological interpretation*

To pursue a full theological interpretation of wrongdoing is well beyond the scope of this article. But the Lucan account of Saul's actions against those belonging to the Way is shaped by the worldview that insists that relationships are ontological in nature and significance, in its depiction of wrongdoing against individuals, the wider community and God. This account raises some fundamental questions about the nature and origin of wrongdoing. Whereas some theological viewpoints do not want to face the question of morality (turning offenders into victims), others dismiss the influence of environment (and the structural issues) that lead to wrongdoing.<sup>31</sup> From a theological standpoint, the account of Saul's wrongdoing must not only anticipate his conversion but also his radical re-orientation towards those he was persecuting. Volf employs Gaventa's third category of personal change, by finding

Paul's transformation was not the result of the pursuit of strict justice on the part of the "victim"—the exalted Christ in self-identification with the church. Had the "victim" pursued strict justice, Paul never would have become the apostle of the very church he had been persecuting.<sup>32</sup>

It is here that Dunn's analysis of Saul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles is most appealing.<sup>33</sup> Through his apostolic call, described in 2 Corinthians 5 as a ministry of 'reconciliation,' Paul is able to mend the relationships his persecution had caused. This work of 'restitution' involves a deep and radical commitment to the demands of God's justice and will be developed later in this chapter. The Damascus event seen only as a conversion story does not satisfactorily explain the transformed relationship between Saul and those he persecuted.

Saul's new relationship with the persecuted Christians, represented in Damascus by the figure Ananias (Acts 9:10-18), is a vital clue to seeing the relational ontology of wrongdoing and reconciliation that is usually overlooked. Without this 'possibility of relationship' Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus as a

<sup>30</sup> The testimony of Paul in Philippians 3 is interpreted by ———, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, p. 346 as his regarding the Hellenists as a threat to Israel's separateness.

<sup>31</sup> The theological sensitivity displayed Miroslav Volf, "Original Crime, Primal Care," in *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness* ed. Lisa Barnes. Lampman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 17-35 avoids unnecessary polarities as he examines the story of Cain and Abel as the 'original crime.'

<sup>32</sup> Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" p. 161 note 12.

<sup>33</sup> Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 353.

living person is diminished because he can only grasp but will not be 'grasped by the living mystery of the "other"'<sup>34</sup> Sarah Coakley suggests that,

what is needed in the richest theological sense of identifying the risen Jesus - is some prior, interruptive undoing of epistemic blockage, some mending of the blindness of the ravages of sin, in order that the person of Jesus might truly be identified.

The 'blindness of the ravages of sin' captures not only Saul's persecution, it encompasses all human wrongdoing that ignores the harm done to people in wider circles of family, community and God. How can wrongdoers restore this relational blindness? Who or what removes this 'epistemic blockage'? How can wrongdoers be fully transformed? For Saul, indeed for all wrongdoers who share his plight, it is through an encounter with his victim, the risen Jesus, whom he was persecuting.

### Remembering wrongdoing through taking responsibility: the offender

#### a. Lucan narrative (Acts 9:2-3)

On the Damascus road there is, however, no hint that Saul conceives his actions as wrong nor is he moved by the plight of the faithful and innocent 'men or women' (presume children as well) as he escorted them 'bound' to Jerusalem (9:2). Saul is convinced that his actions are just. Who or what will convince this wrongdoer to take responsibility for his actions? What makes Saul repent? Luke records two moments in Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus that shed light on how offenders takes responsibility for their actions: the revelation of light and the voice of his victim.

The first impetus is the light that flashed from heaven (*periēstrapsen phōsek tou ouranou*). According to Martin Hengel, 'the vision of light which shines in Paul and radically changes his life is christological and consequently soteriological, and all further conclusions depend on it.'<sup>35</sup> This experience is an Old Testament theophany (or, epiphany) that took two general forms: God appearing in the likeness of a human (see Dan. 7; Ez. 1:26-7) or humans in the likeness of God (Abraham's experience in Gen. 18). The risen Christ appeared to Saul as one "like a son of God" and having the image (*eikōn*) of God. Paul saw the risen Jesus as the Son of God and as the image of God at the same time, a 'Damascus Christophany'<sup>36</sup> revealing Jesus to be the personified Wisdom of God.<sup>37</sup>

Luke narrates the conversion scene as the movement from darkness to light. Saul sees only a blinding light (9:3, 8; 22:6, 11 and 26:13) but recognizes its authority by falling to the ground (9:4; 22:7 and 26:14). All three Lucan accounts of the Damascus event include an interpretation of the light as an appearance of the risen Jesus (9:17; 22:14 and 26:16).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Coakley, "On the Identity of the Risen Jesus: Finding Jesus Christ in the Poor," in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* ed. Beverly Gaventa and Richard Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 312-3.

<sup>35</sup> Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years*, p. 42. Thorwald Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship: Interpretive Models, Biblical Reflections, Theological Consequences* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), p.136.

<sup>36</sup> Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way*, p.215 convincingly shows that Luke interpreted the appearance in this way. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 450 shows this to be consistent with a 'classic theophany.' This rejects the earlier view of Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 203 who maintained that resurrection appearances were confined to the forty days prior to Jesus' ascension.

<sup>37</sup> Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* pp. 205-233. Contra Dunn, "'A Light to the Gentiles,' or 'the End of the Law'? The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul." p. 97ff.

<sup>38</sup> Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*, pp. 1-2 reflects on the its meaning as 'one common metaphor, present outside the New Testament as well as within it, is that conversion involves a change "from darkness to light."'

The first moment of revelation in the blinding light is immediately followed by the voice: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4). The risen Jesus that speaks to Saul is the crucified God, God-in-Christ as the victim. Saul hears the voice of his victim. Moreover, the risen Jesus, as head of his body, the earthly gathering (which Saul had been ravaging 'house-to-house'), is God's solidarity with victims: Saul also hears the voice that speaks on behalf of the silent victim. Finally, the risen Jesus, vindicated, ascended and exalted as a heavenly reality is God's vindication of the victim. Saul unexpectedly hears the voice of the transformed and exalted victim. The voice of the risen Jesus speaks to Saul in the present tense (*egō eimi*), but it is also from the future (*di apokalypseōs* – see following discussion) while it also remembers Saul's past.<sup>39</sup> Immediately Saul recognizes the authority in this voice as "Lord" (Acts 9:5).<sup>40</sup>

For Saul, God's judgment and justice is made manifest in the risen Jesus and invites and summons Saul to reorient his life around this Jesus. This transformation of Saul's life fits the pattern of Jesus' resurrection that animates repentance (salvation, discipleship and mission) throughout the Lucan narrative.<sup>41</sup>

#### b. *Theological interpretation*

In the foregoing paragraphs have been seeking to answer the question, 'who or what will convince this wrongdoer to take responsibility for his actions?' I have argued that it is the appearance of the risen Jesus, firstly, as one who speaks to Saul as the victim; secondly, *on behalf* of the silent victim; and thirdly, *as the vindicated* victim. How does this response compare with that of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, who described the responsibility each person has for the other, particularly in the 'face of the other?'<sup>42</sup> For Lévinas, no true relationship is possible without a certain kind of care, provision or welfare (*Fürsorge*) for the Other.<sup>43</sup> Lévinas was profoundly influenced by the line in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, 'we are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others.'<sup>44</sup> For Lévinas then, face-to-face encounter is the way of transcending the distance between Buber's 'I and Thou' without effectively suppressing it.<sup>45</sup> Lévinas argues that, in contrast with angels, humans alone are capable of giving and of being-one-for-the-other.<sup>46</sup> This involves an ethical responsibility for the other in

<sup>39</sup> what Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 117-8 calls an 'anticipatory memory.' Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 100-1 'we make the transition from 'then' to 'now', when the remembered past and the unthinkable future become realities which shape our present.' In Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), p. 89 '[the risen Jesus] even comes to meet us out of the future.'

<sup>40</sup> Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years*, p. 40 notes 'hearing of the word of the risen and exalted Jesus is decisive; mere seeing is not enough for the conversion of the persecutor.'

<sup>41</sup> Joel B. Green, "'Witnesses of His Resurrection": Resurrection, Salvation, Discipleship, and Mission in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 244-5 who affirms that, 'Jesus' resurrection - invites repentance; it summons people to reorient their lives toward the purpose of the God who raised Jesus from the dead.'

<sup>42</sup> For Lévinas, responsibility for the other is an ontological given and ethical imperative. Lévinas follows Martin Buber in the identification of self, not as a substance but as relation, but departs from Buber's concept of inter-subjectivity because it presumes reciprocity, is too formal and ultimately exclusive. See Emmanuel Lévinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Lévinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> This means that, unlike Buber, where the 'Thou' is primarily understood as a partner and friend, Lévinas argues that 'the inter-subjective space is initially asymmetrical.' *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 98.

<sup>45</sup> *idem.*, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 144, 147-8.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "Failure of Communication' as a Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue between Buber and Lévinas," in *The Provocation of Lévinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 115.

such a way that, 'over and beyond all the reciprocal relations [that] fail to get set up between me and the neighbour, I have always taken one step more toward him.'<sup>47</sup>

Lévinas' formula, steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, offers a partial insight into Saul's repentance and conversion. Empathy for the victim, grounded in a theory of affect is insufficient. But how much further does the ethics of 'being-for-the-other' take us? How well does this account for the offender whose actions are motivated by good intentions, but still occasion harm, violation and injustice? I have already established that Saul's persecution may be interpreted along these lines. While Lévinas correctly identifies taking responsibility through 'being-one-for-other,' the possibility of being-for-the-other that creates or is complicit with injustice remains. What is needed to address this shortcoming is a relational ontology that is grounded in something more than a theory of affects, or even a prescription for ethical responsibility. Lorenzen contends that there were 'no neutral observers to the resurrection appearances' and offers the insight that the resurrection of Jesus is a relational event.

We conclude that the appearances of the risen Christ reveal the resurrection as a *relational* event. It is an event *for others*. It gives expression to the fact that God is love. To share the reality which God has established by raising Jesus from the dead, belongs to the very nature of the resurrection.<sup>48</sup>

For Lorenzen, relationships with the risen Jesus are primarily expressed through the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.<sup>49</sup> But what of the 'possibility of relationship' with the risen Jesus himself of the kind previously alluded to by Sarah Coakley? Can an encounter with the risen Jesus make an offender take responsibility for his or her actions?

In my observations, liberation theologies have been most alert to the relational nature of the resurrection. The cry for justice on behalf of the world's forgotten people is prompted by Jesus' resurrection is most explicit in the challenge enunciated by Sobrino:

Resurrection, therefore, means first and foremost doing justice to a victim, not giving new life to a corpse, even if this is its logical presupposition. It refers not simply to a death, but to a cross; not simply to dead people, but to victims; not simply to a power, but to a justice.<sup>50</sup>

Developing the relational nature of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of victims and justice, Rowan Williams depicts the risen Jesus as 'the saving victim' who is simultaneously a 'merciful judge.'<sup>51</sup> A saving victim cannot be blamed for the wrong done to her. A merciful judge is the one who will ensure that truth and mercy, righteousness and justice are met (e.g. Ps. 85:10-1).<sup>52</sup> In the presence of one who is fully

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being* trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 84.

<sup>48</sup> Thorwald Lorenzen, *Resurrection, Discipleship, Justice* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), p. 47

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-9..

<sup>50</sup> Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 102 grounds this comment in the central affirmation that 'the risen one is the crucified one' and that the 'place of victims' is an 'irreplaceable hermeneutical tool for understanding the texts that speak of a crucified man raised... God is the God who liberates victims.'

<sup>51</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), p. 16

<sup>52</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, p. 105 recognises this as Christ's authority to both judge and recreate.





again, not in vengeful memory, but in action to create a world where others may live.<sup>60</sup> In the Lucan narrative, it is the light that conveys this 'range beyond death.'<sup>61</sup>

When Luke writes of Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus a third time in Acts 26, Paul sums up his preaching with a reference to Moses and the prophets, 'saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.'" (26:22-23). Beverly Gaventa has noted how this reference to proclaiming a 'light for the Gentile' can be bracketed with Simeon at the beginning of Luke's gospel (2:32) where Jesus' birth is light for the Gentiles.<sup>62</sup> The appearance of the light from heaven (9:6 *phōs ek tou ouranou*; 22:6 *tou ouranou periastrapsai phōs* and 26:13 *ouranothen... perilampsan me phōs*) is recorded by Luke, and the regular reference to this light (*phōs*) by Paul in his own writing.<sup>63</sup> For Paul, there is a close connection between light and salvation, and renewed emphasis in New Testament scholarship on that light and this salvation including the Gentiles.<sup>64</sup> Particularly pertinent is Paul's use of the imagery of passing from death to life from Isaiah 9:2<sup>65</sup> in his letter to the church at Ephesus (5:14) where the light that shines is Christ.

Luke conveys, and Paul affirms it throughout his letters, that the moment Saul's wrong was named and forgiven was illuminated by this light of Christ, who was understood to be saving victim and a merciful judge.

b. *Theological interpretation*

While biblical exegesis must respect the silence of the text,<sup>66</sup> the moment of revelation for Saul in his encounter with the risen Jesus stands in need of theological interpretation.<sup>67</sup> As noted earlier, the risen Jesus is encountered as equally 'saving victim' and 'merciful judge.' Williams, however, does not further this proposal in a satisfactory manner. For instance, he makes the initial, plausible claim that 'Jesus is judge because he is victim; and that very fact means that he is a judge who will not condemn... the judgment effected by the presence of Jesus is just.'<sup>68</sup> But Williams has disregarded other significant biblical motifs of judgment in making this claim and in his assertion that,

[Jesus] judges our justice: not condemning it or inverting it, but transcending. It is the secret that Paul learned, of a divine justice, righteousness, which acts only to restore - what Luther called the 'passive righteousness' of God

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Learning and Relearning the Identity of Jesus from Luke-Acts," in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus : A Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 163

<sup>63</sup> see Rom. 2:19; Rom. 13; 2 Cor. 4:6; 14; 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 5:8, 13-14; Col. 1:12 and 1 Tim. 6:16.

<sup>64</sup> Seen in the New Perspective on Paul represented by Sanders, Dunn, Wright et. al.

<sup>65</sup> Isa. 9:2.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 450 and Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles : The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 235.

<sup>67</sup> Jürgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, trans. Jr. O.C. Dean (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 75 asks whether in 'this case no words were needed at all.'

<sup>68</sup> Williams, *Resurrection : Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, p. 8.

Williams appears to restrict God's freedom by arguing that God's 'justice will not act against us, is incapable of aggression or condemnation: the righteousness that makes righteous.'<sup>69</sup> This claim is unconvincing and deficient in many respects.<sup>70</sup> Volf offers a better approach to the question. Volf also understood Saul's encounter as one in which justice is both affirmed and transcended, by observing that,

the divine voice named the action by its proper name—"persecution" (Acts 9:4). Disapproval of the action was powerfully conveyed—Paul "fell to the ground" (v. 4). And the exalted Christ asked the uncomfortable question "Why?" "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (v. 4). Jesus Christ named the injustice and resisted the behavior. Significantly, however, he did so in the very act of offering reconciliation.<sup>71</sup>

According to Volf's schema (and where he differs from Williams) there is a singular moment when justice is restored: the naming of the injustice takes place *in the very act of offering reconciliation* (or forgiveness). It is the moment when the wrongdoer's 'destructiveness is absorbed and not transmitted... [which] transcends the world of oppressor-oppressed relations to create a new humanity, capable of other kinds of relation – between human beings, and between humanity and the father.'<sup>72</sup> The moment when justice is restored, is the moment when those living under the shadow of death are brought into the resurrection light of Christ.

Earlier, we noted the place of the victim and forgotten people of the world as an essential hermeneutical perspective. Now we must add the place of the wrongdoer, the perpetrator and the oppressor as a complementing hermeneutical perspective. Without the voice of the victim, justice is reduced to cheap forgiveness with an illusion of easy reconciliation. Without the wrongdoer, justice is reduced to judgmentalism, with the easy rhetoric of naming and blaming. For Moltmann, the perspective of both victims and wrongdoers together is the heart of Jesus' resurrection,

The dispute over the resurrection of Jesus is concerned with the question of righteousness [*Gerechtigkeit*, justice, justification] in history. Does it belong to the *nomos* which finally gives each man his deserts, or does it belong to the law of grace as it was manifest by Jesus and in the resurrection of the crucified Christ? The message of... a new righteousness which breaks through the vicious circles of hate and vengeance and which from the lost victims and executioners creates a new mankind with a new humanity..<sup>73</sup>

Only when the naming and forgiving of wrongs are held together and not separated, can those living under the shadow of death (both victims and wrongdoers, together with their communities) pass from death to life in the light of the risen Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> The argument of Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 204 is far more compelling: 'my thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance.'

<sup>71</sup> Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" p.166.

<sup>72</sup> Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p.178.

<sup>74</sup> Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 98 understands the comprehensive scope of this, 'it remains valid that in the risen Christ our human nature in its creaturely and temporal existence is redeemed and renewed and established through being taken up in its affirmed reality into the life of God.'

**Reconciliation: a justice that is restorative not punitive**a. *Lucan narrative (Acts 9:6-8a)*

Is the holding together of naming and forgiving wrongs a faithful interpretation of the outcome of Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus? This is the same Jesus Saul believed to be crucified and dead (a sure sign Jesus was accursed by God), and the same Jesus he was persecuting who he now encountered alive and risen, and even vindicated by God! Volf argues that Saul's probable expectation of such an encounter would mean receiving a 'strict' justice, by which he means a vengeful, punishing justice.

The appearance of Jesus as the resurrected One 'must have made one thing clear to him [Saul].' Becker believes that 'Paul was not to change or persecute Christians... rather, he himself, against his legalistic stance, had to learn a new understanding of God and to change himself.'<sup>75</sup> Some scholars think that Saul's strict view of justice is based on the celebrated Old Testament figure of Phinehas (Num. 25) who averted God's wrath against Israel and it was reckoned to him as righteousness' (Ps. 106).<sup>76</sup> A person like Saul possessing zeal for God would have expected 'strict punishment for unfaithfulness' from that same God. Yet, Saul discovers 'a radically different perspective on how God relates to God's enemies' and that 'though grace is unthinkable without justice, justice is subordinate to grace.'<sup>77</sup> But this only makes sense according to Volf's 'strict' definition of justice, which is somewhat problematic. Does subordinating this kind of strict justice to grace suggest there are other 'non-strict' forms of justice that are too lenient or lax? What kind of justice did Saul encounter on the Damascus Road?

Wright compares Luke's version of the Damascus encounter with the (allegedly) well-known account of the Heliodorus from 2 Maccabees 3, where both narratives contain, 'the great light, the falling on the face, the repeated call by name, the question as to who is speaking, and the command to get up, to stand up, and receive further instruction.'<sup>78</sup> What is remarkable (although notably ignored by Wright and other commentators) is the radically different kinds of justice Saul and Heliodorus encounter. Heliodorus encounters 'the mighty power of God' with a justice-as-vengeance that is both violent and unrelenting:

It charged fiercely at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hooves. The one sitting on the horse appeared to have golden armour. Two young men also appeared to him; they were very strong, wonderfully beautiful and gorgeously dressed. They stood on either side of him and flogged him without stopping, inflicting many wounds on him. (2 Maccabees 3:25b-26)

The contrast between Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus and Heliodorus and his assailants could not be drawn more sharply. Instead of a mighty sword, there is 'peace between Paul and the speaker of the divine voice.' Volf argues this 'was not the consequence of justice carried out, but of *justice both affirmed and unmistakably transcended in an act of undeserved grace*.'<sup>79</sup> Volf's description of a justice which is not

<sup>75</sup> Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, p.76.

<sup>76</sup> Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation", 164 See also Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, who also argues 'Paul the persecutor undoubtedly saw himself as a "zealot" in the tradition of Phinehas and the Maccabees.' p. 352. See John Joseph Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 1 (2003) for a much fuller treatment of the Phinehas story and 'the ways in which these biblical texts have served to legitimize violent action.'

<sup>77</sup> Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" 165.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 392. By contrast, Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 441 regards these points of contact as 'real, but relatively superficial.'

<sup>79</sup> Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" p. 166 (emphasis retained from the original).

negated but affirmed and eventually transcended<sup>80</sup> approaches my depiction of the justice that restores. In my view, Saul confronted God's restorative justice in his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Saul's restored relationship was sealed by baptism and marked by a new and surprising apostolic vocation which was expressed in a mission to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15, 22: 21 and 26:16-18). Paul eventually employed the language of 'new creation' to capture, and then transcend, the moment Paul was restored to right relationship with God and the communities he was called to serve (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:17).

b. *Theological interpretation*

Lorenzen argues that the new relationship between Jesus and Paul, Ananias and Paul, the Gentile world and Paul need to be interpreted concretely. At this point, theology has tended to make conversion and transformation, forgiveness and reconciliation largely abstract, other-worldly or even mystical realities. The bodily resurrection of Jesus rejects any dualism that distinguishes between spiritual relationships and fully embodied relationships. Affirming the bodily resurrection of Jesus demands that the process of justly, restoring relationships is expressed in the messy and complicated lives of victims and offenders and their communities. Williams states,

The God who was in Christ "reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19), through raising his Son from the dead, had begun to make this reconciliation concrete in the world, and he called Paul to participate in this mission of salvation (Gal 1:15).<sup>81</sup>

Here Williams observes 'there is all the difference in the world between Christ uncrucified and Christ risen: they speak of two different kinds of hope for humanity, one unrealizable, the other barely imaginable, but at least truthful.'<sup>82</sup> In this light the promise and failure of theologies of liberation can be discerned. First, the promise articulated by Jürgen Moltmann, of what the resurrection of Christ means for God's justice which triumphs over the estranging and exploiting powers of death.<sup>83</sup> Jesus' resurrection means according to Sobrino the 'annihilation of death'.<sup>84</sup>

What is specific about Jesus' resurrection is, therefore, not what God does with a dead body but what God does with a victim. The raising of Jesus is direct proof of the triumph of God's justice, not simply of his omnipotence, and it becomes good news for victims; for once, justice has triumphed over injustice... God is the God who liberates victims..<sup>85</sup>

The freedom of God's restorative justice, where wrongdoing is simultaneously named and forgiven, becomes the praxis of Sobrino's liberating justice. Tragically, justice for the oppressed has been restricted to emphasising naming without forgiving, falling back on 'Christ uncrucified' and settling for the 'combat

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 169 'grace has priority over justice.'

<sup>81</sup> Lorenzen, *Resurrection and Discipleship: Interpretive Models, Biblical Reflections, Theological Consequences*, p. 139.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, p. 81.

<sup>83</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, p. 175.

<sup>84</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 214. repeated on p. 222 where he also describes the 'elimination of death.'

<sup>85</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001) p. 84.



gear' of the struggle for justice.<sup>86</sup> So-called 'revolutionary justice' merely exchanges the position of victim and offender without offering the freedom or beauty of a justly restored relationship.<sup>87</sup>

### Restitution: a deep and radical commitment to the demands of God's justice

#### a. Lucan narrative (Acts 9:6ff)

Luke does not end the story of Saul's dramatic encounter with Jesus in which his wrongdoing is named and forgiven by leaving overly spiritualised or mystical interpretations of what had occurred.<sup>88</sup> Luke connects the dramatic encounter with what is required of Saul's practice of restorative justice (or reconciliation) in a number of ways. First, Jesus continues to speak to Saul with the instructions of 9:6 introduced by *ēgerthē de Saulos* 'where you will be told what to do.' Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus is drawing him into God's passion for the world and its people and the injustice they suffer, in stark contrast to Saul's zeal for the Temple, law and righteousness. The precise shape of God's passion for Saul will be the calling to serve as an apostle to the Gentiles. Second, Saul must continue his journey into Damascus where Luke is concerned to show that Saul is fully integrated into the church community there (9:19).<sup>89</sup> Third, Saul must be initially reconciled with the pivotal figure of Ananias, a disciple from the Damascus community.<sup>90</sup>

The transformed relationship between Saul and Ananias in Damascus is instructive for the continuing work of restoring justice. Lucan scholar Robert Tannehill has noted that 'not only must Saul's aggression toward the disciples be curbed but Ananias' fear of the persecutor must be overcome.' Ananias as the representative of the community in Damascus is appropriately cautious because he has 'heard from many about this man, how much evil (*kaka*» bad, wrong, harm) he has done to [the] saints at Jerusalem' (9:13). Tannehill thinks that 'the reconciliation of enemies takes place through the literary device of the "double vision."<sup>91</sup>

The Lord's statement to Ananias about what Saul "must suffer for my name (*dei... pathein* 9:16) uses language characteristic of Jesus' passion predictions in Luke (cf. 9:22; 17:25; 24:26).<sup>92</sup>

In his second letter to the church in Corinth (4:1, 5, 6) Paul also refers to two aspects of the one event on the Damascus Road where he (a) "received mercy from God", and (b) "God shone in his heart." Both express the end to corresponding aspects Paul's former life: (i) as a persecutor and (ii) as spiritually blind... Both express the *end* of his former life and the beginning of his new life as now sighted, and as a preacher of the gospel of Christ giving light to others.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, p.103 cf. Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p.158 understands that 'liberation carries with it a reproduction of the power that has been destroyed' A more sympathetic critique of theologies of liberation is offered by James William McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 258-261.

<sup>88</sup> Baban, *On the Road Encounters in Luke-Acts: Hellenistic Mimesis and Luke's Theology of the Way*, p. 263.

<sup>89</sup> Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 450.

<sup>90</sup> Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts. A Literary Interpretation. Vol. 2: The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>93</sup> Barnett, "The Corinthian Riddle: Why the Church Rejected Its Founder" p. 5.

*b. Theological interpretation*

The issue of restitution stirs evangelical qualms about adding any demands to the gospel of forgiveness, seemingly a challenge to the sixteenth century fourfold '*solas*' of reformation theology. Oliver O'Donovan emphasises that there 'be no change of voice, no shift of mood, between God's word of forgiveness and his word of demand, no obedience-without-gift, no gift-without-obedience.' The gift and the obedience are in fact one and the same. They are the righteousness of Jesus Christ, encompassing and transforming our own lives, past, present and future.<sup>94</sup> For Williams, 'the authentic word of forgiveness, newness and resurrection is audible when we acknowledge ourselves as oppressors and 'return' to our victims.'<sup>95</sup> There are implications of God's restorative kind of justice for everyday discipleship in families, workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods; for the Church's common life (particularly its 'discipline'); and extending to its mission and stance on public issues and policy, which cannot be pursued here. However, the life, mission and ministry of the apostle Paul following his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road offer some broad contours of these implications. For Saul these implications are immediate and concrete in Damascus, beginning with the disciple Ananias has the community he represents.

**Conclusion**

Is God's justice is the kind of justice that restores? The exploration of Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road confirms that justice is done and relationships restored. Both the traditional emphasis on the horizontal relationship that interpret the encounter as Saul's conversion, and the New Perspective emphasis on vertical relationships which interpret the encounter as Saul's calling are inadequate. By taking reconciliation as a starting point, I have showed that Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus involved five features that together simultaneously affirm justice and restores relationships. At the centre of the encounter, Luke's narrative and its theological interpretation is the simultaneous naming and forgiving of Saul's wrongdoing. I have argued that this is God's restorative justice. God's justice has always shaped Christian discipleship, community life and public theology and mission. Based on Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road, it is essential that future developments in Christian thinking and practice align itself with God's restorative justice.

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<sup>94</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, pp.100-1.

<sup>95</sup> Williams, *Resurrection : Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, p.14.