

## **Poverty and Riches in the New Testament**

**An exegetical paper providing an  
exploration and assessment of the  
theological message and  
underlying hermeneutical assumptions  
displayed by the author of James in  
Jas 2.1-13.  
by Conrad Vine.**

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Date:

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Word count: 3,869 words.

Course #: BIST510

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## Introduction

### *Focal theory*

The relative affluence of churches and members within the writer's communion<sup>1</sup> stands in sharp contradistinction to the absolute levels of poverty witnessed amongst members of the same communion within developing countries<sup>2</sup>.

In the writer's experience, not only is the sense of active Christian solidarity with the poor in developing countries diminishing among members of the writer's communion<sup>3</sup>, but the organizational roles, responsibilities and fellowship activities evidenced within local churches often reflect the local economic strata, further engendering practices of partiality.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'writer's communion' is defined as Seventh-day Adventist congregations within the South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventist during 2004.

<sup>2</sup> A developing country for the purposes of this paper is defined as a country which is classified as being either a Low Income Country or a Middle Income Country by the OECD/DAC HDI 2004 classifications. The writer has broad experience of working in developing countries and conflict / post-conflict situations, and has witnessed at first hand the absolute levels of poverty prevalent amongst members of the writer's communion in countries around the globe. Moreover, there exists a wide disparity of incomes within the writer's own communion, a communion that consists, inter alia, of established professionals, manual workers, the unwaged and asylum seekers.

<sup>3</sup> The writer has worked for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) from 1996 onwards, and during this time has participated in the annual 'Annual Appeal' which ADRA runs in the UK each year. Since 1996 the writer has been involved in various churches in encouraging the active participation of church members in the Annual Appeal, but since 1996 has noticed an increasing reluctance on the part of the church members to actively participate. Many prefer to make a single donation in lieu of public collecting, and allowing for inflation, the absolute level of income generated by the Annual Appeal has remained relatively static since 1996.

### *Purpose of the paper*

Given the wide disparities of wealth and concomitant partiality experienced within the writer's communion, the paper will provide an exploration and assessment of the theological message and underlying hermeneutical assumptions displayed by the Author<sup>4</sup> of Jas 2.1-13. The paper's hypothesis is that a full understanding of the eschatological (salvific) impact of practicing partiality is not possible without an understanding of the theological message and underlying hermeneutical assumptions of Jas 2.1-13.

### *Significance of the paper*

The paper is significant because through understanding the theological message and underlying hermeneutical assumptions of Jas 2.1-13, the author believes that discerning readers, in reflecting more fully upon any practices of partiality which they actively engage in or tacitly condone, may appreciate not only that such practices are fundamentally incompatible with those who profess to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that without repentance and rejection, such practices may incur eschatological κρίσις<sup>5</sup>.

### *Method and methodology*

The paper will utilize the following method (outline of the paper's structure): a) introduction (parameter setting); b) brief exegesis of Jas 2.1-13; c) brief

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the writer will refer to the final author / redactor / composer of the canonical book of James as the Author.

<sup>5</sup> The word κρίσις is used because not only may it be used in New Testament Koine Greek to mean judgment in a neutral sense, but it also incorporates the concept of condemnation, the eschatological consequences of the divine judgment. See particularly the Johannine use of the word in John 3.17-21.

assessment of the Author's key hermeneutical assumptions; d) identification of areas for further study in the area of systematic theology, and 3) conclusions.

The paper will use the above method because any valid conclusions about the eschatological impact of practices of partiality require an assessment of the theological message of Jas 2.1-13 and the Author's hermeneutical assumptions.

#### *Limitations and delimitations*

The paper will not engage in a systematic analysis of the pericope against all contemporary Jewish hermeneutical approaches, trace the historical developments in the interpretation of the pericope, nor develop a systematic theology based on the pericope.

The paper will however provide a brief exegesis of the target pericope, seek to outline the Author's theological message and hermeneutical assumptions, and briefly seek to identify potential areas of further study in the systematic theology context which have personal and ecclesiological implications.

## Brief exegesis of Jas 2.1-13

### *Purpose*

Firmly rooted in the Jewish literary and religious heritage<sup>6</sup>, James is written to provide paraenetic and theological guidance to struggling Christian communities living before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70<sup>7</sup>.

Externally, the primitive Jewish Christian communities are facing the socio-political disintegration and moral declension of the late Second Temple period<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, according to Maynard-Reid, 'It is widely accepted that the Epistle of James is the most Jewish of all the New Testament books. Both its contents and its illustrations are rooted in the Old Testament and in the Jewish documents written during the period between the last Old Testament book and the first century A.D.'. See Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: James* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), p. 22. The Jewish literary heritage runs throughout James, with allusions, paraphrases, confluences and commentary on existing Jewish literature, particularly the Wisdom literature. According to Bauckham, throughout James are examples of the following literary forms common in Jewish Wisdom literature: aphorisms; beatitudes with motive clauses; conditional sayings; aphorisms in synonymous couplets; antithetical and paradoxical aphorisms; wisdom admonitions with motive clauses; statements of reciprocity; debate sayings; and similitudes. This extensive parallelism in literary structure and form between James and Jewish Wisdom literature is most evident when comparisons are made with Ecclesiasticus (or The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach). See Bauckham, Richard, *James* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), pp. 29-111.

<sup>7</sup> Due to a lack of coherent internal evidence, there is much debate about the exact provenance and target readership of James, hence the common designation of James as a 'catholic' epistle, so called because of the lack of a specific target readership. The exact authorship (or final redactorship) is debated amongst critical scholars, as are the target audience, the date of initial and / or final composition / redaction, the epistle's purpose, and after Martin Luther's less than glowing commendation ('a right strawy epistle'), the epistle's consistency with Pauline thought and even its canonicity. Whilst recognizing this ongoing debate, the writer will assume the author was James the brother of Christ, an apostolic leader of the early Jerusalem church, and that the epistle was written prior to 70 AD, if not before the Council of Jerusalem of 49 AD (Acts of the Apostles 15). This assumption is made based on a number of factors, including (but not limited to): the internal evidence of the epistle of a community struggling with poverty, factionalism, fanaticism, violence, oppression of the poor by the wealthy, partiality to the rich within the Christian community; the relatively undeveloped ecclesiology and soteriology witnessed within the epistle (the writer will argue later for a high Christology, as high as anywhere else in the New Testament); the traditional view of the epistle's authorship (i.e. that James the brother of Christ was the author); the strong Jewish heritage evidenced within the epistle; similarities in terms of language used and modus operandi witnessed between the epistle and the presentation of James in Acts 15; the close relationship (although lack of direct quotations) between the author of James and the teachings of Jesus (particularly as contained within the oral proto-Matthean Jesus tradition). For a fuller exposition of these issues and others related to the target readership, date of composition and authorship see Guthrie, Donald, *A New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 1990), pp. 722-59.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the Second Temple period is defined as being between the period between 'the return from the Babylonian exile and the building of the second temple in 516 BC to its destruction in 70 AD'. See Enns, P., 'Biblical Interpretation, Jewish' in Craig A.

political instability; religious fanaticism and factionalism; severe social unrest; rural guerrilla warfare; absentee landlords; corrupt judicial, cultic and political processes; increasingly brutal Roman oppression; endemic exploitation of the poor; absolute poverty levels; vindictive nationalism and the use of violence (including terrorism<sup>9</sup>) for religio-political purposes<sup>10</sup>.

Internally, the primitive Jewish Christian communities are struggling to maintain theological and communal cohesion, so rather than providing an abstract outline of Christian theology, the Author writes a paraenetic letter addressing the difficulties faced by the readers: the nature and source of true wisdom; the proper attitude to the rich and the poor; enduring temptations and trials; the necessity to be both hearers and doers of the word; the (salvific) fallacy of a workless faith; control of the tongue; the dangers of human passions, evil speaking, rash confidence; warnings to wealthy oppressors; effective prayer; and encouragement for the oppressed and backsliders.

#### *Target pericope context*

Written ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορᾷ<sup>11</sup>, the Author addresses the two aspects of πειρασμοῦς; external trials and internal temptations. External trials

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Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 159.

<sup>9</sup> The activities of the party of the Zealots can be described as that of terrorism from the perspective of the ruling Sadducean class, whilst from the perspective of their supporters the Zealots would have been viewed as heroic fighters for the poor and oppressed, an image engendered by their destruction of the credit records in the temple at Jerusalem, an act akin today to the unilateral writing off of the debts of developing countries.

<sup>10</sup> The general breakdown of Jewish society in the years before the Jewish War of 66-70 AD is well documented and reflected in both contemporary records (e.g. Josephus) and modern scholarship. This general context for primitive Jewish Christian community brought enormous social, religious and political pressures to bear upon the nascent movement, pressures which served to exacerbate the existing tensions within the nascent movement between the Judaizers, those committed to an evangelical presentation of the gospel to the gentiles and a new understanding of the role of the Mosaic law, and those seeking to maintain a balance between these opposing forces (such as James the brother of Christ in Acts 15). For further information see Jeremias, Joachim, *Jerusalem in the Time of Christ* (London, UK: SCM Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1969), pp. 1-405 and Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 13-37.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this paper, the writer will use the Greek text taken from Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland (eds.), *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart, Germany; Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 27<sup>th</sup> edn., 1993). The debate about the target readership of the epistle often

call for ὑπομονή, an obdurate and unbreakable endurance<sup>12</sup>, and are to bring one's πίστις to a level of maturity and completion, whilst those who overcome internal temptations from the *yetser hara*<sup>13</sup> are promised a 'crown of life'<sup>14</sup>. Believers in both cases should ask in faith for wisdom from God, not doubting, or they will not receive that which they desire, for not only does God send trials, but also all perfect gifts.

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hinges on an interpretation of the exact meaning of ταῖς δώδεκα φυλαῖς ταῖς ἐν τῇ διασπορά. Is the Author referring to Jews in the dispersion or to Jews scattered throughout Palestine (a literal interpretation focusing on ethnic Jews), or to the primitive Church, a metaphorical understanding? Commentators who posit a late (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) date for composition generally understand this phrase to refer to the Christian church, i.e. a metaphorical understanding, whereas commentators who posit an early (i.e. pre 70 AD) date for composition generally understand this phrase to refer to the primitive Jewish Christian church, an entity which was primarily composed of ethnic Jews. The position of the writer of this paper is that given the composite nature of the primitive Christian church, and the fact that pious ethnic Jews (many of whom were converted in the early apostolic era to Christianity) from across the diaspora settled in Jerusalem, and the surrounding regions in anticipation of their death, the Author was writing to a composite group including ethnic Jews who had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and were suffering for their faith, and to all gentile believers who were now incorporated within the new spiritual Israel.

<sup>12</sup> The Author refers to the ὑπομονή of Job in Jas 5.11, a strong Biblical example of steadfast, obdurate endurance and resistance to external trials. This use of the word is echoed in 4 Maccabees, where it is used to describe the heroic, militant resistance of the priest Eleazer, the seven brothers and their mother who were tortured to death by the Seleucids for their refusal to compromise their faith. See Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: James* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> The Author is clearly stating that one should not blame God for temptations. Rather, temptations come from within, so the individual is morally accountable for the temptations and the response to them, not God. The Author is most likely referring to the rabbinic concept of the *yetser hara*, the 'evil impulse' or 'evil instinct' which was understood as being the source of evil desires and temptations. This rabbinic understanding of the source of evil reflects the Jewish struggles over theodicy and the source and nature of evil that is witnessed in the differing understandings of the source of evil and temptations throughout Jewish literature, e.g. in 2 Samuel we read that it is the 'Lord' who incites David to conduct a census of Israel, whilst in 1 Chronicles we read that it is 'Satan' who incited David. In general, the later the Jewish writings, the greater the desire to disassociate the source of temptations from God and to locate the blame elsewhere. Examples of this struggle over theodicy are seen in 1 (Ethiopic) Enoch which includes in *The Book of the Watchers* two separate accounts of the origin of evil in the world, both of which placed full responsibility for the origin of evil with fallen angels, who alternately seduced the daughters of men and thereby introduced evil, or taught mankind forbidden knowledge and technologies.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout this paper the writer will use the New Revised Standard Version. See Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, (ed), *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, (London, UK: HarperCollins, 1989).

In the ‘great reversal’ motif, the eschatological richness of the poor is emphasized<sup>15</sup>, whilst the certainty of eschatological judgement for the rich is proclaimed<sup>16</sup>.

The readers are then warned that when the word is received, all that is opposed to God’s righteousness must be put away. Echoing the oral proto-Matthean tradition<sup>17</sup>, hearers of the word must also be doers of the word, only thereby gaining an eschatological blessing<sup>18</sup>.

Verses 26-27 form a theological bridge from the previous exhortations to the intricate theology of the target pericope. V. 26 starts with a Jacobean

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<sup>15</sup> The poor are those who are physically poor in worldly terms, but who nevertheless have been promised the ‘Kingdom of God’ (Lk. 6.20). Within Jewish thought there was the concept of the ‘pious poor’, i.e. those who were poor were most likely to trust in God for their daily needs, whilst those who were rich felt the need for daily trust less. Whilst it is true that there may be spiritual understanding of the ‘poor’, as expressed in Mt. 5.3 (‘poor in spirit’), i.e. the poor are understood as those who have a relationship with God, to take a purely spiritual understanding of this verse is not being faithful to the immediate context of the target audience which was largely characterized by absolute levels of poverty and oppression of the poor by the wealthy. Within this epistle, the Author is clearly defending the poor (in a physical sense) from the oppression and avarice of the rich (in a material sense also), (see also 2.1-13, 4.13-16, and 5.1-6).

<sup>16</sup> According to Davids, within the inter-testamental period a number of developments had occurred in thought concerning the rich and the poor: ‘first, the traditional piety of the need to care for the poor remained strong and became a fundamental religious duty...second, the wealthy were increasingly viewed as unlikely to be pious and in at least one work were roundly cursed...third, the poor were increasingly viewed as being pious, and this close association of piety with poverty made “the poor” either a name or a popular self-designation of pious groups who felt oppressed’. The Author does not proclaim the passing away of the rich person’s wealth, rather the passing away of the rich person per se. Debates about whether this rich person is a Christian or not therefore appear to be largely redundant: it is the rich person per se who will pass away, not their wealth. The Author does not have anything positive to say about the wealthy – they will surely pass away. In this theme the Author is emphasizing the concept of the ‘great reversal’ found elsewhere in Scripture, e.g. Amos 2.6-7, Ezek. 16.49, and Lk. 6.20-21. See Davids, Peter, H., *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1982), pp. 41-47.

<sup>17</sup> As shown below in the exegesis of Jas 2.1-13, the Author makes extensive use of echoes and allusions to the synoptic tradition throughout the epistle, particularly the as yet still non-literary oral proto-Matthean Jesus tradition. In relation to Jas 1.22 the Author is alluding to the concluding comments of the Jesus tradition found in Mt. 7.24-27.

<sup>18</sup> ‘...οὗτος μακάριος ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ ἔσται’.

introductory hypothesis<sup>19</sup>, most likely referring to cultic practices such as fasting, giving tithes, and conducting ritual purification rites etc. Echoing the oral proto-Matthean tradition<sup>20</sup>, the hypothesis is then denied – unless one’s religion is manifested ethically, in this case through control of the tongue, one’s religion is worthless, i.e. has no salvific worth<sup>21</sup>.

V. 27 then provides a positive definition of true religion, which for the Author is manifested primarily in ethical and not cultic terms<sup>22</sup>. True religion is manifested in hearing and doing, in (selfless) service to others, others who by virtue of their lowly social status would otherwise have no call on one’s attention, thereby echoing not only the prophets’ calls for social justice<sup>23</sup>, but also the oral Jesus traditions<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> The Author makes common use of such introductory hypotheses throughout the epistle to establish a position – possibly within the context of a rhetorical diatribe structure, e.g. 1.5, 23, 26, and 5.19, a position which then receives comment, either positive exhortation or negative condemnation.

<sup>20</sup> Mt. 6.1-8 includes a call by Jesus for religion to be practiced not in public for public recognition, but in private, where only one’s heavenly Father will see and provide future rewards. Public piety ipso facto has no eschatological reward for Jesus, with the reward for such actions already received in the form of public recognition.

<sup>21</sup> In Jacobean thought, a faith that is purely an intellectual assent to a theological proposition (or consists exclusively in cultic practice) does not work, i.e. has no salvific effect, whilst a faith that works, i.e. has salvific effect, is a faith that engages in impartial works of charity and love for one’s neighbour, regardless of whether the social status of that person. See Jas 2.1-26.

<sup>22</sup> The call for repentance in 4.1-10 exhibits a strong ethical emphasis rather than a strong cultic emphasis. The cultic aspects of religion are nowhere denied in James, rather their practice with no concomitant ethical behaviour is condemned as being worthless in eschatological terms.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Isa. 1.10-17, Deut. 14.29, 24.17-22, Jer. 5.28, Ezek. 22.7, Mic. 6.6-8, Amos 5.21-24, Zech. 7.9-10).

<sup>24</sup> A good example of the Jesus tradition is included in Mk 12.28-34, which concludes with Jesus agreeing with a scribe that ‘...and ‘to love one’s neighbour as oneself’ – this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices...’.

Furthermore, one should ‘keep oneself unstained by the world’. Not only is cultic purity important<sup>25</sup>, but so is ethical purity – true religion before God does not let the values of the fallen world determine one’s values or behaviour, particularly concerning the socially marginalized<sup>26</sup>.

True religion therefore involves a radical and obdurate doing of the heard word, and has eschatological (salvific) effect only when it is practiced in a manner untainted by the world’s value system.

### *Target pericope*

As with the entire epistle, Jas 2.2-13 has evoked widely varying structural analyses, most of which focus on the pericope’s ethical, sociological or rhetorical dimensions<sup>27</sup>. This paper however proposes a tightly integrated

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<sup>25</sup> According to Davids, there is a cultic element incorporated in the Author’s thought here, a cultic element that emphasizes the fallen nature of the world, and the need to remain pure in cultic terms from the evil influences that surround the follower of God. See Davids, Peter, H., *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1982), pp. 103-04.

<sup>26</sup> According to Johanson, in James ‘world’ may be understood as a ‘widespread disposition and power in mankind for evil in opposition to God’. Therefore, according to Maynard-Reid, the use of the term ‘world’ refers not only to a geographic reality but to ‘the whole scheme of things, values, and actions that separate us from God and that is at odds with what God requires. It is not limited to the social, but neither does it exclude a social sense....to keep oneself from being polluted by the world is to avoid being tainted by the prevailing value system that is in opposition to God’s desires. In the context of James, such a value system depreciates the poor and marginal’. See Johanson, Bruce C., ‘The Definition of “Pure Religion” in Jas 1.27 Reconsidered.’, *The Expository Times* 84 (1972-73), p. 119, and Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: James* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> Views on the structural flow and internal consistency of James range from the skeptical views of Dibelius, who argued that James was purely a collection of paraenetic sayings with no internal coherence or systematic theology, to more modern scholars who see James 2 as the theological crux of the epistle, a crux that has a tight thematic unity and flow of thought. Watson argues for James 2 in its entirety to be understood as being ‘structured according to a twofold use of the pattern of elaboration of themes and arguments prevalent in its first century Greco-Roman context’, most specifically, incorporating elements of ‘diatribe and figures common to the *confirmation*’. Hughes argues for a primarily ethical understanding of the target pericope (in terms of the partial treatment of the rich and poor treatment of the poor within one’s communion), Polhill argues that the target pericope ‘comprises a single sustained

theological structure that is predicated on a high Christology in Jas 2.1 as follows:

**Verse Item**

- 1 Negative injunction
- 2-3 Hypothetical illustration
- 4 Evaluation of illustration against written Torah
- 5 Evaluation of illustration against oral Torah
- 6-7 Actual illustration
- 8 Evaluation of illustration against written and oral Torah
- 9-11 Written Torah perspective
- 12-13 Definitive oral Torah perspective

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argument against the sin of prejudice, whilst Vyhmeister argues for a sociological understanding of the target pericope, analyzing the pericope from a social patronage perspective, and concluding that 'James is not so much condemning the rich and pronouncing himself in favour of the poor as he is advocating Christian respect for all, regardless of means or position...equal respect for all would undercut the dishonest social relations that support patronage'. O'Rourke Boyle however argues that the target pericope can only be understood through careful comparisons with the 'Stoic philosophy of benefaction, as expounded pre-eminently in Seneca's *De beneficiis*', and Gertner however argues that the entire target pericope must be understood as a 'covert, or indivisible *midrash*', where 'a religious idea or a legal principle is midrashically interpreted into, or derived from, a given text; and this is done by means of various midrashic techniques. Yet none of them, neither the text nor the idea nor the technique, are named, defined or mentioned. This type of *midrash* is usually presented either in the form of a concise paraphrase or of an expanded paraphastic construction'. For Gertner, the target pericope is a 'covert *midrash*' of Psalm 12, itself a midrashic reworking of Hos. 10.1-4 (in the view of the writer of this paper, this particular argument may be understood as speculative at best, and obliquely tangential at worst). The writer of this paper takes the perspective that whilst interesting, none of the above understandings of the target pericope do justice to the intricate theology and high Christology contained therein, and whilst useful for informing a discussion and understanding of the target pericope, do not present the primary paradigm within which the target pericope may be understood. See Hughes, David, M., 'The Best Seat in the House; James 2:1-10, 14-17', *Review and Expositor* 97 (2000), pp. 223-27, Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean, 'The Rich Man in James 2: Does Ancient Patronage Illumine the Text?', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* Vol. 33, No. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 265-83, Gertner, M., 'Midrashim in the New Testament', *Journal for Semitic Studies* 7 (1962), pp. 267-92, Polhill, John B., 'Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith: James 2', *Review and Expositor* 3 (1983), pp. 395-04, Watson, Duane F., 'James 2 in Light of Greco-Roman Schemes of Argumentation', *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), pp. 94-21, and O'Rourke Boyle, Marjorie, 'The Stoic Paradox of James 2.10', *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), pp. 611-16.

V. 1 – *Negative injunction*<sup>28</sup>: Presenting a negative injunction<sup>29</sup>, the Author instructs the readers not to show favouritism, ἐν προσωπολημψίαις, literally, ‘lifting up the face’<sup>30</sup>. The LXX quotation from Lev. 19.18 in v. 8 and the subsequent judicial terminology and illustration used suggest the Author is referring to the prohibition (written Torah) of Lev. 19.15<sup>31</sup>.

The phrase ‘τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης’ continues to generate considerable debate<sup>32</sup>: is the Author using a subjective<sup>33</sup> or an

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης’, ‘My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?’ (NRSV).

<sup>29</sup> The use of ‘μὴ’ and the present imperative implies that the readers are to cease engaging in partiality rather than they are not to start engaging in partiality, i.e. the readers are already demonstrating partial behavioural patterns and these behaviours need to cease forthwith.

<sup>30</sup> The concept contained within ‘προσωπολημψία’ may be either positive or negative within LXX usage. The concept is expressed positively in 1 Sam. 25.35 and Mal. 1.8, and negatively in a judicial sense in Deut. 1.17, Ps. 82.2, Prov. 6.35, 18.5, and Lev. 19.15. The term is used in the New Testament to express the concept of favouritism or preferential treatment, which the Author is here arguing is incompatible with following Jesus Christ.

<sup>31</sup> ‘οὐ ποιήσετε ἄδικον ἐν κρίσει οὐ λήμψη πρόσωπον πτωχοῦ οὐδὲ θαυμάσεις πρόσωπον δυνάστου ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρινεῖς τὸν πλησίον σου’, ‘You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor’, (NRSV).

<sup>32</sup> Many commentators suggest a primary understanding of an objective genitive, i.e. the Author is referring to partiality being incompatible with faith in Jesus Christ, comparing the pericope with such texts as Rom. 3.22 and Gal. 2.16. Such commentators include, but are not limited to, Polhill, Cranfield, Moo, Adamson, Laws, Barclay, Davids, whilst other commentators (e.g. Maynard-Reid) argue that within the context of James 2, in which ‘πίστις’ is primarily to be understood as an active expression of a creedal belief, we should understand this pericope to refer to ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’, i.e. the life of covenant fidelity, of faithfulness, that Jesus lived on earth, a life that was characterized by service for others and a lack of partiality to any group in particular, a fact recognized by Jesus’ enemies in Lk. 20.21. See Polhill, John B., ‘Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith: James 2’, *Review and Expositor* 3 (1983), pp. 395-04, Barclay, William, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Edinburgh, UK: The Saint Andrew Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1960), pp. 73-92, Laws, Sophie, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London, UK: A. and C. Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1980), pp. 93-38, Adamson, James B., *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 101-37, Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 5-117, Cranfield, C.E.B., ‘The Message of James’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965), pp. 189-345 and Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 48-51.

<sup>33</sup> A subjective genitive is defined as follows: ‘if the word in the genitive produces the action implied by the noun of action, it functions as the “subject” of the verbal idea contained in the noun of action and is therefore a subjective genitive. To put it another way, if the noun of action were replaced by a cognate verb in the active voice, the word in the genitive would be put in the

objective<sup>34</sup> genitive? Grammatically speaking, there are no definitive guidelines for determining the interpretation of such genitive constructions: rather we should note, as Turner has explained, ‘in Greek the distinction between objective and subjective genitive is a question entirely of linguistics’<sup>35</sup>.

To understand the Author’s intent, we need to understand the Author’s concept of ‘πίστις’. In James 2, the Author is ‘contrasting a dead faith (purely an intellectual assent to theological propositions) with a living faith that produces works and subsequently vindicates that profession’, a ‘dynamic possession’<sup>36</sup>. True faith is witnessed to / declared as valid (the Author’s use of the verb δικαιωω<sup>37</sup>) by works of mercy. Christ’s followers therefore cannot

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nominative case and would become the subject of the verb’. See Brooks, James A., and Winbery, Carlton L., *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> An objective genitive is define as follows: ‘if the word in the genitive receives the action implied by the noun of action, it functions as the object of the verbal idea contained in the noun of action and is, therefore, an objective genitive’. See Brooks, James A., and Winbery, Carlton L., *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Turner, N., *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. III, Syntax* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 212.

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins, C. Ryan, ‘Faith and Works in Paul and James’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (January – March 2002), pp. 62-78.

<sup>37</sup> Much of the focus of scholarly commentary has gone into the seeming contradiction between the Pauline and the Jacobean understandings of salvation, primarily based on the seeming contradictions in the use of Gen. 15.6. Many scholars seem to evaluate James through a Pauline perspective, possibly due to the Protestant focus on righteousness by faith and Luther’s generally negative understanding of James (it should be noted that during the reformation times there was a reaction against Luther’s understanding of James, with the followers of Calvin lapsing into a form of legalism as they ‘sought evidence of their election in their good works’ See George, Timothy, “‘A Right Strawy Epistle’: Reformation Perspectives on James’, *Review and Expositor* Vol. 83 (1986), pp. 369-80). Valuable work has been done on identifying the Pauline and Jacobean use of key terms such as πίστις, δικαιωω, and εργα, work which has shown that not only is the use of these key terms conceptually different for each author, but that the two authors are theologically consistent one with another. For further theological and linguistic discussion of this issue see George, Timothy, “‘A Right Strawy Epistle’: Reformation Perspectives on James’, *Review and Expositor* Vol. 83 (1986), pp. 369-80, Jenkins, C. Ryan, ‘Faith and Works in Paul and James’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (January – March 2002), pp. 62-78, Lerenzen, Thorwald, ‘Faith without works does not count before God! James 2.14-26’, *The Expository Times* Vol. 89 (May 1978), pp. 231-35, Jeremias, Joachim, ‘Paul and James’, *The Expository Times* Vol. 66 (September 1955), pp. 368-71 and Dowd, Sharon, ‘Faith that Works: James 2.14-26’, *Review and Expositor* 97 (2002), pp. 195-05.

simultaneously profess His faith (understood in Jacobean terms as being expressed in works of mercy) with acts of partiality, and therefore a subjective genitive interpretation is preferred<sup>38</sup>.

More crucially however, ‘τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης’ contains an exalted Christology<sup>39</sup>: Christ is designated as κύριος and δόξα. As the Author directly quotes from the LXX in v. 8, and is writing to readers ἐν τῇ (predominantly Hellenistic) διασπορᾷ, we may not exclude the possibility that the Author both understood, and is conveying, the LXX’s denotation and connotations for these two terms.

Κύριος ‘as a rule...is used as an expository equivalent for the divine name YHWH’<sup>40</sup>. Κύριος is used in the decisive moments of YHWH’s self-revelation (Exod. 3.15, 6.2): to provide the divine authority for the written Torah (Exod. 21.2, Lev. 19.2, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18), in Israel’s seminal confessions of faith in YHWH (Exod. 15.3, 1 Kgs 18.39), in the daily *shema* (Deut. 6.5), and 6,143 times elsewhere in the LXX to refer to YHWH. Within the context of James 2, we may understand the Author as alluding primarily to Christ’s

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<sup>38</sup> An objective understanding, i.e. a faith in Jesus Christ, is perhaps the type of understanding that the Author is explicitly rejecting in 2.14-26: a mental assent to Christ’s Lordship or Messiahship is not the type of faith that has salvific effect: it is holding to or exhibiting the faith that Jesus Himself exhibited during His life and ministry which has salvific value, i.e. a faith that is expressed in service to others and not exclusively in mental assent to a given theological proposition.

<sup>39</sup> Some scholars argue that James is such a Jewish document that the current verse is only a later Christian interpolation. The position of the writer is that the current verse is the theological foundation for the subsequent discussion, and could not therefore have been a later interpolation, as without the exalted Christology of this verse the rest of the target pericope makes no theological sense.

<sup>40</sup> Foerster, ‘Κύριος’ in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 474-14. According to Foerster, the term Κύριος is used 6,156 times in the LXX for YHWH.

ontological unity with, and being as, YHWH, the giver of the written Torah at Sinai<sup>41</sup>.

The use of δόξα presents an interpretive challenge: is it to be translated adjectivally in apposition to Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ or as a qualifier<sup>42</sup>? ‘The primary meaning of the LXX word...always speaks of one thing...the “divine glory” which reveals the nature of God in creation and in His acts’, including ‘the “divine radiance” at the giving of the Law’<sup>43</sup>.

Given the LXX denotation of δόξα, the Author is referring to Christ inter alia as the shekinah glory, the visible divine presence, present both at the giving of the written Torah, and visible during each subsequent *Yom Kippur*, when the transgressions of the written Torah were judged and forgiven.

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<sup>41</sup> Jas 2.1 contains an allusion through the Greek used to Lev. 19.15, 2.8 explicitly quotes from Lev. 19.18b, and the entire target pericope may be understood as a form of halakhic *midrash* on Lev. 19.18b. See Johnson, Luke T., ‘The use of Leviticus 19 in the letter of James’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101/3 (1982), pp. 391-401. Johnson argues that the entire letter of James incorporates a halakhic *midrash* on Lev. 19.12-18, with the target pericope focusing primarily on an exegesis of Lev. 19.18b.

<sup>42</sup> This phrase has been translated a number of ways, including ‘faith in our Lord of glory, Jesus Christ’, ‘faith in the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ’, ‘faith in our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ’, or as ‘faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory’. A literal translation of the verse would suggest the latter interpretation, which would carry significant theological weight (it is interesting to note that the King James Version [formal equivalence] gives a slightly amended version of the final option). If we understand the verse literally as ‘faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory’, the LXX usage of the word δόξα would provide the linguistic denotation of the shekinah glory, the ‘luminous manifestation of God’s person’, the abiding and visible presence of YHWH amongst His covenant people, the divine glory that was visible to the High Priest on the annual Day of Atonement, and the divine radiance at the giving of the Torah. See Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), pp. 56-101, Kittel, ‘Δόξα’ in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 232-55, and Freeborn, Jack, ‘Lord of Glory: A Study of James 2 and 1 Corinthians 2’, *The Expository Times* Vol. 3 (March 2000), pp. 185-89.

<sup>43</sup> Kittel, ‘Δόξα’ in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 244. See also Collins, C., John, ‘KBD’ in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* Vol. 2 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 577-87.

The Author therefore presents two motifs related to Christ: that of Him as the giver of the written Torah; and of Him being the visible presence of God when the transgressions of the written Torah are judged, either on *Yom Kippur* or at the eschaton<sup>44</sup>.

VV. 2-3 – *Hypothetical illustration*<sup>45</sup>: The Author now presents an hypothetical example of partiality<sup>46</sup>. A rich person and a poor person enter a Christian assembly: the rich person is treated well, the poor with contempt. The assembly may be for religious purposes, but given the critique against Lev. 19.15 in v. 5, a judicial setting is preferred. The Author's circumlocution to describe the rich person suggests that both entrants are Christians<sup>47</sup>, or prospective converts, so not only is partiality shown to a rich person, but it is shown to a rich brother in Christ against a poor brother in Christ, partiality for which the Author allows no excuse.

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<sup>44</sup> The Author has a strong concept of the impending judgment by Christ, e.g. Jas 5.7, 9.

<sup>45</sup> ἂν γὰρ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἐσθήτι λαμπρᾷ, εἰσέλθῃ δὲ καὶ πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθήτι, ἐπιβλέψητε δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἐσθήτα τὴν λαμπρὰν καὶ εἴπητε· σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς, καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ εἴπητε· σὺ στήθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου', 'For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"' (NRSV).

<sup>46</sup> The question is couched in the subjunctive mood, as a long protasis for the conditional statement, with the apodosis coming in v. 5. Although the example may be hypothetical, the use of the indicative mood in vv. 6-7 indicates that the example may be understood as illustrating the realities of what occur within Christian assemblies. The illustration is a long question, concluding with the (negative) evaluation of the behaviour against the written Torah in v. 5.

<sup>47</sup> 'Πλούσιος', the Author's normal term for a rich person – a term with harsh connotations of oppression and eschatological judgment, is not used in the current example. Rather, the Author describes the person's brilliant clothes and fingers covered in gold rings. The person is most certainly wealthy, but given the Author's use of πλούσιος elsewhere, whether he can be viewed as being amongst the πλούσιοι is doubtful. For this reason, an understanding of the rich person coming into the Christian assembly is preferred which identifies the rich person as either an existing Christian, or a prospective Christian convert, who with the poor person in the verse is relatively new to the assembly.

V. 4 – *Evaluation of illustration against written Torah*<sup>48</sup>: The Author’s apodosis to the subjunctive conditional protasis of vv. 2-3 expects a positive response<sup>49</sup>: the readers are indeed making distinctions amongst themselves, thus demonstrating a lack of faith<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, in showing partiality to the rich the readers have become κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν<sup>51</sup> - they therefore stand condemned by Lev. 19.15, the written Torah<sup>52</sup>.

V. 5 - *Evaluation of illustration against oral Torah*<sup>53</sup>: As I have stated elsewhere<sup>54</sup>, ‘the ‘oral Torah’ hermeneutical principle reflected the desire of Jewish exegesis to ‘understand themselves in light of Scripture, and conversely to understand Scripture in such a way to bring meaning to their situation’<sup>55</sup>. There was a strong but disputed tradition<sup>56</sup> that ‘interpretation is

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<sup>48</sup> ‘οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν’, ‘have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?’ (NRSV).

<sup>49</sup> The use of οὐ indicates syntactically that a positive response to the question is required of the readers.

<sup>50</sup> The Author has already used the verb διεκρίθεσθε to refer to those who are ‘double-minded’, those who are ‘unstable in every way’, those who ‘must not expect to receive anything from the Lord’.

<sup>51</sup> The use of the διεκρίνω ἐν ἑαυτοῖς and κριταὶ supports the primary understanding of the hypothetical illustration to refer to a judicial rather than a liturgical assembly.

<sup>52</sup> There are close linguistic parallels with Lev. 19.15, which states that ‘οὐ ποιήσετε ἄδικον ἐν κρίσει οὐ λήμψη πρόσωπον πτωχοῦ οὐδὲ θαυμάσεις πρόσωπον δυνάστου ἐν δικαιοσύνη κρινεῖς τὸν πλησίον σου’, ‘You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor’ (NRSV). The Author is not directly quoting from Lev. 19.15, but there are very strong parallel concepts of showing partiality, the rich, the poor, and sitting in judgment.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν;’, ‘Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?’ (NRSV).

<sup>54</sup> See Vine, C.A.R., ‘An exploration and assessment of the hermeneutical techniques and underlying assumptions displayed by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 1. 5-14’, pp. 10-11, a paper submitted to Newbold College as part of the MA in Religion, BIST 501 course requirements, November 2003.

<sup>55</sup> See Enns, P., ‘Biblical Interpretation, Jewish’ in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 162.

<sup>56</sup> For instance, the Sadducees rejected the concept of ‘oral Torah’ as they held that only the ‘written Torah’ was applicable, whereas the Pharisees not only accepted the concept of ‘oral Torah’, but were the main proponents of the concept in late Second Temple Judaism. Paul was a

comprehensible only through the authoritative tradition of interpretation'<sup>57</sup>, with the authoritative tradition believed to have originated at Mt. Sinai'.

Having shown the incompatibility of partiality with written Torah, and given the logic of the pericope in which the readers' partiality is being questioned in the light of the Christ event, the Author presents an oral Torah evaluation through using the oral traditions of Christ, κύριος and δόξα<sup>58</sup>, i.e. He who originally gave the written Torah is now presenting the authoritative oral Torah interpretation<sup>59</sup>.

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proponent of the 'oral Torah' during his pre-conversion days, one who presumed to 'sit in the seat of Moses'. The concept however was disputed within Judaism, and Stemberger puts the basic question thus, 'does this term entail a statement about the manner of transmission – viz., not in written form but by oral tradition? Or is it merely intended as a distinction over against the Bible, or a suggestion that one Torah was given at Sinai in written and the other in oral form?'. The debate went on in Judaism through the middle ages and into the modern era, with still no firm resolution. However, the doctrine of 'oral Torah' is a natural development from the concept of closed revelation, the 'written Torah', which is in need of interpretation for new situations over time. See Stemberger, Gunter, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1996), pp. 31-42.

<sup>57</sup> See Fishbane, Michael, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> This paper is written with the assumption that James was probably the first New Testament document to be written, and was most certainly composed before the final compilation and redaction of the gospels. The Author therefore has as yet no written source of Christ's logia, but he works with the existing oral Jesus traditions, traditions with which, as the brother of Christ, he is very familiar. Bauckham has shown the close parallels between the words of Jesus as recorded in the synoptic gospels, and the words of James: parallels that extend beyond the structure and form of sayings to the actual contents of the sayings themselves. The Author never provides a direct quotation from the gospels, most likely because James was probably written before the gospels were, and this raises the intriguing possibility of whether the allusions to the sayings of Christ in James represent a closer proximity to the actual words of Christ than those recorded in the gospels. See Bauckham, Richard, *James* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), pp. 29-111.

<sup>59</sup> The use of οὐ with the indicative indicates that the Author is expecting a positive response to his question from the readers, i.e. he is expecting them to say that 'yes, God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the Kingdom'. The question's syntactical structure demands a positive response from the readers, and in providing the positive response they are implicitly condemning the partial behaviour that was presented in the hypothetical illustration of vv. 2-3, behaviour which the use of the indicative in vv. 4 indicates is a reflection of what is actually happening within the primitive Jewish Christian communities.

Drawing on oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions<sup>60</sup>, the Author presents the eschatological promise and great reversal motifs for the poor, those to whom Christ<sup>61</sup> has promised ‘the kingdom’. Although poor in worldly goods, the poor are seen by Christ ‘as rich with respect to their faith and consequently as heirs of God’s kingdom’<sup>62</sup>. To treat the poor unfavourably therefore places one in opposition to Christ, κύριος and δόξα.

VV. 6-7 – *Actual illustration*<sup>63</sup>: Having gained the readers’ agreement that partiality in principle is incompatible with the faith of Christ, the Author moves directly to the readers’ realities: they are dishonouring the poor and favouring the rich<sup>64</sup>, those who (satanically<sup>65</sup>) oppress them, litigate against them<sup>66</sup>, and blaspheme the name of Christ<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> The texts (which we now have in written form, and which were probably in the form of oral tradition for the Author) which are being alluded to are Mt. 5.3, 6.33 and 25.31-46. The writer of the paper recognizes that there was much Jewish literature about the poor, including the concept of the ‘pious poor’ in inter-testamental, Qumranic and rabbinic literature. However, the Author is evaluating the partial practices of the primitive Jewish Christian communities against their profession of faith in Christ, so we must look for logia of Christ which provide the yardstick against which the partial behaviour can be evaluated. A comparison of the readers’ partial behaviour against rabbinic, inter-testamental or Qumranic materials would be totally irrelevant for the Author, who is seeking to draw the readers attention to the gulf that exists between the faith of Christ, as evidenced in a life of service, impartiality and merciful acts, and the partial actions of those who claim to follow Him.

<sup>61</sup> In the context of this pericope, we may understand synonyms for Christ to be YHWH, κύριος and δόξα.

<sup>62</sup> See Polhill, John B., ‘Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith: James 2’, *Review and Expositor* 3 (1983), p. 396.

<sup>63</sup> ‘ὕμεις δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν. οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς;’ ‘But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?’ (NRSV).

<sup>64</sup> The Author reverts to his standard term for the rich, οἱ πλούσιοι, a term with purely negative connotations. The ambivalence and circumlocution of the reference to the rich person in vv. 2-3 is gone, and the Author is now referring to a distinct class who are then defined through three characteristics, each of which is a reason in itself for the (poor) Christians not to be partial to οἱ πλούσιοι.

<sup>65</sup> The use of the verb καταδυναστεύω is important to note. This verb occurs only once elsewhere in the New Testament, in Acts 10.38, where it refers to oppression ‘by the devil’. This satanic element, suggesting the oppression of the poor has a satanic provenance, has stark

In thus disassociating themselves from the poor, the readers are at risk of ‘excluding themselves from the promise to those who inherit the kingdom’<sup>68</sup>, i.e. their eschatological salvation is at risk<sup>69</sup>.

V. 8 – *Evaluation of illustration against written and oral Torah*<sup>70</sup>: The Author now directly quotes from the LXX, Lev. 19.18. Those who were showing partial behaviour towards the rich may indeed claim to be showing love to their

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implications for the readers: are they also engaging in satanic acts through their dishonouring and shaming of the poor within their midst? See Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> In the context of Jerusalem and Palestine between 35-70 AD, the poor were oppressed by the rich, who used their superior wealth, connections and learning to oppress the poor through the courts. Such judicial oppression often led to poor rural families losing their ancestral land and becoming tenant farmers, or being sold into slavery to pay off debts incurred whilst their own daily wages were not paid by the self-same landlords who were then suing them for unpaid debts. The Author is acutely aware of the problem of judicial abuse, referring to it explicitly in 5.1-7. Indeed, ‘in this case our author seems to be referring to the specific financial aspect of the oppression which resulted in physically dragging the poor into court because of their debts – such action made all the more possible because of the prosbul promulgated by Hillel which allowed a creditor to collect debts during the Sabbatical year. James is here, therefore, a Shammaite’. See Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> The exact meaning of the Greek is unclear for this phrase. It is very difficult to determine the exact nature of the blasphemy that the Author had in mind here, particularly as the Domitianic persecution and divine emperor cult were probably in the future, and Christians were not being forced to worship the Roman emperor as ‘our Lord and God’ as Domitian styled himself. There is no evidence that the primitive Jewish Christian communities who were the most likely target readers for the epistle were called ‘Christians’ in the decades immediately after the resurrection, so we may not directly understand the blasphemy to be against the name of Christ. The use of the aorist passive with τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα may indicate however a concept of possession, the one over whom a name is invoked becoming the property of the one whose name is invoked, i.e. ‘it seems more likely that the author again is utilizing an Old Testament formula and is alluding to the special name of God, Yahweh...with this interpretation, it seems clear that the “poor being chosen of God” and the “invoking of the good name” as an indication of possession stand in parallelism...to oppress the poor, God’s chosen possession, is actually to blaspheme’. See Maynard-Reid, Pedrito U., *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 65-66.

<sup>68</sup> See Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> Jas 2.13, the last verse of the target pericope, supports this concept: eschatological judgment will come to those who are not merciful, and in the context of the target pericope, that means being merciful to the poor.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικὸν κατὰ τὴν γραφήν· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε·’ ‘You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”’ (NRSV).

neighbour<sup>71</sup>, but the Author disagrees: showing love to one's neighbour must include all neighbours, not just wealthy neighbours. The humiliating treatment meted out to the poor shows that the respect shown to the rich is not fulfilling the 'royal law', rather is condemned in written Torah terms (Lev. 19.15) as partiality<sup>72</sup>.

But in what sense is this a 'royal law'? Various understandings may be taken<sup>73</sup>, but when the Author refers to the written Torah, he refers to it merely as νόμος, and when he uses it in within the oral Jesus tradition, he qualifies νόμος<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Assuming the Author is using a form of diatribe to present his case, we may imagine that there is an objection from his readers, who were claiming that through showing respect and giving good treatment to the wealthy in their midst they were indeed showing love for their neighbour. The Author would agree with this position, provided the same respect and good treatment was also provided to the poor in their midst, but as the poor do not receive such good treatment, indeed the poor receive very humiliating treatment, then the 'respect' shown for the wealthy can not be understood as fulfilling the 'royal law'. Rather, the behaviour is then shown to be partial behaviour, which is explicitly condemned in the written Torah, Lev. 19.15.

<sup>72</sup> The use of the Greek particle μέντοι may be understood either as adversative, meaning 'however', or as affirmative, meaning 'verily' or 'really'. If understood as being 'however', then the Author is presumably drawing a contrast with the written Torah concepts contained within v. 4 (from Lev. 19.15), i.e. arguing that it is not just enough not to show partiality, a negative injunction, but one is required to show love also to everyone (Lev. 19.18), a positive injunction. Within the context of the target pericope, given the background of diatribe with positions and objections being raised by the readers / opponents and then destroyed by the Author, the writer of this paper prefers the second understanding, i.e. he is suggesting that if the readers 'really' wish to keep the law, i.e. in its fullest possible sense, avoiding partiality is not just enough – they must also show love. The readers are currently not showing love, and are therefore standing condemned under the written Torah.

<sup>73</sup> The 'royal law' is not a single command, in which case the Author may have referred to it as the 'royal ἐντολή'. The 'royal law' may refer to a law which comes from a king, a law fit for a king, the king of all laws (the supreme law), or the law around which the entire written Torah hangs? According to Laws, 'the adjective *basilkos* means regal, belonging to a king, as in its use of the King of Edom's highway in Num. xx.17 and of Herod's territory in Acts xii. 20 (where the noun is understood). Philo comments on Num. xx.17 that the King's highway is 'royal' both because it is his, and because it leads to him, and he finds here an allegory of the Law, which is the true 'royal road'. Interesting as these suggestions may be, and notwithstanding the validity of each, the writer of this paper believes that the Author is using the concept of 'royal law' within the parameters of the Christ event, and should be interpreted thus. See Laws, Sophie, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London, UK: A. and C. Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1980), p. 109.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, in vv. 9-11 the Author uses νόμος to refer to the written Torah: there is no substantive qualification of the term. However, in 1.25 and 2.12 he qualifies νόμος, using it to refer to the understanding of the Law which is now possible after the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Christ, i.e. there is a new hermeneutical principle at work, which interprets the

Together with Paul<sup>75</sup>, the Author is arguing that obedience to the ‘love command’ fulfils the entire written Torah: the written Torah is not denied, but the words of Christ explicate, expand and deepen the requirements of the written Torah, a position further propounded by John, a first-hand recipient of the oral Jesus traditions<sup>76</sup>.

For the Author, the oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions include the definitive interpretation of Lev. 19.18: Mt. 5.18, 43, 7.12, 19.16-19 and 22.34-40 indicate orally how one can really (μέντοι) fulfil the (written) law from the lips of the One whose coming itself fulfilled the (written) law (Mt. 5.17). Entry to the sovereign rule of God’s kingdom, promised to the poor by Christ (v. 5 above, drawing upon oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions), requires obedience to the definitive interpretation of the written Torah provided by Christ. Those who continue to engage in partial behaviour are thereby placing themselves outside of the Kingdom of God as explicated by Christ, and therefore stand in danger of eschatological judgement.

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entire Old Testament through the Christ event, an event which provides the authoritative interpretation of the entire Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>75</sup> See Rom. 13.9 and Gal. 5.14, in which Paul explicitly refers to Lev. 19.18 as being the summation of the entire written Torah.

<sup>76</sup> In Johannine thought, the ‘love command’ comes from Christ, and is obligatory for all who would be followers of Christ (John 13.31-35), a position which is mediated slightly in 1 John 2.7, where John recognizes that the ‘love command’ is not in fact something radically new, and has been contained within the written Torah from its inception, but is only now achieving its necessary prominence through the life and ministry of Christ. ‘It is reasonable to suppose that the prominence of a command to love in many of the NT documents is due to its prominence in the teaching of Jesus, even when this is not explicitly acknowledged’. See Laws, Sophie, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London, UK: A. and C. Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1980), p. 110.

VV. 9-11 – *Written Torah perspective*<sup>77</sup>: If however you do not keep the (written) law through your showing of partiality, you commit sin<sup>78</sup>. The use of προσωπολημπτεῖτε, a *hapax legomenon*, underlines the unity of thought with v.1 (προσωπολημψίας) – the Author is bringing the readers back to the original problem – showing partiality to the rich.

The readers are sinning - ἀμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε<sup>79</sup>. The Author gives no room for evasion of response through lexical, grammatical, syntactical, rabbinic, allegorical or metaphorical dispute. The readers are sinning, and are condemned as such by the very (written) law they are using to justify their behaviour, standing condemned as παραβάται.

And what does it mean to be a παραβάτης? To be a παραβάτης means that if one stumbles ἐν ἑνί, one is guilty (ἔνοχος<sup>80</sup>) of the entire (written) law. ‘One does

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<sup>77</sup> ‘εἰ δὲ προσωπολημπτεῖτε, ἀμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε ἐλεγχόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ὡς παραβάται. ὅστις γὰρ ὅλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἑνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος. ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν· μὴ μοιχεύσῃς, εἶπεν καὶ· μὴ φονεύσῃς· εἰ δὲ οὐ μοιχεύεις φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου’, ‘But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law’ (NRSV).

<sup>78</sup> According to Moo, ‘Verses 8-9, then, stand in clear antithetical relationship. We *do well* when we obey the law, with its summons to love, but we *commit* sin when we transgress that law by showing partiality’. See Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), p. 95. Through showing partiality, within the immediate context the readers stand condemned by the (written) law, in particular Lev. 19.18, which specifically precludes partiality.

<sup>79</sup> The Author makes no allusion to the oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions at this point, but from these traditions there is a terrible eschatological judgment awaiting doers of sin. Mt. 7.23 concludes with Christ stating, ‘ποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν’, ‘depart from me, you evildoers’ (NRSV). Those who commit sin have no place with Christ: they are denied entrance to the presence of Christ by Christ Himself, and face eschatological judgment, even those who (in the Matthean context) have professed faith in Christ – precisely the sort of believers whom the Author is addressing in the target pericope.

<sup>80</sup> According to UBS, ἔνοχος, οὐ liable, answerable, guilty; deserving (of death); guilty of sin against (1 Cor 11.27); ἔ. δουλείας enslaved (He 2.15); ἔ. εἰς τὴν ψέειναν in danger of going to

not have to break all the commandments to be classed as a lawbreaker; on the other side he [the Author] is remarking that a person must keep all the commandments to be a “perfect” law-keeper<sup>81</sup>.

The ‘one point’ for the Author within the target pericope over which one can fail and thereby become a παραβάτης is the sin of partiality! One may not commit adultery, but if one commits murder, one is a παραβάτης. To commit adultery, to murder<sup>82</sup>, or engage in partiality – each action has a moral equivalence – each action condemns the doer as a παραβάτης<sup>83</sup>, bringing eschatological judgment.

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hell (Mt 5.22)’. The use of this legal term further supports the judicial context of the target pericope, and of the hypothetical illustration provided in vv. 2-3 above.

<sup>81</sup> See Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> It is not certain in what sense the Author is using the concept of murder. A reading of the internal evidence of the epistle would suggest a physical sense of murder, particularly given the physical oppression, withholding of wages, backbiting, gossiping and other abuses mentioned in the epistle, and a physical sense may well suit the diatribe background well. The Author’s opponents may be excusing their partial behaviour through stating that they haven’t been committing the so-called ‘graver’ offences of adultery or murder, and as they have obeyed the ‘heavier’ commands, they need to be given some moral ‘leeway’ in ‘lighter’ areas of significance. An alternate understanding of murder would be that expounded by Christ in Mt. 5-7, in which not only the physical act is condemned, but the irate and hostile thoughts themselves that lead ultimately to murder were condemned. If the Author has this Matthean tradition in mind, then he is suggesting that not only are physical acts condemned, but the sinful attitudes from whence they come (c.f. Jas 1.12-16), sinful attitudes which may alternately be expressed in murder, in adultery or in partial behaviour.

<sup>83</sup> This concept that the Author is arguing is an intrinsically Jewish idea – the unity of the law. The concept that to break a law makes one guilty of breaking the entire law to a certain extent is a truism, but this unitary understanding of the written law was common in Jewish thought, first occurring in the LXX (Deut. 27.26), and then in inter-testamental writings, including Philo. ‘In 4 Maccabees, when the pious Eleazer was required to eat unlawfully, he refused, replying, ‘do not suppose that it would be a petty sin if we were to eat defiling food; to transgress the law in matters either small or great is of equal seriousness, for in either case the law is equally despised (4 Macc. 5.19-21). See Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), p. 95. The oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions also included such a unitary understanding of the law, e.g. as we find recorded in Mt. 5.18-19, 23.23, and Paul also had the same unitary understanding of the law, e.g. Gal. 5.3. Indeed, despite the rabbinical debates about the relative weight (salvific import) of different requirements, and the overriding imperative to observe the Sabbath correctly, ‘the rabbis warned against distinguishing between ‘light’ and ‘weighty’ commandments, with the commonsense observation that ‘if you become slack about one commandment, you will end by becoming slack

VV. 12-13 – *Definitive oral Torah perspective*<sup>84</sup>: The Author now presents the conclusion: a double imperative<sup>85</sup> – ‘so do’ and ‘so speak’ in such a way that takes account of the final judgment<sup>86</sup>. Throughout James there is a strong concept that one’s doing and speaking ‘is set in the knowledge of a sure judgment’<sup>87</sup>. The sure judgment of one’s words and deeds will come from ‘the law of liberty’<sup>88</sup>, which is the authoritative summary of the law provided by the oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions<sup>89</sup>: ‘to love one’s neighbour is the highest form of freedom exercised, and ends in fulfilment of the law’<sup>90</sup>.

Transitioning to a gnomic statement with γὰρ, the Author presents a common Jewish understanding<sup>91</sup>: God is a God of mercy, His people are called on to show mercy, and God will judge with mercy those who have shown mercy.

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about another’. See Laws, Sophie, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London, UK: A. and C. Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1980), p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> ‘οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι. ἡ γὰρ κρίσις ἀνέλκος τῷ μὴ ποιήσαντι ἔλεος· κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως’, ‘So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment’ (NRSV).

<sup>85</sup> The use of double imperatives in the present tense (2<sup>nd</sup> person plural present imperative active) suggests that the activities being commanded are not one-off events, but are to be ongoing activities, activities that are habitual and part of one’s daily religious experience.

<sup>86</sup> The Author devotes considerable attention to the issue of being a hearer and doer of the heard word: doing and speaking which must be understood as being ultimately judged. See Jas 1.19, 26, 3.1-12, 4.11-16, 5.12 for the Author’s advice concerning words, and 1.27, 2.1-26, 4.1-10, and 5.1-6 for the Author’s advice concerning actions.

<sup>87</sup> See Davids, Peter, H., *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1982), p. 118.

<sup>88</sup> As already noted above, the Author qualifies whenever he does not wish to refer primarily to the written Torah only, the Mosaic laws of the Jews, but to the written Torah as it has been interpreted in the life, words and deeds of Christ.

<sup>89</sup> The notion of the law that frees, the law that brings one to fulfillment of the entire law, is found in the Matthean traditions in Mt. 7.12, 21, 24-29, 19.17-21, 22.36-40 and 28.20.

<sup>90</sup> See Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary James* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> The concept that God was a God of mercy was common in Old Testament times, being expressed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, e.g. Exod. 34.5-6, Deut. 4.31 and Pss. 103 and 108. For God’s people to act with mercy one to another was enjoined throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, e.g. Jer. 9.26, Hos. 6.6, Mic. 6.8.

In the corresponding oral Jesus traditions, eschatological κρίσις in the coming age will be the reward of those who have not shown mercy in the current age: faith that is incompatible with the faith that Christ demonstrated (v. 1), i.e. that does not express itself in mercy<sup>92</sup>, will result in eschatological damnation<sup>93</sup>. The oral Jesus traditions also present this understanding positively, ‘blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy’<sup>94</sup>, and provide the authoritative promise of eschatological salvation for ‘everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them’<sup>95</sup>.

The Author has therefore presented a stark picture for his readers: to continue engaging in acts of partiality breaks both the written Torah and the oral proto-Matthean Jesus tradition, which without repentance will result in eschatological damnation. The readers are called therefore in a positive sense to engage in acts of mercy, for in the written Torah and the oral proto-Matthean Jesus traditions this is the only way to fulfil the law and receive eternal salvation. This theological message however is predicated on certain hermeneutical assumptions, which will now be briefly explored.

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<sup>92</sup> This concept is strikingly presented in the parable of the two debtors in Mt. 18.21-35. Further Matthean sources for this concept may be found in Mt. 13.24-30, 41-42 and 25.31-46.

<sup>93</sup> It is argued by some that the Author is merely exaggerating the threat in this final verse: that the Author is not really suggesting that one’s eternal salvation is at risk if one does not engage in acts of mercy as an expression of one’s faith, but the linguistic and rhetorical evidence do not agree with this perspective. The Author is providing the solution for those who have an imperfect faith, a faith that is inconsistent with the faith of Christ, and that solution is not only to disengage from acts of partiality, but to engage in acts of mercy, thereby securing mercy for themselves in the final judgment.

<sup>94</sup> Mt. 5.7.

<sup>95</sup> Christ provides a summary of His Matthean teachings and the possible responses to His teachings in Mt. 7.24-27: those who hear and respond accordingly will receive eschatological salvation, but those who merely hear and do not act accordingly are assured eschatological damnation.

## Brief assessment of the Author's key hermeneutical assumptions

### *Potential hermeneutical approaches*

As I have written elsewhere<sup>96</sup>, 'the Second Temple period<sup>97</sup> was a time of intensive and extensive interaction with Scripture within Judaism<sup>98</sup>'. Whilst recognising the sheer variety of Jewish Second Temple writings<sup>99</sup>, a careful approach is required to assess the target pericope within a valid framework, and for a wide variety of stylistic, hermeneutical and content related reasons it is the *midrashic* hermeneutical assumptions which are most relevant to the present study<sup>100</sup>, and it is to these that we now turn<sup>101</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup> See Vine, C.A.R., 'An exploration and assessment of the hermeneutical techniques and underlying assumptions displayed by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 1. 5-14', pp. 10-11, a paper submitted to Newbold College as part of the MA in Religion, BIST 501 course requirements, November 2003.

<sup>97</sup> This paper takes as the definition for the Second Temple period as being the period between 'the return from the Babylonian exile and the building of the second temple in 516 BC to its destruction in 70 AD'. See Enns, P., 'Biblical Interpretation, Jewish' in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 159.

<sup>98</sup> 'The study of Jeremiah by Daniel whilst in captivity, as recorded in Daniel 9, shows that there was serious study of Scripture being conducted even during the captivity, with the purpose of understanding God's word within the current context. During the Second Temple period, canonical books were written (e.g. Ezra and Nehemiah), pseudepigraphia (some apocalyptic in nature) and the books of the Apocrypha were produced, the Qumran sectaries wrote extensive commentaries and developed the *peshet* genre, Philo wrote (allegorical) commentaries with a strong Hellenistic influence, the LXX and its rescensions were produced, there may have been proto-MT Hebrews texts (as witnessed in the Qumran discoveries), Aramaic *targums* were produced for synagogue use, there were extensive rabbinic writings and developments of 'oral Torah' (often in the form of *midrash*), and the earliest writings that were later redacted into the *Talmud* may have been formulated during this period'. See Vine, C.A.R., 'An exploration and assessment of the hermeneutical techniques and underlying assumptions displayed by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 1. 5-14', pp. 10-11, a paper submitted to Newbold College as part of the MA in Religion, BIST 501 course requirements, November 2003.

<sup>99</sup> The sheer scope and breadth of Jewish writings reflect partly the sectarian nature of Second Temple Judaism, the diaspora and rise of influence of rabbis at the expense of the central cultus, and Greco-Romano thought.

<sup>100</sup> As I have stated elsewhere (Vine, C.A.R., 'An exploration and assessment of the hermeneutical techniques and underlying assumptions displayed by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 1. 5-14', pp. 10-14), Philo's writings were heavily influenced by Alexandrian Hellenism, and introduce allegorical hermeneutics to Jewish thought. However, whilst important, and undoubtedly part of the religious culture, Philo's writings are not a distinct genre of their own, neither do they offer relevant hermeneutical approaches against which the target pericope may be directly evaluated...the *talmudic* writings, although of great value, and having their roots in

### *Midrashic hermeneutical approaches*

As I have stated elsewhere, ‘within *midrash* there were two fundamental hermeneutical principles within which all hermeneutical activity took place: Scripture as divine speech; and the doctrine of the ‘oral Torah’. As divine

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much the same milieu as the comparable literature, are not directly comparable to the target pericope (these writings were completed c. 200 AD in Palestine and Babylonia, and reflect the rise in rabbinic Judaism and changes in Jewish thought and cultic practice following the trauma of 70 AD. For further information, see Weitzman, M.P., ‘Talmud’ in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.), *The SCM Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 667-71.)...*Targums* were Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and were necessitated by the Persian and Greek dominance in Second Temple times, when many Jews no longer spoke or understood Hebrew. Used primarily in synagogues and schoolhouses, the *Targums* ‘mixed metaphrases with paraphrases...used Aramaic cognate terms for translation...clarified metaphors in paraphrases...reflected contextual embellishments in paraphrase...contextually related theological points in a non-conspicuous manner...employed Hillel’s exegetical rules’ (data summarized from Herbert W. Bateman IV (Bateman, Herbert W., IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Heb. 1:5-13* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1997) pp. 117-18). Although important witnesses for textual criticism, neither *Targums* nor the *targumic* process will be used to evaluate the target pericope because the *Targums* were primarily paraphrases rather than paraenetic or exegetical in nature... *Pesher* commentaries, as developed at Qumran, whilst a sub-genre of *Midrash* (Gunter Stemmerger argues that *Pesher* commentaries are a sub-genre of *Midrash* due to similarities in structure and technique. See Stemmerger, Gunter, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1996), pp. 235-237), are themselves not directly related to the target pericope as although they had an eschatological emphasis, they primarily sought to directly interpret prophecy within a local and defined context, characteristics which the target pericope does not primarily exhibit... *Midrash*, from the verb root *darash*, ‘to study’, has come to mean early Jewish exegesis and commentary. Given the breadth of *midrash*, it is difficult to clarify or provide definite definitions, but *midrash* is sometimes described as being either *halakha* (a commentary on the law) or *haggada* (a commentary on the non-legal or narrative components of Scripture), or as being exegetical or homiletic (expounding a text in accordance with the synagogues’ liturgical calendar). Furthermore, *midrash* as a genre may be delineated according to outcome, or as a process with distinctive hermeneutical techniques, and whilst it is not directly comparable to the target pericope in terms of methodology used, the midrashic hermeneutical assumptions are evidenced in the target pericope.

<sup>101</sup> It should be noted that the target pericope does not exhibit the normal methodological characteristics of *midrash*, which included, inter alia, as I have stated elsewhere, the following: ‘a) selectively choosing and stringing OT texts together; b) thematically linking disparate OT texts; c) selectively stating and then interpreting OT texts; d) editing the OT text at times for theological emphasis; e) quoting named authorities; f) using introductory formulae; g) validating its interpretations with scripture; and h) using Hillel’s rules’. The above *midrashic* hermeneutical techniques were taken from Alexander, Philip S., ‘Mishnah’ in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.), *The SCM Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 452-59, Bateman, Herbert W., IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Heb. 1:5-13* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1997) pp. 117-18, Silva, M., ‘Old Testament in Paul’ in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 630-42, and Stegner W. R., ‘Jew, Paul the’ in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 503-11. There is not a scholarly consensus about all the hermeneutical techniques used within *midrashic* writings, but the techniques listed do have broad support as being representative of key hermeneutical techniques.

speech, Scripture originated in God's mind and was transmitted through the prophets<sup>102</sup>, with the 'oral Torah' providing the authoritative framework within which the 'written Torah' could be interpreted<sup>103</sup>.

The target pericope's theology is predicated on an exalted Christology<sup>104</sup>: Christ as κύριος and δόξα. As κύριος, Christ is synonymous with YHWH, the giver of the written Torah, and as δόξα, He is the visible manifestation of YHWH, incorporating a strong eschatological judgment motif, and it is within this exalted Christology that the *midrashic* hermeneutical assumptions are both unified and extended<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> According to Alexander, there were a number of axioms associated with the principle of Scripture being divine speech: firstly, 'Scripture is polyvalent: it is an inexhaustible fountain of truth'; secondly, 'Scripture is a totally coherent and self-consistent body of truth', despite seeming and surface contradictions; and thirdly, that 'Scripture is inerrant: it can contain no errors of fact'; and fourthly, 'there is no redundancy in Scripture...everything in Scripture, even the spelling of the words as full or defective, or the shape of the letters, is seen as significant'. See Alexander, Philip S., 'Mishnah' in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.), *The SCM Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 457-58.

<sup>103</sup> According to Alexander, there were a number of principles associated with the doctrine of 'oral Torah': firstly, that the 'written Torah' is a 'closed, canonic text, fixed and inviolable', secondly, that 'the oral Torah is open-ended, ever developing. It is able to demonstrate the relevance of the 'written Torah' in changing historical circumstances'; and thirdly, that 'the oral Torah' imposes limits on the interpretation. The *darshan* does not stand before the text of Scripture with absolute freedom'. See Alexander, Philip S., 'Mishnah' in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.), *The SCM Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 458.

<sup>104</sup> As alluded to above, the entire target pericope is predicated on the exalted Christology of v. 1, and the standard by which one's faith is evaluated is not the rabbinic sayings or any of the writings of Jewish or Hellenistic religious or philosophical thought: it is the sayings of Christ. Therefore, the entire target pericope must be interpreted within the paradigm provided by the words and *logia* of the Christ event if one is to see the full theological significance of the Author's thought.

<sup>105</sup> The Author has extended the *midrashic* hermeneutical assumptions into the basic hermeneutical principle of the apostolic church and of Christ Himself – that Scripture itself can only be understood within the framework of the Christ event. As I have said elsewhere, the New Testament 'provides a Christological interpretative framework for the OT, e.g. Jesus is recorded as stating in Lk. 25.44 that, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled'. Further evidence is clearly seen inter alia in Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2.14-36), Peter's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 3.17-18), Peter's defence to the 'Council' (Acts 4.11), Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7), and in Philip's exposition to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8. 26-40)'. See Vine, C.A.R., 'An exploration and assessment of the hermeneutical techniques and underlying assumptions displayed by the author of Hebrews in Heb. 1. 5-14', p.

Although the Author refers to τὴν γραφήν<sup>106</sup>, for him the Decalogue is YHWH's divine speech, spoken into existence<sup>107</sup>, in response to which it is one's human actions and human speech which will form the basis for divine eschatological judgment<sup>108</sup>. Furthermore, for the believer, Christ's *logia* as κύριος within the oral proto-Matthean Jesus tradition are not only to be understood as divine speech, but also provide the authoritative oral Torah interpretation of the written Torah.

He who as κύριος gave the written Torah, has now as δόξα, the visible manifestation of YHWH, provided the authoritative oral Torah, defining the πίστις by which He as YHWH's δόξα will ultimately bring about eschatological judgment: a πίστις that all may possess; a πίστις that is not mere assent to theological propositions; a πίστις that is met through a life of habitual acts of mercy; a πίστις that works both temporally and salvifically.

Given the above, the paper now suggests areas for further systematic theological study to identify modern applications of the Author's theological message and hermeneutical assumptions.

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23, a paper submitted to Newbold College as part of the MA in Religion, BIST 501 course requirements, November 2003.

<sup>106</sup> Jas 2.8.

<sup>107</sup> Jas 2.11 includes a typically Jewish circumlocution to avoid using the name YHWH or any other divine designation, 'ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν μὴ μοιχεύσης, εἶπεν καί'.

<sup>108</sup> See Jas 2.12.

## **Suggested areas of research in systematic theology**

### *Suggested areas for research in systematic theology*

Given the above, the following areas of further systematic theology study for practical application are suggested:

- How may the modern western Church and individual believers move from a predominantly intellectual concept of πίστις to one which is both predicated upon, and expressed through, habitual and corporate acts of mercy, both within the local communion and across denominational and geographic barriers<sup>109</sup>?
- Grounded in the conceptual unity of Scripture, through which hermeneutical approaches may the modern Church both recognize and accept Christ's definitive and occasionally discomfiting building up of His Church?
- How may individual believers regain and retain a sense of Christ's exalted status, a sense of His divine transcendence and role as bringer of eschatological judgment and the concomitant theological implications to balance a popular focus on His immanence<sup>110</sup>?
- How may individual believers, their local communion of faith, and the corporate ecumenism in time remain 'unstained by the world', retaining

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<sup>109</sup> The writer of the paper recognizes that whilst his experience is relatively limited of the global Church, it is true within his own experience to state that an intellectual concept of faith predominates over an often disparaged or less-esteemed concept of faith that is manifested primarily in practical acts of mercy.

<sup>110</sup> The writer of the paper recognizes that whilst his experience is relatively limited, it is a fair reflection of much modern worship practice and liturgy to state that there is often a focus on the worshipper's personal experience of the divine immanence rather than of the divine transcendence, e.g. as reflected in many modern hymns such as 'What a friend we have in Jesus'.

and expressing impartiality in all its deed and words, and avoiding the sin of partiality to the rich and contempt for the poor both within and without each local communion?

## Conclusion

Given the purpose of the paper<sup>111</sup>, the paper's hypothesis is that '...a full understanding of the eschatological (salvific) impact of practicing partiality is not possible without an understanding of the theological message and underlying hermeneutical assumptions of Jas 2.1-13'.

Written to primitive Jewish Christian communities struggling with severe external and internal pressures, the Author addresses the simultaneous partiality towards the oppressive and blasphemous rich and the contemptuous treatment of the poor and marginalized within and by the community.

Predicated on a high Christology, Christ as κύριος spoke the written Torah into existence, Christ as δόξα provided the authoritative oral Torah interpretation of the written Torah, and Christ as δόξα, the visible and glorious manifestation of YHWH, will bring eschatological judgement to those who fail to appropriate and live by His authoritative definition of a saving faith.

Therefore, those who engage in partial behaviour are sinners, morally equivalent to murderers and adulterers, and face Christ's eschatological condemnation, whereas for those who repent, and dynamically appropriate a living faith that is expressed in habitual works of mercy and regard for the poor,

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<sup>111</sup> '...the paper will provide an exploration and assessment of the theological message and underlying hermeneutical assumptions displayed by the Author of Jas 2.1-13'.

Christ provides an eschatological promise, ‘blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy’<sup>112</sup>.

The message is stark and urgent, because for the Author ‘...the Judge is standing at the doors’<sup>113</sup>. So, affluent western congregations, ‘...you who have lived on the earth in luxury and pleasure’<sup>114</sup>, ‘do you with your acts of favouritism *really* believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ’<sup>115</sup>?

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<sup>112</sup> Mt. 5.7.

<sup>113</sup> Jas 5.9c.

<sup>114</sup> Jas 5.1a

<sup>115</sup> NRSV, italics supplied by the writer of the paper.

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