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The Destigmatization of Onesimus

In Paul's Letter to Philemon

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ABSTRACT:

In the letter to Philemon, Paul appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household. Onesimus was Philemon's slave. It was a stigma to be known as a slave. Furthermore, Onesimus was believed to have fled from Philemon as he sought Paul's assistance to intercede on his behalf. Thus, the stigma on Onesimus was intensified. A slave who escaped from one's master was a grave fault. However, Paul took Onesimus into his care and eventually sent him back to Philemon with the letter under scrutiny. The main intention of the correspondence was for Philemon to receive Onesimus on Paul's behalf.

Onesimus was a stigmatized person when he left Philemon and the social surrounding he used to live in. On his return, he must be received a destigmatized slave. Thus, this paper sets out to show how destigmatization took place in this letter. The main aim of the paper is to show the relevancy of this kind of reading in the interpretation of the shortest extant personal letter Paul wrote. It should also be an example of utilizing this destigmatization reading in other biblical passages where stigmatized characters are obvious.

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Unto Him be all honor and grace.

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INTRODUCTION:

Once stigmatized, always stigmatized. Working in the Police department for fourteen years had molded and instilled this perspective in me. It was one of the acquired skills that was needed to help solve criminal cases. Once an offence had taken place, and the suspect at large, the first move by the investigating officer was to scan the area for any former convicts. This tactic had proven to help solve many cases for the Police department. Although the justice system required the treatment of all to be innocent until proven guilty, police investigating officers working in the Burglary Squad (from my experience) had been trained to perceive former inmates or convicted felons suspiciously. This tactic had proven time and time again to provide answers or a lead for the department. Police mentality was that a prisoner would always remain a prisoner even after their imprisonment term.

The perception of a prisoner as a bad person had been instilled in me and molded my perspective about prisoners. Although born and bred a Christian, it had not helped me stop seeing the way most police officers perceived prisoners. I had come to accept that – once stigmatized, always stigmatized. I had always believed that the perception of stigmatization was personally implicated. That is to say, it was not my fault that a prisoner was stigmatized. It was the fault of the prisoner himself/herself. This line of thinking has been challenged after I was introduced to sociological reading of biblical exegesis.

I had no prior knowledge that a destigmatization process or system existed, or even thought about it. Maybe it was ignorance on my part. Being a Christian did not help me either, to realize my personal limitations in all virtues of Christianity. Yet, it was in the process of taking up this issue and exploring it that has helped me realize that I am an agent of the stigmatization process and therefore can also be an agent of the destigmatization process.

This study focuses on Paul's letter to Philemon. The intention is to employ Carol Warren's[1] charismatic destigmatization reading to explore Onesimus' status as a stigmatized runaway slave who was destigmatized through Paul's association with him. The study begins

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[1] Carol A. B. Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity: From Deviant to Charismatic," *Qualitative Sociology* 3, no. 1 (1980): 59-72.

with a study of the methodology in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 discusses the issue of slave and slavery in the Greco-Roman world and the New Testament times. Chapter 3 contains the destigmatization reading of Paul's letter to Philemon. It concentrates on Warren's three modes of charismatic destigmatization. The Conclusion recounts the usefulness of this reading and it offers some thoughts on its use in the ministry.

Chapter One:

Methodology:

Sociology of Deviance and Destigmatization

1.1: Introduction

Sociology of deviance is the study that I have come to understand as the study of 'stigmatization' on the one hand and 'destigmatization' on the other. In other words, sociology of deviance deals with stigmatization and focuses on the many ways that society contributes to the development of deviance. It also deals with destigmatization by pointing out how a stigmatized person has gone out the task of getting rid of the stigma being imposed upon that person. Thus, destigmatization is simply the fighting back that a stigmatized person puts up against the stigma imposed upon him.

The word stigma comes from the Greek word στίγμα It originally meant a brand, for example, on an animal to indicate its owner.[2] It also meant a brand or a cut made into the body to identify slaves, criminals, or soldiers.[3] In sociology, Erving Goffman defines stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and it downgrades its bearer to a lower status that is discrediting.[4] Thus, the term stigma not only identifies those who have committed criminal acts, it also incorporates other forms of stigmas "associated with mental or physical handicap, race, nationality, or religion."[5]

In this chapter, I will firstly give a brief overview of the sociology of deviance is given to establish a wide framework within which to understand destigmatization. Secondly, in the next section I will highlight how members of a society impose labels of deviance or stigmatization on those who have breached norms that are considered acceptable. Then that will be followed by a brief discussion of symbolic interaction. This section describes the way in

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[2] Otto Betz, "στίγμα," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), 7:658. The term στίγμα appears in the NT only in Gal 6:17.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 3.

[5] Philip Richter, "Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament: An Appraisal and Extended Example," in *Approaches to New Testament Study*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series 120, edited by Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 276.

which each episode in people's interaction within a society is interpreted by others in that society in light of what is normally acceptable. The following section focuses on labelling, which is the stigmatization of others by those of society who consider themselves to be right. Those being labelled will often model the stigma that was imposed. The last section discusses the de-stigmatization modes suggested by Warren[6] by which the stigmatizedperson may attempt to erase the label.

1.2: Deviance

Within sociology, any behaviour that is different from conventional social norms within a given society is termed 'deviance', which I use interchangeably with the term 'stigmatization' in this study. The extent of the stigma of an individual depends largely on the reaction of that person's society towards the behaviour he/she has exhibited.[7] An example is a person with excessive body tattoos. For that person, his/her tattoos may have existential meaning. However, to society, the acquisition of many tattoos may be viewed as the deviant behaviour of one who has psychological problems or mental issues.[8] Josh Adams states that "tattooing was firmly positioned as the domain of those deemed socially undesirable.... Those in the medical community have suggested it as an indicator of low self-esteem."[9]

In contrast, in the Samoan culture, a man having a tattoo which begins from above the belly button down to the knees is a symbol of maturity and servitude. The *tatau* or tattoo signifies that he is no longer an adolescent but a young man who is ready to serve his family and the village. Having a *tatau* entitles him to be included in the group of untitled men called *o le malosi o le nuu* meaning "the strength of the village".[10] But not all societies see them in that way.

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[6] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity. 59 - 72.
[7] Robert L. Hamblin and Paul V. Crosbie, "Anomie and Deviance," in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans*, edited by Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1977), 363.
[8] Josh Adams, "Marked Difference: Tattooing and Its Association with Deviance in the United States," *Deviant Behaviour* 30 (2009): 267.
[9] Ibid., 268.
[10] Traditionally, once a young boy reaches the age of 15-18, he is required to have a tattoo or a *tatau*. For the young women of the same age, they are required to have a tattoo or *malu*. These valuable customs were banned by the missionaries in the mid 19th century as unchristian.

Thus, Howard Becker states, "deviance is not a quality that lies in behavior itself, but in the interaction between the person [or persons] who commits an act and those who respond to it."[11] Once again, society's opinion of a person is not objectively dependent on that person's acts, but subjectively on the way that the society views him/her. Thus, stigma is an important concept for understanding the mechanisms by which any society operates. Society sometimes alters its perception about stigmatized acts. Patricia and Peter Adler note that:

> one of the hallmarks of any society is its changing definitions of deviance, with fluctuations occurring over   time and variations existing between groups. . . . All societies change the boundaries around what is considered deviant, defining it 'down' when they have more deviance than they can handle, and defining it 'up' when they want to point to problematic issues.[12]

The Adlers point out two responses by society to deviance. One is to "define it down". By that they mean that the amount of stigmatization involved is too problematic for the society, and it needs to provide measures to deal with it. For instance, in the past, when the number of people in gangs was very small they were not an issue because they were controlled.[13] However, they have become more of an issue in recent years when more people have joined them. In that sense, society has begun to feel threatened.[14] In the Adlers' words, it is to define deviance 'down.'

On the other hand, the opposite, defining deviance up, addresses stigma by changing the way society perceives stigmatization and its implications. For example, in the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS), it has recently changed its archaic position on entrees to Malua Theological College (MTC) with *tatau* or tattoo. As it used to be, a *sogaimiti* (man with a tattoo) was not allowed to enter MTC. The old adage reason given is that the shedding of blood through the process is unchristian. However, the CCCS changed its position on the ban in the late eighties (1980s) and allowed *sogaimiti* if they pass the MTC entrance exam because the CCCS has moved away from the 'unchristian reasoning' and viewed the *tatau* in its sociological

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[11] Howard Saul Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 14.

[12] Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, "The Deviance Society," *Deviant Behavior* 27, no. 2 (2006): 132.

[13] Daniel Patric Moynihan, "Defining Deviance Down," *America Shcolar* 62, no. 1 (1993): 20-21.

[14] Thomas Barker and Kelly M. Human, "Crime of the Big Four Motorcycle Gangs," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 37 (2009): 174.

and theological connotations.[15] So the CCCS has re- defined this social act as not a stigma. Thus we see that stigmatization is not only determined by society as in the case of a *sogaimiti* in the CCCS, it is also controlled by it.

1.3: Symbolic Interaction

It is clear that acceptable norms of a society prescribe to the members of that society how they should interact with one another. In other words, some behaviours and actions by members of a society are accepted as normal on one hand and out of the norm on the other hand, within their society. Within the sociology of deviance, the sub-discipline that deals with how a society decides what is deviant is called symbolic interaction.

Symbolic interaction focuses on the basic assumption that human interaction is mutually understood through symbols held in common by the people in a group or society. The term 'symbolic interaction' was coined in 1937 by Herbert Blumer, a lecturer at the University of Chicago.[16]

> The term 'symbolic interaction' refers ... to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attached to such actions.[17]

A great part of how humans understand each other depends on how they interpret the actions of others. When they interact with each other, each person pays a great deal of attention to the other person's body language. This is a large part of what helps a person decide how to react to another person.[18]

In the Samoan setting, respect and disrespect is generally exhibited by how people act and interact. A simple example of how a person would indicate respect is shown when that person carries *amoga* ("a load") in front of *fale* ("houses"), especially if the house is a chief's

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[15] The CCCS, nevertheless, does not allow anyone who has already entered MTC or has become a pastor to be tattooed with a *tatau*. The same applies to lay preachers and deacons of the church.

[16] Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 1.

[17] Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 79.

[18] Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, 5th edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 130.

house.[19] Any person carrying a load on his/her shoulder in front of another's dwelling is expected to lower his/her *amoga* and carry it at knee level. That indicates respect. The person carrying the load at knee level has shown respect to those inside the house.[20] At the same time, those observing his/her behaviour label him/her as a respectful person. On the other hand, if the person does not lower his/her load and carry it at knee level, he/she would be labelled as a deviant, *le mafaufau*, literally meaning "having no brain", "a disrespectful person". He/she may[21] be punished by the village council for violating that symbol of respect which all members of the village know. If the person carrying the load was not walking in front of other people's houses, he/she would not have expected to act in that respectful manner. That is, it is not a question of whether observers are visible or not. The presence of people's dwellings is enough to suggest that people may be inside their houses, and that is enough to indicate that respect should be shown. This is an example of the way a major part of human interaction takes place through symbolic interaction.[22]

Another example is the woman in Luke 7:36-50.[23] She was known as a γυνή ἥτις ἥν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός ("a woman in the city", "a sinner"), which is a negative label. If she had not gone into the Pharisee's house, the label she had would not have become exaggerated. Among certain people of the time, she was stigmatized because she had decided to interact with Jesus in the Pharisee's house. If she had interacted with Jesus in a different location, one other than the Pharisee's house, she might not have been stigmatized for what she did to Jesus. In other words, interaction among people can lead to some of them being stigmatized when those people do not uphold accepted norms. So symbolic interaction plays a role in determining which acceptable norm of society has been violated. The person who violates the acceptable

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[19] Traditionally, one of the Samoan ways of carrying things was to carry them on their shoulders. An example is *amoga taro* or a load of taro. Usually, *amoga* taro consists of two baskets made out of coconut leaves that are levelled on the shoulder by the *amo* or a pole of stick about two metres in length. The weight of *amoga* or load depends on the strength of the carrier. Sometimes a single *amoga* can be as heavy as 50kgs.

[20] Samoan *fale* or houses are open. At daytime and when the weather is clear, you can clearly see people sitting inside their houses. It differs at nighttime and rainy days.

[21] What I mean by "may" is that if the deviant act is reported by those observing it to the village council, it would cause the offender to be punished. If the offender is not reported then that ends the matter.

[22] Howard Saul Becker, "Labelling Theory Reconsidered," in *Deviance and Social Control*, edited by Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh (London: Tavistock Publication Limited, 1974), 54-55.

norms of a society is then labelled as such by that society.

Symbolic interaction, like deviance itself, is not a constant in any society; it continually changes relative to the observer and to time. For example, smoking marijuana was thought in the past to be a medical remedy for asthma. More recently, marijuana smokers are labelled deviants and criminals as well. In a similar way, New Zealanders' rejection of gay and lesbian relationships as morally wrong has decreased compared to a decade ago. The change in the extent of toleration shows that persons alter their perception of what is deviant in others over time.

1.4 Labelling Theory

Labelling theory is the hypothesis within the sociology of deviance which suggests that giving a label to a particular individual will make that person more likely to adopt the behaviour indicated by that label. Names such as George Mead,[24] Frank Tannenbaum[25] and Edwin Lemert[26] are always mentioned as early pioneers of the labelling theory.[27] However, the concept was further developed by Howard Becker.[28]

Becker writes:

> [S]*ocial groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.[29]

There is an expression which says, "Do not give a dog a bad name." The implication is that if you call a dog a thief, for example, the dog will be a thief. As another example, my daughter who is six years old has not eaten eggs for about three years now. Any time her mother

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[23] All the English biblical citations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated. All the Greek biblical citations are from Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* 27th edition.

[24] George Mead, "The Psychology of Punitive Justice," *American Journal of Sociology* 23 (1918): 577-602.

[25] Frank Tannenbaum, *Crime and Community* (Boston: Ginn, 1931).

[26] Edwin Lemert, *Social Pathology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951).

[27] An extensive discussion is given by Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and Its Neighbours,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary series 183, edited by Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 94-96.

[28] Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 34.

[29] Howard Becker, "Labelling Theory Reconsidered," in *Deviance and Social Control*, edited by Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh (London: Tavistock Publication Limited, 1974), 9. Italics by the author.

tries to give her an egg, she refuses. The reason is that a long time ago I told a close family friend that she does not like eggs and she heard me. Thus, the impact of the label on the person concerned can be dramatic.

A person labelled by society may take that label very seriously. If society labels someone as deviant, then the person himself will be acutely aware of the tag and will probably also act in such a way as to make others in the community see him in the same light.[30] Consequently, the labelled individual may become deviant, though stigmatized behaviour may happen only when the society labels him/her as such.[31] "The crucial point is that the essential feature of a defiant or deviant act is *external* to the actor and the act."[32]

John Lofland notes that "entrance into deviance from pivotal normality is much more frequent than entrance into normality from pivotal deviance."[33] In other words, he rightly suggests that moving from being normal to being stigmatized is much easier than moving from being stigmatized to being normal. For an example, a local CCCS parish was in the process of electing its pastor. Names of pastors were nominated and each of the names nominated were given some background information by those who nominated them. To shorten the story, at the conclusion of the election, the parish agreed on the pastor who had the majority votes. However, in the following week, some members of the same parish found out that the pastor who won the vote was an ex-convict; a background information that was not made known earlier. They, then, appealed the decision on the premise that they do not want an ex-convict pastor. Society in general finds it hard to associate with stigmatized people.

Labelling theory explains how people become deviants by emphasising the role of society in determining what is normal and what is not. It also accounts for one reason why people become deviants. They become such because they are labelled as such by other adjectives, image, or form." Reinterpretation is the mode of fighting back that takes place people.

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[30] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method, 10.
[31] Richter, "Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament," 275.
[32] Jack P. Gibbs, "Conceptions of Deviant Behavior: The Old and the New," in *Deviant Behavior: A Text Reader in the Sociology of Deviance*, 7th edition, edited by Edward J. Clarke (Madison Ave, NY: Worth Publishers, 2008), 18. (Italics by the author).

Destigmatization, on the other hand, accounts for how labelled persons come to terms with their stigmatized status. Labelling theory provides typologies and models which stigmatized persons can then manipulate to achieve destigmatization for themselves. This is how destigmatization becomes a kind of fighting back against the labels that describe deviant behaviour.

Various destigmatization theories have been proposed but one notable study about destigmatization process is worth a brief mention here because it contains similar traits to Carol Warren's destigmatization reading this study has utilized.

Joseph W. Rogers and M. D. Buffalo, in their article 'Fighting Back: Nine Modes of Adaptation to a Deviant Label',[34] discusses approaches by which a stigmatized person(s) may fight back to establish an accepted position in his/her society, hence destigmatization. They identify nine modes, which are: 1. acquiescence; 2. repudiation; 3. flight; 4. channelling; 5. evasion; 6. modification; 7. reinterpretation; 8. redefinition; and 9. alteration.[35]

A brief summary mention of these nine modes by Rogers and Buffalo[36] are as follows: *Acquiescence* is a mode of destigmatization whereby the stigmatized person accepts the label being imposed, since he/she feels it fits his/her situation. *Repudiation* is a mode of fighting back and takes place when the stigmatized person rejects the label. *Flight* occurs in cases where the deviant exchanges his/her specific circumstances for one which will be more acceptable to society. *Channelling* occurs when a stigma is accepted and put to positive use as a "fulfilling means of self-expression, personal identity, and social effectiveness."[37] *Evasion* is a form of destigmatization which is realized when the stigmatized person appeals to a different view of reality to explain away the stigma. *Modification* is a mode of fighting back in which the deviant ventures to substitute a negative label with a better one "through manipulation of names, adjectives, image, or form."[38] *Reinterpretation* is the mode of fighting back that takes place

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[33] John Lofland, *Deviance and Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 210.
[34] J. W. Rogers and M. D. Buffalo, "Fighting Back: Nine Modes of Adaptation to a Deviant Label," *Social Problems* 22, no. 1 (1974): 101-116.
[35] Ibid., 104-105.
[36] Ibid., 106-114.
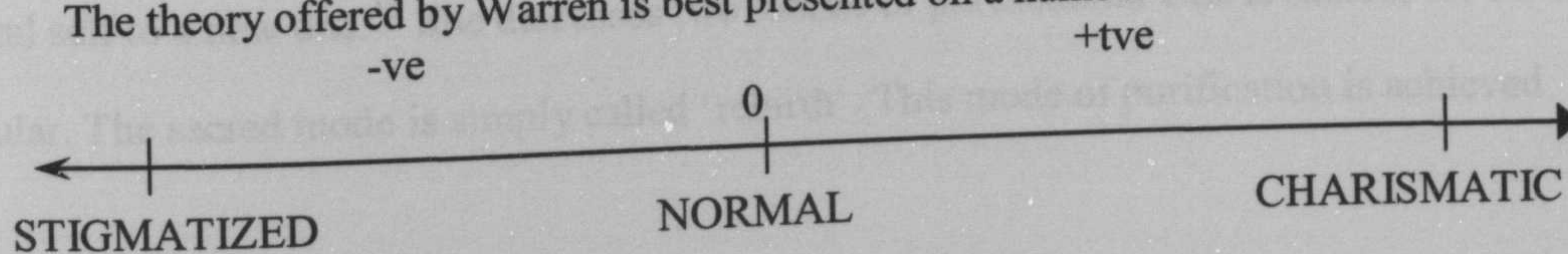[37] Ibid., 109.
[38] Ibid., 112.

when the deviant accepts the label with its associated behaviour but attempts to erase the negativity imposed on her by changing the perception of society about it. *Redefinition* is when a deviant person *rejects* (rather than accepts as in the previous mode) the stigma and then alters or redefines the way society has viewed the label. *Alteration* is where the deviant replaces the negative stigma with one accepted by society.

Of the modes of destigmatisation identified by Rogers and Buffalo, *evasion* and *flight* has very close resemblance to Warren's three modes which I will discuss below. What I have realized with these two sets of destigmatization processes (Rogers and Buffalo and Warren) is that Warren's proposal has developed further what a destigmatization person would become. In other words, Warren suggests that the success of a stigmatized person depend on what she calls - 'charismatic destigmatization'[39]. That is, the destigmatized person has done way beyond what is considered normal in order to convince others that the stigma should be forgotten. It is way beyond normal. It is an aspect of destigmatization that is seen in the case of Onesimus as this study will show.

1.5: Carol Warren and Destigmatization of Identity:[40]

In her article, Warren discusses three modes of transition by an individual in his/her effort to remove the stigma imposed on him/her. She begins by stating that a systematic theory of destigmatization should identify the structural arrangements which could promote destigmatization, the aims of destigmatization as well as the degree of success.[41] What this means is the development of a structure by which a stigmatized person can change how he/she is perceived by others in the community or society. Warren then offers three modes of charismatic destigmatization: (i) purification, (ii) individual transcendence, and (iii) collective aristocratization which I will discuss later on.

The theory offered by Warren is best presented on a number line as follows:

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        -ve                                    +tve

   <------------+---------------+---------------+------->
           STIGMATIZED        0              CHARISMATIC
                            NORMAL
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[39] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 59.
[40] Ibid., 59-72.
[41] Ibid., 59.

The view about a stigmatized person is on the negative side of the number line (–ve) and it indicates how an audience sees that stigmatized person in a negative manner. It is rated negative because of the consequences of what they have done or of what they are and are therefore labeled as not normal.

To consider someone normal by the audience is rated zero on the number line. That is to say that their actions and behavior are seen as acceptable to everyone and therefore are not subject to much public scrutiny. These are people that fulfill public expectation.

A charismatic person on the other hand refers to those who have either destigmatized themselves or have been destigmatized by other means in a way beyond what is considered normal. Warren, in citing Jack Katz, states, "charisma is the obverse of deviance; normals are those who fulfill expectations, deviants and the stigmatized are those who fail, and charismatics are those whose actions surpass the normative."[42] Charismatic destigmatization illustrates that this process does not merely reclassify the individual back to normalcy,

instead, that individual is catapulted to the 'above average' classification and therefore his/her stigma should be totally forgotten. This is the very essence of Warren's theory.

Compared to Rogers and Buffalo's theory, Warren suggests that a stigmatized person requires a strong will and determination to get rid of the stigma. By doing that, his/her destigmatization process deems a success. Rogers and Buffalo, however, only suggest modes of destigmatization but do not consider determination on the part of the stigmatized person as a vital factor in the process. In my reading of Paul's letter to Philemon, I find that Onesimus' determination to destigmatize himself from the label of a runaway slave is a vital part of what has taken place in the letter.

(i) *Purification:* In Warren's article, purification is the changing of the previous moral self to a new one.[43] She discusses two modes of purification. One is sacred, the other is secular. The sacred mode is simply called 'rebirth'. This mode of purification is achieved

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[42] Jack Katz, "Essences as Moral Identities: Verifiability and Responsibility in Imputation of Deviance and Charisma," *American Journal of Sociology* 80 (1975): 1384, cited by Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 60.

[43] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 62.

through a divine agency.[44] By achieving rebirth as a form of destigmatization, a society should

be able to perceive the reborn or destigmatized person in his/her new self rather than the

previous stigmatized one. As Warren states, "the sacred mode of purification is rebirth, which

shifts the audience's attention from an old, impure being to a new, pure being, whose prior

essences and arenas of immoral action have been erased."[45] This is quite similar to Rogers and

Buffalo's mode of evasion where destigmatization is due to an appeal to high reality. 'Rebirth'

also resembles the meaning of baptism in the Christian sense.[46]

The secular mode of purification is dissimilar. Destigmatization by this mode takes

place when the stigmatized one personally transforms his/her self dramatically through a change

of self and personality that goes together with good works.[47] An example is Farani Pauga, a

second year student at MTC.[48] He was in prison for four years for manslaughter. In an interview

with him, he said that he denied the offer of being paroled after serving half of his sentence

because he was considering at the time doing something more than just serving his sentence. He

also mentioned getting inspiration by reading the Bible at the many spare times he had while in

prison.

Following a year of being released after serving his full sentence, he decided to enter

MTC. Knowing about his decision, his village members and others who knew him made fun

of his intention. Some even discouraged him by saying that a prisoner cannot and should not be

a pastor but Pauga stated that he was adamant to follow his intuition.

Pauga has been and should have been destigmatized after serving his full custodial

sentence. But he has done more than that, by training to be a pastor in the future. He, therefore,

is an example of Warren's purification in both the sacred and the secular modes. The people

who mocked him have come to accept him as an *a'oa'o*, a theological student. Purification is

therefore a collective effort by the individual, who is willing to make the change and to die of

its former self and to be reborn into a new image and new concept of self with the help of a

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 63.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 63.
[48] Farani Pauga, Interviewed by the author, August 12, 2012.

superior being, or a committed effort for a complete change to a better acceptable person.

(ii) *Transcendence*: In the mode of transcendence, destigmatization takes place when the stigmatized person does not abandon his or her stigmatized self but attempts to destigmatize himself/herself by offering a better alternative that should replace, in the eyes of the community, the stigma.[49] It is more of a self assurance effort by the stigmatized person rather than an effort by the audience or labelers. "The degree of performance which must be achieved to claim charismatic transcendence . . . depends upon the degree of stigma."[50]

For an example is the treatment of lepers in Samoa. According to Safua Akeli, the ill-treatment of lepers is blamed on the thirty two years of influence and power of the Europeans over the Islands.[51] Because of their disease, they were stigmatized. Lepers were isolated from the general public and were even ostracized to Magonai, an isolated island in the Fijian archipelago.[52] Thus, lepers in Samoa were perceived negatively by the community and society.

However, the view of the Samoan society about lepers has changed drastically. The transformation occurs when the Health department provides medications to stop the spread of the disease. Better still, the effort by lepers themselves has shown that they are not a threat to the community. One example is Kolini Filipo.[53] Although one can see symptoms of leprosy in his fingers and toes, he has proven to others that his leprosy has not stopped him from having a wife and three healthy adult children. He even drives a taxi and owns a big *taro* plantation. He holds a *matai* title and is also a deacon in his local parish. In his words, Filipo believes that his achievements may have been the very factors that have changed his community's view of who he was. Therefore, achievement in the transcendence mode is more of a tremendous effort of the stigmatized person to show others that he/she deserves to be known and viewed otherwise.

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[49] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 64

[50] Ibid., 65.

[51] Safua Akeli, "Leprosy in Samoa 1890–1922: Race, Colonial Politics and Disempowerment" (University of Canterbury, New Zealand: Master of Arts thesis, 2007), 3: accessed May 14, 2012: http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/999/1/ thesis_fulltext.pdf.

[52] Kolini Filipo, Interviewed by the author, September 21, 2012. According to Filipo, a treated leper, his grandfather was diagnosed with leprosy in the 1930's and was then sent to Magonai, one of the Fijian islands, for treatment and he never returned.

[53] Ibid.

(iii) *Aristocratization and Collectivities*: The mode of aristocratization and collectivities as a form of destigmatization is when a stigmatized person joins a group to offer a 'collective response'.[54] Such a stigmatized group project an image to others that they are a special group. This attitude derives from the fact that they do know that once branded, nothing can change that. Therefore, being part of a stigmatized group one achieves a sense of acceptance and belonging. This mode is similar to Rogers and Buffalo's mode of 'flight' where a stigmatized person normally joins a group of deviants where one finds a sense of belonging. An example is the way first century Jewish society viewed Zealots. They were a group of Jews which most likely consisted of peasants and bandits.[55] They were labelled as terrorists or insurgents because they joined forces with other rebel groups like the Sicarii[56]to resist the Roman military takeover of Jerusalem in 70 Christ Era (CE). Yet Zealots probably did not understand themselves as deviants, since the point of their resistance was to defend their land and their faith from foreign rule like that of the Romans.[57]

In another instance, the blind people in Samoa were known as 'disabled ones' in the past. Recently, the blinds have formed up a group with other disabled people and have now called themselves the 'special needs' ones. They collectively claim their rights to be treated like normal people.

The three modes offered by Warren illustrate the change that the stigmatized individual has gone through in order to be transformed in the eyes of the community and society. It is this transformative concept and idea that propels the reading of Paul's Letter to Philemon, as a way to destigmatize Onesimus' prior stigma of being a 'runaway slave' to his new transformation by way of charismatic destigmatization to a fellow 'brother in Christ'. It is not enough for Paul to classify Onesimus as free or normal according to the chart above, but charismatically as a way to show that he is 'above average' in his restoration, redemption, and re-birth as a Christian believer and son to Paul in the faith.

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[54] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 67.
[55] Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), 217.
[56] Ibid., 216.
[57] Ibid., 216-243.

Chapter Two:

Social Context of Slavery

2.1 *Slavery in the Greco-Roman World.*

The origin of slavery is not known for certain but it "had been a part of life for the peoples of the Mediterranean for many centuries prior to the New Testament era."[58] 'Slaves were people who became prisoners of war, or were captured on land or sea by professional slavers. Others entered slavery as infants either because their mothers were slaves or their parents sold them into slavery to pay off debt.[59] People sell themselves into slavery to pay off debt, to secure a more stable life or to climb socially.[60] It is said that "life in slavery, at least with a decent master, could be more predictable and less demanding than the life of a poor free person."[61] The importance of slavery to the Roman Empire was invaluable, as "Rome became dependent on slaves to supply a significant portion of its workforce. Most of these slaves worked in agriculture."[62] Other occupations performed by slaves were in the field of 'mining, quarries, as domestic servants in wealthy households, or were trained as working as clerks, secretaries, maids, and so forth. Many, if not most of imperial Rome's artisans, were slaves. Some were teachers, cooks and managers. Many of the respected doctors in Rome were slaves of Greek origin.[63] We can infer from this that some slaves were endowed with responsibilities considered to be professional occupations in modern times, like doctors and teachers. The most advantage group of slaves are the Imperial slaves, who belonged to the emperor. They were the most fortunate of all slaves as they tended to live longer and were better off than the free poor. At times the Imperial Slaves, travelled in luxury on the emperor's business, and commanded attention from all but the highest aristocrats.[64] It is said that they can

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[58] James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity,* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 220.

[59] A. A. Rupprecht, "Slave, Slavery," in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters,* edited by Gerald F Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 881.

[60] Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era,* 222.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 221.

[63] Ibid., 224.

[64] Ibid., 225.

act on behalf of the emperor, and even had authority over freeborn Romans.[65] Some imperial

slaves were able to buy their freedom, allowing them to rise to status of prominence.

The perception of slaves among the Greeks was unkind. James Jeffers states that Plato

and Aristotle believed that some slaves were slaves by nature and were sub human, but the

Romans however, did not think of slaves as inferior by nature, trusting them to perform high

level functions.[66] Even though the Greeks did consider slaves as humans morally, their law still

regarded them as property. According to Ben Witherington, Aristotle has stated that slaves are

"property with souls."[67]

Compared to the freeborn citizens, slaves were widely regarded as inferior to their

poorest freed counterparts.[68] Cited by Marianne Thompson, Thomas Wiedemann wrote, "[a]t

Rome in particular…slavery is clearly presented as a state of absolute subjection. The slave has

no kin, he cannot assume the rights and obligations of marriage; his very identity is imposed by

the owner who gives him his name."[69] Jeffers, on the other hand, states that although slaves do

not have legal right to marriage, there were cases whereby slaves set up informal marriages and

commemorated each other after death using similar wording as used by legally married

citizens.[70] Although legal limitations were set for slaves, it was also inevitable that severe

punishments were in place for slaves that rebelled or did not conform to those legal

limitations.[71]

During the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, the institution of slavery was

never questioned. Slaves for the most part accepted their status and did not question the

existence of slavery. Slaves certainly wanted their freedom, but didn't see anything immoral

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 226.

[67] Ben Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 27.

[68] Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, The Two Horizon's New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 202.

[69] Thomas Wiedemann (ed), *Greek and Roman Slavery*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1, cited by Marianne Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 202-203.

[70] Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, 228.

[71] Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 16. Barth and Blanke note that some forms of punishments for a runaway slave include branding with the initials FUR or FUG for 'fugitive', leaving a runaway slave exposed to heat or cold, starvation, beaten in public, or "chased across the market by fellow slaves."

about owning slaves. Some slaves even purchased their own slaves.'[72] For example, Imperial

slaves purchased their own slaves[73] illustrating that slavery was a natural part of social order.

To have a slave was a sign of power and wealth and even among slaves brought great prestige.

However, laws were in place to govern this institution as a way to maintain the status

quo as far as the rights of the master and those of the slaves. Thompson states that "because

slaves were human, there were legal limits on the kinds of punishment and treatment that a

master could give a slave."[74] Slaves even had the rights to appeal to the State and force their

sale to a new master because of physical cruelty and not being provided with enough food.

Because slaves were human, there were legal limits on the kinds of punishment and treatment

that a master could give a slave. Yet, the mistreatment of slaves was still rampant and occurred,

therefore the only recourse a slave had was to runaway and the evidence from ancient writings

indicates that this occurred regularly.[75]

"The traditional expectations were that masters would take advantage of their power

over their slaves and the slaves would respond with deceptiveness and lack of zeal for their

work."[76] This means that it was expected that mistreatment would occur and that slaves would

often respond by running away. However, running away for a slave was still against the law.

Thus, they were branded fugitives by the laws that governed the treatment and

punishment of runaways.[77] Some laws are so extreme that, for instance, allows the 'runaway

fugitive to be branded in the face for his/her acts. In addition, such slaves were forced to wear a

metal collar identifying him/her as a fugitive.[78]

Slave owners were confined to certain people or kinds of character and manumission or

emancipation for slaves was possible and occurred under certain conditions. As a dying will and

testament of a master, a slave was released or not freed based on performance. A slave could

also buy his or her freedom, more common for household slaves than agriculture slaves.[79]

Relationships and ties still remain between former slave and master. Some former slaves could

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[72] Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, 227.
[73] Ibid., 225.
[74] Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 203.
[75] Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, 227-228.
[76] Ibid., 229.
[77] Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, 27.

not stand independently and therefore remained in a dependent state to their former owners. Former owners on the other hand maintained certain rights to extracting financial benefit from their former slaves.[80] Therefore, those who had been freed never attained all the rights given to those born free. Freed slaves often continued serving in the same capacity, but no longer as a slave, but an employee. This is not true for all freed men as some of them buy their freedom and/or climb up the social ladder.

2.2 *The New Testament and Slavery:*

Slaves and slavery are mentioned frequently in the New Testament with its acceptance as a way of life. It is also used "as a metaphor, usually of the believer's relationship to God."[81] For example is Paul's use of the term δουλος in reference to his role and capacity as an indentured servant of God (Rom 1:1). Such use illustrates the common knowledge and understanding of the institution of slavery during the first century, that it becomes unheard of or even radical for anyone to challenge this institution by condemning it or calling for its abolition. Although a few references reflect a negative view of slavery, however the writers of the New Testament as a whole never condemned slavery as an institution.[82]

Paul did not come out-right and denounce the institution of slavery in his letters to Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians; instead, he subtly improved the harsher aspects of the existing institution. He first began with society as he found it, then he attempted not to attack the problem in the public sphere but rather to merge the morals and values of the Gospel into the structures of the Christian community and allowing the transformation to take place over time, while advocating for fair and equitable treatment of all members of the household, even if they play subordinate roles in the structure of the family.[83] In this manner, although Paul did not appear to denounce the institution, he advocated the reformation of the institution, which was clearly depicted in his Letter to Philemon. His appeal to Philemon was understood in this

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[78] Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 203.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, 235.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, 30.

study as a way to destigmatize the slave as a purified, transcendent, and transformed member of society. Onesimus was to be perceived and received as a 'brother in Christ'.

Paul held the firm understanding that true Christian living had the power to bring about transformation within the community, especially with regards to the patriarchal and slave structures that went against the moral and ethical cores of Christianity. The Christian community was to live out the new freedom they have obtained in Christ, which carried with it its social implications. Paul diligently worked for change within the newly established community of faith. In citing C. F. D. Moule, Witherington points out that

> Paul's principle that all Christians are created in the image of God and renewed in the image of Christ and are brothers and sisters in Christ led eventually to a situation where it became clear that slavery and Christianity, with the latter's views about human dignity and freedom and total availability to only one Master, were incompatible.[84]

In his letter to Philemon, in particular, Paul is seen to have tried to implement his fundamental beliefs about equality in Christ, which involved changing the social situation of the slave, Onesimus, where possible, and especially within the context of Philemon's house church.[85][80] This is the springboard upon which the exegesis and interpretation of Paul's Letter to Philemon is based. The changes that will be discussed and promoted in the next chapter looks at the issue of destigmatization of Onesimus from his former status as a slave to a freedman by way of his conversion as a fellow brother in the Christian faith.

[84] Witherington, *The letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians,* 30, citing C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 11-12.
[85] Witherington, *The letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians,* 30.

Chapter Three:

Charismatic Destigmatization of Onesimus

This chapter begins with a brief background of Paul's letter to Philemon. The purpose is

to establish the point of departure for this study's use of Warren's modes of destigmati- zation.

It will be followed by a brief discussion of the views by Scott Elliott[86] and Allan

Callahan.[87] These two scholars represent others who hold a different view about the intention

of Paul in his letter to Philemon and also the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon. The

last section addresses the charismatic destigmatization of Onesimus, the running away slave, in

the letter.

3.1 *Background of the Letter*:

The letter to Philemon is one of the seven authentic Pauline letters scholars agreed

upon.[88] It is the only personal letter that we know of from Paul's correspondences.[89]

Although the letter is clearly a personal one, I agree with James Dunn that there is a strong

contention that Paul was playing on the fact that the letter would be read out to all the members

of the church who normally gathered for worship at Philemon's house.[90]

The author was the apostle Paul. He wrote the briefest letter from either an Ephesian

prison or from a place in Ephesus where he was under house arrest[91] to his friend Philemon,

who was a resident of Colossae.[92] The aim of the letter is to persuade Philemon to accept

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[86] Scott S. Elliott, "'Thanks, but no Thanks': Tact, Persuasion, and the Negotiation of Power in Paul's Letter to Philemon," *New Testament Studies* 57 (2010): 51-64.

[87] Allen D. Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no 4 (1993): 357-376.

[88] Charles B. Cousar, *The Letters of Paul*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville, KY: Abingdon Press, 1996), 89-90; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 299-300.

[89] Ibid., 229.

[90] Ibid., 313.

[91] Ibid., 307-308. Dunn discusses three possible locations for Paul's imprisonment. These places include , Rome, and Ephesus. I agree with Dunn that Ephesus presents a stronger case due to its location being closer to Colossae. See also Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*, 198. She concludes that the issue about the location of Paul's imprisonment remains unresolved.

[92] Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 300.

Onesimus, a slave who not only ran away from Philemon (Philemon 15-16), but was also mentioned to have stolen something of his master's possessions (vv. 18-19), back into Philemon's household.[93]

Onesimus is presented as a slave who belongs to Philemon.[94] Even though slavery was part of the social life at the time of the letter, being called a slave is a stigma. It is not normal because it exhibits the fact that people like Onesimus are in the lower rank of their society. In addition, being a runaway slave is more serious. Thus, Onesimus has a double stigma. To be accepted back into Philemon's household, it requires substantial efforts by Onesimus himself, the apostle Paul, and also a receptive attitude of Philemon. Paul's letter to Philemon allows the reader to see his full use of all his personal circumstances i.e. status, experience, relationship, connection, and play of words to achieve what he wants. The main intention of the Book of Philemon is to make Philemon and others accept Onesimus, not as a slave but as a free man.

3.2 Literature Review

The intention here is to briefly highlight Scott's take on the intention of the letter to Philemon and also Callahan's reading of the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon. These scholars represent the many scholarly interpretations that this study cannot accommodate due to its longevity. However, there are numerous valuable perspectives that have come out of the shortest letter Paul has written regarding, Onesimus, a runaway slave.

Elliott begins with a different point of departure. Onesimus did not seek Paul while in prison. He was sent to Paul by Philemon; a gift of the latter, a slave owner, to the former. In Elliot's term this was not an unusual practice in those days.[95] A slave owner had the right and

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[93] Elliott, "'Thanks, but no Thanks'," 52; also Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 241.

[94] Scholars are divided on whether Onesimus was a real slave. I agree with Church Fathers like John Chrysostom and scholars like James Dunn, Marion Thompson, Ben Witherington and others who interpret Phlm 16 as a reference to Onesimus being a real slave. For a counter argument, see Allen D. Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon," 357-376. Callahan argues that Onesimus and Philemon were brothers whose familial relationship was strained at the time. He also argues that the term 'slave' in Plmn 16 should be understood sociologically as a state of "natal alienation" (p. 370).

[95] Elliot, "Thanks, but no Thanks," 52-53.

freedom to gift a slave to a close friend. Elliott supports his reading by referring to the fact that the arrival of Onesimus at the place Paul was imprisoned is not mentioned. It is, therefore, likely that Philemon knew about Onesimus' trip.[96] For Elliott, the sending of Onesimus as a gift by Philemon to Paul and the return of Onesimus by the latter to the former is an indication that Paul did not buy into Philemon's act of patronage. If these instances were the case, as Elliott assumes, they completely change the nature of the letter. While this study upholds the traditional reading that the intention of the letter is for Philemon to accept Onesimus, the runaway slave, back into his household, Elliott perceives it differently. Thus, his reading focuses on the persuasive use of rhetoric that Paul employs to address what Elliott terms the 'power struggle' between Paul and Philemon.[97]

In terms of Paul's refusal to accept Philemon's act of patronage, Elliott proposes an interesting interpretation of vss 10 and 11. The phrase παρακαλῶ σε περὶ should not be understood as an appeal on behalf of Onesimus. Rather, as Elliott argues, there is no appeal indicated in the phrase. It refers to what Philemon should have rightly done. Elliott writes:

> Exactly 'what is fitting' is not stated, however. Philemon, in his turn, had done what he had thought was appropriate: namely, he had attempted to adopt the role of Paul's patron by offering his slave, Onesimus, for Paul's service. However, whether Paul deemed Philemon's actions appropriate remains to be seen. In sending Onesimus back, Paul implies that something inappropriate was done.[98]

Thus, in vs 10, Paul is not appealing concerning Onesimus. Instead, the phrase (I am appealing to you concerning) 'he wrote' implies to Elliott that it is about Paul's refusal to accept Philemon's patronage act.

In vs 11, Paul refers to Onesimus being 'useless' to Philemon before but he has been useful to both of them after associating with Paul. This study takes this to mean that Onesimus was not a good slave prior to the time he met Paul, but he has been viewed useful after that. To Elliott, that is not the case. Commenting on the two meanings, 'unprofitable' and 'useless', of ἄχρηστον (useless), Elliott suggests that Onesimus was worthless to Philemon. "[I]t did not

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[96] Ibid., 53.
[97] Ibid., 51.
[98] Ibid., 57.

really cost Philemon anything to give him away."[99] In its second meaning, 'ineffective', Onesimus was an unsuccessful means of a gift. That is, "[h]e was not successful in becoming the sign of Philemon's patronage toward Paul."[100] Thus, Onesimus' **useless' status** refers not to his being the runaway slave, the runaway slave understanding but to his intriguing position as a gift.

Furthermore, Elliot offers a different interpretation of εὔχρηστον (useful) in vs 11. He argues that the proper interpretation of εὔχρηστον refers to two things. Firstly, Onesimus is 'useful' because he has returned to Philemon with Paul's letter. Secondly, Onesimus' usefulness for Philemon would be realized once the former assumed his duties as a slave in his master's household.

The interpretations of 'useless' and 'useful' helps the reader to grasp Elliott's far-reaching reading of the letter as Onesimus' as Philemon's gift to serve Paul's needs. He shifts the intention of the letter from Paul's appeals to Philemon for Onesimus' acceptance to a power struggle between Paul and Philemon where Onesimus becomes the victim. It is a reading that I find it hard to accommodate despite its convincing case.

The other argument worth mentioning here is by Callahan.[101] He argues that Onesimus is not a slave, not even a runaway slave but the very brother of Philemon. He begins by refuting the runaway theory. Callahan writes, "[t]he exegetical consensus holds that Onesimus is a fugitive, yet there are no verbs of flight in the entire epistle. Nor is any rational offered in the text for Onesimus's irregular departure."[102]

Callahan offers a different proposal because of these reasons mentioned previously. He argues that Onesimus and Philemon are brothers.[103] He supports his thesis by discussing familial terms Paul has used, followed with a discussion of Paul's paternalistic attitude towards Philemon and Paul's determination for Philemon to mend his relationship with Onesimus. One of the terms vital to Callahan's argument is the adverb ὡς (as) in vs 16. He argues that ὡς is the

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[99] Ibid., 58.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon," 357-376.
[102] Ibid., 358.

most important word in the verse, not the word 'slave' as many scholars think it is. He goes on

to say that ὡς should be interpreted to mean that Onesimus is a virtual slave.[104] In other words,

Onesimus is not a real but a virtual slave. To Callahan, the term slave is to be understood as

"the antitype of a blood relative"[105] as it was the understanding, according to Callahan, in

Paul's times.[106] Slavery, therefore, as Callahan argues can be interpreted as "being a state of

'natal alienation'."[107] In the case of Onesimus, being called a slave in Callahan's reconstruction,

it shows that he has been severed of all blood ties from Philemon. Thus is the intention of Paul

in his letter to Philemon, to reconcile the two brothers. Even though convincing to a certain

degree, I concur with scholars who maintain that Onesimus was Philemon's slave in the original

meaning of the term.

3.3 *Labels in the Letter*

Returning to the study of Paul's letter to Philemon regarding Onesimus the runaway

slave, though the letter is quite short, it contains numerous labels, both positive and negative.

These include positive labels like 'brother' (vs 1), 'friend' (vs 1), 'co-worker' (vs 1), 'sister'

(vs 1), 'fellow soldier' (vs 1), 'saints' (vs 5), 'old man' (vs 9), 'my child' (vs 10), 'beloved

brother' (vs 16), 'partner' (vs 17) and others.

There are two notable negative labels and these are 'prisoner' (vs 1)/'fellow prisoner'

(vs 23) and 'slave' (vs 16). These two negative labels and their meanings in the text highlight

the stigma these labels bear on those being stigmatized.

(a) **'prisoner'**: The introduction of this letter is different from all other Pauline letters.

This is the only letter that Paul uses the word δέσμιος (prisoner) instead of the usual term

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[103] Ibid., 369-370.
[104] Ibid., 362-363.
[105] Ibid., 370.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

ἀπόστολος (apostle) he has used in his other authentic letters[108] to introduce himself (Philemon1). It indicates that the use of the term 'prisoner' serves as an introduction not only or he writer but for the intention about the main stigmatized character of the letter, Onesimus. The term 'prisoner' links up the introduction to the whole body of the letter.[109]

The meaning of the Greek word δέσμιος is to bind or to be imprisoned. Its root comes from the verb δεω, to tie or to bind.[110] In describing himself as a 'prisoner' follow by the genitive 'of Christ Jesus', various suggestion have been proposed. Murray Harris takes this combination as an indication of a 'multiple relationship'.[111] Hence, genitive 'of Christ Jesus' implies Paul being possessed, his imprisonment is for the sake of Christ's ministry as well as the cause of it.[112] Dunn notes that the combination of 'prisoner' with 'of Christ Jesus' refers primarily to Paul's "current physical imprisonment" and secondary as a theme that would occur more often in the letter.[113] Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke rightly suggest that the use of 'prisoner' with 'of Christ Jesus' indicate Paul's worldview where Paul believes that every step of the service he is rendering for the Gospels comes under the transformed creation of Christ Jesus.[114]

The last interpretation is important to the argument of this study. A 'prisoner' is a person who has somehow lost his/her freedom. A prisoner is a stigmatized person. These notions about a prisoner are similar to a slave. He or she is a stigmatized person who has no complete freedom compared to an ordinary normal person.

By joining together his imprisoned situation with 'of Christ Jesus', Paul is implying his

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[108] Paul uses the term 'apostle' to introduce himself in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. In the letter to the Philippians, he uses the term 'servant'. He uses neither in his letter to the Thessalonians.

[109] Barth and Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon,* 243-244; also Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 310-311.

[110] F. Staudinger, "δεσμος," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament,* edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdermans, 1978-1980), 1:289

[111] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon,* 244.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 310-311.

[114] Barth and Blanke, *The Letter to Philem,* 246-247.

close association with Onesimus, even before he sets out to reveal to Philemon and others in his house church the main ingredient of his letter. In Warren's destigmatization proposal, we can read this combination as an example of 'aristocratization and collectivities' in a reversal manner. Paul introduces himself a prisoner so he would identify with Onesimus, the runaway slave.

(b) 'slave': As mentioned earlier, Onesimus was a runaway slave who ended up associating with Paul in Ephesus. Onesimus had already being stigmatized as a slave prior to his having contact with Paul. However, the severity of the issue is the fact that he has ran away from Philemon, who is presumably his master. This later issue brings a severe form of stigma upon Onesimus. A runaway slave would have been punished quite severely when he/she is returned to his/her master.[115]

We are not told when and how Onesimus ended up with Paul. What we infer from the letter itself is that Paul appeals to Philemon not to punish Onesimus. In addition, the association between Paul and Onesimus developed into a mutual one whereby the latter was converted to the Christian faith. Here we begin to see traits of destigmatization Warren has proposed which we now turn to.

3.4 Warren's Destigmatization of Identity:

Warren's three modes: Purification, Transcendence, and Aristocratization will guide the exegesis of Philemon to illustrate Onesimus, the ruaway slave being destigmatized in the story.

(a) Purification:

Purification involves the notion of rebirth which is based on two fronts. One is sacred while the other is secular.[116] Being reborn refers to a new fresh start, to be transformed from an older moral self to a new one. Purification refers to the stigmatized person being absconded of

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[115] Perry V. Kea, "Paul's Letter to Philemon: A Short Analysis of its Values," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 23, no 2 (1996): 224.

[116] Refer to page 12-13 where the secular and sacred modes of purification are discussed.

his/her stigma. It is the process whereby the stigmatized individual has to undergo in order to be

accepted back to a rightful fellowship within his community.[117]

In the case of Onesimus, there is no direct mention of the runaway slave being purified

or expunging himself of his stigmatized image. The information about Onesimus we know

comes from Paul's direct words to Philemon. It begins in verse 10 and ends in verse 20. It is

from here that the exegesis of the passage is based.

In vs 10, Paul calls Onesimus 'my child' and himself the 'father' in the NRSV

translation. However, there is no Greek word for the term 'father' but the translation of the

Greek ἐγέννησα[118] requires the English word 'father' to be used. Thus, we have in vs 10 the

literal translation of ἐγέννησα as 'I gave birth'. This translation of the Greek may have led

the translators of the NRSV to use the term 'father'. Regarding the interpretation of

ἐγέννησα here, Moule states that "this metaphor of fatherhood" indicates that Paul is

fathering a convert.[119] In addition, I concur with Ben Witherington that "[f]rom the outset of

v.10, Paul lays his own personal claim on Onesimus. Onesimus is his child, whom Paul begat

in chains. The image of a slave and a high status Roman citizen who was nonetheless a prisoner

in chains becoming spiritual father and child is meant to both surprise and move the

audience."[120]

By claiming Onesimus as his child, Paul speaks like a person with authority to intervene

on behalf of his child in faith. He stresses the fact that his child has been purified and cleansed

of his former inequities as a 'runaway slave' to the new status of his (Paul's) child. This new

relationship between Paul and Onesimus recalls to mind Paul's relationship to Philemon, the

former is the spiritual father of the latter. Also, the order Paul used in writing the sentence in

Greek illustrates that before he provides the name (Onesimus), he delicately makes it clear to

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[117] Refer to page 12.

[118] ἐγέννησα is the first person singular, aorist active indicative of γυνάω. It means to beget, generate, or to bring forth. See also Hermann Büchsel, "ἐγέννησα," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testamsent*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns, 1968-1976), 1:665.

[119] C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Colosians and to Philemon*, Reprint (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1958), 144.

[120] Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, 67.

Philemon the new status of Onesimus as that of τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου (my child).[121]

The word τέκνου(child) in v.10 conveys a similar meaning of a child or son in virtue of discipleship.[122] The use of the word 'child' indicates the personal and intimate relationship that now exists between Paul and Onesimus. It is that of a father and child.

We can therefore assume that Paul converted Onesimus to the faith in Christ Jesus.[123] This must have taken place sometime before the letter was written otherwise Paul would not have called him his child. Clearly, Onesimus had become a child of Paul through conversion into the Christian faith, not through parentage. The process of converting to become a Christian was initiated with baptism to purify. It did not necessarily mean to be reborn in the physical sense. "Baptism is performed in connection with the removal of guilt, cleansing and the granting of a new start."[124] Therefore the basis of their new found relationship was based on Onesimus' conversion through purification from the 'runaway slave' to the Christian child that he is now becoming. This is what Warren calls purification in the sacred sense.

In the secular sense of purification, Warren points out that a stigmatized person is required to do more than normal works. I find that meaning in vs 11. Onesimus is mentioned in vs 11 to be a useless slave to Philemon. This is a serious stigma. But he has now become 'useful' to both Paul and Philemon, a form of charismatic destigmatization. The word εὔχρηστον (useful) means "highly useful or very profitable."[125] The new change from being useless to being useful as Paul has referred to indicates that Onesimus was once a "useless, unprofitable or causing loss"[126] in the past. In the present, he has made a turning point and would become useful and very profitable. Thus, Onesimus has catapulted from one extreme to the other. This is what Warren calls a 'charismatic destigmatization' through the secular notion of purification.

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[121] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 261.
[122] William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 446. The same meaning can be seen in 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1: 2; Titus 1:4; and 3 John 4.
[123] Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon*, 328.
[124] D S Dockery, "Baptism," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 55.
[125] Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, 228.
[126] Ibid., 110.

Also, the use of ἄχρηστον (useless) and εὔχρηστον (useful) is a play of word according to A. A. Rupprecht. He suggests that the two terms sounded similar to the word 'Christos'.[127] This implies that the play on word is interesting, it shows that the purification process that Onesimus has gone through is thorough and complete in the sense that it sounds Christ-like, since the letter is most likely being read aloud, this pun conjures the image that Onesimus is not only the child of Paul but is no longer a 'useless' slave, but a 'useful' Christian.

Paul has not only labeled Onesimus 'useful' in v.11, he has also labeled him 'my own heart' in v.12. The phrase 'my own heart' has been translated from the Greek word σπλάγχνα which literally means an 'inward parts' of a person. The word can also mean a 'sacrifice itself'.[128] Furthermore, the word 'inward part' in later Jewish writing refers to 'a seat of feeling', 'unbearable sorrow came upon him in his inward part.'[129] This is an important connotation of σπλάγχνα. It shows that Paul was deeply moved by Onesimus' presence, conversion, and their fellowship. In other words, Paul has become mutually attached to Onesimus as a father to a child, that his reference to him being sent back to Philemon infers that no harm should befall him, for he is returning not as the 'runaway slave' that left Philemon, but as a new child in Christ. In other words, Onesimus has been purified of his past inequities and cleansed by the sacrificial effort of Paul. It also reminds us of the cleansing effected by the sacrificial blood of Christ which Onesimus has now enjoyed through his conversion to the Christian faith. Onesimus' situation in Paul's eyes is a good example of a person who has done more than enough to warrant his destigmatization.

(b) Transcendence:

In the letter, Onesimus is a slave and remains a slave at the end of the letter. Paul does not intend to change that. Transcendence involves an effort by the stigmatized person to show others that he has changed from being bad to a better person. In Onesimus' situation, he left

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[127] Rupprecht, "Slave, Slavery," 882.

[128] Helmut Koster, "σπλάγχνα," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns, 1968-1976), 7:548.

[129] Ibid., 550.

Philemon and resided with Paul. There Onesimus has served Paul to such an extent that he is known to be useful to the apostle and would be also useful to Philemon.

In vs 16, we find that Paul uses terms that I consider to be quite relevant to Onesimus' destigmatization in the transcendence mode. It begins with the phrase ὑπὲρ δοῦλον (more than a slave). The term ὑπὲρ means 'over' or 'above' and is used metaphorically of what "excels or surpasses."[130] It means that Onesimus should no longer be viewed as a slave. He should be viewed as someone over and above a slave, as someone who surpasses and exceeds those actions and qualities of a slave.

The next is the phrase ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (beloved brother). Paul appeals to Philemon to consider Onesimus as a 'beloved brother'. This is the new vision and version of Onesimus that Philemon should put above that of a 'slave'. Furthermore, Paul's statement is emphatic. This is realized in the use of the term οὐκέτι (no longer), which means 'no longer as'. This term implies that the former condition of Onesimus must be replaced with his new situation.[131] Therefore, showing that Paul wants Philemon and his house church to understand that Onesimus has transcended his former stigmatized/tarnished image to that of someone on equal footing and status as them, Onesimus should no longer be viewed as a runaway slave but a 'beloved brother', an ordinary useful slave.

According to Warren, transcendence "involves not the erasure of the previous self but the expression of an alternative better self."[132] Onesimus was a slave who ran away from Philemon. He was useless to Philemon but on his return he became a useful slave.

(c) Aristocratization and Collectivities:

Destigmatization through aristocratization and collectivities takes place when a stigmatized person joins a deviant group where he/she finds a sense of belonging. It also is a move to be with people like him or her to challenge the status quo.

We are not directly told as to why Onesimus went to Paul. However, we can infer that

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[130] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 267.
[131] Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon*, 79.
[132] Warren, "Destigmatization of Identity," 64.

Onesimus sought out Paul's assistance because he has committed some wrongdoing.[133]

However, I read Paul's use of δέσμιος (prisoner) in vs 1 as a hint to this destigmatization

reading. That is to say, by being a slave Onesimus can easily identify with Paul. Therefore, he

sought out Paul because they are of the same social situation. They are both slaves. Onesimus

might have rightly entertained the possibility that he would be well received by Paul. Not only

that he was well received by the apostle, Onesimus was turned into a better, useful person. The

appeal by Paul on behalf of Onesimus, the runaway slave, has a strong impact because they are

both stigmatized ones.

In verses 17-19, Paul makes his final plea to Philemon to accept Onesimus into this new

group and new label of 'beloved brother' in Christ. In verse 17 Paul uses the phrase

προσλαβοῦ αὐτόν ὡς ἐμέ (receive him as me). It simply means accept Onesimus in to your

fellowship.[134] In others words, it means that Philemon should consider Onesimus to be 'a

partner', which is more than mere friendship. Here, Paul's association of Onesimus with the

house church community and its leader Philemon illustrate the process of aristocratization

and collectivities. Although the letter is addressed to Philemon, it was meant to be read

before the faithful who who were gathering at his house. Therefore, the appeal on behalf of

Onesimus would be known to all the members of the house church including Philemon,

Apphia, Achippus, and others.

Furthermore, Paul realizes that before full acceptance of Onesimus into the Christian

household, there is still a matter of repayment, ὀφείλει (debt), in verse 18 that must be

addressed. Paul cleverly disguises the unmentioned accusations that Philemon and the church

community must have held in regards to Onesimus' actions. Paul not only mentions the act, but

tactfully mentions it in the form of a rhetorical question. "If he has wronged you in any way ..."

(vs 18); it indicates that Paul does not want them to dwell on the past situation, but opens it up

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[133] Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 301-302.

[134] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon,* 272.

for not just Onesimus' wrong doings to Philemon, but to the whole community, so that all their accounts can be settled and there would not be a soul to hold anything against Onesimus, preventing his participation in the house church community.

In verse 19, we find Paul's "promissory note"[135] to repay all the debts of Onesimus to Philemon and to the house church community. However, it comes with a twist as Paul reminds them of their debt to him, which he is not demanding, but subliminally puts it out there for the house church community and Philemon to ponder. By doing so, Paul's rephrasing of words, reverses the destigmatization process and puts them on the offensive, for they too owe much to Paul. By playing with the term προσοφείλεις (owe), he categorizes them all into this special group that owes him much, but more importantly as the letter ends, whom all owe God much. Thus, Philemon and the house church are in the same boat as Onesimus, as part of this special group of believers, faith community, that owes much to God. By concluding his argument for Onesimus in this manner, I contend that the destigmatization mode of aristocratization and collectivities is realized. That is, Onesimus, Philemon, and members of the house church become a special group of believers under the same label, believers and workers of the Christ Jesus.

In summary, in the letter to Philemon we see the process of destigmatization taking place for Onesimus. The former runaway slave has been converted a Christian. He was to be accepted into the community of believers despite his former stigmatized characterization. Although it is not an obvious reading, I hope I have shown how this destigmatization reading enriched the interpretation of this letter.

Through Onesimus, we see a stigmatized person's return, being transformed and restored to his newly established status, acceptable to the eyes of the community of believers. In purification, Onesimus becomes a charismatic person by his actions which were highly praised by Paul. Onesimus is being offered back as an asset, not a debt, to Philemon. In the transcendence mode, Onesimus becomes more than a slave, a beloved brother because of his

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[135] Ibid., 273.

service to Paul. In the aristocratization and collectivities mode, Onesimus becomes a member of

the 'beloved ones, those whom Paul shares his love with. They are the collective group

that should share the same love that initiate and effected Paul's ministry – the love of Christ

Jesus.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this study I will firstly discuss the importance of destigmatization in the evangelization and promotion of the Gospel. Secondly, how Paul's letter to Philemon brings together the three modes of purification, transcendence, and aristocratization into an orderly process by which to make destigmatization a reality; and finally the need for destigmatization in the preaching ministry of the CCCS.

4.1 The need for destigmatization:

As I have discussed thus far, the idea of labeling is crucial to the acceptance of people or a group within the community and society at large. Positively or negatively, labels play an important role in how people and/or ideas are perceived. The acceptance of a way of life and or practice is important in the promotion of the Gospel of Christ. For this reason, it is important that the label placed upon the Gospel is positive, however, once the label is given a negative connotation because of the actions and practices of those within the group, then

destigmatization is strongly needed to ensure the well-being and future of the Gospel.

According to Warren the process by which to promote and ensure the destigmatization of an individual or group relies on the purification, transcendence, and aristocratization of that individual or group; which I have attempted to show in Paul's letter to Philemon.

4.2 Destigmatization in practice:

In the letter to Philemon, Paul has made known to Philemon and the members of his house church that Onesimus has become useful, he is no longer the useless slave as he was before. In Warren's charismatic destigmatization reading, Onesimus has been destigmatized charismatically through his association with Paul. This is important in our relationship with others that are being stigmatized. We need to help them change their stigma. One way of

achieving that is to offer our help and change our perception about those people whom we label as stigmatized.

Secondly, the transcendence process from a slave to being more than a slave, a beloved brother, requires a huge commitment by the stigmatized person to change other people's perception. A stigmatized person must show others that he/she has changed. It requires hard work and full commitment in order for the stigmatized person to alter the community's view about him/her. It can be done as Onesimus has done. He changes Paul's perception about him; and Paul has appealed to Philemon and others for the change of view about Onesimus.

Finally, through aristocratization, Paul was able to ingratiate Onesimus into the community through the use of the term ὀφείλει (debt). We are in debt to one another because we are relational beings. We are also in debt to Warren and Paul for showing us the way to destigmatize others. The term debt in the letter does not only refer to possessions, it also conveys the spiritual life of the community that it owes to Paul. This placed the house church community on par with Onesimus and made them all servants, whether slaves or freed people, of Christ and God.

4.3 Preaching destigmatization in the CCCS ministry:

In a pastoral situation, remembering the charismatic destigmatization reading of Philemon that I have proposed, a person suffering a sense of stigma, whether that stigma is real or not, whether it is deserved or not, can be offered the opportunity to recognise that Onesimus too was stigmatized. But through the work of Paul, Philemon and the members of his house church, that sense of stigma was removed, enabling him to return and continue to serve Philemon in his capacity as a redeemed slave or brother. Such persons can be offered prayerful occasions that may enable them more fully to understand the work of God's grace in the process of their destigmatization.

The church can also use this kind of reading to provide comfort, for example, through preaching or through workshops for people who either are, or fear that they or member of their family could be, stigmatized. The implications for chaplains, specifically prison chaplains, are enormous. Likewise, in some cultures, even disabled people are stigmatized, a situation where the Church has an obligation to develop programmes which help those in their congregations with stigmas to understand that within the Christian community they can be destigmatized through the work of others and the grace of God. Likewise, programmes should be developed to help all Christians understand the nature of stigma, the effects it has on those stigmatized and their obligation under God to try to avoid stigmatizing their fellow human beings.

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