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## The Future of Genocide: A Spectacle for the New Millenium?

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## **Abstract**

The lines between bearing witness and producing entertainment, between genuine outrage and self-righteous apathy can be initially difficult to discern. Such differences lie in the difficult areas of ethics, religion, and the hidden recesses of the human heart. Nonetheless, over thousands of years various world religions have sought to come to terms with the deepest questions pertaining to intention, action, and ethics, and particularly with the manner in which human beings are trained in ways of life or death. This Essay shall include some specifically Christian theological perspectives on the dilemmas that draw us toward the specter of genocide as spectacle.

# THE FUTURE OF GENOCIDE: A SPECTACLE FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM?

*David M. Smolin\**

## INTRODUCTION

Anti-utopian novels are helpful because they critique certain features of our present and warn us of what our future could become. Given the human condition, we must remain ever aware of the ways in which we are most apt to fall, in the hope of avoiding moral catastrophe. In the spirit of such a novel—but without the entertainment value—this Essay plots the trajectory that could bring us to a future in which genocide becomes a spectacle, an event that is presented to the world as an unusually compelling form of entertainment.

The lines between bearing witness and producing entertainment, between genuine outrage and self-righteous apathy can be initially difficult to discern. Such differences lie in the difficult areas of ethics, religion, and the hidden recesses of the human heart. Nonetheless, over thousands of years various world religions have sought to come to terms with the deepest questions pertaining to intention, action, and ethics, and particularly with the manner in which human beings are trained in ways of life or death. This Essay shall include some specifically Christian theological perspectives on the dilemmas that draw us toward the specter of genocide as spectacle.

### I. *BYSTANDERS AS SPECTATORS: GENOCIDE AND THE MORAL EDUCATION OF HUMANKIND*

A bystander is an interesting and somewhat paradoxical figure in moral, legal, and religious discourse. The bystander observes some wrong, crime, or sin. This act of observing, which may appear passive and insignificant in itself, is in fact the gateway to a profound testing of the human person. If the bystander chooses to intervene and assist the victim, then he or she can become a rescuer, an exemplar of neighbor love. If the by-

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stander intentionally renders even slight assistance to the perpetrator, then he or she becomes an accomplice in crime, and possibly equally liable for the evil done by others. The bystander who misinterprets the situation and mistakenly assists the aggressor, or who bungles the rescue and leaves matters worse than before, may be termed a meddler, and resented despite the best of intentions. The common response of simply turning away, or walking on the "other side of the road" in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, is in Christian terms a violation of the law of love, even if in some legal systems there is no liability.<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the failure of bystanders in the Holocaust. The tendency of human beings to turn away from grave human suffering and do nothing has been lamented.<sup>2</sup> The abandonment of the Jews by allied governments during World War II has been criticized.<sup>3</sup> We have worried about the propensity of human beings to remain passive in the face of extreme evil and suffering.

Currently, bystanders are often tuning in rather than turning away. Instead of worrying about what happens to human beings who deliberately turn away from evil and suffering, we now must be concerned with what happens to human beings who deliberately choose to observe such suffering.

Those who view a significant crime are, of course, witnesses. Witnessing a crime has a moral significance that brings with it a corollary set of obligations, such as the duty to affirmatively give testimony (*i.e.*, bear witness), the duty to the truth, the duty to the deceased victims, and the duty to warn others.<sup>4</sup> Bystanders who turn in by electronic media will have no such duties, be-

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1. See, *e.g.*, DAVID P. GUSHEE, *THE RIGHTEOUS GENTILES OF THE HOLOCAUST* (1994) (analyzing ethical and religious ramifications of rescuers, bystanders, and accomplices during Holocaust); WAYNE R. LAFAYE & AUSTIN W. SCOTT, JR., *CRIMINAL LAW* 203-12, 463-65, 569-71 (2d. ed. 1986) (discussing limits of bystander criminal liability, erroneous defense of another, and accomplice liability); W. PAGE KEETON, *PROSSER & KEETON ON THE LAW OF TORTS* 358-59, 375-85 (5th ed. 1984) (explaining tort law discussion of duty, limits of bystander liability, and liability for bungled interventions). According to Professor Ben Zion Eliash, traditional Jewish Law has a broad view of duty that requires bystanders to act to preserve human life. See Ben Zion Eliash, *To Leave or Not To Leave: The Good Samaritan in Jewish Law*, 38 *ST. LOUIS U. L.J.* 619 (1994).

2. See, *e.g.*, GUSHEE, *supra* note 1.

3. See, *e.g.*, DAVID S. WYMAN, *THE ABANDONMENT OF THE JEWS* (1984); MONTY NOAM PENKOWER, *THE JEWS WERE EXPENDABLE* (1983).

4. See, *e.g.*, MARTIN GILBERT, *THE HOLOCAUST* 252-79 (1985) (recording experiences of Polish Jewish witness of January 1942 mass murder).

cause electronic technology will itself provide a clear and true record of the event. Electronic bystanders will thus become, potentially at least, mere spectators. And genocides, particularly where they are broadcast more or less contemporaneously with the event, could become spectacles.

The line in the West between being informed and being entertained is already quite thin, for news itself has become, as an industry, closely allied with the entertainment business. The global integration of mass media enterprises has left the news industry controlled by the same mega-corporations involved in various forms of entertainment, such as movies and popular music.<sup>5</sup> Both sides of the thinly-separated news-entertainment line cover genocide as a subject matter, with the news industry providing coverage of unfolding events in, for example, the former Yugoslavia, while the entertainment industry produces movies such as "Schindler's List."

Most recently those who perpetrate mass killings and genocides have tried, with mixed success, to keep their work undercover. The removal of reporters from the scene is a common precursor to brutality. These efforts to prevent media coverage are often only partially successful, and thus there is often some media coverage of at least the immediate results of large-scale atrocities. One can foresee that with the continuing advance of electronic technology there will come a time when live video-communications will be as ubiquitous as audio technologies (i.e., telephones and cellular phones) have already become. There will come a day, in other words, when it will be virtually impossible to prevent contemporaneous images of genocide from emerging into global consciousness, just as the Chinese were unable to prevent the world from watching as their tanks rolled over demonstrators in Tiananmen Square.

We watch the bystander in Holocaust films, usually with disdain. How could they have turned away, and done nothing? But what does it mean when by watching we ourselves become the bystanders, for the unfolding horrors are yet in progress? Technological advances in transportation and in military capability make it increasingly obvious that we—or more important our

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5. See Ilene Knable Gotts, *Financing, Mergers & Acquisitions in the Telecommunications Industry*, 1014 PRAC. L. INST. 55, 64-67 (Sept. 1997) (noting Disney's acquisition of Capital Cities/ABC and Time Warner's buyout of Turner Broadcasting).

Western, powerfully armed nations—could, if they so choose, intervene forcefully anywhere in the world. Our bystander guilt thus becomes, to the degree that our nations do not act, corporate and national. Whole nations and civilizations become bystander nations and civilizations.<sup>6</sup>

It is well-known that rescuers faced enormous risks during the Holocaust. Bystanders could only become rescuers by violating the rules of the reigning political and military authorities, and risking becoming, along with their families and loved ones, victims of the same fate as those they would seek to rescue.<sup>7</sup> Yet, how often and how easily are such bystanders criticized for their failures to act, and for their propensity to turn away? How then can we defend ourselves as individuals from bystander guilt when we tune in and then turn away without making any effort, from the safety of our home countries, to urge the responsible authorities to intervene?

There is still today, a half-century later, broad criticism of the failure of the Allied Powers to act militarily against the Holocaust, and thereby attempt, for example through the bombing of railway lines or the camps themselves, to save lives.<sup>8</sup> This strategic decision was made within the context of the moral necessity of maximizing efforts toward the defeat of the Axis Powers.<sup>9</sup> Without directly engaging the debate over whether this broader

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6. Several authors have noted that modern media coverage of large-scale human rights abuses often produces pressure to intervene. See Richard Falk, *The Complexities of Humanitarian Intervention: A New World Order Challenge*, 17 MICH. J. INT'L LAW 491, 493 (1996) (stating that "heightened expectations about conformity to minimal human rights standards generate interventionary pressures, especially given the capacity of television and other innovative media to create real-time awareness of many types of inhumane behavior on a global basis"); George Melloan, *Kofi Annan's World View Is Not a Model of Clarity*, WALL ST. J., Oct. 5, 1999, at A27 (arguing that North Atlantic Treaty Organization's ("NATO") intervention in Kosovo was probably influenced by television images of refugees). The present Essay is intended to explore the consequences of our frequent failure, as media bystanders, to act according to our expressed values. We often, in other words, resist the "interventionary pressures" created by the combination of our expressed values and media-created "real-time awareness" of gross atrocities. See Falk, *supra*, at 505 (noting recent trend in United States toward the "avoidance of intervention even in the face of extreme humanitarian emergencies.")

7. ANTHOLOGY OF HOLOCAUST LITERATURE 361, 367-8 (Jacob Glatstein et al. ed., 1977) (noting that those who assisted victims were subject to death penalty).

8. See, e.g., WYMAN, *supra* note 3, x-xi (summarizing conclusions of author).

9. See, e.g., HENRY L. FEINGOLD, WHO SHALL BEAR GUILT FOR THE HOLOCAUST? THE HUMAN DILEMMA IN GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS 59-81 (Jack Nusan Porter ed., 1982); MICHAEL R. MARRUS, THE HOLOCAUST IN HISTORY 167 (1987).

context to any degree explains or excuses the failures of the Allied response to the Holocaust, we can nonetheless compare that situation to our own. How much less weighty are our purported reasons for failing to prevent the genocide in Rwanda! Are our geo-political reasons for not intervening in the internal matter of mass killings in Cambodia greater than those faced by the generation of the Holocaust? How favorably do our reasons for delaying and severely limiting responses to the various ethnic cleansings in the former Yugoslavia compare to those that influenced the Allied powers? Why are we willing to place a hypercritical eye upon prior generations, while excusing our own generation's failures under far less difficult circumstances?<sup>10</sup>

The second half of the twentieth century has demonstrated that the prevention of genocide, mass killing, and ethnic cleansing is a secondary value in the post-Holocaust world community. The comforts of inaction and the maintenance of relative "peace," non-interference in the internal affairs of nations, and geo-political alliances and balances of power rank substantially higher in the operational values of the world community. We do not like to admit the rank order of our values, but they are so visibly displayed by our actions that it is difficult to come to any other conclusion.

To admit that we are willing to put up with genocide in the interest of comfort, peace, non-interference, and power calculations places us precisely in the position of the bystander individuals and nations who, for varied self-interested reasons of their own, decided not to act in the face of the Holocaust. It appears, in other words, that we have not substantially advanced, in deeds as opposed to words, in our attitudes toward the Holocaust.

In the meantime, however, we have elevated the Holocaust itself to a seminal event of religious and moral significance. As opposed to the relative silence that followed the Armenian genocide, of which Hitler took note, we have spoken, and continue to

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10. This Essay will not delineate and evaluate the varied levels of intervention and response to recent mass killings or atrocities, such as those mentioned in the text. The premise of the Essay, which seems to be widely shared, is that the international community has frequently failed to prevent such crimes, even when there has been a significant level of intervention, for example in Kosovo. Those interventions, which have occurred, have generally been too little and too late to prevent large-scale loss of life. See, e.g., Falk, *supra* note 6, at 500 (referring to "profound disillusionment with the capacity of the collective will in international society to protect vulnerable peoples against severe forms of abuse").

speak, repeatedly about the Holocaust. This author, at least, grew up with the overarching question, "what would you have done if you had been alive then?" Once it becomes clear that we will not act decisively to prevent the genocides of our own day, it becomes reasonable to become cynical about ourselves.

The path of cynicism may lead to unexpected places. From lamenting those who turn away, we may become those who tune in, but remain similarly passive. Tuning into the genocides and mass killings of the past and present can become an attempt to escape from the duty of present action. Instead of acting, we dutifully watch. We may call it witnessing, but instead we are really spectators. Repeat the ritual enough—the watching of holocaust movies, the watching of the unfolding of current genocides on the television news, and then someday the real-time video of the actual mass killings—and it may become a form of entertainment. But will this visceral and intense viewing really assuage us from the guilt of inaction? And will we at some point make the subtle transformation toward actually enjoying the atrocities? Like the Roman crowds of old, will we come to admire a particularly brutal act, parsing its methods with the practiced eye of one used to seeing others die? Will live genocide coverage—and not just genocide movies—become an art form, a way of evoking pathos and rage and other human emotions, which while moving our emotions replace in us any need for action and responsibility? Eventually, will genocide itself become a virtual sport or art form, with the masses commenting how one brutal act was particularly well-executed, another particularly pathetic?

In this context, the current propensity to create specialized tribunals to punish perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity can be viewed with cynicism, as reflected by a statement by Payam Akhavan, Legal Advisor, Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda:

It would be a grave error if we were to make a habit of being spectators as a million people were being slaughtered . . . only to create the illusion that justice has been done through a handful of prosecutions. Without an accompanying will to prevent such tragedies or to intervene when they are unfolding, it is difficult to view *ad hoc* courts as anything but a



pretense of justice by the powerful.<sup>11</sup>

## II. FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OUR WORLD ORDER

The contradiction between maintaining peace through non-interference with the internal affairs of sovereign nations, and the contemporary notion of international human rights as legally binding sovereign states regarding their treatment of internal populations, is most evident in instances of genocide or other mass killings. The endless debates over the doctrine of humanitarian intervention, which purports to permit intervention into sovereign states in instances such as genocide or mass killings, suggest that we have not come to a generally-accepted resolution of this fundamental contradiction.<sup>12</sup> Practically-speaking, the international community in our time appears to generally rank the principle of non-interference with the internal affairs of sovereign nations as superior in importance to the protection of international human rights.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the international community will generally seek a way of redressing violations of fundamental human rights in a manner that will not interfere with national sovereignty. In instances of genocide, mass killings, or ethnic cleansing, this means that most often the international community refuses to use military force within the

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11. Proceedings of the 92nd Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, April 1-4, 1998, in Steven R. Ratner, *The Genocide Convention After Fifty Years*, 92 AM. SOC'Y INT'L L. PROC. 1, 13 (1998).

12. See, e.g., Melloan, *supra* note 6; Falk, *supra* note 6; Fernando R. Teson, *Collective Humanitarian Intervention*, 17 MICH. J. INT'L LAW 323 (1996); Nikolai Krylov, *Humanitarian Intervention: Pros and Cons*, 17 LOY. L.A. INT'L & COMP. L.J. 365 (1995). A listing of historical examples of interventions and non-interventions from the early 19th century until 1991 can be found in David J. Scheffer, *Toward a Modern Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention*, 23 U. TOL. L. REV. 253, 293 n.4 (1992).

13. LEO KUPER, GENOCIDE 161 (1981). Leo Kuper makes this point provocatively: The main thesis of this chapter is that the sovereign territorial state claims, as an integral part of its sovereignty, the right to commit genocide, or engage in genocidal massacres, against peoples under its rule, and that the United Nations, for all practical purposes, defends this right. To be sure, no state *explicitly* claims the right to commit genocide . . . but the right is exercised under other more acceptable rubrics . . . . And though the norm for the United Nations is to sit by, and watch, like a grandstand spectator, the unfolding of the genocidal conflict in the domestic arena right through to the final massacres, there would generally be concern, and action, to provide humanitarian relief for the refugees, and direct intercession by the Secretary-General.

sovereign territory of a perpetrator without the consent of the perpetrator nation. The net result is that genocides and mass killings are generally addressed after the fact, through, as noted above, "a handful of prosecutions," rather than through effective efforts to actually prevent or intervene to stop such acts.

The argument in favor of such a rank ordering of priorities is that the principle of national sovereignty is the primary foundation of peace in the contemporary world, without which the world could potentially be bathed in a constant stream of blood. Even the most worthy humanitarian interventions to stop genocides or mass killings undercut national sovereignty and supply cover for those invaders who might want to use alleged violations of human rights as a cover for their own expansionist designs. Concerns about the indirect costs of humanitarian interventions are modest, however, compared to the direct dangers that would be posed by attempting to intervene forcibly within powerful nations, such as China, Russia, or the United States. Any attempt to intervene within these larger nations, even if purportedly in the interest of the most basic of human rights, would doubtless be considered an invasion, and be treated accordingly. Indeed, even the principle of national sovereignty itself appears to have little meaning in instances where one of these larger nations acts in an expansionist manner, or pursuant to its interests within its own most immediate region. Thus, the world has had little meaningful response to China's treatment of Tibet, or to U.S. interventions within the Americas. In this sense, in the modern international community the avoidance of large-scale war trumps even the principle of national sovereignty. Larger powerful nations are sometimes able, despite the principle of non-interference in the U.N. Charter,<sup>14</sup> to prey upon, or intervene within, their smaller, more vulnerable neighbors.<sup>15</sup> The special status and powers of larger nations are implicitly guaranteed by the structure of the Security Council, including the veto power of

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14. See Charter of the United Nations, June 26, 1945, 59 Stat. 1031, art. 2(4) [hereinafter U.N. Charter].

15. Richard Falk's discussion of the "complexities of humanitarian intervention" takes account of the special role of powerful nations in all kinds of interventions, including humanitarian interventions. As Professor Falk notes, it is "virtually a definition of . . . a great power" to "project power and influence beyond territorial sovereignty," creating a geopolitical pressure to intervene in the affairs of weaker states. See Falk, *supra* note 6, at 491.

the five permanent members.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the structure of the U.N. Charter recognizes the privileged status of the most powerful nations.

The principles of international human rights appear, therefore, to rank at least third in order of priority, behind the principles of state sovereignty and the special privileges of great powers. Such calculations could be defended religiously and ethically on prudential grounds. The point herein, however, is neither to defend nor criticize such rank orderings, but rather to examine the impact of our failure, due to this rank orderings of values, to act to defend human life from genocide and mass killing. What are the implications, and effects, of knowingly and purposely failing to protect human life from acts such as genocide, mass killings, and ethnic cleansing?

### III. *PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE*

The book of Proverbs in the Hebrew scriptures records this contemplation on the duty to rescue:

Deliver those who are drawn toward death,  
And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.  
If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,'  
Does not He who weighs the heart consider it?  
He who keeps your soul, does He not know it?  
And will He not render to each man according to his  
deeds?<sup>17</sup>

It seems fitting that this compelling admonition to rescue is preceded by this comment: "If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small."<sup>18</sup>

The task of rescuing, of intervening to save those being un-

16. See U.N. Charter, *supra* note 14, at arts. 23-27.

17. *Proverbs* 24:11-12 (New King James).

18. *Proverbs* 24:10 (New King James). A modern Jewish translation intertwines *Proverbs* 24:10-12 together into a single thought, as follows:

If you showed yourself slack in time of trouble,  
Wanting in power,  
If you refrained from rescuing those taken off to death,  
Those condemned to slaughter—  
If you say, "We knew nothing of it,"  
Surely He who fathoms hearts will discern [the truth],  
He who watches over your life will know it,  
And He will pay each man as he deserves."

TANAKH 1324 (Jewish Publication Society 1988).

justly slaughtered, is not for the faint-hearted. Yet, within the tradition of Biblical religion, the admonition to rescue is not idiosyncratic, but rather is an organic part of the larger teaching regarding the protection of innocent human life. The human duty to protect human life is not limited to the negative commandment not to murder, but instead has positive implications for acting affirmatively in favor of human life. This duty extends to the bystander.<sup>19</sup>

A well-known New Testament text on the duty of the bystander is Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>20</sup> The occasion of the parable is a dialogue between Jesus and an expert in the law, who agree that the law requires us to "[l]ove the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and to "[l]ove your neighbor as yourself."<sup>21</sup> The expert, however, "wanted to justify himself," and asks Jesus "And who is my neighbor?"<sup>22</sup> In response, Jesus tells a story of a man who is left "half-dead" by robbers.<sup>23</sup> Two significant religious leaders—a priest and a Levite—see the man along the road, but "passed by on the other side."<sup>24</sup> A Samaritan traveling the road sees the man, takes pity on him, and rescues him. The Samaritan treats the man's wounds and takes him to an inn, leaving sufficient funds for his care until his return.<sup>25</sup> After telling the story, Jesus asks the expert in the law to identify the one who was a neighbor to the victimized man. "The one who had mercy on him," correctly answers the expert in the law. "Go and do likewise" responds Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

The relational dynamic between Jesus, the expert in the law, and the characters in the story, underscores the meaning of the parable. The expert in the law, like the priest and Levite of Jesus' story, would have possessed a religiously based disdain for the Samaritan. Yet, Jesus creates a story in which the Samaritan fulfills the obligation of the law by acting as a neighbor to the

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19. GUSHEE, *supra* note 1, 132-36 (1994); *Exodus* 20:13; see Eliash, *supra* note 1, at 622-23 (quoting Maimonides, describing undisputed Jewish teaching on bystander's duty to rescue, and quoting *Leviticus* 19:16).

20. See *Luke* 10:25-37.

21. *Luke* 10:27 (New International Version).

22. *Luke* 10:29.

23. *Luke* 10:30.

24. *Luke* 10:31-32.

25. *Luke* 10:33-35.

26. *Luke* 10:36-37.

victim, while the religious leaders fail to fulfill the obligations of the law. Jesus subtly transforms the question “who is my neighbor?” into the challenge that we act as neighbors to those who require our assistance. It is not a question of us sitting in judgment on who is worthy to be our neighbor, but rather of us being judged by whether we treat others as neighbors. Within Jesus’ narrative it is precisely a person who might be considered unqualified to be a neighbor—the disdained Samaritan—who proves himself a neighbor to the victim. Moreover, it is not enough for someone, such as a priest, Levite, or expert in the law, to teach correctly about the requirements of the law; instead, the law of neighbor-love is kept by fulfilling its requirements through deeds of love. Hence, Jesus could challenge the clever teacher of the law to imitate the Samaritan by performing acts of compassion.

The Biblical narrative, interpreted in the context of the New Testament, subtly reminds us of the dangers of knowing, but not doing, the requirements of the law of love. The expert in the law desires to justify himself by posing and answering clever questions regarding the reach of the law. Jesus is unimpressed by this display of self-justifying knowledge and righteousness, for he senses the expert’s pride and lack of love. It would appear that the expert’s correct knowledge of the law serves more to condemn him than to justify him, for this true knowledge is used to undergird pride rather than to aid love. Ironically, the expert uses his correct knowledge of the law of love to justify himself, and, apparently, to make himself feel superior to others, without necessarily using this knowledge as a spur toward actually performing acts of love and mercy. The expert lacks the excuse of ignorance of the requirements of the law, for he is an expert in it; yet being an expert in the law of love has not necessarily caused him to grow in the way of love, but instead may have had the opposite effect.

As the apostle Paul warned the church in Corinth, “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.”<sup>27</sup> Even true knowledge of the law can be misused to foster an attitude of superiority over

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27. See 1 *Corinthians* 8:1 (New King James). The context of Paul’s passage is a debate within the church at Corinth regarding consumption of food sacrificed to idols. Paul states that the idols are nothing, and hence that the eating or not eating of such food is morally indifferent. Nonetheless, Paul insists that knowledge is subservient to the demands of love, which may require abstinence to avoid leading astray the weaker

others and self-justifying pride toward God. Rather than doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, as urged by the Hebrew prophet Micah,<sup>28</sup> even experts in the law can use their very knowledge of the law to obscure and evade the law's requirements.

The application of this Biblical analysis to our present situation in regard to genocide, mass killings, and crimes against humanity is painfully clear. Our generation has become expert in regard to such atrocities. To a degree greater than any prior generation, we proclaim the requirements of the law on such matters. We endlessly analyze the atrocities of the past, placing those from prior generations under a moral microscope. We know that we have learned much, and that we are better than our forebears. We pose difficult questions about the varied degrees of guilt of perpetrators, bystanders, witnesses, and even victims of past atrocities. Yet, when we encounter the victim along the road, in Rwanda, or Cambodia, for example, we, like the priest and Levite of Jesus' story, pass by on the other side. There is, however, a new twist to the story. Rather than continuing on our way, we return periodically to the site to watch as the victim slowly dies. We do not simply turn away, but rather tune in for updates. We sit by the side of the road, watching, but do not act to save the victim from death. And then afterwards we justify ourselves by using prosecutors, courts, and judges to continue developing this law on which we have become so expert. And this we call moral progress.

One of the primary Christian theological insights, then, is that increased knowledge of the law does not necessarily bring with it moral progress. Such knowledge of the law can produce pride and a sense of superiority over others without actually inducing conformity with the law. Other New Testament passages emphasize that knowledge of the law can bring guilt and accompanying feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, as we realize our moral limitations.<sup>29</sup> This inner voice of self-condemnation can be suppressed, however, by self-deception and self-censorship, as we drown our guilt in hedonistic sensuality or nihilistic

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Christians. See also 1 *Corinthians* 8. This theme of the superiority of love to knowledge is further developed in the famous 13th chapter of *Corinthians*. 1 *Corinthians* 13:2.

28. See *Micah* 6:8.

29. See, e.g., *Romans* 7:7-24.

philosophical speculation.<sup>30</sup> In the end, knowing the law can harden our hearts, unless we find a means of fulfilling it.

We are, this would suggest, in a dangerous situation with regard to genocide, mass killings, and crimes against humanity. Like law-abiding families living in a high-crime neighborhood, we have become accustomed to primarily symbolic responses to these offenses. In the meantime, genocide has become an ongoing, apparently permanent part of our world. Our capacity to be shocked by such things is necessarily diminishing over time, as atrocities old and new have become an ongoing part of our consciousness. Our knowledge of these horrors, past and present, is used by us primarily to reassure ourselves of our righteousness and superiority, rather than to spur us to compassionate action. This normalization of such crimes has made us spectators and analysts of inhumanity, passive viewers of the ongoing horror show. And so even as we proclaim our own justification we hide from ourselves the hardening of our hearts.

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30. See *Romans* 1:18-32.