

Heart Attitude,  
Freedom, and  
Perceived Glory

and the Nature  
of Laughter in  
Scripture

THEODORE WOLFGANG SLATER

©1996  
Theodore Wolfgang Slater  
slater@mindspring.com  
All Rights Reserved

Slater, R. (1985). *Noah Webster's first edition of an American dictionary of the English language*. San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education. (Original work published 1828).

Trueblood, E. (1964). *The humor of Christ*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Vine, W.E. (1981). Old Testament edited by E.F. Bruce. *Vine's expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company.

Wells, M. (1982). *Implicit frame crashing: A comprehensive psychological theory of humor and its application to a psychotherapy model*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, Fresno.

White, C. & Howse, E. (1993). Managing humor: When is it funny — and when is it not? *Nursing Management*. 24 (4), 80-96.

Winslow, O.E. (Ed.). (1966). *Jonathan Edwards: Basic writings*. New York: The New American Library.

Wooten, P. (1994). *Heart, humor and healing*. Sacramento, CA: Commune-a-key Publishing.

Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (1983). Uses and effects of humor in educational ventures. In P.E. McGhee and J.H. Goldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of humor research: Applied studies of humor* (Vol. 2, pp. 173-193). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Zillmann, D., & Cantor, J.R. (1976). A disposition theory of humour and mirth. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 93-116). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Ziv, A. (1984). *Personality and sense of humor*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Abstract .....   | 5  |
| Dedication and Acknowledgments .....   | 5  |
| List of Figures .....  | 5  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction of the Problem .....                                       | 7  |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....   | 9  |
| The Philosophical Approach to Laughter .....                                       | 9  |
| Incongruity Theory .....   | 9  |
| Superiority Theory .....   | 11 |
| Relief Theory .....  | 12 |
| Concluding Remarks Regarding these Theories .....                                  | 14 |
| Scientific Findings .....  | 14 |
| Humorous Communication and Interpersonal Needs .....                               | 15 |
| Inclusion (and Exclusion) .....  | 15 |
| Affection (and Repulsion) .....  | 16 |
| Control (and Lack Thereof) .....   | 17 |
| Summary .....  | 19 |
| Chapter 3: An Innovative Model Describing the Dynamics of Laughter in Scripture .. | 21 |
| People Possess an Instinctive Drive for Glory .....                                | 21 |
| “Up” and “Down” .....  | 22 |
| “Up” is Associated with Levity and Laughter .....                                  | 23 |
| Definition of Terms: Glory, Shame, Pride, Humility .....                           | 24 |
| Glory: Positive Essential Worth .....  | 24 |
| Shame: Glory's Antithesis .....  | 26 |
| The Glory-Shame Continuum .....  | 27 |
| Humility: Selfless, Assertive, Serving Heart Attitude .....                        | 28 |
| Pride: Self-Lifting Heart Attitude .....   | 31 |
| The Humility-Pride Continuum .....   | 32 |
| Freedom Interfaces Humility-Pride and Glory-Shame Continua .....                   | 32 |
| Pride Provides a Sense of Glory .....  | 34 |
| Humility Precedes True Glory .....   | 35 |
| Summary .....  | 37 |
| Chapter 4: Scripture Reviewed in Terms of the Proposed Model of Laughter .....     | 39 |
| The Use of Scripture in this Thesis .....  | 40 |
| A Definition of Laughter .....   | 40 |
| God's Laughter .....   | 41 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Animals' Laughter .....                                   | 45 |
| People's Laughter .....                                   | 47 |
| Good Laughter Tends Toward Glory .....                    | 48 |
| Prophetic Laughter is Redemptive .....                    | 51 |
| Bad Laughter Tends Toward Shame .....                     | 55 |
| David Laughs Freely Before the Liberated Ark .....        | 67 |
| Isaac, the Son of the Free Woman, Embodies Laughter ..... | 70 |
| The Body Does Funny Things to Get a Laugh .....           | 75 |
| Summary .....   | 80 |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter 5: Discussion .....                               | 81 |
| God's Laughter .....                                      | 81 |
| Animals' Laughter .....                                   | 81 |
| Human's Laughter .....                                    | 82 |
| Good Non-derisive Laughter .....                          | 83 |
| Good Derisive Laughter .....                              | 84 |
| Bad Laughter .....  | 85 |
| Discussion and Conclusions .....                          | 86 |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter 6: Suggestions for Further Research .....         | 89 |
| The Ethics of Laughter .....                              | 89 |
| Other Suggestions .....                                   | 92 |
| Conclusion .....  | 94 |
| <br>  |    |
| References .....  | 95 |

classroom VI: Verbal control strategies, nonverbal immediacy and affective learning. *Communication Education*, 35, 43-55.

Pollio, D.E. (1995) Use of humor in crisis intervention. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 76 (6), pp. 376-384.

Raskin, V. (1987). The interdisciplinary field of humor research. *Semiotica*, 66(4), 441-449.

Reitz, R. (1991). *Notes toward understanding the use of humor to communicate Christian messages*. Unpublished master's thesis, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.

Richmond, V.P., Gorham, J.S. & McCroskey, J.C. (1987). The relationship between selected immediacy behaviors and cognitive learning. In M. McLaughlin (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 10* (pp. 574-590). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rothbart, M.K. (1976). Incongruity, problem-solving and laughter. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 37-54). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Ruch, W. (1993). Introduction: Current issues in psychological humor research. *Humor*, 6(1), 1-7.

Russell, O.W. (1977). *Humor in Pascal: An examination of the comic humor of the French philosopher Pascal*. North Quincy, MA: The Christopher Publishing House.

Schaeffer, F.A. (1968). *The God Who is there*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Schutz, W. (1960). *The interpersonal underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, Inc.

Scott, C.A.A. (1927). *Christianity according to St. Paul*. Cambridge: University Press.

Shultz, T.R. (1976) A cognitive-developmental analysis of humour. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 11-36). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.

- Macdonald, M.H., & Tadie, A.A. (Eds.). (1989). *G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis: The riddle of joy*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Marlin, G.J., Rabatin, R.P., & Swan, J.L. (Eds.). (1986). *The quotable Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1988). *More quotable Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- McGhee, P.E. (1979). *Humor: Its origin and development*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman and Company.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1989). *Humor and children's development: A guide to practical applications*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Morreall, J. (1983). *Taking laughter seriously*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Morreall, J. (Ed.). (1987). *The philosophy of laughter and humor*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Murray, A. (1951). *Humility: The beauty of holiness*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- Nerhardt, G. (1976). Incongruity and funniness: Towards a new descriptive model. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 55-62). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Newman, C.C. (1992). *Paul's Glory-Christology*. New York: E.J. Brill.
- Onions, C.T. (Ed.). (1979). *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pascal, B. (1660). *Pensees* (W.F. Trotter, Trans.). Internet <gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/130/2>.
- Pasquali, E.A. (1990). Learning to laugh: Humor as therapy. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, 28, 31-35.
- Plax, T.G., Kearney, P., McCroskey, J.C., & Richmond, V.P. (1986). Power in the

## Abstract

While innumerable scholars have contributed much to an understanding of the processes that facilitate laughter, no such study was found which systematically and exhaustively analyzes Scriptural occurrences of this quirky communication phenomenon. This thesis categorizes laughter according to who produced it — God, animals, and people — and examines the dynamics of humility, pride, glory, and shame in relation to that laughter. These characteristics, best conceptualized as endpoints in the continua of humility-pride and glory-shame, were found to be instrumental in understanding this form of communication. It was further found that freedom — extended through graceful forgiveness or taken through disregard for the Laws of God or societal etiquette — was the mechanism that spurred one on to a sense of glory, a state in which laughter bubbles forth. A proposed model innovatively depicts the interactions of these diverse variables. This thesis goes on to explain that a sense of glory — that state in which one is enabled to laugh — is rooted in either humble and prideful heart attitudes; by identifying the predominant quality present in one's laughter it becomes possible to judge laughter as either virtuous or vicious.

## Dedications

To my Lord: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight" (Ps. 19:14). Ah, even more than acceptable, "Let my meditation be pleasing to You. As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord" (Ps. 104:34). You have shown me that Your lovingkindness is truly better than life. Thank You, Father, for remaining faithful to me in my unfaithfulness, for showing me how exalted, how lifted up, how glorious You are, and for emphasizing to me the importance of humility. When we finally see each other face to face we can laugh together about how seriously I took this burdensome thesis.

To my parents: I appreciate your supporting me through this time, including financially and with your prayers. Even though we haven't been able to spend much time together since I left Michigan to study here at Regent University, I've come to see how giving you have been and continue to be. I love each of you.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of more than a year of struggle with the nature of laughter. During that time I received direction from the Author and authors of the various texts I reference, from friends who provided valuable feedback, from my pastors and their sermons, and from my thesis advisers. Without their help, this work would not have been completed. I am indebted to them. Special thanks to Candice Zouhary for her close and critical read of a nearly-final draft.

- Kinser, M. (1980). *The self-image of a Christian: Humility and self-esteem*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books.
- Kittel, G. (Ed.). (1978). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Klein, E. (1971). *A comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language*. New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company.
- Koch, K. (1972). *The rediscovery of apocalyptic: A polemical work on a neglected area of biblical studies and its damaging effects on theology and philosophy*. London: SCM.
- L'Estrange, A.G. (1970). *History of English humour with an introduction upon ancient humour*. New York: Burt Franklin. (Original work published 1878)
- La Fave, L., Haddad, J., & Maesen, W.A. (1976). Superiority, enhanced self-esteem, and perceived incongruity humour theory. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 63-92). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Law, W. *A serious call to a devout and holy life*. Internet <[http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/law/a\\_serious\\_call/serious\\_call1.0.pdf](http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/law/a_serious_call/serious_call1.0.pdf)>
- Lea, F.A. (1947). G.K. Chesterton. In D. Attwater (Ed.), *Modern Christian revolutionaries* (pp. 89-157). New York: Devin-Adair Company.
- Lefcourt, H.M. (1982). *Locus of control: Current trends in theory and research (2nd ed.)*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1992). Durability and impact of the locus of control construct. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(3), pp. 411-416.
- Lefcourt, H.M. & Martin, R.A. (1986). *Humor and life stress: Antidote to adversity*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Lewis, C.S. (1944). *The Screwtape letters*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Lewis, C.S. (1955). *Surprised by joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Luvall, D.O. (1987). *Humor: A critique of current theories and research*.

Jones, J.M. & Liverpool, H.V. (1976). Calypso humour in Trinidad. In A.J. Chapman & H.C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 259-286). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Jónsson, J. (1985). *Humour and irony in the New Testament*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill.

Kaplan, R.M. & Pascoe, G.C. (1977). Humorous lectures and humorous examples: Some effects upon comprehension and retention. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69, 61-65.

Keil, C.F. & Delitzsch, F. (1984a). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984b). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984c). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 3* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984d). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 4* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984e). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 5* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984f). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 6* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984g). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 7* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

\_\_\_\_\_. (1984h). *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 8* (J. Martin, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Original work published 1860.)

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

Scholars have for centuries eloquently described laughter, what causes it, and what it accomplishes. They have shattered its relative, humor, into bite-sized shards, labeling the pieces such things as wit, sarcasm, joke, pun, comedy, and irony. Others have swept up these fragments, erecting comprehensive models. Scholarly and unscholarly alike have published their findings regarding this most elusive of communication phenomena. Those with a faith in God and those with no faith have addressed it. University students who perform keyword searches on their library's computer system soon discover that there is a glut of valuable literature on the subject.

Apparently absent from the fray, however, is an approach that systematically and comprehensively maintains Scripture as its foundation. Of course, Christian writers have included verses and biblical concepts and illustrations to support their contentions, and the value of their works is not trifling. While considering what they and the non-Christian scholarly community have discovered about laughter, the focus of this work will be on Scriptural grist, which reveals strong relationships between laughter and humility, glory, pride, and shame. This work investigates those relationships, innovatively proposing that the mechanism which provides the key to understanding it all is freedom — freedom in the form of forgiveness or freedom in the form of a disregard for God's Law or the etiquette of society.

Researchers have struggled to answer the question, "What is humor?" This thesis rephrases the question into, "What causes the figurative 'humors' of the body to jostle such that laughter occurs?" The communicative process characterized by laughter is not static, and so one should focus on addressing an action (jostle) rather than a thing (humor). This discussion of laughter is made more sensible when such fundamental terms as "humor" are clearly explained up front. For the purposes of this study, then, "humor" metaphorically recollects the ancients' definition: the humors are the squishy liquids in the body which, when out of balance with each other — speaking symbolically now — cause the body to behave erratically. As Webster's *1828 Dictionary* states in its definition of humor, "the temper of mind has been supposed to depend on the fluids of the body" (Slater, 1985, vol. 2, p. 103b). This wetness associated with humor is seen in some modern terms, including "aqueous humors," the watery fluids of the eye.

*Humor*, etymologically, is strongly related to fluid, moisture, sprinkling, wetness, and freshness (Klein, 1971, p. 356). While it may seem related to *human*, the spelling of *humor* "with initial *b* is due to folk etymology, which associate these words with the Latin *humus* 'earth'" (p. 356). There still seems to be a

connection, though — the moisture of the humors may be related to the moistures of the earth. The significance is that if *human* and *humor* are related etymologically, then this may provide evidence that humans are intrinsically humorous, made to be humorous, made to laugh.

While the etymological evidence may be contended, and while the modern scientific community has concluded that the “four humors of the body” view is unfounded and antiquated, the spirit of the ancients’ approach is fundamental to a proper understanding of the laughing phenomenon: that some non-static tension or internal incongruity or bowel-level shift leads to a response such as laughter.

The next chapter reviews what the scholarly community has discovered about laughter, from both a philosophical and scientific approach. The third chapter lays the groundwork for interpreting Scriptural instances of laughter. That chapter discusses such salient terms as levity, glory, shame, humility, pride, freedom and the dynamic relationships between them. An innovative model for visualizing these relationships is proposed in this third chapter. The fourth chapter, with the guidance of such exegetical scholars as Keil and Delitzsch (1984), Kittel (1978), and Vine (1981), analyzes excerpts of Scripture in which individuals are recorded to have laughed, focusing on the saliency of the terms and concepts discussed in chapter three. These passages are categorized according to who was laughing: God, animals, or humans. The fifth chapter provides a brief discussion of the findings, confirming the accuracy and significance of the model proposed in chapter three. The sixth, and final, chapter suggests additional topics for humor scholars to investigate. Using some of the innovative concepts introduced in this thesis, humor scholars can go on to develop a deontological ethic for humor and address the various dynamics associated with laughter and humor.

- Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1905)
- Froeschels, E. (1948). *Philosophy in wit*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- G.K. Chesterton, 62, noted author, dies. (1936, June 15). *New York Times*, pp. 1, 21.
- Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y., Gadfield, N. J., Davies, G. J., & Davies, A. P. (1976). Cognitive aspects of humour in social interaction: A model and some linguistic data. In A. J. Chapman & H. C. Foot (Eds.), *Humour and laughter: Theory, research and applications* (pp. 139-154). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gilhus, I. S. (1991). Religion, laughter and the ludicrous. *Religion*, 21, 257-277.
- Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behavior and student learning. *Communication Education*, 37, 40-53.
- Graham, E. E., Papa, M. J., & Brooks, G. P. (1992). Functions of humor in conversation: Conceptualization and measurement. *Western Journal of Communication*, 56 (Spring), 161-183.
- Gregory, J. C. (1924). *The nature of laughter*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- Hartley, J. E. (1988). *The book of Job*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Hastings, J. (Ed.). (1916). *The greater men and women of the Bible, vol. 1*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Hobbes, T. (1839). *Leviathan*. Internet <gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/98/1>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1840). *Human nature. English works, vol. 4*. London: Bohn.
- Hoffman, M. S. (Ed.). (1990). *World almanac and book of facts: 1991*, (pp. 506-510). New York: Pharos Books.
- Holland, N. N. (1982). *Laughing: A psychology of humor*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bouteneff, P. (1990). *The history, biography and humor of the Fools for Christ*. Unpublished M.Div. thesis, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Crestwood, NY.

Chesterton, G.K. (1908). *Orthodoxy*. Internet version scanned by Harry Plantinga <<http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/chesterton/orthodoxy/orthodoxy1.0.pdf>>; John Lane Company.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1936). *Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton*. New York: Sheed & Ward.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1969). *Chaucer*. New York: Greenwood Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1986). *Collected works of G.K. Chesterton, vol. 2*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Cogan, R., Cogan, D., Waltz, W., & McCue, M. (1987). Effects of laughter and relaxation on discomfort thresholds. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 10, 139-144.

Davis, M.S. (1979). Sociology through humor. *Symbolic Interaction*, 2(1), 105-110.

Deen, E. (1974). *All the Bible's men of hope*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company.

Dennis Stockton's diary. (1995, Sept. 13). *The Virginian-Pilot*, p. A8.

Ebullient genius of G.K. Chesterton. (1936, June 28). *New York Times*, p. 22.

Ernest, J.D. (Ed.). (1994). *Theological lexicon of the New Testament, Vol. 1*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Fee, G.D. & Stuart, D. (1982). *How to read the Bible for all its worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Feinberg, L. (1978). *The secret of humor*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Fensham, F.C. (1982). *The books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Such a topic as laughter can be analyzed both philosophically and scientifically. Philosophers develop models with which they hope to better understand the nature of a phenomenon. They often work with grand, speculative metaphysical concepts, intent on grasping the elusive underpinnings of that phenomenon. Scientists, on the other hand, manipulate physically observable data, working from these particulars until they have developed an idea of the dynamics driving a phenomenon. Individuals from both of these camps have struggled to better understand laughter and the humors that facilitate it.

### The Philosophical Approach to Laughter

Not all humorous jostlings facilitate laughter. There are several theories, however, which address situations in which laughter accompanies so-called humor. Scholars have categorized these according to which aspect of humanity they primarily address — physical, emotional, intellectual. Current humor theorists generally build on one of the three accepted theories of humor: incongruity, superiority, and relief. They may refine existing ideas as does Morreall in his conceptual shift theory (1983, pp. 38-59), a subset of the incongruity theory. On closer consideration, however, these propositions merely address three different elements of the humorous process: objects perceived as laughable, the observer's response to these objects, and the pleasure associated with laughter.

As was explained in the previous section, much has been written about laughter. From a philosophical approach, humor theories tend to fit into one of three camps labeled "incongruity," "superiority," and "relief." These three approaches to understanding the nature of laughter focus on slightly different aspects of the communicative phenomenon.

### Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory focuses on the elements that spark laughter: things are funny because they are expected to be one way, but are found surprisingly to be otherwise. Holland (1982) explains it in the following way: "If we perceive a sudden, playful incongruity that gratifies conscious and unconscious wishes and defeats conscious and unconscious fears to give a feeling of liberation, then we laugh" (p. 107). Incongruity is defined as "a relation of conflict between something we perceive, remember, or imagine, on the one hand, and our conceptual patterns with their attendant expectations, on

the other" (Morreall, 1987, p. 189). Certain terms, such as "playful," remain undefined; and it can be argued that people laugh even when incongruity is not playful, such as in derisive laughter.

The essence of humor, according to Lefcourt and Martin (1986), "resides in the bringing together of two normally disparate ideas, concepts, or situations in a surprising or unexpected manner" (p. 9). Another theorist focuses not so much on the objects that facilitate laughter, but on a person's response to those objects. "We laugh when, hearing an anecdote or seeing an incident, we find opposite emotions struggling within us" (Feinberg, 1978, p. 4). Taking on the ancients' understanding of the humors, he suggests that it is the "jostling of one feeling against another" (p. 5).

One incongruity theorist writes, "Laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift.... To laugh, we must be caught offguard [sic] by the change so that we cannot smoothly adjust to what we are experiencing" (Morreall, 1987, p. 133). This theory attempts to account for the laughter expressed by babies during a game of peek-a-boo, by teenagers who swing from a rope into a chilly pond, by college students who suddenly grasp some complex mathematical concept, and by adults who unexpectedly complete a significant financial transaction. Cognitive shifts can provide a pleasing distraction, a refreshing change; such sobering elements as alcohol and drugs, though, provide similar distractions.

This incongruity theory finds some support among Christian theologians. Kierkegaard, for example, "believed that the religious individual discovers the comical in the largest measure, partly because, in religion, men are acutely conscious of sharp inconsistencies" (Trueblood, 1964, pp. 39-40). These "sharp inconsistencies" sometimes arouse laughter.

Those who shift their conceptions may indeed respond in laughter. However, in a threatening environment that person might also become indignant, compassionate, confused, curious, anxious, or repentant. While it accounts for many instances where laughter is present, this theory does not sufficiently explain why any particular psychological shift is "pleasant." Interestingly, it seems to reintroduce the ancient understanding of laughter as resulting from a shift in the humors of the body: speaking figuratively, the imbalanced liquid humors of the body lead one to behave erratically, which includes erupting in laughter.

Not all incongruity brings about laughter. McGhee (1979) explains, "As long as incongruities occur in a familiar or safe (non-threatening) context, accompanying arousal changes are expressed in the form of laughter" (p. 53). A pie in the face is usually funnier when it is not your face being defiled, you being humiliated. One may suggest that incongruity is even inherently threatening, that "non-threatening incongruity" is an oxymoron. Many people, those with a low tolerance for ambiguity for example, may feel anxious when presented with any incongruity. And as Scripture points out, "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down" (Proverbs 12:25a). The heart weighed down by anxiousness caused by discordant data is not experiencing the levity associated with laughter. There are likely many people whose laughter is stifled because

## REFERENCES

- Andersen, J.F. (1979). Teacher immediacy as a predictor of teaching effectiveness. In D. Nimmo (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 3* (pp. 543-559). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Anonymous. (1893). *Theologia Germanica* (S. Winkworth Trans.). Internet version scanned by John H. Richards <[http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/theo\\_ger/theologia\\_germanica1.1.pdf](http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/theo_ger/theologia_germanica1.1.pdf)>. (Original work published 1516.)
- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Internet <[gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/39/24](http://gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/39/24)>.
- Attardo, S. & Chabanne, J.C. (1992). Introduction: Humor research east of the Atlantic. *Humor*, 5(1), 1-5.
- Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic theories of humor*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Augustine. *Confessions of St. Augustine*. Internet version scanned by Harry Plantinga <<http://www.cs.pitt.edu/~planting/books/augustine/confessions/confessions1.0.pdf>>.
- Bacon, F. (1909). *Essays, civil and moral and the new Atlantis*. New York: P.F. Collier and Son Company. Secured from the internet <[gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/43/1](http://gopher://gopher.vt.edu:10010/02/43/1)>.
- Bergson, H. (1921). *Laughter: An essay on the meaning of the comic* (C. Brereton and F. Rothwell, Trans.). London: Macmillan.
- Bergson, H. (1956). *Laughter*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Bloch, S., Browning, S., & McGrath, G. (1983). Humour in group psychotherapy. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 56, 89-97.
- Bonham, T.D. (1986). *Humor: God's gift*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.
- Bonner, P. (1987). *Journalism's man with the golden key: G.K. Chesterton and Edwardian Fleet Street*. Unpublished master's thesis, CBN University, Virginia Beach, VA.

## Conclusion

Numerous questions remain about the nature of the communication phenomenon known as laughter. While researchers have addressed it with volume after volume of exceptionally well-researched writings, those which consider the dynamics of the continua of humility-pride and glory-shame, and the freedom mechanism interfacing these continua, are found mostly in religious texts. Perhaps some future scholar will clarify many of the obscure points raised in this thesis, tie some of the loose ends, and pursue a few of the issues raised in this final chapter.

In the meantime, the author of this thesis encourages readers to live a life of good humor; to humble themselves, practicing bold submission, anticipating God's lifting; and to desire that levity which is not merely conjured up or attained at someone else's expense. Laugh humbly, and hilariously, like King David before the very presence of God. Share intimate and social distance-decreasing laughter, like Isaac and his wife Rebekah. And laugh prophetically, deriding the enemies of God with the intention of bringing them to a position where they might accept the freeing glory of their Maker.

Ah, what incongruity, seeking death and receiving life abundant. What a funny kingdom the Creator has conceived.

of their unease with ambiguity and incongruity.

An additional ingredient for successful "humor" is that those who are exposed to it must both identify the incongruity and resolve it. McGhee (1979) writes that "laughter reflects the pleasure derived from creating in fantasy play a set of conditions known to be at odds with reality" (p. 67). A person confronted with absurdity is presented with a "conceptual shift," and may indeed respond in laughter. Such pure absurdity might be laughable for a time, but since it is meaningless, for most people it becomes tiring and unfulfilling. Ultimately, humor based on pure absurdity is hollow and meaningless and, one might argue, unethical.

Plato suggested in his cave analogy that the visible things are shadows of heavenly forms. Scripture also identifies things of earth as shadows of heavenly things (e.g., Col. 2:17, Heb. 8:5 and 9:1-10:1). Perhaps what is seen as laughable — the pleasant conceptual shift — is such because it reflects humanity's incongruous perception of God. In other words, humor is not a manmade thing, but something which is a result of God's involvement with mankind. It may be that laughter springs from humanity's paradoxical perception of the nature of God.

Mankind's sin and God's redemption, some say, is an example of divine comedy, comedy consisting of a "situation, complication, and resolution" (Holland, 1982, p. 37), the final complication being death. "The most common comic pattern seems to be death and resurrection" (p. 39). Incarnation may be another example of divine paradox: humanity's incarnation (an amphibious creature of both flesh and spirit) and Jesus' incarnation (simultaneously God and man). Both of these examples reveal an incongruity in people's understanding of themselves and God and the functioning of His kingdom.

Froeschels (1948) expands on this concept when he writes that humor is "the mood in which a person is conscious at the same time of his importance and of his insignificance.... Humor glimpses fate behind the chance incident. It links the finite with the infinite and teaches how to conquer fate smilingly" (p. 39). The Christian, then, according to Reitz (1991),

has assurance of eternal and abundant life, and humor is a legitimate expression of this assurance.... [T]he primary difference between comedy and tragedy rests in the story's ending.... The assurance of a happy ending frees us to laugh at the pain. (p. 32)

In light of this, those in the community of faith should experience a levity out of reach for the faithless. While "under the sun all is vanity," for those who struggle to enjoy heavenly mystery there is laughter. There is a hope and a meaning beyond daily failures. The outcome for the Christian is not tragedy, but victory — some might say a comedy. A comedy which, like traditional comedies, ends in a wedding, a banquet, a celebration.

## Superiority Theory

The superiority theory focuses on the participants: their laughter is facilitated by the "sudden glory" of seeing themselves as better than others or the

way they used to be. People might laugh over a defeated enemy, for example, or in response to a racial slur, or when reflecting on something stupid they said last week. Words and phrases associated with this theory include thrashing laughter, derision, hostility, superior adaptation, and playful aggression. Thomas Hobbes explains his low estimation of humor in the following way:

Men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein there lies not wit or jest at all....Also men laugh at the infirmities of others....I may therefore conclude that the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others or with our own formerly. (Hobbes, 1840, chapter 9)

Henri Bergson (1921) concluded that in laughter there is “an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct, our neighbor” (p. 35). Because of the condescending character of laughter under this theory, laughter was considered a vice. According to Reitz (1991), “Because Plato saw laughter as the product of scorn, he believed it to be ethically suspect” (p. 9). His Republic placed stringent restrictions on such comedic individuals.

The superiority theory, again, posits that “humor is thought to result from a sense of superiority derived from the disparagement of another person or of ourselves in our former naiveté” (Lefcourt and Martin, 1986, p. 11). When confronted by a conflict-filled situation in which one might feel helpless, one can turn to laughter, taking on an attitude of defiance: “I laugh at that which has endangered or degraded or has fought to suppress, enslave, or destroy what I cherish and has fled. My laughter signals its failure and my own liberation” (p. 13).

A problem with the Hobbesian interpretation of laughter as represented by this theory is the assumption that glory is necessarily achieved through the putting down of another. This is true to the extent that people experience glory only through humbling themselves, accepting the freedom of forgiveness. But humility is not necessarily accompanied by derision or disdain; a sense of glory may arise from the sudden realization that one is loved, forgiven, or understood. The Hobbesian superiority view inappropriately blankets a negative connotation onto laughter. What a shame to connote anything negative with such a glorious word as glory.

## Relief Theory

The relief theory focuses on why individuals enjoy laughter. This theory proposes that it loosens pent-up energy that would otherwise erupt in less socially acceptable ways (Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* is often associated with this theory). Phrases associated with this theory include Freudian “excess energy,” release from restraint, release from physical and psychological tension, surplus energy, and discharge of psychic or nervous energy.

Lefcourt and Martin (1986) consider this approach to laughter the most

humility or pride prior to their fall? Perhaps it was only after their eyes were opened that they were able to become self-conscious, considering themselves either humbly or pridefully.

Laughter is a gracious gift from God, which, while it doesn't negate sin, accompanies a momentary lifting of its burdensome consequences. Along the same lines, the clothing which God made to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness (or the leaves they wove together) was, perhaps, the first humorous “prop.” Although it didn't actually take away their sins, or sufficiently atone for the consequences of their sinful behavior, it did lighten the devastating gravity of their newly-fallen nature. Jesus, whom Christians are instructed to “put on,” may drive the pleasure associated with humor to the next level — pure, thoroughly forgiven joy.

Humor scholars should look into those Scriptural instances that are sometimes found funny, but in which the characters do not laugh. Some people laugh when told that a donkey talked to Baalam (Num. 22:21-35), an individual about whom Scripture speaks very poorly. Some people find it funny that the prophet Samuel selected Jesse's youngest son, David, to become the nation's next king. This principle — that God chooses the foolish and weak and base to shame the wise and strong and exalted (1 Cor. 1:27-30) — may account for the apparent silliness of God's behavior. People laugh when a young man identified by some as Mark runs away naked during Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:51). Numerous passages sometimes lead people to laugh, even though the characters involved in them do not. Researchers should address these instances.

Clement calls human speech our “most respectable possession” (Sanders, 1995, p. 142). But through word play this honorable possession is humbled. In word play the words themselves are mocked — they become the objects of derision. The phrase “You turkey!” said laughingly to a friend is so inferior to the friendship shared that the phrase is rendered impotent. The words themselves become feeble, unable to convey the affirming intended meaning, and unable to convince the hearer that they should be taken at face value. In word play humanity becomes superior even to language. The relation of language to humiliation and glory should be investigated.

And, finally, what is the significance of the laugh itself? Christian scholars should address this odd physical manifestation of a pleasant shift of the “humors.” It may be that the tension and release of the resolution of perceived incongruity disturbs both the body and spirit; *spirit* and *breath* are identical in Scripture, so the exhalation of breath may be related to a jostling of the spirit, an offering back of the inspired breath of God that gave Adam life. The acknowledgment of sinful activity or behavior is often accompanied by blushing or smiling. The reliance on evidence revealed through lie detectors indicates that physical reactions reliably reflect internal struggles with untruths. The laugh may be related to the flushing brought about by unethical behavior.

## Other suggestions

There are various tools with which scientists can measure humor and laughter. One measure records the observed emotional reactions to humor stimuli, marking them on a scale which includes grimace, no response, inhibited smile, full smile, and audible laughter (Wells, 1982, p. 121). But people may enjoy "humor" without smiling at all. Furthermore, the correlation between people's exhibited response and their ratings of funniness is low — .30 to .40 correlations (p. 121). None of these measures examines laughter with the clear understanding that good humor is characterized by humility and bad humor is characterized by pride. Humor scholars should develop tools with which to measure humor, taking into account the two continua proposed in this thesis.

It has been pointed out that the Scriptures do not record any instances in which Jesus laughed. Chesterton (1908) ponders this in his *Orthodoxy*:

The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual.... Yet He restrained something.... There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth. (p. 88)

This apparent lack of mirth may be the result of the Jewish writers' anti-laughter cultural worldview (Sanders, 1995, p. 48ff), or they may have not seen it as central to the purpose of their writings. After all, one might say, if all the things Jesus did were written in detail, the world itself could not contain the books in which they were written (John 21:25). But Jesus was the only really free man. He shares the ancestry of Isaac, the son of the free woman, and then goes on to introduce an even greater degree of freedom. Jesus freely opposed the leaders of organized religion, their forms of worship, their religious customs. In doing so, He demonstrated that He was not rule-bound, but free. And so, as a free man, he may have laughed like the son of the free woman, Laughter. On the other hand, it may be true that Jesus never laughed at all during His time on earth. This should be investigated.

Christian scholars should consider the role of the cross of Christ in this discussion. If the cross is associated with shame and lifting of sins, surely it bears some significance to the humility and freedom associated with good humor. The artifacts foreshadowing the cross (e.g., the clothes given by God to Adam and Eve, the scapegoat, animal sacrifices, Isaac's near-sacrifice, the serpent-on-a-stick) should, in the same manner, be considered in relation to their significance to the laughing phenomenon.

Humor scholars should consider the effects of the fall of humanity brought about by Adam's sin. What is the significance of the tree and its fruit? What is the significance of the discovery of their nakedness? Kittel (1978) points out that Adam "had a part in God's *kabod* and ... his radiance was taken from him after the fall" (p. 246). Did the departure of this glory drive people to seek glory in other ways, including pride? Was humanity even capable of practicing

accurate and useful. They explain that "humor and laughter represent an important mechanism for coping with many of the psychosocial stressors that humans encounter in their daily lives" (p. 1). Humor phenomena on which Freud focuses, for example, "seem most likely to provide the sort of therapeutic stress-reducing effects that we discuss in this book" (p. 7) — a conclusion they would understandably draw, considering that the authors share Freud's occupation.

Laughter, according to Freud and Spencer, is the venting of excess nervous energy (Morreall, 1987, p. 6). Freud (1960), when focusing on the laughable elements, says, "The comic effect is produced by the solution of bewilderment" (p. 10), the solving of which looses a psychical dam (pp. 121-122). When focusing on why that solution produces pleasure, he explains it this way:

It is a necessary condition for generating the comic that we should be obliged, *simultaneously or in rapid succession*, to apply to one and the same act of ideation two different ideational methods, between which the "comparison" is then made and the comic difference emerges. Differences in expenditure of this kind arise between what belongs to someone else and to oneself, between what is as usual and what has been changed, between what is expected and what happens. (p. 291, emphasis the author's)

Humor and reactions to it, under this theory, are explained as physiological responses to certain stimuli. According to this theory, "jokes and wit involve techniques that allow people to express briefly unconscious aggressive and sexual impulses that would normally be repressed" (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986, p. 5). Negative emotion is dissipated through a quirky psychological and physiological response. The resulting catharsis leaves the person feeling momentarily freed from conflict.

This theory attempts to account for the pleasure experienced during humorous engagement, and it seems to be confirmed by scientific medical data. A medical expert explains it this way: "Laughter releases pent-up energy. During stress, tension rises with physiological accumulation of certain stressors, hormones, steroids and toxins. Laughter excretes secretions which contain these biochemicals. Consequently, laughter is a catharsis which provides the body with a biological mechanism to release tension and rebalance its chemical state" (White, 1993, p. 81).

Another scholar adds that "the humorous anecdote or amusing situation creates an expectation — the body tenses, blood comes to the skin, etc. — and the emotion has to be released somewhere. Since the joke culminates in a climax for which tears or screams would be inappropriate, laughter provides the only readily available means of release" (Feinberg, 1978, p. 3). Explained this way, the pleasure of laughter is not unlike the pleasure of sex, a laugh merely being ejaculation of air from the lungs. It is a superstratum orgasm.

This theory provides a useful foundation for those in the medical and psychological community. And it overlaps with portions of the incongruity theory

as well, acknowledging that what creates a laughter-possible environment is the “solution of bewilderment.” Relief theorists, however, tend to use terms such as “humorous anecdote” or “amusing situation” without identifying qualities that make one bewilderment-reconciling process amusing and another horrifying. What remain to be adequately addressed are the characteristics that distinguish good laughter from bad laughter.

### Concluding Remarks Regarding these Theories

As mentioned at the outset of this section, these three theories, because they address different aspects of the humorous process, are not necessarily incompatible. Phenomena which jostle the figurative humors are characterized by incongruity, one gains a sense of superiority at the solution of such incongruity, and the resulting relief is often pleasurable.

Others concur. Lefcourt and Martin (1986) find these three theories, “on the whole, complementary rather than contradictory and ... by combining them we are provided with a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding the stress-buffering effects of humor” (pp. 13-14). Indeed, these theories do seem complementary, one focusing on the objects that spark laughter, one focusing on the individual’s response to that incongruous data, and the third focusing on the pleasure associated with the consequential release of laughter. None of the theories, however, sufficiently emphasizes the role of humility in “good humor” or the crucial mechanism that facilitates laughter: freedom. At this point it is appropriate to turn to social scientific findings.

### Scientific Findings

Scientific studies report conflicting results: laughter increases social distance, according to one study (Pollio, 1995, p. 380). It decreases social distance, according to other studies (Bloch, Browning, & McGrath, 1983; Cogan, Cogan, Waltz, & McCue, 1987; Pasquali, 1990; White & Howse, 1993). In order to account for these disparate conclusions, this thesis goes beyond the physical phenomenon of laughter to a fundamental property that colors it; this thesis seeks to address the seemingly contradictory effects of humorous communication.

Recent research provides dramatically contradictory conclusions. Some research indicates that laughter is ineffective in facilitating learning (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Zillman & Bryant, 1983). In fact, one study concluded that the use of “humor” by educators, when unrelated to the topic of instruction, is detrimental to teacher-student rapport (Zillman et al., 1983). Other research indicates that certain properties of laughter (those which encourage intimate communication and reduce psychological distance between educators and their students) positively affect learning outcomes (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987).

From a scientific approach, laughter has been found to affect people in significant and apparently contradictory ways. It can regulate social distance

ceptable target of derisive laughter. An apocryphal story is told of Martin Luther. One night he rolled over on his bed and came face to face with a hideous demonic being. The thing was hunched in a corner, staring ferociously at the great reformer. Luther’s response was the right one: he laughed at it and rolled his back to it, going back to a restful sleep. At another time Luther said, “The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn” (in Lewis, 1944, p. 7). Evil spirits, enemies of God who are beyond redemption, are always laughable.

In addition to laughing at evil spirits, the righteous, through “prophetic laughter” or “redemptive laughter,” are permitted — perhaps even encouraged — to deride evil people. As the term indicates, great discernment must be made as to whether or not an individual is “evil” enough to become the butt of such laughter. Perhaps only religious hypocrites such as the Pharisees should be laughed at. Through a type of prophetic prompting, as though representing God, His Church, and His Kingdom, one is empowered to deride the proud, with the intention of bringing them to a low state, one in which they might humbly turn to God and accept His real glory in exchange for the shame they sense as glorious.

In the process of humiliation, the proud, like Goliath, stumble and fall, sometimes painfully. The righteous should not be overly concerned about others’ stumbling, though. After all, “one should not cause others to stumble” is not necessarily a biblical stance. One of the responsibilities of Jesus, the One Whom Christians are to imitate, is to trip people up. Indeed, Scripture says

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for. (1 Peter 2:6-8)

Communicators are to avoid causing others to *sin*. Jesus implies that people are able to facilitate others’ sinning. He declares that those who do so would be better off killing themselves than in effect killing others (Matt. 18:6f). Through the derisiveness inherent in “prophetic laughter,” others may be caused to stumble to a state of humiliation, one in which they become able to turn to God, accept His freeing forgiveness, and experience His real glorious levity.

Finally, humor ethicists should reaffirm that laughter is in itself good, only bad if perverted. Recall the Apostle Paul’s saying that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude” (1 Tim. 4:4). Those who practice humor and laughter should appreciate the sense of glory it accompanies, careful that they don’t strive to achieve that glory through haughty self-exalting pride.

peculiar to the laughter phenomenon.

Such an ethical system would tend to be deontological, rather than teleological, since salient factors in humorous communication include humility and glory. "Deontological" refers to the perspective that a behavior is right in itself, that the consequences are ethically irrelevant. Murder and lying are, in themselves, wrong and should not be practiced, for example, even to save a friend. "Teleological" refers to a perspective that a behavior is right if its consequences are perceived as good. It is right, for example, to execute criminals because capital punishment deters violent crime; it is right to deceive the Nazis at your door, telling them there are no Jews hidden in your home. A deontological approach to laughter avoids the pitfalls innate in a teleological system of ethics, a system which tends to be highly subjective and short-sighted.

Humor may lead individuals to suspend moral judgment. A comedic movie may be thoroughly perverse, but may arouse the affirming laughter of even good people. These individuals may, however, in retrospect reject their prior acceptance of the aberrant jesting. Sometimes people laugh at something they later feel embarrassed to have laughed at. This ability of laughter, and the environment in which it is facilitated, to lower one's moral guard should be investigated.

Scripture seems to indicate that if the heart attitude is wrong, then the action associated with it, such as laughter, is wrong. If you arouse a laugh through the non-prophetic, non-redemptive derision of an opponent, the behavior is wrong. If you laugh pridefully over someone, the behavior is wrong. Using a teleological argument, the Puritan William Law noted this as well:

You know how it hurts you to be made the jest and ridicule of other people; how it grieves you to be robbed of your reputation, and deprived of the favourable opinion of your neighbours; if, therefore, you expose others to scorn and contempt in any degree ... you are so far from loving such people as yourself, that you may be justly supposed to have as much hatred for them, as you have love for yourself. (p. 157)

While Law may be right, contemporary scholars should propose the more deontological side of this argument, taking into account the factors discussed in this thesis.

It is commonly said that missionaries should maintain a sense of humor. Scholars would be wiser to encourage the selflessness that accompanies "good humor." Good humor consists of the ability to rightly jostle the humors of others and oneself. This jostling — admittedly sparked by incongruity — is right when characterized by humility, which is selflessness. It is the celebration of the selflessness-izing of oneself or others. Mission researchers should emphasize the virtue of humility when encouraging good humor for cross-cultural workers.

The laugh of victory is not without its victim. Ethicists should consider when it is right to victimize others. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Such an adversary, it seems, is always an ac-

(it can either increase or decrease intimacy), for example (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992, p. 165). Researchers explain that laughter can be used to resolve both internal and external conflict, manage negative emotions, express taboo topics in socially acceptable ways, provide a kind of vacation from logical thinking, and reveal information about ourselves and others (pp. 161, 167-168, 176-177). On the other hand, common sense indicates that laughter can produce conflict, simply suppress negative emotions, express taboo topics in very unacceptable ways, accompany profoundly logical thought, and hinder others from learning about us. Scientific studies seem to be wrought with confounds and a lack of clear definition — mainly, as this thesis suggests, because the subjects' heart attitude (humility or pride) is not taken into account by the researchers.

Researchers Graham, Papa, and Brooks (1992) indicate that "humor" serves just a few basic functions. It can be used, in part, to resolve internal and external conflict, relieving intrapersonal and interpersonal tension pleasantly; manage anxiety, fear, or embarrassment (possibly as a defense mechanism); express human needs and taboo topics (e.g., aggression, sexuality) in socially acceptable ways; transmit verbally aggressive messages; provide a sense of momentary freedom from reality by challenging the usual rules of logical thinking; give others information about ourselves; avoid giving others information about ourselves; entertain or play with others; find out information about others and how they respond to us; and control other individuals or a group of individuals (pp. 167-168, 176-177). In general, laughter is generally used to facilitate and regulate communication (p. 161).

### *Humorous Communication and Interpersonal Needs*

Communication, according to Schutz (1960), meets three central interpersonal needs: inclusion, affection, and control. Humorous communication, being a subset of communication in general, can satisfy these same interpersonal needs.

#### *Inclusion (and exclusion)*

Inclusion is "the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to interaction and association" (p. 18). Humorous communication, characterized by laughter, can make people feel accepted as part of, or rejected from, a group. M.M. Belfie said, "Something special happens when people laugh together over something genuinely funny, and not hurtful to anyone. It's like a magic rain that showers down feelings of safety and belonging to a group" (in Wooten, 1994, p. 252). Lefcourt and Martin (1986), in more academic language, say that humor "may be a means of reducing interpersonal tensions and expressing a feeling of oneness with others and with the universe" (p. 4).

Laughter can also, however, serve to exclude people from a group, as sometimes seen in the use of aggressive jokes, for example. Pollio (1995) explains that "humor can be used to exclude individuals, which is particularly useful when one individual is menacing a group of individuals. Humor can bond

individuals into a group, thus empowering them to exclude an individual who threatens the group's cohesion" (p. 381). The bond-causing affirmation or bond-breaking dis-affirmation can be communicated subtly and non-verbally; it is therefore difficult to measure scientifically.

Group solidarity may result from the following functions of humor: integration, adaptation, and accommodation (Graham et al., 1992, p. 166). People tend to feel welcomed into a group when long-standing members of that group feel comfortable enough to playfully tease them. This teasing shows newcomers that they share common perspectives with established members. And when the newcomer practices self-depreciating humor, this informs other group members that the joke-teller is willing to participate in the predominant force of organizational humor: teasing (p. 167).

White and Howse (1993) explain the dynamics behind the apparently conflicting effects of humor. They write, "When the humor is regarded as esteeming, it solidifies the group, increases morale and fosters consensus and social integration. Whenever the humor has been judged as disparaging, group relationships may deteriorate and group integrity may be threatened. Therefore how humor functions depends upon how the 'audience' evaluates it" (p. 82). This thesis proposes that disparaging humor is marked by the sender's pride, whereas esteeming humor is marked by the sender's humility. While it may be true that the audience detects disparagement, they may also discern something more fundamental: pride. Humility, it seems, is a perfect ingredient to attain to good humor.

Humor can be used to both increase and decrease social distance (Graham et al., 1992, p. 165). In business, managers can distance themselves from their employees by a certain joke, for example. The manager could, through humor, deflect employees' questions that would reveal personal feelings or struggles. A new employee could be shown his or her status in the company through fellow workers' teasing. Similarly, a woman's humorous expression could let a male acquaintance know that she is comfortable sharing her intimate feelings with him. This would tend to both decrease social distance and increase interpersonal attraction.

When humor decreases social distance, ingroup morale increases, which forestalls conflict, provides common ground, and controls deviance from group norms (p. 166). Group members become encouraged to share with other members in a non-threatening manner. And as group cohesiveness is developed, group effectiveness is increased (p. 167). Of course, humor that increases social distance would have the opposite effect, tending to crimp down on effective communication.

### Affection (and repulsion)

Affection consists of "the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to love and affection" (Schutz, 1960, p. 18). Humor can be utilized to both increase and decrease interpersonal attraction between people (Graham et al., 1992, p. 165). By appearing humorous, people are often able to gain others' attention and admiration — even affection.

## CHAPTER 6: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There is so much that has been left unaddressed. This final chapter highlights some of the areas that Christian scholars of humor and laughter might consider examining. To reiterate, this thesis serves mostly to direct humor scholarship to the salience of the humility-pride continuum, the glory-shame continuum, and the freedom mechanism that interfaces the two. This approach is different from that taken by most contemporary humor scholars; additional research should be done from this perspective. The following paragraphs discuss certain as-of-yet insufficiently examined elements, elements which might likely receive some illumination from this paradigm.

### The Ethics of Laughter

Emotions can't really be judged right or wrong, although people's reactions or responses to them can be. If laughter is merely emotion, like anger or happiness, then it is presumptuous and invalid to propose a system of ethics for it. (Recall the Apostle Paul's command, "In your anger do not sin" (Eph. 4:26), the implication being that anger in itself is not sinful behavior.) If, however, laughter is a modifiable behavior, then a righteous standard exists — one that should be examined and described. By approving of certain type of laughter and disapproving of other types, Scripture indicates that laughter can be judged right or wrong; a standard of virtuous humor/laughter therefore exists.

Although certain rules should be presented regarding the right use of humor and laughter, it should also be acknowledged that no human (save He Whose mirth is never explicitly revealed in Scripture) has the ideal sense of humor. As Paul writes, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect.... I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on ..." (Phil. 3:12-14). This should be an encouragement — the realization that one can always develop a better sense of humor and right use of laughter.

Humor scholars should propose a system of ethics, then, based on the ideas and relationships discussed in this thesis, with which to judge laughter. Laughter, a form of communication, must adhere to the rules for ethical communication in general, of course. The comprehensive ethic for laughter should therefore address lying, taking the Lord's name lightly, and course joking, among many other things. But it should go beyond this to address characteristics

Through this type of dialog parties are able to express their likes and dislikes in a non-threatening manner, able to rise above any conflicts which are brought up during their conversation. And people are drawn to a person who appears secure.

Research indicates that men and women use humor in differing ways in their interaction with each other. Lefcourt and Martin (1986) reported that “men who perceived themselves as using humor in a strategic manner reported less satisfaction with their marriages and behaved more destructively, whereas women reported more satisfaction and behaved in a more engaging manner when using humor in this way” (p. 108). They go on to say that “men who perceive themselves as using humor to reduce the effects of stress report more dissatisfaction with their marriages, whereas women seem to be that much more satisfied” (p. 108). The authors suggest that women may be using humor in a playfully submissive manner, which eases tension and reduces conflict. Men, on the other hand, tend not to use humor in any purposeful way; for men it often serves little social function.

Lefcourt and Martin (1986) proposed that “if marriage partners were to feel less threatened by the consequences of potential altercations with their spouses, as would be signified by their display of ‘good humor,’ then one might anticipate observing more open communications between them, especially with regard to potential conflicts” (p. 101). Their thesis was confirmed by the study which followed — open communication tended to be accompanied by positive affect. Women, more than men, responded positively to the use of humor in marital communication (p. 108).

The authors conclude, however, that in general, “marriage partners with a good sense of humor seem to be more active and constructive in the resolution of potential conflicts between them” (p. 124). The question remains: How does one define a “good” sense of humor? These researchers avoid addressing that question, and don’t distinguish between good and bad humor in their study, neither qualitatively nor quantitatively.

### control (and lack thereof)

Control refers to “the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with people with respect to control and power” (Schutz, 1960, p. 18). Through humor, people are also able to exhibit a degree of control over forces in, and out of, their control. Death row inmate Dennis Stockton displayed this type of humor just days before his death in September 1995. A guard was discussing with Stockton the method by which he was to die — lethal injection. Stockton responded to the lieutenant, “Load that baby down with methamphetamine...” The officers all got a good laugh. I did too” (*The Virginian-Pilot*, 1995, Sept. 13, p. A8). Faced with his imminent death, the inmate rose against that threat, laughing at it in defiance, offering an appearance of control over it. Researcher Pollio (1995) inserts: “Humor is situational; not all individuals viewing the same situation will perceive the humor in it” (p. 378). It is not likely that any readers found Stockton’s humor laughable. After all, as Shakespeare, in his *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, has Rosaline poignantly say, “A jest’s prosperity lies

in the ear of him that hears it, never in the tongue of him that makes it" (V.ii.1377-1379).

Humorous detachment, such as shown by Mr. Stockton, "allows us to see ourselves from a remote perspective, to see how small we are, and how chaotic is the universe....To see the disorder in order is to perceive the nonsense in what we take most seriously" (Lefcourt et al., 1986, p. 126). Described in this way, it is not clear whether laughing in the face of conflict is good or bad. On one hand, the grandeur of the Creator and His creation is beyond the comprehension of fallen humanity. Phenomena do seem chaotic and nonsensical at times. On the other hand, there *is* order and sense in the universe, although it might not be perceived as such. And people, although capable of base and incongruous behavior, are "fearfully and wonderfully made," not the utterly absurd beings some humorists make them out to be.

Elsewhere the authors write that "if one does not succeed in fulfilling one's aspirations and plans, it is not a catastrophe; in fact, if one does succeed, it likewise does not mean too much over the long haul. This meaning of humor attributed to Freud has nihilistic overtones" (p. 125). For Christians the ups and downs of the typical day *are* meaningful because they are being done "as unto the Lord." If they were being done for their own sake and the results they bring, of course the meaninglessness of it would seem absurd, like some cosmic joke. But people cannot maintain their sanity in the shadow of meaninglessness, and so their conflictive thinking usually stops in a laugh rather than a self-directed gunshot.

Dennis Stockton laughed at the thought of a needle full of drugs bringing his life to a close. An African official, reminiscing about a plague that had passed through his village, provides insight into what drives one to laugh at imminent death. He said, "In such a situation one must either laugh or go mad, laugh at the reality or be mad in the illusion.... In an environment in which tragedy is genuine and frequent, laughter is essential to sanity" (pp. 125-126). Perhaps this is true. In a fallen world in which tragedy and conflict are sure to come, perhaps humor is a God-given gift meant to lighten humanity's burden. It may be that God, in his mercy and forgiveness, provided humor as a pleasurable way to forgive others, forgive ourselves, and forgive nature for behaving contrary to how God had intended.

Hostile, demeaning remarks define boundaries. If one crosses these boundaries, some type of negative response is anticipated. An individual can, in a sense, be controlled by others through their harsh humor. While those who control others through humor may achieve certain interpersonal goals, drawbacks include their being perceived as "less intelligent, less confident, and less witty" (Graham et al., 1992, p. 164).

Advertisers have studied the role of humor in attracting viewers' attention and encouraging them to buy their products. Both advertisers and educators "would like to understand the effectiveness of using humor on the retention and learning of information. Advertisers take the process one step further by trying to make inferences about how humor ultimately relates to consumer behavior and attitudes" (Luvalle, 1987, p. 6). Advertisers are betting their money

come part of this humble community of believers. Quiet laughter at this mispronunciation led to heightened sense of community, and may be good — it was characterized by humility, unpretentiousness, a common affirming bond of naïveté. My laugh arose as a private offering of forgiveness, since I myself am not incapable of mispronouncing words. If I were to laugh at their ignorance, a result of seeing them as inferior — such a non-humble perspective — my laughter would have been wrong, the consequences of which being a decreased sense of community.

An extreme example of a laughable lifestyle is found in the "Holy Fools." This ancient community of believers, although they didn't outrightly encourage laughter, participated in behavior that could be found laughable. Members sometimes jumped and bounced, dragged themselves along on their buttocks, rode ox carts backwards, and tripped people (Bouteneff, 1990, p. 23). Accompanying this behavior was an attitude of subserviently wanting to bring sinners to a state of humiliation and repentance. In order to avoid the glory inherent in accomplishing this task, though, they abased themselves. By doing so, they

remained free — from the pride which comes from the glory of others, free because in effect he was so "low" that he had nothing to lose, and finally because he could deal with people in effect incognito, free from their awareness and resultant self-consciousness. (p. 23)

And such freedom facilitates levity, and laughter. Foolishness may be spontaneous, free and life-giving; it may be mere ignorance, stupidity, contrived, dead (p. 60). And the laughter that accompanies virtuous foolishness is "a laughter of enjoyment, a laughter of freedom — it is free from the tensions inherent in the humor which we know best" (p. 67). This religious community knew well the significance of freedom to a life of levity.

In effectively presenting an argument which challenges people's assumptions, shifting them into a state of disequilibrium, individuals may come across as laughable, as further illustrated by Chesterton (1969):

When corruption and chaos are disturbing ordinary minds, and many good men are only worried and serious, it has often happened that a great man could apparently be frivolous; and appear in history almost as a great buffoon.... And there is always something about them puzzling to those who see their frivolity from the outside and not their faith from the inside. It is not realized that their faith is not a stagnation but an equilibrium. (p. 273-274)

Many people are not able to "get the joke" — perhaps because they refuse to repent and accept the paradoxical gift of faith in an unfathomable Being and the levity-inducing, forgiving freedom that He so assertively offers. But it is only through humility before God and others that people are able to experience the freedom of merciful forgiveness, and the real glory that facilitates virtuous laughter. Such laughter might be interpreted as frivolity, but, as Chesterton points out, it is an outcome of a faith in God and the apparently incongruous workings of His kingdom.

Elisha reacts in 2 Kings 2:22-24 as though some boys mocking him are dishonoring the Lord Himself. The youths in this passage are not wanting to see Elisha's rise to glory out of the ashes of humility, but rather want merely to see his humiliation; their own self-worth would seem to increase in comparison. Those who dishonor the Lord and his chosen are sometimes met with laughter, always met with humiliation. In this case, they are met with death.

Both Potifar's wife and Herod felt humiliated when they sensed others laughing at them (Gen. 39:12-17, Matt. 2:16). In these two examples those who feel as though they are laughed at respond in anger. In order to reclaim their self-worth, it becomes necessary to face that humiliation — either through repentance or through lashing out at the one who brought about that humiliation. In these cases, the characters chose the less virtuous response.

Mocking is a form of aggression, an expression of spiteful anger; while it gives a degree of pleasure to those who participate in it, it is not at all a joyful phenomenon. Sanballat's mockery in Neh. 4:1-5 was accompanied by anger, and not happiness. And while it provides a sense of glory, it is considered a truly shameful "iniquity" and "sin" by God's chosen people. In this case, the mockery is unprophetic, wrong because it is directed toward the righteous behavior of the people of God. Note that Nehemiah wishes Sanballat's laughing mockery to become silenced — through enslavement. Again, Scripture indicates a positive correlation between laughter and freedom, lack of laughter and slavery.

In Ps. 1:1f, a sense of freedom is achieved through rejecting the "law of the Lord." Instead of relying on God to forgivingly provide freedom and consequential glory, individuals disregard the law entirely, freeing themselves from it. The resulting shame feels to them like glory. Keil and Delitzsch (1984e) note that scoffers are those "who make that which is divine, holy and true a subject of frivolous jesting" (section 1, p. 84). The righteous achieve their sense of freedom in another way though: through an acceptance of the Law and the forgiveness that God provides when it is broken.

## Discussion and Conclusions

My telephone number is one digit different from a local chicken wing restaurant. A few times per week my family receives a phone call asking, "Is this Wing King?" Instead of responding exasperatingly or condescendingly at the dialer's incompetence, the right response is a gentle laugh, an expression of forgiveness and freedom from guilt, an affirmation that communicates our being in no position to judge, since we also press wrong keys. A wrong response might be to laugh derisively, which would communicate our relative superiority to the individual on the other end of the line. Such derisiveness is characterized by pride, a quality that pollutes laughter, making it vicious.

Another example: while visiting my family's church in Upper Michigan a man asked for prayer. A relative was undergoing "prostrate" surgery and requested the Lord's blessing. The leader of the Sunday School class continued to mispronounce "prostate," and I found myself laughing gently, feeling a wel-

that their "pupils" learn about their products with the aid of humorous communication. In fact, among advertising executives, "humor was believed to help increase audience awareness and attention, but it was potentially disruptive to general comprehension" (p. 6). The conclusion of their study: humor drew viewers into the commercial (e.g., the Budweiser frogs, various Pepsi commercials), but didn't prove more effective in increasing sales than comparison-type advertisements.

## Summary

This chapter has examined both what the philosophical community and the social scientific community have published regarding laughter. It was discussed that humor scholars' three proposed theories are complementary rather than incompatible. Certain aspects of these theories, however, remain inadequately addressed: the nature of the state of glory associated with laughter, why incongruity evokes laughter, and how to distinguish between good and bad humor, for example. Social scientists have uncovered conflicting findings: laughter may increase or decrease social distance, for example. Little has been proposed to account for the conflicting results. The following chapters address some of these shortcomings, proposing, for example, that heart attitude plays a key role in discerning and developing a "good" sense of humor.

merely humiliated, but because he pridefully “did not make God his refuge.” Those who hold a right attitude toward their Creator laugh heartily at those who deem themselves as more glorious than God, a laugh that God shares with them.

In addition to the humility-pride element, the element of belief-disbelief reoccurs in Job 29:24f. Laughter is associated with belief: it either makes up for lack of belief or accompanies belief (at the expense of those who don't believe). Belief, or faith, is wrapped up in the heart attitudes of humility and pride, however — humility being a belief in one greater than oneself, looking up to another; pride being a belief in oneself, a gaining of one's perceived worth by looking down on others. Jesus confirmed that faith and glory are intertwined, for without faith it is impossible to experience glory; He said that “if you believe, you will see the glory of God” (John 11:40b).

The derisiveness inherent in prophetic laughter is permissible, since it is enjoyed on behalf of the Most High; people are wrong, though, to laugh at those behaving righteously. In 2 Chr. 36:14-16, it is clear that to laugh derisively at such people is equivalent to laughing at God Himself. Such laughter, when characterized by self-exaltation and other-diminution, is wrong, and punishable by the wrath of God.

### Bad Laughter

Certain human laughter is bad, based on its clear denunciation of the godly, the laughers' raising themselves up against God's chosen, slavery, disregard for God's Law, disbelief, and outright “foolishness.” The virtuous laugh described in the previous section occurs amid glory facilitated by a heart attitude of humility. The virtuous laugh at others' humiliation while anticipating their repentant rise to glory; it is a type of joy that teachers experience when their students are beginning to understand where they went wrong. The vicious, on the other hand, laugh not at the glory-anticipating lowly heart attitude, but merely at the lowered heart, as it were.

Laughter accompanies a sense of glorious exaltation, something the Chaldeans possessed (Hab. 1:5f, 10f). The laughter of these strong Chaldeans sprouts from a proud confidence in their own strength, rather than in God's raising them from a state of humility. As such, they are condemned to come crashing down in tangible humiliation.

The laughter of the wicked results from a freedom experienced by disregarding the Law of God; they speak from on high, setting their mouths against heaven, mocking (Ps. 73:8-11). They have lifted themselves up, as far as those who were building the Tower of Babel, and like Satan challenge even God Himself. They feel free to do so because they don't believe God is at all concerned with their behavior. These mockers are described elsewhere in Scripture. The Psalmist indicates that “they say, ‘Who hears?’” In that case, however, God responds with crushing laughter (Ps. 59:7b-8a).

Derision is seen in opposition to a high regard for the Law of God (Ps. 119:51). Individuals who oppose those who trust in the law gain their sense of freedom by disregarding that Law.

In Isaac, laughter and freedom find a strong positive correlation (Gal. 4:22-31). Jesus, whose ancestry includes Isaac, proclaimed freedom to the captives (Luke 4:18). And those who share the lineage of Jesus, the second Adam, are also free to share freedom with the captive. It is not a freedom achieved through disregard for the law, a freedom achieved through self-exaltation. Instead, this is a freedom from the humiliation of death, a forgiveness for breaking law. Jesus, the second Isaac, makes provision for freedom, a freedom not alien to the joyful shout of laughter.

### *Good Derisive Laughter*

Just as God's derision of the wicked is good, so certain instances of humans' laughing at the wicked is good. Prophetic, or redemptive, laughter is by nature derisive. However, such laughter is not derived merely from the downfall of an enemy, but primarily from the hope of their humbling themselves. Just as God's laughter usually accompanies an offering of reconciliation, which is commonly rebuffed, so prophetic laughter is practiced with the intentions of bringing people to a state of humility in which they might turn to God.

Elijah's behavior in 1 Kings 18:25-29 supports Bergson's (1921) contention that in laughter there is "an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct, our neighbor" (p. 35). He may have been wanting the false priests to see the ludicrousness of their behavior and consequently humbly repent. On the other hand, the prophet Elijah may have merely been applying the command to

Pour out the overflowings of your anger; and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and tread down the wicked where they stand. (Job. 41:11f)

His prophetic mockery humiliated Baal's prophets, not only figuratively but literally, as shown in their agreeing to cut themselves to the point of bleeding profusely. And their gruesome deaths were but a few hours away. How difficult it was for these deceived priests to humble themselves, laugh along with the prophet at their foolish behavior, and enter into real glory.

Those who exalt themselves are encouraged by God to humble themselves and accept His lovingkindness. Again, mercy precedes the teeth-baring rage of God. In time it becomes necessary for God to recant His offer of mercy and deliver justice; He will humble them, break them down, thrash them about, and kill them. At such a gruesome sight the righteous are to laugh fearfully, a behavior which seems to contradict published humor scholarship and even other portions of Scripture (Ps. 52:5-7). This fear, though, is doubtlessly to be sensed in reference to God; it consists of a reverent submission to Him. As explained earlier, when one fears God, it is no longer necessary to fear anything in His creation — a condition in which laughter becomes entirely possible.

This laughter is prophetic because the object of this risible derision is an enemy of God. The man is not laughable merely because he fell down or was

## CHAPTER 3: AN INNOVATIVE MODEL DESCRIBING THE DYNAMICS OF LAUGHTER IN SCRIPTURE

A model accounting for the various dynamics of laughter is developed in this chapter. Based on the literature and Scripture, "glory" (and its antithesis, "shame") is identified early on as a key element behind laughter. Backing way up, this thesis then addresses such fundamental concepts as "up," "down," and "levity" — very broad terms which provide a general understanding of the dynamics in play during this humorous communication process.

It is then proposed, admittedly at this point without much evidence, that during humorous engagement the specific factors of humility, pride, and freedom are salient. Each of these words is carefully defined and then their relationships to each other are proposed graphically through the use of two models. These models are the centerpieces of this thesis. Chapter 4 goes on to examine Scripture in light of these innovative graphical descriptions of the process that culminates in laughter.

### *People Possess an Instinctive Drive for Glory*

The concept of glory arises throughout the literature pertaining to laughter; as shown in the previous chapter, it is usually associated with the superiority theories, and hence drags along with it negative connotations. Hobbes (1840), for example, defined laughter as "a sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the inferiority of others, or with our own formerly" (chapter 9).

Hobbes' negative evaluation of this phenomenon may prevent people from seeing "sudden glory" as accompanying both virtuous laughter and vicious laughter, a position this study holds. Scriptural passages which include laughter or similar phenomena often include references to glory, though, and so this thesis pursues the concept of "glory," intent on seeing the biblical connection of it with laughter.

In addition to glory (and its opposite, shame), the heart attitudes of humility and pride consistently were found in passages which include laughter. At this point it is necessary to develop a foundation, addressing the key concepts associated with Scriptural instances of laughter: glory and shame, humility

and pride, and the mechanism that, like the mini-lightnings of a Tesla' coil, sparks that glorious leap: freedom. Even more fundamental than these concepts, however, is the notion of "up" being good and "down" being bad.

### "Up" and "Down"

In the realm of metaphors, downward movement always seems to be portrayed in a negative light; an upward movement or position, however, is thought of as good. Consider the following phrases: "things are looking up," "chin up," "uplifting," "build up," "feeling high," "mountain top experience," "exalted leader," "high and mighty," "highly esteemed," and "head in the clouds." Consider the other side of the proverbial coin: "down in the dumps," "rock bottom," "the pits," "in the valley," "low spirits," "feeling low," "crash and burn," "down and out," "downcast," "downhearted," "downtrodden," and "put down." Judging from the words people use, "high" is a good thing — being high, possessing highness, striving for the heights; in contrast, "low" is seen as a bad thing.

At first, Scripture seems to confirm this view entirely. Consider the following biblical phrases: high standing; the highest heavens; highly respected; handsome and highly praised; the Most High God; the Lord Most High; exalted far above all gods; [the Lord] is highly exalted; if you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?; [the Lord] makes me walk on my high places; Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them; glory to God in the highest; Jesus, Son of the Most High God; hosanna in the highest; the God on high; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace; God highly exalted Him; Thou, O Lord, art on high forever (1 Tim. 3:13, 2 Chr. 2:6, 2 Kin. 5:1, 2 Sam. 14:25, Acts 16:17, Ps. 97:9, Ex. 15:1, Gen. 4:7a, Hab. 3:19, Lev. 9:22, Luke 2:14, Mark 5:7, Matt. 21:9, Mic. 6:6, Num. 6:26, Phil. 2:9, Ps. 92:8).

On the other hand, there are occasions where Scripture portrays exaltation in less glowing terms, sometimes in an outright negative light: folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places; that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God; when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne, and his glory was taken away from him; He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble; let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position, and let the rich man glory in his humiliation; whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted; humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time; the proud look of man will be abased, and the loftiness of man will be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day (Eccl. 10:6, Luke 16:15b, Dan. 5:20, Luke 1:52, James 1:9f, Matt. 23:12, 1 Pet. 5:6, Is. 2:11).

Accompanying the lifting found in these verses are words such as proud and humble. Unacceptable lifting or exaltation is that which is associated with

\* Often seen in Hollywood laboratories, Tesla's invention resembles the rabbit ears of a television set. Sparks travel up from the base and erupt in a zap from small metal spheres near the tips of the rods.

### Good Non-derisive Laughter

There are several examples of non-derisive laughter in Scripture, including that found in various Psalms and Proverbs, David's laughter as he dances before the ark entering Jerusalem (1 Chr. 15:29), Sarah's laugh following her giving birth to Isaac (Gen. 21:6), and the laughter shared between Isaac and his wife Rebekah (Gen. 26:8). Scripture provides examples of laughter judged good, identified as such because the phenomenon is a reward from God, angers those opposed to God, accompanies God's redemption, or is otherwise plainly described as virtuous. In each case, the evidence supports the model proposed in chapter 3. The following paragraphs illustrate this point.

Ps. 126:1-5 indicates that righteous laughter is facilitated by a sense of freedom. Although this section of Scripture reflects the association of laughter with victory and liberation, it may further indicate that such laughter stimulates the reinforcement of community: neighbors note that "great things have been done for *them*." In this passage, the psalmist reiterates the principle that tearful humility is awarded with such glorious phenomena as joyful shouting.

The woman of Prov. 31:25 is clothed in glory and she laughs; glory and laughter are clearly positively correlated, something suggested in the model proposed in chapter 3. The virtuous woman laughs at the future out of fearlessness. Because she fears God alone, there is nothing beneath the Most High whom is deserving of her fear. As in other Scripture passages, laughter and fear are negatively correlated, fear never accompanying laughter.

In 1 Chr. 15:29, David selflessly celebrates the glory of God, laughing before the ark, dancing about in a short priestly outfit. If humility is characterized by selflessness, then David's laughter during his humiliating dance is virtuous. Salient to his wife, though, was David's appearance, not God or even David's celebratory heart attitude. With conviction David declares that he will continue to laugh before God with self-effacing abandon, a form of worship that makes one appear trifling (2 Sam. 6:20-23). He recognized, though, that his selflessness will lead to an exaltation, a glorious *kabod* — if not before his wife, then before other women.

Sarah's good laughter (Gen. 21:5-7, Heb. 11:11f) at the birth of her son was characterized by humility; a humility that facilitated group bonding and decreased social distance. Such a faithful laugh decreases social distance, thereby reinforcing a sense of community. As Sarah indicates, her laughter will be contagious, those who hear of her blessing laughing along with her. Verse 6 indicates that Isaac is not merely named Laughter because of the behavior of his parents, but because he is himself reflective of laughter, its incarnation: "God has made laughter."

Laughter can be an expression of intimacy, as when Isaac and his wife are laughing together in Gen. 26:6-9. Once again, it is seen accompanying decreased social distance. Laughter reveals the special intimate nature of the married couple's relationship; that laughter may have merely accompanied their marital playfulness, or it may have facilitated it. In any case, those who observed their playfulness recognized it as something shared not between mere siblings but between lovers.

though, which indicates that no other human communication phenomenon better describes their behavior. The tension between the glory-shame pride-humility continua is not present, likely because animals are incapable of possessing a “heart attitude.” Animals do sense freedom and glory, though, as shown in the following verses.

The free wild donkey laughs at its relative held in captivity (Job 39:5-7). Other animals laugh because of their carefree attitude — after all, God will take care of them when they are unable to do so (see Job 39:16ff). The care-free ostrich laughs because it can run faster than a horse (Job 39:16-18) — this is its one distinguishing glory. The horse, on the other hand, laughs when it sees itself as fearlessly superior to its opponents (Job 39:22, 25). Leviathan’s laugh is facilitated by a lack of fear, brought about by a sense of its own superiority (Job 41:29, 33). And animals belonging to behemoth’s ingroup laugh, secure that the terrifying creature is on their side, and that God will provide for their needs (Job 40:20).

While God, in the Book of Job, does not say so explicitly, people might be encouraged to adopt an attitude similar to that of the other species God has created. People should consider exchanging their heavy concerns about such things as self-care for the freeing levity of knowing that all their needs are met by their Creator. Jesus, for example, reminds His audience that animals are not so careful about themselves and their sustenance; God provides for them (Luke 12:22-32). He goes on to encourage His listeners to shed their anxiousness, their fear, and adopt the attitude of these animals — and the Father, who “has chosen *gladly* to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

## Human's Laughter

People laugh for a variety of reasons; their “humors” become jostled through various means. As proposed in chapter 3 and discussed in chapter 4, the dynamics behind laughter include heart attitude (humility-pride), essential worth (glory-shame), and the sense of freedom that joins the two continua. As fleshed out in the previous chapter, laughter may result from a sense of glorious victory, fearlessness, disbelief, freedom from captivity, freedom from the Law, self-exaltation, and the humiliation of others.

Jesus said, “Be of good cheer” — because of companionship accompanied by a lack of fear (Mark 6:50), because of forgiveness (Matt. 9:2), and because of victory (John 16:33). These “three cheers,” identified by Vance Havner (Bonham, 1986, p. 142), are compatible with the model illustrated in chapter 3 of this thesis and investigated in chapter 4. The lifting inherent in humble, submitted fearlessness; freeing forgiveness; and glorious victory facilitates laughter.

In chapter 3 people’s laughter was categorized as either good or bad, a judgment made according to the context in which it was enjoyed. Note in the following paragraphs the recurrence of such themes as glory and shame, humility and pride, and freedom — all elements of the model discussed in chapter 3.

self-exaltation, or pride. Humility, on the other hand, is associated with acceptable lifting or exaltation. God, the Archimedean Point, lifts from His most high and fixed position; one cannot acceptably lift oneself (just as a man cannot lift himself by his bootstraps). Pride is simply people’s trying to push themselves up.

Scripture reiterates the principle that in order to be lifted up one must first be put down, or at least not assert to the heights. One must be humbled prior to exaltation; a seed must be buried before it can grow (John 12:24); one must die before becoming born again. Jesus explained this principle many times, including the following: “When you are invited [to a meal], take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:10f). The self-denial that accompanies humility will be richly rewarded with exaltation.

## “Up” is Associated with Levity and Laughter

When people laugh, they typically feel “up.” But what is “up” when it comes to feelings? Some might define it literally as the direction away from the center of gravity, a natural attractive force. Gravity, this natural attractive force between objects, can be thought of as a downward pull toward the earth, a natural inclination for fallen humanity. The supernatural, in opposition to the natural, levitates toward the heavens, making one feel “high.”

Chesterton (1908) discussed the relationship of “up” and “down” to humility and pride as well, suggesting that the joys of feeling “up” are associated with humility:

Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of “levitation.” They might go further; a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly.... The tattered cloak of the beggar will bear him up like the rayed plumes of the angels. But the kings in their heavy gold and the proud in their robes of purple will all of their nature sink downwards, for pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One “settles down” into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise to a gay self-forgetfulness. A man “falls” into a brown study; he reaches up at a blue sky. Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking one’s self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to write a good Times leading article than a good joke in Punch. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity. (p. 67)

On the side of pride, Chesterton puts sinking downward, a downward drag, an easy solemnity, and a selfish seriousness. On the side of humility, he puts

levity, gay self-forgetfulness, reaching up, and finally, the leap of laughter.

Levity refers to a physical, mental, or moral lightness (Onions, 1979, p. 525), and is etymologically related to lightness, frivolity, fickleness, inconstancy, light in weight. It comes from *levis*, which is related to lift, raise, easy, agile, nimble, and small (Klein, 1971, p. 419). Webster's *1828 Dictionary* defines levity as "lightness of tempter or conduct... gayety [sic] of mind; want of seriousness; disposition to trifle" (Slater, 1985, vol. 2, p. 6f).

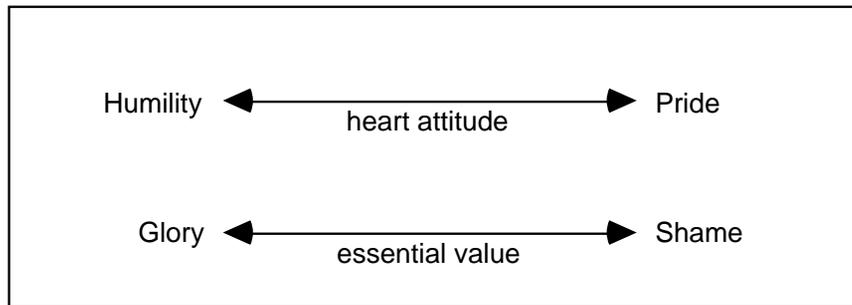
While one may achieve a sense of glorious levity in the manner Hobbes describes — the misfortunes of others — Scripture (and Chesterton) indicates other causes of levity, including humility. While this thesis holds that a sense of glory accompanies laughter, glory in this thesis does not have the negative connotations that Hobbes, for example, implies in his proposals. While glory may result from a self-puffing putting-down of others, it may be caused by self-diminution and consequential action by another.

Scripture identifies various means by which to achieve the lifting or lightening characteristic of glory including humility, repentance, and consequential forgiveness. People try to achieve glory through other means, such as self-exaltation (pride), but Scripture (as shown) indicates that they are destined to be unsuccessful, merely achieving shame.

### Definition of Terms: Glory, Shame, Pride, Humility

At this point, it is necessary to provide in-depth definitions of certain words that have come up, including glory (and its opposite, shame), pride, and humility. These concepts can be understood best as endpoints of two continua: the glory-shame continuum and the pride-humility continuum (see figure 1).

Figure 1: The humility-pride and glory-shame continua.



### Glory: Positive Essential Worth

The definition of *glory* develops throughout Scripture, from having the connotation of weightiness in ancient Hebrew (Kittel, 1978, p. 238) to being the incarnate Son of God in Pauline Greek (Scott, 1927, p. 268), the *doxa* become flesh. Even during the same time period it could convey a broad range

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Laughter, as discussed, is not merely the consequence of a pleasant resolution of non-threatening incongruity, but erupts from the sense of freedom experienced as a result of being forgiven or from disregarding God's Law or society's etiquette. Captivity (as opposed to freedom) and its accompanying fear tend to muffle the atmosphere in which laughter is possible. And the glorious environment which facilitates laughter is the result of a heart attitude characterized by either humility or pride.

It should be acknowledged at this point that some readers may not have been able to complete reading chapter 4 in its entirety. For that reason, the findings of that chapter will be reviewed and discussed in this chapter. Of course, the few paragraphs that follow do not treat the issue of laughter in Scripture to the depth of the previous chapter. In any case, this chapter reviews the findings sufficiently to support the validity of the model proposed in chapter 3.

### God's Laughter

The laughter of God, the most glorious and exalted Being in existence, is associated with, to use Bergson's (1921) phrase, "an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct" (p. 35) those who are characterized by pride. He laughs at those who foolishly and pridefully "counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed" (Ps. 2:1-5). He laughs at those who reject His counsel (Prov. 1:24-26). He laughs at those who exalt themselves above the righteous (Ps. 37:12-15 and Ps. 59:7-10). And He laughs against those who pridefully see themselves as strong, sufficient apart from the Lord (Amos 5:9).

Such laughter appears to be associated with destruction, commonly thought of in negative terms. But Scripture indicates that His intention is to bring those at whom He laughs to a state of humility; a state in which they might find themselves able to turn to God and His Law. In this sense, then, such laughter is redemptive. While His laughter is not necessarily what we might call "humorous," His intentions are good; His attitude is one that causes the vicious merely to fear, but the righteous to join in His laughter.

### Animals' Laughter

Animals "laugh" (to use the word from Scripture) out of a sense of freedom and glory. Again, just as God does not laugh in the same sense as His creation, animals' laughter is different from humans'. Scripture uses the term "laughter,"

people, and I am one at whom men spit" (Job 17:6). God speaks prophetically of Jesus when He says through Isaiah, "I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting" (Is. 50:6b). Jesus Himself predicted and experienced this form of humiliation (Mark 10:34, 14:65). The association is found elsewhere as well (Deut. 25:9, Num. 12:14, Rev. 3:16). Oddly, though, the Great Iconoclast used His own spit to cure a blind man (John 9:6) and deaf-mute (Mark 7:33).

### vomit

During George Bush's presidency, while attending a formal meeting with Japanese heads of state, he found himself becoming sick to his stomach. After curling over and vomiting, his wife relieved the tension by humbly joking about it. Vomit is associated with shame and laughter in Scripture, when God says, "Make him drunk, for he has become arrogant toward the Lord; so Moab will wallow in his vomit, and he also will become a laughingstock (*seboq*: laughter, derision, sport)" (Jer. 48:26). It is associated with shame elsewhere as well (Is. 28:8). Such shame, when dealt with humbly and almost apologetically, is found favorably funny. Such shame, when directed derisively with malignity, also facilitates an atmosphere in which one might laugh; such laughter is spawned by pride, though, and is therefore ethically suspect.

Moist humors and the crevices from which they ooze are usually seen as unclean in Scripture, the revealing of which is shameful. Coming into contact with them transfers this shame; the freeing from such acquired shame, however, may leave one laughing. As discussed earlier, this freedom results either from merciful forgiveness or from disregarding the weight of God's Law or society's etiquette.

### summary

This chapter presented biblical instances in which individuals — God, animals, and humans — laughed. The context in which an occasion of laughter occurs identifies such laughter as either virtuous or vicious. In either case, laughter is consistently associated with heart attitude, freedom, and a sense of glory. Virtuous laughter accompanies a state of humility, or intention to bring one to a state of healthy humility; other-offered freedom; and real other-provided glory. Vicious laughter accompanies prideful behavior, or intention to put others down for their virtuous behavior; self-taken freedom (through disregard for law); and self-taken glory (perceived glory, which is truly shameful). While the model provided in chapter 3 is simple and relatively undeveloped, it seems to be substantiated by Scripture.

of meanings. The ancient Hebrew *kabod* could mean anything from wealth, blessing, and honor to burden, severity, and even sin (Newman, 1992, p. 19). The Greek *doxa* could mean anything from praise, radiance, and divine presence to vain conceit (p. 162). Jewish scholar Koch (1972) adds the essence of holiness to his definition of the word when he submits that *glory* "is used wherever the final state of affairs is set apart from the present and whenever a final amalgamation of the earthly and heavenly spheres is prophesied" (p. 32).

The Hebrew *kabod* developed from an ancient word which means "be heavy" (Ernest, 1994, p. 364). This understanding of the word is seen in the New Testament Greek as well: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). This heaviness is what gives an individual substantial importance (Kittel, 1978, p. 238). When made visible, it is "to be conceived as a radiant, fiery substance" (p. 240), something that filled the temple and guided Moses and his people through the desert. This tangible glory sometimes covers a person like a garment, clothing the nakedness they inherited from the fall, making them presentable before God.

*Doxa* was understood by the first century secular Greeks merely as "opinion, which implies all the subjectivity and therefore all the vacillation of human views and conjectures" (p. 245). It could refer to one's good reputation (Ernest, 1994, p. 363), for example. The Greek translation of the Scriptures (the Septuagint), however, used *doxa* in place of the Hebrew *kabod*, and so those in the religious community imposed a more objective meaning onto it: the reality of God (Kittel, 1978, p. 245) or divine mode of being (p. 247). It has the connotations of light and radiant (p. 235), honor and glory (p. 236), repute and loftiness (p. 237), something that belongs to the higher heavenly regions (p. 240), to extol (p. 253), luminescence (Ernest, 1994, p. 366), beauty and splendor (p. 368), and celebrate (p. 376) — all excellent qualities characteristic of God.

*Kabod* can refer to such bodily things as the tongue or soul, as in the Psalms 16:9 ("my heart is glad and my tongue [*kabod*] rejoices"), 30:12, 57:8, and 108:1. Vine (1981) explains, "The tongue, as the interpreter of the soul, is the glory of man as superior to the brute; it is that by which he glorifies God, and therefore as associated with the soul, is man's highest glory" (OT, p. 73).

Webster's *1828 Dictionary* explains that *glory* "coincides with clear, and the primary sense seems to be to open, to expand, to enlarge.... Honor; praise; fame; renown; celebrity" (Slater, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 92e-f). On the one hand it is "noble; excellent; renowned; celebrated; illustrious," while on the other hand it can be "boastful; self-exulting; haughty; ostentatious" (p. 92e). Etymologically the English *glory* is related to fame, renown, and praise (Klein, 1971, p. 315).

While it has a wide range of meanings, Kittel's (1978) understanding of *glory* as a positive evaluation of one's objective "substantial importance" (p. 238) or positive evaluation of one's essential worth or value is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, with the admission that the word should carry

along with its nuances of the characteristics discussed in the previous five paragraphs.

### Shame: Glory's Antithesis

Shame is the absence of glory, and is positively correlated with dishonor. The Psalmist, for example, confesses to the Lord his "shame and dishonor" (Ps. 69:19) and wishes shame and dishonor on the wicked (Ps. 35:26, Ps. 70:2) as does the Prophet Isaiah, who says, "Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored" (Is. 41:11a).

Just as glory is associated with strength and power, so shame is associated with lack of strength — "Their inhabitants were short of strength, they were dismayed and put to shame" (2 Kin. 19:26a) — and fear (Ps. 53:5 and Is. 54:4: "Fear not, for you will not be put to shame"). While glory is seen as productive, shame is recognized as unproductive (Is. 44:9). While glory is often associated with an abundance of food, shame is associated with a morose lack of food (Is. 65:13, Joel 2:26). And while glory is associated with humility, shame is associated with pride (Zeph. 3:11).

Shame is also associated with nakedness, a state that was first recognized immediately upon the fall of humanity (Gen. 2:25, 3:7). Nakedness was sensed after Adam sinned, for example, after he and his wife in effect transferred allegiance from God to themselves; they did not cover themselves from each other, but from the One they disavowed. Michal considered shameful the minimal clothing of her husband King David (2 Sam. 6:20), the one to whom she belonged and who belonged to her. Shame is associated with "uncovered buttocks" (Is. 20:4). God lifts the skirts of Israel and Judah, revealing their shame\* (Jer. 13:26). Even a naked head\*\* — baldness — is associated with shame (Ezek. 7:18). Jesus, in Revelation, encourages people to buy "white garments, that you may clothe (4016g. *periballo*: to throw around, put on) yourself, and that the shame (152g. *aishbune*) of your nakedness (1132g. *gumnotes*) may not be revealed" (Rev. 3:18a). The association of shame and nakedness is made elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Is. 47:3, Mic. 1:11, and Rev. 16:15). Those who feel a sense of shame and its accompanying nakedness may feel inclined to hide or obscure their shame (2 Cor. 4:2). The association of shame to nakedness is made clear throughout Scripture (e.g., Job 8:22, Ps. 35:26, Ps. 89:45, Ps. 132:18, Jer. 3:25, and Mic. 7:10).

Again, it should be emphasized that an uncovered body is not necessarily shameful. Scripture indicates that it is the inappropriately uncovered body, the body and its more glorious parts revealed to those to whom it does not belong, that is shameful. The beautiful, glorious body becomes "naked" when it is revealed to someone to whom it is perceived as not belonging. Interestingly, the more glory associated with a particular body part, the more shameful it is to inappropriately reveal that part. The sexual organs, for example, are

\* Note that it is Israel's skirts that are lifted; their shame is not in their being uncircumcised, but in their nakedness being revealed.

\*\* A symbol of glory, see 1 Cor. 11.

"Cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go" (Gen. 3:14b). Satan, the serpent, is eternally humiliated in his having to crawl belly-down upon the humus. Levitical law goes on to declare all such belly-crawling creatures unclean (Lev. 11:42).

### Bodily Discharges

The exhuming, or opening up, of the wet humors of the body is shameful. Again, Levitical law declares, "When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean" (Lev. 15:2b). Such shame the woman with the flow of blood felt as she approached Jesus to be healed (Luke 8:43-48). But Jesus was not hesitant to touch this unclean woman, didn't laugh at her discharges; instead, His clean-ness so overpowered her shameful unclean-ness that she became pure and was consequentially healed. On the other hand, the blood of sacrifices, including Jesus, is a cleansing agent (Lev. 14:52, Lev. 16:19, Ezek. 43:20, and Heb. 9:14). Blood is an odd exception to the shamefulness of bodily discharges since it is associated with life (Gen. 9:4, Lev. 17:11, Lev. 17:14, Deut. 12:23, John 6:53, and John 6:54).

### Dung and Urine

The body's refuse, leaving the lower stratum of the body, is celebrated during Carnival as the topsy-turvy height of that stratum. It represents gaiety, "neither life nor fully degraded matter, a liminal substance just like the festival of which it was such a vital part" (Sanders, 1995, p. 200). Associating this degraded matter with people is degrading. Shame on those who are "doomed to eat their own dung and drink their own urine" (2 Kings 18:27). Shame on those who in dying are "like dung on the face of the ground" (Jer. 25:33). Such humiliation makes people feel like sh\*\*, but like the kingdom of God itself, they may rise like a mustard seed into a lofty tree through layers of such natural fertilizer.

### Flatulence

Those parts of the body relatively close to the earth — either positionally like the feet or buttocks, or materially like flatulence, burps, and defecation — are sometimes sources of laughter. People's attitude might be, "I'm so different from, so superior to the earthiness that comes out of me." Although the expulsion of gasses from the anus is not clearly mentioned in Scripture, because it is associated with defecation it shares its humiliation. Sanders (1995), who seems to enjoy discussing dirty humor, explains that flatulence represents inversionary laughter (p. 224) or substratum laughter (p. 221). Flatulence, he says, "brings together the alimentary and respiratory systems in one foul and corrosive act." (Sanders, 1995, p. 221).

### Spit

Scripture generally associates spit, representing one of the four humors of the body, with shame. Poor Job declared, "He has made me a byword of the

## Nakedness

A tear in your pants or hole in the armpit of your shirt might draw a laugh. Television script writers commonly include the dropping of one's drawers to get a cheap laugh. Such nakedness, or hints of it, Scripture identifies as shameful. In order to shame His enemies, God declares His intention to "lift up your skirts over your face, and show to the nations your nakedness" (Nah. 3:5b). Elsewhere He declares that His enemies will be led away to slavery, "naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt" (Is. 20:4). Such inappropriate revealing of the body is shameful.

It should be reemphasized that an uncovered body is not necessarily shameful. Scripture indicates that it is the inappropriately uncovered body, the body and its more glorious parts revealed to those to whom it does not belong, that is shameful. The beautiful, glorious body becomes "naked" when it is revealed to someone to whom it is perceived as not belonging. Interestingly, the more glory associated with a particular body part, the more shameful it is to inappropriately reveal that part. The sexual organs, for example, are strongly associated with the blessing of God. The first command God gave to humanity was to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). The womb and its fruit are associated with the manifestation of God's blessing (e.g., Ps. 127:4f). Lack of pregnancy is associated with lack of blessing (e.g., Ex. 23:26, Deut. 7:14). It is when these more honorable parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:23ff) are trivially revealed that shame is brought about.

The connection with shame and nakedness is found throughout Scripture (Ezek. 22:10, Mic. 1:11, Hab. 2:16, Rev. 3:18, and Rev. 16:15).

## Baldness

Those who lose their hair at an early age are met with laughter, sometimes friendly, sometimes not. They may even joke about it themselves in order to voice others' perspective in a more forgiving manner. The prophet Elisha was bald, and a few dozen kids found this a source of amusement, to their harm (2 Kin. 2:23f). This correlation between baldness and shame is echoed in Jeremiah as well: "Every head is bald ... he is ashamed! So Moab will become a laughing-stock" (Jer. 48:37-39). But baldness is not itself a shameful form of nakedness. Priestly law, for example, declares, "Now if a man loses the hair of his head, he is bald; he is clean" (Lev. 13:40). Paul, however, states that women's lack of hair is shameful, hair being a covering for her nakedness (1 Cor. 11:6, 15). Again, Scripture indicates that the inappropriate uncovering of the body is shameful, whereas the appropriate uncovering of the body is not so.

## The Belly

There seems to be a link between certain joyful occasions and the digestive process, as symbolized by the belly. Things that erupt from the midsection — burps, grumblings, flatulence, dung, vomit — are degrading, and sometimes found laughable. A big, round belly sometimes evokes belly laughs. This part of the body is associated with humility. Recall the garden serpent's punishment:

strongly associated with the blessing of God. The first command God gave to humanity was to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). The womb and its fruit are associated with the manifestation of God's blessing (e.g., Ps. 127:4f). Lack of pregnancy is associated with lack of blessing (e.g., Ex. 23:26, Deut. 7:14). It is when these more honorable parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:23ff) are trivially revealed that shame is brought about.

Just as shame is associated with nakedness, it can also be associated with clothing; people can be clothed with glory, people can also be clothed with shame. The Psalmist writes, "Let my accusers be clothed with dishonor, and let them cover themselves with their own shame as with a robe" (Ps. 109:29). When people tailor their own figurative garments, they are found to be not unlike the Emperor's new clothes, clothes which were insufficient to cover his nakedness. Adam and Eve, for example, crafted garments from leaves when they recognized their shameful nakedness (Gen. 3:7); only God, however, was able to provide less shameful clothing, made from the skin of an animal He had killed just minutes before (Gen. 3:21). People cover themselves and each other with shame; God covers with glory. This glory is worn like a flight suit, like a cluster of helium balloons. Shame is a deep-sea diving suit, on which are attached massive weight belts.

While shame is not associated with one's humbling oneself, it is associated with one's humbling of another. "Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress," the Psalmist cries (Ps. 35:26). The Prophet Isaiah comforts Israel, saying, "You will not be put to shame or humiliated" (Is. 45:17). The connection between shame and other-imposed humiliation is clear, especially in the prophetic books (e.g., Ps. 70:2, Is. 45:16, Is. 54:4, Is. 61:7, Jer. 14:3, and Jer. 15:9). Again, bringing shame upon oneself is not the result of self-humbling, but self-exaltation. The first appearance of shame, for example, brought about by the first couple, resulted not from their self-humbling, but their prideful self-exaltation.

Shame is associated with others' demeaning laughter. The Psalmist cries out, "Let those be ashamed and humiliated who seek my life; let those be turned back and dishonored who delight in my hurt. Let those be turned back because of their shame who say, 'Aha, aha!'" (Ps. 70:2f). He repeats his prayer in Ps. 40:15. The "aha!" said in delight is nothing less than a derisive laugh.

Finally, the cross of Christ is a thing of shame, something Jesus despised, yet endured, because He recognized the joyful glory that awaited Him (Heb. 12:2, Heb. 6:6). The Jewish people understood it to be despicable, cursed by God (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13). The Apostle Paul saw the incongruity of God's glorious Son being joined to such a shameful, cursed thing, and noted that if those who had crucified Him had understood what they were doing, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). But they did, and the consequences for humanity, and for humor scholarship, is not trifling.

## The Glory-Shame Continuum

Being a continuum, individuals possess a degree of both glory and shame, and there is tension between these two endpoints. Humor scholars have rec-

ognized that this tension is a source of humor. Froeschels (1948), for example, writes that humor is “the mood in which a person is conscious at the same time of his importance and of his insignificance” (p. 39). Hoffding writes, “In humor we feel great and small at the same time” (in Feinberg, 1978, p. 5). This hints of the uneasy friction that develops between humiliation and exaltation, and between shame and glory.

Furthermore, people may misinterpret their shame, deriving from it a sense of glory. Regarding these people, the Apostle Paul writes, “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame” (Phil. 3:19a, see also Prov. 30:12). Their bellies, and perhaps the flatulence and burps their stomachs produce, become elevated so high that they are found to produce more belly laughs than the Creator of bellies. It is not that the noises and smells of the body are not funny — they very well may be, unless the Belly Creator is disallowed to join the laughter. In the midst of their shame, these people experience a type of fantasized glory. But shame is shame, even though it may share the levity of glory: “... they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame” (Hos. 4:7b) and “utter disgrace will come upon [their] glory” (Hab. 2:16b). Again, laughing at the body, in the manner of *Jongleurs de Dieu*<sup>†</sup> St. Francis, who might consider the ignoble platypus his brother, is not necessarily sinful activity. It becomes sinful only when the body is found to be a source of more joy than the One Who created it.

Scripture indicates, “It is not ... glory to search out one’s own glory” (Prov. 25:27). It is natural for people to seek glory through prideful, puffed-up-like-popcorn, self-seeking means, for even the ungodly recognize that glory is associated with mirth (Is. 66:5). Attainment of glory, though, is possible only through self-humbling, a wise but apparently shameful activity, the seeds of which produce a lofty and weighty glory (1 Cor. 15:43, Prov. 3:35). This unnatural and unexpected process, one which frees the humble dung-level wretch into the high realm of glory, is also a source of paradox and laughter.

### Humility: Selfless, Assertive, Serving Heart Attitude

While glory and shame refer to the essential worth or value of an individual, humility and pride are attitudes of the heart — heart attitudes. The heart practices humility; Scripture identifies it as the primary organ capable of doing so (Lev. 26:41, 2 Kin. 22:19, 2 Chr. 32:26, 2 Chr. 34:27, Ps. 107:12, Dan. 5:22, Matt. 11:29, Col. 3:12). Scripture also clearly says that pride too is an attitude seated in the heart (Deut. 8:14, 2 Kin. 14:10, 2 Chr. 25:19, 2 Chr. 26:16, 2 Chr. 32:25, Ps. 131:1, Prov. 16:5, Prov. 18:12, Prov. 21:4, Is. 9:9, Hos. 13:6, Luke 1:51). For this reason, the continuum identified by humility and pride is labeled heart attitude.

There are many misconceptions about the heart attitude of humility. Some might think of the humble as shy, self-depreciating, and nondescript. This is to misunderstand humility. While it does refer to one’s heart attitude, and how one thinks of oneself, it doesn’t merely deal with the question, “Should I think

In the same way, they don’t laugh at the pratfall of a friend — they laugh at her anticipated rising. The righteous may laugh when Saul is felled from his horse by God because they know God also raises him up. They may even be bold enough to laugh on Good Friday, breathlessly awaiting the glorious resurrection. There may even be those who laugh at Satan’s involvement in the fall of humanity, in full assurance of the levity Christ achieved through His shameful cross.

Or consider it this way: children don’t push a beach ball beneath the surface of the water just to watch it go down, but to see it burst splashingly out of the water. Farmers don’t plant seeds in dirt to get rid of excess grain, but in anticipation of a fruitful harvest. They only plant deep enough, generally not so deep as hell. Jesus’ joy wasn’t in the death-plummet of the cross, but in “the joy set before Him” (Heb. 12:1). Life is enduring because of the hope of rising. Glorious laughter is pleasant because of the hope of lifting, not from the fall itself. The cross is not itself a source of heavenly joy, but Jesus’ resurrection is. The cross represents the deepest fallenness to which humanity has sunk; resurrection is the highest of heights.

Humility consists of the act of considering others’ needs before one’s own, serving them boldly, assertively, sensitively, and with an accurate self-assessment. Others’ physical needs include food and clothing and, within a God-given framework, sex (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Interestingly, the alimentary and food-processing digestive systems, the body underneath the clothing, and the reproductive system are fundamental sources of most jokes, albetthem vulgar or dirty ones. The humiliation of things associated with the needs of the body is often found laughable.

Laughter and celebrations often include food, a substance necessary for the maintenance of the body. One might question, “Is food a catalyst or an outright cause of laughter?” and “Why is there an apparent link between humor and the alimentary or digestive systems?” — and Scripture indeed indicates that there is such a link. While waiting for Moses to return from the mountain on which he received the Ten Commandments, for example, “the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh)” (Ex. 32:6). These faithless Jews humbled themselves before a god, exalting the golden calf, perhaps even sharing ham sandwiches with each other, the result of which drew them up to a sense of glory and laughter. The preacher of Ecclesiastes notes that people “prepare a meal for enjoyment (7814h. *sechoq*: laughter, derision, sport)” (Eccl. 10:19a). This correlation between food and laughter is found throughout Scripture: 1 Chr. 12:38-40, 1 Chr. 29:22, Neh. 8:12, Eccl. 9:7, Is. 65:13, Joel 1:16, and Luke 15:23.

As well, there is a correlation between the “shameful” parts and behaviors of the body and laughter. These items include nakedness, baldness, the belly, bodily discharges, dung and urine, flatulence, spit, and vomit. Such shameful exhibitions might arouse laughter if dealt with forgivingly or if their shame is entirely disregarded. The following paragraphs touch on these eight elements.

<sup>†</sup> Juggler or jester of God.

while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Cor. 12:22-25)

Of course, the writer is talking about the Body of Christ, how those who are considered less useful possess a glory that the lofty often lack — a principle discussed at length in this thesis. The principle behind this concept, though, can be applied to the literal bodies of people: certain body parts are by nature less presentable, weaker, apparently less honorable. When these parts are portrayed as holding a degree of honor not innate to them, people may laugh at the resulting incongruity. When you leap from the apparent shamefulness of these unrepresentable parts to the glory God gives them, one may laugh.

St. Francis was known to laugh gaily at his body, belittling it as “Brother Ass” (Chesterton, 1986, p. 27). Nature, which includes the human body, “is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little, dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved” (Chesterton, 1908, p. 62). The Roman Catholic monk went so far as to declare, “Praised be God for our Sister, the death of the body” (Chesterton, 1986, p. 28). Amid such self-depreciation the Christian ascetic found a joy that caused the wealthy to wonder. He practiced the Baptist’s “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30), and experienced God’s consequential blessed happiness. Humbly, he disregarded his body; he stretched the common understanding of humility by actually physically abusing his body (Chesterton, 1986, p. 27). Such abuse is hard to justify, since upon conversion to the Christian faith the body no longer remains the property of the one who inhabits it:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you ... and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19f)

This sentiment is echoed in Deut. 14:2 and 1 Cor. 7:23 as well. Keeping with humility, a disregard for the body — even laughing at the tensions of its glories and humiliations — is right; a self-centered, body-centered mentality is a perversion of true humility, though. It is not right to put down what belongs to Someone else, unless it is done in the prophetic, redemptive manner discussed earlier.

The hurting of the body is not innately funny. The psalmist, for example, does not find it funny: “May they not rejoice over me, who, when my foot slips, would magnify (1431h. *gadal*: to grow up, become great) themselves against me” (Ps. 38:16). And neither does the ecclesiastical Preacher find it funny: “Woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up” (Eccl. 4:10b). Falling is not in itself funny. Instead, people should celebrate with those who fall *and then arise*, vicariously enjoying their rise from humility, like someone might enjoy their football team’s winning after being behind most of the game.

Good people don’t laugh at mere humiliation, but amid the resulting glory.

well or poorly of myself?” When it thinks of itself, it thinks truthfully. Indeed, however, it thinks rarely of itself. A devotional identifies humility as “the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for God to be all” (Murray, 1951, p. 14). The humble do not merely lower themselves to dirt level, they lose themselves in self-forgetfulness. In humility, others — their happiness, their well-being — take precedence over one’s own.

Webster’s *1828 Dictionary* emphasizes the lowness associated with humility: “Lowly; modest; meek; submissive; opposed to proud, haughty, arrogant or assuming.... To abase; to reduce to a low state.... to abase the pride of; to reduce arrogance and self-dependence; to give a low opinion of one’s moral worth” (Slater, vol. 2, p. 103a). It is free from pride and arrogance (p. 103b). Etymologically *humble* is related to “low, base, on the ground, earth, ground, soil, humus” (Klein, 1971, p. 356). Both *humble* and *human* share a common root, a root that burrows deep into the dust of the earth. Humble humanity was created by a dust-dwelling God, One who plays more in the dirt and mud than in the trees. While He resides up in a lofty mansion on Mount Zion, He condescends on His hands and knees to interact with those crafted breathingly from earthy muck.

Humility is not merely a virtue; it is the primary, foundational one from which all others are derived. Murray (1951) writes, “Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue” (p. 12). And what surprising joy is found in this most basic of virtues:

Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man.... His very power of enjoyment destroyed half his joys. By asking for pleasure, he lost the chief pleasure; for the chief pleasure is surprise. Hence it became evident that if a man would make his world large, he must be always making himself small. Even the haughty visions, the tall cities, and the toppling pinnacles are the creations of humility. Giants that tread down forests like grass are the creations of humility. Towers that vanish upwards above the loneliest star are the creations of humility. For towers are not tall unless we look up at them; and giants are not giants unless they are larger than we. All this gigantesque imagination, which is, perhaps, the mightiest of the pleasures of man, is at bottom entirely humble. It is impossible without humility to enjoy anything — even pride. (Chesterton, 1908, p. 16)

So innocent, so child-like is humility. It is so trusting, believing even the most bizarre and fantastic imagery crafted by long-dead journalists. It looks up and sees heaven, while pride looks down and sees mud. It looks up into the face of daddy and laughs. Humility sets the stage for laughter; it even facilitates it. The sense of surprise necessary for laughter is characteristic of humility.

The heart attitude of humility does not consist of deceptive or manipulative self-effacement, but of an accurate assessment of oneself. In his book *The Humility of God*, Macquarrie (1978) writes that humble spirituality is not “an

introspective concern with one's own inner health....This life is one of going out in freedom, love and community. But the pull of gravity seems to be all the other way, shutting us up in sloth, inertia and self-centredness" (p. 82). C.S. Lewis (1944) in his *Screwtape Letters* has one demon write to another:

You must therefore conceal from the patient the true end of Humility. Let him think of it, not as self-forgetfulness, but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character.... By this method thousands of humans have been brought to think that humility means pretty women trying to believe they are ugly and clever men trying to believe they are fools.... [God's] whole effort, therefore, will be to get the man's mind off the subject of his value altogether. (pp. 72-74)

This false humility is enjoyable to those who practice it, according to Scripture. It is characterized by unspiritual puffed-up bragging (Col. 2:18) and the harsh treatment of the body (Col. 2:23). But this is not humility.

Humility is not to be confused with timidity, which is a vice (2 Tim. 1:7). Timidity is the opposite of boldness; it obscures the truth and is accompanied by a spirit of fear. It is spineless. It is "an emotional bondage, a fear of position, status, of being seen and being known" (Kinzer, 1980, p. 46). Fear is merely a submission to something or someone perceived as greater than oneself. One who fears God, for example, submits to Him. Those who fear death consider it a more formidable entity than the Life-Giver. The humble, in fearing and submitting to God above others, should not fear or feel threatened by anything in creation, as Jesus often repeated. As humor scholars point out, threat, commonly associated with timidity, debilitates an environment favorable to laughter.

The opposite of timidity — boldness — a quality consistent with humility, may be found laughable. Bacon (1909) writes:

So these men, when they have promised great matters, and failed most shamefully, yet (if they have the perfection of boldness) they will but slight it over, and make a turn, and no more ado. Certainly to men of great judgment, bold persons are a sport to behold; nay, and to the vulgar also, boldness has somewhat of the ridiculous. *For if absurdity be the subject of laughter, doubt you not but great boldness is seldom without some absurdity.* (p. 32, emphasis added)

While humility is characterized by boldness, it possesses a degree of submissiveness as well. Humility includes the idea of "taking on the mind of a servant, placing oneself at others' disposal" (Kinzer, 1980, p. 62). This is consistent with the following, identified by many as this term's defining Scripture passage:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was

## The Body Does Funny Things to Get a Laugh

The body and its humors have long been a source of laughter. Its noises, its smells, its sometimes-quirky behavior and appearance are all stimuli which metaphorically sometimes jostle the "humors," leading people to laugh. As this thesis has been discussing, laughter is related to humiliation and glory, pride and shame, and a freedom that imparts that glorious sense of levity. An examination of what the Bible says about the body and its inner workings further supports this contention.

Laughter accompanies a type of transparency, or opening up of the body — when the embarrassing inside thoughts and gasses are freed into the outside. During hilarity, the body loses a degree of control (Gilhus, 1991, p. 267), a humbling state during which those muscles which close the body sometimes become lax. Unintended (and sometimes intended) releases of air — flatulence, burps, tummy grumbings, bad breath, odors from feet and armpits — sometimes stimulate a release of air and sound from the mouth, in the form of a laugh. One either laughs freely at these noises or smells or feels humiliated — and sometimes both. The unearthing of people's unclean inner workings is humiliating, even shameful, and observers may react laughingly to such displays. Sanders (1995) leads one to consider that if the behavior degrades the individual alone, it is found funny; if the behavior is a degrading commentary on those whom the audience loves and respects, including God and His creation, it is found not funny (p. 200). The humbling of those who are perceived of as not deserving such humiliation is found not funny. Ultimately, in terms this thesis has been using, if such humiliating phenomena degrade righteous behavior, they are morally wrong; if they bring people to a state of humility in which God is able to bring about glory, they are right.

The law declares the haphazard spilling of the humors to be a cause of uncleanness; merciful forgiveness, however, declares such spillage a source of redemption. It is interesting to note that Jesus' humors — his blood and bile and phlegm — brought cleansing, healing, lifting, blessing (the original meaning of which is "to sprinkle or consecrate with blood" [Klein, 1971, p. 85]). Keeping in mind the ancients' concept of humor, then, it is not heretical to suggest that Jesus' inner workings are humorous, offering relieving levity to fallen humanity.

The Apostle Paul notes that certain parts of the body are sometimes perceived as less honorable than others. He suggests that these less honorable parts are indeed bestowed by God with a special honor. Just as the haphazard spillage of such a sacred humor as blood — the source of life — brings uncleanness, so the inappropriate uncovering of certain sacred body parts is a dishonoring act. It may be for this reason that the lighthearted treatment of these parts sometimes leads people to shift into that glorious feeling accompanying laughter. Paul writes that:

those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,

their marital playfulness, or it may have facilitated it. In any case, those who observed their playfulness recognized it as something shared not between siblings but between lovers.

Sanders (1995) claims that the Hebrew for laughter (*sechaq*) and the Hebrew for copulation (*sechoq*) are extremely similar (pp. 40, 53). Oddly, none of the verses that contain *sechoq* (Job 8:21, Job 12:4, Ps. 126:2, Prov. 10:23, Prov. 14:13, Eccl. 2:2, Eccl. 7:3, Eccl. 7:6, Eccl. 10:19, Jer. 20:7, Jer. 48:26, Jer. 48:27, Jer. 48:39, and Lam. 3:14) would make sense if the word were translated “copulation.” And replacing Isaac’s “caress” or “play” with “copulate” would not be consistent with how the word is translated in other passages: jesting, laughing, making sport, mocking, and entertaining. The King James Version is pretty literal when it translates *sechoq* in this instance “sporting” — Isaac was sporting with his wife. In any case, that the two words may be so similar could shed light on the intimacy of laughter, since they may be etymologically related.

### Example 6

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free (1658g. *eleutheros*: free, i.e. not a slave or not under restraint) woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son [i.e., Isaac] by the free woman through the promise (1860g. *epaggelia*: a summons, a promise). This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, “Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.” And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman. (Gal. 4:22-31)

In Isaac, laughter and freedom find a strong positive correlation. Jesus, whose ancestry includes Isaac, proclaimed freedom to the captives (Luke 4:18). And those who share the lineage of Jesus, the second Adam, are also free to share freedom with the captive. It is not a freedom achieved through disregard for the law, a freedom achieved through self-exaltation. Instead, this is a freedom from the humiliation of death, a forgiveness for breaking law. Jesus, the second Isaac, makes provision for freedom, a freedom not alien to the joyful shout of laughter.

also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name. (Phil. 2:3-9)

This humble Jesus said and did things perceived to be funny, causing people to laugh. He wasn’t joking when He told people that a dead girl was only sleeping, but they laughed (Matt. 9:23-25). He allowed soldiers to dress him up, thorny tiara and all, and laugh spittingly at Him, inviting Him to join them in a game of blindman’s bluff (Mark 15:17-20). And He humbled Himself through His shameful crucifixion, and the rubberneckerers laughed (Matt. 27:41-43). Onlookers may have snickered when this vulgar Man rubbed muddy spit on a blind man’s eyes. They may have rolled their haughty eyes when He risked defiling Himself by touching those judged unclean. But the gawkers and the soldiers and the disbelievers missed out on the hilarious laughter enjoyed by Jesus’ friends just a few days later when He exchanged His humility for the glory of resurrection.

### Pride: Self-Lifting Heart Attitude

Pride “signifies showing oneself above others, pre-eminent; it is always used in Scripture in the bad sense” (Vine, NT vol. 3, 1981, p. 226). It is the lifting of oneself in anticipation of the attainment of glory. The proud gain their sense of loftiness by considering others’ debility, and their relative strength; they personify the law of natural physics which states that a downward kicking action produces an upward thrusting reaction. It will be shown shortly that the proud achieve a sense of glory (which is truly shame) by freeing themselves from the bondages imposed by law (in the form of God’s laws and societies’ etiquettes). The proud are in opposition to the humble, and they gain their sense of loftiness by considering others’ strength — an upward, sun-ward, levity-inducing posture. Indeed, pride is the absence of humility.

Webster’s *1828 Dictionary* explains that it consists of an “inordinate self-esteem; an unreasonable conceit of one’s own superiority in talents, beauty, wealth, accomplishments, rank or elevation in office, which manifests itself in lofty airs, distance, reserve, and often in contempt of others” (Slater, 1985, vol. 2, p. 42g). It is puffed up like popcorn, as light and fragile as a balloon. Such a thing is incapable of taking on the weight of glory, although its levity may provide the illusory feelings of glory. Indeed, the proud refuse the burden of heavy glory, accepting instead the puffy air-headed substitute known as shame.

\* It should be noted that breaking various societies’ etiquettes is not necessarily characteristic of pride or ungodly character. In fact, freeing oneself from the bondage of those societal rules which are contrary to God’s law is not a vice, but a virtue; not mere rebelliousness, but patriotism.

## The Humility-Pride Continuum

It should go without saying that the humbling of oneself is virtuous, and the self-exaltation inherent in pride is a vice.<sup>7</sup> Those who practice the former will receive the happy blessing of God, unlike the latter, who would rather bless themselves. Indeed, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5b, James 4:6b). And it is much better to keep company with these humble, avoiding the proud (Prov. 16:19, 1 Cor. 15:33).

So much does God hate pride that He is committed to flattening it to the ground. "He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (Dan. 4:37b, see also Is. 2:11, 17, 5:15). And He does so with "the trickery of His hands" (Is. 25:11). God goes so far as to instruct others to lower the proud, angrily if necessary: "Pour out the overflowings of your anger; and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and tread down the wicked where they stand" (Job 40:11f). The prophet Elisha humbled a group of adolescents who laughed pridefully at him. Because of their calling him "baldhead," he cursed them and two bears consequently mauled them (2 Kings 2:23). A valid question remains, though: "Are the proud to be lowered through some humorous type of communication?" A later section explains that this is permissible, through what this thesis labels "redemptive laughter" or "prophetic laughter."

## Freedom Interfaces Humility-Pride and Glory-Shame Continua

The laughter-producing jostling of the "humors" results from the freedom people feel as they suddenly achieve a sense of glory. It was freedom from captivity that led the psalmist to laugh (Ps. 126:1). It was the freeing of the ark of the covenant that led the Jews to laugh (2 Sam. 6:4-8). The son of the free woman, rather than the slave woman, was named Laughter (Gal. 4:22). Even the wild donkey laughs because it enjoys a freedom its domestic relative lacks (Job 39:5-7). In a more abstract way, freedom (either through merciful forgiveness on behalf of the law-giver/enforcer or one's simple disregard for the Laws of God or societal etiquette) is the mechanism that interfaces the liberating leap from heart attitude (humility-pride) to a positive sense of one's essential worth (glory-shame).

Recall that even in their shame individuals may feel a sense of glory, that they truly feel they are clothed in glory (Phil. 3:19). This in mind, freedom could also be conceptualized as a clothing process. Those who achieve true glory are clothed in something substantial and weighty, while those who attain shame are clothed in, well, nothing. Recall Hans C. Andersen's fable of *The Emperor's New Clothes*: his highness paid two shysters a fortune in exchange for a new royal robe. They pretended to spin and sew elegant material, and

<sup>7</sup> It *should* go without saying. Of course, there are those in the contemporary North American culture who would argue against this point.

demeaning humiliation. The child of the slave woman mocked the chosen child of the free woman. The mocking young man achieved his laughter not through the freedom associated with graceful forgiveness, but through a disregard for the law of God, Who had promised that Isaac would be the blessed and chosen offspring of Abraham. Ishmael, then, represents flesh, sin, law, judgment, slavery; Isaac represents spirit, forgiveness, mercy, and freedom.

Isaac's humble personality in this case is notable. Nowhere does he indicate any negative response toward his half-brother, the one who is deriding him. Instead, Laughter humbly accepts the mockery, sloughing it off as though it had no effect; he seems to have a good sense of humor. Of course, he was a mere infant at this time, and probably did not understand his half-brother's insolence. Later in life Isaac and his half-brother's friendship is once again manifested: together they bury their father (Gen. 25:9).

The literature characterizes Isaac as modest and retiring, passive, meditative, trusting, easygoing, yielding, self-effacing, submissive, affectionate, cooperative, harmless, useful, peaceful, stationary, content, meek, gentle, and blameless. Although he was in his mid-twenties, he submitted to his father's plans to sacrifice him to God (Deen, 1974, p. 12). While in his mid-thirties, his mother died, and his father selected for him a wife (Gen. 24). (Both his father and sons had multiple wives; Isaac was satisfied with but one.) When challenged by enemies, he moved himself and his family, a response that eventually won their friendship (p. 15). And when his sons came to receive their blessing, Isaac was tricked into giving it to God's chosen, rather than his chosen (Gen. 27).

For these reasons, Isaac is often the overlooked Patriarch, being overshadowed by his father, his sons, and his wife. Oddly, among the Jews Isaac holds a special place. Hastings (1916) mentions that "for the name of Isaac they reserve their greatest honours and their deepest reverence" (pp. 370-371). Isaac is the least imposing of the three Patriarchs, the one with whom most people can relate. And he is the one who most strikingly typifies Christ, in his supernatural birth and near-sacrifice.

## Example 5

So Isaac lived in Gerar. When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." And it came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh) his wife Rebekah. Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister?'" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" (Gen. 26:6-9)

Laughter can be an expression of intimacy. In this case it accompanies decreased social distance. Laughter revealed the special intimate nature of the married couple's relationship. That laughter may have merely accompanied

### Example 3

Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac (3327h. *Yitschaq*: “he laughs,”) was born to him. And Sarah said, “God has made laughter (6712h. *tsechoq*: laughter) for me; everyone (3605h. *kol*: the whole, all) who hears will laugh (*tsachaq*) with me.” And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.” (Gen. 21:5-7)

While her earlier laughs were facilitated by lack of faith, this laugh is one of faith, as implied by the writer of Hebrews:

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (Heb. 11:11f)

Such a faithful laugh decreases social distance, thereby reinforcing a sense of community. As Sarah indicates, her laughter will be contagious, those who hear of her blessing laughing along with her. Verse 6 indicates that Isaac is not merely named Laughter because of the behavior of his parents, but because he is himself reflective of laughter, its incarnation: “God has made laughter.”

### Example 4

And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh). Therefore she said to Abraham, “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.” (Gen. 21:8-10)

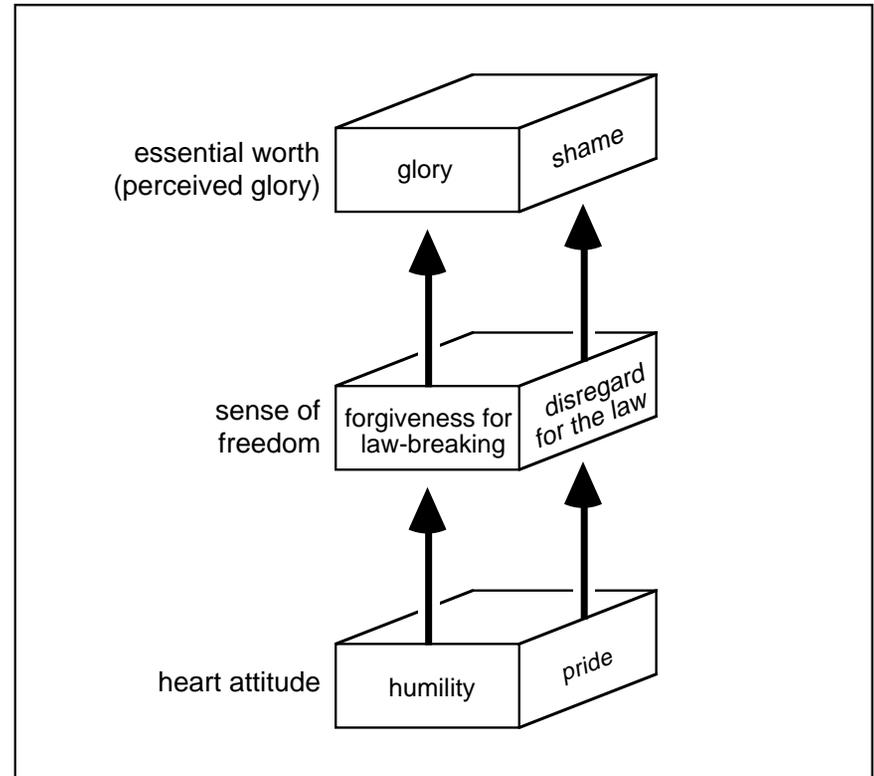
Imagine Ishmael’s situation. He had lived for 13 years as his father’s only son, and been given the name “God hears.” All those around him recognized him as the rightful heir to Abraham’s fortunes, the child of promise. Doubtlessly he was doted on by many of those around him, receiving their respect. Now that Isaac is born, though, he finds himself the son of a mere slave, himself becoming but a mere slave. Indeed, even God identifies Isaac as Abraham’s only son (Gen. 22:2). Ishmael’s response is not unlike that of the prodigal son, who complains bitterly about the apparent preference of his brother. His anger, while unacceptable, is understandable.

The mockery that Ishmael shows toward Isaac is not an isolated occasion. Sarah saw that he was in the habit of persecuting his half brother, according to Gal. 4:29, Ishmael being born according to the flesh, Isaac being born according to the Spirit.

Such laughter at Laughter communicated a self-exalting pride and other-

then gave him an “invisible suit” that could only be seen by intelligent people (such as, of course, the emperor). In truth, the emperor gloated *au naturale* during a parade held in his honor, to his shame. Just as the emperor was under the impression that he was wearing grand clothing, so those who laughingly enjoy their shame are under the false impression that they are clothed in glory. In both cases, it is precisely their pride that drives individuals to not recognize their nakedness.

Figure 2: Freedom is the mechanism interfacing the humility-pride continuum with the glory-shame continuum.



Webster explains that freedom means “to pardon; to remit, as an offense or debt; to overlook an offense, and treat the offender as not guilty” (Slater, 1985, vol. 1, p. 86g). Macquarrie (1978) defines freedom as “the dissolving of a false relation, but it remains incomplete until a new relation comes into being and takes the place of the old one” (p. 47). In this case, though, the relations — people’s relationship with their law-breaking — are not at all false. Both the humble and the proud recognize that a law — either God’s or society’s — has been broken and needs to be addressed. The dissolving of this slavish relation

frees people to levitate into glorious realms where law-breaking has become irrelevant.

Figure 2 is a model of this process. The continua described in the previous sections are now represented as different sides of a cube, the ends of the continua now forming two planes of a box. One can only achieve a sense of glory by transecting the middle box, which represents freedom. The path to true glory is humility ' freeing forgiveness ' glory; the path to illusory glory is pride ' disregard for law ' shame.

While this model appears innovative, it is consistent with Scripture and aspects of humor scholarship. Humor scholar Sanders (1995), for example, points out that "The joke pushes the victim in that one direction only — toward forgiveness" (p. 187). He goes one step further and adds, "The more aggressive the joke, the more clever the teller, the greater the push toward forgiveness" (p. 187). And this forgiveness, the lifting of negative judgment, is the source of risible freedom people experience as they enter glory. This is not unlike Jesus' saying that those who are forgiven much end up tending to love much (Luke 7:47) — love being a source of great, deep joy.

It follows that when you laugh at a joke, you either communicate forgiveness or a disregard for the Law of God or the etiquette of society. When you withhold laughter, you communicate that the law-breaking trespass remains unforgiven. Forgiveness facilitates interrelational cohesiveness, a decreased social distance — indeed, love. People's being freely forgiven, accompanied by the affirmation inherent in love, creates an environment in which glorious laughter is made possible. Such an affirming environment draws people to acknowledge their imperfections, in anticipation that they will be laughingly forgiven.

### Pride Provides a Sense of Glory

Pride lifts itself up in anticipation of achieving glory. In order to achieve that sense of glory, it is necessary to slough off the "sins that so easily entangle" (Heb. 12:1) — the proud do so by pretending as though that sin is non-existent, thus disregarding the broken laws that produced it. What they achieve is shame, which shares characteristics with glory, including a degree of levity. While glory is high and heavy, shame is light and truly low.

This principle is described throughout Scripture — that pride results in shame, which can feel glorious (2 Kin. 14:10, Is. 13:19, Is. 23:9, Is. 28:1, Zeph. 3:11). Daniel told Belshazzar that both he and his father Nebuchadnezzar were wrong to exalt themselves, lifting up their hearts and allowing their spirits to become proud. Because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar's glory was taken from him (Dan. 5:20). And because of his pride, Belshazzar was humbled to death (Dan. 5:30). The Proverbs reiterate this principle: "A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor" (Prov. 29:23) and "When pride comes, then comes dishonor" (Prov. 11:2a).

Pride consists of seeking glory from the self or others instead of from God, through humility. Jesus refused to receive glory from those around Him (John 5:41). He showed that pride, consisting in seeking glory from the created,

Isaac, then, represents life coming from death, a dead womb. When a humbled womb undergoes such a glorious transformation, laughter is bound to be the result.

It is not clear whether or not Abraham's laughter was judged right or wrong by God in this case. On the one hand, it seems to have sprung from a lack of faith in God, his verbal response appearing to be a mere rhetorical question. On the other hand, God does not comment negatively (as He does with his wife's laughter), but encourages the naming of his son to follow Abraham's risible response.

### Example 2

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh) to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure (5734h. *ednab*: delight), my lord being old also?" And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied (3584h. *kachash*: to disappoint, deceive, fail, grow lean) it however, saying, "I did not laugh (*tsachaq*)"; for she was afraid (3372h. *yare*: to fear), and He said, "No, but you did laugh (*tsachaq*)." (Gen. 18:9-15)

It was emphatically and redundantly clear: "Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing." If there was any uncertainty in the reader's mind beforehand, there should be none now.

Laughter in this case accompanies the resolution of a struggle with incongruent data. Disbelief — the conviction that an incongruity is logically unresolvable — facilitates fear and doubt, even though a laugh be present. Sarah has been suffering shame for her entire life, a lack of fertility implying an absence of glory: "their glory will fly away like a bird — no birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!" (Hos. 9:11).

Sarah's laughter was characterized by disbelief, and therefore pride, for "pride renders faith impossible.... It is the humility that brings a soul to be nothing before God, that also removes every hindrance to faith, and makes it only fear lest it should dishonour Him by not trusting Him wholly" (Murray, 1951, p. 69-70). This is supported by Jesus, Who asks, "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?" (John 5:44). Sarah's next laugh was characterized by humility, though; a humility that facilitated group bonding and decreased social distance.

ous *kabod* — if not before his wife, then before other women. Her self-exaltation led to barrenness, infertility commonly considered a sign of shame, fruitfulness a manifestation of God's blessings.

## Isaac, the son of the Free Woman, Embodies Laughter

Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, received his name primarily as a result of his parents' shocked response to their being told they would have a child in their old age (what a "pleasant psychological shift" they were in for, as humor scholar Morreall might put it). While his name, which means "laughter," reflects his parents' personality, there are elements of his life that indicate he, at least to a degree, personifies laughter.

A name given by God is reflective not only of events that led up to that point, but of the individual's entire life. Abraham, for example, receives his name because he would go on to become the "exalted father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). Josiah is named such because he would come to sacrifice false priests (1 Kin. 13:2). John was named so because he would be great in the sight of the Lord, acting as a forerunner before the Messiah (Luke 1:13-17). Peter was named such because he would go on to be a foundational member of the Church (John 1:42). And Jesus is named such because He went on to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

In the same way, Isaac may have been named "Laughter" because he in some way was its incarnation. If so, then his lifestyle would provide insight into this elusive communication phenomenon. Consistent with the discussion so far, Isaac is associated with freedom, humility, and glory.

### Example 1

[Then God said to Abraham,] "And I will bless [Sarah], and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed (*tsachaq*), and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac (3327h. *Yitschaq*: "he laughs"); and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him." (Gen. 17:16-19)

Isaac was to be a punch line long in the waiting. But Gen. 21:2 indicates that he was born at the "appointed time." If he had been born earlier, he would not have produced such hilarious laughter, laughter that drove his father to fall flat on his face. The punch line was to be considered a blessing from God, one which was given in the form of a son. The blessing of fruitfulness was considered a glorious honor (see Gen. 1:28, Gen. 49:25, Deut. 7:14, and Ps. 127:3).

inhibited faith, which is characterized by a lack of fear toward created beings: "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?" (John 5:44). Elsewhere Jesus said that "if you believe, you will see the glory of God" (John 11:40). So individuals are not to seek glory from people, and those who do so fear those around them, fear being an inhibitor to laughter and glory.

St. Augustine was not afraid of the scorn of such prideful individuals. In his personal *Confessions*, he proclaimed the following:

*Let the proud laugh at me*, and those who have not yet been savingly cast down and stricken by thee, O my God. Nevertheless, I would confess to thee my shame to thy glory.... Therefore, *let the strong and the mighty laugh at us*, but let us who are "poor and needy" confess to thee. (book 4, chapter 1, emphasis added)

His confessing his shame to God is an act of humiliation, which glorifies God, Who in turn glorifies Augustine (in this case).

An anonymous author, whose writings were lauded by Martin Luther, identified the mechanism that leads one from pride to a sense of glory: lawless freedom. From this freedom they gain a degree of "false peace and satisfaction":

... the Devil cometh and soweth his seed in the man's heart. From this seed spring two fruits; the one is spiritual fulness or pride, the other is false, lawless freedom. These are two sisters who love to be together. Now, it beginneth on this wise: the Devil puffeth up the man, till he ... is altogether raised above any need. Whereupon there ariseth a false peace and satisfaction with himself.... (Anonymous, 1893, chapter 25, p. 20)

This same writer continues later on:

when men claim *freedom for their own*, so as to feel no sorrow or *indignation* at sin and what is contrary to God, but say that we must heed nothing and care for nothing, but be, in this present time, as Christ was after His resurrection, and the like; — this is no true and divine freedom springing from the true divine Light, but a natural, unrighteous, false, and deceitful freedom, springing from a natural, false, and deluded light. (chapter 51, p. 46, emphasis added)

This freedom, brought about by self-exaltation and disregard for the law, is false and deluded, but it does provide people with a pleasant sense of glory.

### Humility Precedes True Glory

Real glory is only achieved through humility. While a "man's pride will bring him low, a humble spirit will obtain honor" (Prov. 29:23). James encourages the humble to "glory in his high position" (James 1:9). Murray (1951) speaks highly of such glory-producing humility: "Let us choose to be weak, to be low, to be nothing. Let humility be to us joy and gladness. Let us gladly glory and take pleasure in weakness, in all that can humble us and keep us

low” (p. 86). He is so sold on humility because he recognizes it to be Jesus’ glory: “Christ’s humility is His chief glory, His first command, and our highest blessedness” (p. 43). Indeed, the Perfect Man’s achieving glory through humility is an indication that humanity should seek glory through the doormat of humility as well.

On closer inspection, the dynamics behind this principle are ludicrous: by flattening yourself to the earth, to the point of nothingness, you become glorified. And, echoing St. Francis, if you expect nothing, you will enjoy everything (Chesterton, 1986, p. 73). It is clear that the ways of the Architect are definitely not like the ways of humanity. The structure may appear to be a house of cards, a crooked, haphazard one; the builders had inadvertently held the blueprints upside down. In truth, the Architect had intended it to be this way. While He had been devising this unexpected contrary-to-human-nature principle by which His creation might achieve glory, the earth itself flopped on its side, then flat on its back. But for the few, the wise, the house is recognized as a mansion for which they are eager to trade everything they own. The house was built by the free-wheeling Law of Freedom, and Laughter, the son of the free woman, frolics in this house. Quixotic Isaac\* sees the boards sticking out at odd angles, the roofing tiles embedded deep into the ground, the foundation reaching to the heavens. And he lives up to his name, seeing that it is all right.

Of course people laughed at Jesus, One Who emanated glory. This is the One made low Whom God crowned with glory (Ps. 8:5, Heb. 2:9). This glorious One lived a life of humility and servanthood, to the point of being a threshold to walk over — one on which he invited his scoffer to tread on their way to a heavenly banquet. This doormat is deadly, though. Passing from one side of it to the other brings one’s life to a close, a humbling death, death being the ultimate humiliation. But beyond the doormat is glory and victory, a victory shared with the One Who first experienced levity from his deathly humiliation. This is the One Who encourages followers to pour themselves out, humors and all, in expectation of freeing, life-abounding resuscitation. He is the One to “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21a).

Again, this shift from humus-level humility to golden glory is incongruous with natural expectations, and may cause that rumbling of the humors which drive one to laugh. Baudelaire considered these dynamics of humility and glory sources of laughter. He posed that man is amused by the anomaly of his position, far above the animals but far below God (Feinberg, 1978, p. 1). In relation to animals, people are glorious; in relation to God, very humble. Again, it is people’s glory and their relation to God and creation that play central roles in humor. Laughter accompanying a rise to glory through humility, it follows, is righteous.

\* Isaac was the promised son of Abraham and Sarah; his name literally means “laughter.”

her crazed father and hated such affectionate expressions of joy. Instead of laughing humbly in the presence of glory, she pridefully despises this humble glory, choosing instead to shamefully laugh at it.

If humility is characterized by selflessness, then David’s laughter during his humiliating dance is virtuous. David’s wife’s laughter during his humiliation is vicious. David was selflessly celebrating the glory of God, personified by the ark, returning to Jerusalem. Salient to his wife, though, was David’s appearance, not God or even David’s celebratory heart attitude.

Dancing, Keil and Delitzsch (1984b) point out, even though it was associated with holy enthusiasm, was generally practiced only by women (p. 336). Sometimes, though, women enjoy right forms of worship generations earlier than men; Israel’s king was one of those early iconoclasts to stretch the rules of propriety, freeing himself laughingly from such social guidelines; passionately displaying his affection toward God. Such playfulness before God’s glory, Augustine argued in his *City of God*, is a way to please Him (Sanders, 1995, p. 164). And, as shown in example 3, God was more pleased in David’s laughter than Michal’s laughter.

### Example 3

But when David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel distinguished (3513h. *kabad*: to be heavy, weighty, or burdensome) himself today! He uncovered (1540h. *galab*: to uncover, remove) himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly (7386h. *req*: empty, vain) uncovers himself!” So David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) before the Lord. And I will be more lightly esteemed (7043h. *qalal*: to be slight, swift or trifling) than this and will be humble (8217h. *shaphal*: low) in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished (3513h. *kabad*: to be heavy, weighty, or burdensome).” And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death. (2 Sam. 6:20-23)

Michal disapproved of David’s behavior, and wanted — perhaps only unconsciously — to control her husband’s behavior, changing him into the respectful man of high standing that a king should be. She didn’t understand the principle that real glory drives one to humility and real humility bestows on people the levity of glory. And so Michal imitated her father’s proud disposition. (Note her being referred to not as David’s wife, but as the daughter of Saul. The Lord had rejected Saul on account of his pride; it was for that reason that He selected David above Saul and his family, including Michal.)

With conviction David declares that he will continue to laugh before God with self-effacing abandon, a form of worship that makes one appear trifling. He recognized, though, that his selflessness will lead to an exaltation, a glori-

### Example 1

So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) before the Lord with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals. But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his *irreverence*; and he died there by the ark of God. And David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzzah. (2 Sam. 6:4-8a)

The ark was being freed from captivity; the freedom of Israel's glory drove people to celebrate laughingly.

It was common for people to feel glad at the sighting of the ark; the ease and decreased social distance inherent in an environment in which there is good laughter may have led those present to lose their fear of the ark, and consequentially lose their fear of God. In their laughter, a few didn't maintain a fear of God — a lack of fear in general can lead to a lack of fear toward God. And it was for this irreverence that one near the ark was killed; in a sense, he laughed himself to death. As soon as that fear was reinstated (a result of Uzzah's death), their laughter was replaced by a similarly strong emotion: anger.

Many others, including King David, maintained their reverence toward God during their celebratory laughter. The implication is that laughter and reverence are not mutually exclusive. Laughter must not be equated with foolish behavior. Scripture identifies wisdom and foolishness as opposing qualities (e.g., Prov. 3:35, Rom. 1:14). Wise King David laughed; it follows that laughter and foolishness are not necessarily associated. Indeed, as Scripture points out, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Such "foolish" things must not step over the line into irreverence, a sin for which one might die prematurely.

### Example 2

And it happened when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping (7540h. *raqad*: to skip about) and making merry (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh); and she despised (959h. *bazab*: to despise) him in her heart (3820h. *leb*: inner man, mind, will, heart). (1 Chr. 15:29)

David was laughing heartily before the ark, dancing about in a short priestly outfit, a sight that would make most wives blush in embarrassment. Michal's response was more than embarrassment, though; she took on the attitude of

### Summary

This chapter has examined the various dynamics behind laughter as portrayed in Scripture and the scholarly literature. They have been identified broadly as heart attitude, essential worth, and freedom. Terms defined in this section included humility (selfless assertive service), pride (selfish self-lifting), glory (positive evaluation of one's self-worth), shame (one's absence of value), and freedom (liberation from God's laws and societal etiquette). Models were presented which illustrate how these dynamics interact.

The innovative models proposed in this chapter are tested out in more depth with Scripture in the following chapter. The grist of Chapter 4 includes passages of Scripture that include laughter, each of which is examined in light of one or more nuances of this chapter's models.

provided above) would be slightly different. It shows that the fool is unable to logically resolve conflict, and so resorts to an excited non-cognitive response. Such a response may be either laughter or a rage. This seems to support the Freudian view of laughter as a release of dammed psychical energy.

### Example 29

I said of laughter (*sechoq*), “It is madness (1984h. *balal*: to be boastful, to praise),” and of pleasure (8057h. *simchab*: joy, gladness, mirth), “What does it accomplish (6213h. *asab*: do, make)?” (Eccl. 2:2)

For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter (*sechoq*) of the fool, and this too is futility. (Eccl. 7:6)

Thorn bushes ignite quickly, burning intensely and noisily, and then expire quickly. They are inadequate fuel for a kitchen fire. A slow-burning log, on the other hand, would quietly provide sufficient heat to prepare a meal. As such, thorn bushes as fuel are seen as useless, accomplishing little while making lots of noise. Although he does not say so explicitly, this ecclesiastical philosopher seems to be looking at laughter pragmatically, and has found it to have non-productive results. In other words, since it doesn't seem to serve any legitimate function, it is useless, and should not be sought as an end in itself. The phenomenon, therefore, is perceived as illogical, something the wise don't practice, according to this philosopher.

### David Laughs Freely Before the Liberated Ark

The account of David and the Israelite people joyfully bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem is told in both 1 Chronicles 13 and 2 Samuel 6. This ornate box, in which were placed icons of God's love and provision, and in which God's presence dwelled, was stolen by their rivals, the Philistines. It represented the glory of Israel. When temple priest Eli, for example, heard about the ark's being taken, he fell backward and died. When his pregnant daughter-in-law heard of the ark's being taken, she gave birth prematurely. She named the boy Ichabod (a negation of *kabod*, glory), saying, “The glory has departed from Israel” (1 Sam. 4:21a). As she died, she proclaimed, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken” (1 Sam. 4:22).

The glorious ark was put in the temple of Dagon, and Dagon could not keep from falling down before it, which he did twice (1 Sam. 5:2-5). No doubt many Israelites laughed at the humiliation of this god falling on its face before the ark, losing its head and hands in the process.

In any case, the ark was returned to Jerusalem with great joy. The next three examples show how joy accompanied by laughter led a man to irreverence and death, how laughter is again associated with freedom, how laughter is not in itself a sign of irreverence, and how the phenomena which include laughter can be considered shameful by onlookers.

### Example 26

Doing wickedness is like sport (7814h. *sechoq*: laughter, derision, sport) to a fool (3684h. *kesil*: stupid fellow, dullard, fool); and so is wisdom to a man of understanding. (Prov. 10:23)

The fool laughingly enjoys wickedness; the man of understanding laughingly enjoys wisdom. This verse lays out two types of laughter, each colored by what sparks it. While “fools mock at sin” (Prov. 14:9a), the wise enjoy the study and practice of the truth. Keil and Delitzsch (1984f) elaborate on this, saying that “wisdom brings him joy; it is the element in which he feels himself satisfied” (section 1, p. 224). The fool, however, sees himself as above the Law of God and the etiquette of society (p. 223).

### Example 27

Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives (7411h. *ramah*: to beguile, deal treacherously with) his neighbor, and says, “Was I not joking (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh)?” (Prov. 26:18f)

“Can’t you take a joke?” some ask if their humor is not appreciated. “I was only teasing.” “I didn’t mean it that way,” others might say if their joking is misunderstood. It was intended that the hearer see beyond the words, to sense that the intended meaning was not being accurately conveyed by the mere words, that the speaker was in fact playing with words. But such humorous communication is inherently deceptive, a quality found unacceptable according to this proverb.

But “I was just kidding” is no excuse for sinful, pain-inducing behavior. The things that cause one to laugh are often deceptive, albeit playful. It seems that deception, though, even in jest, is unacceptable behavior, according to this proverb.

### Example 28

When a wise man has a controversy (8199h. *shaphat*: to judge, govern) with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages (7264h. *ragaz*: to be agitated, quiver, quake, be excited, perturbed) or laughs (*sachaq*), and there is no rest (5183h. *nacbeth*: quietness, rest). (Prov. 29:9)

The KJV, as well as translations by Luther and Jerome, suggests that it is the wise man who either rages or laughs (Keil et al., 1984f, section 2, p. 245). “If a wise man in the right is in contact with a fool, he starts up, and laughs, and keeps not quiet” (p. 246). This response follows experience: when you butt heads with someone who refuses to consider your argument, you may respond in laughter, shaking your head incredulously.

The interpretation for this verse as translated in the NASV (the translation

## CHAPTER 4: SCRIPTURE REVIEWED IN TERMS OF THE PROPOSED MODEL OF LAUGHTER

While taking into account tradition and Christian exegeses, this chapter consists primarily of Scriptural passages referring to laughter. The reason for this is that various Christian traditions characterize laughter in conflicting ways. Certain Christian traditions, for example, propose that laughter is bad (Sanders, 1995, p. 128ff). It was sometimes seen as a gateway for demons, “because it symbolized outburst of feelings, bodily exposure and an opening up to the sensory world” (Gilhus, 1991, p. 269). The same concerns that arouse exclamations of “God-bless-you” following a sneeze were associated with a repetitive and slightly more controllable type of sneeze: laughter.

Renowned puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, for example, resolved “never to utter any thing that is sportive, or matter of laughter, on a Lord’s day” (Winslow, 1966, p. 71). Saint John Chrysostom posed the rhetorical warning, “Christ is crucified and dost thou laugh?” (Sanders, 1995, p. 132). Elsewhere he stated, “Truly it is not for us to pass our time in laughter” (p. 125). Tertullian, in reference to the Second Coming of Christ, says bitingly that only “then the comic actors will be worth watching, much lither of limb in the fire” (p. 144). In the 1600s, religious groups even made their members vow to shun public and private joking, which was considered sinful behavior (p. 224). A millennia earlier monasteries punished laughing monks with “the scourge of humility” because monastic life “is not a time of joy for laughing, but a time of penance” (p. 134). A dictum from an even earlier time concluded, “He cannot laugh who sees the Divine Judgment” (p. 132). In places Scripture seems to support this position: “Woe to you who laugh now” (Luke 6:25b) and “let your laughter be turned into mourning” (James 4:9b) (see also Eccl. 2:2).

But throughout the Bible laughter is also encouraged and modeled; it is judged good by the Scriptures. It is a heavenly reward (Luke 6:21), for example, which may be awarded during one’s earthly life as well (Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30). Indeed, people are to desire such a good gift during their time on earth (Matt. 6:10). The ethical dilemma, then, is not whether laughter itself is good or not — for everything God created is good (1 Tim. 4:4), including laughter — but under what circumstances it is perverted to become bad. The following section indicates that laughter characterized by self-humility and redemptive other-humiliation is good. Proudful self-exaltation and other-humiliation is bad.

## The Use of Scripture in this Thesis

The Protestant Reformation brought Scripture into the hands of all Christians, even those with relatively little theological training. While general principles and a general understanding of the personality of their Creator can be accurately gleaned from the Bible by the untrained laity, apart from supernatural intervention certain tools are necessary for the proper interpretation of Scripture. Correct exegesis (“careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning” [Fee & Stuart, 1982, p. 21]) and hermeneutics (“seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts” [p. 21]) preclude a proper scholarly understanding and use of Scripture. Good Bible study, then, primarily consists of grasping what the text meant to its writers and then what its relevance is to us now.

This work recognizes Scripture as “the Word of God given in the words of people in history” (p. 19). As such, it has eternal relevance. But each book included in the biblical collection was written during a particular time and from within a particular culture. Furthermore, the Bible includes various genres of literature: poetry, letters, collections of wise sayings, laws, prophecies, riddles, parables, historical and apocalyptic accounts. In order to draw the right meaning from the texts, then, it is necessary to keep in mind such things as the writers’ cultures, times, writing styles, and audiences; in a word, the text’s context. Prior to properly understanding what Scripture means to us here and now, it is necessary to understand what it meant to them there and then. Although not always explicit in this thesis, with the assistance of the writings of numerous biblical scholars care was taken to interpret Scripture contextually.

Except when otherwise noted, all Scriptural excerpts are from the New American Standard Bible. For those who might want to continue the study of these excerpts in more depth, Strong’s *Concordance* numbers are often included parenthetically alongside key words; an example is the following: (8433h. tokachath: argument, reproof). The digits refer to Strong’s method of numbering, the letter identifies it as either a Hebrew or Greek word. The italicized word is the transliteration of the ancient word as it appears in the original text and those words which follow the colon are how the word might accurately be translated, according to Strong.

## A Definition of Laughter

While it accompanies dramatic emotional experiences, laughter itself is not an internal, emotional phenomenon such as joy or humor. It refers to “physiological and behavioral concomitants or sequelæ” (Lefcourt et al., 1986, p. 3). In other words, laughter is an observable physical action, a response to some stimulus. It is a physical action which typically results from the sudden unexpected, unanticipated pleasurable experience characteristic of a rise to glory. Laughter can simply be thought of as a physical response brought about by a pleasant shift in the figurative humors of the body. The more dynamic the incongruity (e.g., elements at first appear vastly different, one’s perceived

when they heard Lot discuss it, they thought he was joking. They recognized the association of freedom from the Law of God with laughter. In addition, laughter, as in example 21, is associated with disbelief. Lot’s future sons-in-law did not believe their betrothed’s father, thinking he was joking. Such jesting behavior communicates the idea that one is being untruthful.

### Example 23

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. (Ps. 1:1f)

Laughter results from a sense of freedom. In this case, the freedom is achieved through rejecting the “law of the Lord.” Instead of relying on God to forgivingly provide freedom and consequential glory, they disregard the law entirely, freeing themselves from it. The resulting shame feels to them like glory. Keil and Delitzsch (1984e) note that scoffers are those “who make that which is divine, holy and true a subject of frivolous jesting” (section 1, p. 84). The righteous achieve their sense of freedom in another way though: through an acceptance of the Law and the forgiveness that God provides when it is broken.

### Example 24

The arrogant utterly deride me, yet I do not turn aside from Thy law. (Ps. 119:51)

Again, derision is seen in opposition to a high regard for the Law of God. Individuals who oppose those who trust in the law gain their sense of freedom by disregarding that Law. Such individuals’ sense of freedom is fleeting, though, for “anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy” (Heb. 10:28a).

### Example 25

[Following the disciples’ baptism in the Holy Spirit, those watching on] all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.” (Acts 2:12f)

When confronted with phenomena difficult to account for, individuals may laugh. Such incongruity remains unresolved, a common release from which is laughter. They may try to make suggestions as to what causes the behavior, reflecting on what has led them to laugh so. The Apostle Paul addresses this phenomena: “If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?” (1 Cor. 14:23). They will call you mad and then laugh.

fall is a pleasant experience — hence the laughter. Samson clearly did not like being humiliated by such laughter. The text, however, indicates that Samson pulled down the roof to avenge the loss of one of his eyes.

### Example 2φ

And now do not carry on as scoffers, lest your fetters be made stronger. (Is. 28:22a)

Already enslaved, these rulers of Jerusalem (verse 20) achieve a sense of freedom by mocking their bonds. If they would but humble themselves and trust in God to release them from these fetters of Asshur (Keil et al., 1984g, section 2, p. 13), God Himself would release them (Nah. 1:13). But by self-sufficiently resisting their bondage, instead of getting glorious freedom, they become even more bound by their shame.

### Example 21

While He was saying these things to them, behold, there came a synagogue official, and bowed down before Him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live....” And when Jesus came into the official’s house, and saw the flute-players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, He began to say, “Depart; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.” And they began laughing (2606g. *katagelao*: to deride) at Him. But when the crowd had been put out, He entered and took her by the hand; and the girl arose. (Matt. 9:18, 23-25)

This is an example of the association that laughter and disbelief share. The crowd’s laughter is in response to their disbelief and resultant dishonoring of Jesus. If the crowd believed in Jesus and his ability to carry out his intentions, their response would likely not have been laughter, or at least not haughty laughter.

### Example 22

Then the men said to Lot, “Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it.” And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, “Up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy the city.” But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh). (Gen. 19:12-14)

Lot’s daughters were pledged to marry two residents of Sodom, likely men who neither feared nor believed in the God of Abraham or His judgment. They may have become so accustomed to the mockery of the Law of God that

level of glory makes a dramatic shift, one experiences astounding forgiveness), the more hearty the laughter may be.

Webster defines it as “convulsive merriment; an expression of mirth peculiar to man, consisting in a peculiar noise and configuration of features, with a shaking of the sides and expulsion of breath” (Slater, 1985, vol. 2, p. 4h). He reveals a negative judgment of laughter when he associates it with ridicule and “to treat with some degree of contempt” (vol. 2, p. 4h). Interestingly, Webster points out, all laughter expels breath from the lungs. This may provide some insight into the spiritual nature of laughter, breath being equated with spirit (including the Holy Spirit) in both the Old Testament Hebrew — *Ruach* — and New Testament Greek — *Pneuma*.

The term *laughter*, according to etymologist Klein (1971), is related to a sharp, quick sound, twang, resound, clang, to cackle, and to clack (p. 413). The word seems to have harsh, negative connotations. Indeed, the word seems as onomatopoeic as those Klein relates it with; *laughter* is gusty and breathy, not unlike the action it represents.

In setting out to understand the Bible on laughter, it was necessary to identify and examine every variation of the word *laugh* (e.g., laughter, laughing, laughed) in Scripture. In addition, those Hebrew and Greek words which are sometimes translated as a variant of *laugh* (e.g., the Hebrew *tsachaq*, *mischaq*, *sachaq*, *laag*, and the Greek words *katagelao* and *gelao*) were also thoroughly analyzed. Every variation of *mock* was also examined, mockery not being unlike laughter. Interestingly, the Hebrew words *laag* and *sachaq* are translated sometimes “laugh” and sometimes “mock.”

These selections of Scripture were first broadly categorized according to who was laughing: God, animals, or humans; it follows that since the nature of these three beings is different, the nature of their laughter may be different. People’s laughter was further categorized according to whether it is presented in the context of these passages as either virtuous or vicious. Prolonged discussions of the son of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac (Hebrew *Yitschaq*: “he laughs,” and Greek *Isaak*), and the notable correlation between food and laughter are included in a later section. During the analysis of Scripture, special consideration was made for the two salient continua — pride-humility and glory-shame — and the mechanism that frees people from the Law of God and societal etiquette.

## God's Laughter

God’s laughter, which emanates from the One Who is truly exalted, is different from the laughter of fallen humanity. It is expected that God’s laughter be different from people’s laughter because He is entirely glorious, as well as the Author of freedom, the Lawgiver, and the Forgiver of trespass. It is true that, since He developed the rules regulating communication, He is by definition incapable of participating in non-virtuous laughter. But since the mechanisms underlying God’s laughter are different from those of human laughter, these verses should not be used as evidence that people are blessed to laugh at the wicked. God, for example, judges, but people are warned not to judge each

other (e.g., Matt. 7:1). God's virtuous laughter is not necessarily virtuous if practiced by God's creation (unless, as discussed in a later section, the laughter is redemptively prophetic).

Some might argue that God's "laughter" is misrepresentationally anthropomorphic. "How can God laugh?" they might ask. But if God is able to breathe life into the first man Adam, He may very well be capable of doing so laughingly. Of course, since God is spirit (John 4:24), his breath is likely spirit as well. In any case, Scripture's using the term "laughter" indicates that there is no more accurate word describing the type of communicative behavior in which God participated in these instances.

### Example 1

Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain (*riq*: empty, vain) thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed: "Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs (*sachaq*), the Lord scoffs (3932h. *laag*: to mock, deride, stammer) at them. *Then* He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury. (Ps. 2:1-5)

God, Who is in the highest place, responds laughingly to those who would see themselves as notably high. As with the builders of the Tower of Babel, God frustrates these people who would put themselves up against the Most High. He reconfirms His exaltation as head over all (1 Chr. 29:11), something creatures are simply unable to do. God's laughter accompanies His glorious superiority over others. He laughs just prior to humbling them.

At first glance it appears that God is in the process of playing with the wicked as a cat plays with a mouse. But God's laugh can also be interpreted as an offering of reconciliation, the laugh accompanying an extension of freeing forgiveness. He may in effect be saying, "You trifling, incomparably small creatures don't really mean to come against Me, do you? Let's be reasonable now. Humble yourselves so that I may cloth you in real glory, not that shameful outfit you call glory." If this is the case, then God's laughter is also an expression of disbelief. The last verse of this Psalm seems to substantiate this position: "Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way" (Ps. 2:12), a verse which strongly encourages humility before God.

God's laughter and scoffing should not necessarily be associated with the anger and fury mentioned in later verses. Keil and Delitzsch (1984e) explain that the word "then" beginning the final sentence of this example is significant in that it indicates a period of time passing between God's laughter and His anger. It is only after this pivotal word that "He begins at once to utter the actual language of His wrath" (section 1, p. 93). The laugh prior to His anger may represent, then, the divine forbearance that He demonstrates prior to an unleashing of His humiliating anger.

### Example 16

"Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, who acts with insolent pride. (Prov. 21:24)

Keil and Delitzsch (1984f) translate Prov. 21:24 in the following manner: "A proud and arrogant man is called mocker (free-spirit); One who acteth in superfluity of haughtiness" (section 2, p. 77). The NIV provides a similar translation, one which clearly brings out the connection between pride and the freedom that mockers experience. Again, Scripture notes the significance of heart attitude in regards to laughter.

### Example 17

Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, even strife and dishonor will cease. (Prov. 22:10)

Scoffing, a type of laughter, is associated with dishonor, just as it is associated with pride.

### Example 18

In the days of her affliction and homelessness Jerusalem remembers all her precious things that were from the days of old when her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and no one helped her. The adversaries saw her, they mocked (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) at her ruin (4868h. *mishbath*: cessation, annihilation). (Lam. 1:7)

The "ruin" that Jerusalem is experiencing is the cessation of their public worship (Keil et al., 1984h, section 2, p. 365). The enemies of God and His people laugh at the Jewish faith, as well as the object of that faith, God Himself. The relative glory of one who has defeated and enslaved a rival facilitates such freeing phenomena as laughter.

### Example 19

It so happened when [the Philistines, Samson's captors] were in high (2895h. *tob*: to be pleasing or good) spirits (3820h. *leb*: inner man, mind, will, heart), that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh; 6440h. *panim*: face, faces) them. And they made him stand between the pillars.... Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) them. (Judg. 16:25, 27)

The humbling of another seems to raise one's spirits. Another's humbling makes oneself appear to possess more glory. This self-glorification at another's down-

for Thou didst fill me with indignation. (Jer. 15:16f)

The prophet would rather sit alone stewing than exult with a group of laughing friends. Exaltation is associated with laughter, a type of exaltation regarded by Jeremiah with indignation. Such laughter had the effect of increasing social distance between Jeremiah and those who participated in it. Such laughter is characterized by pride, which is self-exaltation. Laughter which decreases social distance, on the other hand, is characterized by humility (see Gen. 21:5-7). He recognizes that “those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting” (Ps. 126:5).

### Example 14

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Even in laughter (7814h. *sechoq*: laughter, derision, sport) the heart (3820h. *leb*: inner man, mind, will, heart) may be in pain, and the end of joy (8057h. *simchab*: joy, gladness, mirth) may be grief. (Prov. 14:12f)

The way that seems right to a man is self-exaltation, the laughter which accompanies it ultimately not being pleasant. Where laughter is achieved through humility, such is enjoyable; not so the laughter achieved at others' expense. Recall Sanballat's laughter in example 3 — he laughed angrily, the two phenomena not necessarily being incompatible.

### Example 15

[The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw:] “Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days — you would not believe if you were told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.... They mock (7046h. *qalas*: to mock, scoff) at kings, and rulers are a laughing (4890h. *mischaq*: object of derision) matter to them. They laugh (*sachaq*) at every fortress, and heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god.” (Hab. 1:5f, 10f)

Laughter accompanies a sense of glorious exaltation, something the Chaldeans possessed. But pride leads to the non-attainment, even removal, of glory: “But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly ... his glory was taken away from him” (Dan. 5:20). The laughter of these strong Chaldeans sprouts from a proud confidence in their own strength, rather than in God's raising them from a state of humility. As such, they are condemned to come crashing down in tangible humiliation.

### Example 2

[Wisdom shouts in the street,] “Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention; and you neglected all my counsel, and did not want my reproof (8433h. *tokachath*: argument, reproof); I will even laugh (*sachaq*) at your calamity; I will mock (*laag*) when your dread comes.” (Prov. 1:24-26)

Wisdom, personified as a woman, sometimes interpreted as a manifestation of God, laughs at those who disregard her counsel. Recall that one may achieve a sense of glory through the freedom of disregarding the Law of Wisdom. It seems that those proud individuals who would laugh disrespectfully at the Wise Law are laughed at in return by that very Law.

According to Pope Gregory the Great, God's laughing at the wicked in this verse is a “just laughter” (Sanders, 1995, p. 139). It is a laughter unaccompanied by the mercy extended just before it. Here, as in example 1, the Most Exalted first offers mercy, but is rebuffed. Keil and Delitzsch (1984f) compare this “stretching out my hand” with God's spreading out His kingdom to gather the lost: “Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your pegs” (Is. 54:2) (section 1, p. 72). But again, as in example 1, the proud reject this wise offering, and in return receive God's dreadful laughter.

### Example 3

The wicked plots against the righteous, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs (*sachaq*) at him; for He sees his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow, to cast down the afflicted and the needy, to slay those who are upright in conduct. Their sword will enter their own heart, and their bows will be broken. (Ps. 37:12-15)

An assault on God's people, the righteous, is an assault on God Himself. And while the wicked gnash their teeth, God parts His in laughter. He laughs because he sees that His enemies are soon to be returned to the humus from which He formed them — and in such a humiliating manner: their own swords will finish them off.

It seems that God responds to people as they act towards Him: they bear their teeth at Him, and He bears His laughingly at them. Scripture does not support this as a blanket statement, though, for “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8b) — in this case He did not respond to humanity as they acted toward him. He acted in unreasonable mercy. And continues to show mercy toward *the humble*. That the humble receive mercy and the proud receive laughable humiliation is spelled out in Prov. 3:34f: “Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the humble. The wise will inherit honor (*kabod*), but fools display dishonor.” Elsewhere the Lord declares, “those who honor (*kabod*) Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly

esteemed (7043h. *qalal*: to be slight, swift or trifling)” (1 Sam. 2:30b). The honorable are considered by God a weighty matter; the dishonorable are as insignificant as seagull feathers blowing around the oceanfront.

The correlation between God’s humiliating people from His high position and His laughing at them is evident.

#### Example 4

Deliver me from those who do iniquity, and save me from men of bloodshed.... Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips, for, they say, “Who hears?” But Thou, O Lord, dost laugh (*sachaq*) at them; Thou dost scoff (*laag*) at all the nations. Because of his strength I will watch for Thee, for God is my stronghold. My God in His lovingkindness will meet me; God will let me look triumphantly upon my foes. (Ps. 59:2, 7-10)

Again God is seen in a sense mouthing back to those who mouth off to His people. What a scene: God laughing at people’s belching. In this instance, as in the previous example, the God above all the nations laughs at those puny sharp-tongued individuals who would exalt themselves against His chosen people. Those who wonder if there is anybody in heaven to hear them likely do not perceive the distant chuckle, a sound like the whine of a bomb as it plummets toward the earth. God is sure to gift them with humiliating defeat.

Here laughter is associated with triumph, as shown in the final phrase of example 4. Certain humor scholars explain laughter as a triumphant expression over one’s defeated enemies. This Scriptural passage supports this contention.

#### Example 5

The Lord flashes forth (1082h. *balag*: to gleam, smile) with destruction (7701h. *shod*: violence, havoc, devastation, ruin) upon the strong (5794h. *az*: strong, mighty, fierce), so that destruction comes upon the fortress. (Amos 5:9)

This is the most terrifying of God’s laughs. Those who are proud of their strength are utterly destroyed by God’s laughter. The Hebrew word here translated “flashes forth” — *balag* — is translated “cheerful” or “smile” in Job 9:27, “cheer” or “joy” in Job 10:20, and “smile” or “rejoice” in Ps. 39:13. The baring of one’s teeth — a smile — can be a violently aggressive expression, as shown in this verse. In this case, the smile apparently is not so different from the white-toothed snarl of an angry dog.

God’s “flashing forth” here, as in the Thunderstorm Psalm, can be compared to a lightning bolt, which is a representation of God’s glory: “The God of glory thunders” (Ps. 29:3b). The dramatic difference between God’s glory and the relative frailty of His creation is significant, and when the proud fail to see this distinction it is laughable.

and consequently punished Joseph. In the same way, Herod felt laughed at, and punished a whole town in response. Such laughter makes people feel humiliated, their self-worth diminished. In order to reclaim their self-worth, it becomes necessary to face that humiliation — either through repentance or through lashing out at the one who brought about that humiliation. In these cases, the characters chose the less virtuous response.

#### Example 11

[Jesus said,] “Woe to you who laugh now (3568g. *nun*: now, the present), for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.” (Luke 6:25bf)

Those whose laughter is unacceptable are those who pridefully perceive themselves as having high honor, actively seeking the praise of others. But Jesus warns against such an approach to achieving exaltation. Instead, He tells his followers to take the lowest seat at the table; the master of the ceremony will raise them up: “For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11). Weeping, as Scripture says elsewhere, last for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5). The pattern is clear: an “up” position or feeling follows a “down” position or feeling. Glory follows humility. Laughter follows weeping.

#### Example 12

[The wicked] mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore his people return to this place; and waters of abundance are drunk by them. And they say, “How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?” (Ps. 73:8-11)

Their laughter results from a freedom experienced by disregarding the Law of God. They have lifted themselves up, as far as those who were building the Tower of Babel, and like Satan challenge even God Himself. They feel free to do so because they don’t believe God is at all concerned with their behavior. These mockers are described elsewhere in Scripture. The Psalmist indicates that “they say, ‘Who hears?’” In that case, however, God responds with laughter (Ps. 59:7b-8a).

#### Example 13

Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts. I did not sit in the circle (5475h. *sod*: council, counsel) of merrymakers (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh), nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone (910h. *badad*: isolation, separation),

*sechoq*: laughter, derision, sport) to my friends. The one who called on God, and He answered him; the just and blameless (8549h. *tamim*: complete, sound) man is a joke (7814h. *sechoq*: laughter, derision, sport).” (Job 12:2-4)

Job struggles between self-effacement and defensiveness, mostly because he feels dishonored. He alternates between bitter cynicism, saying something he really doesn't believe, and deadpan rhetorical questions. He feels slighted that he, who at one time doled out wisdom as the clan chief, is now the recipient of counsel. He is implying to his friends that their laughter is wrong, since it arises from a ridicule of godly character. Job recognizes that his friends are exalting themselves over him, which has the effect of humiliating him, and so he defends himself and his self-worth.

### Example 9

[Job said,] “But now those younger than I mock (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) me, whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.” (Job 30:1)

In the previous chapter, Job had smiled (29:24) on those who are now mocking him. His laughter imparted to them a sense of confidence, whereas their laughter now discourages Job. He was noble, but these children are the offspring of shameful people, and Job feels humiliated to be laughed at by those who are in age and social status beneath him. Such laughter is clearly wrong (see 1 Tim. 5:1).

### Example 10

[Potiphar's wife] caught Joseph by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household, and said to them, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh) of us...” So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport (6711h. *tsachaq*: to laugh) of me.” (Gen. 39:12-14a, 16f)

Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked (1702g. *empaizo*: to mock at) by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs. (Matt. 2:16a)

In these two examples those who feel as though they are laughed at respond in anger. Potiphar's wife communicated to her husband and those in her house that she felt the object of ridicule. They understood this to be a very bad thing,

## Animals' Laughter

The only references to animals laughing are found in the oldest biblical book written, Job. There is one exception, Psalm 104:26, and that refers to the playful laughing of Leviathan, a large reptilian creature mentioned first in the ancient book of Job. Interestingly, all descriptions of animals laughing, again with the exception of that found in Psalm 104, are provided by God. God speaks from out of a whirlwind, posing rhetorical questions to Job and his friends, teaching them that He is so far above them, His ways so unlike their ways, His capacity to sustain all of creation beyond their comprehension. During His two speeches, God identifies the animals as laughing because of their freedom and their glorious feelings of superiority over others. The tension between the glory-shame pride-humility continua is not present, since animals are capable of possessing neither pride nor humility. They do sense freedom and glory, though, as shown in the following verses.

### Example 1

[The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,] “Who sent out the wild donkey free? And who loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, to whom I gave the wilderness for a home, and the salt land for his dwelling place? He scorns (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) the tumult of the city, the shoutings of the driver he does not hear.” (Job 39:5-7)

The wild donkey's lust for freedom was legendary, as supported by this passage of Scripture. In this section the wild donkey is portrayed as laughing, while the domestic donkey, burdened beneath the load and commands of its master, is dumbly obedient. Freedom — from submission to others — is clearly correlated with laughter.

Another reference to this animal is found in the first book of the Bible. The half-brother of Isaac (the son of the free woman, whose name means Laughter) was named “Ishmael” by God (Gen. 16:11). One verse later this child of the slave woman was prophesied to be “a wild donkey of a man,” experiencing a lust for freedom, although because of his being birthed by a slave was destined to be a slave. Ishmael, like the wild donkey of Job, was destined to be an outcast.

### Example 2

[The Lord said,] “The ostrich's wings flap joyously with the pinion and plumage of love, for she abandons her eggs to the earth.... She treats her young cruelly, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, she is unconcerned; because God has made her forget wisdom, and has not given her a share of understanding. When she lifts herself on high, she laughs (*sachaq*) at the horse and his rider.” (Job 39:13f, 16-18)

The Lord playfully and ironically labels as loving the careless treatment the ostrich apparently shows toward her offspring. While God is not laughing as

He talks with Job and his friends, He does communicate an incongruity that seems laughable. Again, as in both His speeches, God provides evidence as to how He sustains animals despite their apparent carelessness. And while this animal is free from care, God providentially sees to it that her offspring are not crushed by passing animals.

The ostrich's laughter in this case is associated with her one strength — running faster than a horse. The ostrich cannot fly with her flappy little wings, is not a good mother, and is overall foolish. But because she is superior to the majestic horse, in that she can outpace it, she enjoys glorious laughter.

### Example 3

[The Lord said,] “Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane?... He laughs (*sachaq*) at fear (6343h. *pachad*: dread) and is not dismayed (2865h. *chatbath*: to be shattered or dismayed); and he does not turn back from the sword.... As often as the trumpet sounds he says, ‘Aha!’ and he scents the battle from afar, and thunder of the captains, and the war cry.” (Job 39:19, 22, 25)

The horse resists fear by laughing at it, a response that instills a sense of superiority over such an obstacle. This passage indicates that laughter does not merely result from the lack of fear, but actually repels fear.

### Example 4

[The Lord said,] “Surely the mountains bring him food, and all the beasts of the field play (*sachaq*: to laugh) there.” (Job 40:20)

The animal around which the beast of the field laugh is the behemoth, the pluralized form of the Hebrew word for *cattle* — it is, in effect, a “superbeast” (Hartley, 1988, p. 523). In the presence of this strong and kingly beast the other animals feel a degree of safety. Because of their lack of fear — an inhibitor to laughter — the animals laughingly enjoy a heightened sense of community, a decrease in social distance.

### Example 5

[The Lord asked,] “Will you play (*sachaq*: to laugh) with him as with a bird?” (Job 41:5a)

The leviathan, considered by some Bible scholars to be a crocodile (Hartley, 1988, p. 530), is a fearsome beast. God poses the rhetorical question as to whether Job will laugh with it in the same manner as he would a very harmless animal. The leviathan is an object of fear, and one is not expected to laugh in its presence; in opposition, the bird is a fragile thing around which nobody should fear, and people are free to laugh in its presence. Laughter is not expected in the presence of fear.

Roman soldiers do not really believe Jesus to be the King of the Jews, but they act as though they do. But Elijah's motives and physical interaction with the priests are different from those of the soldiers. Elijah may have been hoping that a few of the priests would recognize the ridiculousness of their behavior and change; he also did not physically abuse them until they proved that they would not repent. The soldiers, on the other hand, reveal no intention of wanting Jesus to repent, and they physically abuse him while laughing at Him. Their abuse of Jesus takes the form of physical humiliation (hitting), symbolic humiliation (spitting, kneeling), and verbal humiliation (“Hail!”).

Hobbes (1839) noted that “it is incident most to them that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much laughter at the defects of others is a sign of pusillanimity” (chapter 6, paragraph 41). These soldiers must have known about Jesus; some of them may even have witnessed the miracles and sermons of this most amazing of Men. In comparison, they must have seen themselves as quite inferior. What an opportunity, then, to lift themselves up — by putting Jesus down. Such extreme shame must have felt so perversely glorious to those participating in this feeding frenzy.

### Example 7

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Matt. 27:41-43)

The most glorious Man ever to have walked the earth was back to back with a cross, an object of immense shame. Such incongruity! — and those viewing it recognized this. Those who did not fear God laughed at Him, taunting Him just as Satan taunted Jesus to turn a rock into bread and leap from atop a temple pinnacle (Matt. 4:3, 5). Their laughter is characterized by disbelief, by other-humiliation, by pride, and by the incongruity of One claiming to be the Son of God being so shamefully exposed on a cross. It was only after being “very frightened” that some of them were able to remark, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:51-54). It was fear that quenched their laughter, fear and laughter generally being incompatible. While glory is often associated with gladness (1 Chr. 16:10, 1 Pet. 1:8, Rev. 19:7, Is. 44:23), it is also a cause of fear (Luke 2:9, Ps. 102:15), these two also not necessarily being incompatible.

### Example 8

[Job responded,] “Truly then you are the people, and with you wisdom will die! But I have intelligence as well as you; I am not inferior to you. And who does not know such things as these? I am a joke (7814h.

people, to again reveal His intimate concern over them, to reinforce in them a humble reliance upon God. The individuals in Psalm 35, however, are satisfied to watch on unhelpfully as David tries to collect himself from a nasty stumble.

David reveals his righteous perspective in the verses surrounding those quoted above. When those who now persecute him were down, David “humbled [himself] with fasting,” sackcloth, bowed over (Ps. 35:13f). He empathized with them in their humiliation, but since they did not respond in kind, he cries out unempathetically for their humiliation to return. In another Psalm he conveys a similar message, that those who laugh at his falling would become ashamed and humiliated: “Let those be ashamed and humiliated together who seek my life to destroy it; let those be turned back and dishonored (1322h. *bosbeth*, shame, shameful thing) who delight in my hurt. Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, “Aha, aha!” (Ps. 40:14f).

### Example 5

So they established a decree to circulate a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem.... So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord. (2 Chr. 30:5a, 10-12)

This celebration was called in preparation for Passover, a holiday recollecting the Jews’ liberation from Egyptian slavery. Such freedom was remembered with a great annual festival, although it had not been observed for some time. Many of those who heard of the party refused to celebrate their God-given freedom, but instead laughed for some other reason. Verse 11 indicates that their laughter was characterized by pride, and that a degree of humility was necessary to accept the invitation to travel to Jerusalem. Again, a quality noted in conjunction with laughter is heart attitude; in this case those who did not laugh were humble.

### Example 6

And [the Roman soldiers] dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting at Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, and put His garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. (Mark 15:17-20)

This scene is reminiscent of Elijah’s mocking the priests of Baal. Elijah did not really believe the priests’ god was real, but he acted as though he did. The

### Example 6

[The Lord said,] “Clubs are regarded as stubble; he laughs (*sachaq*) at the rattling of the javelin.... Nothing on earth is like him, one made without fear” (Job 41:29, 33)

The dragon-like leviathan is fearless, and therefore laughs. Its laughter is directed toward its enemy, and so it carries with it the connotation of taunting. As Hartley (1988) explains, “the one in control laughs at what others admire or fear” (p. 533). The animal anticipates victory, a quality positively associated with glory and laughter.

### Example 7

O Lord, how many are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all; the earth is full of Thy possessions. There is the sea, great and broad, in which are swarms without number, animals both small and great. There the ships move along, and Leviathan, which Thou hast formed to sport (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) in it. They all wait for Thee, to give them their food in due season. Thou dost give to them, they gather it up; Thou dost open Thy hand, they are satisfied with good. Thou dost hide Thy face, they are dismayed; Thou dost take away their spirit, they expire, and return to their dust. Thou dost send forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou dost renew the face of the ground. Let the glory of the Lord endure forever. (Ps. 104:24-31a)

A primary function of this fearsome, gargantuan creature is to laugh — laugh because it recognizes itself as such a mighty creature and because God Himself is tending to its sustenance. “Laughing” is the psalmist’s one descriptor of this fearsome beast. The psalmist mentions it for its being one of the most mighty; again, laughter is associated with superiority and lack of fear. God, here as in Job, is shown to be the sustainer of the wild and carefree animals. Because of His care there is no need to fear. One is free to laugh.

## People’s Laughter

The preacher in Ecclesiastes declares that there is an appointed time for everything, “A time to weep and a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:4a). He fails to elaborate as to when the appropriate time might be, though. There is enough evidence in Scripture, however, to develop a basic understanding of when these instances might be. Generally, it is time to weep when you are puffed up with pride; it is time to laugh when in your humility God exalts you.

Jesus said, “Blessed (3107g. *makarios*: blessed, happy) are you who weep now, for you shall laugh” (Luke 6:21b). It follows that Jesus considered laughter a good thing, a glorious reward for a certain behavior associated with humility. Just a few verses later, though, Jesus adds, “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25b). A thorough examination of Scrip-

ture reveals that the laughter to which Jesus here refers is characterized by pride and shame, while the laughter in the former verse is characterized by humility and glory. James includes a reference to this same type of proud, shameful laughter:

Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom (2726g. *katēpheia*: with eyes downcast, dejection). Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt (5312g. *bupsoo*: to lift or raise up, to exalt, uplift) you. (James 4:9f)

Laughter in these verses is associated with pride; mourning with humility. Those to whom James was writing were laughing, and their laughter was spawned by pride. It is not their laughter that is bad, but their prideful laughter; if they humble themselves, God will impart to them his levity. The laughter enjoyed by David as he danced before the Ark of the Covenant, for example, is an example of humble — and therefore good — laughter.

A friend promises Job that God “will yet fill your mouth with laughter... Those who hate you will be clothed with shame” (Job. 8:21f). The promise of laughter for Job is accompanied by a promise of glory’s opposite for Job’s enemies. Another friend tells Job, “You will laugh at violence and famine, neither will you be afraid of wild beasts” (Job 5:22). His laughter is accompanied by an absence of fear. While some care must be taken in interpreting the book of Job, since the human characters were found faulty by God, these passages do seem to confirm that the Most High is the ultimate source of laughter.

Sanders (1995) suggests that joyous laughter for Jews represented an alien practice — they went so far as to see it as pagan (p. 48). But this is not true for the Jewish God, who considered laughter as a reward. God promises laughter and honor for His chosen people (Jer. 30:18f), for example — their laughter being associated with glory, as well as freedom from bondage. In the next chapter the Lord declares that they will “go forth to the dances of the merry-makers (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh)” (Jer. 31:4). Again, this laughter is accompanied by freedom from their slave masters.

The following section includes many Scripture passages in which people are shown to either laugh or mock — words which are often the same in Hebrew or Greek. From the context it was determined that the laughter in question was either deemed good by God or judged bad. Passages that resisted such categorization include those referring to Isaac, and David’s dancing laughingly before the Ark of the Covenant — they will be examined toward the end of this section. Included in the “good laughter” section is something labeled “prophetic laughter” — a redemptive expression called such because those who laugh in these cases seem to do so on behalf of God.

### Good Laughter Tends Toward Glory

Humor scholar Sanders (1995) falsely states that there is but one non-derivative laugh in Scripture (p. 47), but there are several, including David’s laughter

out before Thee, for they have demoralized the builders. (Neh. 4:1-5)

Mocking is a form of aggression, an expression of spiteful anger; while it gives a degree of pleasure to those who participate in it, it is not at all a joyful phenomenon. Note that Sanballat’s mockery was accompanied by anger, and not happiness. And while it provides a sense of glory, it is considered a truly shameful “iniquity” and “sin” by God’s chosen people. In this case, the mockery is unprophetic, wrong because it is directed toward the people of God.

Sanballat’s mockery consists of portraying his enemies as feeble, unable to complete their task, attempting to do so with materials unfit for the job. The wall, they say, will be so weak that a little animal will be able to topple it. Such language is intended to humiliate the Jews, making them feel small and making Sanballat and his rich friends feel lofty in comparison.

Note that Nehemiah wishes their laughing mockery to become silenced, through enslavement. Again, Scripture indicates a positive correlation between laughter and freedom, lack of laughter and slavery.

### Example 4

At my stumbling they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; the smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me, they slandered me without ceasing. Like godless jesters at a feast, they gnashed at me with their teeth. (Ps. 35:15f)

And they opened their mouth wide against me; they said, “Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!” (Ps. 35:21)

Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Thy righteousness; and do not let them rejoice over me. Do not let them say in their heart, “Aha, our desire!” Do not let them say, “We have swallowed him up!” Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me. (Ps. 35:24-26)

God’s pattern is to bless humility with glory, a state in which laughter is made possible. A humiliating fall, followed by a glorious rise, is consistent with this pattern. But a fall without a rise is only sensed as glorious by such shameful individuals as the psalmist describes in this portion of Scripture. Such people are themselves destined to fall, and hard. The stumbling of these godless individuals will end in shame and dishonor. The stumbling of David, a man after God’s own heart, ends in glory.

Both those in and out of God’s will fall down. Some are lifted up, while others remain in their humbled state; woe to them who have nobody to lift them up (Eccl. 4:10), but blessed are those who do (Prov. 24:16). It is God Himself who lifts the righteous; it is He Who holds their hand (Ps. 37:24). Falling, then, is not all bad. It provides an opportunity for God to touch His

be slight, swift or trifling) them in the name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number. (2 Kin. 2:22-24)

Such a short temper it seems Elisha has. He reacts as though the boys were dishonoring the Lord Himself, who declared, “those who honor (*kabod*) Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed (7043h. *qalal*: to be slight, swift or trifling)” (1 Sam. 2:30b). It seems that the manifestation of being “lightly esteemed” is, at least in one case, to become dinner for bears. Those who dishonor the Lord are sometimes met with laughter, always met with humiliation.

The virtuous laugh described in the previous section occurs amid glory facilitated by a heart attitude of humility. Virtuous individuals laugh at others’ humiliation while anticipating their repentant rise to glory. It is a type of joy that teachers experience when their students are beginning to understand where they went wrong. The vicious, on the other hand, laugh not at the glory-anticipating lowly heart attitude, but merely at the lowered heart, as it were. The youths in the passage above were not wanting to see Elisha’s rise to glory out of the ashes of humility, but rather wanted merely to see his humiliation; their own self-worth would seem to increase in comparison.

Jesus experienced a similar situation to Elisha’s while walking along with His friends. The inhabitants of a Samaritan village were told that Jesus was coming, but they rejected Him. His disciples told Jesus of their intention to “call on the she-bears” (in this case fire from heaven), but He responded, “the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56). Elisha’s actions, and God’s honoring Elisha’s curse, are difficult to account for. After all, Elisha was not in fact God, but a mere man, albeit a key representative of God. Jesus told people just like Elisha that they were blessed when others insulted and persecuted them (Matt. 5:11). In any case, it remains that some children who laughed at a prophet were killed for acting on their haughty heart attitudes. The consequences for such prideful laughter can be devastating.

### Example 3

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?” Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, “Even what they are building — if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!” Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted

as he dances before the ark as it enters Jerusalem (1 Chr. 15:29), the laughter shared between Isaac and his wife Rebekah (Gen. 26:8), and Sarah’s laugh following her giving birth to Isaac (Gen. 21:6). The following pericopes provide examples of laughter judged good because the phenomenon is a reward from God, angers those opposed to God, accompanies God’s redemption, or is otherwise plainly described as virtuous.

### Example 1

[As David returned from killing a Philistine,] the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy (8057h. *simchab*: joy, gladness, mirth) and with musical instruments. And the women sang as they played (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh), and said, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him.” (1 Sam. 18:6b-8a)

Prov. 28:12 indicates that “when the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.” Glory is consistently associated with victory, triumph, and exaltation (1 Chr. 29:11, Prov. 28:12). And so it is glory that accompanies David’s righteous triumph, the women’s laughter consequently being associated with honor and glory. In this case, laughter accompanies a victory over the Israelites’ defeated enemy. By vicariously celebrating another’s victory, they share in the joy, as manifest in their laughter. This laughter is not unlike that of Sarah’s friends in Gen. 21:6, who laughed along with her, sharing her uplifting experience and enjoying the resulting decreased social distance.

Interestingly, the very next day an evil spirit came upon Saul (verse 10). This provides further evidence that the proverb is true which states, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22). It would have been better for Saul to have joined in on the laughter, not merely because laughter produces positive physiological effects, but because the humility accompanying good laughter would lead one to receiving God’s glorious blessing.

### Example 2

When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with joyful shouting. Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad (8056h. *sameach*: glad, joyful, merry). Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. (Ps. 126:1-5)

This passage indicates that righteous laughter may be facilitated by a sense of freedom, in this case literal freedom from real captors. The Lord is credited with bringing about their blessing, and they respond with gladness manifested

as laughter. Although this section of Scripture reflects the association of laughter with victory and liberation, it may further indicate that such laughter stimulates the reinforcement of community: neighbors note that “great things have been done for *them*.” As in example 1, this section of Scripture is reminiscent of the community-building laugh of Sarah in Gen. 21:6.

Note that the psalmist reiterates the principle that tearful humility is awarded with such glorious phenomena as joyful shouting.

### Example 3

Thus says the Lord, “I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth (571h. *emetb*: firmness, faithfulness, truth), and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.... And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) in its streets.” (Zech. 8:3, 5)

Scripture indicates that children are a blessing from God, and so the promise of children is a way for God to manifest His blessings (Ps. 127:3). All is well in Jerusalem when the streets are filled with Abraham’s offspring, and their laughter is confirmation of their state of wellness. Their laughter also eludes to a deep sense of community — children not laughing alone, but with each other. Again, it seems that laughter which accompanies a decrease in social distance is good laughter. Some might rephrase this concept in this manner: good humor facilitates a sense of community.

### Example 4

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.... Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) at the future. (Prov. 31:10, 25)

This woman is clothed in glory and she laughs; glory and laughter are clearly positively correlated. The virtuous woman laughs at the future out of fearlessness. Because she fears God alone, there is nothing beneath the Most High who is deserving of her fear. As in other Scripture passages, laughter and fear are negatively correlated, fear never accompanying laughter.

### Example 5

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. And they sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, “For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord

off my guard” (section 2, p. 135). Job was happy and assisted those who were sad and faithless, not being drawn down into their sadness himself. Job remained undiscouraged by those around him who feared and lacked faith, fear of (or submission to) created things being an emotion that inhibits laughter.

In addition to the humility-pride element, the element of belief-disbelief reoccurs in this Scripture passage. Laughter is associated with belief: it either makes up for lack of belief or accompanies belief (at the expense of those who don’t believe). Belief, or faith, is wrapped up in the heart attitudes of humility and pride, however — humility being a belief in one greater than oneself, looking up to another; pride being a belief in oneself, a gaining of one’s perceived worth by looking down on others. Jesus confirmed that faith and glory are intertwined, for without faith it is impossible to experience glory; He said that “if you believe, you will see the glory of God” (John 11:40b).

## Bad Laughter Tends Toward Shame

The following Scriptures judge certain human laughter as bad, based on its clear denunciation of the godly, the laughers’ raising themselves up against God’s chosen, slavery, disregard for God’s Law, disbelief, and outright “foolishness.” The arrangement of the following examples roughly follows this order.

### Example 1

Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the Lord which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. And the Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place, but they continually mocked (3931h. *laab*: to jest) the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed (8591h. *taa*: to mock) at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy (4832h. *marpe*: a healing, cure, health). (2 Chr. 36:14-16)

Mocking prophets or others chosen by God result in negative consequences. While prophets are permitted to engage in derisive laughter, since they represent the Most High, people are wrong to laugh at a prophet. In this and the next few examples, it is clear that to laugh derisively at a representative or chosen one of God is equivalent to laughing at God Himself. Such laughter, when characterized by self-exaltation and other-diminution, is wrong.

### Example 2

Elisha went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked (7046h. *qalas*: to mock, scoff) him and said to him, “Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!” When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed (7043h. *qalal*: to

and kill them. At such a gruesome sight the righteous are to laugh fearfully, a behavior which seems to contradict published humor scholarship. This fear, though, is doubtlessly to be sensed in reference to God; it consists of a reverent submission to Him. As explained earlier, when one fears God, it is no longer necessary to fear anything in His creation — a condition in which laughter becomes entirely possible.

The laughter is prophetic because the object of this risible derision is an enemy of God. This wicked individual shows a lack of fear toward God, while the righteous reaffirm their fear of God. The man is not laughable merely because he fell down or was merely humiliated, but because he pridefully “did not make God his refuge.” Those who hold a right attitude toward their Creator laugh heartily at those who deem themselves as more glorious than God, a laugh that God shares with them.

Laughing at the fall of an enemy, a form of communication encouraged above, seems to go against Prov. 24:17f:

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and He turn away His anger from him.

The wise are warned not to laugh over a personal enemy, whereas the Psalm allows laughter at the expense of an enemy of God, the two not necessarily being the same. It seems consistent with Scripture to conclude that it is permissible to laugh at the proud who shamefully refuse to humble themselves, and withhold laughter when an enemy is humbled and then submits to that humble state, crying out to their Maker for mercy, a God Whose kindness leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

### Example 3

[Job said,] “The young men saw me and hid themselves, and the old men arose and stood.... I smiled (7832h. *sachaq*: to laugh) on them when they did not believe (539h. *aman*: to confirm, support), and the light of my face they did not cast down. I chose a way for them and sat as chief, and dwelt as a king among the troops, as one who comforted the mourners.” (Job 29:8, 24f)

Job appears to behave condescendingly toward those who disagree with him, laughing derisively at them. Despite this apparently brash behavior, they recognized Job as a virtuous man, the older men standing in respect, the younger men hiding in fear. His laughter, while it should have distanced him from those with whom he was interacting, actually facilitated a decrease in social distance. His prophetic laughter is recognized as being the stuttering voice of reason, and is not rejected. The glory that Job experienced was manifest in his laughing and his becoming the clan chief.

Keil and Delitzsch (1984d) provide a further interpretation. They have Job saying that “however gloomy they were they could not make me gloomy and

was laid. Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy (8057h. *simchab*: joy, gladness, mirth); so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away. (Ezra 3:10-13)

Fensham (1982) points out that the first temple, which the older Jews had seen, was a great deal grander than the one being constructed in the passage above (pp. 64-65). The stones were larger, and the foundation was broader. That some laugh and some cry confirms that laughter is situational — a phenomenon, depending on the context and cultural history of the individual witnessing it, may facilitate laughter, but not necessarily.

Pascal (1660) discussed his observation that one experience may produce both laughter and weeping. He writes, “Things have different qualities, and the soul different inclinations; for nothing is simple which is presented to the soul, and the soul never presents itself simply to any object. Hence it comes that we weep and laugh at the same thing” (no. 112). Indeed, the soul is quite complex, and while the building of a temple may cause some to rejoice laughingly, others may witness the same construction and respond with tears.

Seeing the foundation of their temple must have been a glorious experience. Glory prevents people from behaving normally. It is as though an encounter with glory jostles one’s humors violently. Sometimes individuals become unable to minister (1 Kin. 8:11), unable to speak (1 Pet. 1:8), unable to stand (2 Chr. 5:14, Ezek. 3:23; 44:4), and unable to walk (Ex. 40:35). God, however, is able to sustain people to “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 1:24). In this case, the humorous jostling brings about similar oral responses: laughter and weeping.

Glory is a cause of both joy and weeping, both peace and fear. God prophesies a blessing over “the fortunes of Judah and Israel,” for example, promising to rebuild them as they were at first. He continues, “And it shall be to Me a name of joy, praise, and glory before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear of all the good that I do for them, and they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it” (Jer. 33:9). Glorious phenomena may simultaneously facilitate both joy and fear, apparently non-contradictory emotions.

### Prophetic Laughter is Redemptive

Sanders (1995) argues that scornful laughter conveys an arrogance of the heart. It plays the ultimate role — God (p. 69). In laughing simultaneously humbly and scornfully, then, individuals imitate God. And in their mocking laughter, they practice a communication device that the enemies of God detest to have directed toward them: “The devill ... the prowde spirite ... cannot endure to be mocked” (T. More in Lewis, 1944, p. 7).

The virtuous laughter of certain prophets seems different from that of

other individuals. Positively-judged Scriptural references to laughter erupt from a sense of glory, but the laughter is generally not directed toward the vanquished party; it is typically communicated celebratively toward the Lord. The prophets' laughter, on the other hand — laughter which appears to be approved by God — is directed harshly toward their enemies and God's enemies. Just as God's laughter usually accompanies an offering of reconciliation, which is rebuffed, so prophetic laughter is practiced with the intentions of bringing people to a state of humility in which they might turn to God. Starting from humility, these people might become clothed with forgiving freedom and experience true glory.

### Example 1

So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:25-29)

Perhaps the prophets of Baal did not understand that Elijah was playing with them, making light of their serving a non-existent deity. Aristotle agreed with a fellow philosopher: "Gorgias said that you should kill your opponents' earnestness with jesting and their jesting with earnestness; in which he was right" (chapter 18, paragraph 5). The style of communication Elijah chose with which to address these ungodly priests was consistent with classical rhetoric.

Elijah's behavior supports Bergson's (1921) contention that in laughter there is "an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct, our neighbor" (p. 35). He may have been wanting them to see the ludicrousness of their behavior and consequently humbly repent. The prophet Elijah may have seen that the Baal's prophets were beyond correction, though. He may have merely been applying the command to

Pour out the overflowings of your anger; and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and tread down the wicked where they stand. (Job. 41:11f)

His prophetic mockery humiliated Baal's prophets, not only figuratively but literally, as shown in their agreeing to cut themselves to the point of bleeding

profusely. And their gruesome deaths were but a few hours away.

Another interesting feature of Elijah's mockery is that, literally, it is deceptive. He says to them, "He is a god," a statement the prophet holds to be false, and which truly is false. This illustrates another aspect of communication that either facilitates or accompanies laughter — it sometimes amplifies a lie, or follows it to its logical conclusion, in order to lead others to more clearly see it as a lie, in the hopes that they will turn and humbly accept the truth. Schaeffer (1968) identifies this as a key element of evangelism: lead people to the logical conclusions of their non-Christian presuppositions, and when they realize that they cannot tolerate them, present them with the truth of the gospel (pp. 119-130). How difficult, though, for these deceived priests to humble themselves, laugh along with the prophet at their foolish behavior, and enter into real glory.

But the humble humor suggested in this passage may not lend itself to effective rhetoric. His words did not bring the priest of Baal to a state of humble repentance — it wasn't until after God's miraculous consummation of the sacrifice that they recognized the truth of Elijah's argument. The humble humorist may well prove to become an ineffective rhetor. And the prophet was not content to win the discussion. After he, in effect, killed the argument of those who debated him, Elijah had them killed.

Mocking is very similar to laughter. In fact, the Hebrew words *laag* and *sachaq* are sometimes translated "laugh" and sometimes "mock." Instead of a laughter that stems from oneself being lifted up, it consists of a type of laughter that stems from another's being put down. Mockery is a communicative phenomenon which aims to de-glorify the object (and therefore glorify the subject) through the illumination of apparently-incongruous qualities. The behavior of wicked people is ludicrous — these individuals either reject God's existence or discount his power. Those who believe in God's omnipotence find these people's behavior absurd, and may find mockery an acceptable means to bring them to a state of humiliation and possible reconciliation with God.

### Example 2

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The lovingkindness of God endures all day long.... But God will break you down forever; He will snatch you up, and tear you away from your tent, and uproot you from the land of the living. Selah. And the righteous will see and fear, and will laugh at him, saying, "Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge (4581h. *maoz*: a place or means of safety, protection), but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and was strong in his evil desire." (Ps. 52:1, 5-7)

Those who exalt themselves are encouraged by God to humble themselves and accept His lovingkindness. Again, mercy precedes the teeth-baring rage of God. In time it becomes necessary for God to recant His offer of mercy and deliver justice; He will humble them, break them down, thrash them about,