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Anatomy of Scandal:

Self-Dismemberment in the Gospel of Matthew (and in Gogol's "The Nose")

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel has always been recognized as one of the great sources of Christian teaching about the ethical life. Matthew's Jesus intensifies what it means to fulfill the Law. He demands mercy, the love of enemies, the rooting out of sin from its first impulses, secrecy in prayer, in fasting, and in giving alms. A new economy of total sacrifice, a measureless commerce with the unseen Father, supervenes upon the even exchange of an eye for an eye.[1] The stakes are raised, too: we now risk heaven or hell. Thus – to take the central example for this talk – Jesus[2] redefines adultery and invokes absolute sanctions.

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
>
> "If your right eye offends you (*skandalidzei se*), pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand offends you, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell." (Matthew: 5: 27-30)[3]

Yet the speech may suggest more than the terror of hell to the male listeners Jesus addresses. Tear out the roving eye. Lop off the groping hand. Better to remove any *member* that takes one down the path of lust. One fears the speaker has in mind a particular amputation that would inhibit acts of adultery quite efficiently.[4]

If we smile at this implication, it is only uncomfortably. For some students of the Gospel have taken Jesus literally to endorse self-mutilation and yes, in the extreme case, castration, in order to keep from sin.[5] Scholars who do not read so literally and who want to avoid the idea of a Jesus advising self-violence (not to mention the

inconveniences of emasculation) nonetheless agree in principle with more literal readers. They agree that Jesus' ultimate aim is to impress upon his listeners the moral seriousness of adultery and its consequences for the life hereafter. Jesus is only expressing himself "hyperbolically," they say, when he recommends self-dismemberment over losing the whole body in hell.[6]

Let us be clear at the outset. We do not imagine that the commandment against adultery is under siege. Nor is there any doubt that Jesus advises decisive action against one's own philandering. The question is what such acts of philandering *mean* for Jesus. The interpretation of his speech as "hyperbole" – by far the most common reading – rests content with moralizing. It says in effect that Jesus reiterates the commandment and underscores it with apocalyptic warnings. This interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that his speech juxtaposes perfectly co*ntradictory* sayings: the recommendation of bodily mutilation follows the lesson that adultery is an inward inclination of the heart. If adultery is in the heart in a figurative sense, then assaulting the body is *precisely* what will never solve the problem. We are not just in the presence of hyperbole. We are in the presence of the *absurd*. Is it possible that the ancient redactor of this text has Jesus speak deliberate absurdities (including a taunt to dismember oneself, to "cut it off") and that in the earliest tradition Jesus had not yet lost his sense of humor?[7] But the question that goes deeper than phallic comedy here is whether, in light of Jesus' inward lesson, we should be less literal-minded and more inquisitive about his grisly injunctions to dismemberment. Do these words of Jesus have a figurative sense that we would discern if we understood all he means by the adultery of the heart? To say simply that he exaggerates here precludes asking what he is driving at.

We might for another reason question the claim that Jesus is merely engaging in hyperbole. I have already indicated my surmise that scholars would cover up something more embarrassing than a coarse sexual allusion. They are troubled that, taken literally, Jesus urges his listeners to do harm to their bodies, to violate the created image of God.[8] We may not want to take Jesus' giving such advice at face value. But we might want to think about why that outrageous appearance is there at all – what it says about Jesus' relation to his audience and how it fits into his message – before canceling its effect by rhetorical classification. Even if your eye or hand does not offend you, perhaps your ear attending Jesus *should.*

There is one more curious fact worth mentioning, an internal parallel found only in this Gospel yet, like the other points I just cited, resoundingly ignored by interpreters. The verses about maiming the body in Matthew 5 have striking parallels in chapter 18, where their sense is not well defined by immediate context...

If we do not dismiss these facts as oversights on the part of the redactors of Matthew (mechanically compiling the text from their sources), if we grant the redactors a degree of subtlety and even *art*,[9] what bears on dismemberment in this gospel begins to feel like a riddle. We might well wonder if the book is designed, like countless Hebrew bible texts and commentaries, to provoke us and invite our imaginative participation as readers. This invitation by its very nature must be ambiguous. Is this an example? In Matthew 13 Jesus makes what looks like an ingenious pun on the Greek name "Matthew."[10] He calls *every* initiate of the kingdom *grammateus matheteutheis*, an "instructed scribe," able to bring forth new and old treasures. (13:51-52)[11] As if to suggest that *every* earnest student of this gospel might have to be a "Matthew," a

collaborator with the reputed author in order to bring out the book's secrets. One can hardly be sure; imagination is consent to a lack of certitude. But – it bears repeating – such collaboration of text and reader is in line with what students of the Hebrew scriptures have traditionally understood about the art of biblical interpretation.[12] As in the rabbinical tradition that informs Matthew's Gospel,[13] and as even English etymology attests, the ancient art of *reading* was akin to being engaged with a *riddle.*[14]

It is in this spirit that I shall attempt to read these puzzling texts of Matthew. In pondering them, I have repeatedly been led to one particular idea, which goes under the biblical term "scandal." Indeed scandal is the real topic of this talk. I shall therefore first explain that idea at some length and illustrate it with the help of Nikolai Gogol, who may have been the first to grasp its role in the New Testament and its connection to adultery. Finally I shall propose an interpretation of what Matthew 18 says concerning children and the adulteration of the heart.

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When we first try to understand self-dismemberment in Matthew 5, we notice a peculiarity in Jesus' description of a reaction to one's own body. He employs a curious word. "If your right eye *offends* you, pluck it out... If your right hand *offends* you, cut it off..." The Greek word for "offend" here is *skandalidzei.* It is a word of exceptional power, one of the most important in the New Testament.[15] Even a good translation fails to convey its full meaning, and the problem is complicated by the fact that in Matthew 5 the usage really is odd. The English word "offend" captures something of the ordinary meaning of the Greek verb *skandalidzo*: the idea of delivering an insult, of causing resentment and provoking hostility. Yet one gathers from many biblical texts that the

term "scandal" signifies far more than the particular vice of asserting oneself and getting into scuffles. We shall need to see how scandal, in fact, constitutes a root of human behavior, beneath the surface of our mundane interactions. Then we shall turn back to see what it could mean to say an eye or hand "scandalizes" someone in Matthew 5, and how this meaning is elaborated in Matthew 18.

In biblical language, "scandal" denotes a trap set by an adversary. The *skandalon* (in New Testament Greek) is "the obstacle," "the stumbling block" that someone falls over – often as not because another has put the obstacle in the way to bring the person down.[16] Figuratively, to "scandalize" is to do or say something as a play of power to provoke the other; to "be scandalized" is to fall for it, to take offense, or to be humiliated, and then react. It is striking how the Bible emphasizes (I am thinking of the Book of Proverbs) – emphasizes the danger of *being* incited by another to *hurt oneself.* Indeed the translation of scandal as "offense" does not capture this insidious effect. Another common translation renders scandal as *to make someone* sin, or (in the passive voice) *to be made to sin.* This is where scandal becomes psychologically interesting. People have considerable power over whether they can be offended or affected by another so as to be *made to fall.* The problem is that they repeat typical entanglements and aggravate their predisposition toward them rather than realize that power. Matthew's Jesus is – among other things – deliberately testing his audience with his deadpan exhortations to dismemberment, scandalizing them so as to call attention to this psychology of provocation. (This would not be the only place in the Gospels where he takes the role of tempter.[17]) Jesus is undoubtedly aware that, should his listeners refuse to examine their susceptibility to scandal, he draws upon himself all their hypocritical indignation.

Much of the Bible's imagery of stones and stumbling, traps and snares refers to the scandalous preoccupation with others that results in a fall. The imagery appears in Leviticus, and is developed in Psalms and Jeremiah, as well as Proverbs.[18] The thought that men's so-called accomplishments have only been motivated by mutual envy and strife oppresses the sage of Ecclesiastes (4:4), who grieves that there is nothing new under the sun. In the beginning was scandal. Indeed in Genesis a certain serpent successfully makes the knowledge of good and evil into the *obstacle* between the first human couple and God, the insulting *difference* by which their insecure Creator keeps them down. Cain and Abel are scandalized, too, insofar as they imagine they must compete against each other for divine blessings.[19] But God is not responsible for the enmity of brothers. The difficulties arise when the human outlook is just the world, an outlook forever distorted by rivalry, such that even one's gods become instruments to frustrate opponents. The fall that comes from tripping on the *skandalon* is therefore a fall from a higher to a lower order, from confidence in divine judgment to the human sphere where fear and pride prevail. That is the sense of 1 John, which also teaches that "...he who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no *skandalon* in him." The *skandala* on which we stumble are really within us, figments of worldly hatreds and anxieties (1 John 2:9-11,16).[20] Matthew's Gospel describes this radical psychology through the parable of the sower. The Word sown in the world does not spring up because the "earth" of some human souls is shallow and there are stones in it (13:5/21). The stones, Jesus explains, are the *skandala*; the shallow individuals "...have no root in themselves." They react easily to others' pressure and persecution, and are readily *scandalized*.[21] Hence in Matthew's Gospel when Peter rebukes Jesus for his acceptance

of persecution and death, Jesus calls him a *skandalon*, one mindful only of the things of men (Mt. 16:21-23).

One of the most striking episodes of scandal occurs near the end of Matthew 17. The authorities, aiming to trip Jesus up, question Peter about whether Jesus pays the temple tax. Peter goes to his master, who proceeds to speak not about God and Caesar but about privilege and resentment. Do the kings of the earth take taxes from their sons or from strangers? From strangers. Therefore, Jesus says with irony, [22] the sons are free, and we should not enter into scandal with them (*me skandalisomen*). Peter should perform the following miracle:

> Go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for me and you. (Mt. 17:27-28)

No doubt, bible scholars will someday throw light on Jesus' method of fishing by exhaustive research into the piscatorial practices of the ancient Near East. But on one point our ordinary experience should suffice: it usually requires bait to catch a fish. Please notice: Jesus makes a point of mentioning the hook, but not the bait; and indeed he says the fish will come up (*anabanta*) freely, on its own. I find myself asking if the miracle really illustrates how Jesus, like the fish, is not caught up in men's diabolical devices. He does not "take the bait." He will allow himself to be captured when he is ready. The whole episode would seem to sum up the revolutionary freedom that exposes the game of scandal and annuls its power.

Jesus' memorable response regarding the temple tax concerns the kingdoms of the earth. But the disciples' allegiance to the heavenly kingdom fails to dispel their anxiety about status – which is nothing but scandal – because they next inquire about the hierarchy of heaven: "Who," they ask, "is the greatest in the Kingdom?" (18:1) In the

New Testament, spiritual things are by no means exempt from the game of scandal, the game of people having it over one another. Religious practices themselves and contention over them are suspect. This is the ground of Jesus' withering denunciations of pious hypocrisy in the pages of Matthew (15:7-11, 23:10-30). Paul, in 1 Corinthians (8:7-13, 10:32) and Romans (14:13), fixes the charge of scandal on the new Christian congregations, where rituals and rules of purity continue to be occasions of offense. The apostle's admonition is sweeping: "Give no offense either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the Church of God."(1 Cor 10:32)

If scandal clouds the wine of professed Christian love, it is because people always find good enough pretexts for indignation and self-righteous triumphs. Is this why Jesus warns his listeners about anger with their brothers *without a cause*?[23] Everyone is sure they have cause; *that* is what Jesus is challenging. For it doesn't take much to escalate conflicts. Honor and insults become matters of life and death. Each of two opponents demands vindication; neither can withdraw from the field. Thus antagonisms acquire a life of their own. In Matthew 5, Jesus advocates truncating the progress of hostilities that will continue through the legal process if it does not end in violence.

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment... Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last farthing." (Mt. 5:21-22, 25-26)

These statements come immediately before the warnings about adultery. Indeed the arguments about anger and lust have the same structure. Both anger and lust seek power over one's neighbor and turn out to overpower the aggressors. Yet prohibitions against crimes, the indispensable commandments, cannot reveal the root evils growing according

to their own laws in the realm of spirit. That is the point of Jesus' revelation of scandal – scandal that unfolds behind crime, behind vice, even behind temptation.

For scandal is one of the keys to the genesis of evil. Matthew 13 symbolizes this lesson in the parable of the wheat and tares, which contains, according to this text's use of Isaiah, something "kept secret [since] the world's foundation."(Mt. 13:35) Time does not permit a detailed reading; but the kernel of the parable is this.[24] The roots of the wheat and the tares, entangled below ground, represent the ensnarement of unconscious humanity. The Enemy, the cosmic source of evil, sowed the tares "while men slept" – during that siesta we call life. We poor devils are therefore only second-class Satans, not especially perceptive about how discord is sown. All our hatreds are ignorant effects of the autonomous evil whose name is Scandal. For, beyond the breaking of the law, it is *scandal* that Jesus denounces (13:41) when he explains this parable. Scandals must be removed for the Kingdom ever to be realized.[25]

Let this suffice as our account of the Bible's theme of scandal. Now, it is not immediately clear what this universe of rivalry has to do with the hand or eye that, in Matthew 5, Jesus says might scandalize someone. The scandalizing hand or eye could be a figure of speech, like the "rebellion of the flesh." It would describe the loss of control, the being-divided-against-oneself that constitutes lust. The text even spells out self-division by referring to the right eye and the right hand as opposed to the left,[26] and it describes a sort of metastasis, from the heart to the eye and the hand and the whole body. But as we saw in introducing the topic, Jesus mocks our naïveté. We impute lust to the body; by habitual literal-mindedness, we feel that our eye or hand is a scandal in the

sense of something that "makes" us sin. Jesus' irony challenges us to draw the logical conclusion of this attitude.[27] Apprehend the anatomical culprits and cut them off!

To accept the body's "scandalizing" as *simply* a figure of speech for lust only reflects the habit of non-thinking that eternally misleads us. One indulges in behaviors that undermine one, then imagines that the body has "tripped one up." Jesus' speech exposes how irrational it is to accept this self-division, to accuse the body as "other" and yet to identify with it and fear for its harm – learning nothing from the fact that *adultery is divided desire.* But now shift his statement onto the figurative plane and it holds out a different possibility. Figuratively, it is not some self-seducing bodily organ that one cuts off or plucks out; it is *scandalizing impulses* that one removes from *oneself.* Note: after the advice to remove the hand or eye, Matthew always adds "...and cast it from you" – as if even the detached member still had some power. This further touch of the absurd compels thought to another level of meaning.[28] Matthew expresses the idea of distancing oneself from these scandalizing impulses, distancing oneself from accretions that will be seen differently once we stop thinking about the body and lust so literally. Once one sees the Gospel's recommendations of surgery as directed at accretions *of scandal*, one can begin to understand adulterous impulses as acquired rather than intrinsic to one's identity. Figuratively, your body "scandalizing you" stands not for the simple fact of the body's lust, but for the complex fact of a susceptibility to having scandal awakened. Lust only activates an unconscious role one plays in the world's scandals, in the Bible's more general sense of the term. On this view it becomes possible to ask *how* one has become so divided against oneself – to ask *what* scandals have gotten into one, the better to cast them off. This is the question Matthew's Gospel addresses in chapter 18.

At the opening of that chapter, as we already saw, the disciples ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, a preoccupation they should have realized is the essence of scandalized thinking. Jesus calls a child up to him:

> "Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. But whoever [scandalizes] one of these little ones who trust [*pisteuonton*] in me, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of [scandals]! For [scandals] must come, but woe to that man [by/through] whom the [scandal] comes."
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> "If your hand or foot [scandalizes] you, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye [scandalizes] you, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." (Matt. 18:5-9)

Midway through these verses we are disoriented. The advice to cut off a limb or remove an eye is not clearly motivated here; it feels as if we have missed a step in the sequence. But won't the adult reader remember that Matthew has already given these pieces of advice a sexual connotation? – that Matthew has already associated them with adultery in his earlier pages?[29] If so, then the reader must sense the theme of adultery here between the lines. After the several remarks retailing the primordial history of scandal, one wonders if that history is also meant to shed light on the subject of adultery.[30]

With this in mind, let us restate the argument of this chapter. An adult provokes a child. Scandal comes into the world by an adult who betrays a child's fundamental *trust* (I am giving the Greek word *pisteuo* its deeper and also more Judaic sense.[31]) But the adult is not fully himself; he does not know his own self-interest. Note that drowning is *better* than the man's life of scandal. Which is to say, the affliction in *his* soul exceeds any consequence to his body. René Girard has pointed out that the millstone around the man's neck sinking him in the sea is a good metaphor for his scandalized existence.[32] The compulsion of engaging in petty rivalry (to the extent of antagonizing a child) is a millstone turning round and round, a neurotic routine making the man spiral down into an

inward abyss. Now, since millstones usually come as a pair, the upper and the lower (Cf. Deut. 24:6), this single millstone describes self-division, much like the image of the half-mutinous body. (Mt. 18:9) But between the two images, Jesus progresses gradually from the third to the second person.[33] He moves from the miserable adult who scandalizes a child, to the generalized "...man by whom scandals come," and then he includes his adult listeners ("If your hand or foot scandalizes you..."). In keeping with the rest of Matthew, this text depicts scandal as an autonomous social contagion, the real agent of evil: something that happens tragically to children and replicates itself in their behavior as adults, *including the behavior described earlier as adultery.*

We are in the hell of abject necessities. Freedom decays into fatality on the whole human scene. We are told, woe to the *world*, that scandals *must* come and, by an alternative for the Greek *di[a]*, that scandal comes *through* a man. As in the parable of wheat and tares, scandal is always already in the world, a universal blight infecting every generation. Here in Matthew 18, where nothing associates the scandalous body with adultery explicitly and specifically, adultery as a moral issue has evanesced.[34] Here are no recognizable sins of the flesh, but only spiritual evil obeying its own unyielding laws. The spontaneous movements of lust show up as so many petty and compulsive provocations in a whole world of provocation. It is as if the species of lust are symptoms, or better, disguises that cunning pride wears, pursuing a sensuous career to compensate itself for its humiliations. The disjointed body, with its scandalizing hands and feet and eyes, appears as a mere puppet animated by the scandal of the world. This is not to say that individuals bear no responsibility for transgressions against the commandment. But the individual's responsibility is only one twisted thread in the web of scandal. Blame

and judgment are complex, and compassion is in order. Indictments of particular acts, no less than accusations of our bodies, conceal the essential problem. The essential problem is the spiritual malady of scandal, moving hearts in more insidious ways than we care to imagine.

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What I take to be the teaching of Matthew's Gospel about adultery is neither a total break with tradition nor a particularly original discovery. Since the Apostle Paul, Christian authors have felt that the body's temptations were symptoms of ills greater than the foibles of sexuality simply. It was not sexual sins per se that concerned the Desert Fathers so much as the arrogance and assertion of difference that lay hidden in them.[35] The new formulation I am offering here is only the idea that lust is the reflex of scandal, that lust is a means for scandal to pursue its campaigns of conquest and self-vindication. And on this point, the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol may have been the first to feel the Gospel's full implication. With only slight exaggeration one could call his story "The Nose" the most illustrative commentary on Matthew's texts about scandal, or – to be more precise – a midrash on those texts, a story embroidered upon them.[36] Midrashim by no means excluded humor; and Gogol realized that scandalized humanity deserved not only our compassion but also a good lampoon.

We know for a fact, from Gogol's own statements, that he believed part of his originality to consist in opening up Jesus' psychological ideas, radical ideas surpassing all previous science of the soul.[37] Indeed he regarded his own writing as a vehicle for his extraordinary Christian vision; his storytelling was an evangelical enterprise.[38] This comes as a surprise to people acquainted with his baffling tales, and certainly Gogol was

far from direct about his new revelation.[39] As far as public teaching is concerned, it is entirely possible that he learned some of his pedagogical methods from the Gospels – the use not just of parable, but of disordered narrative, sexual innuendo,[40] and ambiguous humor, all of which make extraordinary demands on readers. If Gogol meant to reveal the banal evil of scandal,[41] he had at the same time to conceal it from his incriminated audience. Pearls cast in their faces might only provoke them to "turn and rend" him, as the gospel warns. (Matt. 7:6)

In Russian the word "Nose" is "sleep" or "dream" backwards (*Nos /Son*). Gogol's absurd tale is a dream sequence of confused events with partly sexual meanings. His contemporaries did not need Freud to figure out that the Nose was a phallic appendage. Twice in the story the absence of a nose is identified with the condition of old women. (p.307).[42] And its loss absolutely impedes the hero's liaisons with the ladies, which becomes clear to him for some reason as soon as he puts his hand into his pocket.(313-14). But what Gogol's audience might not have fully recognized was that the point here was neither "dirty"[43](as some imagined) nor even ultimately sexual.[44] In Gogol's St. Petersburg tales, parts of bodies and items of clothing regularly take the place of whole human beings. Not people, but swords, whiskers, balloon sleeves, and delicately adorned feet parade down fashionable Nevsky Avenue. This replacement of the wholes by the parts is not just a trick of language or representation.[45] It is something Gogol's characters do to themselves ironically in the quest for mystique and prestige. The Nose is simply a further step in this process of self-dehumanization, a replacement of a whole with a part, and the part with another part. Such substitution is indeed the method of our dreams.

All this is to say that Gogol understood the dynamics of scandal, hidden by the very ubiquity of its signs and the casualness of people's obsession with them. Scandal in this sense is the background to the bizarre events of "The Nose." The protagonist Kovalyev is a thoroughly scandalized character – "an extremely touchy man"(315). He is preoccupied with rank in the civil service, and the uniforms that declare it (306-9). His ogling of women on the streets of Petersburg is hardly distinguished from his lust for status.

> Kovalyev was a Caucasian collegiate assessor. He had held this rank for only two years, and therefore could not forget it for a moment; and to give himself more nobility and weight, he never referred to himself as a collegiate assessor, but always as major. "Listen, dearie," he used to say on meeting a woman selling shirt fronts in the street, "come to my place; I live on Sadovaya; just ask, "Where does Major Kovalyev live?" – anyone will show you." And if he met some comely little thing, he would give her a secret order on top of that, adding, "Ask for Major Kovalyev's apartment, sweetie." For which reason, we shall in future refer to this collegiate assessor as a major. (p.305)

Scandal infects all of the major's interpersonal relations. His least important encounters reveal their true importance under Gogol's magnifying glass – for example, his snobbery toward Ivan the barber. Kovalyev cavalierly offends him by remarking on the offensive smell of his hands. " 'Your hands eternally stink, Ivan Yakovlevich' – Ivan Yakovlevich would reply with a question: 'And why should they stink?' to which the collegiate assessor would say, 'I don't know, brother, but they stink.' " Now notice Ivan's impotent retaliation: "And *for that* (*za eto*)[46] Ivan Yakovlevich after a pinch of snuff, would soap him up on the cheeks, and under the nose, and behind the ears, and under the chin – in short, anywhere he liked." (p.303, Italics added)

So much are Kovalyev and Ivan in the boat of scandal together that, although the story recounts Kovalyev's dream of "waking up" to find his face minus a nose, somehow it is following *Ivan's* dream, too. For the tale opens with Ivan just as *he* "wakes up." *His* nose is out of joint too, apparently, since he can only "sense the smell" (*uslyshal zapakh*)

of his wife's fresh-baked bread. When a nose shows up in the bread, the narrator tells us, Ivan's terror is nothing next to his wife's indignation.(302) What might a *nose in her bread* be pointing to ...perhaps a sexual dalliance with Kovalyev? Having thrown the nose-bearing loaf in her husband's face, so to speak, she must cover up her guilt and defend herself by hurling more abuse at him. Yet we suspect that any illicit conduct on her part expresses deeper scandal, her frustrated marital ambition. On the first page we are informed of the resentment of this "respectable lady" toward her menial spouse.(301)

While Ivan's role in the affair of "The Nose" remains in the background – his guilt is that of a man whose murderous wish has come true – the greater part of the tale follows Kovalyev's psyche and its symbolic downfall. Ivan's dream is Kovalyev's worst nightmare. Kovalyev is a man so divided that his split-off identity has inflated and acquired a life of its own. His truant nose appears about Petersburg as an officer of superior rank in the service. If Gogol has borrowed the motif of dismemberment from the Gospel, he repays the loan with interest by carrying the Gospel's absurdity to a revealing extreme.

For in Gogol's story, biblical scandal, the dream of cutting a great figure in the world, reaches its crisis point – a showdown with reality. This showdown takes the form of confrontation with "the double," the *other* who, like oneself, is out to cut a great figure in the world. Kovalyev declares to the newspaper office clerk that he wishes to publish an announcement, not about any small matter "...but about my own nose: which means almost about me myself."(313) The Nose is both a lost self and another person. That is, scandal has, as its ultimate consequence, the lack of all "root in oneself" in the Gospel's terms, the loss of true identity which is instead projected outward as the rival who (I

repeat) represents the proud man's ambitions incarnate. Now vanquishing *him* would be success defined by an indisputably external standard. But likewise *being* vanquished means utter failure. Gogol's tale dramatizes this all-or-nothing game one unconsciously plays against oneself, where "oneself" is disguised as the other, and one's defects count no less as disasters. Kovalyev is tormented by the prospect of navigating Nevsky Avenue *sans* nose. So he covers up his pancake face, intent on ignoring the nose-endowed world. But he cannot lower his eyes in modesty as he would now do. The momentum of scandal hurls him toward the man who is literally all he lacks, as surely as a projectile moves according to the laws of physics. Only to Kovalyev the encounter is "inexplicable."

> Biting his lips in vexation, he walked out of the pastry shop and decided *contrary to his custom, not to look* at anyone or smile at anyone. Suddenly he stopped as if rooted outside the doors of one house; *before his eyes* an inexplicable phenomenon occurred... a gentleman in uniform ...his own nose! ...He was in a gold-embroidered uniform with a big standing collar; he had kidskin trousers on; at his side hung a sword. From his plumed hat it could be concluded that he belonged to the rank of state councillor. (306, Italics added)

When finally Kovalyev gets up the nerve to confront the Nose with the fact that it is really *his* nose, the Nose *literally* scandalizes him. The Nose says, sneering, "You are mistaken, my dear sir. I am by myself. Besides, there can be no close relationship between us. Judging by the buttons on your uniform, you must serve in a different department."(308) The eerie truth about scandal enacted as comedy: the rebel body part dramatized as interpersonal humiliation. It is no accident that, later in the story, in the letters exchanged between Kovalyev and his lady friend Podtochina, the Nose is confused with a sexual competitor.(321) Evidently, if the whole does not cut off such a scandalizing part (as the Gospel recommends), the part will finally cut off the whole! Kovalyev dreams his career of self-validation is being "cut off" by his rival and superior,

as it inevitably will be in real life. Again one might paraphrase Matthew: he who lives by the nose will die by the Nose.

The process of scandal – the psychological theme of Gogol's tale– is not obvious on account of the puppet-theatre exaggeration. Readers should suspect something, however, as the narrator mocks our lack of comprehension. Indeed he scandalizes *us*. "...Are there not incongruities everywhere?... Once you reflect on it, there really is something to all this. Say what you like, but such incidents do happen in the world – rarely, but they do happen."(306) As readers we find ourselves in the position of Gogol's bewildered characters, especially if we still fail to see our own noses in this mirror. We may feel a scandalous indignation. Or, like Ivan near the beginning of the story, we may feel a twinge of complicity but fail in reading it. "Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I can't say for sure. But by all tokens this incident should be unfeasible: for bread is a baking matter, and a nose is something else entirely. I can't figure it out!"(302)

The barber's wife and the philandering major find it convenient to blame others for the scandal, thus displacing their own guilt. As scandal is universal, the tactic succeeds in eliciting confessions – only not to the suspected crimes!(302,321) Alternatively, the characters see the "devil's work" in the events, unconscious of the irony in the exasperated hypothesis. "Devil knows how it happened," says Ivan.(302) "The devil alone can sort it all out," says Kovalyev-of the-flattened-face, letting his arms drop like a marionette.(322)[47] At which point, significantly, the narrator describes the *scandal* of the Nose in the diabolical and modern sense of the word, a contagion of gossip that spreads through society insofar as no one thinks or acts conscientiously.(322-23)

Yet Gogol gives stronger hints that his characters unconsciously parody the Gospel. The date for the appearance of the severed Nose is March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, announcing the revolutionary Christian miracle, the scandalous phallus-free Conception of a Savior. In Gogol's funhouse, the warped reflection of the sacred event is the main "action" of the story: Kovalyev, on the inspiration of "heaven itself" (310), attempts to place an "announcement" in the newspapers declaring that his "nose" is on the loose. Near the culmination of events, the Noseless One's afflictions begin to sound familiar. "My God, my God!" he exclaims, like Christ on the cross, "Why this misfortune? ...If I lacked an arm or a leg, it would still be better; if I lacked ears it would be bad, but still more bearable; but lacking a nose... And if it had been cut off in a war or a duel, or if I'd caused it myself..."(315) A duel? Caused it himself? Now Kovalyev is getting warm. For the idea that the duels of scandal simply bring further suffering upon the scandalized is an essential teaching of Matthew's Jesus. When Kovalyev's nose is returned, the doctor who considers re-attaching it unwittingly echoes the Gospel's idea of the healthy amputee. "You'd better stay the way your are, because it might come out still worse. Of course, it could be attached... but I assure you *it will be the worse for you.*"(319) Kovalyev might benefit monetarily, the doctor observes, by selling the separated member. Here Kovalyev reveals himself to be a man with priorities, though not the ones the Jesus of Matthew advocates in similar words. Unwilling to give another the power of the nose, Kovalyev cries, "I won't sell it for anything! *Better let it perish!*"(320 Italics added)

For Kovalyev there is only the most superficial resolution: his nose reappears on his face, and he returns to his scandals. But a couple of the tale's minor characters are

not so obtuse; and it would be like Gogol to let the "little guys" offer what positive points there are in his tale. The downtrodden policeman, for example, arrests and returns Kovalyev's nose, despite, or rather because of, the fact that he is too near-sighted to notice anyone's nose.(317) Blind to what for others are the banal occasions of scandal, he sees without such anxious distortions. Therefore he is able to solve the mystery – reduce the Nose to its true-life proportions and restore the part to the whole.[48]

Gogol's cartoon comedy may even distract us from the symbolic climax, when Ivan the barber sees the obstacle or *skandalon* for what it is. In a closing scene Ivan arrives to shave Kovalyev as usual. And, as usual, Kovalyev keeps Ivan in his place by his insults about his smelly hands. Ivan, however, is now unusually timid, "...more taken aback than he had ever been before." He maneuvers without even holding "the smelling part of the body" (even naming the Nose at this point seems scandalous). So Ivan shaves Kovalyev after "*...overcom[ing] all obstacles*" (*adalyel vcye prepyatstvia*; p. 324). A metaphorical overcoming of obstacles if ever there was one. For Ivan finally triumphs by avoiding the signifier not just of Kovalyev's vanity but of every scandalous downfall as the Gospel understands it.

* * *

The idea that the "little guy" in Gogol's story overcomes the essential human temptation is in line with the thought of the Gospel.[49] In Matthew 18, as we saw, Jesus brings forward a nameless little child and places it at the center of the discussion. By this gesture Matthew's Jesus is not evoking some nostalgic sentiment about childhood. As I said earlier, he is speaking of the effects of scandal on children and adults, as grim a

spectacle as a man ever described with a child on his knee. But the discourse does not lead to despair. The revelation of evil turns out to be a disclosure of how adults may find themselves by becoming "little ones." Through a string of short oracles and utterances, all in deceptively simple language, Matthew seems to have constructed a riddle of redemption.[50] Let us look at this page of Matthew 18 again, this time through v. 14.

> At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them, and said,
>
> "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. But whoever [scandalizes] one of these little ones who trust in me, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of [scandals]! For [scandals] must come, but woe to that man [by/through] whom the [scandal] comes.
>
> "If your hand or foot [scandalizes] you, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye [scandalizes] you, pluck it out and cast it from you...
>
> "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.
>
> "What do you think? If a hundred sheep be to a man and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mounts to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." (Mt. 18:1-14)

"Unless you are *converted* (*strephete*) and become as little children," Jesus' speech begins in the King James Version. This translation implies *two* distinct actions, the conversion and the becoming as children. Yet another natural rendering of the Greek would be: "Unless you *turn around*..." or "Unless you *turn back* and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom..." This rendering allows us to see that the announced subject of these verses is *the turning back.* I mean, the fourteen verses begin by stating the condition of becoming as children and end up remarking on the supreme worth of the "little ones." In between is all the business of scandalizing and being scandalized.[51] The text itself takes us from childhood to a renewed littleness, which logically entails an undoing of all the intervening scandal.

And notice there is a reversal in the order of images. Our scandals, or rather our acts of psychic dismemberment, here lead backwards. Compare the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5: there the metastasis of scandal progressed outward, from the heart to the eye and the limb. Here in chapter 18, the order of afflictions and amputations is reversed – first the limb, and then the eye – as if a disease (with its scandalous symptoms) is in remission.[52] Even the devil obeys rules; Mephistopheles himself must leave by the way he entered. Matthew's text describes a reversal of the stages of corruption: a path of liberation that leads back metaphorically to simplicity. This is not to be confused with that more literal movement backward known as *reversion.* This return is no resurgence of the rash and defenseless naïveté of the child, nor is it a withdrawal into security. Rather, the text describes a removal of inward conflicts and second intentions, which makes integrity possible.[53]

Integrity. It is striking how the parable of the lost sheep, which is the end of this metaphorical path, represents such self-unity. For in Matthew the story of finding the lost sheep works not just as a figure of social reconciliation but as a figure of the *individual's recovery of wholeness.*[54] There is a hint in Matthew's Greek not found in Luke's corresponding verses. Matthew says, "If *there be to a man* (*ean genetai tini anthropoi*) a hundred sheep..." – that is, we might think of a human being *as* the whole flock, by a sort of proportion, one man to a hundred sheep.[55] Moreover, the flock stands for wholeness because it is not a random aggregate but a large round number. The hundredth sheep the Son of Man goes after is then the one that *makes* the flock a whole, the one that restores or causes its wholeness. Jesus is not just offering a touching image of redemption, but showing the individual's recovery of oneness after the ravages of scandal.[56]

But what does the parable offer beyond the image of recuperated health? It is reasonable to expect, following the analogy of the invalid, that after amputating the diseased limbs and eyes the next step is to look into the recesses of the heart. Should we not find even the source of the ailment, here in the heart's secret workings? Let us follow the text's lead. Right after the figures of self-separation from the diseased organs, we have a brief introduction to the parable. This introduction may indeed be disclosing the origin of this divided self on which the disciple has been operating. When Jesus says, "Take heed that you do not *despise one* of these little ones," he may not merely be repeating his warning against scandalizing children. If his listeners are to reacquire the humility of children, that "one" little one they are not to despise may be the little one *each of them once was*. Is this self-despising the original fracture of simplicity that the parable addresses? Does Jesus' anatomical procedure here uncover the rupture through which scandal first invades the heart?

Despising (*kataphroneo*) is a looking down on what is vulnerable. Despising is not equivalent to scandalizing, but is only the initial movement of scandal: the hostile action *without* the reaction, the offense *without* the angry response on the part of the despised. Despising might, in theory, fail to obtain complicity in the propagation of evil that is scandal. In theory – and in the parable. In the parable, the hundredth member of the whole flock has gone *down* (from the mounts); it is despised and estranged. As a figure of humiliation and alienation, the image expresses the affliction of every human being induced to despise his or her smallness and to repudiate trust. One can easily imagine a diabolical version of the rule to love one's neighbor as oneself: thou shalt despise thyself as thou art despised by others.[57] The relevant quality of the child is not

just humbleness. The child, Jesus states, is originally one who *trusts*, trusts in him, the Son of Man, trusts in the original bonds of its own with others' humanity.(18:6) Despised, the little one is in danger of rejecting both itself and this root confidence it has within.(Cf. 13:21) According to the parable, this is the moment, recovered like a memory, when the Son of Man intervenes. He comes (in the words of the text) "to save that which was lost" (18:11),[58] (in other words) to restore the humility and essential trust that were lost in humiliation and ensuing scandal.

This humility and this trust that are restored are not a child's inexperience and state of subjugation. Indeed "children" and the "child" are not mentioned again after the text moves us through the chaos of scandal. The closing parable is framed by references only to "little ones" whose angels reflect the face of the Father[59] – children who now are no longer "children," except as sons and daughters of the Father, who is above the world's wasteland of scandal. Jesus says, "my Father in heaven" when he announces the work of the Son of Man, but he says "*your* Father...in heaven" to conclude that not "one of the little ones" should perish.[60] So we might finally ask if the Son of Man is perhaps the same as our own original humanity – and the same as the humility that overcomes every obstacle and the confidence that withstands every persecution. We have puzzled through the intricate riddles of Matthew's text to find ourselves at the threshold of genuine mystery.

Endnotes

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[1] This formulation of intensifying and fulfilling the Law departs from many scholars who read Mt. 5:17-48 as presenting "antitheses" between the Law and the Gospel, a position that can be traced back to the anti-Semitic misreading of Marcion. In light of Mt. 5:17-19, it is more than a little misleading to think of Jesus' teachings as replacing the Law. If my reading has merit, concern with scandal is behind Jesus' teachings in the Sermon because the psychology of scandal conditions the human ability to adhere to the Law.

[2] Given the advances of scholarship in reading the Gospel record, it may be useful to clarify how names are used here. Questions of authorship and of the historical Jesus are not immediately relevant to this reading which presupposes the redacted text. I refer to "Jesus" only as the main character in Matthew's Gospel, and "Matthew" as whoever composed it from previous sources, oral or written.

[3] I have mostly used the New King James Version for the English text of Matthew, making minor corrections to reflect the Greek. The source for the Greek text and variants of the New Testament is *Nestle-Almond Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

[4] Phallic and castration motifs in the Bible hardly begin in the Gospel. See, e.g., Joseph's interpretations of the pharaoh's eunuchs' dreams in Genesis 40 (one is phallic and potentially threatening, the other self-castrating and submissive), or the enmity between David and Saul (with its "Oedipal" features, for want of a better term) in 1 Samuel 18:25, 22:8, and 24:3-11. On psychological themes in the Hebrew Bible, see also Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (note 12 below), pp. 21-22.

[5] There is the well-known case of Origen's self-castration, relying on Mt. 19:12, as mentioned in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, viii. 2, J. E. L. Oulton transl. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) v.2, p. 29. Note also G. Stahlin's reading of Mt. 5, cited in Betz (see note 6), p. 239, n. 346.

[6] E.g. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 187; *The Catholic Bible: Personal Study Edition*, J. M. Hiesberger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), new section p. 14, note to 5:29-30; *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 16. *The Anchor Bible: Matthew*, W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann translators (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), also centers interpretation on the plain warning about hell, albeit in reference to Mt. 18, on p. 216. Martin Luther preserves the eschatology without it controlling his reading in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, in *Luther's Works*, J. Pelikan, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), p. 90. He is the first writer I have found to see the inconsistency and offense of the text of Mt. 5:27-30 (e.g. that dismemberment should extend to tearing out the heart, and that a "kind of castrating" is implied).

For a thorough recent discussion of the so-called Second Antithesis on adultery in the Sermon on the Mount, relying on the literal eschatological view of Mt. 5:29-30, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 231, 235-239. Betz aligns the teaching of Matthew 5:27-30 both with Hellenistic ethical philosophy (also cf. p.47) and with rabbinical literature, to avoid the temptation to find a more original Jesus. In Betz's view, the Sermon warns listeners about the eschatological consequences of adultery and, at the same time, constitutes a "special application of the love-command." The subtleties in Matthew's redaction are muted on this view. However, as Betz regards the evangelist's work as potentially elaborating on the Sermon (p.6), Mt. 18 can still throw light on Mt. 5.

[7] Betz notes something "absurd" about the injunctions to self-dismemberment (*Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 236,238), but he is using the term loosely, not to bring out the contradiction and irony that indicate another possible layer of meaning.

We must entertain the idea that Matthew 5:29-30 is comic. "Member" is a perfectly good translation of the Greek *melos*. And all the similar exhortations in the Gospel to sacrifice an eye or a limb to save the patient *never include this suggestive generalization* which attaches so comically to the context of adultery.

[8] "To [literally] remove an eye would be to reproach the Creator," states *The Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 16. Thus, if we take "offense" or "scandal" in the sense of causing another to sin, Jesus is scandalizing his listeners. See also note 16 below.

[9] To speak of the "art" of the Gospel only assumes that the redactor was aware of what he put together. Cf. Gabriel Josopovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 321 n.2. The study of the history of texts apart from their meaning (diachrony) cannot finally displace the study of the meanings the texts set up (synchrony). Historicist presumption leads directly, in Josopovici's phrase, to "the death of reading." (p. 15) Scripture, like poetry, does extraordinary things with language and images, with given but mutable pieces of tradition. It lays down a threshold that readers must cross into its world, leaving the transitory passions and politics of their banal world behind. Otherwise it is little more than an ancient form of modern journalism, immersed in "scandals."

[10] This is even more significant if there was never a Hebrew or Aramaic original behind Matthew's text. See Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 79-80.

[11] These remarks of Matthew's Jesus conclude his private discourse with the disciples, and allude to what the reader should have understood there. The householder's (or landowner's) treasure refers back to 13:36 and 44. See also note 24 below.

Contemporary scholars have acknowledged the veiled allusion of "Matthew" to himself and to his treasure of wisdom about salvation. (See David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 122.) What is not appreciated especially well is the implication of such wordplay and textual craft for the speculative reading of Matthew. In the context of Matthew 13, with its references to pearls and secrets and hidden treasure, more must lie between the lines of this writer: some treasure must be buried beneath the surface. Wisdom, says the profound student of scripture Maimonides, is an aptitude for stratagems. (*Guide for the Perplexed*, translated by M. Friedlander (New York: Dover, 1956), iii, 54.) "Matthew" is not just commenting on scriptural texts in the rabbinical fashion, but writing texts that themselves will demand study and reflection. Research on the Matthaean community is consistent with the supposition of a writer with rabbinical training and subtle knowledge of Hebrew scriptures. See, e.g. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 97-105; and Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, pp. 115-163.

[12] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, A. Aronowicz trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 77; and Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 43, and in general chaps. 1-3. What I am offering is an argument from textual clues for less than obvious meanings in the text, in accord with the Semitic tradition of reading – extricating the spirit from the letter. (Besides Alter and Levinas, see David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996), chaps. 1-2; and Jean Grosjean, *Araméenes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1988), p.10, 35-50.) The rabbinical tradition has continuously preserved the practice of learning wisdom from the scriptures through utterly free, reasoned interrogation of the text. The practice assumes that the Bible interweaves the literary and religious impulses; and although biblical books are not seamless unities, the redactor's art can approach the most inspired authorship (Alter). To sum up points made by Levinas, Alter, Grosjean, and Stern: one must consider how "gratuitous" details are used in these texts, how the art of indirection works in them, how received materials are worked into multi-dimensional collages, how narrative gaps are left to be filled by the reader, and so on, before presuming to see defects owing to the books' composition. These Hebrew and Greek scriptures ask of readers a sort of delightful complicity with the creative act of the writers. Respect for the plurality of interpretations is indispensable to this unrestrained and serious play.

Robert Alter argues for recovering an older art of reading the Bible, in introducing his new translation of Genesis. "The biblical conception of a book was clearly far more open-ended than any notion current in our own culture, with its assumptions of known authorship and legal copyright." The assumption in commentary is that the text "...has powerful coherence as a literary work, and that this coherence is above all what we need to address as readers. ...One need not claim that Genesis is a unitary artwork...in order to grant it integrity as a book... What seems quite clear... is that the redactors had a strong and often subtle

sense of thematic and narrative purposefulness in the way they wove together the inherited literary strands. ...I am deeply convinced that conventional biblical scholarship has been trigger-happy in using the arsenal of text-critical categories, proclaiming contradiction wherever there is the slightest internal tension in the text, seeing every repetition as evidence of a duplication of sources, everywhere tuning in to the static of transmission, not to the complex music of the redacted story." See Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), pp. xl-xliii.

Historical and theological preoccupations have become so predominant in English-speaking scholarship that relatively few students of the Gospels have been trained to read them with any of the subtlety and imagination characteristic of the Judaic tradition. Some of Paul Claudel's *Commentaires et Exegeses*, for example *Paul Claudel Interroge L'Apocalpyse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) are an exception. Claudel's texts inspired the more brilliant work of Jean Grosjean, whose commentaries and midrashic fiction are steeped in knowledge of Hebrew and Syriac literature and aim to recover the original Semitic-Christian genius eroded over centuries by the Greek theological enterprise. See, in particular, his *L'ironie christique: commentaire de l'Évangile selon Jean* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991). René Girard's seminal work, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (cited below) also reads the Bible against centuries of distorting doctrine and prejudice. Girard uncovers the original revelation of the scapegoat in Christian scriptures that have historically collaborated in violence and the making of victims. Insofar as the art of reading removes the "sediment" of tradition that covers biblical texts, it could prove to be no less radical than the historical and paleographic researches of the last century. (Cf. Grosjean, *Arameénnes*, pp. 135-137 and Levinas, *Nine Readings*, p. 47.)

[13] See, for example, Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press), pp. 17-19; and David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Chrisitanity* (Tel-Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), pp. 23, 29-30, 66.

[14] See Keener, *Commentary*, pp. 54-55.

[15] The subject of scandal is powerfully treated by René Girard, in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1987), pp. 393-431. He discerns in the Bible the most thoroughgoing deconstruction of human consciousness and collective violence. I do not intend to adopt Girardian theory as a total method of reading, but to derive a related meaning of scandal in biblical texts, understood as compatible with other strands or layers of meaning.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 416. The polysemy of the term "scandal" should not overwhelm us. It is not a great stretch of thought to posit a unified idea of scandal, if one simply speculates on what is behind the various senses of *skandalidzo* and *skandalon* as given in a standard reference. See e.g. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by William Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, after Walter Bauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 760, where the non-literal meanings of *skandalon* include "that which causes revulsion, that which arouses opposition, an object of anger..." It is no great leap in meaning to see scandal generally as the power of any difference to threaten, or to draw one into the world's senseless feuds. One may then begin to see how New Testament scandal is linked both to the Shakespearean idea of scandal (e.g. *Hamlet* I. iv) and to the modern idea of exploiting people's conventionality to arouse their prurient and moralistic indignation.

[17] The scandalizing Jesus is more obvious, for instance, in John 6:22-61: "Does [my speech] scandalize you?" See also Jean Grosjean, *L'ironie christique*, e.g. pp. 119, 159.

[18] As with scandal in the New Testament, we should not discount the (relative) unity in the Hebrew scriptures' imagery (Cf. Alter, *Biblical Literature*, p. 79), such that the motif of stumbling can already be seen to suggest a syndrome of sin. With astonishing frequency, stumbling in the Hebrew Bible is associated with rivalry, gloating over enemies, and taking advantage of others' weaknesses. (Lev 19:14, Prov 4:11-19, 24:17, 19-20) Insolence, because it is a consequence of our stakes in a world of violence, entails its own downfall. (1 Sam 2:3-6, Ps 140:5, Prov 1:18, 3:23-27, 24:19-20, Jer 50:32). Enemies locked in conflict *both* stumble; scandal has a reciprocal, natural and necessary effect, described as the Lord's vengeance. (Prov 3:11-12, 34, 4:18-19; Ps 27:2; Jer 46:12; Mal 2:8-10). We roam through a dark

"underworld" of barely conscious mutual injustice. (Is 59:10) On the other hand, by not participating in the game of mutual persecution, our enemies' power diminishes. (Ps 119:165, Jer 20:10-11)

[19] Cain and Abel initiate the contest of sacrifices entirely on their own. The Lord's regard for Abel's offering does not imply a stake in the brothers' rivalry. The Lord gives Cain a lesson infinitely more valuable than the pride of accepted sacrifice: "If *you* do what is right, *you* will be accepted" or, in Alter's translation, "Whether you offer well or whether you do not, at the tent flap sin crouches..."(Gen 4:6) Outward signs of favor and rank are not the essential. For a slightly different but nonetheless positive evaluation of Cain's lesson, see the *Midrash Rabbah*, H. Freman and M. Simon, editors (London: Soncino Press, 1983), v. 1 (Genesis), p. 184.

[20] The Gospel of John (11:9-10) has a parallel view of stumbling, using the verb *proskopto*.

[21] The Greek verb confirms the ambiguity of the image of the stones "in" the earth that represents the scandalized receiver of the word. As *skandalidzetai* is in the middle *or* passive voice, one cannot distinguish being scandalized by another from scandalizing oneself; one cannot determine how much the scandal is others' doing and how much is the subject's reaction (having the stones within one).

[22] Jacques Ellul, in *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 63-4, sees the ridicule in Jesus' remark and in the miracle, but not how the miracle exposes and ridicules scandal.

[23] This phrase is found in the Majority and Received (traditional) Texts. See also Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 219.

[24] The reading greatly compressed here is worked out in "A Parable of Scandal: Speculations about the Wheat and the Tares," *Contagion* 5 (1998), pp. 98-117.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[26] The most common reading is that Jesus mentions the "right" eye or limb as the more important one.

[27] There is ancient support for the ironic reading insofar as it was recognized that Matthew could not have meant that Jesus *accused the body*. See *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of Matthew*, translated by George Prevost in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), Homily 17 on Mt. 5:27-28, p. 118. "...[F]or nowhere does He say that our flesh is to be blamed for things, but everywhere it is the evil mind that is accused. For it is not the eye that sees, but the mind and the thought."

[28] Mark's parallel texts lack the phrase (Mark 9:43-48). As the surgical advice in Mark is never even connected to adultery, as it is in Matthew, Matthew's added phrase "...and throw it from you" is possibly related to his interest in adultery. It seems both to underline the idea of cutting this scandal off (versus arresting temptations) and to preserve the unity of theme behind Matthew's verses in chapters 5 and 18, distinguishing them from Mark's.

Keener, in *Commentary*, p. 188, comes admirably close to the figurative sense of Matthew's added phrase but, not suspecting the powerful revelation of scandal, he does not see how it encourages interpretation of scandalous behavior and helps one "cast it off."

[29] I assume the tightness of the whole construction of Matthew's Gospel, with Keener, *Commentary*, p. 10.

[30] Clearly vv.4-9 are constructed on the basis of the associated term "scandal" from diverse texts, as were verses in Matthew's main source here, Mark. (See *The Anchor Bible: Matthew*, p. 216.) This does not prevent the final redactor from altering them minimally and achieving maximal results in new meaning in the fresh context he supplies. On "recontextualizing," see Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature*, p. 18. I also borrow Alter's highly probable suggestion of a redactor making "brilliant collages out of traditional materials," on pp. 69-70.

[31] Gabriel Josipovici, *Writing and the Body* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 129; and Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 42. Dense biblical texts can admit of several important yet different senses. Given the text's reference to children, the "little ones" might naturally refer to children rather than to simpler members of Christian belief-communities (see notes 50 and 51). The belief or trust of little ones would then be something like the natural confidence of children rather than their religious faith.

[32] Girard, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

[33] Cf. Mark 9:42-43. On the hypothesis that Mark's text is Matthew's main source, it does not follow that Matthew took over verses (that would dictate the third- to second-person movement) without figuring them into his own ideas. Indeed, the change to the second person in Mk 9:42-43 has a similar meaning to that change in Matthew, only located in an argument that brings out the danger of scandal in a different way. Mark is arguing that the disciples should be wary of getting into feuds and rivalries with other groups of disciples, that they had better consider the motives behind their own self-righteous anger and resentment. Are they themselves burning with the fire of self-sacrifice (Mk 9:49-50), or just seething with worldly scandal and embroiled with the other? Better to lose a hand than the integrity of one's soul.

[34] Thus a foreground focus on adultery, corresponding to our interest in good and evil, may be contrasted to that truth contained in the figurative language of the bible text. This distinction has support in one important rabbinical school of reading. See Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 2 vols., v. 1: I, ii, pp. 24-25. In contemporary scholarship, compare Crossan's reading of the NT parables as the deliberate overthrowing of ethics, in John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 80-82.

[35] See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia *University* Press, 1988), pp. 48, 239.

[36] For the sense in which works of literature fit the rabbinical idea of midrash, see Stephen Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially pp. 15-16; and Gerald Bruns, "Midrash and Allegory," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1987), p. 629.

[37] The Christ that inaugurated Gogol's literary mission was the preeminent sage and scientist of the soul. "The reason I met Christ," he wrote in a letter, "was an analysis of the soul of man such as others do not make. I was amazed first at the human wisdom in Him and knowledge of the soul unknown till then – and only then did I worship His divinity." *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, translated and edited by Carl Proffer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), to S. Shevyrev, February 11, 1847, pp. 171-172. Elsewhere Gogol explained his oeuvre: "I turned my attention to the discovery of the eternal laws by which each man and mankind in general move. ...Insensibly, almost without knowing how, I journeyed along this road and came to Christ. And I saw in him the key to the human soul and realized that none who knew the soul had reached the pinnacle of spiritual understanding on which he stood." Cited in Georges Florovsky, *Theology and Literature: Collected works of Florovsky, v. 11*(Vaduz: Buchervertriebanstalt, 1989), pp. 58-59. *Cf. Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, p. 26 where Gogol refers to his early interest in "Natural laws," and indicates that he followed this "road" from the age of twelve, p 138. One naturally infers that such autobiographical accounts refer to the same psychological discoveries, made during a precocious adolescence. From the Russian edition of Gogol's letters, Marianna Bogojavlensky traces his mission back to his thirteenth year, in *Reflections on Nikolai Gogol* (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1969), p.44.

[38] Gogol insisted that his artistic mission was always Christian. See *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, e.g.letter to S. Aksakov, May 16, 1844, p. 138. See also one of the first Russian critics to understand Gogol's whole career as a religious enterprise, Vasily V. Zenkovsky, *Gogol* (Moskva: Shkola "Slovo", 1997 reprint), pp. 15-16. Gogol was continually fighting inward battles to prepare himself for the spiritual task of teaching through storytelling. See *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, letter to S. Shevyrev, February, 2,1844, p. 135, and the editor's note, p. 230; *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, translated by Jesse Zeldin (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), pp. 70, 84, 104-5, 107-108.

[39] See Gogol, *Selected Passages*, pp. 104-5.

[40] On Gogol's "prodding" of his readers, see Ivan Yermakov, "'The Nose,'" in *Gogol from the Twentieth Century*, transl. Robert A. Maguire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 198.

[41] Gogol, *Selected Passages*, pp. 103-5.

[42] Nikolai Gogol, *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*, translated and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998). All page references in parentheses in my text and notes refer to their text of "The Nose." The source for the few parenthetical citations of the Russian is *Sobranie sochinenii N. V. Gogolya v semi tomak* (Moskva: Kudhozhestvennaya Literatura, 1967).

[43] Robert A. Maguire, "Introduction," *Gogol from the Twentieth Century*, p. 26.

[44] Richard Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 129-30.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 98-101.

[46] The Russian also means "in exchange for that."

[47] Cf. Kovalev's gestures, on pp. 312, 315. Many readers of Gogol – e.g. Fanger, Lindstrom, Karlinsky, and the Russian animator Yuri Norstein – have noted the link of Gogol's brand of comedy with the Ukrainian puppet theatre tradition.

[48] Yermakov, "'The Nose,'" pp. 183, 195.

[49] On Gogol and the spirit of childhood, see Yermakov, " 'The Nose,' " pp. 189, 193; and Gogol's essay, "The Christian Goes Forward," in *Selected Passages from Correspondence*, pp. 69-70.

[50] Hence the power of this "brilliant collage" (R. Alter) may easily be underestimated. See Augustine, "Sermon XXXI" on Matthew 18:7 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), v. 6, pp. 354-355. Augustine's idea of scandal as counseling evil is clear in this text and controls his reading. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part II, II, Q 10. Art. 9, a. 3; and Luther, "Sermon on the Mount," *Luther's Works*, v. 21, p. 92. The general tendency seems to be to read the early verses of Matthew under the rubric provided by Mt. 18:15-20 (dissent in the church community), dismissing too abruptly the dramatic gesture of Jesus putting a child before the disciples. See Keener, *Commentary*, pp. 447-450. The Anchor Bible's *Matthew* (pp. 215-219) turns the "little ones" unequivocally into simple "believers" who can be led astray from true doctrine: the bold child psychology in Mt. 18 becomes invisible under such a translation.

The idea found in many notes and commentaries to Matthew 18 (e.g. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, p. 92; and Daniel Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp.265-66) is that the bodily organs sacrificed in order to save the whole body from hell now refer to refractory members cut off from ecclesiastic communities. But would expulsion really constitute self-injury and sacrifice? Are church members punished as a corporation in hell? How does this reading account for the subsequent parable of the lost sheep, which is about a *retrieving what is lost* (not an expulsion)?

[51] Matthew's employment of traditional materials should not deter us from inquiring into the sense he builds up by the juxtaposition. The editors of the *Anchor Bible*, pp. 216-17, reasonably assert that Matthew has made a more coherent discourse than Mark 9:33-50. If one examines what Matthew has removed from Mark's sequence and what he has consistently added, one sees that Matthew has created and sustained a discourse, through v. 14, about children and the "little ones" understood first as children and then as adult disciples grown wise. Matthew has consistently displaced Mark's emphasis on disciples of any age with

material about children and adults' recovering trust and humility, which constitutes a radical answer (different from Mark's) to the disciples' question about greatness in the kingdom.

[52] Ancient manuscripts consistently preserve the intertextual chiasmus, the reversal in the order of amputations, between Mt. 5:29-30 and Mt. 18:8-9. See *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings arranged in Horizontal Lines against Codex Vaticanus (Matthew)*, Reuben J. Swanson, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 38-39, 171-172. Strictly speaking, Matthew did not have to reverse the order of amputations in Mt. 18 to achieve his effect, if he took the sequence from Mark 9:43-47. He had only to *introduce them in the opposite order into the Sermon* in Mt. 5:29-30, however it stood in an earlier source such as Q. See Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 236. Matthew's compression of the sequence of three surgeries in three sentences in Mk 9 into a *sequence of two surgeries in two sentences* in Mt 18 strengthens the connection and the chiasmus between Mt. 5 and Mt. 18.

[53] Cf. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, pp. 48-49.

[54] C. H. Dodd called the lost sheep parable "a little too mechanical" in his *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961) p. 92, and that seems right. Hence we might go beyond the surface reading, and seek the "realized eschatology" (p. 159) in this parable too. Adding to the maiming motifs the idea of "enter[ing] into *life*" in Mt. 18:8-9 (following Mk 9:43ff.), and treating earthly and heavenly life as continuous, also shifts the ambiguous eschatology of Mt. 5 into present experience.

[55] Luke 15:4, by saying the man "has" the sheep, closes off the idea of thinking of the man *as* a whole flock of a hundred. Luke thus stays with the social version of the parable, as the context of his chapter 15 dictates. Nonetheless Françoise Dolto recognized a reference to psychic wholeness in the flock parable of Luke 15! See her *L'évangile au risque de la psychanalyse, tome II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), p. 28.

[56] Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, p. 417, goes so far as to claim that everything essential in psychoanalysis is summed up in New Testament scandal. Readers acquainted with Freudian and post-Freudian theory must appreciate the boldness of this claim. The revelatory force of the idea of scandal is not fundamentally different from any number of traditional practices of the examination of conscience, only perhaps more radical, illuminating the way of the world as well as the individual psyche. In general, the biblical perspective corrects for the excesses of Freudianism insofar as scripture teaches that human conflicts are at the root of sexual conflicts and not the other way round. See also Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 170.

[57] Incidentally, Gogol approaches the problem from this side in his tale "The Overcoat." It is enlightening to read this story as the fall of "one of the little ones," a fall encouraged by others' contempt, a fall into imitated, self-despising sensuality and a world of envy from which the "overcoat" is no protection. Gogol links "The Overcoat" to his earlier tale "The Nose" by repeating an image of the most vulgar of scandals, the commercial incitement to lust. See Gogol, *The Collected Tales*, p. 322 and cf. p. 410.

[58] Mt. 18:11, appearing in some witnesses, seems to align the meaning of the parable with the first verses of chapter 18, confirming that Matthew's fourteen verses concern the humility and trust the disciples need to regain. To that degree it separates the parable from 18:15, which concerns handling a refractory member of a congregation.

[59] On the implicit presence of the divine face in the human being, and on "the secret of angels," as biblical themes, see Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, pp. 45, 167-168.

[60] In Mt. 18:14, "your father" appears in several important manuscripts, although not in Codex Vaticanus. See *New Testament Greek Manuscripts (Matthew)*, p. 174.