The Bible, Justice and Public Theology

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The Bible, Justice and Public Theology

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The first biblical story outside the garden is the account of two brothers and their father, a story of the father's honour and the brothers' rivalry borne of their different ways of inhabiting the world. The story includes enmity and violence—with the menace of revenge—and concludes in exile (Gen. 4.2-16). Cain's murder of Abel is the 'original crime', and philosophers, anthropologists, theologians and Christian antagonists have found in this story compelling accounts of crime and wrongdoing, victim and wrongdoer, evil and justice.[1] The extant, cross-disciplinary engagement with the Cain and Abel story demonstrates that public theology can be biblical. But are biblical theologians provoked to engage with public issues and policy? The desire to engage public life with the biblical text can be diverted to mere evangelism (serving the pragmatic needs of the church) or mere abstractions (serving the research needs of the academy). A fully public, biblical theology has a deeper and more extensive role to play.

Luke's rendition of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15.11-32) is among the most influential and perhaps best loved of all the parables Jesus told. The parable has been painted by a host of artists (most notably Rembrandt), provided the themes for plays (most notably those of Shakespeare), been set to music and most recently served as the subject of motion pictures. The parable's central themes of rebellion and return vividly capture the devastation of becoming lost and the deep longing for home that characterize the human condition. It seems to encapsulate the entire Christian message,

1. See 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; Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (trans. S. Bann and M. Metteer; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).

as illustrated by Tim Keller, a pastor, speaker and author from New York who reaches a global audience. Keller stands in a long and venerable tradition of biblical commentators who interpret Jesus' story as 'the gospel… the heart of the Christian message'.[2] The real challenge in the story, according to Keller's account of the 'Prodigal God', is the reckless generosity of the father-God towards both sons who are lost. Evangelistic preachers and teachers, Keller contends, emphasize the grace and forgiveness bestowed on the younger son who leaves home but pay less attention to the elder son who stays home. Keller locates the true and deeper meaning of the parable in this second 'act' of the story. Lazy preachers, teachers and Bible commentators who interpret the lost son in Lk. 15.11-32 as simply another 'lost and found' story—like that of the lost sheep (Lk. 15.4-6) or the lost coin (15.8-9)—have missed a crucial development in the parable's plot. In narrating the elder son's account of his father's reckless generosity, Keller places the following words of indignation on the dutiful son's lips: 'Where is the justice in that?'[3]

Exactly. *Where is the justice is this much-loved story?* Or more precisely, what kind of justice is shaped by the father-God's 'reckless generosity'? Some commentators suggest that the justice enacted by the father-God's forgiveness precludes traditional notions of atonement.[4] Christopher Marshall is sympathetic to J. Denny Weaver's reading of the parable but does not find it convincing.[5] Keller is more concerned with 'Jesus's radical redefinition of what is wrong with us' so as to explore in a satisfactory way 'why Jesus constructs a story so that one of them is restored to right relationship with the father, and one of them is not'.[6] Preoccupation with the parable's evangelistic message (so, Keller) or its atonement theology (so, Weaver) limits public engagement with Jesus' most famous parable.

More recently, Marshall has constructed a public theology by focusing on Jesus' most *public* parables: the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). As Keller, Weaver and many others have demonstrated, these are biblical stories that still resonate in the public domain. But can they serve public life?[7] Marshall adopts Stackhouse's three criteria for his

2. Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), pp. xi-xii.

3. Keller, *The Prodigal God*, pp. 26, 107. In his final chapter, Keller notes that 'Christian theologians have spoken about the law-court aspects of Jesus's salvation. Jesus secures the legal verdict "not guilty" for us so we are no longer liable for our wrongdoings'.

4. J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

5. Christopher D. Marshall, 'Atonement, Violence and the Will of God: A Sympathetic Response to J. Denny Weaver's *The Nonviolent Atonement*', *MQR* 77.1 (2003), pp. 69-92.

6. Keller, *The Prodigal God*, pp. 43, 46.

7. Chris Marshall, 'What Language Shall I Borrow? The Bilingual Dilemma of

social ethic of compassionate justice: 'theologically sound, publicly accessible, and practically viable'.[8] Marshall believes that 'public theology is necessarily an interdisciplinary exercise'.[9] *Compassionate Justice* is Marshall's most explicit interdisciplinary dialogue between two Lukan parables and 'law, crime, and restorative justice'.[10] A rigorous interdisciplinary approach is the method by which Marshall relates the Bible and justice, but his achievement goes further than a contribution to the academy.

This chapter demonstrates the possibilities of Jesus' parables for public theology because Marshall's biblical theology is *prescient, peaceable and performable.* A prescient reading includes historical interpretations without becoming frozen in another time; a peaceable reading incorporates cultural interpretations without being located in some other place; and a performable reading integrates practical-theological interpretations within concrete, local relationships and community.

Preliminary Reflections on Marshall's Method

The promises and pitfalls of an interdisciplinary approach are beyond the scope of this chapter. An interdisciplinary method is so central to Marshall's *Compassionate Justice*, however, that two preliminary observations are necessary.

First, Marshall's interdisciplinary approach has bona fides in restorative justice and wider law and criminal justice literature. Marshall is neither new to the disciplines of biblical studies, law and justice nor is he only now pioneering an interdisciplinary dialogue between these disciplines. More than a decade ago he established his approach in B*eyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*, in which justice is rehabilitated as one of the Bible's central themes. For Marshall, the promotion of justice is primarily understood as a 'restorative activity'.[11] Marshall's

Public Theology', *Stimulus* 13.3 (2005), pp. 11-18 (11) argues that 'the quandary' for public theology is this: 'What language should religious believers use when they engage in public debate? Do they use the language of faith? Or do they adopt the secular language of mainstream political discourse?'

8. Cited in Marshall, 'What Language?', pp. 11, 17. Marshall concludes that 'Christians must be able to speak the language of political discourse effectively, albeit with a foreign accent'.

9. Marshall, 'What Language?', p. 12. See also Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 35-47.

10. Christopher D. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

11. Christopher D. Marshall, *The Little Book of Biblical Justice: A Fresh Approach to the Bible's Teaching on Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), pp. 35-47.

conclusion to his earlier studies is the perfect segue to his extended engagement with Lk. 15.11-32: 'according to the witness of the New Testament, the basic principle of the moral order is not the perfect balance of deed and desert but redeeming, merciful love'.[12] Significant theorists in both law and restorative justice have recognized and affirmed Marshall's interdisciplinary approach.[13] Furthermore, other New Testament scholars (such as Ched Myers) have followed Marshall in his interdisciplinary endeavour.[14] The happy consequence of Marshall's work is that discourse in the restorative justice movement has not remained superficial (cf. earlier vague notions of its 'spiritual roots') but has become more biblical! As important as this interdisciplinary methodology has been, however, it is my view that Marshall's role as a scholar-practitioner holds even greater significance.

My second preliminary observation, then, is that public theology as a purely academic pursuit is an oxymoron! Miroslav Volf notes trends both within the broader discipline of systematic theology to become more consciously biblical and within biblical studies to be more consciously theological:

> In my judgment, the return of biblical scholars to the theological reading of the Scriptures, and the return of systematic theologians to sustained engagement with the scriptural texts—in a phrase, the return of both to theological readings of the Bible—is *the most significant theological development in the last two decades*.[15]

These converging trends in theological and biblical studies to engage in study of and reflection on the Scriptures has a growing body of literature attached to it—theological interpretation of Scripture![16] The judgment by Volf, a scholar who has reflected deeply on issues of justice and reconciliation, suggests that theological works on justice need to be more thoroughly engaged with Scripture. Marshall answers this challenge with an extended engagement with two Lukan parables for the work of restorative justice.

Despite the positive development of theologians returning to the Scriptures, there remains another issue within biblical studies: mere interdisciplinary research and writing confined within the academy or mere missional

12. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, p. 259.

13. Exemplified by contributions such as Christopher D. Marshall, 'Terrorism, Religious Violence and Restorative Justice', in *Handbook of Restorative Justice* (ed. Gerry Johnstone and Daniel W. Van Ness; Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2007), pp. 372-94.

14. Ched Myers and Elaine Enns, *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*, Vol. I: *New Testament Reflections on Restorative Justice and Peacemaking* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

15. Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 14.

16. See, e.g., Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

goals for the life of the Church. More than a decade ago Saunders and Campbell identified the problem of academic interpretation that resonated with my own reading of the Scriptures alongside homeless people suffering addictions and a range of mental health issues on the streets of inner-city Sydney.[17] In time I would begin to add my own voice to those asking for the liberation of serious study of Scripture from the academy.[18] Most recently friend and mentor Ched Myers has edited a volume demonstrating the need for our contemporary storytellers—from artists to activists—to join in the task of making biblical theology more public.[19] This requires the deliberate straddling of 'the seminary, the sanctuary, and the streets' because such reading 'reshapes…what vantage point, and in whose interests we read and study the Bible'.[20]

I will return to the critical role of scholar-activists at the end of this chapter. Particularly in the Australian context, Marshall's dual roles as biblical scholar and restorative justice practitioner should not be overlooked. Australia boasts some of the world's best restorative justice researchers.[21] Australia has also demonstrated early 'best practice' in restorative justice to the world.[22] Drawing together practice and principles has been a key concern for the restorative justice movement during the last decade.[23] With 'one foot in the academy' and 'one foot in the justice system', Marshall has been attentive to both principle *and* practice,[24] which is demonstrated throughout *Compassionate Justice.* As a scholar-activist, therefore, Marshall demonstrates how biblical studies can serve public life by becoming *prescient,*

17. Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell, *The Word on the Street: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

18. Geoff Broughton, 'Reading the Bible through the Lens of the Street', in *Reflections on a Remarkable Church* (ed. Katharine Brisbane; Sydney: St John Foundation, 2008), pp. 103-105.

19. Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers (eds.), *Liberating Biblical Study: Scholarship, Art, and Action in Honor of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

20. Ched Myers, 'Introduction', in *Liberating Biblical Study* (ed. Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. xxiii.

21. See John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

22. See Terry O'Connell, Ben Wachtel and Ted Wachtel, *Conferencing Handbook: The New Real Justice Training Manual* (Pipersville: Pipers Press, 1999).

23. Howard Zehr, 'Evaluation and Restorative Justice Principles', in *New Directions in Restorative Justice: Issues, Practice, Evaluation* (ed. Elizabeth Elliott and Robert M. Gordon; Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2005), pp. 296-303.

24. Christopher D. Marshall, 'Reflections on the Spirit of Justice', in *Restorative Justice and Practices in New Zealand: Towards a Restorative Society* (ed. Gabrielle Maxwell and James H. Liu; Wellington, NZ: Victoria University Institute of Policy Studies, 2007), pp. 311-19.

peaceable and performable. This may be demonstrated by comparing Marshall's reading of Lk. 15.11-32 with three other representative readings of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Three Interpretive Approaches to Luke 15.11-32

There are many and varied approaches to interpreting the text of the New Testament. Here I survey three approaches well established within the academy and popular among interdisciplinary theologians and evangelistic preachers. Luke 15.11-32 can be interpreted in historical, cultural and practical-theological contexts.[25] In order to compare the exegetical commentary that is representative of each approach, I have isolated two moments in the drama of the prodigal son's journey to a far country and return home. The first is his request in Lk. 15.12: 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me'. The second is the beginning of his return in Lk. 15.17-19:

> But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."'

After surveying representatives of the historical, cultural and practical-theological approaches to the parable of the Prodigal Son, I demonstrate in the following section that Marshall's exegetical commentary in *Compassionate Justice* incorporates all three dimensions but goes further to be more *prescient* than mere historical criticism, more *peaceable* than cultural analysis and more orientated towards *performance* than practical-theological interpretation.

Joachim Jeremias's Historical Approach

In the post-Bultmann age of biblical studies, Joachim Jeremias's *The Parables of Jesus* was a bold investigation into the historical context of not only Jesus' life and teaching but also his parables.[26] Jeremias identified significant details informing his interpretation of the parable. For example, in his commentary on the Prodigal's request, he interprets this as a request to live an independent life:

25. Each of these approaches reflects a genuinely dynamic view of the relationship between theology and lived experience (or between theory and practice) which is substantively different from the dialectical approach of earlier generations and goes beyond mere 'praxis'.

26. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. S.H. Hooke; London: SCM Press, 3rd rev. edn, 1972).

> The legal position was as follows: there were two ways in which property might pass from father to son, by a will, or by a gift during the life of the father… In v. 12 the younger son demands not only the right of possession, but also the right of disposal; he wants a settlement because he proposes to lead an independent life.[27]

A generation of scholars and preachers followed Jeremias as interpreting the son's request as saying to his father, 'I wish you were dead'.[28] The legal context of inheritance sheds light not only on the son's request but also on the plight he faced in returning home. Jeremias notes that the son has foregone all legal bases for the basic necessities of life (his earlier desire for complete independence was fulfilled!): '"he came back to himself", "he came into himself", is in Hebrew and Aramaic an expression of repentance… [A]fter the legal settlement he has no further claim, not even to food and clothing. He asks to be allowed to earn both.'[29]

Such historical details prepare the hearer to appreciate the utter graciousness of the father in both granting the son's request and welcoming the son's return. These features of Jeremias's analysis represent good exegesis but prepare the ground for public theology. The connection with public and everyday life is made because the historical narrative is a lived experience. The father and son in the parable are not merely spiritual or psychological tropes employed to serve a larger theme of lost and found. They are two people governed by laws of inheritance in a particular time and place. Historical readings of the parable lose their potency for theology to be genuinely public, however, when the story remains frozen in 'some other' time. What twenty-first century father would agree to such a request or refuse to feed or clothe a returning prodigal? Biblical theology must be more *prescient*.

Kenneth Bailey's Cultural Approach

The rhetorical question, 'What twenty-first century father…?', highlights the distance in time and culture between the world behind the text and the world in front of it. Biblical studies have been attentive to the importance of social and cultural readings of Scripture, and Kenneth Bailey's *Poet & Peasant* is a highly regarded and oft-cited interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal.[30] The majority of Western readers of this story are tone-deaf to

27. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 128-29.

28. See, e.g., Keller, *The Prodigal God*, p. 18.

29. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 130.

30. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, combined edn, 1983). See also Kenneth E. Bailey, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St Louis: Concordia, 1992).

issues of honour and shame. Bailey highlights the extraordinary insult of the son's request, which uncovers a deeper dimension to the son's 'lostness':

> Can it be confirmed from ancient literature that this son's request is an extraordinary insult to the father? [In response to Levison, Bailey aims] to demonstrate that this can be confirmed and that this cultural aspect of the parable sets the stage in a crucial way for all that follows… In the Middle Eastern milieu the father is expected to explode and discipline the boy for the cruel implications of his demand.[31]

Also significant is the role of the wider 'family' on his return: the reception by the elder brother and also by the village. Most Western interpreters concentrate on the father's welcome, but Bailey notes that a bitter price must be paid as the son faces the wider consequences of his action:

> The prodigal's three primary relationships, as he sees them from the far country, can…be summarized [as follows]. He plans to live in the village as a hired servant. With such a position his status will be secure. He can perhaps fulfil his responsibility to his father, and the problem of any relationship to his brother is eliminated. The village with its mockery will have to be faced. He will have to pay this bitter price in order to get home.[32]

The connection with public and everyday life is made because the cultural narrative is a living expression. Unlike inheritance laws of first-century Palestine, cultural readings portray a different way of relating. For the contemporary reader, the immersion in another culture can be a rich and disorientating experience, similar to travelling overseas for the first time. Cultural readings of the parable lose their potency for theology to be genuinely public, however, when the story is set in 'some other' place one does not inhabit but only visits as a tourist. What twenty-first century prodigal has a neighbourhood or village to return to, let alone with which to reconcile? Biblical theology must be more *peaceable*.

Miroslav Volf's Practical-Theological Approach

A practical-theological approach to the parable of the Prodigal Son, with its vision of reconciliation though the image of embrace, is the heart of Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*.[33] Volf's interpretation of the parable as a 'drama of embrace' describes the multiple breaches precipitated by the son's request. The combined effect on father *and* son was that the breach was total:

31. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant*, pp. 162 and 165.

32. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant*, pp. 178-79.

33. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

> the younger son has already done wrong by demanding the parceling out of the inheritance and deciding to depart… [H]e cut himself off from the relations which constituted his very identity… The younger son's breach with the family was total.[34]

For Volf, the process of reconciliation (of being embraced again) begins with the memory of proper relationships. Despite all that he had forfeited and wasted, the son retained the memory of sonship:

> Through departure he wanted to become a 'non-son'; his return begins not with repentance but with something that makes the repentance possible—the memory of sonship. There is no coming to oneself without the memory of belonging… The memory of sonship gives hope, but it also reminds of failure; the bridge that the memory builds is a testimony to the chasm created by departure.[35]

The connection with public and everyday life is made because the practical-theological narrative is a life-giving encounter. The *relational world* evoked by the practical-theological reading has the potential to be deeply transformative. Practical-theological readings of the parable lose their potency for theology to be genuinely public, however, when they suggest 'something other' than faithful discipleship through Christian community. The metaphor of embrace is suggestive of how to restore relationships after wrongdoing, but it does not describe what actions are required. Biblical theology must be *performable*.

Paradigm for Biblical Theology

Each of the three approaches described above fails to render the kind of theological implications for a fully public social ethic. My brief examination of historical, cultural and practical-theological interpretations of the parable of the Prodigal Son suggests that for biblical theology to become fully public, the following paradigm is needed:

- prescient (engaging today's issues)
- peaceable (reconciling enmity and division)
- performable (faithful in word *and* deed)

The prescient, peaceable and performable shape of Marshall's interdisciplinary reading of the parable of the Prodigal Son is achieved by using the lens of restorative justice. Before examining Marshall's commentary on the same verses of request and return in Luke 15, I will briefly describe the importance of the restorative justice lens in Marshall's work.

34. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 157-58.
35. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 158-59.

The Restorative Justice Lens for Interpreting Scripture

The most common understanding of restorative justice encompasses the theory and practice of justice-making in which relationships are restored. While there is no clear consensus about what this means among leading restorative justice theorists and practitioners, there is some common ground in relation to the following two principles:

> First, justice requires that we work to heal victims, offenders and communities that have been injured by crime. Second, victims, offenders and communities should have the opportunity for active involvement in the justice process as early and as fully as possible.[36]

According to both theorists and practitioners, just outcomes are primarily relational. Biblical justice—interpreted as *shalom*—has consequently been a significant element in much restorative justice literature. Too much of this literature, however, does not adequately account for the great diversity in Scriptural perspectives on justice that are inherent in the crucial distinction between the semantic domains of justice and righteousness. In general terms the restorative justice movement has preferred Scriptures that witness to both *mishpat* and *tsedaqa* as relational and social justice ('delivering, community-restoring justice'), while reinterpreting classic definitions of *dikaiosynē* ('righteousness, forensic justice') along similar lines. The current evaluation of Marshall's *Compassionate Justice* takes place within these broader concerns through an extended investigation of biblical justice in two of Jesus' most loved parables.[37] The reading of Scripture through the lens of restorative justice is *prescient* because it addresses contemporary issues of wrongdoing; it is *peaceable* because it reconciles wrongdoers and victims; and it is *performable* because it transcends the divide between a public debate over 'law and order' (fixing crime as the responsibility of government) or more private, 'therapeutic' resolutions (helping victims as therapeutic intervention). A distinctive feature of Marshall's reading of Luke 15 is his attention to community responsibility in the aftermath of wrongdoing.[38] In the final section I will demonstrate how the relational lens of restorative justice is employed by Marshall to make the parable of the Prodigal prescient, peaceable and

36. Daniel W. Van Ness and Karen H. Strong, *Restoring Justice* (Cincinnati: Anderson, 3rd edn, 2006), p. 44, cited in Gerry Johnstone and Daniel W. Van Ness, 'The Meaning of Restorative Justice', in *Handbook of Restorative Justice* (ed. Gerry Johnstone and Daniel W. Van Ness; Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2007), pp. 5-23 (14-15).

37. See also Geoff I. Broughton, *Restorative Christ: Jesus, Justice, and Discipleship* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, forthcoming).

38. This is explicit in an earlier treatment of Luke 15. See Christopher D. Marshall, 'Offending, Restoration, and the Law-Abiding Community: Restorative Justice in the New Testament and in the New Zealand Experience', *JSCE* 27.2 (2007), pp. 3-30.

performable. The result is that the biblical theology of *Compassionate Justice* is properly public.

Making Biblical Theology More Public

I have argued that the common interpretive approaches to Lk. 15.11-32 are not public enough because they inadvertently focus attention on another time (e.g., Jeremias), another place (e.g., Bailey) or another relational world (e.g., Volf). By contrast, I suggest that Marshall's interdisciplinary dialogue with restorative justice enables his reading of the parable of the Prodigal to maintain a focus that is prescient, peaceable and performable, resulting in a 'better justice'.[39]

Prescient

Marshall's dialogue between Scripture and contemporary principles and practice of restorative justice makes his theology prescient. By engagement with thinkers such as Richard Bell, Marshall connects 'what it means to be a just human being' with 'classical (and biblical) thinkers', which provides the 'capacity to hold justice and mercy together in the domain of corrective or criminal justice'.[40] He shows that the father's response ('a paragon of patient, merciful justice') elucidates the justice-making that eludes contemporary practice: *respect* (for personal agency), *hope*, *empathy*, *humility*, *integrity*, *honour* and *acknowledgment*.[41] The father's impressive list of virtues extends the meaning of the parable from forgiveness to justice-making but also significantly deepens the implications for enacting justice. Relating the father's actions to contemporary debates on community responses to crime, Marshall asserts:

> There is a legitimate place for external sanctions in the enactment of justice. But if justice relies wholly or predominantly on force, it can never achieve its ultimate goal of promoting human flourishing. It is revealing that what finally moved the prodigal to change his behavior and seek reconciliation was not fear of his father's power to punish him but recollection of his father's generosity of character (v. 17) and the regard he had shown for his moral autonomy, now expressed as a willingness to accept personal responsibility for his wrongful deeds ('Father, I have sinned', vv. 18, 21).[42]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the kind of communities that benefit most from human flourishing—and suffer most from wrongful deeds—are embracing this better justice: schools, workplaces and urban neighbour-

39. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, pp. 217-45.
40. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 218.
41. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, pp. 220-33.
42. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 221.

hoods.[43] By observing the details of Marshall's interpretation of the parable, these deeper concerns of justice-making as *peaceable* are evident.

Peaceable

A central concern of restorative justice is the relational harm caused by wrongdoing. Marshall calls this 'relational rupture'. The description of this familial and communal damage in the story of the Prodigal has been identified as: the quest for an independent life (the historical contribution); an extraordinary insult (the cultural contribution); and the total breach of proper relationships (the practical-theological contribution). Marshall affirms and deepens these descriptions by noticing the 'relational connections and responsibilities': 'His rebellion consisted in a thoroughgoing rejection of his relational connections with, and his responsibilities towards, his father, his brother, and his wider village community.'[44]

With the trained eye of a biblical exegete *and* facilitator of restorative justice conferences, Marshall provides an anatomy of the younger son's offending as primarily 'relational rupture'. The first rupture is the explicit *disrespect* of the request itself. Beyond greed, impatience and the sheer shamelessness of the approach, Marshall describes the 'deeply dishonouring' wounds to the father. While contemporary Western cultures remain somewhat blind to issues of honour and shame, the wounds (or 'harm') that comes from wrongdoing is immediately recognized. Contemporary debates around law and order, crime and punishment have struggled to name either these relational connections or the responsibilities they entail. Peacemaking initiatives begin by exposing a false peace—the illusion that wrongdoing is impersonal or that the impact is limited to the victim. The parable, as interpreted by Marshall, highlights the 'injury of disrespect' caused by the son's wrongdoing: 'The youngest son in the parable had no qualms whatsoever about making his greedy impatience obvious to his father. This would have been as wounding to him as it was deeply dishonouring.'[45]

The second rupture is to the relational order implicit between father and son so distorted by the younger son's request. Parent-child relationships—particularly relationships between parents and their adult children—are often painful, perplexing and result in permanent damage to people on both sides. An entire therapeutic system has developed by analysing the transactions in these parent-adult relationships. Since the 1960s revolution in attitudes to authority, patriarchy and orderly relationships, the mere suggestion

43. See Geoff Broughton, 'Restorative Justice and Jesus Christ: Why Restorative Justice Requires a Holistic Christology' (PhD thesis, Charles Sturt University, 2011), p. 35, where I identify each as a 'third place' which have become restorative communities.

44. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 196.

45. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 199.

that a son might have a 'proper relationship' to his father appears quaint and conservative. Surely his bold approach reflects an old-fashioned, no-nonsense, 'man-to-man' talk? The son's insolence, on the contrary, serves to reveal that he is still only a boy. The father's deep wounds and hurt reveal that he is aging and vulnerable. For this story to enact justice the son cannot remain stuck in his boyish insolence, nor can the father remain an aging victim. Justice-making involves the re-ordering of relationships distorted by wrongdoing: 'He [the younger son] was preparing to deprive [his father] of the ground of his existence and belonging. It was an insolent and emotionally hurtful demand that manifested a profound distortion in a son's proper relationship to his father.'[46]

Wrongdoing is relational rupture because offending wounds people through disrespect and distorts relationships through immaturity and insolence. Wrongdoers persist in their offending because they have become contemptuous of their victims: they do not see or hear the impact of their offending. When offenders are asked in a restorative justice conference, 'What were you thinking about at the time (of committing the offense)?' the answer is never: 'the impact this will have on my victim'. Too many forms of justice-making remain blind to the victim *after* the offense. With little insight into the 'relational rupture' caused by wrongdoing, the victim remains invisible and the wrongdoer unaccountable. At their best, the various *Truth and Reconciliation Commissions* and courts across Africa during the last two decades have demonstrated the possibility that the penetrating vision of the community can engender respect by offering a gift to the victim and wrongdoer, namely, being able to see the other person in a new way. Finally, there is the son's contempt for all his father had ever accomplished: 'for the younger son to sell the family patrimony to an outsider, presumably at a bargain basement price since the deal was struck so quickly, was to express contempt for all that his father had accomplished during his lifetime'.[47]

Performable

What actions are performed by father and son in the parable? What is the relationship between the actions of these two central characters? It is widely understood that the son's *repentance* followed by the father's *forgiveness* are the two critical actions in this story. Marshall suggests it is 'the profoundest insight of restorative justice theory' that recognizes the 'parallel journeys' for victims and offenders.[48] The parallel journeys of father and son are shown to be *mutually honouring* actions. The 'obligation of offenders' is to take responsibility for their wrongdoing. The catalyst for this action in

46. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 199.
47. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 201.
48. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 231.

the story of the Prodigal has already been identified as: coming into himself or coming to his senses (the historical contribution); acknowledging the bitter cost of returning home (the cultural contribution); and remembering the proper relationship of father and son (the practical-theological contribution). Marshall narrates the son's return with three actions: contrition, correction and reconciliation.

> *Repentance as confession:*
> Contrition, if it is sincere, will lead to confession and apology… First it requires an acceptance of moral blame… The prodigal also acknowledges, secondly, that his actions have injured others… A third element in the boy's confession is an acknowledgment that his actions have changed the nature of his relationship to his victim.[49]

Contrition without correction of life is little more than 'feeling sorry for yourself'. Without amends, superficial remorse produces forced apologies rehearsed by celebrities, politicians and young children: 'I'm sorry I got caught'. The yearning for renewed relationships is the key to life-changing action.

> *Repentance as correction of life:*
> the prodigal's remorse, his yearning for renewed contact with his father, his journeying home from a great distance, and his verbal confession of sin, all imply a commitment to a corrected lifestyle in the future, no longer marked by the selfishness and rebellion of the past.[50]

A striking feature of the parable is the son's *desire for reconciliation* with his father rather than forgiveness or exoneration that enables his return. Marshall rightly observes the uncertainty of the son's reception by father, brother and village.

> *Repentance as atonement and reconciliation:*
> [The younger son] could be less certain of his father's pardon or his brother's acceptance [than of God's forgiveness]. From the way he treated his hired hands, he knew his father to be a kind and gracious man (v. 17). But his own offending has been unusually grave, and he could not be sure his father's grace would extend that far… What he experiences when he arrives home, however, is a merciful justice that confounds his expectations and restores him completely to the relationships he had so casually renounced.[51]

His journey home honours his father's generosity. The son, in turn, is bestowed great honour in the father's embrace and following actions. To this point, the father's action has remained at the periphery of the parable but now takes centre-stage. Following Volf, Marshall sees the father's

49. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, pp. 208-211.
50. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 211.
51. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, pp. 213-14.

'stubborn, passionate yearning' for restoration as stirring the son to action.[52] Following Bailey, Marshall interprets the father's action as compassion for his son.[53] This is no mere sentimentality, however. The father's 'restorative gestures' are central to his compassionate justice: 'It is impossible, then, to miss the message implied by the father's actions. He does not merely supply his son's bare physical necessities; *he makes him an object of honor*.'[54]

For Marshall the story of 'lost and found' in Luke 15 is the lost honour of both sons and the father (which individually and collectively harms relationships). It is the honour of the father and the younger son that is 'found' and their relationship restored, individually and within in the wider community of their village. It is the elder brother who stands outside those restored relationships; a place without honour and a stance that pours dishonour on his father. The restoring of honour to victim, wrongdoer and their community is, in my view, prescient, peaceable and performable.

The Christology of Compassionate Justice

The central role of honour in Marshall's interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 invokes the controversial—and widely misappropriated—notion of satisfaction in Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*,[55] so I conclude with a brief appraisal of Marshall's Christological vision in *Compassionate Justice*. New Testament scholar C.F.D. Moule once characterized God's justice as 'restorative justice' and argued that it was 'ultimately the only way to justice—yes, justice!—on the deepest level, and the only ultimately effective reply to wrong'.[56] The restoration of honour—as witnessed in the final scenes of Luke 15—is a gift of grace. This is not because forgiveness and reconciliation cost nothing 'but because the price is willingly…paid by the donor himself'.[57] Moule understood that the parables of Jesus can only be interpreted through the person and work of Jesus Christ. As famously rendered by Eduard Schweizer, Jesus *is* the parable of God.[58] The compassion of Jesus, so wonderfully portrayed in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, is even more wonderfully enacted

52. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, pp. 222-23.

53. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 223.

54. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, p. 229.

55. Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, LCC (ed. Eugene R. Fairweather; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 100-183.

56. C.F.D. Moule, 'Retribution or Restoration?', in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation and Other New Testament Themes* (London: SPCK, 1998), pp. 41-47 (41).

57. C.F.D. Moule, 'The Theology of Forgiveness', in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 250-60 (253), where a recurring theme is that 'forgiveness uses you up'.

58. Eduard Schweizer, *Jesus the Parable of God: What Do We Really Know about Jesus?* (Allison Park. PA: Pickwick Publications, 1994).

in his death *for* others—even his enemies. For Marshall, Jesus remains a prophet of compassionate justice, devoting less attention to Christ's death and resurrection.[59] In my view, this distorts the broader New Testament emphasis portraying the Christ event in an entirely integrated way.

Writing a generation after Moule, Marshall recognizes that punishment played a crucial—if limited—role in the enacting of God's justice. Marshall refers to 'restorative punishment' as the 'pain of taking responsibility' where 'judgment works itself out non retributively inasmuch as God "gives people up" to experience the consequences of their own free choices'.[60] This means that 'if God works for restoration up until the very last moment, so too must we'.[61] To what extent does Marshall allow for God's final justice beyond the intrinsic punishment of consequences? The question that remains for Marshall is this: does the 'pain of taking responsibility' fully encapsulate the obligations that result from wrongdoing? A fully biblical account of Jesus' *compassionate* justice must grapple with the demands of God's *eschatological* justice![62]

Conclusion

For biblical theology to be fully public, the social location of scholar-practitioners like Marshall is critical. Happily Marshall occupies two public locations in which theology is under-represented: in the University and also in the delivery of justice as a restorative justice facilitator. I have argued that the strength of his reading of Lk. 15.11-32 is largely due to these roles making the implications of the parable of the Prodigal Son prescient, peaceable and performable. This is an admirable achievement, making biblical theology more public. If the church is the only location for the reading of Jesus' parable, then evangelistic concerns will continue to be the primary focus. The church has another crucial role in making biblical theology more public. The Christian community can and must witness to the kind of mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation and justice narrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. This demands that public theology be more biblical. Marshall's *Compassionate Justice* is exemplary in proving that public life and contemporary issues are not as remote from the concerns in Scripture as some claim! Ultimately it is the primary task of the church—not scholar-practitioners—to *enact* Jesus' compassionate justice and the daily challenge of Christian discipleship in the footsteps of the compassionate One. We are indebted to Marshall for his challenge to follow faithfully the compassionate Jesus.

59. Chris Marshall, 'A Prophet of God's Justice: Reclaiming the Political Jesus', *Stimulus* 14.3 (2006), pp. 28-41.

60. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, pp. 145, 195.

61. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, p. 195.

62. See further Chapter 9 in this volume by David Neville.