

# Defoe's Ego Contra Mundum or the 'Dark Side of Crusoe's Eucharist'?

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It is conventional to note the degree to which Western society and the twentieth century produced the era of the individual. In much Westernized Christianity there is a shared thread of individualistic androcentrism, emphasizing androcentric power structures, and after creating an amorphous 'other', subjugates all that is non-androgenic (the feminine, non-human species, the environment). Kierkegaard foresaw this when he recognized the human trend towards objectification of the self, whereby

The immediate man ... is merely soulishly determined, his self or he himself is a something included along with 'the other' in the compass of the temporal and the wordly, and it has only an illusory appearance of possessing in it something eternal.<sup>1</sup>

Subjugation of the self and all that surrounds the self as 'other' generates a society disconnected from its roots. In this disconnected milieu a common denominator operates:

[T]here is a clear necessity for some human contact, no matter how minimal; but since contact always holds out the threat of assimilation it has to be done in a manner in which self can *control* other, thus continuing to assert identity in the act of exploitation: a case of 'no contact without contract'.<sup>2</sup>

This is a masculinist understanding of relationship to 'the other' in which

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<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Sickness Unto Death' in *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, translated and edited by Walter Lowrie, (Princeton, 1954), p184.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Sim, *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe*, (Savage, 1990), p126 (my emphasis).

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[o]ur primal male experience of identity through separation and individuation has buttressed the theological perception that God is Absolute Other, utterly transcendent. Divine perfection is completeness: God needs nothing. Thus we have had centuries of imaging God as unilateral, non-relational power, glorified by the weakness and dependency of humanity, deficient in the erotic power of mutuality.<sup>1</sup>

If God is made absolute Other, and maledom is created firmly in the image of God, then maledom's dealings with all forms of otherness (including, if Kierkegaard is right, itself) will be firmly aggressive and highly separate, un-incarnational, dispassionate, and dysfunctional.<sup>2</sup> This caricature has dominated Western society, and Christianity within it, in thought and action. It has been seen to be epitomized by the thought world of Daniel Defoe, as explored in the seminal work of cultural critic Bernard McGrane.<sup>3</sup> But while McGrane's critique of Defoe is a forceful attack on androcentric individualism, he may have robbed contemporary Christianity of a prophetic ally.

Fierce individualism, coupled with economic opportunism, *does* dominate Defoe's writing; 'Moll Flanders, and most of Defoe's other characters all belong on Crusoe's island; essentially solitary, they take a severely functionary view of their fellows.'<sup>4</sup> Ian Watt notes that in *Moll Flanders*, 'although there are some two hundred characters ... no one of them knows the heroine for more than a fraction of her career.'<sup>5</sup> Moll Flanders demonstrates Defoe's own characteristics: 'a restless, amoral and strenuous individualism'.<sup>6</sup> This applies even to the comparatively compassionate narrator of *A Journal of a Plague Year*,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Nelson, 'On Doing Body Theology,' in *Theology and Sexuality* Vol. 2, March 1995, p49.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: the bible and postmodern imagination*, (Minneapolis, 1993), p18.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. (Harmondsworth, 1972), [London, 1957] p125.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Watt, *op cit*, p126. Similar attributes are no less characteristic of Roxana. *Roxana*, edited by David Blewett, (Harmondsworth, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Ian Watt, *op cit*, p128.

<sup>7</sup> Penguin edition, edited by Anthony Burgess and Christopher Bristow, (Harmondsworth, 1966). All references are to this edition.

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who remains quarantined, medically and by and large emotionally, from the effects of the plague that he narrates. Defoe's picaresque heroes and heroines share a massive *ego contra mundum*,<sup>1</sup> not altogether divorced from his own.

But this *ego contra mundum* is associated with the social world of seventeenth century criminality, in which survival instinct dominates. In this context long-standing concern for other members of a community is superfluous to individual survival. This is the world of the ultimate underclass, and Defoe knew it well and feared it hugely. He was imprisoned briefly for bankruptcy twice in 1692, again for five months in 1703, and for a handful of days in 1713. In each case, his imprisonment was as much to do with his membership of the nonconformist subculture as it was for his financial mismanagement or misfortune; although he was a political moderate, the High Church Tories loathed him. He was to remember Newgate prison for the rest of his life.

*Robinson Crusoe*, published in April 1719, is essentially a 'conversion narrative';<sup>2</sup> an amalgam of Jonah, Paul and the Prodigal, further influenced by Job.<sup>3</sup> Crusoe deserts the residential security of York and the divinely ordained security of his father's blessing, to explore the potentials of his own 'rambling thoughts'.<sup>4</sup>

Much note is made of the economic opportunism of Crusoe's journeying, which begins with the conversion of £40 to £300 on his first African journey.<sup>5</sup> This economic opportunism must be understood for what it was:

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<sup>1</sup> Watt, *op cit*, p148.

<sup>2</sup> Sim, *op cit*, 1 and *passim*. This is true also of *Roxana*, *Captain Jack*, and *Moll Flanders*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Robinson Crusoe*, Penguin edition, edited by Angus Ross, Harmondsworth, 1965, (repr. 1979), pp279f. All references are to this edition. Also see Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life*, (Baltimore and London, 1989), p428 and p470.

<sup>4</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p27 (cf. p60).

<sup>5</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, pp39f, on p199 Crusoe laments momentarily his lack of economic opportunity in 'the Brasils,' where he 'might have been worth an hundred thousand moydors,' developed largely on the back of cheap labour and the slave trade (note how the number of slaves was an evaluation of the plantation's worth, p279). On his return to England and subsequently to Portugal his energies are predominately spent on economic calculation and negotiation; see 273-283.

[i]n contrast to the [earlier] aristocratic search for military glory, which was seen as widely destructive and as frequently turning to the practical quest for plunder, commerce is a constructive and civilizing force, binding men together and forming the basis of “polished” mores.<sup>1</sup>

Crusoe’s economic improvement was a reversal of the patterns of Defoe’s early business life.<sup>2</sup> Defoe’s life was seemingly characterized by a total disregard for the economic plights of his business partners and creditors, and a total lack of remorse for his exploitation of them; the late 1680s and early 1690s were the antithesis of a prosperity gospel success story.<sup>3</sup>

Defoe’s life is enigmatic; his personal aversion to the ‘unwearied and impatient vice’ avarice<sup>4</sup> is juxtaposed with his lifelong belief in the economic advantages of international peace; as he put it, ‘the longest purse, not the longest sword, wins wars’.<sup>5</sup> He recognizes, and re-enacts in economic terms in the novel *Roxana*, that ‘Poverty was my snare, dreadful Poverty.’<sup>6</sup> Defoe knew it well. Hence the individualism that McGrane finds foundational to Crusoe’s economic and soteriological journey. Crusoe, for example, interprets events surrounding the deaths of his three co-travelers, and the enslavement of the remainder on Crusoe’s second ‘Guinea’ journey, as simply a mechanism by which ‘Heaven’ reaches and ‘overtakes’ him with its stern warnings.<sup>7</sup> ‘Why were not they saved and you lost?’ he muses on the death of his next set of companions. The question is one of theodicy; the trip was Crusoe’s plan in the first place, and the crew his hirelings. He returns to this line of thought following his fever and dream of a vengeful

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity*, (Cambridge, 1989) p214.

<sup>2</sup> Defoe, in 1698, published a tract called *The Poor Man’s Plea*.

<sup>3</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, pp41-61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 484, for the ambiguities of Defoe’s personal attitudes to justice and debt see especially *ibid*, 538f. Qv. *Moll Flanders* edited by Juliet Mitchell, (Harmondsworth, 1978) 199; ‘as poverty bought me into the mire, so avarice kept me in.’ Also see *Roxana*, edition cited, n. 176, (204), pp392f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p513.

<sup>6</sup> *Roxana*, p73.

<sup>7</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p41.

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God,<sup>1</sup> and it re-emerges as a peripheral issue when a second ship is wrecked at the same place.<sup>2</sup> ‘Why were you singled out? Is it better to be here or there? and then I pointed to the sea.’<sup>3</sup>

A hermeneutical key to Defoe’s theodicy lies in the warnings of an English sea captain:

‘Young man’, says he, ‘you ought never to go to sea any more, you ought to take this for a plain and visible token that you are not to be a seafarin man’. ‘Why sir’, said I, ‘will you go to sea no more?’ ‘That is another case’, said he, ‘it is my calling, and therefore my duty; but as you made this voyage for a trial, you see what a taste Heaven has given you of what you are to expect if you persist; perhaps this is all befallen us on your account, like Jonah in the ship of Tarshish’.<sup>4</sup>

This is the theory of social location at work. As long ago as Plato it was a hard and fast rule to stay within one’s social station, though for reasons of class rather than vocational stability.<sup>5</sup> Crusoe is traversing lines of ascribed and achieved status. Given Defoe’s own ambivalent journey of achievement from ministry-postulant through careers in trade to literature and politics, layers of self-analysis and irony underscore his portrayal of the captain’s social rigidity.<sup>6</sup> Nonconformists were ridiculed by their opponents for ‘having ruined the ideals of old England’.<sup>7</sup> Prior to this, Crusoe has been portrayed as a prodigal, setting out to venture against ‘the commands of [his] father’.<sup>8</sup> Vocations, in a theology that cannot separate secular from sacred, are the domain of God, not to be disobeyed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See especially *Robinson Crusoe*, p104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p192.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p80.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p37.

<sup>5</sup> Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity*, (New Haven and London, 1990), pp110-113.

<sup>6</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, (London, 1926) p253.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (London, 1930, repr. 1968) p180.

<sup>8</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p27.

<sup>9</sup> Defoe interpreted his own multi-form career as a writer as a vocation, substitute for the vocation as a clergyman that he considered and rejected. In this his thought

Defoe is aiming to find economic liberation grounded in a source of more just authority than that of the Established Church. Though the loss of Crusoe's fellow-travellers appears a high price to pay for the instruction of a prodigal, it may be acceptable if the individualism of one's soteriology and theodicy forbids asking questions of the purposes of God active in lives other than one's own. Crusoe 'checks his thoughts' when he begins to ask soteriological questions, satisfying himself by recognizing God's freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly Augustine found no problems with God achieving salvation in chosen human lives at the cost of the salvation of those whom God does not choose: 'Who does not tremble at these judgments, where God works even in evil men's hearts whatever he wills, yet renders to them according to their deserts?'<sup>2</sup> A person's careless deed, such as an act of errant navigation, no less than a blatantly evil deed, will serve the unquestionable salvific purposes of God.

Thus, attempts to challenge divine ethics are ruled out. God's salvific will is done. In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Defoe had the diarist-persona muse that

I was mercifully preserved by that great God whose name they had blasphemed and taken in vain by cursing and swearing in such a manner, and ... I believed I was preserved in particular, among other ends of his goodness, that I might reprove them for their audacious boldness in behaving in such a manner and at such an awful time as this.<sup>3</sup>

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prefigures that of Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. David Swenson *et al.*, (Princeton, 1959, vol. 1) p19. Backscheider, *op cit*, pp144f.

<sup>1</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 212. Donald Davie notes in passing that it is open to question whether Calvin's 'economic morality ... fired the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.' Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930*, (London and Henley, 1978) p107.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, xxi:42. Calvin, more directly influential on Defoe's non-Conformist religious milieu, cites Augustine as his ally in affirming 'in the same act as a man's evil deed shows itself, so God's justice shines forth.' *Institutes* I:xviii.

<sup>3</sup> *A Journal of the Plague Year*, pp83f.

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But this diarist-persona has enough compassion to note ‘many good people would, and did, fall in the common calamity.’<sup>1</sup> Compassion is not an unknown counterpart to Defoe’s seemingly dark theodicy; in both *A Journal of the Plague Year* and the lesser known *Due Preparations for the Plague as Well for Soul as Body* (1722) ‘he offers plans for the supply of food and other necessities and emphasizes the impracticality and undesirability of shutting healthy people up for excessive amounts of time.’<sup>2</sup>

The biblical world, despite claims of modern fundamentalism to be biblical, was not individualistic. Ched Myers regards modernity’s preoccupation with the individual as an *etic* assumption whereas ‘what we find in the first-century Mediterranean world is what might be called “dyadism”’<sup>3</sup>; ‘persons were not “individuals” at all but overlapping members one of another.’<sup>4</sup>

Defoe was theologizing out of his own experience of economic oppression at the hands of the Established Church. Like a contemporary Third World observer he knew at first hand the cyclical links between economic disadvantage and physical suffering. It was Defoe’s duty to speak from the heart of his own experience of disenfranchisement and the constant threat of oppression or annihilation. Poverty was the state from which he had escaped and which ever threatened to re-engulf him; he had no alternative but to write his justice-dreams of an alternative world. For Defoe solidarity with an oppressed ‘other’ is therefore unnecessary. He *is* that other. Oppression is his own experience, and he, with his characters, seeks liberation from it. This is the difference in state between the pre-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p86.

<sup>2</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, 489, for such passages in *Journal* see pp123-127, pp171f.

<sup>3</sup> ‘[A] dyadic personality ... would conceive himself [*sic*] as always interrelated to other persons while occupying a distinct social position both horizontally (with others sharing the same status, moving from center to periphery) and vertically (with others above and below in social rank). Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, (Atlanta, 1981) 55, quoted in Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, (Maryknoll, 1988) 46. Also see, following Malina, Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, (Maryknoll, 1994), pp13f, pp118f.

<sup>4</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a post-Christian World*, (Downers Grove, 1996) p91, also quoted in Barry A. Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World*. (Harrisburg, 1999) p157.

Exodus Hebrews, suffering in the brickyards of Egypt, and the pre-exilic Hebrews who have forgotten their ancestors' suffering.

Defoe remains in a worldview in which salvation is individually experienced and appropriated. He experiences daily the essential human need for physical delivery from trials as well as spiritual delivery from injustice. Individualism is neither unique to nor original in Defoe's seventeenth century, and is traceable back to at least the seventh century BC.<sup>1</sup> The Reformation accelerated the impact of individualism on society, so that the individual's relationship to God is mediated sometimes via an inner light, or at other times by biblical (or other) reading and interpretation, but largely to the exclusion – or at least minimization – of a recognized or acknowledged institutional influence. This process was accelerated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the 'mother-world' of medievalism was left behind in a western-global parturition-process of 'individuation'.<sup>2</sup>

For Defoe the strength and resourcefulness of the individual is pitted against the entire cosmos, human and non-human alike. This narrative of extreme individualism lacks checks and balances provided by the real individual's anchorage in a community of humanity. Neither religious nor ethical individualism presupposes an abstract individual. The religious believer and the sovereign values that they respectively postulate are real, concrete, historically and socially located persons.<sup>3</sup>

Crusoe is not thus socially located; 'Robinson Crusoe is Cartesian in his concrete, solipsistic solitude and his 'desert island'; his outer isolation is a mirror to his 'inner isolation.'<sup>4</sup> But, as Kermode puts it,

Insofar as we can treat a text as not referring to what is outside or beyond it, we can more easily understand that it has internal relationships independent of the coding procedures by which we may find it transparent upon a known world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, *Individualism*, (Oxford, 1973) pp94f.

<sup>2</sup> Susan R. Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, (Albany, 1987) p59.

<sup>3</sup> Lukes, *op cit*, p140.

<sup>4</sup> McGrane, *op cit*, p44.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: on the interpretation of narrative*, (Cambridge & London, 1979) p122.



McGrath demands that we eschew hermeneutic conventions, treating Crusoe as a maladjusted neighbour, rather than as literary symbol. Certainly, when redeemed from total isolation, Crusoe returns to participate not in a process of 'co-creation' but of manipulative and chauvinistic or colonialist creation of Friday, the first 'other'. Defoe is expecting that we will not impose the coding procedures by which we live, but those by which he writes and to some extent within which he lives, on our hermeneutic engagement with his text. It is in his colonialist liberation that he achieves the liberation his societal conventions refuse him. The discovery, then, of 'the biggest mazzagin [*sic*] of all kinds',<sup>1</sup> symbolizes liberation, not oppression.

When Crusoe discovers 'barley' (corn) and rice growing near his fortifications he imagines its presence to be a sign of intervention by God. Intense individualism lends itself to an unbalanced perspective of divine providence. Gradually, however, he recalls that he had himself cast corn scraps there, and 'the wonder began to cease'. Crusoe's journal notes 'I must confess, my religious thankfulness to God's providence began to abate too.'<sup>2</sup> But when editing his journal Crusoe recognizes the duplicity of this standard, musing 'I ought to have been as thankful for so strange and unforeseen providence, as if it had been miraculous; for it really was the work of providence as [*sic*] to me.'<sup>3</sup> Here is Sara Maitland's 'artful theology'<sup>4</sup> at work. Rational or scientific explanation of an occurrence need not detract from its divine source. Crusoe's expectation of extraordinary divine intervention gives way to recognition of the divine at work in the explicable.

For McGrane this demonstrates a 'titanic will to maintain the sovereignty of his rationalism, his faith'.<sup>5</sup> But Defoe's theological discovery is no less than the rediscovery of the fundamentally Hebrew understanding that Crusoe's compassion is continually at work in the satisfaction of the needs of 'all things living' (Ps. 104.27f). Despite Ps. 104.14f, God's is a universal providence, *not* an androcentric one. God

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<sup>1</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p95.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p95.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Maitland, *A Big-Enough God: Artful Theology*, (London, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> McGrane, *op cit*, p50.

causes humankind to share 'the world not only with domestic animals but also with wild beasts, for some of whom Yahweh has provided mountainous terrain unfit for human habitation to be their home.'<sup>1</sup> This is not androcentrism, for in its biblical form it includes a theology of sanctuary, provision of a place where humanity cannot reach. The divine is at work in the ordinary, seen or unseen, shared or excluded from human experience.

At this early stage of his conversion process, Crusoe's consideration of divine providence is self-confessedly cursory; even the force of a major earthquake leads only to the common 'Lord ha' mercy upon me'.<sup>2</sup> God is the hope of action in times of earthquake or illness.<sup>3</sup> Reduction of God to a *deus ex machina*, the result of 'seafaring wickedness',<sup>4</sup> is an infantile form of faith. But these inadequacies of faith become apparent to Crusoe, so that, in the depths of illness, he again seeks God's mercy,<sup>5</sup> and enters into more mature theological reflection. This leads him quickly from a universalist doctrine of creation, 'it is God that has made it all',<sup>6</sup> through an individualist theodicy, 'He has appointed all this to befall me',<sup>7</sup> to a personalized soteriology. He goes 'directed by Heaven, no doubt'<sup>8</sup> to his stores, discovers bibles he had previously rescued from the shipwreck, and finds support in the words of the Psalmist, 'Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me. (Ps. 50.15).

Crusoe follows his reflection on Psalm 50 with the Israelites' rebellious doubt 'Can God spread a table in the wilderness?' (Psalm 78.19).<sup>9</sup> Later he is to answer 'yes' to the Israelites' rebellious question; 'I frequently sat down to my meat with thankfulness, and admired the hand of God's providence, which had thus spread my table

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie C. Allen. *Psalms 101-150*, (WBC 21. Waco, 1983) p33.

<sup>2</sup> *Robinson Crusoe* p97. The same motif is used in *Moll Flanders*, p266, and *Roxana*, p165.

<sup>3</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, pp101f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p106.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p107.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc cit*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p108.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp108f.

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in the wilderness.’<sup>1</sup> After prevarication Crusoe senses that God has received his penitential prayers. Only then does he attain the maturity of faith to recognize that the Psalmist’s expectation of deliverance is hamartiological, rather than mere ‘deliverance from affliction.’<sup>2</sup> He has moved from the nearly universal ancient understanding of salvation that formed the ideological basis of Semitic soteriology,<sup>3</sup> and replaced it with the arguably Zoroastrian-influenced eschatology of Judaism. This is a personalized soteriology born out of oppression:

[s]alvation is that ‘at which all religion without exception aims,’ and ... ‘religion is always directed towards salvation, never towards life itself as it is given; and in this respect all religion, with no exception, is the religion of deliverance.’<sup>4</sup>

‘Salvation’, then, operates at more than one level for Defoe. Crusoe strives towards a point of spiritual rebirth, with otherworldly ramifications. Yet at the same time he reflects on physical salvation, being saved from tangible trials in which others are lost. To recent biblical scholarship ‘otherworldly’ salvation may be a hermeneutical non-starter, even if understood ‘not in our modern sense, as strictly personal angst or guilt, but in the Hebrew sense, as the admission of our solidarity with historical injustice.’<sup>5</sup>

There is here a hidden dimension easily passed over today. The journey of Crusoe from a universalist creation doctrine to individualist theodicy need not be seen as either/or but as both/and. Defoe, like many of the non-Conforming Christians who were his contemporaries (and founders of the American religious consciousness), knew that religio-political resistance, the resultant oppression and persecution,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p140, cf. p157.

<sup>2</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p111.

<sup>3</sup> See Willard G. Oxtoby, ‘Reflections on the Idea of Salvation,’ in Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells, eds *Man and his Salvation: Studies in Memory of S.G.F. Brandon*, (Manchester, 1973) pp17-24.

<sup>4</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, ‘Salvation, Germanic and Christian’, in Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells, eds. *op cit*, p248.

<sup>5</sup> Myers, *op cit* p450.

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and escape from these, are highly individualized experiences at the hands of an amorphous and massed persecutor.<sup>1</sup>

Citizens of modern England and America cannot easily imagine what it was like to be a Dissenter in the summer and fall of 1702. The amount and nature of the abuse from pulpits and the press angered and intimidated even the sturdiest Dissenter. Pamphleteers traced a version of the history of Dissent in order to link Nonconformity with the puritans who had beheaded Charles I and to preserve the idea that they were 'turbulent and factious spirits', malcontents, and potential rebels. They were frequently compared to vermin, reptiles, cancers and disease.<sup>2</sup>

Early Christians knew this suffering too, and in their writings often dispatched opponents to damnation. But this biblical style, even in the lurid apocalyptic writings,<sup>3</sup> reserves damnation primarily for opponents and deserters of the Christian *kerygma*. If the 'outer darkness' can be equated with the place which in common parlance is called 'hell,' then the Epistles and Matthew lead to the conclusion that 'hell is for Christians only'; that is for those saints who betray their faith, belie their name, and dishonour their Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Apocalyptic writings, originally a source of comfort and inspiration to victimized and oppressed minorities,<sup>5</sup> have often been interpreted and used as a means of other-worldly avoidance of justice issues. Howard Kee finds in apocalyptic discourse permission for passivity: 'For those who make this commitment [to Jesus and his words] there is a promise of eschatological vindication, both personal (finding life) and corporate (seeing the kingdom having come with power)'.<sup>6</sup> However the apocalyptic is not an invitation to passivity, but an encoding of hope-in-persecution: 'Apocalyptic eschatology ...serves to strengthen, comfort and offer hope to the group which is experiencing

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<sup>1</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, pp22-40 and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp93-4.

<sup>3</sup> Defoe's own writings could adopt apocalyptic urgency and floridity. See Backscheider, *op cit*, p145.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6, The Anchor Bible* Vol. 34a, (Garden City 1974) p595.

<sup>5</sup> Myers, *op cit*, pp101-104.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Kee *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel*, (London, 1977) p165.

the crisis.’<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic is an inspiration and invitation not to passivity but to hope-filled action. Crusoe’s re-formation of Friday must be put into the context of Defoe’s own socio-economic struggles.

McGrane winces at Crusoe’s (and Defoe’s) *reductio ad absurdum* toward behaviour of ‘otherness’ as ‘savage,’ and at his description of practitioners of such behaviour patterns as ‘monsters’ or ‘creatures’,<sup>2</sup> not to mention Crusoe’s dreams of their wholesale slaughter.<sup>3</sup> Defoe’s own treatment of creditors, if not ‘savages,’ suggests limited adherence to Christ’s ‘do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Luke 6.31, Mt. 7.12). ‘The ways that Defoe borrowed repeatedly, pieced loans together, promised payments from expansion, renegotiated agreements, delayed and used the courts to delay yet more suggests a slippery, clever, reprehensible, and perhaps desperate man.’<sup>4</sup>

McGrane does not mention Crusoe’s awareness of the ironies and over-dramatizations of his dreamed response to ‘these monsters’,<sup>5</sup> traces of whose cannibalistic behaviour he has uncovered on his island:

I began with cooler and calmer thoughts to consider what it was I was going to engage in; what authority I had, to pretend to be judge and executioner upon these men as criminals, whom Heaven had thought fit for so many ages to suffer unpunished.<sup>6</sup>

Defoe is unreservedly Pauline, adopting Paul’s doctrine of divine wrath. To be ‘given over to’ human depravities (Romans 1.24-25) is *per se* indication of falling outside the parameters of God’s wrath. God’s wrath is not directed punitively towards human ‘depravity’,<sup>7</sup> for ‘immorality is the punishment, not the guilt’.<sup>8</sup> C.H. Dodd observed

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<sup>1</sup>David Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, (Cambridge, 1996) p63.

<sup>2</sup>*Robinson Crusoe*, p175.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p176.

<sup>4</sup>Backscheider, *op cit*, p66.

<sup>5</sup>‘Figures manifesting the iconography of hell.’ McGrane, *op cit*, p 44.

<sup>6</sup>*Robinson Crusoe*, p177.

<sup>7</sup>For the opposite view see William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, fifth edition, (Edinburgh, 1902) p39.

<sup>8</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, 1980) p39.

## *The Dark Side*

'Paul should not be understood as propounding a rigid theory of the total depravity of human nature',<sup>1</sup> but, as Fitzmeyer puts it, God 'leaves pagan society to stew in its own juice'.<sup>2</sup> Crusoe reaches a point of soteriological agnosticism: 'How do I know what God Himself judges in this particular case?'<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, for Crusoe, ignorance of the Gospel is a sign of divine displeasure.<sup>4</sup>

Crusoe goes on to attain heights of pietism, but there is a dark side to Crusoe's eucharist. Like Thales praying thankfully that he was 'born a human being and not a beast, next a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian,'<sup>5</sup> Crusoe prays that his fate was not to be 'like a meer [*sic*] savage',<sup>6</sup> not to be a part of the natural order but above and beyond it. He is spiritually and emotionally unconnected to nature, able to relegate it and 'savages' within it to the status of Otherness. This is Defoe's belief that human beings can find in all circumstances a basis on which to praise God, to exercise a Pollyannaesque transforming will by which even the direst of circumstances can be survived.<sup>7</sup> Yet this belief helped him survive imprisonment.

McGrane<sup>8</sup> emphasizes the 'shadow' side of Crusoe's ethics without acknowledging the place or benefits of a eucharistic life. *A Journal of the Plague Year*, for all the faults of its theodicy, reaches its denouement in almost hymnic if highly individualistic thanksgiving: 'if ten lepers were healed, and but one returned to give thanks, I desire to be as that one, and to be thankful for myself.'<sup>9</sup> In a rare act of pre-conversion piety, Moll Flanders similarly engages in thanksgiving; 'Now I seemed landed in a safe harbour, after the stormy voyage of life past was at an end, and I began to be thankful for my deliverance.'<sup>10</sup> Roxana, unique amongst Defoe's picaresque heroes,

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, (London, 1932) p19.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, (New York, 1993) p272.

<sup>3</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p177.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp232f.

<sup>5</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Thales* 1.33.

<sup>6</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p141.

<sup>7</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, p 427.

<sup>8</sup> McGrane, *op cit*, pp43-54.

<sup>9</sup> *A Journal of the Plague Year*, p255.

<sup>10</sup> *Moll Flanders*, p186.

fails to make this transition,<sup>1</sup> with dark consequence; the telling of her tale is a Defoe parable against this omission.

Crusoe's enforced solipsism is most ambivalent when he is confronted by the tragedy of a second shipwreck at the location of his own ship's foundering. He mourns and pities the passing of the 'poor men' who have apparently perished, and mourns the continuation and heightening of his own solitude. Yet with Calvinistic recognition of God's unquestionable and individualistic dealings with him, Crusoe finds in the tragedy his own pedagogic revelation:

I learned here again to observe, that it is very rare that the providence of God casts us into any condition of life so low, or to any misery so great, but we may see something or other to be thankful for, and may see others in worse circumstances than our own.<sup>2</sup>

Again his response is eucharistic, turning from self to other-centeredness. He responds doxologically, not with a reasoned attempt at questioning the purposes of God or establishing a rational theodicy. His is a personal (and individualistic) response to a theophany. This is to be expected if this is essentially a conversion narrative, as the narrator's Preface indicates. Defoe's Crusoe only for a moment begins but then refuses to push the parameters of theodicy, making for 'an undertone of questioning of Providence and the suppressing of discontent and ... the tendency to second-guess God.'<sup>3</sup> Now, such theophany should not necessarily indicate a manipulative and destructive divine control exercised for the sole benefit of the receiver. After all, neither Dostoyevsky's 'coincidences' nor Jung's 'synchronicity' imply divine manipulation, but demand receptiveness to personal meaning in the natural or human events surrounding the receiver;<sup>4</sup> Defoe's cosmology must be read in the same way.

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<sup>1</sup> Nb. *Roxana*, p167, 'I had no thorow [sic] effectual Repentance...' Cf. p159; 'I had none of those things [thankfulness] about me.'

<sup>2</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p192.

<sup>3</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, p 417, see *Robinson Crusoe*, p213.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Wilson, *Reasons of the Heart*, (St Leonards, 1998) p11.

When Crusoe admits a human other into his solipsistic universe he demands subjection, servitude and submission. This man was previously a 'savage', a cannibal about to be cannibalized, and as such represented the depths of the unknown and unnamed Other in all its horror. "Friday" undergoes the necessary transformation and takes his assigned place as a subject inside Crusoe's world, subjected to its order.<sup>1</sup> Crusoe is the conduit of this newcomer's salvation, physically<sup>2</sup> and 'spiritually'.<sup>3</sup> He forces Friday into European dress, never mind that 'wearing the drawers was very awkward to him, and the sleeves of the wastcoat [*sic*] galled his shoulders and the inside of his arms.'<sup>4</sup>

By naming the new 'other' Crusoe realizes the prerogatives of the primal human beings of the second creation story, (Gen. 2.19b-20) ordering the unknowns on the parameters of his existence. For the Genesis sources naming and ordering was a mutual responsibility, continuation of the mutual contract of God's act of creation. However for Defoe's European Christendom the command from the first Creation story to 'have dominion' (Gen. 1.26. Heb. *radah*) and 'subdue' (Gen. 1.28. Heb. *kabash*) had lost the undertones they once had of mutual contract, and the 'task of intra-creational development',<sup>5</sup> Yet Defoe's own precarious position as an economic underdog must be recalled. As a non-Anglican he had no recourse to imagery of independence and self-respect other than the economic independence of the merchant class. He had no other liberation language available to him.

Friday's attempt to suggest an apokatastatic soteriology: 'so you, I, devil, all wicked, all preserve, repent, God pardon all'<sup>6</sup> is quickly rectified by his Master. In a context of persecution apokatastasis is an unlikely soteriology. Similarly, when Crusoe with momentarily anti-Calvinist incredulity wondered 'why it has pleased God to hide the like saving knowledge from so many millions of souls, who if I might

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<sup>1</sup> McGrane, *op cit*, p48.

<sup>2</sup> 'I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life.' *Robinson Crusoe*, p209.

<sup>3</sup> 'When he came again to me, I entred [*sic*] into a long discourse with him upon the subject of the redemption of man by the Saviour of the world' *ibid*, p221.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p211.

<sup>5</sup> 'Genesis' NIB volume one, (1994) p346.

<sup>6</sup> *Robinson Crusoe*, p220.



judge by this poor savage, would make a much better use of it than we did',<sup>1</sup> such thoughts are 'checked' as an invasion of the unquestionable 'soverainty [*sic*] of Providence.'<sup>2</sup> McGrane notes this momentary faith-questioning by Friday to be one realm in which he is able to 'burst the chain of ... enforced identity' which leaves him otherwise oscillating between poles of instrumentality and domestic animality.<sup>3</sup> Yet Defoe was creating his fictional universe in a world of often mutually exclusive religious absolutes claimed in the name of Christianity. Vilification, persecution, and execution in the name of Christianity were the hallmarks of successive royal houses and civil governments. Post-modernity too easily mocks the absolutism of Crusoe's treatment of Friday.

It is surprising that McGrane, who has argued that 'anthropologists and ethnologists should eschew their desire for objectivity and neutrality',<sup>4</sup> should not give consideration to the historical suffering of Defoe the Dissenter, for whom economic advancement was a struggle for justice against Erastian-Anglican oppression.<sup>5</sup> Defoe's writings were a struggle against oppressive economic structures.<sup>6</sup> Defoe's attitude towards economics was always theologically driven: 'I cannot believe that God ever design'd the Riches of the World to be useless'.<sup>7</sup> McGrane reads back into Defoe's century modern concerns for environmental and ethnic correctness, robbing the texts of their subversive undertones.

For all the faults apparent to a contemporary reading of him, Defoe may be less flawed than is first apparent. He saw men remain 'of a sweet natural temper, and a generous public spirit' in the face of injustice and persecution; he saw his religious group resist reactionary

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p212.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc cit*.

<sup>3</sup> McGrane, *op cit*, p53.

<sup>4</sup> As cited in Gavin D'Costa, 'The End of *Theology* and *Religious Studies*', *Theology*, September/October 1996, p345.

<sup>5</sup> '[Defoe's] faith in the possibility of economic development never faltered.' Backscheider, *op cit*, p251, for the failure of Anglican Christianity, by and large, to address popular need see *ibid*, p521.

<sup>6</sup> '[A] discursive sphere of exchange without domination.' Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, (London, 1996) p17.

<sup>7</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, p515.

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tendencies and become the bulwark of progressive education, and he saw a people barred from civil life become the backbone of mercantile England. Defoe learned piety, hard work, economy, long-suffering, self-discipline, and service, but he also learned resistance, distrust for authority, and independence of thought that tended to self-righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

While hints of the positive, compassionate side of Defoe's characterization and characters may, from a distance of three hundred years, be more apparent in a lesser-known work such as *A Journal of the Plague Year*, they can also be discerned in *Robinson Crusoe*. As with apocalyptic's invitation to hope and even to militant non-violence, they can be mocked now as then. However, the fact remains that 'the need for individuals to define themselves and resist the community's perceptions was a part of every Dissenter's experience'.<sup>2</sup> Apocalyptic writings provide the disadvantaged with an imagining on which to base militant non-violent opposition to oppressive structures. Defoe's economic opportunism must be seen not through the eyes of late twentieth century environmental, ethnic and economic correctness, which is McGrane's error. Throughout his life, Defoe had insisted that 'Anglicans lacked charity and benevolence'.<sup>3</sup> In this historical context, he was simply dreaming the subversive dream of power for the powerless, a dream of justice for the Dissenters who were disenfranchised at every opportunity by the dominant, Erastian Anglican machine.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p538.

<sup>3</sup> Backscheider, *op cit*, p400.