**Midterm Essay**

Paul’s Views of Evil and Hero vs My Views

Introduction

Every society or social group must have some criteria for distinguishing between good and bad. For instance, religious groups will categorize behaviors as good or bad depending on teachings contained in their religious teachings. Similarly, most governments have laws that are enacted through a legislative process that guide people in knowing what is good and bad, and how actions that go against the prescribed laws are punished. In this paper, I will explore the Christian concept of evil as explained by Paul in the New Testament and I will also provide my own understanding of evil. In addition, I will explain why Paul views Jesus as his hero in the bible and why, in my opinion, my parents are my heroes. And lastly, I will discuss how evil is ended in the bible and comparing the situation of Jesus to that of Neo in the science fiction film, *The Matrix*.

*Part I: Evaluating Paul’s Thinking*

Paul’s thinking was influenced by five factors including his Hellenistic background, Pharisaic, Jewish background, the Revelation to him, Jesus and early traditions, and his experiences as an apostle. Paul’s thinking was greatly influenced by the Pharisaic tradition that he came about as a Jew. This had a huge influence on his thoughts and expressions in his theology. Most of Paul’s theology, as well as anthropology, plainly depicts a Jewish background. Secondly, Paul’s ideas are a clear depiction that he was also a diaspora Jew. His technique of creation and articulation often show the impact Gk rhetoric had on his thinking. The use of words such as ‘Son of God’ ‘Lord’ and ‘flesh and spirit’ reveal his Hellenistic background**[[1]](#footnote-1).** Thirdly, the experience Paul had near Damascus and the faith he had in Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ greatly influenced his thoughts. He came across a revelation by Jesus that shaped his ideas. Next, Paul’s ideologies were shaped by early church traditions and his interactions with Jesus. Finally, Paul’s ideologies were influenced by his experiences as a missionary and apostle in his journey of proclaiming the gospel and establishing churches in different countries[[2]](#footnote-2).

*Evaluating My Thinking*

To begin with, I am not a Christian. However, this does not mean that I do not respect religion. As a matter of fact, I went to Christian schools for both my high school and college. I thus have a deep understanding of the Christian religion. I have great respect for all religions be they Muslims, Hindus, or Christians among others. Thus, I engage in any discussions relating to religion with an open mind and a desire to learn more about the teachings. Lastly, my interactions with different Christians during my high school and college education really impacted my thinking. I often engage in discussions relating to religions and mostly Christianity as some of my friends are Christian faithful.

Paul’s description of Jesus qualifies Him as his hero while to me, my parents are my heroes. Different people can have different definitions of their heroes. Heroes can be described as people who show courage when they are faced with difficult situations. Others can describe their heroes as individuals who are always there to help and give them the strength and the motivation that they need to go through difficult situations[[3]](#footnote-3). While heroes can be afraid and not always exhibit their courage, they always display their heroism through their actions. Heroes are considered to be selfless, courageous and honest and are always willing to go the extra mile to assist others.

*Part II: Paul’s View of Evil*

First, Paul views sin as something that is inheritable such that a person acquires sin from birth. Consequently, human beings are all sinners. Though human beings strive to live a life that is upright before God, none has achieved the glory that the Lord God intended for His people[[4]](#footnote-4). In Romans 3: 23 Paul writes, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This particular view of sin is consistent with the Old Testament view of sin. Psalm 51:5 states, “Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Clearly, Paul views sin as universal across the whole of humanity. In teaching about sin, Paul largely depends on the Old Testament. In Romans 5:12, Paul alludes to Psalms 51:5 when he writes, “therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people because all sinned.” In particular, Paul believes that all human beings have sinned. However, Paul believes that human beings can achieve salvation through Christ Jesus. Further, Paul explains that the benefits of following Jesus are far more astonishing than the consequences of Man’s sin**[[5]](#footnote-5).** In Romans 5:20, Paul states, “the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Paul states that by following Jesus Christ, Christians are freed from the power of sin.

To a large extent, I concur with Paul’s view of sin. In my view, sin is actually contagious. In practical normal life, it is common to find that children engage in behaviors that their parents engaged in. For instance, there are very high chances that at least one child of parents who drink alcohol also becomes an alcoholic in life[[6]](#footnote-6). Therefore, the fact that sin is contagious means that human beings are at great risk of sinning since they live in a society that is sinful. In a similar manner, righteousness and grace are contagious. Therefore, people can avoid sin by following Jesus. In Romans 5:19 Paul states, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

*Part III: Paul’s Idea of his Hero, Jesus*

From the ways in which Paul describes Jesus in the bible, we can tell that He is his hero. For instance in the book of Romans 5:1-2, Paul describes Jesus as a Peacemaker. He states that by believing in Jesus Christ, human beings are able to have peace with God. In the book of Galatians 5:1, Paul describes his hero as a Delivery. He encourages the Galatians to hold on to the liberty that Jesus had granted them and to be cautious lest they find themselves in bondage again. In Titus 2:14, Paul describes Jesus as a Redeemer who gave his own life on the cross so that man can be saved from sins. Paul continues to describe his hero in so many other ways across his epistles. He uses other phrases such as the Giver of Life, the Son of God, the King of Kings, and the Destroyer of Death, among others[[7]](#footnote-7). From all his descriptions of Jesus, we can tell that the only way that mankind can have life is in believing in Jesus and accepting him as their personal savior. Paul mentions time and again in his epistles that anybody who fails to accept Jesus as his or her Savior will suffer the wrath of hell.

*My Parents as My Heroes*

As I explained earlier, I am not a religious person. However, this does not mean that I do not have respect for world religions. Most of my friends are actually very religious. Personally, I view my father to be my hero and my mother to be my heroine. My choice may not be derived from religious beliefs, but from the experiences that I have gone through with my parents. From the time I was a small child, I have seen the stand by me when I am on the wrong. They sacrificed a lot to make sure that my siblings and I get an education.

Whenever my siblings and I got sick our parents would go into any great lengths to ensure that we get medical attention, even if it meant borrowing money from friends and relatives. I remember this one time when one of my sibling was to undergo an operation and my parents have helped to organize fundraising. My parents have always guided and counseled me even when I was the one on the wrong. Whenever we are together, I can see the worry in their faces about my future even when they do not share them with me. So to me, my parents are my heroes. They may not have brought me up in religious ways but their sacrifices mean a lot to me.

*Comparison between Paul’s Idea and Mine*

The way in which we describe our heroes and heroines is always shaped by the experiences that have with those heroes. In my case, I view my parents as my heroes because of the experiences I have had with them all my life, as explained above. The sacrifices they have made for me and my siblings so that we can have a better life make me really admire them. One day when I become a parent too, I will want to raise my children the way my parents raised me. Paul’s idea of a hero differs from mine because of the personal experiences he had with Jesus. For instance, his experience with Jesus at Damascus must have had a lot of influence on his perceptions of Him[[8]](#footnote-8)**.** His interactions with Jesus and the traditions of the early church must have played a huge role in shaping his thought patterns. He not only had personal experiences with the Messiah but he also interacted with people who had personal experiences with Jesus, such as the disciples who were with Jesus throughout his ministry on earth. These disciples witnessed many of the miracles of Jesus such as the raising of the death, the healing of the sick and even his resurrection. Paul was able to learn a lot from them.

Paul’s biblical hero is portrayed as a savior of mankind. He dies on the cross so that mankind can be delivered from evil, which Paul describes as hereditary. Paul’s view of evil is that the sins of the parents are inherited by their offspring, and humans can overcome these evils by embracing Jesus (Paul’s hero). On the other hand, my heroes – who are my parents, do not have the powers to carry the evils of mankind. They are humans who fall under the category that is to be saved by Paul’s hero. Being humans, they are also considered to be evil according to Paul’s teachings.

*Part IV: The End of Evil*

In Romans chapter 5, Paul explains Jesus died on the cross so that humans can be saved from their iniquities or sins. He explains that it was because of one man that sins entered the world, and only by one man will humans be saved from their sinful nature: “In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all”[[9]](#footnote-9). Before God sent His only child to the world to come and die and save mankind from the chains of sin, the children of Adam and Eve were helpless. But at God’s appointed time, Jesus died on the cross to that the ungodly could be saved.

Paul continues to explain that sins separate mankind from God and that God considers sinful people to be his enemies. But because of His undying love for mankind, God sent his only son to the world to die on the cross so that mankind can be reconciled with God: “Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life”[[10]](#footnote-10). This means that through Jesus Christ, humans are delivered from sin. The new creatures have to be purified through baptism, as explained in Romans chapter six. Through baptism, mankind dies and resurrect with Christ. They let go of the old sinful natures and start a new life: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life”[[11]](#footnote-11). So for according to Paul, the sinful or evil nature of humans is brought to an end when they confess their sins and accept Christ in their lives. Their start of a new life is implied through baptism which represents the death and the resurrection of Jesus on the Cross (the death of sin and the beginning of a new life).

The explanation provided by Paul in Romans chapter 6 is very much similar to the depictions in the science fiction movie, “The Matrix”. The movie is full of philosophical ideas that left many marks in the hearts of those who watched it. The movies portray oriental philosophies that reference Christianity. Many have argued that the writers of the film wanted to convey a clear message of how we are being controlled and that a savior will come to liberate humans from the systems that control them[[12]](#footnote-12). In the Matrix, the main character who is Neo is also considered to be the savior. He is considered to be an allegory of Jesus created by machines to keep humans under control. Neo lives a double life. In the daytime, he is a boring office worker. At night, he is a computer hacker. He lives his life with an apparent purpose but knows that something is wrong in society, so he spends time trying to understand what is really going on. He later meets Morpheus and Trinity, two individuals who are part of a resistance that intends to reveal the secrets behind the human world.

According to the film, the humans became so dependent on AI robots that machines eventually retaliated against their creators. Neo means “new” and is also an anagram for “the chosen one”. This implies the concept of the savior, creating a connection between Paul’s ideas that Jesus is the savior[[13]](#footnote-13). The similarity that exists between Neo and Jesus is clear from the movie, beginning from his deep love for Trinity. Trinity is a doctrine in Christianity that suggests that God's nature appears in three persons. Just as the birth of Jesus was prophesied – the emergence of a savior who will free humanity from sin and slavery was prophesied, the movie propagates the idea that a savior would arrive to destroy the matrix. Following his assassination, Neo resuscitates and comes backs to life with new powers such as having the ability to ascend to the sky, just as Jesus ascended to heaven when he resurrected. In the third film of the Matrix series, neo is sacrificed for humanity. He has shown places his arms in the shape of a cross, denoting a very clear similarity to Jesus. There are also other references to the bible, such as the city of Zion, the Ship of Nebuchadnezzar, and a traitor similar to Jesus named Cypher.

​ *Conclusion*

In this paper, I have explained the biblical view of evil which suggests that all humans are born evil and that mankind can only be saved from the slavery of sin by accepting Jesus in their lives. While I am not a religious person, I tend to agree with most of the Christian views about evil. Paul views Jesus as his hero because he died on the cross in order for mankind to be saved from evil. To me, the sacrifices that my parents have made for me make them my heroes. The way we all describe our heroes mostly depends on our experiences with them. I have also explained in this paper how the main character in the movie “The Matrix” is said to be an allegory of Jesus. Neo was seen by other characters in the movie as the chosen one who would put to an end the conflicts between humans and machines.

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