



Research article



A THEOLOGY OF HUMANITY THROUGH IDENTITY POLITICS: READING THE BOOK OF ESTHER

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ABSTRACT

Humanity obligates respect. To respect someone is to intend what the person intended that one intends. A daughter respected her father if he intended that she rests regularly, then she does so with the correct motive. Jesus' Greatest Commandment, through the Worship of Yahweh identified via the First Commandment, interacts love with respect. If to love is to value the loved one's welfare, valuing it for its own sake differentiates a malignant form of love from one out of respect. From gender, through ethnicity and humanity, I bring out the theological insight from us being created in the image of God. Why respect? Because we are human. But why does humanity obligate respect? Because Yahweh commanded so. The vice of idolatry, ecologically, is constituted by self-disrespect – a form of worship that demeans and defiles oneself. That we are grateful to be Designed thus enlightens our life.



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The Book of Esther is the only book in the presently canonised Bible that does not directly mention God. Where is God, and what does He do, among the events its author describes in the book? In this paper, I develop a theology of humanity from the Book of Esther. A theology of humanity entails an ethic of humanity – it obligates humanity to be one way instead of another. Immanuel Kant proposes that humanity obligates respect, through his demand that we treat others as ends-in-themselves, and with my theology, we will have better understood this human obligation. Why must we respect? Because of God. Why must we intend all and only, at least restrictively, what someone with a goodwill intends? Because God designed us to be such that we have libertarian freewill, and thus our righteous exercise of our power, given our freedom, on God’s Design, deserves respect. Clines suggests looking at the issue of identity in the Book of Esther,¹ and I investigate identity politics with this book thus. I will present a humanity of respect with regard to gender, ethnicity, and then the whole humanity, especially when under oppression. I will then understand idolatry using humanity in response to the puzzle of the Third Commandment²: how is some worship of God through iconolatry not idolatry? I point out that, with humanity, we do not always have to include the Second Commandment³ in understanding the obligation of the Third Commandment.

1. Gender: The Biological Limitation

Sex is distinguished biologically; male and female are distinguished with their respective anatomy, especially with the reproductive organ. Gender is distinguished culturally; men and women are distinguished with their respective social role. If there are gender inequality among the respective social roles, then, given that the equality of persons with regard to moral worth, biology ought not have determined social roles. If, for example, biology determines culture,

¹ Clines (1990:47).

² “You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.” (Exodus 20:4-6, NET)

³ “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3, NET)



then those who are biologically female are determined to be socially inferior if women are. The patriarchy developed at least until the time of the Book of Esther, with the Persian king, constitutes such a culture. The social mobility of women is typically constituted by men's appreciation, especially with their feminine beauty. Therefore, the social hierarchy is constituted by social rankings determined by the decisions of men, which constitute the patriarchy. Not only are male and female thus born without social equality, let alone an equality of opportunity, there is also inequality among female persons measured by their feminine ugliness.

Queen Vashti, upon being summoned by Ahasuerus, King of Persia, to display her beauty to others, refuses.^{4,5} As humanity is still in the process of perfecting itself, the gender inequality in the patriarchy that the Kingdom of Persia instituted is not something that Queen Vashti takes for granted. The obedience to the husband, let alone to the King, is assumed of women, but, when being treated as merely carnally pleasing to others, she discerns its immorality and rejects them. For someone being brought up during her times, either she is used to being treated in that way, or, even if she feels uncomfortable about it, she might not have considered the alternatives, and have learned, on the patriarchy, to put up with it. The immorality of the King's plan to display her beauty is, allegedly, constituted by his disrespect for her. Not only does she not want to expose herself and be looked at that way, she would have disrespected herself if she did want to comply. Her courage of noncompliance with the collective rules demonstrates the reality of humanity to be perfected against the culture at that time.

Although God is not directly mentioned, if humanity is the way it is because of God's Design, then we see God in Queen Vashti's, as a flash of humanity some thousands of years ago. That was a time when men, who are, biologically, more athletic, are in power, without much restraint from its abuse. The use of King Ahasuerus's power against the goodwill of

⁴ 'On the seventh day, as King Ahasuerus was feeling the effects of the wine, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who attended him, to bring Queen Vashti into the king's presence wearing her royal high turban. He wanted to show the people and the officials her beauty, for she was very attractive. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's bidding conveyed through the eunuchs. Then the king became extremely angry, and his rage consumed him.' (Esther 1:10-12, NET)

⁵ See Clines (1990:31-2) on Queen Vashti as a radical feminist 'assert[ing] her human right to say no'.



Queen Vashti is abusive, but, on consequences of more women coming to equality with men, his officials advise him to transfer her Queenship to someone else – someone ‘more deserving’ –, and ban her from his presence.⁶ Obedience, even if prized as a feminine virtue, ought to have only been to a righteous authority with regard to righteous commands. Even if a wife, upon rational choice to enter into marriage and take care of a household, were to obey her husband to do the domestic chores, it is on respect, together with competence, that the husband issued those commands that obedience is justified. The patriarchy at that time was constituted by men who deemed it righteous that they imposed their will against women’s goodwill, and a woman who does not obey does not deserve a higher social ranking

However, are there gender inequality that is inherent to the biology of sex? Consider the polyamory of King David. He has many wives,⁷ without his wives respectively having many husbands. Does the asymmetry demonstrate gender inequality? If it is a biological difference

⁶ ‘The king then inquired of the wise men who were discerners of the times – for it was the royal custom to confer with all those who were proficient in laws and legalities. Those who were closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. These men were the seven officials of Persia and Media who saw the king on a regular basis and had the most prominent offices in the kingdom. The king asked, “By law, what should be done to Queen Vashti in light of the fact that she has not obeyed the instructions of King Ahasuerus conveyed through the eunuchs?” Memucan then replied to the king and the officials, “The wrong of Queen Vashti is not against the king alone, but against all the officials and all the people who are throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the matter concerning the queen will spread to all the women, leading them to treat their husbands with contempt, saying, ‘When King Ahasuerus gave orders to bring Queen Vashti into his presence, she would not come. ’And this very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media who have heard the matter concerning the queen will respond in the same way to all the royal officials, and there will be more than enough contempt and anger. If the king is so inclined, let a royal edict go forth from him, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media that cannot be repealed, that Vashti may not come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king convey her royalty to another who is more deserving than she. And let the king’s decision that he will enact be disseminated throughout all his kingdom, vast though it is. Then all the women will give honor to their husbands, from the most prominent to the lowly.”’ (Esther 1:13-20, NET)

⁷ ‘These were the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: The firstborn was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel; the second was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel; the third was Absalom whose mother was Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; the fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith; the fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital; the sixth was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah. These six were born to David in Hebron, where he ruled for seven years and six months. He ruled thirty-three years in Jerusalem. These were the sons born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon the mother of these four was Bathsheba the daughter of Ammiel. The other nine were Ithar, Elishua, Elpelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. These were all the sons of David, not counting the sons of his concubines. Tamar was their sister.’ (1 Chronicles 3:1-9, NET)



that female preferred a unique erotic partner over many, and male being open to more than one, then it is on mutual respect among them that they so chose to enter into the asymmetric erotic relationship, and thus it is with biological difference, but not moral difference, that the asymmetry is justified. Consider two children: one always with a bigger appetite, and the other smaller. It would not have been equality that each ate the same amount of food, for although the former will be happy through satiation, the latter will suffer from overeating. This constitutes inequality because the former is respected with his will of eating enough but not too much, but the latter is not, or even disrespected.

2. Ethnicity: The Ancestral Limitation

After Esther becomes Queen, Mordecai, her uncle, meets Haman, a recent promote by King Ahasuerus, but refuses to kowtow to him, and this infuriates Haman.⁸ Haman later on convinces King Ahasuerus to murder the Jewish People.⁹ However, upon the King's

⁸ 'Some time later King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, exalting him and setting his position above that of all the officials who were with him. As a result, all the king's servants who were at the king's gate were bowing and paying homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded. However, Mordecai did not bow, nor did he pay him homage. Then the servants of the king who were at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you violating the king's commandment?" And after they had spoken to him day after day without his paying any attention to them, they informed Haman to see whether this attitude on Mordecai's part would be permitted. Furthermore, he had disclosed to them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing or paying homage to him, he was filled with rage. But the thought of striking out against Mordecai alone was repugnant to him, for he had been informed of the identity of Mordecai's people. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews (that is, the people of Mordecai) who were in all the kingdom of Ahasuerus.' (Esther 3:1-6, NET)

⁹ 'Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a particular people that is dispersed and spread among the inhabitants throughout all the provinces of your kingdom whose laws differ from those of all other peoples. Furthermore, they do not observe the king's laws. It is not appropriate for the king to provide a haven for them. If the king is so inclined, let an edict be issued to destroy them. I will pay 10,000 talents of silver to be conveyed to the king's treasuries for the officials who carry out this business." So the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, who was hostile toward the Jews. The king replied to Haman, "Keep your money, and do with those people whatever you wish." So the royal scribes were summoned in the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month. Everything Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps and governors who were in every province and to the officials of every people, province by province according to its script and people by people according to their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written and sealed with the king's signet ring. Letters were sent by the runners to all the king's provinces stating that they should destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, from youth to elderly, both women and children, on a particular day, namely the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar), and to loot and plunder their possessions. A copy of this edict was to be presented as law throughout every province; it was to be



remembrance of Mordecai's assistance in pre-empting his assassination,¹⁰ he wanted to hound him, which resulted in his eventual downfall through Queen Esther,¹¹ and the King's decision to stop the murder of other Jewish people.¹²

Queen Esther, a Jew, cooperates with Mordecai, also a Jew, and exposes Haman's conspiracy to murder the Jewish people, very probably because of his hatred for Mordecai for not paying homage to him. How Haman would have avenged Mordecai's putative disrespect on his people – the Jewish people – demonstrates an identity issue by ancestry. The Jewish people could have been murdered because of their ancestry – not for the crimes their ancestors

made known to all the inhabitants, so that they would be prepared for this day. The messengers scurried forth with the king's order. The edict was issued in Susa the citadel. While the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in an uproar.' (Esther 3:8-15, NET)

¹⁰ 'Throughout that night the king was unable to sleep, so he asked for the book containing the historical records to be brought. As the records were being read in the king's presence, it was found written that Mordecai had disclosed that Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, had plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus. The king asked, "What great honor was bestowed on Mordecai because of this?" The king's attendants who served him responded, "Not a thing was done for him.'" (Esther, 6:1-3, NET)

¹¹ 'So the king and Haman came to dine with Queen Esther. On the second day of the banquet of wine the king asked Esther, "What is your request, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your petition? Ask for up to half the kingdom, and it shall be done." Queen Esther replied, "If I have met with your approval, O king, and if the king is so inclined, grant me my life as my request, and my people as my petition. For we have been sold – both I and my people – to destruction and to slaughter and to annihilation. If we had simply been sold as male and female slaves, I would have remained silent, for such distress would not have been sufficient for troubling the king." Then King Ahasuerus responded to Queen Esther, "Who is this individual? Where is this person to be found who is presumptuous enough to act in this way?" Esther replied, "The oppressor and enemy is this evil Haman!"' (Esther 7:1-7, NET)

¹² 'The king's scribes were quickly summoned – in the third month (that is, the month of Sivan), on the twenty-third day. They wrote out everything that Mordecai instructed to the Jews, and to the satraps, and the governors, and the officials of the provinces all the way from India to Ethiopia – 127 provinces in all – to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, and to the Jews according to their own script and their own language. Mordecai wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring. He then sent letters by couriers, who rode royal horses that were very swift. The king thereby allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and to stand up for themselves – to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any army of whatever people or province that should become their adversaries, including their women and children, and to confiscate their property. This was to take place on a certain day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus – namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). A copy of the edict was to be presented as law throughout each and every province and made known to all peoples, so that the Jews might be prepared on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who were riding the royal horses went forth with the king's edict without delay. And the law was presented in Susa the citadel as well.' (Esther 8:9-14, NET)



committed against the murderer, but the alleged crimes committed by someone else, their contemporary, who shares their ancestry. In this way, if the Jewish people were thus murdered, their crime is merely sharing an ancestry with Mordecai, and nothing else. How is any Jew, especially for those sufficiently distal without ever having interacted with him, liable for the alleged wrong Mordecai committed that they deserve the punishment of death through genocide? How an ethnicity, identified by ancestry, is evaluated as one people whose members are liable for the crime of any other member, is yet again a culture of the older times. If sexism with the patriarchy was one bad thing, this racism, or ethnicism, is another.

Queen Esther's commitment to save her people, through revealing her kinship with Mordecai,¹³ is a courageous one, for she is betting on King Ahasuerus saving her people on her account, instead of having herself dragged into the punishment he sentenced on them, at the risk of his anger at her prior deceit. It was a rational choice given its eventual outcome; but was it reasonable? This is where her trust in the effect of her and her people fasting matters.¹⁴ Jewish people take care of each other, so as to risk oneself, at the opportunity cost of a peaceful and luxurious life as a queen, demonstrates not only the solidarity of the selected – the Israelites –

¹³ 'On that same day King Ahasuerus gave the estate of Haman, that adversary of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Now Mordecai had come before the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her. The king then removed his signet ring (the very one he had taken back from Haman) and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther designated Mordecai to be in charge of Haman's estate. Then Esther again spoke with the king, falling at his feet. She wept and begged him for mercy, that he might nullify the evil of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had intended against the Jews. When the king extended to Esther the gold scepter, she arose and stood before the king. She said, "If the king is so inclined, and if I have met with his approval, and if the matter is agreeable to the king, and if I am attractive to him, let an edict be written rescinding those recorded intentions of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, which he wrote in order to destroy the Jews who are throughout all the king's provinces. For how can I watch the calamity that will befall my people, and how can I watch the destruction of my relatives?" King Ahasuerus replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Look, I have already given Haman's estate to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows because he took hostile action against the Jews. Now write in the king's name whatever in your opinion is appropriate concerning the Jews and seal it with the king's signet ring. Any decree that is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring cannot be rescinded.'" (Esther 8:1-8, NET)

¹⁴ 'Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa and fast in my behalf. Don't eat and don't drink for three days, night or day. My female attendants and I will also fast in the same way. Afterward I will go to the king, even though it violates the law. If I perish, I perish!" So Mordecai set out to do everything that Esther had instructed him.' (Esther 4:15-17, NET)



, but also the humanity of a people. They respect each other with mutual assistance in enforcing their right to life.

However, this might have gone overboard when the Jewish people become fearsome.¹⁵ Consider, in other part of history, the animosity between the Israelites and the Canaanites. It is God's promise that Joshua will lead the Israelites to completely conquer Canaan.¹⁶ If all humanity is God's Creation, how is it that one people is favoured over another? One suggestion is that it has to do with God's promise with Abraham.¹⁷ How God's promise through Abraham set aside the Israelites, such that not only do they fight for themselves as one ethnicity, but also that they have been successful at least until their enslavement by the Egyptians, also demonstrates the reality of humanity through God.

3. Humanity: The Genetic Limitation

We have to be careful with the conquest of the land of Canaan as a demonstration of the reality of humanity because, given that both the Israelites and the Canaanites belong to humanity, it is unclear how the slaughter of the latter demonstrated humanity. As we look back from our present, contemporary, liberal values, the oppressive attitude of King Ahasuerus, of Haman, of the Jewish people who were set free with Queen Esther's help, and of the Israelites led by Joshua, seems alien to us. We have to remind ourselves that we are in an era after the establishment of the United Nations in the wake of the atrocity committed during World War Two. Before that, war not in response to aggression, and thus not in self-defence, is politically justifiable; citizens of different nations are committed to a lottery of strength through violence, and the winners would have gotten to conquer the losers. That was a time when one does not

¹⁵ 'Now Mordecai went out from the king's presence in blue and white royal attire, with a large golden crown and a purple linen mantle. The city of Susa shouted with joy. For the Jews there was radiant happiness and joyous honor. Throughout every province and throughout every city where the king's edict and his law arrived, the Jews experienced happiness and joy, banquets and holidays. Many of the resident peoples pretended to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had overcome them.' (Esther 8:15-17, NET)

¹⁶ 'The Lord told Joshua, "Don't be afraid of them, for about this time tomorrow I will cause all of them to lie dead before Israel. You must hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.'" (Joshua 11:6, NET)

¹⁷ 'That day the Lord made a covenant with Abram: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.'" (Genesis 15:18-21, NET)



always have a choice whether to enter into such a lottery, as one does when one chose to enter into a duel with someone else, betting on oneself being a better shooter, aiming right and fast enough to pre-empt the opponent's killing shot. Humanity was not perfected, and power was not always justified with respect, which must have been mutual. An authority justified only with coercive power is politically justified, but not morally so, on a morality of respect, contrasting with fascism. Politics, before nations entered freely into contractual relation with one another through the ratification of the Charter of the United Nations, thus permitted immoral authority through oppression with force.

Indeed, it was the Israelites who invaded the Canaanites, but back in the days when wars, however immoral, are what politics sometimes obligates, murder in conquest of land, property, or even body, was permitted. It is with this imperfection of humanity during which immorality was politically permitted, or even obligated, that we observe the climax of humanity in the Salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus, without having committed any crime, let alone bearing any sin, was sentenced to an extreme judicial punishment. However, His Glory is constituted by His obedience to Yahweh's decision to not intervene and make a difference to His suffering, however much He wished the Father to have the cup removed.^{18,19} That power of complete

¹⁸ "Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me." Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with me for one hour? Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will must be done." He came again and found them sleeping; they could not keep their eyes open. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same thing once more. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is approaching, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us go. Look! My betrayer is approaching!" (Matthew 26:36-56, NET)

¹⁹ I hypothesise that the event of Barabbas, whom, on Pontius Pilate's seeking of public opinion, was selected, instead of Jesus, to be pardoned by the Jewish people, manifests Yahweh's decision to not interfere with His people's heart this time around. Like Pharaoh, their hearts were hardened – but not by Yahweh. Yahweh could have made a difference but decided not to. Barabbas might have been Judas Iscariot, whom Jesus met some time after being arrested, perhaps because the guards want to mock Him with the presence of His treacherous follower. He shared with him His Gethsemane prayer, and Judas sought to place the bet of His Father intervening with himself taking His place on the cross. Consider this my Barabbas conspiracy.



submission of the person glorified God through perfecting humanity as God's Creation. Jesus' message of love, and our righteousness constituted by being justified through faith, is continuous with Yahweh's justice when human beings of other ethnicities were in competition, with regard to resources such as land and its fruits, in terms of the obligation of humanity of respect – not only does one respect oneself and others, one also respects God. Gentiles did not know God, but through Jesus, they also have the opportunity. Yahweh would have kept His promise to Jesus' followers just as He did the Israelites.

The conflicts between ethnicities across humanity also raise a similar question among species across the whole Creation. God gives us dominion over His Creation.²⁰ However, just as ruling over a nation's people does not entail absolute freedom with what a head of state does over their people, ruling over animals also does not. We are genetically human beings, and could not have been otherwise. If, on humanity, animals have the right to welfare but not the right to life, then our genetics permits us to use animals as food, which entails taking their life, and also obligates our less to no infliction of their suffering. Ecological diversity includes equilibrium of the habitat, and it could not have been sustained without the ecosystem being the way it naturally is, and some animals in a habitat constitute a wildlife only if there are predation.²¹ Animality, and its beauty, and how it might have also pleased God, raise issues about the morality of hunting, and, in the end, shed light on human animality before the eventual perfection of humanity through Christ. Wars among nations were once romantic, and it has been an honour to fight for your country, not only to protect its people, but to expand sovereignty both geographically, and also socially, conquering other people. The new form of conquest – diplomacy –, that is through mutual respect and persuasion, shall not have blunted our sensibility towards the old time political reality. Contrast Elijah's win with fire, and Christ's win with the conquest of our heart.

²⁰ 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.'" (Genesis 1:26-28, NET)

²¹ See Cheung (2024:53-4) for the naturality of animality.



4. Personhood: The Theological Limitation

Although humanity genetically distinguished us from other species with regard to carnivores, which prohibits cannibalism, it does not genetically obligate respect with the species. It was eugenics, on Nazism, that the Jewish people must be exterminated on genetics. Christianity is one among many religions that obligates respect through, at least, love. It is on Christ that we are obligated to love each other, at least when they are not evil and Satan followers. Love, however, is clarified through its being Christ's description of the Greatest Commandment.²² How are we to understand the Second Commandment and the Third Commandment? How are we not acting on our love for God, when we worship Him through some idolatry? How is carving in the image of God and worshipping it wrong?

Our typical concrete example of violation of the Third Commandment is the case of Aaron with the golden calf.²³ However, this also violates the Second Commandment, and it is unclear which violation is prior that ignited Yahweh's wrath. Although the elaboration of the Third Commandment is with His jealousy, it is only violations of both that it necessarily is an icon that is not of God. Might there be violations of the Third Commandment without violating the

²² 'Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together. And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'" (Matthew 22:34-40, NET)

²³ 'When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Get up, make us gods that will go before us. As for this fellow Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him!" So Aaron said to them, "Break off the gold earrings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the gold earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. He accepted the gold from them, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molten calf. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it, and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow will be a feast to the Lord." So they got up early on the next day and offered up burnt offerings and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play. The Lord spoke to Moses: "Go quickly, descend, because your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned aside from the way that I commanded them they have made for themselves a molten calf and have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" (Exodus 32:1-8, NET)



Second Commandment? Consider idolatry using icons of God, be it the Catholic Cross, the Protestant Cross, or the Orthodox Cross. How does it not violate the Third Commandment? Is it only in virtue of the golden calf being icons of some other deities that it violated the Third Commandment? Would this thus constitute the redundancy of either the Second or the Third Commandment?

Now consider what worshippers of false gods through idolatry typically do. The Israelites, without sufficient biological sustenance, need a subject with better power who would assist them. That yearning for such assistance is easily satisfied with a god that instrumentalises the believers, in a way that their submission would have been purely in reciprocity for the benefits, as Satan would have sometimes done. Psychologically, if one were to disrespect oneself for some undeserved benefits, one would have modified one's will, in a way that one is more susceptible to the lure of undeserved earthly goods, as in bribery. One must have intended what one intends that one intended, and that modification constituted an intention that violates this obligation of self-respect. Yahweh distinguishes Himself as the god that does not permit self-disrespect, through, for example, informing Abraham that it is not His way to sacrifice one's own children in exchange for some benefits.²⁴ Yahweh, unlike almost all other gods, does not permit, let alone obligates, self-disrespecting slavery even for Himself. The humanity He obligates us to perfect is one of respect, and given that each of us belongs to humanity as well, He also obligates self-respect. Having false gods is one thing; worshipping Him incorrectly is another. Worshipping Him on self-disrespect, defiling oneself, might as well have disrespected Him because one acted against His goodwill and treated oneself, and in the end Himself, as mere means. There is thus an idolatry of Christ and of Yahweh.

Idolatry is distinguished with a kind of worship that is on self-respect from other kinds that are otherwise. Worshipping on self-respect is when one's complete submission is on respect, instead of, to use the Kantian terminology, treating oneself as mere means. One would

²⁴ 'The first possible interpretation of Genesis 22 is the most traditional and the simplest from a historical point of view; this text prohibits the practice of human sacrifice and institutes that of animal sacrifice. The practice of the sacrifice of first-born children – well known in Greek mythology in the story of Agamemnon, who sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia in order to placate the gods – was normal for the people of Canaan among whom Israel came to live.' (Bianchi, 2008:21-2)



have been treating oneself as mere means when one worships only out of the instrumentality of exchange of goods. The worship motivated by the putative fortune that Yahweh would have brought is merely constituted by a putative faith that is easily tested and revealed to be fictitious – that is, false. What if God did not reward you the way you thought He promised you? Job, in the Book of Job, demonstrates a kind of respect for God that is on self-respect. The knowledge of one's own worth, in virtue of being God's Creation, and the respect through the respect for God for oneself, distinguish some other religions and their gods, that, for example, obligate, on biology, eroticism with temple prostitutes. It is not the eroticism that constitutes the wrongness of their obligation; it is their treating themselves as mere means to slave for their biological end, doing things that ought to have been done on respect, treating others as ends as persons are – ends-in-themselves –, that constitutes the moral wrongness of their religious permissibility. Eroticism without romance is rarely out of self-respect.

If one were to ask a metaethical question for the normativity of the goodwill why we must have respected persons constituted by their goodwill, one answer is theological: because Christianity obligates a humanity of respect. On Christianity, human beings ought to have respected all persons, and persons are perfection of humanity through respect. This is because we are created in the image of God, and God respects all, and only, the respectable. Although even Christ gives consequential arguments, the early Christians, especially Saint Paul, demonstrate what it is to act on self-respect and respect for God. Respect obligates trust restricted within the competence of the respected; the respect, even on mere politics, one ought to have had in saluting the rank in the military, obligates obedience with military commands, on supposition of the military competence, such as in strategy, of the commanding officer. God, with His compassion, wisdom, and prudence, obligates our trust in Him. It is with this, and the commitment to Him that is on self-respect, that Christ achieved what he did at Gethsemane.

5. Summary

Humanity obligates respect, and it is on self-respect that one self-identifies with oneself. Queen Vashti self-identifies with her anatomy, Queen Esther and Mordecai with their ancestry, human beings with genetics, and Christians with religion. Identity politics, on liberalism, is an ethic of self-identification, and, through Christ, all members of the whole humanity could have self-



identified as belonging to Christ. The interactions between facts and values, with regard to Christianity, is the reality of all humanity belonging to God's Creation. Although, with Christianity as a mere culture, or even religion, citizens in liberal societies are free to self-identify, but if we all indeed belonged to Christ in virtue of being part of His Creation, then we ought to have self-identified thus. Hereditary, for example, could have ethically restricted the freedom of self-identification with, for example, being black, in a way that, on Christianity, our freedom is thus ethically restricted to self-identify with belonging to Christ. Christianity obligates self-identifying only with Christ, although not all of us are always in the position to know this obligation and be justified through faith in Him. In Him, we restore our righteous relation with God, and with ourselves, through respect.

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