

## REVIEWS

Joseph McDonald (Ed.), *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts. Studies in Religion and Theology*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2017. (214 pp.) [ISBN 9781785927560]

**Darren Cronshaw**

Moral injury (MI) eventuates from violating moral convictions. Whereas Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is founded on fear, MI is driven by and leads to shame and guilt, and then to self-harming, self-handicapping, self-medicating behaviours. Recovery from moral injury cannot rely on therapy and medication alone. Community support and practices such as forgiveness and making amends helps foster moral repair. These are traditionally the sphere of faith communities and religious practices and texts. So, what can religions and their Scriptures offer for the journey of moral repair for soldiers and others when morally injured?

*Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts* offers a model of reading the texts of religious traditions and gleaning insight about the dynamics of moral injury and how religions may point in healing directions. A large part of its value is how it draws on traditions of Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and US civil religion. The contributors never suggest any list of easy steps to shortcut recovery, but they identify and offer thoughtful exegesis of passages that are relevant to those who have suffered moral injury and are on a journey to moral recovery.

The texts include narratives of war, murder, rape, slavery, toxic leadership, and betrayal and how these injurious events affect individuals and groups. For example, Professor of Judaic Studies David Blumenthal offers a Jewish view of soul repair and explores King David and his abusive use of power and sex with Bathsheba. He explains his subsequent suicidal ideation but also his repair and rejoining life.

Similarly, Old Testament scholars Nancy Bowen and Brad Kelle both offer reflections on the Hebrew Bible. Bowen exegetes Sodom and Lot and how MI can produce dehumanization and further MI. Yet then, good acts of character can foster moral repair as in the story of Ruth. Kelle examines rituals of acquiring and sharing enemy goods after battle—with non-combatants as well as combatants (thus communalizing responsibility warfare) and as temple offerings (thus reframing military action in a broader cosmic narrative).

Amir Hussain explores an incident of Muhammad's life, inspired by Joseph and his brothers, both stories which point beyond violence and vengeance. Hussain faces contemporary rhetoric of Islamophobia, compares Qur'anic references to war and violence with Islam's sister traditions of Judaism and Christianity, and guides a path from moral injury through forgiveness to peace.

Theological ethicist Daniel Maguire explores civil religion and moral wounds particularly in Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and its sanctification of warfare and its call for citizens to bring healing. He appeals for greater attention to that call for healing and questions the US soldier's enlistment oath and its removal of the right to selective conscientious objection.

Peace and Justice Studies scholar Kelly Denton-Borhang integrates a reading of the gospels alongside a critique of civil religion's clichéd conceptualizing of soldiers' deaths as analogous to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. She sensitively but boldly advocates looking at how wartime killing is fed by structural violence (including the economics of the military complex) and deeper cultural violence (including religion and assumptions of cultural supremacy and contesting the idea of moral injury).

Michael Yanell, PhD student and veteran US Army Sergeant Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialist, reads "the man out of the tombs" who Jesus meets in Mark 5 as a symbol of Palestinian occupation and literally as a Roman military veteran with moral injuries. Unique among the volume's writers, Yannell draws on his experience of veteran suffering to explain the man's confused identities, isolation and self-harm. The story illustrates the beginning and trajectory of a path to healing from MI with divine assistance.

Considering Peter's denial and Judas' betrayal, New Testament scholar Warren Carter suggests Jesus was willing to forgive both of their guilt and shame. Yet he asks why Peter went on to be a key leader in the church, while Judas was withdrawn from his community and hung himself?

John Thompson reflects on Buddhism's story of Aṅgulimāla, a murderous outlaw who suffered MI both being betrayed by authority and choosing gruesome violence. Yet after encountering Buddha and doing reparative community work, he transforms into an ascetic monk.

A limitation of this list of writers is they are all academics and all work in the United States. Reflective practice from practicing caregivers and more military leaders, and further exegesis from people from other national and cultural contexts, would broaden the engagement and relevance of this kind of study.

Rita Brock, previous Director of the Soul Repair Center at Brite Divinity School and currently Senior Vice President for Moral Injury Programs at Volunteers of America, offers a Foreword that positions the importance of these textual studies in the context of communities that seek to offer moral repair to soldiers and others outside the military.

Joseph McDonald, adjunct faculty at Texas Christian University, edited the volume and introduced how textual studies can mutually inform moral injury. Following Shay's seminal work on moral injury as seen in ancient literature from *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994) and *Odysseus in America* (2002), McDonald has invited religious scholars to delve into their texts with the lens of moral injury. Whether the agency of any MI is from a betrayal of "what's right" by an authority (as Shay defines MI) or from a personal violation of one's moral code (following Litz and colleagues), the writers of *Exploring Moral injury in Sacred Texts* maintain that Scriptures and classical texts are allies in healing. For those who are familiar with the texts, they broaden understanding in the context of MI. For those unfamiliar with certain traditions, they illuminate the healing utility of fresh readings of diverse Scriptures. Moreover, contemporary psychological understanding of moral injury can illuminate and offer fresh readings of ancient sacred texts.

*Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts* is an important resource for chaplains and caregivers, for textual scholars interested in the relevance of their traditions for contemporary moral dilemmas, and for those who have suffered moral injury from across religious traditions. It is an important addition to the growing body of literature on moral injury. It is also an original foundation for what will hopefully be a growing field of

research on the use of sacred texts in moral injury treatment from scholars of religion and pastoral theologians, and reflective practice from caregivers and military personnel themselves.

**John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. (xviii + 184) [ISBN 9780802874610]**

**Jonathan R. Robinson**

John Barclay is Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at Durham University. He is an authority on the Second-Temple Jewish Background of the New Testament and possibly the most widely respected Pauline scholar of the current time after his book, *Paul and the Gift* (Eerdmans, 2015). That last work is probably the most important book in Pauline studies since E. P Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977), although time is yet to tell if it will have such an enduring impact. *Paul and the Gift* is an imposing and detailed tome of nearly 700 pages and designed to engage numerous complex scholarly debates. This more recent work, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, is a much-condensed and more accessible version of the earlier book, but with additional chapters responding to questions and concerns raised by respondents. It should be said at the outset, that this book is a model of clarity, accessibility, scholarly care, and economy. It absolutely succeeds in its intention and is highly readable.

Chapters 1-9 of *Paul and the Power of Grace* contain a precis of the argument of *Paul and the Gift*. The first two chapters discuss the anthropology of and possible implications of the idea of gift, a concept found throughout human societies. Barclay clearly explicates six different ways in which gift/grace could be understood to be “perfected.” The concept of gift may reach perfection in some combination of or emphasis on superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy, and non-circularity (pp.13-16). Barclay argues that a failure to clarify these different possible approaches to gift has fueled many theological and exegetical disagreements (p. 17). He rightly observes that non-circularity of gift is the most widespread present-day conception of a perfect gift, that is, one with no response expected or required. However, as he argues in the next chapter, this view of gift is simply not apparent in ancient texts. Therefore, reading Paul as if he has a modern conception of gift may considerably mislead the interpreter.

The third chapter discusses four different Second Temple texts, each of which illustrates a different understanding of gift at work in the Jewish environment. The Wisdom of Solomon “expresses an emphatic theology of grace” marked by priority (God gives first) and superabundance (God gives abundantly) but not by incongruity, because God only gives to the worthy (p. 31). Philo of Alexandria “thinks that God’s gifts are singular, abundant, and prior” but not undeserved, or incongruous (p. 32). The Hodayot (hymns) of Qumran give “probably the most negative picture of the human condition in Jewish literature of the time.” God brings the elect into an undeserved righteousness and destiny despite their initial worthlessness, and thus grace is perfected in incongruity (pp. 33-4). His final example is the dialogue from 4 Ezra between Ezra and the angel Uriel. While Ezra pleads for incongruous grace, mercy given to the unrighteous, for Uriel this would “compromise justice” and is “ultimately unsatisfactory as a view of the world” (p. 36).